




Helping Behavior and Altruism







The Social Psychological study of helping behavior has historically been influenced by trying to understand and explain situations where people did ***not*** help.

Often explained in terms of conformity and *diffusion of responsibility*



Conforming by not Getting Involved

- 1964 Kitty Genovese brutally murdered over a period of 30 minutes with 38 witnesses, none of whom helped or even called the police.

Conforming by not Getting Involved

- Eleanor Bradley fell and broke her leg and remained lying in the New York City street unassisted for 40 minutes while people stepped over her.



Conforming by not Getting Involved

- Not getting involved is an example of conformity.
- “If it was a real emergency, someone else would surely be doing something.”
- More people present actually decreases the likelihood of getting help.
- Diffusion of responsibility.

Latane & Rodin (1969) “Lady In Distress” studies

- Cover story—female researcher asked college students to fill out a questionnaire while she went to the next room and faked an accident to see if the subjects would help.
- When alone, 70% helped.
- When participating in pairs, only 20% helped—the bystander effect.

Darley & Latane (1968)

- People placed in separate rooms but were able to communicate via microphones and earphones.
- Confederate staged fake epileptic attack.
- If the subject thought they were the only one hearing the seizure, they were far more likely to help than if they thought others were also hearing it.
- As the number of people listening increased, the likelihood of help decreased.

Factor that Increase Likelihood of Help

- A sense of mutuality or a common fate.
- Lack of escape from the face-to-face aspect of the situation.




Piliavin, Rodin & Piliavin (1969) “Good Samaritanism”

- Confederate of researcher staggered onto NYC subway as “stricken victim.”
- When “victim” was obviously ill 95% of times, people rushed to help.
- If the “victim” carried a liquor bottle and was made to smell of alcohol, someone came to help 50% of the time.
- Comparable help came on crowded and nearly empty trains—no diffusion of responsibility on crowded train.

Piliavin, Rodin & Piliavin (1969)
"Good Samaritanism"

- People on the subway have a feeling of sharing a common fate.
- They were in a face-to-face where there was no avoiding the victim.

Increasing the Tendency to Help



- 1. Define the situation as an emergency.
- Bickman (1971) female students sitting in cubicles listening over an intercom heard a crash and a victim's scream.
- Subjects were more likely to assist when they heard the incident interpreted as an emergency.

Increasing the Tendency to Help

- 2. Assuming personal responsibility for intervening.
- More likely to help when you think you are the only one aware of the emergency or that other who may be aware are unable to respond.

Increasing the Tendency to Help

- 3. The cost for helping must be reasonable.
- In the Piliavin experiments, when fake blood was used with the “victim,” people helped less. The cost for helping went up.
- Darley & Batson (1973) even if costs are more subtle, help decreases.
- 50% of Princeton divinity students would not help if they were led to believe that helping would make them late for an appointment to deliver a speech.

Increasing the Tendency to Help

- 3. The benefits of their assistance must be reasonable.
- People are more likely to help if they know they can actually do some good e.g. that their response will alleviate pain.
- If the potential responders did not believe they could alleviate the “victim’s” pain, the more apparent pain, the less likely the help.

Increasing the Tendency to Help

- 4. The person assesses the benefits and costs of not helping as well.
- If you can redefine the situation as not an emergency, relinquish responsibility, and easily remove yourself from the situation, the likelihood of helping decreases.

Increasing the Tendency to Help

- 5. You are more likely to help if the victim is someone close to you.
- This closeness can also be due to a perceived similarity of attitudes and interests even if the person is a stranger to you.

Motives for Helping Behavior

- Egoism: Benefiting another as a means to benefit oneself.



Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Gaining rewards*
- *Reciprocity credit* —the helped individual “owes you one”
- *Mood enhancement* —we’re more likely to help when we feel bad ourselves because we know we can give ourselves a “pat on the back” when we do something nice for someone, and that makes us feel better.

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- Mood enhancement continued
- People who were in a negative state because they accidentally harmed someone, or had seen someone else harm someone, were more likely to volunteer to make telephone calls for a worthy cause more than people who did not feel bad (Cialdini, Darby & Vincent, 1973).

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Mood maintenance*
- The reward value for helping can be even stronger when people are in a good mood.
- When subjects' moods were enhanced (by succeeding at a task, having a cookie, finding a coin in the return slot, etc.) their likelihood of giving help to good causes increased (Isen, 1970; Isen & Levin, 1972)

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Mood maintenance*
- Being in a good mood may also bias one's memory.
- People in a good mood are more likely to recall and attend to the positive aspects of the helping behavior rather than the negative.

