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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 University 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 hang out. 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 have been so worried and I was so thankful 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 in an attempt to

answer the research question, “Can the “three good things” gratitude process have a positive impact on my well-being?” (Seligman). After a week of recording gratitude entries, I concluded that this process did have a positive impact on my happiness. This process of journaling about my moments of gratitude worked because I was inspired to participate in social relationships, find meaning in my life, and experience 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 conducted research proving that this process can improve ones well-being by focusing 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 accomplishments (Seligman). The “Three Good Things” process 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 to remember to write a moment I was grateful for each day because I was eager to know what would happen during my day that would make me grateful.

Whenever a gratitude encounter occurred, I would feel grateful and afterwards appreciate that moment while journaling 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 those moment 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, I found myself happier. Whenever I would experience a gratitude moment, I would look back and think in the moment or while writing about it 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 might 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 by remember three moments that would occur everyday or a moment could be forgotten and the meaning vanishes. 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). While writing the gratitude moments, there may not have been a period of time

that one was grateful for and instead composes one in order to finish the “Three Good Things” assignment.

Section III: Findings

Before this research project, I was feeling down and found the negatives in almost every situation in my life, but after the gratitude process experiment, I do believe that the ‘Three Good Things’ has made me feel so much better. It can be proven from Martin Seligman’s, the father of positive psychology, PERMA elements. PERMA stands for positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. This model was useful in helping me review my entries and analyze data for my research. After the week of recording, I used the model and associated each day by counting how these elements appeared in my entries.

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). Most of my journal entries involved relationships with family, friends, and even strangers. For my journal entry on Thursday November 1, I wrote that I babysat for my brothers girlfriends daughter and in return she bought me a black jean jacket as a thank you when we went to Target later that day. I was going to buy it for myself but when she insisted, I found myself in the moment and even while writing about it really appreciative because it was so sweet and unexpected. Another example from my journal was from Sunday November 4, I had written that a friend who I hadn’t seen in over a year texted me saying that she missed me dearly. When I wrote about this day in my journal, it made me really happy because we still have a strong friendship even though she lives in Florida.

Positive emotions transpired 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. Positive emotions allowed me to focus on the positive elements in my life, which is one aspect of the improvement on my well-being. Out of the 21 days of gratitude moments, I counted 15 different moments where I experienced positive emotion. On Sunday November 4, my friend tagged my twin and I on Instagram in a picture she posted titled “Wow, I miss them.” I haven’t seen her in a while and it put me in a better mood after seeing the post. While I recorded this memory, it made me feel loved and grateful that she posted a photo of us because it showed that she still cares about us even if we haven’t seen each other in awhile.

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. An example of this element from my journal was on Monday November 5. I had worked on and finished a painting for an art class assignment, and afterwards felt satisfied with the outcome. This made me appreciate my talent and connects to another element to the PERMA model which 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. Although it is useful and an easy way to connect to friends that may live far away, I appreciate face-to-face interactions more because the connection with others feels more real and authentic.

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 because the act of writing about a moment made me more thankful. 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. Elements from the PERMA model helped me better my well-being such as making an accomplishment, strengthening relationships, and finding meaning in my life. I find purpose in my artwork and relationships with others, which could be a reason for why this worked for me. The accomplishment of moving past my fears by asking Megan what she was doing in West Chester was a little victory for me and it also allowed me to strengthen our friendship. 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. Cataloging gratitude moments made me appreciate the little moments that I used to take for granted.

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