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English 100

Formal Assignment #2: Research Project

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Introduction: My Entry into Three Good Things

Her face is as pale as a ghost. Her glassy eyes stare distantly from behind the half open door. She silently opens the door shuffles quietly inside without a word. Every movement she makes exhibits the exhausted perception of life weighing her down. I look at her face with a frowning mouth and disappointed eyes, and it brings back my memories of the positive psychology method the “three good things.” I am visiting my cousin in New York whom with three children has had to sell her house and move to an apartment. The strain and pressure from the daily stress is almost visible from her physical appearance. I felt like her before, life can get tough and significantly impact a person’s physical health. The “three good things” targets a person’s perception of life and emphasizes the positive factors. I think adding this sort of positive reflection to my cousin’s daily routine can dramatically improve her outlook on life, which can directly improve her wellbeing as well. I am all too aware of the negative effects this can have on a person’s ability to enjoy life. I was in a similar circumstance before undertaking a research assignment to evaluate the effects positive self-reflection through identifying at least three good things each week. I was tired, rushing to meet deadlines and juggling responsibilities between my job, family, and school. But as I was reflecting on the positive instances in my life, I realized how much joy I found in the small time I spent taking my family out to dinner and enjoying the close connections we have. The realization of how important a role my family plays in my happiness and enjoyment in life really turned around my outlook on my perceived happiness. I

would have taken for granted the small events like taking my family out to eat, but I now see the true impact these positive factors have on a person's overall wellbeing. The practice of reflecting on "three good things" provides a necessary evaluation of my positive self-reflection and reinforces gratitude for everyday factors that benefit my wellbeing.

Literature Review

Before I jump into the finding section, here are some questions and explanations related to the "Three Good Things." First, what is positive psychology? Peterson (2008) stated that "Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living." Also, Paul T.P. Wong defined the "positive psychology as different things to different people, depending on their rhetorical perspectives and cultural backgrounds."

Second, what is wellbeing? Wellbeing is not just a happiness or pleasure. Dr Ylenio Longo at the University of Nottingham, in England identified "fourteen distinct and recurring constructs that are used to describe well-being: happiness, vitality, calmness, optimism, involvement, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-worth, competence, development, purpose, significance, congruence, and connection (Joseph, 2017)." As said by Bartel "wellbeing is conceptualized to include a continuous spectrum of positive feelings and subjective life assessments." Wellbeing conveys information regarding a broad range of behaviors and health, including physical and mental health, social relationships, leisure, and subjective states such as emotions and mental engagement (Bartel).

Third, what is gratitude? A study from Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence states that "gratitude is a state of mind that arises when you affirm a good thing in your life that comes from outside yourself, or when you notice and relish little pleasures." Gratitude is not bound by a person's life circumstances and can be found small moments of appreciation or life lessons.

Next, what research suggests gratitude improves well-being? Emmons and McCullough stated “There are reasons to believe that experiences of gratitude might be associated perhaps even in a causal fashion with happiness and well-being. Initial research suggests that gratitude is a moderately pleasant and activating emotion” (378). Doing the “Three Good Things” assessment each day clearly lists out and highlights events a person can feel grateful for. This practice could significantly improve your mental being.

Then, what research suggest gratitude does not improve wellbeing? There is research to the contrary that identifies that not all forms of gratitude dramatically impact a person’s wellbeing. According to Phelps “being grateful is generally thought of as a wonderful quality. But insisting on it is less than helpful. Consider the classic example of when a mother insists that her child gratefully eat his food because other children in the world are starving. The response, then send it to them! is not just a sign of being ungrateful, though that may be true. It also points to a bigger problem.”

Lastly, what research supports your data and experiences? Although every category of PERMA is important for a person wellbeing, not all category may directly impact every person to the same degree. I have not found any collaborating research that investigates the difference between individuals and their preference to list the different components of PERMA. However, this would not impact the overall evaluation as noted in the successful use of “three good things” as a wellbeing evaluation tool in research paper by Siew Tim Lay & Ronan E. O’Carroll.

Findings

As per my findings evaluating the “Three Good Things” assessment process, I found a number of trends that support how the “Three Good Things” help to benefit my personal wellbeing. I have used the PERMA categorization to score my perception of my wellbeing. As stated by Seph Fontane Pennock, the co-founder of Positive Psychology Program, “Martin

Seligman, the founder of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, created the PERMA model which stands for the five main features that are crucial for lasting wellbeing; Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment /Achievement. The basic idea is that knowing what makes out for a happy life is the first step in achieving it.”

