

Penn Study of Personal Qualities Annual Newsletter [SUMMER 2011]



Greetings! We have created this newsletter to keep parents and teachers of children involved in our research project informed of our progress to date. We are excited to share some highlights of our investigation!

[PARTICIPATION]

Students at 9 schools in New York City and Philadelphia are participating in this research project. As a group, the children in this study are extremely diverse, representing many different ethnic and racial heritages. Complementing this rich data set are public, national databases which we also use for research.

We are very grateful to the parents and teachers of these students. Your support makes this research possible – **thank you!** Since participation is voluntary, we also want to remind you that if you would like to withdraw participation at any time and for any reason, you can contact us or the school administration.

[THE ROLE OF TEST MOTIVATION IN INTELLIGENCE TESTING]

Intelligence tests are widely assumed to measure maximum intellectual performance, and IQ scores are typically assumed to affect later-life academic, professional, and social outcomes. This study critically examined these assumptions and found evidence against both. First, we examined whether motivation is less than maximal when students take intelligence tests in the context of low-stakes research situations. Specifically, we statistically reviewed random-assignment experiments testing the effects of material incentives on intelligence-test performance with 2,008 participants. Incentives increased IQ scores, with larger effects for students with lower baseline IQ scores. Second, we tested whether individual differences in motivation during IQ testing can magnify the relationship between intelligence and life outcomes. Trained observers rated test motivation among 251 adolescent boys completing intelligence tests using a 15-min video sample. IQ score predicted life outcomes, including academic performance in adolescence and criminal convictions, employment, and years of education in early adulthood. However, when we accounted for the effect of test motivation on life

outcomes in our analyses, the effect of IQ on those outcomes was significantly weaker. Our findings suggest that under low-stakes research conditions, test motivation can play a major role in strengthening the relationship between IQ scores and later-life outcomes.

[SCHOOL WORK, NOT SCHOOL PLAY]

This investigation uses data from the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development (SSYSD, 1992-97). Investigators recorded the subjective experiences of a large national sample of 1,106 students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 while they were engaged in everyday academic and recreational activities. We examined participants' feelings of positive emotion, mastery, intrinsic motivation and deliberate practice (i.e., challenge, concentration, and motivation toward future goals) during six different types of activities (passive leisure, active leisure, socializing, academic work, non-academic work and nothing). We found that while students reported high levels of deliberate practice for academic work, it was not intrinsically motivating and students did not report positive emotion. For active leisure activities, on the other hand, (e.g., playing sports, doing art, playing music) students reported high levels of intrinsic motivation and positive emotion in addition to high levels of deliberate practice. An understanding of the subjective experiences of adolescents in school and out of school is crucial for guiding education policy and practice.

[WHAT MAKES A “GOOD” PERSONALITY?]

Why do certain children enjoy the acceptance and approval of their peers, while others are disliked or simply ignored? In other words, what makes for a “good” personality? This study explored these questions by examining which personality traits predict popularity over time. In a longitudinal study of 317 middle school students, Big Five conscientiousness measured by self-report and teacher report predicted sociometric popularity (the number of classmates who name you as a friend) better than any other Big Five factor or IQ. These findings suggest that a “good” personality, as seen through the eyes of others, is a conscientious personality.

[CONTACT INFORMATION]

If you have any specific questions, concerns, or suggestions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact Professor Angela Lee Duckworth at 215/898-1339 or duckworth@psych.upenn.edu.