Investigating Optimism In Clouds Movie (2020): A Psychological Approach

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how optimism is displayed in the movie Clouds by using Martin Seligman's optimism theory from Positive Psychology. The objectives of this study are (1) to evaluate the optimism reflected in Clouds movie and (2) to identify the impact of optimism on the main character Zach. A qualitative method was used to collect the data from dialogues and scenes containing optimism taken from the movie which were supported by books, journals, and related theories. The data were analyzed using Miles' and Huberman's (1994) model. The result showed that even though all the three parts of optimism which were permanence, personalization, and pervasiveness were reflected from Zach's character; the three optimism values were actually gained from how Zach received strong support from the people around him, especially his mother Laura, his best friend Sammy, and his girlfriend Amy. The result also showed that Zach's optimism and the support from people around him had helped him stay strong, hopeful and confident in pursuing his dream despite his facing cancer. The results were in line with Seligman's theory which showed how optimism could help people keep them mentally strong during difficult times. All in all, Clouds movie brought attention to important issues such as emotional support and mental health.

1. Introduction

Literature is a creative art form that transforms human imagination into stories, characters and worlds. This is in line with Rathika (2022), literature in the arts serves as a powerful tool to express emotions and preserve memories through the written word. In other words, literary works entertain, convey ideas, preserve cultural heritage, and instill moral values across generations (Ogundokun, 2021). Literary studies can be examined through a range of perspectives, one of which is the Psychological approach. In addition, the combination of literature and psychology reveals the deep connection between thoughts and behaviors, allowing writers to create characters whose thoughts and emotional journeys reflect real human experiences (Dar, 2022).

Positive Psychology, as a field focused on human strengths and well-being, places optimism at its core as a key driver of a fulfilling and hopeful life (Seligman, 2002). Additionally, Positive Psychology is a modern approach that focuses on what makes life meaningful and helps people be and give their best (Velasquez, 2024). One interesting topic that can be researched from a Psychological approach is optimism, which is a mindset that anticipates positive outcomes and focuses on the hopeful aspects of the future, even in the face of challenges. This is in line with what Seligman (2006) said that optimism is the belief that setbacks are temporary, specific, and not caused by personal failure, which leads to resilience and persistence. Therefore, optimism portrays a hopeful outlook that expects positive outcomes in the future despite challenges (Rehman & Ashraf, 2021). Moreover, optimism becomes one of the key variables in Positive Psychology, which plays an important role in predicting higher levels of well-being and lower levels of distress (Parkinson et al., 2023).

Optimism has been widely used as a research topic in literature. Afendi (2021) in his research analyzed the optimism of many characters in one of Andrea Hirata's novels by using Goleman's framework, which included indicators such as self-confidence, perseverance, and self-motivation as

the main basis for understanding optimistic attitudes in literature. Aditionally, Protomo's (2020) research highlighted how the elements of optimism in a novel could be a form of resistance to the patriarchal system and encouraged the struggle of female characters in achieving freedom and self-identity. Meanwhile, Palupi et. al. (2024) in her research used Seligman's Explanatory Style theory, namely: Permanence, Pervasiveness, Personalization as dimensions that distinguished the forms of optimism found in Interstellar movie.

The three dimensions of optimism used in Palupi's research are a combined theory from terminologies developed by Weiner and Seligman (Seligman, 2006). Weiner originally classified explanatory style into two dimensions: Permanence and Personalization, which Seligman later expanded by adding the third dimension called Pervasiveness. Permanence means that optimists see problems as temporary, Pervasiveness shows that they do not let one problem affects all aspects of their life, and Personalization illustrates that they do not always blame themselves for bad things that happen. Asnicar (2024) further defines these dimensions of optimism: Permanence is the distorted belief that negative situations will last indefinitely which often leads to despair and discourages self-improvement, Pervasiveness causes individuals to generalize negative events by mistakenly believing that they affect every part of life despite being limited to one area, and Personalization involves the false attribution of negative events and oneself which results in excessive guilt and self-blame without considering external factors. Seligman then explains that applying the three P's of optimism Permanence, Pervasiveness, and Personalization can provide individuals with a powerful cognitive framework to navigate uncertainty, cope with adversity, and maintain Psychological resilience during challenging times (Roca, 2020). Therefore, by applying the explanatory style framework, one can assess an individual's level of optimism based on how they interpret and respond to the three dimensions of optimism. An interesting literary work that contains optimism to be studied is the movie Clouds.

