

Further Studies on the Effect of Feeling Good on Helping*

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In an attempt to clarify and extend the findings of an earlier study (Isen and Levin, 1972), two experiments investigated the effects of a person's positive affective state on his or her subsequent helpfulness to others. The studies were conducted in divergent locations of a large eastern city, and the subjects differed in ethnic and socio-economic characteristics. As in the earlier investigation, "good mood" was induced by the discovery of a dime in the coin return of a public telephone. The dependent measure in the present experiments, however, was willingness to mail a sealed and addressed letter which had been left at the telephone, apparently by accident. Both stamped and unstamped letters were used. This measure of helping was designed to demonstrate the existence of a relationship between feeling good and helping in situations which do not involve interaction with a person, and to rule out an interpretation of the earlier findings in terms of differential attention to the person in need. Results supported the prediction that those finding a dime would be more helpful, even though all subjects saw the letter and even though the help did not involve interpersonal interaction.

A recent study (Isen and Levin, 1972) investigating the relationship between "feeling good" and helping found that experimental

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subjects who had unexpectedly received a dime in the coin return of a public telephone more often spontaneously helped a confederate pick up papers than did control subjects whose telephone had not been "stocked." An accompanying experiment, and a growing body of literature on the effects of mood on helping, allowed the authors tentatively to conclude that the determinant of helping in this case had been positive affective state. However, an alternate interpretation remained. An explanation in terms of differential reinforcement of attention suggested that the experimental group had received reinforcement (in the form of a dime) for attentiveness and might therefore have paid more attention to the surroundings (Feldman, personal communication). Thus their increased helpfulness could be seen as a reflection of their having been more likely to notice the person in need, rather than as a function of their mood state.

The present experiment was conducted in order to determine whether, in a situation where the minimal necessary attention to the helping situation was guaranteed, mood state as manipulated in the earlier study would still affect spontaneous helping as it had before.

A second aim of this study was to begin to clarify the relationship between feeling good and helping. Now that this relationship has been demonstrated in a variety of ways (Adelman, 1972; Adelman and Berkowitz, 1970; Berkowitz and Connor, 1966; Isen, 1970; Isen and Levin, 1972), it becomes necessary to distinguish among the several possible mediators of this association: some of the proposed mediators may be absolutely necessary for the observed relationship, while others may only enhance the association or may even be unrelated to it.

One possibility is that good feeling leads to a desire to interact with others, and that helping follows because it is one of the few ways of initiating contact with strangers. In all of the studies which have attempted to manipulate mood state and which have had as the dependent measure some non-solicited helpful behavior, that measure has always involved helping another person directly. Thus, it may be that feeling good results in helpfulness but only because the helpful act is a way to initiate interaction with another person. Several studies have indicated such association between good mood and a high desire to interact with others (e.g., Isen, 1970). Nonetheless, it is not clear whether desire for interaction plays any role in the association between feeling good and helping, and if it does, whether this actually produces the relationship or merely enhances it. If the desire to interact after the induction of positive affect is the primary motivation for helping, then one might expect to find that good mood and helping are related only if the helpful

acts involve an opportunity to interact.

In the present experiment the dependent measure — rather than requiring direct aid to another individual — involved picking up and/or mailing an unstamped, but addressed and sealed letter which had apparently been left behind accidentally by the sender. In an attempt to deal with the differential attention interpretation of the Isen and Levin “dime” study (1972), the amount of attention necessary for helping to occur was minimized in this experiment. That is, the letter was left on the ledge in a telephone booth where it was plainly in sight to anyone who used the booth. Preliminary observations revealed that subjects looked at the letter almost immediately upon entering the booth and certainly before checking the coin return slot. Thus, dime-induced differential awareness of the presence of the letter could not be a factor in differential helping.

Since we conceive of the relationship between feeling good and helping as a more pervasive one than that implied by the interaction hypothesis, and following from Isen and Levin’s findings and the “warm glow” hypothesis, we predicted that those subjects who found the dime would be more likely to help (that is, to take the letter with them and mail it), than those who found no money. If this manipulation were to result in increased helping of the kind under investigation here, then one might be able to conclude that 1) minimal attention (awareness of another’s need) is not, in and of itself, sufficient to produce helping, and 2) the prospect of interpersonal interaction is not necessary in order for feeling good to result in helpfulness.

STUDY I

Method

Subjects. Subjects were male and female adults who were alone and who happened to make telephone calls at designated telephone booths at Suburban Station of the Penn-Central Railroad and International Airport in Philadelphia. All but a few of these subjects were Caucasian. Excluded as subjects were: people who were not alone; official personnel, such as conductors and policemen, who took the letter without making a phone call; and other persons who checked the coin return without making a phone call. One potential subject was not included in the study because he failed to check the coin slot.

