

## **SEMESTER-6 18BPS62C SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY-II**

### **UNIT-1 PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Many aspects of prosocial behaviour that influence the occurrence of prosocial actions—both external factors relating to the situations in which it occurs and personal characteristics that influence the likelihood that specific people will, or will not, provide help when it is needed.

#### Prosocial Behaviour and Altruism

Prosocial behaviours are actions considered beneficial to others and as having positive social consequences. These include donating to charity, intervention in emergencies, cooperation, sharing, volunteering, sacrifice, and the like. Second, helping is one kind of prosocial behaviour that has the consequence of providing some benefit to or improving the well-being of another person. Notice that, in contrast to aggression, the intent of the helper is at issue. Helping can occur even if the actor has no intention of benefitting another. Further, the helper can also benefit from helping; under this definition, helping behaviour may involve selfish or egoistic motives. Another type of prosocial behaviour is altruism.

**Altruism** is helping that is intended to provide aid to someone else without expectation of any reward.

**Prosocial behavior**—actions by individuals that help others (often, with no immediate benefit to the helper)—are a very common part of social life. We want to emphasize that fact right at the start because such kind, helpful actions are definitely an important part of social life.

#### **Motives for Prosocial Behavior**

Why do people help others? That's a very basic question in efforts to understand the nature of prosocial behavior. As we'll soon see, many factors play a role in determining whether, and to what extent, specific people engage in such actions. Several aspects of the situation are important, and a number of personal (i.e., dispositional) factors are also influential. We focus on these factors in later discussions. Here, though, we focus on the basic question, what motives underlie the tendency to help others? Several seem to play an important role.

#### **Why People Help: Motives for Prosocial Behaviour**

Objective Assess the factors that lead people to help others Why do people help others? Before addressing the specific factors that increase or decrease the tendency to engage in such actions, we will first focus on a key question: What motives underlie the tendency to help others? As we will see soon, many factors play a role in determining whether, and to

what extent, specific people engage in such actions. Several aspects of the situation are important, and a number of personal (i.e., dispositional) factors are also influential.

### **Social Exchange and Social Norms**

Several theories of helping agree that, in the long run, helping behavior benefits the giver as well as the receiver. One explanation assumes that human interactions are guided by “social economics.” We exchange not only material goods and money but also social goods—love, services, information, status (Foa & Foa, 1975). In doing so, we aim to minimize costs and maximize rewards. Social-exchange theory does not contend that we consciously monitor costs and rewards, only that such considerations predict our behavior. Suppose your campus is having a blood drive and someone asks you to participate. Might you not implicitly weigh the *costs* of donating (needle prick, time, fatigue) against those of not donating (guilt, disapproval)? Might you not also weigh the *benefits* of donating (feeling good about helping someone, free refreshments) against those of not donating (saving the time, discomfort, and anxiety)? According to social-exchange theory—supported by studies of Wisconsin blood donors by Jane Allyn Piliavin and her research team (1982, 2003)—such subtle calculations precede decisions to help or not.

### **REWARDS**

Rewards that motivate helping may be external or internal. When businesses donate money to improve their corporate images or when someone offers a ride hoping to receive appreciation or friendship, the reward is external. We give to get. Thus, we are most eager to help someone attractive to us, someone whose approval we desire (Krebs, 1970; Unger, 1979). In experiments, and in everyday life, public generosity boosts one’s status, while selfish behavior can lead to punishment (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Henrich and others, 2006). Rewards may also be internal. Helping also increases our sense of self-worth. Nearly all blood donors in Jane Piliavin’s research agreed that giving blood “makes you feel good about yourself” and “gives you a feeling of self-satisfaction.” Indeed, “Give blood,” advises an old Red Cross poster. “All you’ll feel is good.” Feeling good helps explain why people far from home will do kindnesses for strangers whom they will never see again. Helping’s boost to self-worth explains why so many people feel good after doing good. One month-long study of 85 couples found that giving emotional support to one’s partner was positive for the *giver*; giving support boosted the giver’s mood (Gleason & others, 2003). Piliavin (2003) and Susan Andersen (1998) point to dozens of studies showing that youth engaged in community service projects, school-based “service learning,” or tutoring children develop social skills

and positive social values. They are at markedly less risk for delinquency, pregnancy, and school dropout and are more likely to become engaged citizens. Volunteering likewise benefits morale and health. Bereaved spouses recover from their depressed feelings faster when they are engaged in helping others (Brown & others, 2008). Those who do good tend to do well.

