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English 112 Formal Research Project (Draft #3)

11/ 27/ 2018

In Pursuit of Happiness

Introduction

I walked into the open kitchen and began taking off my shoes. My mom was over at the other end of the kitchen cooking at the stove. The smell of spaghetti gravy wafted over me. She turned around at the sound of me entering. After greeting me, she asked how my Econ test went. I responded by saying that I got a 100%. My mom got excited and gave me a hug and told me how proud she was and how well I was doing in school. This is what I am grateful for. A mom that is proud of me, that I can do well in school and that my parents give me support in school. Dr Martin Seligman hypothesized that being grateful can improve a person's wellbeing. Seligman thought that if a person were to record three “good” things a day that happened to them in a week, the person would notice a difference in their attitude. Happiness and wellbeing are coveted by today's culture and people. But do we as humans really know what well-being and happiness mean? For me, gratitude and happiness can be found in the scene just mentioned, where other people praise me or my work. I believe that the “Three Good Things” Experiment improved my Mentality and physical wellbeing, and, in this paper, I will prove how doing this experiment was able to change me.

Literature Review;

The following is a literature review done on the topic of gratitude. To really start off we need to define a few terms. First, what is Positive psychology? In short it is the study of happiness and was first founded by Dr. Mark Seligman. Positive psychology studies the emotion of happiness, but happiness can be defined as wellbeing and the meaning of wellbeing is best thought of as Seligman says in his article “Using wellbeing for public policy: Theory, measurement, and recommendations”; Wellbeing is now understood not simply as positive emotions, but, rather, as thriving across multiple domains of life (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003). Wellbeing integrates hedonic wellbeing (feeling good) and eudaemonic wellbeing (functioning well). The development of an integral conception of wellbeing that goes beyond affective indicators (e.g., happiness, affect balance) (Seligman).

Another term that we need to understand and define is gratitude. What exactly is gratitude? Gratitude is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself; it is a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation (Sansone). Gratitude is basically being thankful about someone or something.

As we progress along in this review, we need to start to investigate research and see what believable and provable facts we can find that prove that being grateful can change a person's well-being. Some people say that gratitude and wellbeing are unrelated and very polar. In his article *Gratitude and Wellbeing*, Randy Sansone addresses this view point and has this to say;

“There are several studies that indicate potential nuances in the relationship between gratitude and wellbeing as well as studies with negative findings. In terms of assessing gratitude, numerous assessment measures are available. From a clinical perspective, there are suggested therapeutic exercises and techniques to enhance gratitude, and they appear

relatively simple and easy to integrate into psychotherapy practice. However, the therapeutic efficacy of these techniques remains largely unknown. Only future research will clarify the many questions around assessment, potential benefits, and enhancement of gratitude” (Sansone).

Sansone is saying that though well-being and gratitude have not been scientifically proven to be related there is a strong possibility that they may be related. Not only is Sansone inferring that there is a relationship between gratitude and well-being, but he is saying that being grateful can be therapeutic. If being grateful can be therapeutic, and we know that therapy is good for one's health and mental wellbeing, then it is safe to say that being grateful can be an improvement of physical and mental well-being.

For the sake of this paper, we will need to define Mental and Physical. In this paper we will define Physical as: Things relating to the body and the five senses and not of the mind.

Mental will be defined as: things relating to the mind and not to the body or the five senses.

Findings

The goal of the following experiment was to see if being grateful could, if at all possible, improve a person's wellbeing. The experiment was to record three things every day for a week that you thought were good or that you were grateful for. Here are my personal findings:

Tuesday

1. I received a good grade in an ECON test. I like the class but receiving a good grade helped me to be more enthusiastic.
2. Today I was able to study for the SAT's for 2 hrs. I am starting to get nervous about the SAT's

but studying helps me to calm down. I am grateful for the time I was able to spend studying.

3. I am grateful for the friendship that I have with my neighbor Judah. Whenever I go over to his house we always have a good time playing soccer.

Wednesday

1. I was hoping to get off work early today and Jay said that I could go home early. Going home helped me to relax and unwind from the day.

