The Influence of Elevation and Guilt on Attitudes and Intentions to Perform Prosocial Behaviors

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The Process of Completing an Undergraduate Research Project In Psychology

SENIOR HONORS PROJECT SUMMARY
2014 HONORS RESEARCH CONFERENCE

DESIREÉ WILLIFORD
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About Me

- Psychology major and Human Development and Family Studies minor
- Interested in the overlap between physical and mental health
  - Undergraduate opportunities (research, clinical) have strengthened this interest
- Aspirations for graduate school
  - Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program
Aims & Objectives

- Formulate research question(s)
- Design a study guided by theory
- Frame specific study hypotheses with associated analytic approach
- Learn steps to complete an IRB proposal and attain approval for human research
- Recruit participants and collect data
- Put knowledge of quantitative methods (from prior courses) into action: analyze the results
- Attain additional experience in poster session preparation and presentation
Steps of the Current Research Study

STEP 1: FORMULATING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The question and background for the project

Many public health concerns rely partially or entirely on prosocial health behaviors (i.e., organ/tissue and blood donation).

Literature shows efforts to increase these behaviors often relies on the induction of guilt.

- Guilt works to some extent, but often causes fatigue and anger.

Elevation, on the other hand, was found to be an additional and powerful tool in this area.

- An uplifted mood state elicited upon witnessing a moral act, particularly one altruistic in nature.
  - Associated with desires to engage in similar, prosocial ways.
The question and background for the project (continued)

- Formulation of research question
  - Many induction studies have focused on *in vivo* or video methods
    - Made me think:
      - Would a brief story work?
      - Could the effect be powerful enough to influence attitudes and intentions to perform prosocial behaviors?
Step 2: Designing the Study

HOW DO I GO ABOUT ANSWERING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS?
Designing the study

- Hypotheses:
  - Can elevation be induced by a brief, written story?
    - If yes, can it influence attitudes and intentions to perform prosocial behaviors?
    - If yes, is the effect strong enough to progress individuals up in their level of readiness for change
      - i.e., move from precontemplation to contemplation or to preparation?
Designing the study (continued)

- How do I assess my hypotheses?
  - Scales
    - Utilized literature searches and a prior dissertation from a URI graduate student for inspiration
    - Also utilized a scale designed by URI’s faculty at the Cancer Prevention Research Center (CPRC) to assess volunteerism
Designing the study (continued)

Theoretical Framework: Transtheoretical Model (TTM)—Stages of Change

James Prochaska, Ph.D. and colleagues propose that an individual moves through five stages of change:

- **Precontemplation**: does not intend to change within 6 months
- **Contemplation**: thinking about changing in the next 6 months
- **Preparation**: ready to take appropriate actions for change in the next 30 days
- **Action**: changed behavior in the last six months
- **Maintenance**: sustained change for over 6 months
Step 3: Institutional Review Board (IRB) and CITI Training

THE STEPS TO GETTING APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
IRB & CITI Training

- Required to complete research on human participants
  - CITI training (online training course) is to be completed before beginning work on any research study
    - Provides background of ethical guidelines, research procedures, IRB, etc.
  - IRB and CITI training are designed to maintain and verify ethical treatment of research participants
  - IRB monitors research projects to ensure standards are upheld
    - They want to be sure participants aren’t placed at risk and that proper consent is acquired from participants
IRB & CITI Training (continued)

- IRB Process
  - Application
    - Requires descriptions of all components of your study (from recruitment to research design to analysis) and explanations of all benefits, risks, and purpose of research
      - What will participants be asked to do? Did you have an informed consent form detailing all necessary information? Is the study ethical?
  - Modifications
    - Designed to modify a study (if necessary) to reach standards of IRB.
Informed Consent

- Very important part of a research study
- Components
  - Description of the project
  - Overview of what will be done
  - Study risks or discomforts
    - Usually determines the level of review by the IRB (i.e., expedited vs. full review).
  - Expected benefit of participation (i.e., incentives)
  - Confidentiality
  - Right to quit the study at any time
  - Signature/other means of acknowledging consent (i.e., pressing “I agree...” for an online survey) and verification of legal age
  - Contact information for study investigators
Step 4: Bringing the study to life

STUDY RECRUITMENT, DATA COLLECTION, SURVEY MONKEY, AND PROCEDURES
“Bringing the study to life”

- Participants
  - Recruitment
    - Goal was n=400; actual n=306
    - Current URI students over the age of 18
    - Recruited via emails to professors, Sakai/course website postings, newsletter postings

- Materials
  - Computer with internet connection (to access Survey Monkey)
“Bringing the study to life” (continued)

- **Procedure**
  - Online informed consent, followed by survey, followed by conclusion and survey incentive (extra credit) instructions
    - Extra credit was awarded at teacher’s discretion (not all participants received this credit for participation)
  - Analysis of data via SPSS statistical software
    - Analysis of Variance [ANOVA] and Chi Square tests
Step 5: Poster presentation procedures

DISPLAYING THE PROCESS AND FINDINGS
First reminded myself of the main study hypotheses
  - Used these hypotheses to guide what I included on poster
A poster can’t display everything
  - Had to learn to balance what is needed vs. what I could leave out and explain further if asked
Tables and graphs
  - Practice with showing results visually
Designing the poster

- Attempted to be clear, as concise as possible, and create a poster that was visually appealing
- Format: Abstract, Introduction. Purpose, Method, Results, Discussion

Personal growth

- Noticed very quickly how “wordy” I am and was forced to learn to replace flowery language with concise statements conveying the same information
  - Still could use some improvement here for the future
Conclusion

WHAT DID I LEARN? WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?
Conclusion: Value of this project to my goals

- Stepping stone into entering field of clinical psychology
  - Helped me to realize what I like about the field and why I am so passionate about it

- Practice with theory application and testing and quantitative research methods
  - Required/helpful for admittance to (and performance in) Ph.D. programs
  - Allowed me to put the knowledge I learned in the classroom to use in a real, applicable way.
Conclusion: Value of this project to me

- Personal insight
  - Realizing how much I enjoy the research process
    - I may not have found the exact results I was expecting, but I was surprised that I was not disappointed
      - My results made me ask more questions and want to explore further—I think that is the whole point of research
    - It’s not about getting the results, but discovering what your results could mean
  - You cannot “fail” in research. You always continue to learn and grow from the process
Conclusion: Value of this project to psychology and what now?

- The current study contributes to the body of research on affective states and their influence on decision-making in regards to prosocial behaviors
  - Further research in the field is needed
- Future goals with this project
  - Additional presentations and/or publications for additional experience with write-up and presentation procedures
- Goals for my future
  - Research will be an important part of my graduate training and future career.
  - The skills I have learned here will be an excellent introduction/foundation for what I plan to do with my life
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