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THE BENEFITS OF OPTIMISM IN A STUDENT- INSTRUCTOR RELATIONSHIP

by

Johnathan Kyle Nelson

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

UNIVERSITY HONORS
WITH DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

The Department of Psychology

Approved:

Thesis/Project Advisor

Department Honors Advisor

Director of Honors Program

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

The positive psychology movement of the past decade has produced an impressive amount of psychological literature devoted to studying the best of human attributes such as resilience, commitment, and optimism. This dramatic increase in available literature on optimism highlights a heightened awareness and interest in human proficiency, when so much of psychology has been traditionally devoted to the study of human deficiency. This research has led to an increased understanding of what characteristics of an individual lead to facilitate various activities such as problem solving, leadership ability, income, achievement, sales, and job satisfaction. This study explored the relationship between positive affect and performance, specifically in reading, a skill used frequently in higher education. This study investigated if a comment from an instructor elicited a positive feeling in a student, and what impact that positive affect may have had upon a student's reading performance.

The Positive Psychology Movement

Martin Seligman began his career as most psychologists: researching the frailties of people. Many of the studies he conducted were on learned helplessness (Seligman & Maier, 1967). Then, shortly after becoming president of the American Psychological Association, he said that he had an epiphany when his daughter said to him: 'When I turned five, I decided not to whine anymore. That was the hardest thing I've ever done. And if I can stop whining you can stop being such a grouch' (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 6). Of this experience Seligman said he then realized his job as a parent and a psychologist was not just about correcting faults, but nurturing the strengths of individuals.

The positive psychology movement is not like the "feel good" positive approaches of the past made popular by those such as Norman Vincent Peale (1952). Instead, it is a research based approach with an emphasis upon what characteristics of individuals facilitate success and quality of life. Research based upon positive psychology is concerned with how factors such as resilience, commitment, and optimism can enhance the lives of individuals and the society in which they live. While the positive psychology movement has implications in virtually every aspect of the field of psychology one area that it has had a profound impact is in the study of organizational behavior. For instance, through a greater understanding of human strengths it may be possible to further enhance the abilities of employees and managers in achieving success in the workplace. To understand the full impact that positive psychology can have upon the field of organizational behavior, one must first be familiar with and understand the far reaching effects of optimism, how it may be displayed, and how optimism has had a direct impact upon performance in a variety of settings, including the workplace.

Staw and Ross (1985) explored the influence of an optimistic attitude in the workplace and the stability of that optimistic attitude over time. They observed that there was a consistency in the observed optimistic attitude of individuals. Optimism was measured by job satisfaction on the part of the employee. They found that this satisfaction remained stable in a variety of work settings across time. Prior job satisfaction ratings reported by individuals, served as better indicators of future job satisfaction than either current income or job status. While those other factors such as income do play a role in job satisfaction, those optimistic people consistently report greater job satisfaction than their counterparts. Similarly, other studies indicate a positive correlation between certain personality attributes, and satisfaction in the workplace as well (Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995; Furnham, Petrides, Jackson, & Cotter, 2002; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). It appears that those people who have the greatest positive disposition will naturally be happier in the workplace. Optimistic dispositions may even serve as a predictor of job satisfaction even before entering the work force.

This consistency of an individual's optimistic attitude may begin even while an individual is still enrolled in college. Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, and Sandvik (2002) conducted a longitudinal study to observe the effect that having a cheerful disposition upon entering college would have on later job outcomes. Using The American Freshman survey administered in 1976, cheerfulness of participants was measured. Participants were then given the College and Beyond survey in 1995 and were asked to report their current salary and job satisfaction. Results indicated that participants with the highest cheerfulness ratings in 1976 had a job satisfaction rating 19 years later that was higher than individuals with the lowest cheerfulness ranking when entering college. Results also indicated that those participants with the highest cheerfulness

ratings upon entering college had higher incomes than those who reported lower cheerfulness ratings. A positive disposition may serve to predict more than job satisfaction as well.

A positive disposition has also been observed to be an accurate predictor of achievement in the classroom. A hopeful disposition accurately predicts success as measured by GPA in the classroom (Ruby & Rehm, 1997; Peterson & Barrett, 1987). A hopeful disposition also predicts performance for students on the playing field. For example Ruby and Rehm (1997) administered the Dispositional Hope Scale at the beginning of a semester and observed that the hope score then served as a better indicator of future sports achievement than any other measure, including hours spent in practice.