Ditto for giving money. Making donations activates brain areas linked with reward (Harbaugh & others, 2007). Generous people are happier than those whose spending is self-focused. In one experiment, people received an envelope with cash that some were instructed to spend on themselves, while others were directed to spend on other people. At the day's end, the happiest people were those assigned to the spend-it-on-others condition (Dunn & others, 2008). This cost-benefit analysis can seem demeaning. In defense of the theory, however, is it not a credit to humanity that helping can be inherently rewarding? that much of our behavior is not antisocial but "prosocial"? that we can find fulfillment in the giving of love? How much worse if we gained pleasure only by serving ourselves. "True," some readers may reply. "Still, reward theories imply that a helpful act is never truly altruistic—that we merely call it 'altruistic' when its rewards are inconspicuous. If we help the screaming woman so we can gain social approval, relieve our distress, prevent guilt, or boost our self-image, is it really altruistic?" That argument is reminiscent of B. F. Skinner's (1971) analysis of helping. We credit people for their good deeds, said Skinner, only when we can't explain them. We attribute their behavior to their inner dispositions only when we lack external explanations.

When the external causes are obvious, we credit the causes, not the person. There is, however, a weakness in reward theory. It easily degenerates into explaining-by-naming. If someone volunteers for the Big Sister tutor program, it is tempting to "explain" her compassionate action by the satisfaction it brings her. But such after-the-fact naming of rewards creates a circular explanation: "Why did she volunteer?" "Because of the inner rewards." "How do you know there are inner rewards?" "Why else would she have volunteered?" Because of this circular reasoning, egoism—the idea that self-interest motivates all behavior—has fallen into disrepute.

To escape the circularity, we must define the rewards and the costs independently of the helping behavior. If social approval motivates helping, then in experiments we should find that when approval follows helping, helping increases. And it does (Staub, 1978).

## **INTERNAL REWARDS**

So far, we have mostly considered the external rewards of helping. We also need to consider internal factors, such as the helper's emotional state or personal traits. The benefits of helping include internal self-rewards. Near someone in distress, we may feel distress. A woman's scream outside your window arouses and distresses you. If you cannot reduce your arousal by interpreting the scream as a playful shriek, then you may investigate or give aid, thereby reducing your distress (Piliavin & Piliavin, 1973). Altruism researcher Dennis Krebs (1975) found that Harvard University men whose physiological responses and self-reports revealed the most arousal in response to another's distress also gave the most help to the person.

## **GUILT**

Distress is not the only negative emotion we act to reduce. Throughout recorded history, guilt has been a painful emotion, so painful that we will act in ways that avoid guilt feelings. As Everett Sanderson remarked after heroically saving a child who had fallen onto subway tracks in front of an approaching train, "If I hadn't tried to save that little girl, if I had just stood there like the others, I would have died inside. I would have been no good to myself from then on." Cultures have institutionalized ways to relieve guilt: animal and human sacrifices, offerings of grain and money, penitent behavior, confession, denial. In ancient Israel, the sins of the people were periodically laid on a "scapegoat" animal that was then led into the wilderness to carry away the people's guilt. To examine the consequences of guilt, social psychologists have induced people to transgress: to lie, to deliver shock, to knock over a table loaded with alphabetized cards, to break a machine, to cheat. Afterward, the guilt-laden participants may be offered a way to relieve their guilt: by confessing, by disparaging the one harmed, or by doing a good deed to offset the bad one. The results are remarkably consistent: People will do whatever can be done to expunge the guilt, relieve their bad feelings, and restore their self-image.

Picture yourself as a participant in one such experiment conducted with Mississippi State University students by David McMillen and James Austin (1971). You and another student, each seeking to earn credit toward a course requirement, arrive for the experiment. Soon after, a confederate enters, portraying himself as a previous participant looking for a lost book. He strikes up a conversation in which he mentions that the experiment involves taking a multiple-choice test, for which most of the correct answers are "B." After the accomplice departs, the experimenter arrives, explains the experiment, and then asks, "Have either of you been in this experiment before or heard anything about it?" Would you lie? The behavior of

those who have gone before you in this experiment—100 percent of whom told the little lie—suggests that you would. After you have taken the test (without receiving any feedback on it), the experimenter says: “You are free to leave. However, if you have some spare time, I could use your help in scoring some questionnaires.” Assuming you have told the lie, do you think you would now be more willing to volunteer some time? The answer again is yes.

