

Dimes and Helping: The Other Side of the Coin

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**Abstract.** An attempt was made to replicate and extend Levin and Isen's (1975) "Feeling good and helping" experiment. Contrary to their findings, those subjects who found a dime did not mail an apparently lost letter more often than did those who did not find a dime. These results were obtained in three different settings.

The finding that individuals who are in a good mood are more likely to help than individuals who are in a bad mood appears to be robust and very general. "Good mood" has been shown to increase helping with diverse subject samples (e.g., Isen, 1970; Levin & Isen, 1975); in the field (Isen & Levin, 1972; Levin & Isen, 1975) as well as in the laboratory; and with various operationalizations of "good mood" and helping (e.g., Adelman, 1972; Rosenhan, Underwood, & Moore, 1974; Isen & Levin, 1972).

Intuitively, one might expect that if positive affect increases helping behavior, then negative affect should decrease helping behavior. However, unlike the robust finding that positive affect leads to greater helping across a wide variety of situations, the evidence that "feeling bad" leads to a reduction in helping has been equivocal. Studies have shown that subjects who "feel bad" sometimes help more than controls (Isen, Horn, & Rosenhan, Experiments II & III, 1973), the same as controls (Berkowitz & Connor, 1966; Isen, 1970; Isen, et al., Experiment I, 1973; Rosenhan, Underwood, & Moore, 1974), and less than controls (Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973). While these results are conflicting, it should be noted that in the experiments which showed increased helping as a result of subjects "feeling bad," subjects had an opportunity to "repair their image" (cf., Isen, Horn, & Rosenhan, 1973), whereas in the experiment that showed a reduction in helping, subjects had limited resources (cf., Rosenhan, Underwood, & Moore, 1974).

The purpose of our first study was to compare the effects of feeling good vs. bad on helping in a field setting. Previous investigators have primarily studied the latter only in the laboratory. We employed a paradigm recently developed by Levin and Isen (1975). "Feeling good" was manipulated by having some subjects find a dime in the coin return of a phone. Subjects were made to "feel bad" by having them soil their fingers while checking the coin return (graphite was placed in the coin return). In addition, two comparison groups were run: some subjects found no dime in the coin return and others found a dime and graphite. For all conditions, the helping measure was the number of persons who mailed an apparently lost letter which they found on the telephone booth shelf.

Based on the Levin and Isen findings we predicted that subjects who unexpectedly found a dime would be more likely to mail the letter than would the subjects who did not find a dime. The lowest percentage of helping was expected from the graphite subjects, with the graphite-dime subjects falling in between.

## Study 1

**Method.** Subjects were 32 male and 32 female adults (53 white and 11 black) who made telephone calls sometime between 9:A.M. and 4:P.M. (Monday through Friday) at pay phones that had been "set up" by an experimenter. Only those people who were alone, made a call, and checked the coin return were counted as subjects (21 potential subjects did not check the coin return). Experimenters were two male (both white) and two female (one white and one black) undergraduates who participated in order to partially fulfill the requirements of an experimental social psychology course. Two pay phones were located in two different shopping malls and one was located across the street from campus.

**Procedure.** Phones were "set up" in essentially the same manner as those in the Levin and Isen (1975) study except for the addition of two graphite conditions. An experimenter approached a pay phone, put his or her things on the shelf under the phone, made an incomplete call, and walked away leaving a stamped letter, addressed to the first author, face down on the shelf. Before walking away from the phone, the experimenter either took the dime from the coin return, pretended to take the dime from the coin return, took the dime and sprayed graphite into the coin return, or pretended to take the dime and sprayed graphite into the coin return. In short, each subject was "set up" to find either a dime, no dime, graphite, or graphite and a dime in the coin return. The order of experimental conditions was determined randomly and care was taken to clean out the coin return after each graphite trial. After "setting up" a phone, the experimenter unobtrusively noted the experimental condition, the subject's sex and race, whether the subject checked the coin return, whether the subject made a call, whether the subject handled the letter, and whether the subject took the letter. A number inside each letter that corresponded to a master list was used to determine under which conditions the letters were mailed.