However, optimism can serve as a predictor for much more than just grades and other achievements. Dunning and Story (1991) observed that individuals with positive attitudes were able to better predict future events that would occur to them than their depressed counterparts. These events included a variety of things that could happen during any semester in college such as: "obtaining an A in your favorite course," to "meet a person who becomes a good friend", and to "change roommates" (p. 525). It appears that optimism may serve as an accurate predictor in future success in many aspects of an individual's life, including salesmanship.

A positive disposition can serve as an indicator for success in sales. Numerous studies have been conducted to observe any possible relationships between positive-affect and sales (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988; Rafaeli & Sutton, 2001; George, 1991; Pugh, 2001). There have been a variety of benefits from positive attitudes displayed by sales representatives in the workplace. For instance, Pugh (2001) found that positive emotions displayed by a sales representative led to greater happiness and quality of service evaluations on the part of customers. Likewise, George (1991) found that positive mood on the part of employees led to three important outcomes:

displayed emotions, customer service, and sales. It appears that a positive disposition can play an important part in many aspects associated with the success of an organization, particularly in the area of sales.

Seligman and Schulman (1986) have even observed benefits in an optimistic attitude in the doomsday world of life insurance. Even in an area where one would expect a pessimistic attitude to be beneficial, they observed that salespersons in life insurance with an optimistic disposition obtained greater success in their work than those with a more negative disposition. Those agents scoring in the top half for reported optimism sold 37% more life insurance than those reporting a lower degree of optimism, and were more likely to keep their job.

Along with these aspects of success as a result of optimism, a great deal of research has also been conducted to study the effects of positive disposition upon problem solving, where in each case optimism and positive affect have been discovered as reliable predictors for successful problem solving and divergent thinking (Estrada, Isen & Young, 1994; Vosburg, 1998; Greene & Noice, 1988; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). In one instance, Greene and Noice (1988) conducted a study to observe if positive affect among children facilitated creative thinking and problem solving. Twenty-two eighth-grade school students from western Kentucky were selected as participants. They were each randomly assigned to either a control group or a treatment (positive-affect) group. Participants in the positive-affect group were presented a small gift of a package of gum, and complimented before the experimental session officially began. To measure creative thinking, the Duncker candle task and word-generation task were used. Results revealed that positive-affect facilitated creative thinking and problem solving: Seven of the eleven participants in the positive-affect group correctly solved the Duncker Candle Task in the allotted time while only two participants in the control group were successful.

Participants in the positive-affect group also had a mean number of 29.0 words for the given categories, while the neutral group only generated a mean of 15.6 words during the time allotted for the word-generation task. Participants influenced by the positive affect appear to have been able to engage in faster and more diverse problem solving.

While optimism on the part of an individual has been observed to improve the happiness and achievement in the life of that individual, researchers have also provided strong evidence that optimism can effect those associated with a positive individual (George, 1995). Not only can the productivity (improved customer satisfaction) of an individual increase in the workplace, but it can increase for those whom come in contact with an optimistic individual as well. George (1995) found that a positive mood on the part of leaders had a direct impact upon the optimism found in their workplaces as well. She hypothesized that a leader's positive mood would be positively associated with group performance. To test this, a sample of 53 sales managers (each oversaw groups consisting of 4 to 9 salespeople) was used. Leader positive mood was measured using a PANAS scale which consists of 10 mood descriptors that participants were asked to complete in regard to how they had felt at work for the previous week. Job satisfaction and job involvement was also measured for each of these leaders. Group performance was evaluated for each group by branch managers who used three-item scales using a seven-point Likert score to measure the quality of service that each group provided for customers. Results from these measures were then combined to measure the relationship between a leader's positive mood and the degree of customer service provided to customers by their group. These results supported the hypothesis that positive mood on the part of the leader would be positively associated with group performance ($r = .41; p < .01$). It appears that one way to directly increase the optimism of

employees in sales is to simply increase the optimistic outlook of their leaders. This relationship may extend to job performance evaluations as well.

While a positive disposition has been found to facilitate many aspects of various tasks in a typical work environment, a relationship has also been observed with job performance evaluations in general (Wright & Staw 1999; and Begley, Lee, & Czajka, 2000). Furthermore, Wright and Staw (1991) observed that the effects of optimism on performance evaluations can last over a significant period of time.

In light of the research that has been conducted, there is still much more to be learned on the effects that optimism can have upon an individual as they strive to excel in various aspects of life. One area that is lacking in particular is the effect that a positive job evaluation from a leader can have upon an individual's job performance. Previous studies have simply observed that optimistic individuals generally tend to receive higher evaluations of job performance and that an optimistic leader can influence the effectiveness and success of a group (George, 1995).