On average, those who had not been induced to lie volunteered only two minutes of time. Those who had lied were apparently eager to redeem their self-images; on average they offered a whopping 63 minutes. One moral of this experiment was well expressed by a 7-year-old girl, who, in one of our own experiments, wrote: “Don’t Lie or you’ll Live with guilt” (and you will feel a need to relieve it). Our eagerness to do good after doing bad reflects our need to reduce *private* guilt and restore a shaken self-image. It also reflects our desire to reclaim a positive *public* image. We are more likely to redeem ourselves with helpful behavior when other people know about our misdeeds (Carlsmith & Gross, 1969).

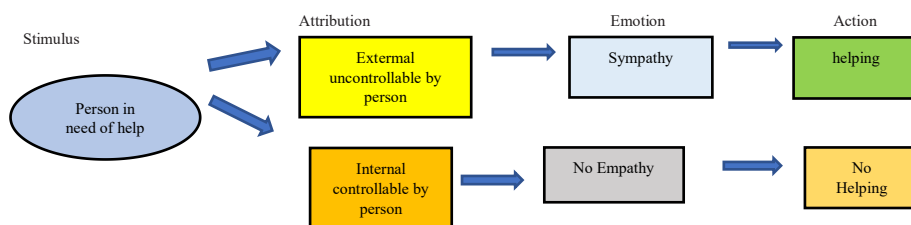
All in all, guilt leads to much good. By motivating people to confess, apologize, help, and avoid repeated harm, guilt boosts sensitivity and sustains close relationships. Among adults, the inner rewards of altruism—feeling good about oneself after donating blood or helping pick up someone’s dropped materials—can offset other negative moods as well (Cialdini, Kenrick, & Baumann, 1981; Williamson & Clark, 1989). Thus, when an adult is in a guilty, a sad, or an otherwise negative mood, a helpful deed (or any other mood-improving experience) helps neutralize the bad feelings.

#### **EXCEPTIONS TO THE FEEL BAD–DO GOOD SCENARIO**

Among well socialized adults, should we always expect to find the “feel bad–do good” phenomenon? No. In Chapter 10 we saw that one negative mood, anger, produces anything but compassion. Another exception is profound grief. People who suffer the loss of a spouse or a child, whether through death or separation, often undergo a period of intense self-preoccupation, which restrains giving to others (Aderman & Berkowitz, 1983; Gibbons & Wicklund, 1982).

**FEEL GOOD, DO GOOD** Are happy people unhelpful? Quite the contrary. There are few more consistent findings in psychology: Happy people are helpful people. This effect occurs with

both children and adults, regardless of whether the good mood comes from a success, from thinking happy thoughts, or from any of several other positive experiences (Salovey & others, 1991). One woman recalled her experience after falling in love: At the office, I could hardly keep from shouting out how deliriously happy I felt. The work was easy; things that had annoyed me on previous occasions were taken in stride. And I had strong impulses to help others; I wanted to share my joy. When Mary's type-writer broke down, I virtually sprang to my feet to assist. Mary! My former "enemy"! (Tennov, 1979, p. 22) In experiments on happiness and helpfulness, the person who is helped may be someone seeking a donation, an experimenter seeking help with paperwork, or a woman who drops papers. Here are three examples.



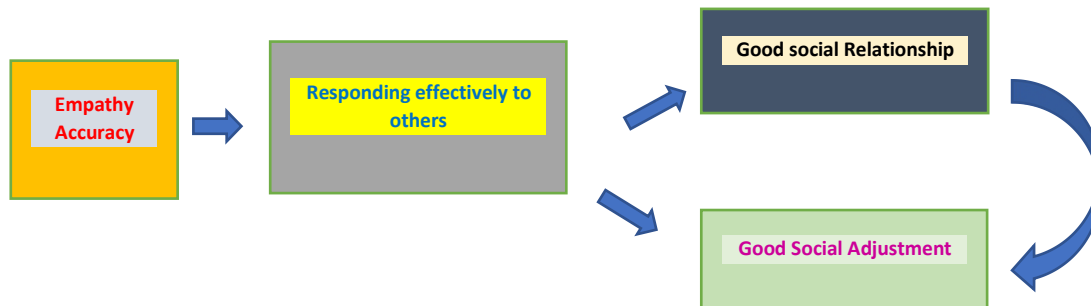
**Attributions and Helping** In this model, proposed by German researcher Udo Rudolph and colleagues (2004), helping is mediated by people's explanations of the predicament and their resulting degree of sympathy.

