

# 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, ie: Helping, sharing and providing comfort.
- ★ Prosocial behavior is relevant in both interpersonal relationships and interactions among individuals and groups without close ties (Jonas, 2019).
- ★ Prosociality is characterized behaviors that will benefit another person but not yourself (Jonas, 2019).



- ★ 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.
  - 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.
- ★ 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.
- ★ The idea that moral behavior is controlled by a negative feedback mechanism is supported by the fact that people are more willing to help when they have persistently experienced good moral behavior (Cameron, Daryl, Payne, 2012).
- ★ Conway and Peetz (2012) suggest that moral behaviors are controlled by a self-regulated process that creates a “damage control” response in social situations.
  - this damage control response makes a person subconsciously question an interaction, whether it was positive or negative and helps to make a decision on how to advance in that situation
- ★ Geher et al. (2014) suggested that there are different directions prosocial behavior can head in
  1. Paying it back- giving to others who have done something that shows altruistic behavior to you
  2. Paying it forward- completing an altruistic act without having someone do something nice first,

## Hypothesis

**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 rather than if the target individual is seen as selfish.

## Methodology

- 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
  - In this study it was proposed that women who are used to conforming to the demands of an exploitive person would be more likely to help an experimenter portrayed as exploitive.
  - The hypothesis was supported through a series of surveys and interactions with these so called exploitive experimenters, we modeled methodology of this experiment in our experiment.
- **Demographics:**
  - between-groups design on adolescents from New Paltz Central High
  - ages of 13-18.
  - 133 participants that range from freshman to seniors.
- **Experimental Conditions:**
  - participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions.
  - Conditions included vignettes about a target person whom they had the option of helping with a homework related task at a later point.
- **Vignettes:**
  - described an interaction with “Paul” who helped someone with a homework related task then explained how “Paul” was looking for help
  - The first vignette portrayed Paul as a helpful, kind person. The second as an unhelpful, unapproachable person
- **Survey:**
  - 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.
  - Amount of time available to donate to Paul was 0-180 mins

## Results

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

- ★ The primary analysis- 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.
- ★ Based off the means in table 1 there was a significant main effect for the reputation of Paul ( $F(1, 128) = 618.040, p = .026$ ). 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.

Figure 2: vignettes, as shown on the survey. left is positive paul and right is negative paul.

I know this guy named Paul, he is about 5’11” and has short brown hair, brown eyes and wears glasses. His favorite sport is baseball and he knows how to play the guitar. Paul is a really good student, he likes math and science. He also has a younger brother and an older sister, every year his family goes on a trip to the beach for a week.

This year Paul said he wants to learn to surf. Last year paul helped me with a project for school. He was super helpful. He always came excited to work and was super encouraging and supportive. I got a really good grade on the project because of his help and positive attitude.

Currently, Paul is doing a project for school now and needs help. Imagine that he asks you to help him gather data. Please answer the following questions for Paul's project.

I know this guy named Paul, he is about 5’11” and has short brown hair, brown eyes and wears glasses. His favorite sport is baseball and he knows how to play the guitar. Paul is a really good student, he likes math and science. He also has a younger brother and an older sister, every year his family goes on a trip to the beach for a week.

This year Paul said he wants to learn to surf. Last year I asked Paul to help me with a project for school. He was super unhelpful. He would show up with a really bad attitude and act as if it was the last place he wanted to be. He would continuously put down my work and make me feel bad about my project. I got a really bad grade on the project because of his lack of help and attitude.

Currently, Paul is doing a project for school now and needs help. Imagine that he asks you to help him gather data. Please answer the following questions for Paul's project.

## Other Findings:

- ★ a correlation was run between degree of religiosity and proclivity to help
  - 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.
- ★ 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.
- ★ There was no present trend or effect shown for parent marital status.
  - No data was significant enough to show that parents marital status correlated to rates of prosociality.

## Discussion

- Prosocial behaviors tend to be exerted when an individual feels like they were treated well in return
- There is much evidence to support that prosocial behavior and religion having effects on each other it is very hard to say which is affecting the other.
- 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 (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.
  - 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 themselves from getting hurt
- 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.

## Conclusion

The hypothesis was supported by the results of the experiment. 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.

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