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The Effects of Prosocial Tendencies on Interpersonal and Personal Interactions

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Abstract:

People have options to engage in helpful or harmful behaviors toward others. This research is interested in factors that predict prosocial behavior (i.e., helping behavior). In particular, this research investigates whether a target individual is likely to receive help from participants based on the known past behavior of that target individual. Specifically, if the target is portrayed as having been helpful, it is predicted that people will want to help that target. If the target is portrayed as having been unhelpful in the past, the prediction is that people will NOT want to help that target. This research can have implications in terms of better understanding moral behavior and the psychology of prosociality.

Introduction and Review of Literature:

The psychology of prosocial behavior is critical to helping us build a moral and ethical world. Prosocial behaviors are voluntary behaviors that are intended to benefit another individual. Helping, sharing and providing comfort are all examples of prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior is important because it is relevant in both interpersonal relationships, such as how peers interact and interactions among individuals and groups without close ties; it is essential in order to understand human relationships (Jonas, 2019). Prosocial behaviors have found their way into many aspects of society, whether it's in the standards set by people for other people to uphold (stealing is bad, call 911 if you see an accident, community service) , or political standards (jury duty, volunteering at polls). People are taught from a young age to treat people a certain way, act a certain way, and participate in society in certain ways; most of these experiences are derived from the idea of helping others to create a better society.

It is also essential in understanding what leads a person to make a decision, especially ones that will affect another person. Prosociality is characterized behaviors that will benefit another person but not yourself (Jonas, 2019). Meaning there can be no direct result to how that help you provided to another will actually affect yourself. For example, if you were to witness a car accident that you're involved with in any way, and after witnessing the accident, you call 911. This decision to call 911 and help the people in the accident is a prosocial act. There is no direct benefit for yourself after doing this act. Calling 911, and helping those people will probably cause you to feel a drawback emotion such as happiness. This feeling of happiness causes you to want to seek it over and over again, almost as if prosocial behaviors are addicting; but it can also

cause you to feel like you have fulfilled the quota for good behaviors for that time being. Sachdeva, Iliev and Medin et al. (2009) proposed a framework that suggested that moral behaviors can result from an internal balancing act of good and bad behavior. This means that once you have conducted this prosocial act, such as calling 911, you feel as if you don't need to uphold the standards in other areas. That you have balanced your behaviors internally. This is relevant to the research we are conducting because this so-called balancing act of moral behaviors can affect a person's willingness to help another individual.

If a subject is persistent with showing higher levels of bad moral behavior they would be less likely to spend their time helping another person. This idea that people are more willing to help when they have persistently experienced good moral behavior supports the idea that moral behavior is controlled by a negative feedback mechanism (Cameron, Daryl, Payne, 2012). This is very similar to the idea that we have all been raised with, "treat people the way you want to be treated." If you are treated in a bad way after you have only been nice to someone, your desire to help that individual will decrease. This is very similar to an idea suggested by Conway and Peetz et al. (2012) that moral behaviors are controlled by a self- regulated process that creates a "damage control" response in social situations. As to prevent negative outbursts of behaviors, this damage control response makes a person subconsciously question an interaction, whether it was a positive or negative one and helps to make a decision on how to advance in that situation and whether or not to engage in an act of prosociality.

 Geher et al. (2014) suggested that there are different directions prosocial behavior can head in. The first one being, paying it back: giving to others who have done something that shows altruistic behavior to you, for example helping your friend with math homework after they have helped you with science homework. And the second being paying it forward: completing an altruistic act without having someone do something nice first, for example calling 911 after witnessing a car accident (Glenn, 2014). In either circumstance prosocial behavior is extended. Prosocial behaviors are so hardwired into people that they do them without even thinking about it. Now the question is do some people conduct these behaviors more easily than others?

Hypothesis:

It was hypothesized that individuals are more likely to help a target individual who has demonstrated to be helpful in the past. This target individual will be compared with a target

individual who has demonstrated to be unhelpful in the past. It was expected that those who view the target individual as helpful will be more likely and willing to help that rather than if the target individual is seen as selfish.

Methodology:

The methodology was based on Lyon and Greenner's et al. (1991) study on the evidence of codependency in women with an alcoholic parent: helping out Mr Wrong. The study was conceptualizing codependency and its development among women being raised in an environment of an alcoholic parent. It was proposed that women who are used to conforming to the demands of an expolistive person would be more likely to help an experimenter portrayed as exploitative. The hypothesis was proven through a series of surveys, interactions with these so called exploitative experimenters, we modeled methodology of this experiment in our experiment.