### Empathy-Altruism: It Feels Good to Help Others

One explanation of prosocial behavior involves empathy—the capacity to be able to experience others' emotional states, feel sympathetic toward them, and take their perspective (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000; Hodges, Kiel, Kramer, Veach, & Villaneuva, 2010). In other words, we help others because we experience any unpleasant feelings they are experiencing vicariously, and want to help bring their negative feelings to an end. This is unselfish because it leads us to offer help for no extrinsic reason, but it is also selfish, in one sense, since the behavior of assisting others helps us, too: it can make us feel better. Reflecting these basic observations, Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, and Birch (1981) offered the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which suggests that at least some prosocial acts are motivated solely by the desire to help someone in need (Batson & Oleson, 1991). Such motivation can be sufficiently strong that the helper is willing to engage in unpleasant, dangerous, and even life-threatening activities (Batson & Batson et al., 1995). Compassion for other people outweighs all other considerations (Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995; Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010).

In fact, research findings indicate that empathy consists of three distinct components: an emotional aspect (*emotional empathy*, which involves sharing the feelings and emotions of others), a cognitive component, which involves perceiving others' thoughts and feelings accurately (*empathic accuracy*), and a third aspect, known as *empathic concern*, which involves feelings of concern for another's well-being (e.g., Gleason, Jensen Campbell, &

Ickes, 2009). This distinction is important because it appears that the three components are related to different aspects of prosocial behavior, and have different long-term effects. For instance, consider the effects of empathic accuracy. This appears to play a key role in social adjustment—the extent to which we get along well with others.



### **Empathic Accuracy: An Important Aspect in Social Adjustment**

Recent research indicates that empathic accuracy—the ability to accurately understand others’ feelings and thoughts (sometimes termed “everyday mind-reading”) plays an important role in social adjustment. Adolescents who are high in this skill have more friends, greater acceptance from their peers, and are victimized less by others than adolescents who are low in this skill. In contrast, those low in empathic accuracy tend to develop problems of social adjustment. (Source: Based on suggestions by Gleason et al., 2009).

In an informative study on this topic, Gleason and colleagues (2009) hypothesized that the higher adolescents are in empathic accuracy—that is, the better their skill in what has been termed “everyday mind-reading” (accurately understanding what others are thinking and feeling), the better their social adjustment: the more friends they will have, the more they will be liked by their peers, the better the quality of their friendships, and the less they will be victims of bullying or social exclusion. Basically, the researchers reasoned that empathic accuracy would help the students respond appropriately to others; this in turn would lead to better relationships and better adjustment. Empathic accuracy was assessed by showing the participants in the study a videotape in which a student interacted with a teacher. The tape was stopped at specific points, and participants wrote down what they thought the other people were thinking or feeling; accuracy was assessed by comparing their responses to what the people in the tape reported actually thinking and feeling. Results indicated that the higher students were in empathic accuracy, the better their social adjustment in terms of all the dimensions listed above (number of friends, peer acceptance, etc.). In short, a high level of empathic accuracy clear understanding of others’ feelings and thoughts—contributed strongly to their ability to get along well with others. Of course, we should quickly add that it is possible that people who get along well with others become more empathetic, perhaps as a result of pleasant interactions with lots of other people. We mention this possibility not because we think it is more likely to be accurate, but mainly to remind you that establishing causality is always a difficult and tricky task, even in excellent research like this.

**IS EMPATHY DECLINING? AND IF SO, WHY?** Before concluding this discussion, we should mention recent evidence indicating that empathy is declining among U.S. college students (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011). Students at the present time report lower levels of empathy than students in previous decades. The declines are small, but significant for two aspects of empathy: empathic concern (concern for the feelings and well-being of others) and empathic perspective taking (being able to take the perspective of others). Why is empathy declining? As Konrath et al. (2011) note, many factors probably play a role. For instance, increasing exposure to violence in the media and even in schools may tend to reduce important aspects of empathy. Similarly, increased emphasis in schools and other settings on building individual self-esteem may reduce the tendency to focus on others and their needs. Reality television shows, which are viewed by tens of millions of people, tend to emphasize such messages as “winners take all,” or “put yourself first and to heck with others . . .” Perhaps most intriguing possibility is that the social media are contributing to this trend toward reduced empathy. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media reduce face-to-face contacts between people, who form “friends” and relationships online rather than in person. This, in turn, can reduce empathic feelings toward others because it is easier to ignore the needs and feelings of others when we “meet” them only as online representations rather than as flesh-and-blood people.