## Results

A summary of the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Study I: Number of People Mailing and Not Mailing Lost Letters in Each Condition.

Helping	Found Dime		Conditions		Found Graphite		Found Graphite and Dime	
			Did NOT	Find Dime				
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Mailed Letter	2	4	2	0	0	1	2	1
Did Not Mail	5	5	5	9	7	8	9	4

Fisher Exact Tests (one-tailed) showed that subjects who found a dime mailed the letter more often than the graphite-only subjects (38% vs. 6%,  $p=.04$ ), but they did not differ from either the no-dime subjects (13%,  $p=.11$ ) or graphite-dime subjects (19%,  $p=.22$ ). The no-dime, graphite and graphite-dime subjects did not differ significantly from each other ( $p > .25$ ).

Additional Fisher Exact Tests on sex of subjects indicated that females who received a dime were more likely to mail the letter (44%)

than were females who did not find a dime (0%,  $p=.04$ ) but they did not differ significantly from the graphite only subjects (11%,  $p=.15$ ) and the graphite-dime subjects (20%,  $p=.38$ ). There were no differences among the experimental conditions for male subjects ( $p>.20$ ).

The above analyses were performed on all subjects who met the a priori subject criteria. However, 22% of these subjects did not touch, handle, or pick up the letter during the experiment. When these subjects were excluded from the analyses, Fisher Exact Tests revealed no differences among the experimental conditions, although there was a tendency for females who found a dime to help more than females who did not find a dime (50% vs. 0%,  $p=.10$ ).

We found these results puzzling because Levin and Isen (1975) found rather large differences between dime and no-dime conditions and their  $n$  was even smaller than that employed in the present study. Moreover, their subjects would even buy a stamp to mail a letter if they had previously found a dime. Thus, given their impressive results, we found it necessary to run additional subjects at the same and different locations. The graphite conditions were eliminated because of the low rate of helping observed in the no-dime condition.

#### Study II

**Method.** The procedure and subject restrictions for Study II were the same as those for Study I except for the omission of the graphite conditions and the inclusion of eight additional experimenters and two additional locations--the Tallahassee Municipal Airport and the Florida State University campus. The subjects were 61 females and 45 males.

#### Results

A summary of the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Study II: Number of People Mailing and Not Mailing Lost Letters in Each Condition.

Locations	Found Dime		Did Not Find Dime	
	Mailed	Did Not Mail	Mailed	Did Not Mail
Airport	3	9	3	9
Malls	3	17	4	16
Campus	6	16	8	12
Totals	12	42	15	37

Fisher Exact Tests indicated that, for all three locations, there were no differences in mailing letters between the dime and no-dime conditions for either sex ( $p>.50$ ). The same pattern of no differences also held when only those subjects (81%) who handled the letters were counted. Even when we summed over the dime vs. no-dime conditions of Studies I and II, subjects who did not find a dime were just as likely to mail the letters as were the subjects who found a dime (25% vs. 26%,  $\chi^2=.005$ ,  $df=1$ , n.s.).

#### General Discussion

With the exception of female subjects in Study I, subjects who found a dime did not mail an apparently lost letter more often than did subjects who did not find a dime. While these results are highly discrepant from those obtained by Levin and Isen (1975), it should be recalled that numerous experimenters and three different locations were employed in the present studies. Perhaps, there are subtle differences between Tallahasseeans and Philadelphians, although one would

expect more helping from the former (Latané & Dabbs, 1972).

The present results are not isolated failures to replicate the effect of feeling good on helping behavior in a field study. Blevins and Murphy (1974) were unable to replicate Isen and Levin's (1972) finding that subjects who found a dime were more likely to subsequently help someone pick up papers than were subjects who did not find a dime. Similarly, Schellenberg and Blevins (1973) reported that persons receiving an unexpected free certificate for a "whopper" hamburger, which was conceptually similar to the Isen and Levin (1972) "cookie manipulation," were no more likely to volunteer for an experiment than were those people who had not received certificates. In short, these results question the generality and stability of the dime-induced helping phenomenon.

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