Released in 2020 and directed by Justin Baldoni, *Clouds* is a heartfelt Disney+ film that tells the real-life story of Zach Sobiech, a teenager facing terminal cancer. Shot in Quebec, the film beautifully captures Zach's passion for music, his viral hit "Clouds," and the powerful impact of his final months. Supported by his family, best friend Sammy, teachers, friends, and girlfriend Amy, Zach drew strength from their love to turn his final months into a journey of hope through music (IMDb, 2020). The highlights of the movie are, Clouds is a remarkable and emotional biopic that accurately portrays the struggles of Zach Sobiech, a talented young man with cancer, along with his family's hardships, and delivers a beautiful yet heartbreaking ending that can bring the audience to tears (Rotten Tomatoes, 2020).There have been some researchers who studied Clouds movie. Bit et al. (2022) revealed Zach Sobiech's four main personalities in Clouds, Beili (2023) highlighted the educational values and moral inspirations of the main characters, and Dewi et al. (2023) analyzed the types of language styles used as well as the factors that influence them, making these three previous studies highlighted various aspects in the film being investigated in this research. Nevertheless, none of the aforementioned previous studies investigated the optimism dimensions in the movie Clouds.

Based on these reasons, the researchers conducted a study entitled "Investigating Optimism in Clouds Movie (2020): A Psychological Approach" to evaluate optimism reflected in the Clouds movie and its impact by adopting Seligman's theory of optimism. The Seligman's three P's which were adopted in this research are expected to manifest within the narrative through the protagonist's internal narration, interpersonal dialogue, and consequential decisions, thereby bridging the theoretical framework and the film's character development. This research is expected to inspire the audience to acknowledge various dimensions of optimism of characters in literary works and apply them to other literary works in their research.

2. Method

The research used a qualitative method to produce descriptive and textual data for deeper understanding. Qualitative research is a flexible, inductive approach that explores how individuals or groups interpreted social or human issues through deep data collection and thematic analysis (Creswell, 2018). The subject of this research was the movie Clouds and the object of this research

was the optimism contained in the movie. The primary data were dialogues and scenes from the movie Clouds while supplementary data were obtained from articles, journals, archives, books, web pages and other relevant sources. Supplemental data, once limited to non-essential appendices, has evolved into a diverse and integral component of academic publishing, encompassing various content formats beyond the main article (Kwon et al., 2020). The steps used to collect data included in this research watching Clouds carefully and transcribing the script, selecting important scenes, and categorizing them based on Weiner's and Seligman's three dimensions of optimism and the impact. The method of data collection is carefully selected based on the research objectives and its appropriateness to effectively address the specific type and needs of the study being conducted (Mazhar, 2021). The analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman (1994) method of data analysis, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to explore optimism in the movie Clouds. As such, the method of analysis in qualitative research should be appropriate to the research objectives, reflect theoretical underpinnings, and support inductive reasoning (Bingham, 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

This section delivers responses to the research questions and offers a thorough analysis of the findings. Data are presented in tables to support and simplify the research process.

3.1. Results

Here, the researchers discussed the result based on the research questions and the theoretical frameworks presented earlier.