Of course, at present, all of these explanations are simply interesting, but unproven possibilities. Regardless of the precise causes, though, it seems clear that empathy is indeed declining, and that this trend can have important implications for the incidence and scope of all forms of prosocial behavior.

### **Negative-State Relief: Helping Sometimes Reduces Unpleasant Feelings**

Another possible motive for helping others is, in a sense, the mirror image of empathy: Instead of helping because we care about the welfare of another person (empathic concern), understand their feelings (empathic accuracy), and share them (emotional empathy), we help because such actions allow us to reduce our own negative emotions. In other words, we do a good thing in order to stop feeling bad. The knowledge that others are suffering, or more generally, witnessing those in need can be distressing. To decrease this distress in ourselves, we help others.

This explanation of prosocial behavior is known as the negative-state relief model (Cialdini, Baumann, & Kenrick, 1981). Research indicates that it doesn't matter whether the bystander's negative emotions were aroused by something unrelated to the emergency or by the emergency itself. That is, you could be upset about receiving a bad grade or about seeing that a stranger has been injured. In either instance, you engage in a prosocial act primarily as a way to improve your own negative mood (Dietrich & Berkowitz, 1997; Fultz, Shaller, & Cialdini, 1988). In this kind of situation, unhappiness leads to prosocial behavior, and empathy is not a necessary component (Cialdini et al., 1987).

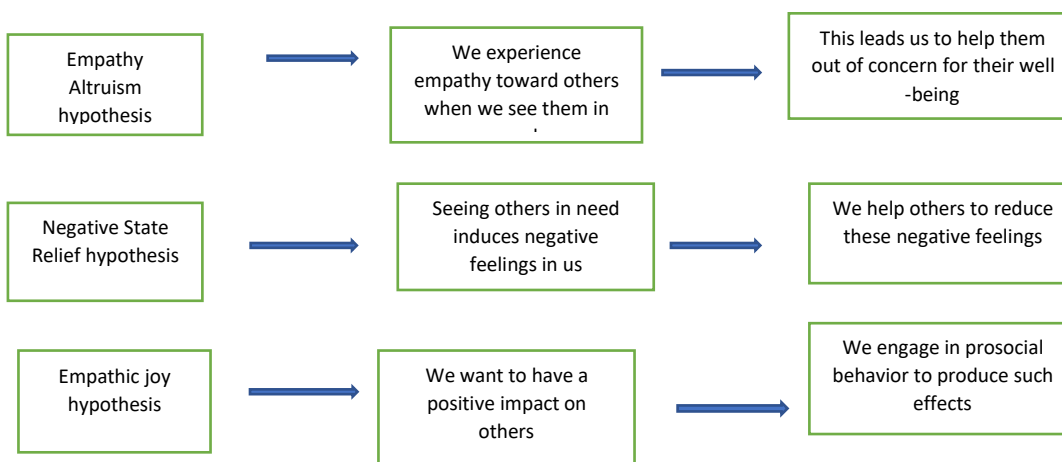
### **Empathic Joy: Helping as an Accomplishment**



It is generally true that it feels good to have a positive effect on other people. This fact is reflected in the empathic joy hypothesis (Smith, Keating, & Stotland, 1989), which suggests that helpers enjoy the positive reactions shown by others whom they help. For instance, do you recall how good it felt seeing someone you care about smile and show pleasure when you gave them a gift? That is an example of empathic joy. An important implication of this idea is that it is crucial for the person who helps to know that his or her actions had a positive impact on the victim. If helping were based entirely on emotional empathy or empathic concern, feedback about its effects would be irrelevant since we know that we “did good” and that should be enough. But it would not guarantee the occurrence of empathic joy. To test that prediction, Smith et al. (1989) asked participants to watch a videotape in which a female student said she might drop out of college because she felt isolated and distressed. She was described as either similar to the participant (high empathy) or dissimilar (low empathy). After participants watched the tape, they were given the opportunity to offer helpful advice. Some were told they would receive feedback about the effectiveness of their advice while others were told that they would not be able to learn what the student eventually decided to do. It was found that empathy alone was not enough to produce a prosocial response. Rather, participants were helpful only if there was high empathy and they also received feedback about their action’s impact on the victim.

