

Research
Can't Buy Me Laughter
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Stanford Social Innovation Review
Winter 2011

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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Volunteering for Number One

► To get into a top university in the United States, academic achievement isn't enough; you have to demonstrate "how wonderful you are as a human being" by volunteering for good causes, says Femida Handy, a professor of social policy and practice at the University of Pennsylvania. That is not true everywhere. In India, where grades and test scores alone often determine admissions, one high school student told Handy that he didn't volunteer because colleges wouldn't take him if they found out he wasn't studying all the time.

If volunteering makes such a difference, are students doing it primarily to pad their résumés? Handy and an international group of researchers administered a survey in a dozen countries, including Belgium, South Korea, Australia, and Finland, to find out. "Very few people will tell you, 'I volunteer for myself.' So what we tried to do was to elicit responses by asking questions about the benefits of volunteering," says study co-author Ram Cnaan, a social work professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "And regardless [of the question], we found that the No. 1 reason among any group of volunteers is 'I want to do good.'"

Students did not rate résumé building as their top motivation to volunteer in any country. Altruistic and value-



Chae Kim, a pre-dental student, volunteers in the pediatric ward aboard the U.S. Navy hospital ship MERCY.

driven motivations always came first. Also, volunteering is no more frequent in the countries where service is assumed to be most useful to the volunteer (primarily Canada and the United States). The highest participation rates—more than 80 percent—were in India and China, where service doesn't help a student get into a university. Canada and the United States follow closely behind with participation rates in the high 70s, and Croatia and Japan bring up the rear.

These results please Sarah Jane Rehnborg, associate director of the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service at the University of Texas at Austin. When Rehnborg surveyed 1,500 students for a different study, she didn't ask whether they were padding their résumés—"It's a somewhat cynical question"—but 94 percent responded that compassion toward people in

WELL-BEING

Can't Buy Me Laughter

► All over the world, people who have more money say they are happier. But that might not always be the case, according to a large new global study of the relationship between wealth and happiness. "People have been arguing for a long time about whether money buys happiness, but it's a bit more contextual than that," says James Harter, a research psychologist at the Gallup Organization and an author of the study. "There are big differences depending on how you measure well-being."

"Happy" could mean you think your life is going well overall, as the word has connoted in previous studies. It could mean you smile and laugh a lot in a given day. Or it could just mean you're not suffering much. The researchers used the Gallup World Poll, representing 96 percent of the planet's adult population, to look at well-being from multiple angles. More than 136,000 people in 132 countries completed the questionnaire from 2005 to 2006.

It turns out that the kind of happiness money can buy worldwide is a high evaluation of oneself. The more wealth and luxury conveniences, such as televisions and computers, you have, the better you view your life. That rich people think they are happier even if they don't enjoy themselves more is "not a surprise," says Carol Graham, a happiness researcher and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. The survey framed

need was their motivation for serving. "And even if people are serving to build a résumé, I don't know that that's bad," Rehnborg says. "One of the ways you learn about what you want to do is by getting out there and doing it."

One strong finding of Handy and Cnaan's study was that students who volunteer for selfish reasons do it less—they invest fewer hours in service and don't show up as often. "If you're motivated more by résumé, all you have to do is a little and it's on your CV," says Cnaan. He suggests to administrators that they "make the contract very clear to this type of student." So do students volunteer just to pad their résumés? "Almost every student you talk with, when you probe for about five minutes, admits he or she was told it was good on the résumé," says Cnaan. "It's a major factor. But nobody volunteers only for egoistic motives—they won't last." ■

Femida Handy, Ram A. Cnaan, Lesley Hustinx, et al., "A Cross-Cultural Examination of Student Volunteering: Is It All About Résumé Building?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 39, 2010.

the self-evaluation question in a global context, asking people to rate their lives on a scale of “worst” to “best possible.” “And somebody in Togo knows the best possible life is not in Togo,” says Graham.

At the lower end of the income scale, money can contribute to feeling less bad: If it gets food in your stomach and a roof over your head, having more will decrease your anger, sadness, worry, and depression. After meeting basic needs, though, money loses the power to soothe—the United States is the richest nation and also populated by the most worriers.

As for actually enjoying oneself? Money is almost no help. The researchers found that social and psychological needs—being treated with respect, having friends, learning new things, doing what you do best, and being able to choose how you spend your time—trump everything else, no matter where you live. “The thing that surprised me most was how consistent some of these patterns were across different parts of the world,” Harter says.

Graham’s own research reveals similar trends. People in Afghanistan are happier than the world average; and “after having enough food to eat, the most important thing to Latin Americans’ happiness is having a friend or family member they can fall back on in times of need,” Graham says. Although it’s true that people in developing countries have the social and psychological means to be as chipper as New Zealanders (who scored first in positive feelings), happiness may not be an appropriate goal for development. “People make do with what they’ve got,” Graham says. “They adapt to prosperity and they also adapt to adversity. ... People in

Kenya are as satisfied with their health as people in the United States, even though objective standards are moons apart.” ■

Ed Diener, Weiting Ng, James Harter, et al., “Wealth and Happiness Across the World: Material Prosperity Predicts Life Evaluation, Whereas Psychosocial Prosperity Predicts Positive Feeling.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99, 2010.