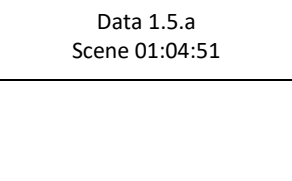### 3.1.1. How Optimism is Reflected in Clouds Movie

Weiner's and Seligman's (Seligman, 2006) three dimensions of optimism which include Permanence, Pervasiveness, and Personalization were scrutinized from how the main character, Zach, interacted with other characters; which revealed 17 data as follows:

Table 1. Type of Weiner's and Seligman's Optimism in Clouds Movie

N o	Character	Data	Details	Dimensions of Optimism
1.	Laura	Data 1.1.a Scene 00:06:30	Laura praised her son Zach for having the courage to appear confident with his baldness in front of many people.	Permanence
2.	Laura	Data 1.1.b Scene 00:14:27	Zach was due for surgery soon and was terrified and panicked, but Laura calmed him down by telling him everything would be fine.	Permanence
3.	Laura	Data 1.1.c Scene 00:20:30	Zach was depressed and felt that it would be difficult for him to face a new life with cancer, Laura, using the analogy of a painting, encouraged her son to stay colorful no matter what.	Permanence

4.	Laura	Data 1.1.d Scene 00:26:57 	Laura did not give up and tried to search endlessly for other ways by surfing the internet for her son Zach's recovery.	Personalization
5.	Laura	Data 1.1.e Scene 01:18:41 	Zach was sad that he had broken up with his girlfriend during a difficult time, but Laura encouraged him that everything would be okay.	Permanence
6.	Laura	Data 1.1.f Scene 01:32:32 	Laura accompanied Zach in his last moments and helped him read the letter that Zach would be performing on prom night, holding back tears Laura still showed her smile.	Pervasiveness
7.	Sammy	Data 1.2.a Scene 00:09:40 	Zach felt he didn't fit in with Amy because of his baldness, but Sammy gave him the view that he had strengths on the other side	Personalization
8.	Sammy	Data 1.2.b Scene 00:37:33 	Sammy reflects Seligman's concept of permanence by encouraging Zach to see his situation as temporary, with the belief that despite his illness, he still has the opportunity to enjoy meaningful moments like prom night.	Permanence
9.	Sammy	Data 1.2.c Scene 00:56:21 	On the way to school Zach realized the bad comments about his cover music video, Sammy as his best friend thought it was just an external factor.	Personalization
10.	Sammy	Data 1.2.d Scene 01:17:00 	Sammy and Zach were invited to record a song at a famous BM music company, Sammy emphasized that this was a new beginning that turned into a positive thing.	Pervasiveness
11.	Amy	Data 1.3.a Scene 00:02:21	Amy encouraged Zach to appear confident even when his baldness was pointed out, thus boosting Zach's confidence.	Permanence

			Data 1.3.b Scene 00:25:14	
12.	Amy		Zach confessed to Amy the reason they couldn't see each other a few days ago was because his cancer was terminal, Amy gave Zach a hug to encourage him.	Personalization
13.	Amy	Data 1.3.c Scene 00:52:32	Amy came to Zach's room and invited him to discuss a beautiful future even when Zach's condition was bad.	Permanence
14.	Amy	Data 1.3.d Scene 00:56:21	Zach apologized to Amy for all his mistakes in the past, without thinking Amy immediately forgave Zach because she felt nothing was too serious. personal failure.	Pervasiveness
15.	Mr.Weaver	Data 1.4.a Scene 00:20:14	Mr. Weaver was Zach's high school teacher, he assigned an essay on what life after high school would be like to encourage Zach that there was hope.	Permanence
16.	Mr. Weaver	Data 1.4.b Scene 00:45:10	On the school field Mr. Weaver accompanied Zach to lie on the grass, knowing that his favorite student failed chemotherapy he reminded Zach that he did not have to go to school and could enjoy his life.	Pervasiveness
17.	Rob	Data 1.5.a Scene 01:04:51	As a father, Rob didn't want his son to feel bad about his situation so he borrowed a friend's car for Zach to use.	Personalization

