Testing the Barnum Effect in Malta High School Students

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The study of the Barnum Effect refers to the gullibility of people and how they perceive themselves and their personalities. Also examined was the self-serving bias and if subjects attributed more positive, negative and neutral results to their personalities or futures. Eleven males and thirteen females were tested. These subjects were given a survey, a personality test, and a list of horoscopes to choose from. The survey gathered general data on what kind of day they were having, how tired they were, and if they were feeling healthy. The results from the personality test were modified from the standard Barnum Effect result. The subjects did not recognize that the personality test results were not genuine and that everyone would get the same results. On day two, the personality test results would be neutral, day three would be positive, and on day four negative results. I had them score these on a Likert scale of 1 to 10 to see how accurate the subjects thought the results were. When the results of neutral and positive were given, the subjects rated it as a more accurate representation of their personality than with the negative personality test results. The final experiment involved giving the subjects twelve horoscopes with three trials. The first trial contained all traditional horoscopes as the control. The second and third trial had two horoscopes that were modified to either have a more positive or negative future. The results of this data indicated that the subjects preferred the negative themed horoscope over the more positive or neutral ones.

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