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Article *in* The Journal of Social Psychology · April 2010

DOI: 10.1080/00224540903365554 · Source: PubMed

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REPLICATIONS AND REFINEMENTS

Acts of Kindness and Acts of Novelty Affect Life Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT. The present experiment was designed to establish the effects of acts of kindness and acts of novelty on life satisfaction. Participants aged 18–60 took part on a voluntary basis. They were randomly assigned to perform either acts of kindness, acts of novelty, or no acts on a daily basis for 10 days. Their life satisfaction was measured before and after the 10-day experiment. As expected, performing acts of kindness or acts of novelty resulted in an increase in life satisfaction.

Keywords: kindness, life satisfaction, well-being

KIND ACTS HAVE CONSISTENTLY been positively correlated with enhanced life satisfaction (e.g., Dulin, Hill, Anderson & Rasmussen, 2001; Hunter & Lin, 1981). However, only a few unpublished studies have conducted interventions to establish the direction of causality (reviewed in Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009). For example, students who performed five kind acts per week for 6 weeks experienced an increase in happiness, an effect not mirrored in the control condition (see Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). The present study asked participants to perform a daily kind act for 10 days and expected to replicate research indicating enhanced life satisfaction.

The success of kind acts may be due to the potential element of novelty counteracting adaption effects (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Brickman, Coates & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). Indeed, participants who performed five kind acts in

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1 day every week had a larger increase in happiness than those who performed five kind acts over a week (see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), presumably because performing the acts regularly allowed participants to adapt faster. This highlights novelty as an important factor in increasing happiness and raises the question of whether performing new acts is sufficient to increase life satisfaction. Presently, only correlational support linking positive activity change with positive affect has been obtained (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). To test if novelty can promote happiness, we added an experimental condition in which participants performed new acts every day for 10 days. We predicted that participants performing new acts would report a greater improvement in happiness than the control group.

We recruited 86 participants (38 males and 48 females, aged 18–60, $M = 26$, $SD = 6$) via opportunity sampling to complete the study in 2008. Because all participation was voluntary, this may have resulted in a smaller sample size than anticipated. Participants were randomly assigned to perform either kind acts, new acts, or no acts. Participants performed acts every day for 10 days and received daily email reminders containing a web-link used to record the act performed. We used the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) to measure life satisfaction before and after the intervention.

A one-way ANOVA established that life satisfaction increases (T2-T1) differed across the activity conditions (kind, new, or none), $F(2, 83) = 4.13$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$. Life satisfaction increased in the experimental conditions (Kind condition: $M = .54$, $SD = .86$; New condition: $M = .35$, $SD = .73$) but not in the control condition ($M = -.04$, $SD = .74$). Planned comparisons revealed that the increase in life satisfaction was significantly higher in the experimental conditions compared with the control condition (Kind condition: $t(83) = 2.84$, $p \leq .01$, $d = .62$; New condition: $t(83) = 1.86$, $p \leq .05$, $d = .41$). The experimental groups did not differ in life satisfaction increase ($t(83) = .94$, NS , $d = .21$).

The current experiment indicates that kind and new acts, performed daily over as little as 10 days, can increase life satisfaction. Furthermore, the results highlight novelty as an integral feature of happiness-enhancing interventions.

AUTHOR NOTES

Anat Bardi, PhD, is a senior lecturer (equivalent to associate professor) in Royal Holloway, University of London. Dr. Bardi received her PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. **Kathryn E. Buchanan** is a doctoral student at Royal Holloway University of London.

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Received February 20, 2009

Accepted April 20, 2009

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