Based on the data presented, Laura as Zach's mother was the character who most consistently fostered optimism in him in which seven instances were identified. Her constant support and absence of pessimism played a significant role in maintaining Zach's positive outlook. Furthermore, Sammy's support to Zach as found on four occasions influenced Zach's optimism, which consistently focused on positive aspects and provided ongoing support as one of Zach's best friends. It can be seen that optimism in the movie Clouds mostly came from the characters around Zach who helped him become more optimistic about his dream and struggle. In addition, the analysis based on Seligman's three dimensions of optimism in the 17 data indicated that the most frequently identified dimension is Permanence, with eight instances observed in the data. The Personalization dimensions were identified in five findings, and Pervasiveness dimensions occured four times which indicated an equal distribution of these two dimensions in the findings. It seems that Permanence is the most common dimension found in Clouds.

As identified by Seligman (2006), Permanence dimension differentiates people who give up easily see the cause of negative events as something permanent and unchangeable, while those who reject helplessness see it as a temporary setback that does not determine their future. In the Clouds movie, it was found in the form of Data 1.1.c where Laura countered Zach's sense of permanence by encouraging him to see that his struggle with cancer does not mean a permanently colorless life. Another data was also found on Data 1.2.b, where Sammy helped Zach see his illness as something temporary, not as a lifelong limitation. Then in Data 1.3.a, Amy countered the permanence dimension by helping Zach believe that his baldness is a temporary challenge, not a permanent flaw. Additionally, in Data 1.4.b Mr. Weaver challenged the dimension of immortality by showing Zach that the failure of chemotherapy did not mean the end of everything, but rather an opportunity to enjoy life in a new way. Similar to Protomo's (2020) research, optimism reflected by the characters in the literary work being studied could help female characters resist patriarchy and strive for freedom and self-identity.

Moreover, in Data 1.1.f Laura countered the pervasiveness dimension by refusing to let Zach's illness define every aspect of her life, and insisting on continuing to try and hope. Pervasiveness can also be found in Data 1.2.d, when Sammy helped Zach see the negative comments as isolated feedback, not reflecting his entire value or effort. Data 1.3.d shows that Amy countered the pervasiveness dimension by pointing out that Zach's past mistakes do not define their entire relationship, seeing them as specific and forgivable moments. Mr. Weaver also demonstrated pervasiveness in Data 1.4.b, Mr. Weaver challenged the pervasiveness dimension by helping Zach see that the failed chemotherapy did not destroy all aspects of his life, encouraging him to still find joy in the present. All of these data are in accordance with what Seligman (2006) said that Pervasiveness refers to whether individuals perceive negative events as universally affecting all areas of their lives, causing widespread distress, or specific to one area only, so that they can still function well in other areas. These data also aligned with Afendi's (2021) study of the characters' optimism in Hirata's novel in which optimism is inseparable with the ways characters tried to motivate themselves, overcome problems, and as a form of support system from other characters to each other.

Finally, Personalization was found in Data 1.1.d, Laura took personal responsibility for finding a solution, showing her refusal to blame external factors for Zach's condition. Next, in Data 1.2.c Sammy helps Zach avoid personalization by seeing negative comments as external and not a reflection of Zach's value. In Data 1.3.b Amy's supportive hug helps Zach avoid personalization by

showing that his illness is not his fault. Last but not least, in Data 1.5.a Rob's supportive action shows that he avoids personalizing Zach's situation, treating the challenge as something external and not Zach's personal fault. The data are all in line with Personalization in that when negative events occur, individuals who internalize blame often experience low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness, whereas those who externalize blame tend to maintain higher self-esteem and self-worth (Seligman, 2006). The data found in this movie were similar to what Palupi et. al. (2024) found in her study that the three dimensions of optimism could all be found. All in all, the film Clouds depicts various expressions of optimism, which can be analyzed through Seligman's three dimensions of optimism. These dimensions of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization help reveal how characters maintain hope and resilience in the face of adversity. Moreover, Zach's optimism appeared more visible to the other characters around him from the ways they gave support to the main character.