2. I was grateful for the time that I was able to study for the SAT's today after I got off of work early.

3. I woke up on time for work which helps me to have a better day.

Thursday

1. I am grateful that Christ redeemed my life and saved me. I always need to be reminded of the good news.

2. I am thankful that I can do well in my school. I sometimes take for granted that I get to have an education as good as the one that I have.

3. I am grateful for the comfort that I enjoy day-today.

Friday

1. I studied for the SAT's for the last time today. It was a relief to be done with all the studying and practice tests.

2. I was able to have friends over after dinner. I had a lot of fun and I was able to take my mind off the SAT's

3. I am grateful that I have a job and that I love to do what I do.

Saturday

1. I am so glad that the SAT's are done and over. I feel free and more able to do more things.
2. After the SAT's I attended a conference and listened to two really good messages, one was on work and the other was on racial identity and how to be comfortable with your identity.
3. One of my friends had a snowboard and offered it to me. I was really looking forward to going snowboarding this winter and this just helped my excitement.

You can view the whole article in a like that will provide one the Research Project page.

After a week of doing this and recording my findings, I was able to see a definitive incline in my level of gratitude. Whether it was toward something small or even relatively inconsequential I was more likely to point it out in the later end of the week rather than at the start of the week. Why is this? Some people would be inclined to think that this is because we as humans are able to narrow down our thoughts the more and more, we think about them. But I think that this was because I was able to improve my mentality of the way that I think about life and things relating to life. During the week of experimenting, I was able to be more relaxed about life and my daily tasks. Let me explain. During the start of the week I was always up tight and forced myself to try to do something that would be noteworthy but as the week progressed and I began to see how much there was to be grateful for I no longer thought that I needed to do anything of the sort. All that I needed to do was live life like normal and reflect on it and just think and be grateful. This is because I was able to physically improve my wellbeing. Look at the journal entry for the last Saturday and read the first of the entries. During the week I was stressed because of the SAT's but I noticed that after I physically wrote down that they were over and that I was able to be done with them I walked with confidence in being grateful that the test was

over. I was almost like the key to my personal gratitude. I needed thought AND action for me to feel better. Furthermore, if you read Wednesday's journal entry you will notice that I was both physically and mentally improved.

Wednesday

1. I was hoping to get off work early today and Jay said that I could go home early. Going home helped me to relax and unwind from the day.
2. I was grateful for the time that I was able to study for the SAT's today after I got off work early.

The action of going home early may not seem like much but doing this allowed me to mentally focus and physically relax. Do you see the connection? In the next section I will present further research to further my point.

Support

If we chose to go even further into this topic, we could look at what Dr. Martin Seligman says in his article *"Using wellbeing for public policy: Theory, measurement, and recommendations"* he has this to say about wellbeing; "Wellbeing is now understood not simply as positive emotions, but, rather, as thriving across multiple domains of life (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003). Wellbeing integrates hedonic wellbeing (feeling good) and eudaemonic wellbeing (functioning well). The development of an integral conception of wellbeing that goes beyond affective indicators (e.g., happiness, affect balance) is the framework on which we base this paper"(Seligman).

To understand what he is saying, we need to dissect what he is saying and read "between the lines". Seligman is saying that wellbeing is not JUST positive emotions but that it is derived from "multiple domains of life" (Seligman). If we use this as a foundation to our argument, we

must be not just happy about life, but we need to be thriving in our domains of life. In other words, if I said that I think that my wellbeing was improved through the experiment, I need to have improved my physical AND mental wellbeing together for this to be true.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I truly think that the “three good things” experiment did improve my mental and physical wellbeing. I also think that this experiment might not affect everyone in the same way that it did to me, but I do think that it will influence the person doing it and I strongly encourage everyone to give it a try. I also think that Dr Seligman concluded rightly in saying that improvement of one's wellbeing is defined as an improvement across multiple dimensions.

Works cited

Clark, Coleman “A Week Of Three Good Things” ://colemanclark.weebly.com/blog/a-week-of-three-good-things

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