MANAGEMENT

Generation Me at the Office

► Today’s youngest workers are, on average, lazier and less selfless than previous generations. Many companies have been appealing to the Millennial Generation’s altruistic values as a tool to recruit young employees, “but that strategy’s not going to work any better now than it did 15 or 30 years ago,” says Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University. “It might even work a little less well.”

According to Twenge’s latest research, what has changed most about work values through the generations is that “millennials place a much higher value on leisure—things like a job that has at least two weeks vacation, a job that has an easy pace, and a job that allows time for other things in your life,” says Twenge. “They’re also more likely to say work is just for making a living, less likely to say work is a central

part of their life, and less likely to say they are willing to work overtime to do a good job.” At the same time, extrinsic rewards—money, respect, and status—are more important to them than they were to boomers.

Twenge’s study draws on a large database called “Monitoring the Future,” a national survey of high school seniors that has been conducted every year since 1976. Twenge and colleagues used three time points representative of three generations. Boomers (born 1946-1964) experienced the civil rights and women’s movements, the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War, and Watergate. Gen X (born 1965-1981) went through the AIDS epidemic and the fall of the Soviet Union. The Millennial Generation, also known as Generation Me (born 1982-1999), grew up wired and watched the fall of Enron. GenMe’s answers to the survey questions, from making friends on the job to making a difference in the world, seem to show “less interest in work in general,” says Twenge.

Are nonprofits suffering from the rise in selfishness this study found? According to Tim Wolfred, a senior project director at CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, applications to nonprofit jobs are up again. Wolfred adds, “I experience [the younger

generation] as working as hard as any of their predecessors—certainly very dedicated to their work, and working much smarter.” Of course, trends are just averages, and in the nonprofit sector, “You’re going after the segment of the generation that *does* want to make a difference and be worthwhile to society,” says Twenge.

The way to recruit the best of them is to appeal to their desire for a balanced life. “This generation wants work-life balance right out of the gate, even when they don’t have children,” says Twenge. Give them “more vacation, some flexibility in schedules, the ability to work at home,” she says, so “they can spend time with a friend who comes to town or take off for a few days and go skiing. The phrase ‘mental health day’ is a rather recent invention.” ■

Jean M. Twenge, Stacy M. Campbell, Brian J. Hoffman, et al., “Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing.” *Journal of Management*, 36, 2010.

CIVIL SOCIETY

One Villager, One Vote

► Increasingly in the developing world, when governments make local policy they are listening to local voices. But whose voices, exactly, get heard? Concerned that elites in Indonesia dominated decision making at the local level, Benjamin Olken, a development economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, designed a field experiment to compare the effects of alternative democratic institutions. Would direct elections result in fairer outcomes, and happier citizens, than the current system in which a few representatives deliberate among themselves?



“O.K., on my signal we’re going to shift from pre-millennial to post-millennial thinking.”

“Villages were deciding what kind of local public good they wanted to build,” says Olken. “They had a block grant and they could decide how they wanted to use the money, whether it should be to build a road, or a well, or an irrigation system,” or something else. In one of the first randomized field experiments of its kind, Olken designated the political process itself. He picked out 49 villages representing more than 100,000 people participating in the Indonesian Kecamatan Development Program (KDP), which is funded through a World Bank loan to finance small-scale infrastructure activities. Some of the villages continued to choose their preferred proposal at a meeting attended by a small group of village leaders—the usual KDP way. In the remaining villages, Olken set up direct

election-based plebiscites in which every eligible citizen could vote.

“The key finding is that the plebiscite process resulted in dramatically higher levels of satisfaction and legitimacy of the program and of the proposal,” says Olken. Having had the opportunity to vote, the people in the study were more satisfied with the development program and judged the winning proposal fairer. They were more likely to agree that the project was “in accordance with the people’s aspirations,” that they would use the project, and that it would benefit them personally.

Interestingly, this was true despite the fact that villages chose exactly the same proposals through both political processes. They decided to build roads and bridges about 60 percent of the time and water and sanitation

projects about 12 percent of the time, regardless of whether the decision was made at a village meeting or by a direct election with 20 times as many people participating.

That direct plebiscite did not change the ultimate decision is surprising. Still, it makes the increase in satisfaction all the more striking. “It’s some of the clearest evidence we have that the process can matter even if the outcomes don’t change,” says Olken. It shows that “direct participation can be a legitimizing force,” and when soliciting local input for community-driven development programs, “the details matter a lot. There’s a real difference between direct participation and indirect participation.” ■

Benjamin A. Olken, “Direct Democracy and Local Public Goods: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia,” *American Political Science Review*, 104, 2010.

ENVIRONMENT

Bring Polluters Back In

► It is not race or class that makes communities more susceptible to industrial pollution. The reason that environmental justice research has produced “very mixed results,” says Don Grant, a sociologist at the University of Arizona, is that it’s been asking the wrong questions.