3.1.2. The Impact of Optimism in the Clouds Movie
Based on the data analyzed in result question one, the researchers tried to find out the impact:

Table 2. Type of Impact of Zach Optimism in the Clouds Movie

No	Character	Data	Details	Impact of Optimism
1.	Laura	Data 2.1.a Scene 00:06:30 	Laura praised her son Zach for having the courage to appear confident with his baldness in front of many people.	Laura's praise gave Zach the **motivation** to appear bold despite his baldness.
2.	Laura	Data 2.1.b Scene 00:14:27 	Zach was due for surgery soon and was terrified and panicked, but Laura calmed him down by telling him everything would be fine.	Laura's reassurance before surgery made Zach feel **hopeful** about the outcome.
3.	Laura	Data 2.1.c Scene 00:20:30 	Zach was depressed and felt that it would be difficult for him to face a new life with cancer, Laura, using the analogy of a painting, encouraged her son to stay colorful no matter what.	Through her painting analogy, Laura helped Zach stay **resilient** in the face of depression.
4.	Laura	Data 2.1.d Scene 00:26:57	Laura did not give up and tried to search endlessly for other ways by surfing the internet for her son Zach's recovery.	Laura's continuous effort to find a cure reflected her **positive** mindset.

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Data 2.1.e

Scene 01:18:41

| 5. | Laura | | Zach was sad that he had broken up with his girlfriend during a difficult time, but Laura encouraged him that everything would be okay. | Laura's support after Zach's breakup gave him **hope** that things would improve. |

Data 2.1.f

Scene 01:32:32

| 6. | Laura | | Laura accompanied Zach in his last moments and helped him read the letter that Zach would be performing on prom night, holding back tears Laura still showed her smile. | Laura's calm smile at Zach's final moment showed her **balanced** emotional strength. |

Data 2.2.a

Scene 00:09:40

| 7. | Sammy | | Zach felt he didn't fit in with Amy because of his baldness, but Sammy gave him the view that he had strengths on the other side | Sammy reminded Zach of his worth, making him feel more **confident**. |

Data 2.2.b

Scene 00:37:33

| 8. | Sammy | | Sammy reflects Seligman's concept of permanence by encouraging Zach to see his situation as temporary, with the belief that despite his illness, he still has the opportunity to enjoy meaningful moments like prom night. | Sammy's encouragement made Zach feel **motivated** to enjoy life despite his illness. |

Data 2.2.c

Scene 00:56:21

| 9. | Sammy | | On the way to school Zach realized the bad comments about his cover music video, Sammy as his best friend thought it was just an external factor. | Sammy externalized negative comments, helping Zach feel more **secure**. |

		Data 2.2.d		
		Scene 01:17:00		
10.	Sammy		Sammy and Zach were invited to record a song at a famous BM music company, Sammy emphasized that this was a new beginning that turned into a positive thing.	Sammy saw their music opportunity as a fresh start, keeping things **calm** and optimistic.
		Data 2.3.a		
		Scene 00:02:21		
11.	Amy		Amy encouraged Zach to appear confident even when his baldness was pointed out, thus boosting Zach's confidence.	Amy's support made Zach more **resilient** in the face of public judgment.
		Data 2.3.b		
		Scene 00:25:14		
12.	Amy		*Zach confessed to Amy the reason they couldn't see each other a few days ago was because his cancer was terminal, Amy gave Zach a hug to encourage him.*	Amy's hug restored Zach's **positive** feelings despite his terminal condition.
		Data 2.3.c		
		Scene 00:52:32		
13.	Amy		Amy came to Zach's room and invited him to discuss a beautiful future even when Zach's condition was bad.	Amy's vision of a future with Zach kept him **hopeful** even in illness.
		Data 2.3.d		
		Scene 00:56:21		
14.	Amy		Zach apologized to Amy for all his mistakes in the past, without thinking Amy immediately forgave Zach because she felt nothing was too serious. personal failure.	Amy's forgiveness made Zach feel **balanced**, not burdened by guilt.