A professor can be viewed as the leader of their class. They have authority over the individuals enrolled in their class. Performance of students is often measured through multiple-choice tests. Tests are often prepared for through attending lectures and reading from textbooks. College-level reading places special demands upon students. Students need to be able to read passages for an extended amount of time and be able to process the information that they are reading through relating it to prior information (Flippo & Schumm, 2000). Three hypotheses were proposed in this study. First, it was hypothesized that displayed optimism (written comment) from a leader, in this case a professor, and a small gift of gum would both produce a positive affect in students. Second, positive affect would improve reading intensity. Third, that

reading intensity would predict performance on a multiple-choice test of the material that had been read.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruited from a general introduction to psychology class taught at Utah State University. Fifty-seven undergraduate students participated. A research assistant announced the time and purpose of the study to the class and informed students that the study would take about one hour of their time. Students were informed the study was conducted to study the reading styles of college students. Students were not informed of the role of positive mood in the study in order to avoid expectancy effects. Students received class credit for their participation. Students were also told that all information that they provided would remain anonymous.

Materials

Participants completed a series of questionnaires. They completed: the Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale, (PANAS), the Life Orientation Test, the Mood Awareness Scale (MAS), and the Affect Intensity Measure (AIM). Participants also read a section out of their texts related to health psychology (Weiten, 2003). All participants also completed a questionnaire designed especially for this study (Appendix A). Items were selected to evaluate the ways in which students read from the text, and how serious they were in participating in the experiment. Items used to evaluate reading intensity were based off of items used in the SQ3R that have been used in various studies to measure reading intensity and comprehension (Pressley, M., Brown, R., El-Dinary, P.B., & Afflerbach, P., 1995; Caverly, D.C., Orlando, V.P., & Mullen, J.L., 2000). The multiple-choice test included questions related to the health psychology chapter in the text

(Appendix B). Selected participants also received a short statement included with their questionnaires designed to create a positive affect. The statement read: "Thank you for participating in this study. I have enjoyed having you in my class, and appreciate the work that you are putting into my class, and the time you have taken to be a part of this study. Thanks Again." The statement ended with the personal signature of the instructor.

A small gift was given to selected participants. This gift consisted of a small pack of gum. Students were told that this was a token of thanks for their participation in the study. This has been proven effective in previous studies for producing a positive affect in study participants (Isen, Johnson Mertz, & Robinson, 1985).

Procedure

For this study a 2 (gift or no gift) by 2 (statement from instructor or no statement) between subjects factorial design was used to test the three hypotheses. The independent variables were expected to produce a positive-affect. Participants were randomly assigned into one of four groups. Group one served as the control group receiving no gift or statement. Group two received the small gift expected to produce a positive-affect. Group three received the statement from their instructor expected to produce a positive-affect. Group four received both the small gift and the statement from their instructor. The dependent variable of performance was measured by participant's scores on the 20 question multiple-choice test. All groups met at the same time, and were then directed to similar rooms on the Utah State University campus. Each participant was seated at their own desk.

Lab assistants were instructed only to verify that participants have arrived to the correct section, and to direct them towards their seats. They were specifically instructed to not thank participants for coming, or engage in any other conversation. Participants were handed a packet

containing their questionnaires and the letter of information. Group 2 and Group 4 also received the small gift of a package of gum at this time, and were thanked for coming. Group 3 and Group 4 received the written note from their instructor. Lab assistants read the letter of information aloud, and then explained that participants would have 15 minutes to complete the PANAS, Life Orientation Scale, the MAS, and the AIM. Following this period, participants were told to open their books to the chapter on health psychology, that they would be given 15 minutes to read, and that they would then be taking a short test on that material. After this period of reading, participants were handed the questionnaire designed especially for this study, and the multiple-choice test. They were given 15 minutes to complete this portion of the experiment. All materials were then collected, and students were thanked and debriefed.

Results

The first hypothesis stated that displayed optimism (written comment) from a leader, in this case a professor, and a small gift of gum would both produce a positive affect in students. Table 1 shows means and standard deviations for positive affect for each group; a significant difference in positive affect as measured by PANAS scores was not observed between any of the groups ($F=.627, p< .432$).

Table 1

Positive Affect Scores

	Positive Affect	
	Mean	Standard deviation
Group 1: No candy; no statement	35.1	3.26
Group 2: Candy; no statement	34.4	7.04
Group 3: Statement; no candy	36.0	4.81
Group 4: Candy + Statement	37.2	2.35

Hypothesis two stated that positive affect would improve reading intensity. Since PANAS scores were not significantly different for each group this did not turn out to be the case. Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of reading intensity scores for each group. A significant relationship between reading intensity scores and the introduction of the small gift of gum was observed ($F=13.39, p < .001$).

