Positive Feedback And Self-Esteem

Introduction

According to self-enhancement theory individuals are influenced to maintain their self-esteem in an optimistic way (Ryckman, 2004). Rogers (1959) explained that an individual's self-concept may be viewed in both the experience of *self* and the *ideal self*. Self-discrepancy theory implies that individuals become distressed when our *'actual'* self is different from our *'ideal'* self (Higgins, 1987). Furthermore, self-verification theory or, self-consistency theory, refers to the tendency of individuals to seek positive or negative information about oneself. It assumes that individuals strive to sustain a positive attitude and inconsistent evaluations of ones self may produce a negative reaction (Ryckman, 2004). Aronson and Mettee (1968) claimed that individuals would feel good about themselves if self-esteem levels were raised and feel worthless if self-esteem was lowered. Allport (1937) suggests individuals have an internal drive to feel good. He claims that doing badly in a task can damage an individual's self-esteem. In addition, Aronson (1992) claimed that if people are unable to improve ability they prefer positive feedback.

The current study attempts to look at the beneficial affects of *positive* feedback. To illustrate, in a study by Deci (1971) in which soma puzzles were given to a control group and an experimental group comprising of undergraduate students, the experimental group recieved verbal praise whilst the control group did not. The group who received positive

feedback showed increased intrinsic motivation in comparison to the no feedback group. Greenberg & Pyszczynski (1985) and Heatherton & Polivy, (1991) conducted an experiment using either a positive feedback condition or a neutral feedback condition. They found that individual's self-esteem alters after bogus feedback. Rikketa & Dauenheimer (2003) criticised the feedback method in manipulating self-esteem and favoured a non-obtrusive way with subliminally presented words.

It is held that self-esteem has some significance in relation to our inner beliefs. Robins and Beer (2001) conducted research to assess student's positive beliefs about their academic ability as they first entered college and then this was followed up to test if there were any benefits relating to holding positive beliefs. They found positive beliefs were closely related to narcissism, ego involvement, self-serving attributions, and positive affect. Additionally, the second part of their study found that reduced levels of self-esteem and well-being were found to be linked to positive beliefs. This research shows the importance of self-appraisal within individuals on aspects of ability.

The present study attempts to establish whether or not perceived or actual ability in completing the task will be consistent with levels of self-esteem. Similarly, a study by McFarlin & Blascovich (1981) reported that individuals with high, moderate or low self-esteem in either positive, negative or no feedback conditions *expect* success or failure *consistent* with their levels of self-esteem. However, Crocker and Wolfe (2001) suggest self-esteem varies with either success or failure but this is dependant on a person's contingency of self-worth. They argued that self-esteem changes daily depending on how

you feel and depending on the importance of the success or failures. Additionly, Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, (1993) has pointed out that stability of self-esteem should be considered as well as the actual level of self-esteem. Recent research has claimed that the evidence for boosting self-esteem to establish a positive effect remains inconclusive. They suggest that other factors or variables may be entwined in the concept of self-esteem such as personality or mood (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs 2003).

The Rosenberg (1965) questionnaire has been widely recognised as the standard method for measuring global self-esteem. (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs, 2003). In the present study self-esteem was measured using the 10- item Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (1965) the items within the scale were counterbalanced, half the items applied to high self-esteem and the other half to low self-esteem. One group received positive feedback and the control group received no feedback at all. The current study will investigate using a range of hypotheses using a 'one-tailed test'. The first hypothesis proposed that self-esteem ratings would increase in participants who received positive feedback. The second hypothesis suggested that participants with high self-esteem scores will be positively correlated with a high, perceived ability rating in completing the tasks. The third hypothesis incurred that scores on perceived ability will positively correlate with scores on actual ability.

(703 words)

Comments

Some good points made about research on self-esteem but a little disjointed, literature review has not included research on perceived ability compared to actual ability[3rd hypothesis].

Design

A between-subjects design was carried out as the experiment involved more than one condition. The study was performed under a controlled condition. The independent variable was *'positive feedback'* and the dependant variable was *'self-esteem' and also ability of tasks..*

<u>**Participants**</u>

There were 39 participants in total comprising of 14 males and 25 females. They were aged between 18-65 years with a Mean age of 34.1.The population was taken from a mixture of students at Glasgow Caledonian University and general population. Participants freely agreed to take part in the study when invited.