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		Data 2.4.a Scene 00:20:14		
15.	Mr. Weaver		Mr. Weaver was Zach's high school teacher, he assigned an essay on what life after high school would be like to encourage Zach that there was hope.	Mr. Weaver's assignment gave Zach a reason to stay **motivated** about the future.
		Data 2.4.b Scene 00:45:10		
16.	Mr. Weaver		On the school field Mr. Weaver accompanied Zach to lie on the grass, knowing that his favorite student failed chemotherapy he reminded Zach that he did not have to go to school and could enjoy his life.	Mr. Weaver's presence and message helped Zach feel **calm** and free.
		Data 2.5.a Scene 01:04:51		
17.	Rob		As a father, Rob didn't want his son to feel bad about his situation so he borrowed a friend's car for Zach to use.	Rob's thoughtful gesture helped Zach feel **confident** and seen.

The data presented show that Zach received the most impact from optimistic thoughts from Laura as his mother. Sammy is Zach's best friend who also gives a lot of impact from the optimistic thoughts given. Therefore, it can be seen that the impact of optimistic thoughts from the people around him. The impact obtained by Zach from the three dimensions of optimism by Weiner and Seligman namely Permanence, Pervasiveness, Personalization were very diverse. Motivation, hopefulness, resilience are the impacts of Permanence, while Pervasiveness gives the impact of balance and calm. Lastly, confidence, positiveness, and security were the impacts of Personalization. This can be concluded that the impacts of Permanence and Personalization have the same number of occurrences and appear the most than Pervasiveness .

Moreover, optimists believe that good events occur due to lasting causes, which makes them more hopeful for the future, unlike people who think that such events are temporary is the notion of permanence (Seligman, 2006). Laura gives Zach optimistic thoughts to face his baldness, making Zach motivated and believing that the problems that come are only temporary in Data 2.1.a. The concept of permanence is also found in Data 2.3.c a high indication of Zach being hopeful about the future impact given optimistic thoughts by Amy who is his girlfriend. Besides, the Pervasiveness dimension of optimistic thoughts given by Amy to Zach has the impact of changing his guilt to be balanced, this can be seen in Data 2.3.d. The impact of Zach being calm is found in Data 2.4.b optimistic thoughts given by Mr. Weaver as a form of reminder that the bad things he is facing will not interfere with other aspects of his life. This demonstrates the idea of pervasiveness, where optimists see bad events as limited to one area, but believe that good events can positively impact many parts of their lives (Seligman, 2006).

Finally, the confident attitude of Zach's character can be seen in Data 2.2.a. in which the impact of optimistic thoughts given by Sammy shows the result of Personalization Dimension. In addition, in Data 2.3.b Amy gives optimistic thoughts so that it has a positive impact on Zach's thoughts on himself. Seligman (Seligman, 2006) says people who blame themselves for bad events tend to have lower self-esteem, whereas people who blame external factors maintain a more positive self-view. In conclusion, each optimistic thought from the three Dimensions of Optimism by Weiner's and Seligman's given to the main character Zach has an impact based on the definition of each dimension.

4. Conclusion

Using Seligman's theory of optimism, this study analyzes how the main character Zach and those around him in Clouds (2020) display three key dimensions of optimism: Permanence, Pervasiveness, and Personalization. These traits are clearly reflected in the way characters support each other and confront adversity throughout the movie. More than just a narrative device, the portrayal of optimism in this film illustrates society's growing interest in mental resilience and emotional strength in the face of suffering. Zach as the main character is facing a terminal illness but he is surrounded by people who are optimistic and supportive of his dreams of becoming a famous singer, which in turns drives his own optimism. By applying Seligman's model, this research emphasizes the importance of presenting psychological concepts accurately in popular culture, as they can shape public perceptions and emotional responses.

In conclusion, Clouds (2020) brings attention to the complexity and nuance of optimistic thinking, encouraging further exploration of how cinematic depictions of psychological strengths influence society. Conversations around character development, emotional education, and the role of films in promoting Psychological insight remain essential and highly relevant today.

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