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ENG 100

Formal Assignment #2: Research Project

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Improving My Well-Being

Section I: My Introduction into Three Good Things

“Are you going to West Chester this weekend for homecoming?” my brother asks. “I don’t know, I haven’t been up there in a few weeks” I respond, feeling a little anxious. I look down at my phone, wondering whether or not I should message my friend Megan who lives up in West Chester. I really wanted to go and I question myself, “should I ask to hangout, I don’t want to be annoying.” I am always fearful of what people think of me. “No, just do it”. I start typing out a text to Megan, “Hey what are you doing this weekend?” I push send and sigh with relief. Last time I visited I asked the same question, I hope she doesn’t think I’m bothersome. I then see three text bubbles, and start to anticipate for her response and prepare myself for rejection. A blue message finally appears on my phone, “It’s homecoming this weekend, you should come up!” She replies. “Whew, thank god” I tell myself. Now my stress had disappeared and I reply, “Okay, see you Saturday!” I found myself in the moment feeling grateful that I pushed myself out of my comfort zone. I realized that I shouldn’t be so worried about little things and I’m so grateful that she invited me up to visit.

Remembering and writing down gratitude moments and considering what caused them can help me think of the goodness in my life that I might take for granted. For seven days, I kept a journal and recorded three gratitude moments that would occur each day to test the theory of

whether or not this process could improve my well-being (Seligman). Can the “three good things” gratitude process have a positive impact on my well-being? After a week of recording gratitude entries, I concluded that this process did have a positive impact on my happiness. This process worked because I participated in social relationships and experienced positive emotions throughout the week.

Section II: Literature Review

Martin Seligman is referred to as the founder of positive psychology and was the director of the clinical training program at the University of Pennsylvania (Pennock). His main focus was positive psychology, learned helplessness, depression, resilience, pessimism and optimism (Pennock). Seligman encouraged the “Three Good Things” process, and believes that this process can improve ones well-being by focussing on strengths rather than weaknesses. The purpose of the “Three Good Things” process is to see if my well-being can improve based on positive psychology. Positive psychology studies thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, with a focus on “what makes life worth living” (Peterson). Positive psychology does not focus solely on happiness, but instead on well-being.

Well-being can be defined by Dr. Seligman’s happiness model PERMA. This means that one’s well-being can be measured through positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman). This assignment is to help improve my well-being by focusing on gratitude moments, which is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful in oneself and represents a general state of thankfulness or appreciation (Sansone and Sansone). It was easy for me to remember everyday to write a moment I was grateful for because I was eager to know what or how my day was going to turn out. Whenever a moment would occur, I would

really think about it in the moment and afterwards appreciate it. Clinical psychologist Sasha Lynne explains, “By focusing on what we are grateful for, and looking toward what is going right in our lives, it can help reframe our thinking processes.” I never really stopped and thought about my appreciation for a gratitude moment before this experiment which makes it more special and thoughtful.

When I began writing a week of “Three Good Things”, I was a little skeptical of the outcome. After a week of recording “Three Good Things”, I found myself happier. Whenever I would experience a gratitude moment, I would look back and think in the moment on how much I appreciated and cherished that moment which I had never done before. According to neuroscientist and a 2009 National Institute of Health study, practicing gratitude can cause the brain to improve mood and trigger a blood flow to the hypothalamus which controls sleep patterns and stress levels (Emmons). Gratitude can activate the neurotransmitter dopamine to the brain as well which can improve mood (Emmons). Feeling happier after the experiment would explain why I felt an impact on my well-being. It is so easy to focus on the negative, but by participating in this process, I was able to recognize and focus on the positive and reflect on the goodness in my life.

Although the three good things process improved my well-being, I know it does not work for others. One week may not be enough time for one to experience a positive impact. The process can be seen as a chore to remember three moments that would occur everyday. A reason why this process may not work for someone is finding a moment of gratitude that may not be deserving of it (McNulty JK, & Russell VM).

Section III: Findings

Before this research project, I was feeling down and almost lonely. In my opinion, I do believe that the ‘Three Good Things’ has made me feel so much better and it can be proven from Martin Seligman’s, the father of psychology, PERMA elements. PERMA stands for positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Positive emotions allowed me to focus on the positive elements in my life, which is one aspect of the improvement on my well-being. Engagement is finding an activity that involve engagement and it allows one to learn and grow (Seligman). Social interactions and relationships is an important element to human nature. “Humans are social animals that thrive on connection, love, intimacy, and a strong emotional and physical interaction with other humans”(Seligman). Meaning is having something or someone that gives one purpose. For me, that is art and creating, which gives me a purpose because I can create an image or a piece that others will enjoy. The last element to the PERMA model is accomplishment. An accomplishment can be achieved by goals and ambitions one sets (Seligman), which can also give one purpose in life.

I discovered that most of my gratitude entries involved positive emotions and relationships. The gratitude process worked for me because I did find a purpose in my life, and social relationships played a major role in this project. I can be a very shy person, and can sometimes struggle to make connections with people. I feel as though others my age can relate, especially because of the influence of smartphones. There has been an increase in teens spending less time socializing in person, and more time through social media and technology (Twenge). It is much easier to communicate to others behind a screen than in person which is why I think so many people struggle with this issue.

I think that social relationships are important because feeling cared for is an important aspect in feeling needed. Most of my journal entries involved relationships with family, friends, and even strangers. It made me feel loved when a friend would randomly text that they missed me, or having a moment with my sister about something we can both connect and relate with. Positive emotions occurred pretty much after these moments which made them positive. Although I had a good week during my gratitude recording sessions, I find myself weeks later still feeling happier.

Section IV: Conclusion

After taking part in the “Three Good Things” gratitude process, I would use this whenever I am feeling down and need to boost my well-being. I would not continue this everyday but I think that Dr. Martin Seligman’s research was really beneficial for me, especially because of his PERMA model on happiness. This process made me realize that I shouldn’t take anything for granted and has made me appreciate the little moments in life that I may have not thought of before. Also, it has made me appreciate myself most of all, because I am my harshest critic.

It has been a few weeks later and even though I haven’t continued writing grateful moments, I still find myself stopping and feeling more appreciative. This to me is about personal growth, and I learned so much about myself during this research. Not only what I do can impact someone’s life, what I do or say to others is more important to me. I should not worry about small fears I have, and instead push myself out of my comfort zone. That is the truest way to grow and learn from life. I should appreciate what I am capable of, and look at the positives in most situations.

Maybe I just happened to have a good week during the “Three Good Things” process, but I feel as though I am much happier than before. The basis of the PERMA model is finding a meaning to make life worth living. Instead of focusing on negative elements in my life, I began to focus on myself and my abilities. I find purpose in my artwork and relationships with others, which could be a reason for why this worked for me. Many moments that occurred during that week was unexpected which was really enjoyable. The moments that I created were the most special to me because I felt like I had a purpose and what I was doing mattered. It is rewarding to see how I can change someone's day by my actions or even towards myself.

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