The study was a between-groups design on adolescents from New Paltz Central High school between the ages of 13-18. Our sample size of 133 participants that range from freshman to seniors. Students in both advanced placement and regular placement classes were tested in the experiment. These participants were randomly chosen and assigned to one of two conditions. Both conditions included vignettes about a target person whom they had the option of helping with a homework related task at a later point. The vignettes described an interaction with "Paul" who helped someone with a homework related task then explained how "Paul" was looking for help. The vignette started by describing Paul and his interests, then described how he helped another individual then proceeded to explain why he needed the participants' help. The first vignette portrayed Paul as a helpful, kind person. We used key phrases like, "he was super helpful", "because of him I got a good grade", "had a positive attitude and was supportive"**.** The second vignette portrayed "Paul" as an unhelpful, unapproachable person. The key phrases used in this vignette were "he was super unhelpful", "really bad attitude and morale", "put down my work and made me feel bad", "got a bad grade because of him". Based on Paul's interaction with the other individual explained in the vignette the participants had to answer a series of questions.

The questions consisted of participants' age, gender, religiosity, religion, parents' marital status, how much the participant was willing to donate to Paul (in minutes) and a short description of why they chose that amount of time. The amount of time that was available to

donate to Paul is 0-180 minutes. The main variable tested in the study was the amount of time that participants were willing to donate, we also expected the primary outcome variable would pertain to how much the participants were willing to volunteer to help Paul with some homework-related task. It was anticipated that more people would be willing to donate more time to the version of Paul who is portrayed in a positive manner.

Results

Two basic analyses were conducted. First, a correlation was run between degree of religiosity and proclivity to help. This result yielded a significant finding ($r(153) = .15$, $p = .04$). People who identified as more religious were generally more helpful, regardless of the experimental conditions that they were in.

The primary analysis conducted was a two-way Analysis of Variance using helping (in terms of minutes allocated) as the dependent variable and with Paul's reputation (positive or negative light) and gender as the independent variables. The means and standard deviations of helping for the different groups can be found in Table 1.

Based on the findings, there was a significant main effect for the reputation of Paul ($F(1, 128) = 618.040$, $p = .026$). Based on the means in Table 1, we can see that this effect was driven by the fact that people were more likely to want to help the "good" Paul than the "bad" Paul.

There was also a significant main effect for gender of participant ($F(1, 128) = 3.512$, $p = .033$). Based on the means found in Table 1, this effect was driven by the fact that on average, women were more helpful than men.

The interaction between gender and reputation of Paul was not significant ($F(1, 128) = .046$, $p = .830$).

Table 1: The Reputation of Paul's Effect on Gender

Gender	Paul	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Positive reputation	67.2308	45.91759	26
	Negative reputation	23.1000	31.02029	30
	Total	43.5893	44.26029	56
Female	Positive reputation	79.5714	57.38635	35
	Negative reputation	38.8537	40.51269	41
	Total	57.6053	52.77931	76
Total	Positive reputation	74.3115	52.74958	61
	Negative reputation	32.5833	37.26938	72
	Total	51.7218	49.47227	133

There were no significant effects for age or parents marital status on the amount of time willing to donate to paul. Ages effect on helping was trending towards significant but it was not statically significant enough to be a trend. To test age we used a correlation test.

There was no present trend or effect shown for parent marital status. None of the data was significant enough to show that parents marital status correlated to rates of prosociality. To test this variable we used a correlation test.

Discussion

The main hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. Individuals were more likely to help a target individual who has demonstrated to be helpful in the past. Prosocial

behaviors tend to be exerted when an individual feels like they were treated well in return. In instances when people are asked to help someone else more often than not they engage in helping them when the target person who needs help treats them in a positive way. The golden rule, "treat people the way you want to be treated", shines through more than people think.

There was a significant effect in the degree of religiosity and the proliviety to help; people who identify as religious were more willing to help. This positive correlation showed that religion and prosocial behavior have an effect on eachother but which one actually affects the other? Ahmed et al. (2009) did a study on if religion makes a person more prosocial. The test subjects were "Madrash" people from a rural village in India. The results of this study support that fact there isn't one cause for another. It was discovered that while religion has an effect on emphasizing prosocial behaviors there are also other contributors that could cause someone to have more prosocial tendencies. Or maybe being prosocial causes you to be more religious. For example becoming a priest means giving to others, and helping people in a variety of ways (Ahmed, 2009). So while this is much evidence to support that prosocial behavior and religion have an effect on each other it is very hard to say which is affecting the other.