Procedure. Telephone booths were “set up” in the following manner. The experimenter entered an empty booth, put her belongings on the shelf under the phone, and made an incomplete

call. She then ostensibly took her dime from the return slot, gathered up her books and papers, and left. What actually happened was that in both conditions a letter was left behind face down on the shelf, and in the experimental condition the dime was really left in the coin slot. The experimenter then unobtrusively waited near the phone booth. When a subject arrived to make a telephone call at the designated booth, the experimenter recorded whether the subject was in the experimental or control condition, whether and when the subject checked the coin return slot, and whether the subject took the letter with him. The letter left in the booths was sealed and addressed, but unstamped. Other than the address there were no marks on the letter. As the envelope was translucent, a short letter was enclosed. The name of the addressee — Michael Ross — was fictitious, chosen in order to be ethnically ambiguous; and the street address was one in Lancaster, Pa., where the experimenters could receive those letters actually sent. Each letter was numbered on the inside, and the observer kept an account of the numbers which corresponded to the two conditions. This was done to provide a check as to whether or not those who took the letter did mail it, and if so, whether they stamped the letter or sent it postage-due.

Results

Table 1 presents a summary of the findings. Fisher Exact Tests revealed that Ss who unexpectedly received a dime were more likely to take and mail the letter than were control Ss ($p < .02$).

In every case the subject noticed the letter and did handle it sometime before checking the coin return slot.

Discussion

The results of the present experiment indicate that, as predicted, subjects who discovered money in the telephone were significantly more likely to take and mail a letter which seemed to have been

TABLE 1

*Experiment I:
Behavior of Subjects in Each Condition*

Condition	Mailed Letter	Did Not Mail Letter
Found Dime	6	3
Did Not Find Dime	1	9

accidentally left behind. Differential helping occurred, even though only a minimal amount of attention was required for noticing the lost letter, and even though the helping did not entail social interaction. This lends credence to the hypothesis that there are additional mechanisms which mediate the relationship between good mood and helpfulness.

Since the letter was unstamped, however, an alternative interpretation of the results is plausible. It could be argued that subjects who received the dime might simply be better able to afford the \$.08 postage, and that this difference in money accounted for the difference between conditions in number of people who mailed the letter. (Of interest here may be the fact that only one letter arrived postage-due; it was sent by someone in the dime condition.) Thus, we performed a second study which replicated Study I and added conditions using stamped envelopes. This was done in order to demonstrate that the effect was not due to an attempt on the part of experimental subjects to "return" the found money, or merely to their being financially better able to afford the postage. The use of stamped letters eliminated the issue of postage cost. We would like to suggest that increased helping when in a positive mood state is not due to an actually increased ability to afford the helpful act, but to an increased optimism, an altered *perception* of the costs and rewards of helping. Study II, we felt, would be a first step in allowing such an interpretation.

Second, Study II gave us the opportunity to extend the generality of our findings, through the use of a new experimental location.

Method

Subjects and locale. As before, subjects were male and female adults who were alone and who made telephone calls at designated telephone booths. However, while Study I had been conducted at an airport and at a train station which served predominantly suburban commuters, Study II was conducted at the city's main station of the Penn-Central Railroad (30th Street Station). Eighty percent of the subjects of Study II were black.

Design and procedure. The design and procedure of Experiment II were identical with those described above for Experiment I, except that there were four conditions in all: two in which subjects found unstamped envelopes, and two in which each letter bore a stamp.

Results

Table 2 presents a summary of the findings. Although there were no differences between the sexes on this measure, the data are

TABLE 2
Experiment 2:
For Stamped and Unstamped Letter,
Behavior of Subjects in Each Condition

Condition	Unstamped Letter		Stamped Letter	
	Mailed Letter	Left Letter	Mailed Letter	Left Letter
<i>Found Dime</i>				
Males	4	1	6	1
Females	3	0	4	0
Total	7	1	10	1
<i>Did Not Find Dime</i>				
Males	0	6	4	4
Females	1	3	0	5
Total	1	9	4	9

presented by sex for your interest. A Fisher Exact Test revealed that, as in Study I, subjects who had unexpectedly received a dime took the unstamped letter with them significantly more often than did Control subjects ($p < .005$). In addition, it can be seen from Table 2 that the same effect held when the letter already bore a stamp ($p < .005$).

Discussion

The addition of Study II allows us to say that the results obtained in the first experiment were not due solely to a greater ability on the part of the "dime" subjects to afford the cost of postage. Moreover, Study II revealed that the effect appears in both the predominantly black and predominantly white samples. Recently, there have been several interesting studies involving racial, socioeconomic, or ethnic identification as a variable in helping (Bryan and Test, 1967; Feldman, 1968; Gaertner and Bickman, 1972; Hornstein *et al.*, 1968; Piliavin *et al.*, 1969; Wispe' and Freshley, 1971). The present study does not make such comparisons directly, but it broadens the base of the observed effect of feeling good on helping. It indicates that the relationship holds true in divergent locations and for both whites and blacks. We feel that these subject sources do provide, in general, socioeconomically different populations, but at the same time represent a restricted range of economic subcultures. The same study conducted at other locations might well yield different findings.

The results of the two studies, taken together, provide evidence that the connection between feeling good and helping obtained in the earlier "dime" study (Isen and Levin, 1972) cannot be accounted for solely in terms of differential awareness of the need for help, since all subjects were aware of the lost letter. The results also suggest that the opportunity for social interaction need not be present in order for good mood to lead to helping. This implies that desire for social contact is not the only mediator of the observed relationship. However, it does not rule out the possibility that variables such as desire for social contact may affect the association between feeling good and helping in a secondary, possibly cumulative, manner.

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