Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology with an emphasis in Clinical Psychology

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Signature Strengths: A Positive Psychology Intervention with Informal Caregivers

Date: Wednesday, 7/19/2017
Time: 1:00pm
Place: Stadler Hall Room 339

Abstract
The adverse effects of caregiving on informal caregivers’ physical and mental health are well documented (Vitaliano, Zhang, & Scanlan, 2003; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2003a). Many evidence-based treatments exist to address caregiver distress and burden (Gallagher-Thompson & Coon, 2007). Positive aspects of caregiving, however, have received considerably less attention in the literature. At present, there are relatively few interventions that have a primary focus on improving positive aspects of caregiving. The current study tested an established positive psychology intervention with informal caregivers of older adults. This internet-based study employed a three group randomized controlled design. One hundred and fifty-five women caring for an older adult were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a standard version of the “using signature strengths in new ways” exercise (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), a modified version of the exercise adapted for the caregiving domain, and a survey only control group. Participants across all conditions reported significant increases in happiness, $F(2, 174) = 3.54, p = .04, \eta^2_p = .04, 90\% \text{ CI} [.002, .089]$ and greater satisfaction with life $F(2, 170) = 9.38, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10, 90\% \text{ CI} [.03, .17]$ over their time in the study. Participants who received the “using signature strengths” intervention showed a significant decrease in depressive symptoms compared to the control group at one-month follow-up, $F(1, 88) = 4.44, p = .04, \eta^2_p = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [.00, .14]$. The modified version of the exercise did not out perform the other conditions on positive caregiving measures, although, secondary analyses did reveal significant increases in positive aspects of caregiving for the modified condition at one-month follow-up compared to baseline, $t(29) = -2.34, p = .03, d = -.36, 95\% \text{ CI} [.06, .79]$. Results were mixed with regard to clear intervention effects for the “using signature strengths in new ways” exercise. However, caregivers in this study did experience improved well-being, which points to a potential role for positive psychology interventions to augment existing caregiver interventions.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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