

Thoughts on Positive Psychology 9-25-06

In watching the news and reading articles online I've found that our media is caught in a rut of advertising what is wrong with society. From women and their children being murdered to casualties in the war on terrorism, the sensationalist news coverage showcases a grim world. Much like traditional psychology, a lot of what people are shown in the news is the negative and the positive is left out of the show. Being a part of the Positive Psychology Seminar has been a breath of fresh air. Not only do we get to talk about the research being done to highlight the good in people, we get to be reaffirmed that we are among good people by sharing stories of ourselves at our best and acting in kind ways through out the semester. I've really enjoyed what we've been discussing thus far and I can't wait for the chocolate tasting :)

I had some trouble thinking of what to do for the "assignment" of performing a random act of kindness. I found that there were opportunities to do kind things for people I am friends with or those that might be able to figure out who the anonymous good-doer was, but it was more difficult to come up an original idea to help out someone I didn't know. Saturday night I found a small way. I went to the jazz quartet tribute to John Coltrane at Hill Auditorium that evening. Before the performance there was a speech and food provided to students as part of the "Arts and Eats" package. There was tons of pizza. Absolute tons. In the end, more pizza than the group there could ever eat. So we were offered boxes to take home. We had about 40 minutes before the show started so I grabbed a box and walked back to my dorm with wonderful dreams of solving my late night food cravings. When I arrived at South Quad there was a group of students sitting around that eyed the pizza box enviously. I heard one mention how hungry they were and how they were disappointed to recently find the cafeteria closed. With a slight twinge at the thought of losing my midnight snack I handed the kids my pizza and walked away.

While it wasn't something that necessarily helped anyone out in a huge way, it made a group of hungry kids happy. It felt nice to do something for someone else without expecting to see them again or to have a reciprocal favor. The feeling of doing something nice just for the sake of spreading a form of kindness felt very pure. I know a few people who often do nice gestures for their friends and loved ones but then expect to receive something in return, maybe not immediately, but usually by some point. This seems to mar the good act. It is no longer something you are doing for someone else, but a method for you to achieve something that you desire later; a kind of unfair situation for the person receiving the "random" act of kindness.

I believe the assignment also brought about an awareness of how to be a nicer person in general. I found myself thinking about what I could do for others each day, and although I didn't always act on the thought, I felt like I kept a more positive attitude through out the week.

I'm excited at the prospect that this course will have a strong influence on how I approach the world. For example, I'm conducting a research project this semester on motivation and testing and at first I wanted to look at what makes kids do poorly on these exams. After starting to look into the literature on the topic I've realized that I could also begin examining the subject from the opposite side, seeing what makes people succeed and what leads to resilience. Even if I don't fulfill that objective in my research directly, I'll at least have a new outlook from which to view the results. I'm looking forward to where this course will take all of us.