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Empathic joy*—a vicarious feeling of pleasure from seeing a person in need experience relief.
- Interestingly, not related to high degree of sympathy or empathy for another in need.
- When subjects were induced to feel little empathic concern for a person in need, their desire to experience empathic joy motivated their helping behavior (Batson, Batson, Slingsby, Harrell, Peekna & Todd, 1991).

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Avoiding punishments* or social sanctions for *not* helping.
- Norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960).
- “You expect repayment when you help and you should help those who help you.”

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Reciprocity:*
- Pressure to help in return depends on the circumstances under which we received our help:
- how badly we needed help
- our perception of how much the other person gave us relative to his or her total resources
- our perception of the other’s motives
- and whether the other person helped voluntarily or was pressured into it (Gergen et al., 1975; Pruitt, 1968; Wilke & Lanzetta, 1970)

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Sanctions for violating social norms* influences our helping behavior only if our attention is focused on this standard of helping (Cialdini et al., 1991).
- Being self focused when the norm was salient highlighted the threat of sanctions for violating the norm.
- Otherwise, if we're not focused on the norm of helping, then being self focused will make you less likely to help (Gibbons & Wicklund, 1982).

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Empathy costs* – Because of your empathy, you anticipate feeling discomfort and distress if the person in need continues to suffer, and your desire to avoid this discomfort motivates you to help (Piliavin, J., Dovidio, J., Gaertner, S. & Clark R., 1981).

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Reducing aversive arousal*
- *Escaping one's own distress* – witnessing someone else's distress is also distressing (aversive). By helping you terminate the distress (escape), (Piliavin et al., 1981).

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Reducing aversive arousal*
- *Escaping discrepancy* – (Reykowski, 1982).
- Perceiving a discrepancy between the real state and the ideal state produces cognitive inconsistency. We are then motivated to alleviate this inconsistency. One way to do this is through helping.

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Reducing aversive arousal*
- *Escaping injustice* – Based on the Just World Hypothesis (Lerner, 1980).
- We all have a need to believe our world is predictable and just. If you believe this, witnessing an innocent person suffer violates this belief and is upsetting.

Egoism: Possible self-benefits....

- *Reducing aversive arousal*
- *Escaping injustice* – Based on the Just World Hypothesis (Lerner, 1980).
- If people can easily help they are likely to do so to relieve the suffering of an innocent person.
- But, if they cannot easily help, they are likely to derogate the victim (Hafer, 2000; Lerner & Simmons, 1986; Mills & Egger, 1972).

Altruism: Benefiting another as an end in itself...


- *Empathy-altruism hypothesis*
- Feeling empathy for a person in need leads to increased helping of that person.
- However, empathic helping does not always reveal the underlying motivation.
- Helping someone else could be the ultimate goal, and any self benefits are unintended consequences.
- The self benefits could be the instrumental goal,
- Or both might be at play—both altruism and egoism.

Altruism: Benefiting another as an end in itself...


- *Egoistic alternatives explaining empathy induced helping*
- *Aversive-arousal reduction-* - Feeling empathy for someone who is suffering is unpleasant. Helping eliminates the unpleasant empathic feelings.
- Doubts cast on this explanation by evidence that shows people who experience a predominance of empathy are as likely to help when escape is easy as when it is hard (Batson, 1991).

Altruism: Benefiting another as an end in itself...

- *Egoistic alternatives explaining empathy induced helping*
- *Empathy-specific punishment* – Empathic people may help to avoid any shame or guilt they may feel if they failed to help.
- *Empathy-specific reward* -- Empathic people may help to because of the honor and pride they will experience for helping

 **Collectivism: Benefiting another to benefit a group**

- Collectivist motivation is a product of group identity and group norms.
- Accounts for prosocial responses to social dilemmas
- Some argue that collectivism is just an enlightened form of egoism.

 **Principlism: Benefiting another to uphold a moral principle**

- Long advocated by moral philosophers and religious teachers.
- Recent research support the notion that behavior which appears to be motivated by upholding a principle may be an instrumental means to pursue self-benefit and appear moral, while avoiding the cost of actually being moral (Batson et al., 1997, 1999, 2002).