Table 2

Descriptive Means of the four groups

Dependent Variable: Reading intensity

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Group 1: No candy; no statement	35.1	3.26	14
Group 2: Candy; no statement	34.4	7.04	12
Group 3: Statement; no candy	36	4.81	11
Group 4: Candy + Statement	37.2	2.35	18

Hypothesis three stated that reading intensity would predict performance. Figure 1 displays the relationship between reading intensity and multiple-choice test score. Multiple regression analyses revealed that reading intensity was positively related to the participant's multiple-choice test score ($\beta=.305, p<.028$).

students, one of the questions that should be asked is if social reciprocity is playing a role in this process. This change in behavior was observed, but is not accounted for by positive affect scores.

Another possibility is if the task used in this study to observe performance (multiple-choice test) is amenable to other tasks influenced by positive affect. Previous studies have focused upon the role that positive affect may play in problem solving (Estrada, Isen & Young, 1994; Vosburg, 1998; Greene & Noice, 1988; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). It may be that those processes differ from the processes that would be used in performance related to the classroom.

Future research should investigate what interventions can produce the greatest positive affect in participants. This study only employed the use of candy and a statement from a professor. It may be that these were not effective in producing a positive affect in students. Other methods for facilitating a positive mood should be established. In addition, further measures should be developed for detecting changes in positive affect. It may have been that this change was occurring, but the measures that were used were unable to detect those changes.

Future research should also focus upon how positive affect influenced performance on problem solving tasks, and in what ways those behaviors could be carried over into other activities. It may be that reading is not facilitated by positive affect. Other tasks such as memory tasks could also be explored to see if a positive mood could facilitate those types of tasks.

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Appendix A

*Please do not include your name

Research Questionnaire

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Current Status in school:
- 2 or fewer semesters
 - 3-4 semesters
 - 5-6 semesters
 - 7 or more semesters

4. Undergraduate Major(s): _____

5. Undergraduate Minor(s): _____

This following questions asks about your current experience; remember that your answers are anonymous so please answer as honestly and accurately as possible. Your honest answers to these questions will help us to better understand the learning that occurs through the reading of a text.

How many of the pages of Health Psychology Chapter in your text did you read? _____

Please describe what you focused upon as you read the text:

Please describe your method in reading the text:

Please describe if your method of reading during this exercise differed from the way in which you typically read your psychology text book, and please explain why:

In general, rate how much you agree to the following statements in regards to your experience and participation in this experiment, as specifically related to your reading of the text, and the test that followed containing questions related to the read text.

	Disagree Strongly		Neutral		Agree Strongly
I read intently.	1	2	3	4	5
I did not become distracted in my reading.	1	2	3	4	5
I paid attention to all instructions from the research assistant.	1	2	3	4	5
I answered all questions related to the text to the best of my ability.	1	2	3	4	5
I answered all questions honestly.	1	2	3	4	5
I strove to do my best on the test.	1	2	3	4	5
I paid attention to all instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
I read the text with an intent to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
I took this experiment seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
I read the text carefully.	1	2	3	4	5
I read as much as I could.	1	2	3	4	5
I paid attention to details in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
I strove to differentiate between new material and material I already knew as I was reading.	1	2	3	4	5
I read as quickly as I could in order to get through as much material as possible, while still comprehending it.	1	2	3	4	5
I simply skimmed through the text.	1	2	3	4	5
I completed the test as quickly as possible with little concern for my score.	1	2	3	4	5
I paid little attention to the text.	1	2	3	4	5
I read the text more carefully than I normally do in studying for this class.	1	2	3	4	5
I read slower than I normally do in order to comprehend and remember more.	1	2	3	4	5
I attempted to relate what I was reading to what I have learned in my psychology class.	1	2	3	4	5
I strove to relate what I was reading to other information I had read in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
I thought about how what I was reading would relate to my psychology class.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Identify the letter of the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question, and indicate that choice in the space provided.

