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## **Reflection Paper: Study Review, Reaction, and Extension**

### Reflection Paper: Study Review, Reaction, and Extension

The purpose of the study by Isen and Levin (1972) was to determine whether the positive affective state affects the subsequent helpfulness to other people. Previous researchers established that there is a significant relationship between success and helping, but subsequent studies found that the relationship between success and helping did not exist when there was no previous relationship between people or when helping was low-cost or unsolicited.

Based on those studies, researchers proposed that a positive affective state may significantly determine helpfulness. However, a positive mood state was induced by reports of success in those studies, which does not provide a reliable measure of good feelings. Other studies found that positive feelings associated with helping could be induced through positive verbal interactions or self-induced by reading mood statements.

Although Isen and Levin (1972) agree that positive affective states determine helpful behavior, but they also point out that good mood does not necessarily lead to helpful actions. A positive affective state could just lead to increased productivity and activity in general, which can also manifest as being helpful to others. Therefore, their study aimed to determine whether increased helpfulness is caused by positive affective states and whether there is a difference between responses to help and general activity engagement after a positive affective state is induced.

It was hypothesized that subjects with induced positive affective states would be more willing to help and less willing to hinder than subjects in

without inducing any affective states previously. The two independent variables were positive affective state and negative effective state. The positive affective state group received a cookie in the first study and an unexpected dime in the phone booth in the second study. The dependent variables were helping or not helping in the second study and helping or distracting in the first study.

The potential findings of this study are important to the field of psychology because affective states can be used to predict personal behavior to a certain extent. In clinical settings, the therapists may also use various techniques to frame their patients in positive affective states and increase their cooperation throughout the treatment. If positive affective states do lead to increased productivity and activity, education needs to place an emphasis on teaching people the implications of these findings in daily life.

The two studies presented in the paper used a 2 × 2 design. In the first study, 52 male college students were recruited as participants from two colleges in Philadelphia. The coordinator randomly assigned rows of carrels to two groups. The positive affective state group received a cookie while the neutral group did not receive a cookie. The subjects were then randomly assigned to helping and hindering groups. The subjects in the help group were asked to assist others who were attempting to conceive new uses for ordinary items while the subjects in the distract group were asked to distract students studying at the library.

In the second study, participants were recruited at the phone booths in closed shopping malls. A total of 24 female and 17 male adults were selected for the study. The experimenter would make an incomplete phone call and

leave the dime in the return slot in the experimental booths. In the control booths, the experimenter would pick up the dime. When a subject left the booth, the confederate would proceed to catch up with them and drop an envelope full of papers in the subject's walking path. It was recorded whether the subject helped the confederate pick up the papers or not.

## **Results**

The first study found that people who received a cookie more often volunteered to help people while people who did not receive a cookie more often volunteered to distract people. That finding supports the authors' hypothesis. The second study confirmed the first study by finding that even impersonal induction of a good mood can result in unsolicited helping. The authors concluded that their findings, which are consistent with previous studies, suggest that helping can be observed through the maintenance of positive affective states and the perception of costs and rewards.

## **Reaction**

Although the study reveals that helping will more likely occur when individuals are in a positive reactive state, there are too many limitations despite the statistical significance between the variables reported by the researchers. Other than expanding the field of studying the determinants of helpfulness and their interactions, the authors do not discuss the practical implications of their findings.

## **Limitations and improvements**

According to Isen and Levin (1972), the study aimed to determine whether the response in subjects with induced positive affective states differ when

they are presented with the opportunity to help others or engage in another activity. Both studies presented only “ help” and “ hinder” groups, so no part of the study addressed whether there is an increased response rate to activities in general. Although hindering was interpreted as a general activity in the results, it is not possible to generalize that finding to other activities because distracting people knowingly may conflict with somebody’s moral convictions, and hindering others certainly cannot be used to determine whether good feelings affect productivity.

Furthermore, the control group was a neutral group, which is a significant weakness in this study. There were no interventions used to induce any mood state in those subjects, which means any previous mood state would determine their choices and skew results. A better option would have been inducing positive mood states in one group and negative mood states in the control group because the control group could have been comprised of people in both positive and negative mood states from their previous experiences.

Finally, both male and female participants were present only in the second study. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the results of the first study to both genders because the second study showed that there are some differences in decision-making between the genders when helping is concerned.

## **Practical implications**

Because a positive affective state was correlated with higher instances of helpful behavior and lower instances of unhelpful behavior, it is possible to suggest that maintaining positive affective states in daily life can improve

social interactions between people. However, the study only explored the relationship between helpfulness and feeling good, so it is not possible to suggest practical recommendations on how people can consciously control their affective states to improve their behavior.

## **Further Research**

Although the authors concluded that feeling good contributed to helping others rather than activity in general, that conclusion was based on the data in which the alternative activity was detrimental to others. The study does not clarify how subjects with a positive mood would engage in activities beneficial to themselves or increase their productivity in different settings, such as education or workplaces.

An extension study could investigate how positive and negative moods affect productivity in students. Participants would be recruited at the beginning of the semester and would have to agree for monthly assessments. Once per month, the students would complete the Gratitude Questionnaire – 6 (GQ-6) because it is positively correlated with prosocial behavior and optimism and negatively related to pessimism and depression. At the end of the semester, their GQ-6 results would be correlated with their test scores and grades achieved throughout the semester.

It is hypothesized that students with higher scores on the GQ-6, which indicate positive mood states, will show higher academic performance than students with low scores, which indicate negative mood states, because of their higher productivity. The findings could potentially reveal that the effects of positive mood states extend beyond activities related only to helping others.

## **References**

Isen, A. M., & Levin, P. F. (1972). Effect of feeling good on helping: Cookies and kindness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 21(3), 384-388.