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ENG 100

Formal Assignment #2: Research Project

Due Date: November 26th, 2018

Perspective and Self

Introduction

Often in life, one might find it hard to take a step back from it all and feel grateful for what is good around them when they have a lot going on. Personally, I have to remind myself sometimes that I will never progress and flourish as an individual if I complain too much and get wrapped up on minor issues that can be easily taken with a grain of salt. For an entire week, I kept that mindset and I noticed, not major, but minor changes within myself that although were minor, they were still beneficial to my state of mind. It was with help of the “Three Good Things” project curated by Dr. Martin Seligman, referred to as the father of positive psychology, that motivated me to ground myself and actually keep my perspective of inconveniences in check. As apart of the project, each night before bed, I wrote down three good things that happened to me from that day and explained in detail what happened and why that event made me feel good. As does any good piece of research, I asked myself a question to answer about the topic of what I am arguing. That question being, “can the “Three Good Things” gratitude process have a positive impact on my well-being?” With how my well-being is

now, compared to that of my well-being the months prior to using the method, the answer is clear and drastically different, but could also use some adjustment.

Literature Review

When partaking in experiments as such, I found it easier to evaluate my findings when I had a stronger understanding of the underlying terms that correlate with the process. For example, how would an individual know how to even start without grasping what exactly positive psychology is? Positive psychology, as defined in a passage called “What (and Why) is positive psychology?”, is “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005). When learning about the Greek philosopher, Socrates, I found it easy to connect his quote, “An unexamined life is not a life worth living,” to the definition. Positive Psychology will then let an individual counter that and ask themselves, what does make life worth living? When examining what makes my life worth living, I have already begun the process to a more optimistic mindset.

Another important anecdote to be aware of is how well-being can have many different interpretations depending on the person defining it. A universal definition that can be used with the acronym P.E.R.M.A in mind states, “Well-being is a construct with five measurable elements: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment” (Seligman). Positive emotion, being what makes you feel happy, engagement, how engaged you are in the activities in your life, relationships, positive attributes that come out of one’s social life, meaning, a feeling of purpose, and accomplishment, setting goals and achieving them allowing yourself to feel complete.

This conceptual definition rather than a general book definition made it easier for me to organize my data using these elements and let me connect it to my experiences. Those elements provide broad categories for an individual to divide their life up into and think about what makes their life worth living in a more complicated matter than simply asking themselves a question.

Gratitude is something we as people all feel inside towards someone or something whether we express it physically or not. It can be argued that gratitude can be defined in multiple ways, but Michael Miller, M.D. of Harvard Health Publishing best describes gratitude when he retorts, “Depending on the context it means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. In some ways, gratitude encompasses all of these meanings. It is an appreciation for all that one receives. Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack.” What Miller is saying is that feeling more appreciative of what you have in the moment you have it can help one put what they’re lacking aside to diminish any remaining negative thoughts, therefore being a step closer to improving your well-being.

There is an inexplicable amount of research that proves showing gratitude can improve the well-being of an individual like I have previously began to mention. In 2004, a TED Talk lead by Dr. Martin Seligman called, “The New Era of Positive Psychology,” offered a few experiments that have resulted in solid research to back the argument that gratitude does improve well-being. One of those experiments being called, “The Gratitude Visit,” where the person conducting the process is to think of someone currently or no longer in their lives who is still alive that has done something very

significant for the better in their lives. Then, to write them a concrete letter, minimum of 300 words, explaining what they did and how it affected their life, then to call them and ask to pay a visit where they would give that significant person the letter or better yet, read it to them. Maria Popova, an author on Brainpickings.com, comments on this tactic saying, “This somewhat self-consciousness-inducing exercise, Seligman promises, will make you happier and less depressed a mere month from now.” While this is effective research as well, the “Three Good Things” method is primarily what I’ve chosen to focus on. “Writing about three good things was associated with increased happiness immediately afterward, as well as one week, one month, three months, and six months later” (Park, et al 2005). I tested this proven theory myself and provided my own experience in the findings section.

To be fair, it is best to acknowledge the other side of the argument and to correlate it with my discussion. What research suggests gratitude DOESN'T improve well-being? A quote once again from Seligman can be used for this counter-argument where he explains, “People who believe they cause good things tend to like themselves better than people who believe good things come from other people or circumstances.” To put into simpler terms, for some people, gratitude isn't the best form of expression to tend to their well-being and self esteem. Sometimes it takes self appreciation and entitlement to bring a wave of happiness into their life rather than always appreciating others. For me personally, a combination of both self reflection and outside inflictions were the cause of my minor well-being improvements in my time partaking in the “Three Good Things” project.

Findings

To return to the question, “can the “Three Good Things” gratitude process have a positive impact on my well-being?” from my introduction, here I will truthfully answer and back it up with information from my own personal findings. Yes, the “Three Good Things” process does have a positive impact on my well being as far as managing my perspective and how I perceive negative events but, the experiment will have had to be conducted longer in order to produce long lasting effects on my well-being, way of thinking and self esteem. In my opinion, relying heavily on yourself to keep a good mindset going further into the future with only one week of help from this process is a difficult task, especially if the process is a fairly new concept to someone. Although that is true, the one week was still enough to realize that, like I had mentioned, all it takes is change of perspective. It just needs maybe another two to four weeks, in my opinion, to really set my new healthy, and positive mindset in stone, and to have positive perception from here on out.

One entry from my good things journal on November 1st, I explained how my cat of three years, Winnie, had passed away from an incurable kidney infection and before that was often wincing in pain at even the slightest touch, and acting unlike herself. When returning to my journal the night after hearing the news earlier that day, my old instincts immediately were, “there is absolutely nothing good I could pull from this day,” considering how heartbroken I was from the loss. It was then that I realized the purpose of the experiment and I turned that negative event into a positive one. But how can I do that? Instead I looked at it like this: Winnie is no longer living in constant pain she

couldn't control and instead of feeling sadness, I can feel content and happy for her that she is no longer struggling in her day to day life, and can enjoy eternal bliss without sickness. In that moment is when I changed my perspective, the common theme I noticed throughout the week as well as of this project. I looked at what I normally would've thought as something terrible and made it into a rather more sympathetic and conclusive idea. I think this more impacted my well-being positively in that specific moment and during that week but not long term in the following weeks and months.

Conclusion

To conclude and finalize my argument one last time, the "Three Good Things" method did have a positive impact on my well-being temporarily, but will need to be continued for the benefits and ideals to last. One week was all it took though, to make myself aware that sometimes, I just need to change my perspective on how I look at events that occur in order to improve. Although it did not feel like a chore, I will not be continuing with the process only because it doesn't feel necessary to physically document three good things when I can just take a moment of reflection each night or even a few days out of the week to just remind myself that with every negative emotion, I will only feel worse. My main take-away from this project is to be more grateful for what is good around me and to change my mindset when I'm feeling low and I will ultimately feel more satisfied in my quality of life.

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