<u>**Apparatus**</u>

The study materials comprised of a Standardised Introduction letter of the project. (Appendix 1), a Consent Form that respondents initial and a Set of standardised instructions for tasks which details the experiment about to be carried out.
"***You will be asked to perform two tasks, the Stroop task and the Embedded figures task. Each task will be timed individually ***".

The Rosenberg (1965), 10-item scale was used as a measure of overall self-esteem . Items are rated on a 4-point scale that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree

(4). One included the Question on perceived ability, One was presented in reversed order.
(Appendix 2) The two tasks were the Adapted Attention (colour naming) task Stroop
(1935) (Appendix 3) and Embedded Figures Task which was scored appropriately 0 for
those who had not attempted it, 1 for an attempt,2 for participants who completed it
(Appendix 3). Positive Feedback sheets for experimental group, which stated that they
had done well above average compared to other students who had previously completed
the task. A stop-watch was used to time the respondents and at the end a Debrief handout
was read out telling the respondents about the aim of the study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was used to eliminate any extraneous variables to be found in the study. A
mirror task was originally used as one of the tasks but was found to be too difficult in
setting up. Also a sign was put on the door of the room being used for the study, to avoid
interruptions.

Procedure

The subjects were randomly selected and taken to a room provided by the Psychology
Department in Glasgow Caledonian University. The participants were assigned to the
positive and no feedback groups intermittently. They were then reassured on the
anonymity and confidentiality of the information and given an introduction letter
explaining this was part of a 3rd year project along with a contact email address. A
consent form was presented to participants. Two self-report questionnaires (Rosenberg
1965) were used to collect the data. The first was administered before two ability tasks
were completed along with the question "How confident are you that you will complete

these tasks?" This was rated 1-7 the starting point where 1 is lowest perceived ability

rating, 2 is higher and so on until 7 which is very high. Using standardised instructions,

participants were informed about the attention task and then on the embedded figures

task. One experimenter timed each task individually. The positive feedback group were

given subtle verbal praise during the tasks and written feedback by the experimenter after

completion of the two tasks, which stated they had done well above the average when

compared to other participants who had completed the tasks (this was bogus feedback).

The control group were given no feedback. The second Rosenberg (1965) questionnaire

was compiled of the same 10-items but in reverse order. After completion, the

Participants were debriefed and thanked for taking part in the study.

Comments

This section is very comprehensive and well described.

Results

To test the one-tailed hypothesis that self-esteem ratings would increase in participants

N=39 who received positive feedback, a 2x2 repeated measures (Anova) analysis was

carried out. The independent variable was the subject groups (positive feedback group

and no feedback group) and dependant variable was self-esteem measured by Rosenberg

(1965) self-esteem scale.

Table 1 :   **Self-esteem Mean Scores (SDs)**

Subject Groups	Mean	Std Deviation	N
Self-esteem 1st Questionnaire			
Control Group	20.05	4.21	22
Experimental Group	19.65 (20.10) total	5.44 (4.05) total	17
Self-esteem 2nd Questionnaire			
Control group	20..32	3.17	
Experimental group	19.82 (19.87) total	5.07 (4.72)total	

NB:Only the scores on the embedded figures task was used in actual scores. This was considered to be easier to mark.

The results showed no main effect in the 1st self-esteem (F= 0.23, df=1,37, P=0.634).

comments make more clear did you mean 1st questionnaire

No significant effect was found in the groups' for the experimental group and the control

group (F=0.011 df=1,37, p<.745) With reference to Table 1. The total mean scores show

that there were no real differences in both groups self-esteem in either the first or second

questionnaire. A very similar result was found at only.23 difference in the total mean.

Need to make this more clear

Between the self- esteem scores and the groups there was again non significant result

(F=0.011 df=1,37, p=0.919), suggesting that there was no benefit to self-esteem to those

participants who received positive feedback. Therefore the hypothesis that self-esteem

would increase in those participants in the positive feedback condition was not upheld.

Table 2:   Correlation Matrix Table for perceived ability and self-esteem

	PERCIEVED SCORE	SELF-ESTEEM 1
PERCIEVED SCORE	1.00	-.18
SELF-ESTEEM 1		1.00

Table 3:   Correlation Matrix Table for actual scores and self-esteem

	SELF-ESTEEM 1	ACTUAL SCORE
SELF-ESTEEM 1	1.00	.17
ACTUAL SCORE		1.00

Further analysis using Pearson's correlation was used to test between two sets of data and

to produce a figure, which tells the direction of either a positive or negative relationship

between two variables. In this case to test whether there was a correlation between *'self-*

esteem' and *'perceived ability'.* The result (r = -18) showed no correlation at p=0.001, p<

0.05 levels. A further correlation was carried out to test if *'perceived score's* correlated

with *'actual scores'.* The result (r= .17) The result also showed that there was no

relationship at the p=0.001, p<0.05 levels of significance. These results can be found in

Tables 2 and 3 titled the Matrix Correlation Table. This is indicated in Table 1 in the

Total mean scores for Self-esteem in the 1st Questionnaire (20.10) and (19.87) for the

2nd questionnaire showing similar mean scores.