- _____ 1. Your text defined stress as
- any unpleasant event
 - the responses we make to unpleasant events
 - illness-inducing behavior
 - circumstances that are perceived as threatening
- _____ 2. Mason is already late for an important appointment when he realizes he is almost out of gas. He stops to fill up, and the clerk has trouble getting approval on his credit card. When he finally pulls out of the service station, the traffic is crawling because of an accident. Inconveniences of this type
- can often have a significant effect on physical and mental health
 - are such routine hassles that they are not perceived as stressful
 - usually create avoidance-avoidance conflicts
 - are only stressful to individuals with a Type A personality
- _____ 3. Most of Conrad's friends consider him to be highly neurotic. It is likely that, compared to his friends, Conrad is
- less likely to perceive events as stressful
 - more likely to "choke" under pressure
 - less likely to use defensive coping strategies
 - more likely to perceive events as stressful
- _____ 4. Tatiana just finished entering her 10-page term paper into one of the computers in the University's computer lab. She clicks the "Save" command, and the computer unexpectedly locks up. When she reboots the computer she discovers that all but the first two pages of her term paper have been lost. At this point in time Tatiana is MOST likely experiencing
- pressure
 - conflict
 - frustration
 - burnout
- _____ 5. The person who is MOST likely to experience frustration is one who
- can predict the outcome of an event
 - is a perfectionist
 - sets goals that are too low
 - must decide between two equally attractive alternatives
- _____ 6. Leonard has a job with a small company where he gets along well with everyone, and he has 15 years of seniority. Recently a competitor called to offer him a job that would pay more money, but where he would be starting over, with no seniority. As Leonard tries to decide whether to accept the new job because it offers more money, or turn the job offer down because it would mean giving up his seniority, he is facing
- an approach-approach conflict
 - an approach-avoidance conflict
 - an avoidance-avoidance conflict
 - a frustration-pressure conflict
- _____ 7. The most likely INITIAL consequence of an approach-avoidance conflict is
- approach
 - vacillation
 - avoidance
 - withdrawal

8. Holmes and Rahe reasoned that major sources of stress for people come from
- failures
 - life events involving loss
 - changes in one's life that require readjustment
 - only those life changes the person sees as negative
9. People with higher scores on the Social Readjustment Rating Scale have been found to
- react more negatively to stressful events
 - be more vulnerable to physical illness and psychological problems
 - have a more external locus of control
 - cope more effectively with stress
10. Current research on change and stress suggests that
- change is not inherently or inevitably stressful
 - both positive and negative changes are equally stressful
 - too much change of whatever sort automatically makes one more vulnerable to physical and psychological problems
 - keeping change to a minimum is an effective way to avoid the harmful effects of stress
11. Research has shown that the emotional responses to stress
- may involve either positive or negative emotions
 - always involve negative emotions
 - typically alternate between positive and negative emotions
 - are more intense in women than in men
12. The optimal level of arousal for task performance
- is about the same from one task to another
 - increases as the tasks become more complex
 - decreases as the tasks become more complex
 - relates more to personal makeup than to the task
13. The fight-or-flight response causes
- a reduction in breathing and heart rate and an acceleration in digestive processes
 - an acceleration in breathing, heart rate, and digestive processes
 - a reduction in breathing, heart rate, and digestive processes
 - an acceleration in breathing and heart rate and a reduction in digestive processes
14. Tiana was walking down the street late one evening when a stranger suddenly stepped out of the shadows. Her initial reaction was one of total panic, but then she began to think of all her options. Although her heart was still pounding, she quickly crossed to the other side of the street and began walking in the opposite direction. According to Selye's general adaptation syndrome, Tiana was probably experiencing
- a resistance reaction
 - an alarm reaction
 - physiological exhaustion
 - autonomic rebound
15. Stress effects appear to be moderated by the
- thalamus activating the pituitary gland
 - pituitary gland activating the hypothalamus
 - hypothalamus activating the sympathetic nervous system
 - cerebellum activating the autonomic nervous system

16. Ivan's car began to slip sideways on the rain-slick road. As his car spun out of control, and into the path of oncoming traffic, his pituitary gland began to secrete adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH). This would have stimulated the adrenal glands and caused
- the adrenal cortex to begin to release corticosteroids
 - the adrenal medulla to begin to release corticosteroids
 - the adrenal cortex to begin to release catecholamines
 - his amygdala to slow the release of acetylcholine
17. Learned helplessness involves
- a release of emotional tension that often accompanies stress
 - passive behavior produced by exposure to unavoidable aversive events
 - protecting oneself from unpleasant situations by refusing to acknowledge them
 - atoning for unacceptable unconscious drives or impulses in socially acceptable ways
18. According to the original frustration-aggression hypothesis put forth by Dollard and his colleagues,
- frustration is always a consequence of aggression
 - aggression is always caused by frustration
 - frustration causes males to be more aggressive than females
 - frustration is only a factor in aggressive behavior for non-human species
19. Garret is frustrated and angry when his request for a pay raise is turned down. After work, Garret goes to his gym and hits the punching bag for 10 minutes. Garret finds that he feels less tense and wound up after his workout. This change in Garret's mood is consistent with the concept of:
- overcompensation
 - undoing
 - denial
 - catharsis
20. Francis finished writing her Economics final and was convinced that she had failed the exam and would have to repeat the course. She was so stressed out by the thought of taking the course a second time that she drank eight glasses of wine when she got home. Based on this information, it appears that one method that Francis uses to cope with stress is
- self-indulgence
 - overcompensation
 - learned helplessness
 - undoing

