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Preliminary Investigation of Continuous Self-Improvement & Optimism

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Background

John R. Wooden's father shared two principles which were a major influence for his life: (1) "Don't try to be better than someone else, and (2) Always try to be the best you can be" (Wooden & Carty, 2005, p. 17). The first principle was a reminder that a successful life does not find peace of mind by comparing one's self to others. There is an interconnection between the second principle and Wooden's competitive greatness construct (CG). The definition of CG: "Be at your best when your best is needed. Enjoyment of a difficult challenge" (Wooden & Carty, 2005, p. 90).

Competitive greatness is linked to continuous self-improvement. By making the focus of life primarily on individual growth and development, there are endless opportunities to expand our skills and abilities. In Wooden's words: "We don't have to be superstars or win championships to reach competitive greatness. All we have to do is learn to rise to every occasion, give your best effort and make those around us better as we do it. It's not about winning. It's about learning to give all we have to give" (Wooden & Carty, 2005, p. 91).



Background (Cont'd)

Wooden created a pyramid of success as guide to the continuous self-improvement process. In his books, Wooden provides explanations for each of the 15 building blocks.

Key words for each block are: (1) hard work and planning (Industriousness), (2) enjoyment (Enthusiasm), (3) mutual esteem & devotion (Friendship), (4) beneficial work (Cooperation), (5) self-respect (Loyalty), (6) discipline (Self-Control), (7) observation & open-mindedness (Alertness), (8) decisions & action (Initiative), (9) realistic goals (Intentness), (10) physical, mental, moral, & spiritual (Condition), (11) timing & performance (Skill), (12) eagerness & sacrifice (Team Spirit), (13) true to self (Poise), (14) respect without fear (Confidence), and (15) loving a difficult challenge (Competitive Greatness).

Aim

Using an educational intervention, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between CG/Continuous Self-Improvement and Optimism. Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students (N=53) were participants in this study.

Methods

Instrumentation: In the summer of 2016, the first author read most of Wooden's books, and transferred his ideas into Likert-type questions. The name of this quantitative instrument is the Wooden Pyramid of Success Questionnaire (WPSQ; Hilty, 2017) which consists of 229 items. In order for the WPSQ to have content validity, it was a goal for the 229 questions to mirror Wooden's own words. The process of developing the WPSQ was assisted by his decision to major in English at both the undergraduate and graduate degree levels. CG is one of the scales on the WPSQ.

The measurement of optimism was based on Seligman's 2006 publication. In his book (Seligman, 2006, pp. 33-51) a copy of his optimism test and the scoring procedures are available. There are 10 scales: Personalization Good (PsG), Personalization Bad (PsB), Permanent Good (PmG), Permanent Bad (PmB), Pervasiveness Good (PvG), Pervasiveness Bad (PvB), Hope (HoB=PvB+PmB), Total Bad, Total good, and Good-Bad. The optimism test can also be completed at the <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/> website under the heading of questionnaires.

Hypothesis 1: Using a SPSS correlational analysis, it was hypothesized that a significant positive correlation coefficient would be found between the CQ and Good-Bad scale.

Hypothesis 2: Linear regression analysis would result in a significant finding using the Good-Bad scale as the predictor variable and CG as the outcome variable, the outcome will be significantly different from zero.

Results

Hypothesis 1: A positive correlation was found between the CG and G-B scales ($r = .372$, $p = .006$). It is important to remember that a correlation does not imply causation, it appears there is an association between the two variables.

Hypothesis 2: The linear regression analysis confirmed the hypothesis 3 prediction and produced a correlation between CG and Good-Bad scales of $.372$ (r square = $.138$) which is significant ($F(1, 52) = 8.192$, $p = .006$). A higher score on the Competitive Greatness scale is associated with higher scores on G-B scale.

Conclusions

In chapter 12, Seligman (2006, p. 207) offers the following thoughts regarding optimism.

Life inflicts the same setbacks and tragedies on the optimist as on the pessimist, but the optimist weathers them better. As we have seen, the optimist bounces back from defeat, and, with his life somewhat poorer, he picks up and starts again. The pessimist gives up and falls into depression. Because of his resilience, the optimist achieves more at work, at school, and on the playing field, the optimist has better physical health and may even live longer. Americans want optimists to lead them. Even when things go well for the pessimist, he is haunted by forebodings of catastrophe.

For pessimists, that is the bad news. The good news is that pessimists can learn the skills of optimism and permanently improve the quality of their lives. Even optimists can benefit from learning how to change. Almost all optimists have periods of at least mild pessimism, and the techniques that benefit pessimists can be used by optimists when they are down.

This Seligman quote is a reminder that the association between CG/continuous self-improvement and optimism that additional research investigations are required.

References

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