There was a significant main effect of Paul's reputation of Paul on the willingness to help. More participants offered to help Paul after reading about with a positive reputation, then participants wanted to help Paul after reading about him with a negative reputation. When asked why they would donate the amount of time they did to the positive reputation Paul , participants said things along the line of, "he helped me so I want to help him," "he is a good person so I want to help him," "I want to reciprocate the energy he gave me," and "I don't want to help him." The participants who had the negative reputation of Paul said things along the lines of "he didn't help me so I why should I help him," it's his fault I did bad so why would I help him," "I don't want to help him," and " even though he wasn't nice or helpful to me I want to help him."

People are more likely to want to help the good reputation of Paul because that Paul helped them. "Good Paul" treated them in a nice way and helped them succeed. Their positive interaction with Paul created an instance that is a perfect example of "paying it back." "Paying it back" means doing something altruistic for someone who was altruistic to you. The participants who received the positive reputation of Paul felt obligated to help him with some homework related task, but the participants who received the negative reputation Paul didn't feel obligated

to help him. But why? Conway and Peetz's et al (2012) theory of moral behavior being controlled by a negative feedback mechanism illuminates the subconscious want to help people based on how individuals are treated, negatively or positively. If a person is negative to another individual persistently over time that individual will create a negative feedback mechanism, which could be contrasted with a bias (conway, peetz. 2012) This mechanism will subconsciously prevent a person from interacting with that negatively behaved individual as much as they can in the future. It creates a damage control response to protect themself from getting hurt. In the instances of this study, the person who received the negative vignette on the reputation of Paul, created a damage control response through the vicarious interaction with Paul. "Bad Paul's" failure to help another on their homework related task and bad attitude, made more participants weary of helping. The vicarious negative interaction leads to less of a prosocial response from participants. This effect is what we expected.

There was also a significant main effect on the gender of participants. On average women were more helpful than men. This is consistent with other research conducted in the field. Women and men tend to observe different social norms around the world, and depending on the contexts of situations different behaviors are expected from the different genders. In a study by Espinosa and Kovarik et al. (2015) on prosocial behavior and gender, It was hypothesised that "people internalize behavioral norms which are advantageous in their daily life situations and apply them in atypical situations such as lab experiments, only when prompted to reason or reflect about the new situation or in-lab experience, experimental subjects behave more in line with their self-interest." This study also proved that women's brains have adapted to facilitate better communication in the molecules of the brain, the analytical, sequential reasoning modes of the left hampshire and the processing of information in the right hemisphere of the brain. This being said initially women are not necessarily more prosocial but they are better at analyzing situations and producing the answer that is wanted. As for this study, women were shown to be more prosocial and willing to help Paul in both the good reputation and the bad reputation. In the future looking at this significant main effect and more of the actual differences in levels of prosociality in women and males could be drastic in the advancement of this field.

No correlation was shown for the effect of age on the willingness to help paul. A study by Matsumoto, Yamagishi, Li and Kiyonari et al (2016) found that people develop prosocial

behavior patterns as they age . It is said that age related changes in personality change as a person's rewards systems shifts from immediate to long-term gains. The change in prosociality happens conceivily with the change in gains. The subject group in this study consisted of everyone being in the same age range, therefore at similar places in their prosocial development. The lack of correlation of age on the reputation of paul could have been because of the stage at which the experimental group was at, in the development of prosociality.

No correlation was also shown for the effect of parents marital status on rates of prosociality. There was no trend for this either which leads us to believe that prosocility isn't determined by an experience like that because some adolescents of divorced parents are more personality than adolescents with parents together and vice versa.

Conclusion

The effect of prosociality on interpersonal and personal relationships, even those of a virtuous fashion are extremely prominent in how a person will react and the levels of prosocial behaviors that will be exerted. These behaviors are very important in understanding why people treat people the way they do and act in certain ways. It creates a better understanding of human interaction in general. The study supports the idea that negative behavior will, on average, produce a negative response from another individual. People want to help people who have helped them and been nice to them in the past.

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