The Effect of Positive Affirmations on Self-Esteem and Well-Being in College Students

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Introduction

- Spontaneous other- and self-affirmation have been associated with **greater levels of happiness, hopefulness, and more health benefits** (Emmanuel et al., 2018).
- Past research has shown that self-esteem can **be fostered through positive regard from others** (Rogers, 1951 as cited by Maxwell & Bachkirova, 2010).
- Well-being theorists believe that it is important to examine if people can **intentionally enhance their resiliency** by using happiness-enhancing strategies such as **affirmations** (Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2010 as cited by Howell, 2017).
- Delivering virtual messages through a mobile phone is a **widely accessible method in facilitating behavior changes** through the support and immediate feedback (Sharifi et al., 2013).

Method

This study had a sample of 38 students from a small liberal arts university in the Bay Area, 23 of which completed the study (21 females and 2 males aged 18-22 years old; mainly of Asian descent).

Participants were asked to complete an online survey consisting of the three measures listed below:

- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1965) measuring positive and negative feelings about the self using a 4-point Likert scale.
- Flourishing Scale** (Diener & Biswas-Deiner, 2009) measuring self-perceived success in key areas of life using a 7-point Likert scale.
- Satisfaction with Life Scale** (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) measuring cognitive judgments of the self-perceived life satisfaction aspect of subjective well-being using a 7-point Likert scale.

For two weeks, participants in both conditions received affirmations twice daily between the hours of 10am and 10pm, then asked to take a post-test survey.

Hypotheses

Virtual affirmations will have a beneficial impact on college students' self-esteem and well-being.

Affirmations given via text message will have a greater positive impact on self-esteem and well-being than affirmations given via mobile application.

Results

When comparing pre- and post-test scores, there were significant increases in: Esteem ($t(23) = -4.447, p < 0.001$), Flourishing ($t(23) = -3.574, p < 0.005$), and SWLS ($t(23) = -3.759, p < 0.005$).

Average Pre-test and Post-test Scores

When comparing score changes for each condition, there were no significant changes in: Esteem ($t(22) = -1.511, p > 0.05$), Flourishing ($t(22) = 0.723, p > 0.05$), and SWLS ($t(22) = 0.674, p > 0.05$).

Differences in App vs. Text

Conclusions

Key findings

- Significant increases were found between pre-test and post-test scores for self-esteem, flourishing, and satisfaction with life.
- No significant differences were found between changes in scores of the text and mobile app conditions.
- One variable had greater change in one condition, while the other two had greater change in the other condition

Future directions

- Replicate this study with a different population
- Follow up after 4-6 weeks to see if these benefits last beyond the intervention

Implications

- Virtual positive affirmations have a statistically significant beneficial impact on reported self-esteem and well-being
- There are simple things people can do to better the lives of others