People, from sociologists to activists to policymakers, “like to reduce problems like pollution to a single factor, such as race or income. But our findings suggest it’s more complex than that,” and should include traits of the polluting firm, says Grant. “It doesn’t make sense to focus on one particular variable; it makes more sense to talk about these things coalescing in certain ways.”

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The Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation Program in Social Entrepreneurship

Grant and his colleagues used data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Risk-Screening Environmental Indicators on the toxic emissions of individual facilities and their associated health dangers. They appended to these data not only neighborhood characteristics such as race and income, but organizational features like the size of the facility. Then the researchers employed a novel statistical technique called "fuzzy set analysis," which, instead of simply assuming linear and straightforward causes, allows for the unexpected.

"What we're finding is that there are multiple pathways to the same dangerous outcome," says Grant. By changing the framework, Grant and colleagues resolved many of the field's paradoxes. It's not that one study is wrong and another is right, he says. "Our study is showing that poverty and minority presence *do* have inconsistent effects: They are important in some contexts and not in others."

Each of the recipes for risk that Grant identified validates seemingly contradictory, prior case study findings. For example, one of the most potentially hazardous combinations is a large absentee-owned plant in an African-American neighborhood. Another is a neighborhood with both large African-American and Latino populations—a contributing factor other studies have described as ethnic churning. A third is the interaction between being poor and being African American.

"It's not race *or* class, it's both, and it can be both in different ways in different kinds of neighborhoods and in relation to different kinds of firms," says Scott Frickel, an environmental sociologist at Washington State University who reviewed Grant's paper. Frickel thinks the

new method "actually gets us a lot closer to what's really going on out there."

This is more than just theoretically important. "When you can identify the types of facilities that are dangerous in certain types of communities, that lends itself to some kind of policy remedy," says Grant. It could help regulators to focus their efforts on the most potentially harmful facilities, firms to focus their improvements on the most efficient pathways, and scholars to focus their research on the most fruitful case studies. "There's an entirely different way to look at this," says Frickel. ■

Don Grant, Mary Nell Trautner, Liam Downey, et al., "Bringing the Polluters Back In: Environmental Inequality and the Organization of Chemical Production," *American Sociological Review*, 75, 2010.

HEALTH

Virtual HIV Prevention

▶ Keisha's boyfriend invites her over when nobody will be home, and almost instantly the lovers are in bed. Will they use a condom? The answer can be life changing, but the moment of decision is just plain awkward. An interactive DVD slows down that moment, allowing viewers to choose different scenarios, and pauses the action at key points so viewers can mentally rehearse the interaction along with Keisha.

This HIV prevention tool is one of 20 computer-mediated interventions that, in aggregate, were recently shown to work as well as human counselors. The field of health education "is kind of at a crossroads right now," says Seth Noar, a professor of health communication at the University of Kentucky who led the study. "We've developed all these [effective] programs, but we've done a terrible job getting

them into practice." Even interventions proven to increase condom use and to reduce sexually transmitted disease rates rarely make it out the lab door. "Why do we keep developing these human interventions, when in most cases they can't be disseminated—oftentimes for reasons as simple as cost?" asks Noar. "Let's have computers do a lot of this counseling."

Noar and his colleagues analyzed all the existing studies that test high-tech behavioral interventions to help prevent the spread of HIV by "developing people's skills, improving their attitudes about condom use, and increasing their knowledge about STDs and HIV," says Noar. By 2009 there were 20 such trials, the first published in 1997. "Really, the most surprising part was that the effects are quite similar to those that have been found in human-delivered interventions." For example, teenage girls who struggled along with Keisha on the condom question were two and a half times more likely to be sexually abstinent for three months after participating in the interactive program, and less than half as likely to report an STD six months after the computer-mediated intervention, than a control group who didn't follow Keisha's story.

"This is the first synthesis that shows we can use technologies like the Internet to successfully intervene and facilitate healthy sexual behavior," says Sheana Bull, a professor of community and behavioral health at the Colorado School of Public Health. It reveals enormous potential, since computer-based



A worker packs condoms at the Human-Care Latex Corporation in Tianjin, one of China's biggest condom producers.

programs combine some of the strengths of personal interactions with the broad sweep of mass media campaigns. "You can reach large numbers of people in a pretty efficient way, but also you can tailor content at an individual level," says Noar.

Bull is currently experimenting with Facebook and text messaging to reach at-risk populations, but she doesn't think computer-mediated interventions are a panacea. "I would caution anyone to avoid using the computer to replace effective face-to-face communication and health promotion," says Bull. "It's not going to have the same ability to evoke empathy or clear understanding of an individual's problem or circumstances. But it can still be a very good tool for providing clear, consistent, standardized information." ■

Seth M. Noar, Larson B. Pierce, and Hulda G. Black, "Can Computer-Mediated Interventions Change Theoretical Mediators of Safer Sex? A Meta-Analysis," *Human Communication Research*, 36, 2010.