

Running Head: ACTS OF KINDNESS AND ACTS OF NOVELTY

Acts of Kindness and Acts of Novelty Affect Life Satisfaction

Word count: 500

Keywords: Well-being, life satisfaction, kindness.

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 However, only a few unpublished studies have conducted interventions to establish the direction of causality (reviewed in Boehm and Lyubomirsky, in press). For example students who performed five kind acts per week for six 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 ten 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 one 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 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 everyday for ten days. We predicted that participants performing new acts would report a greater improvement in happiness than the control group.

Eighty six participants (38 males and 48 females, aged 18-60, $M = 26$, $SD = 6$), recruited via opportunity sampling, completed the study in 2008. All participation was voluntary possibly contributing to a smaller sample size than anticipated. Participants

were randomly assigned to perform either kind acts, new acts or no acts. Participants performed acts everyday for ten 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 differences in life satisfaction increase between the experimental and controlled conditions were significant (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 ten days, can increase life satisfaction. Furthermore, the results highlight novelty as an integral feature of happiness-enhancing interventions.

References

- Boehm, J. K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (in press). Enduring happiness. In J. Lopez (Ed.), *Handbook of positive psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brickman, P., & Campbell, D. T. (1971). Hedonic relativism and planning the good society. In M. H. Appley (Ed.), *Adaption level theory: A symposium* (pp. 287-302). New York: Academic Press.
- Brickman, P., Coates, D., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (1978). Lottery winners and accident victims - is happiness relative? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 917-927.
- Dulin, P., Hill, R. D., Anderson, J., & Rasmussen, D. (2001). Altruism as a predictor of life satisfaction in a sample of low-income older adult service providers. *Journal of Mental Health and Aging*, 7, 349-359.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75.
- Hunter, K. I., & Lin, M. W. (1981). Psychosocial differences between elderly volunteers and non-volunteers. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 12, 205-213.
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 111-131.
- Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006). Achieving sustainable gains in happiness: Change your actions, not your circumstances. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7, 55-86.