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## 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

# Poster presentation

- ▶ 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

# Poster presentation (continued)

- ▶ 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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