

Karli Davis
ENG 100
Formal Assignment #2: Research Project
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Introduction

I sat besides my, at the time, boyfriend in his car as we drove to Philly for the night. We had just got done our daily ritual of fighting when I decided to face the passenger side window. The setting sun was turning the sky the slightest color of pink and orange which then reflected onto the buildings' windows to the right of me. I sat up in awe and rolled down the window for a more clear view, ignoring my partner next to me. I could not believe how beautiful these otherwise basic buildings appeared in this particular lighting. I opened my eyes as wide as I could and took a deep breath to really take it all in. I thought about just how large this world is and how silly it was to be fighting over such insignificant things with somebody I didn't even want to be with. I have made it a point since that day three years ago to really appreciate what I have been lucky enough to be surrounded by in this life. Since then I have pulled myself deeper in moments I experience by opening my eyes as wide as I can and taking as deep breaths as I can.

When I was presented with the Weeks of Three Good Things experiment I welcomed it with open arms. For seven days I was to recall three good things that I experienced throughout the day. I welcomed this process with open arms, seeing that this is a practice I do regularly. It also required me to do it more frequently than I normally would have, which I found very exciting and more than likely beneficial. The week turned out to be harder on me than most are, but I found myself more optimistic than a bad week might leave me feeling.

Literature Review

Martin Seligman, the founder of positive psychology, conducted research in the 60s and 70s to support that "learned happiness" can be directly linked to depression and how people

control how they suffer. From those findings he turned around and started looking at ways people can look explore psychology to find how people can be more positive, rather than explore the ways humans are negatively affected. In 2002 Seligman wrote a paper on how focussing on the positives on life is the key to a happier life with better well-being. While Merriam-Webster defines well-being as, “the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous”, Dr. Ylenio Longo at the University of Nottingham uses fourteen recurring constructs to define well-being: happiness, vitality, calmness, optimism, involvement, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-worth, competence, development, purpose, significance, congruence and connection.

The authors of *The Benefits of Appreciation*, Randy A. Sansone, MD and Lori A. Sansone, MD define gratitude as, “the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself; it is a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation”. Robert A. Emmons at the University of California, and Michael E. McCullough at the University of Miami, conducted an experiment that consisted of three groups of participants. The first group was to recall the bad things that happened to them throughout the day, the second was to recall the good things; much like the Week of Three Good Things process, and the third was to recall normal/neutral events. By the end of the experiment, the findings showed that the group who wrote the positive events that unfolded each day became better off emotionally. While this case supports the correlation between gratitude and well-being, not all experiments that researchers have conducted help this point. Kashdan et al studied veterans with and without PTSD to measure their relationship with gratitude, and those who suffered from PTSD showed to have a closer relationship with a system involving gratitude rather than the veterans who did not have PTSD.

I suppose the cause of results in PTSD victims having a relationship with gratitude could tie into them being more emotionally vulnerable. I, personally, feel as though that is why I have

such a close relationship with gratitude, as well. I have depression, anxiety, insomnia and paranoia so that is why I have such a strong will to find the good and keep positive.

Findings

The week of October 30th to November 5th proved to be a trying week for me to be finding three positive events, but I am very glad I made time for them. I was losing a lot of sleep and a lot of my relationships were all out of whack, but I pushed through what I couldn't control and focussed more so on what I could. I really focussed on the balance of things and tried to see the opposite end of every negative thing I was experiencing.

I had lost a very important relationship I had with somebody the week prior to October 30th, and it continued to weigh on me into the week of my practice. I found ways to fill the void with his absence (in a healthy manner) and it made me appreciate the opportunities I had been given. I was offered a free ticket to a show that I had wanted to go to really bad, but couldn't afford, on the day of the concert. The spontaneity of the situation made me feel really blessed that I was able to do things on a whim like that, while others may not be so lucky; it put my privilege in perspective.

Because of the lack of my relationship with that important person, I reflected on the ones I still had. I began to really appreciate my two best friends and their support for me. I utilized their support while going through this tough time and they proved to be there for me like always. This was something I felt as though I couldn't have done in the past with other friends, and it was very refreshing and enlightening to see that I could do it with my current friends.

Overall, I felt like anytime something negative was popping its head up, I was replacing exhaust and frustration with acceptance and the realization that bad things needed to happen to keep the universe in order and to be able to experience, and appreciate, the good. I was quicker to look for the small things that make me happy and made sure I was taking them in.

Conclusion

“What you focus on most often becomes familiar, and what is familiar feels real to you,” says Robert Holden, the author of *Be Happy*. For the seven days I took part in the Three Good Things, my day-to-day life felt more meaningful and positive. I believe the world is constantly pushing and pulling to create balance, and this week made that all the more clearer for me. Much like I have before, I will continue to add the ways I have reflected on my days into my future days. I have done it more frequently than I used to and I feel a lot happier, overall. I think that it is important to take in to account who does and does not struggle with mental illnesses when conducting these experiments. I think it could show why someone may have more of a desire to feel better, because it seems to be that case for me.

Work Cited

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