Here’s what the section about my “Three Good Things” assessment process. The assessment requires that we list three good things on a weekly basis. At first it is simple to list big events like Halloween and deviations from my daily routine like a cancelled class or a new project. However after identifying major events, it became more difficult to come up with positive events. The early weeks in this assessment really acted as an adjusted period to become more used to the process. By the third week I began listing smaller and less noticeable events. These were the little things that were a part of my every day routine like time with friends, picking up and dropping off my children and finding my husband preparing the school lunches. By the sixth and seventh week I was enjoyably listing daily events like dinner, cooking and spending time with family.

My views on what was important to me really expanded through the duration of this project. Constantly pursuing a major event or simply something different in hopes for fleeting happiness is not unrewarding but the frequency of such events unpredictable and are shorter lived than the cumulative effect of daily gratitude. I think relying solely on larger, more dramatic, events for positive reinforcement is too unreliable less likely to make long term improvements to a person’s wellbeing. My gratitude for the smaller things that I used to take for granted became amplified by the conclusion of the assessment and reinforced through the reflection needed to evaluate the results.

Expanding my perception of where I could find positive events in my life gave me a greater sense of gratitude for the small things in my everyday routine. This process really made me change my overall approach in how I can find happiness in my life. My new outlook gave me a greater sense of satisfaction from my daily routine and made me look closer at the relationships and family that has always been around to make me happy.

I agree with Martin Seligman that all five components of PERMA will be necessary to improve my overall wellbeing. However, per evaluating the results of the assignment only three out of five categories appear to show a significant impact on my personal wellbeing. Through evaluating my current scores, I noticed I had a significantly lower number of positive events that would fall into the category of Engagement and Achievement. I identified that I chose my experiences almost entirely in correlation to the PERMA components, positive emotion and meaning. I found these two components were consistently underlying factors behind my selection of events that I believed to be important and critical to my personal enjoyment of life.

Positive Emotions and Meaning are two components of PERMA that were consistently demonstrated by the events listed in my assessment. Both components play a very significant role in ensuring a person's wellbeing. Positive emotion is one of the most basic components that supports a person's wellbeing and is one of the most obvious connections to happiness. While meaning similarly attributes significantly to a person's wellbeing as described by Mariana "Having a purpose and meaning to why each of us is on this earth is important to living a life of happiness and fulfillment. Such meaning gives people a reason for their life and that there is a greater purpose in life." Both components play such a significant role in wellbeing that it isn't abnormal that almost every event listed in some way was tied to positive emotion and meaning.

Relationships and social connections accounted for a significant number of events I listed during this assessment. I personally believe that relationships account for one of the most important factors in my own wellbeing. Martin Seligman identifies relationships as one of the most important aspects of life and a core component to supporting a healthy and prosperous life.

Engagement in activities and Achieving a goal or Accomplishment that rewards a sense of accomplishment are both important components of PERMA that helps us to grow and nurture our personal happiness. I found that these two components of PERMA correlate to only a few of the events I listed during this assignment. Only a few events I listed could demonstrate examples of Engagement or Accomplishments. Although every category of PERMA is important for a person wellbeing, not all category may directly impact everyone to the same amount.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the change I went through in improving my gratitude for the smaller events in my every day opens the door to the long term benefits of positive reflection and a significant in my personal wellbeing. I feel happier and more energetic to enjoy the life I have. The benefits of finding joy from the simple every day events is a more sustainable and lasting improvement to my happiness. Finding gratitude for the little things already around me is much healthier to my wellbeing than constantly looking outwards and hoping to find some major event or change that I can rely on to bring me joy.

Rather the difference in scoring is more likely a reflection of my personal bias toward identifying happiness with certain types of events more than others when I decided on which events to list in this assignment. I think the positive components offered by PERMA provide a good general identification for the types positive events that can help a person improve their wellbeing. However I think the components making up the PERMA model could be expanded on

through further studies. One of the questions I would like to review in further studies is, how can we evaluate the PERMA categories as it related to gratitude, and how scoring correlates to different personalities and social demographics? I think expanding the existing list of PERMA components based on more research would greatly improve the efficiency of reaching participants and improving the likelihood for improving their wellbeing.

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