Running Head: OPTIMISM

The Benefits of Optimism: Positive Psychology's Perspective

Johnathan Nelson

THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY MOVEMENT

Martin Seligman began his career as most psychologists: researching the frailties of people. Many of the studies he conducted were on learned helplessness (Seligman & Maier, 1967). Then, shortly after becoming president of the American Psychological Association, he said that he had an epiphany when his daughter said to him: ‘When I turned five, I decided not to whine anymore. That was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. And if I can stop whining you can stop being such a grouch’ (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 6). Of this experience Seligman said he then realized his job as a parent and a psychologist was not just about correcting faults, but nurturing the strengths of individuals.

The positive psychology movement is not like the “feel good” positive approaches of the past made popular by those such as Norman Vincent Peale (1952), but instead is a research based approach, with an emphasis upon what is right with people. This research is concerned with how strengths such as resilience, commitment, and optimism can enhance the lives of individuals, and the society in which they live. While the positive psychology movement has implications in virtually every aspect of the field of psychology, one area that it has had a profound impact is in the area of organizational behavior. The emphasis in organizational behavior is increasing its focus to that of enhancing the abilities of employees and managers through training which has been made possible in part, through a greater understanding of these strengths which have been the focus of the positive psychology movement. To understand the full impact that positive psychology can have upon the field of organizational

behavior, one must first be familiar with and understand the far reaching effects of optimism, how it is often displayed, and how this optimism has had a direct impact upon performance in a variety of settings, including the work force.

Staw and Ross (1985) explored the influence of an optimistic attitude in the workplace, and the stability of that optimistic attitude over time. They observed that there was a consistency in the observed optimistic attitude of individuals. Optimism in this case was measured by job satisfaction on the part of the employee. They found that this satisfaction remained stable in a variety of work settings across time. Prior job satisfaction ratings reported by individuals, served as better indicators of future job satisfaction than either current income or job status. While those other factors such as income do play a role in job satisfaction, those optimistic people consistently report greater job satisfaction than their counterparts.

Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, and Sandvik (2002) conducted a longitudinal study to observe the effect that having a cheerful disposition upon entering college would have on later job outcomes. Using "The American Freshman" survey administered in 1976, cheerfulness of participants was measured. Participants were then given the "College and Beyond" survey in 1995, and were asked to report their current salary and job satisfaction. Results indicated that participants with the highest cheerfulness ratings in 1976 had a job satisfaction rating 19 years later that was higher than individuals with the lowest cheerfulness ranking when entering college. Results also indicated that those participants with

the highest cheerfulness ratings upon entering college had higher incomes than those who reported lower cheerfulness ratings.

Optimism effects many facets of life. A positive disposition has been observed to be an accurate predictor of achievement in both the classroom and even on the playing field. Ruby and Rehm (1997) administered the Dispositional Hope Scale at the beginning of a semester and observed that the hope score then served as a better indicator of future sports achievement than any other measure, including hours spent in practice. Studies have also shown hopeful disposition accurately predicts success in the classroom among athletes and non-athletes (Ruby & Rehm, 1997; Peterson & Barrett, 1987).

However, optimism can serve as a predictor for much more than just grades and other achievements. Dunning and Story (1991) observed that individuals with positive attitudes were able to better predict future events that would occur to them than their depressed counterparts. These events included a variety of things that could happen during any semester in college such as: "obtaining an A in your favorite course," to "meet a person who becomes a good friend", and to "change roommates" (p. 525). It appears that optimism may serve as an accurate predictor in future success in many aspects of an individuals life.