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Comments

This section could be made clearer

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Discussion

The results showed no main effect in the first questionnaire for self-esteem (F= 0.23,

df=1,37, P<0.634). No significant effect was found in the groups for the experimental

group and the control group (F=0.011 df=1,37, p<.745) The mean scores show that there

was no real differences in both groups' self -esteem in either the first or second

questionnaire. A very similar result was found. The self- esteem scores and the Control

group and the Experimental group there was again non-significant result (F=0.011

df=1,37, p=0.919), suggesting that there was no benefit to self-esteem to those

participants who received positive feedback. The second hypothesis incurred that

participants high in self-esteem would have high perceived ability rating in completing

the tasks, this was not upheld. The test results indicated that there was no relationship

between *'self-esteem'* and *'perceived ability'*. The result (r = -18) showed no correlation

at p=0.001, p< 0.05 levels. This indicates that participants in low self-esteem perceived

themselves to do better and participants in high self-esteem perceived themselves to do

badly in the task. The third hypothesis incurred that scores on perceived ability rating will be positively correlated with scores on actual ability. This hypothesis was not supported results. A further analysis was carried out to test if *'perceived score's* correlated with *'actual scores'*. The result (r= .17) provided evidence that there was no relationship at the p=0.001, p<0.05 levels of significance.

The main conclusion in the present study assumes that there is no relationship in the use of positive feedback in relation to self-esteem despite conflicting views in some studies. Individuals may not have been affected by the use of feedback and perhaps the nature of the task was not appropriate. It has been suggested that self-esteem may vary daily depending on success and failures (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). More research on the stability of self-esteem may be required (Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993).

It has been shown that Individuals may assess their positive beliefs in ability using self-appraisal (Robins & Beer, 2001). However, it may be difficult to confirm this using a self-report measure. The notion of the importance of intervening *other factors* was highlighted such as mood and personality.

Self- enhancement theory doesn't take into account an individual's prior experience relating to success or failure. Low self-esteem individuals would react positively to success and similarly people with high self- esteem would act negatively to failure, as self-esteem has not been maintained. Self-consistency theory has limitations in that

individuals may not always feel the need to strive for consistency, all of the time. This may have been the case for participants in the current study.

The current research could have been improved in a number of ways. The feedback method may have affected the results as they have been found to be obtrusive (Rikketa & Dauenheimer, 2003). In addition, the methodology in measuring self-esteem with a questionnaire shows quantifiable results rather than qualitative and can be considered to be too broad an indicator. It has been found that self-esteem scores can be easily manipulated, self-reporting bias and individuals can try to make themselves look better that they are (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs,2003). The population could be extended to more than 40 and the time taken for the tasks may have been too short to produce any real affect. The short time limit may have made the nature of the study obvious from the outset. The reversed order self-esteem measure was easily recognised and this may have affected the results.

Future research would consider more unobtrusive measures in manipulating self-esteem such as in verbal or written tasks. It may have been of interest to measure different levels of self-esteem including negative feedback as well as positive feedback.

(634words)

Abstract

This report investigates the concept of self-esteem using Rosenberg's (1965) standardised questionnaire. The study used a between subjects design in a controlled environment. A total of 39 participants took part, from both the general population as well as various undergraduate students from Glasgow Caledonian University. A range of one-tailed hypotheses were proposed. The first hypothesis was that self-esteem ratings would increase in participants who received positive feedback. The second hypothesis, that high self-esteem scores will be positively correlated with a high, perceived ability rating in completing the tasks. The third hypothesis that scores on perceived ability will positively correlate with scores on actual ability. Results indicated that there was no significant relationship between self-esteem and positive feedback, perceived ability ratings and actual ratings. The main findings therefore suggest that self-esteem varies within individuals. Individual's self-evaluations depend on specific abilities or past experience. The role of other factors may overlap with self-esteem.

(152 words)

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The use of positive feedback on self-esteem when applied to perceived rating and actual ability scores.

ARM PROJECT

Glasgow Caledonian University