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An Alternative to Hedonism: Eudaimonic Well-Being

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Introduction

- Eudaimonics is finding happiness through the highest mortal good. Aristotle described it as linking character (such as virtue and empathy) with happiness and good health. This stemmed from common discussion in ancient ethics. (McMahan & Estes, 2011)

- There has been disagreement with the eudemonic way of finding happiness; its alternative view is hedonics, finding happiness through more frequent moments of pleasure rather than pain. (Schnitker, 2008)

- Research has repeatedly shown that individuals who rate highly on eudaimonic personality measures have a more positive perception of their well-being (physical and psychological) than individuals who rate highly on hedonic personality measures. (Extremera, Ruiz-Aranda, Pineda-Galán, & Salguero, 2011)

- We hypothesized that individuals who rate highly only the eudaimonic questions in the survey will have lower blood pressure and heart rate in response to stress, and also will return to normal stress levels more quickly than hedonic individuals.

Method

Procedures

116 Brigham Young University students were chosen as participants. Participants filled out a questionnaire with items assessing stress, depression, mood and anxiety. Participants were then randomly assigned to a regular PASAT control group or two experimental groups of the following PASAT conditions:

- PASAT A – received positive feedback after each of the four PASAT trials
- PASAT B – received negative feedback after each of the four PASAT trials

The participant’s heart rate, breathing rate, diastolic and systolic blood pressure readings were recorded for data analysis. Participants were then given a post questionnaire designed to assess their post task mood and anxiety levels. Participants were then debriefed by the research assistant and all of the participant’s questions were answered.

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using SAS. Pearson’s Partial Correlation Coefficients were used to determine the relationship between the participant’s response on items Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy scale (FACIT) and their heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rates.

Results

- Analysis of the data demonstrated significant correlations between the different groups and blood pressure/heart rate, suggesting that psychological stress influences physiological stress, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

- There was no correlation found between the heart rate/blood pressure of participants and the presence of Eudaimonic traits and perception as measured by the FACIT.

- There were, however, several strong correlations between Eudaimonic traits and psycho-social measures of mood, anxiety, and depression. The bivariate correlations are listed in Table 1.

Conclusions

- Eudaimonic individual demonstrated a significantly greater satisfaction with life, and lower rate of alexithymic understanding.

- Eudaimonia was also significantly correlated with lower stress, depression and anxiety levels. Finally, eudaimonic individuals also tended to have better positive moods.

- These results valid a number of other research studies that have demonstrated that eudaimonic thought is consistently related to better health outcomes. Similarly, individuals who rated highly on eudaimonic measures were generally more psychologically healthy than their more hedonic counterparts.

- We believe that further studies will reveal a relationship between physiological stress responses and eudaimonic traits. Future studies that may be able to demonstrate this relationship would take care to specifically screen to only include individuals who were strongly eudaimonic or hedonic.

References