Another area that optimism has a strong effect upon is job satisfaction. Observations indicate a positive correlation between certain personality attributes, and satisfaction in the workplace (Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995; Furnham, Petrides, Jackson, & Cotter, 2002; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). These studies also show that a positive-affect such as a small gift are able to increase the

satisfaction that an employee may report. It appears that those people who have the greatest positive disposition will naturally be happier in the workplace they find themselves placed in. It also appears that those with positive dispositions receive many other benefits around the workplace besides just being happy with their job (Staw, Sutton & Pelled, 1994). One of these observed benefits is increased performance in the workplace, specifically in the area of salesmanship.

A positive disposition can serve as an indicator for success in sales. Numerous studies have been conducted to observe any possible relationships between positive-affect and sales (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988; Rafaeli & Sutton, 2001; George, 1991; and Pugh, 2001). There have been a variety of benefits from positive attitudes displayed by sales representatives in the workplace. For instance, Pugh (2001) found that displayed positive emotions on the part of a sales representative led to greater happiness and quality of service evaluations on the part of customers. Likewise, George (1991) found that positive mood on the part of employees led to three important outcomes: displayed emotions, customer service, and sales. It appears that a positive disposition can play an important part in many aspects associated with the success of an organization.

Seligman and Schulman (1986) have even observed benefits in an optimistic attitude in the doomsday world of life insurance. Even in an area where one would expect a pessimistic attitude to be beneficial, they observed that salespersons in life insurance with an optimistic disposition obtained greater success in their work than those with a more negative disposition. Those agents scoring in the top half for reported optimism sold 37% more life insurance than

those reporting a lower degree of optimism, and were more likely to keep their job.

Along with these aspects of success as a result of optimism, a great deal of research has also been conducted to study the effects of positive disposition upon problem solving, where in each case optimism and positive affect have been discovered as reliable predictors for successful problem solving and divergent thinking (Estrada, Isen & Young, 1994; Vosburg, 1998; Greene & Noice, 1988; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). In one instance Greene and Noice (1988) conducted a study to observe if positive affect among children facilitated creative thinking and problem solving. Twenty-two eighth-grade school students from western Kentucky were selected as participants. They were each randomly assigned to either a control group or a positive-affect group. Participants in the positive-affect group were presented a small gift of a package of gum, and complimented before the experimental session officially began. To measure creative thinking, the Duncker candle task and word-generation task were used. Results revealed that positive-affect facilitated creative thinking and problem solving: Seven of the eleven participants in the positive-affect group correctly solved the Duncker Candle Task in the allotted time while only two participants in the control group were successful. Participants in the positive-affect group also had a mean number of 29.0 words for the given categories, while the neutral group only generated a mean of 15.6 words during the time allotted for the word-generation task.

While optimism on the part of an individual has been observed to improve the happiness and achievement in the life of that individual, research has also provided strong evidence that optimism can effect those associated with a positive individual (George, 1995). Not only is the productivity of an individual increased in the workplace, but it can increase for those whom come in contact with an optimistic individual as well. George (1995) found that a positive mood on the part of leaders had a direct impact upon the optimism found in their workplaces as well. She hypothesized that a leader's positive mood would be positively associated with group performance. To test this, a sample of 53 sales managers overseeing groups of salespeople ranging from four to nine were used. Leader positive mood was measured using a PANAS scale which consists of 10 mood descriptors that participants were asked to complete in regard to how they had felt at work for the previous week. Job satisfaction and job involvement was also measured for each of these leaders. Group performance was evaluated for each group by branch managers who used a three-item scales using a seven-point Likert score to measure the quality of service that each group provided for customers. Results from these measures were then combined to measure the relationship between a leader's positive mood and the degree of customer service provided to customers by their group. These results supported the hypothesis that positive mood on the part of the leader would be positively associated with group performance ($r = .41$; $p < .01$). It appears that one way to directly increase the optimism of employees in sales is to simply increase the optimistic outlook of their leaders.

While a positive disposition has been found to facilitate many aspects of various tasks in a typical work environment, a correlation has also been observed with job performance evaluations in general (Wright & Staw 1999; and Begley, Lee, & Czajka, 2000). Optimism has been found to have a positive correlation with job performance evaluations. Furthermore Wright and Staw (1991) also found that the effects of optimism on performance evaluations can last over a significant period of time.

In light of all of the research that has been conducted, there is still much more to be learned on the effects that optimism can have upon an individual as they strive to excel in various aspects of life. One area that is lacking in particular is the effect that a positive job evaluation from a leader can have upon an individual's job performance. Previous studies have simply observed that optimistic individuals generally tend to receive higher evaluations of job performance. Research does indicate the effect an optimistic leader can have upon the effectiveness and success of a group however (George, 1995). It is hypothesized that the displayed optimism from a leader will lead to an exaggerated evaluation of job performance in an individual, which will then produce a positive affect in that person. This positive affect will then improve performance on a variety of tasks. To study this, it is proposed that a study be conducted to observe if the comments of a leader can in fact produce a positive affect in an individual, and if that positive affect will actually improve performance. It is also hypothesized that this affect would be greater for those individuals who have a naturally more optimistic disposition than others.

METHOD

Participants

Participants will be selected from a general introduction to psychology class taught at Utah State University. As a class period begins, a research assistant will announce the study to the class. They will be informed that a study is being conducted to study the memory of college students. Students will be told in class that they can receive a lab credit for participating, and that the study will only take about one hour of their time. Students will also be informed of the time and date of the lab session. They will also be told that all information that they provide will remain confidential. A sign-up sheet will then be made available to all students interested, and they will record their contact information on the form at that time. They will also be given an e-mail address which they can use to express interest in being involved with the study, and will be informed that they have three days to express interest past that class period. A list of all students willing to participate will then be compiled, and those students will be randomly assigned into three groups. It is expected that there will be no more than a 2:1 ratio of either sex in each group.

Materials

Two test forms will be used. The two test forms shall be referred to as form A and form B. All questions will remain consistent both in content and order for both tests. The only difference between the test forms will be a small statement included on form A designed to create a positive affect. The statement will read: "Thank you for participating in this study. I have enjoyed having you

in my class, and appreciate the work that you are putting into my class, and the time you have taken to be a part of this study. Thanks Again.” The statement will then end with the personal signature of the instructor of the class. Both forms of the test will then be consistent from that point to the end. Participants will be asked to record their age, sex, and semesters of school completed. No other personal information will be recorded. The test will then conclude with questions from chapters that had been covered on a test administered to the entire class one week previous to the date of this study. The test questions will be taken from the same test question bank that their instructor used to form the test that they had previously taken. All questions will be multiple choice, and will be answered on a scan-tron form.

A small bag of candy will also be used for one of the two sample groups receiving test form B. It will be a small cellophane bag of hard wrapped candy, held together by a small string. This has been proven effective in previous studies for producing a positive affect in study participants (Isen, Johnson Mertz, & Robinson, 1985).

Procedure

For this study a two by three quasi-experimental factorial design will be used. The independent variables will be sex, consisting of male and female, and positive-affect which will be divided into three levels: one control group receiving no affect, one group receiving candy to produce a positive-affect, and the last group receiving test form A with the statement from their instructor to produced the positive-affect. The dependent variable will be a measure of their

performance and memory as measured by their scores on the administered test. Once participants have been randomly selected into three groups, they will be contacted and told the location of where they need to attend for the lab credit. All three groups will meet at the same time, and in similar rooms. All rooms will be located on the fourth floor of the education building of the Utah State University campus. They will have a desk for each participant, and will be uniform in appearance. A standard temperature and lighting will be used for each room.

Upon arrival, all participants will check in with a lab assistant, and be directed towards a seat. They will be asked to sit quietly until the study is ready to begin. The lab assistant will be instructed only to verify that participants have arrived to the correct section, and to direct them towards their seats. They will specifically be instructed to not thank participants for coming, or engage in any other conversation. Five minutes after participants were informed the study was to start a different lab assistant will enter, and the door will be closed. No one else will be admitted at that point. Participants will then be handed a manila folder containing their test, and asked to not open it until instructed. Group 1 and Group 2 will receive test form B, which does not contain the positive-affect of the note from their instructor. Group 3 will receive test form A which includes the positive-affect of the written note from their instructor on the test. Group 1 will also be handed a small bag of candy. They will be told the candy is a token of appreciation for participating in the study. All participants will receive the following instructions for completing the test. Lab assistants will remind participants that the purpose of the study is to observe the memory of college

students. They will be told that they will have 45 minutes to complete the test.

Lab assistants will not be able to answer any questions about the test, but to simply answer all questions to the best of their ability, and with what participants feel is the best answer. Once they have completed the test, or time is up, participants will be instructed to place the test back in the manila folder, and to leave it with the lab assistant as they exit the classroom. Once these instructions have been given, participants will be instructed to remove the test from the manila folder, and to begin. A clock showing the time remaining for the test will be located at the front of the classroom. Once the time is complete, the lab assistant will inform those remaining of the time, and ask them to stop work on the test, and to turn in the completed form in the manila folder as they exit.

Data will then be specifically analyzed to observe the effects of each of the different conditions upon the average score received on the tests for each of these three conditions.

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