### Why Nice People Sometimes Finish First: Competitive Altruism

The three theoretical models described so far (summarized in Figure 9.3) suggest that the affective state (feelings) of the person engaging in a prosocial act is a crucial element. All three formulations rest on the assumption that people engage in helpful behavior either because they want to reduce others’ negative feelings or because doing so helps *them* feel better—it counters negative moods or feelings. This general idea is carried one step further by another perspective on prosocial behavior—the *competitive altruism* approach. This view suggests that one important reason why people help others is that doing so boosts their own status and reputation and, in this way, ultimately brings them large benefits, ones that more than offset the costs of engaging in prosocial actions.



The Origins of Prosocial Behavior: Three Different Views *What are the origins of prosocial behavior—actions that help others? The views summarized here are among the varied explanations offered by social psychologists.*

Why might helping others confer status? Because often, helping others is costly, and this suggests to other people that the individuals engaging in such behavior have desirable personal qualities; they are definitely the kind of people a group—or society—wants to have around. For the people who engage in prosocial actions, the gains too may be substantial. High status confers many advantages, and people who engage in prosocial behavior may be well compensated for their kind and considerate actions. For instance, as you probably know, many people who donate large amounts of money to universities are treated like stars when they visit their alma mater, and they may have entire buildings named after them—as is true at the university where one of us works. Research findings confirm that the motive to experience a boost in social status does lie behind many acts of prosocial behavior—especially ones that bring public recognition (e.g., Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah, & Ames, 2006). So, overall, this appears to be an important motive for helping others.

### **Kin Selection Theory: Helping Ourselves by Helping People Who Share Our Genes**

A very different approach to understanding prosocial behavior is offered by the kin selection theory (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Pinker, 1998). From an evolutionary perspective, a key goal for all organisms—including us—is getting our genes into the next generation. Support for this general prediction has been obtained in many studies, suggesting that, in general, we are more likely to help others to whom we are closely related than people to whom we are not related (e.g., Neyer & Lang, 2003). For example, Burnstein, Crandall, and Kitayama (1994) conducted a series of studies in which participants were asked whom they would choose to help in an emergency. As predicted on the basis of genetic similarity, participants were more likely to say they would help a close relative than either a distant relative or a nonrelative. Furthermore, and also consistent with kin selection theory, they were more likely to help young relatives, who have many years of reproductive life ahead of them, than older ones. For example, given a choice between a female relative young enough to reproduce and a female relative past menopause, help would go to the younger individual.

Overall, then, there is considerable support for kin selection theory. There is one basic problem, though, that you may already have noticed: we don't just help biological relatives; instead, often we *do* help people who are unrelated to us. Why do we do so? According to kin selection theory, this would not be useful or adaptive behavior since it would not help us transmit our genes to future generations. One answer is provided by *reciprocal altruism theory*—a view suggesting that we may be willing to help people unrelated to us because helping is usually reciprocated: If we help them, they help us, so we do ultimately benefit, and our chances of survival could then be indirectly increased (e.g., Korsgaard, Meglino, Lester, & Jeong, 2010).

### **Defensive Helping: Helping Outgroups to Reduce Their Threat to One's Ingroup**

As we saw in our discussion of prejudice (Chapter 6), people often divide the social world into two categories: their own *ingroup* and *outgroups*. Furthermore, they often perceive their own group as distinctive from other groups, and as superior in several ways. Sometimes, however, outgroups achieve successes that threaten the supposed superiority of one's own group. Can that provide a motive for helping? Recent research suggests that it can because one way of removing the threat posed by outgroups is to help them—especially in ways that make them seem dependent on such help, and therefore as incompetent or inadequate (e.g., Sturmer & Snyder, 2010).

In other words, sometimes people help others—especially people who do not belong to their own ingroup—as a means of defusing status threats from these people. Such actions are known as defensive helping because they are performed not primarily to help the recipients, but rather to “put them down” in subtle ways and so reduce their threat to the ingroup's status. In such cases, helping does not stem from empathy, positive reactions to the joy or happiness it induces among recipients, but, rather, from a more selfish motive: protecting the distinctiveness and status of one's own group.

Evidence for precisely such effects has been reported by Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky, and Ben-David (2009). They told students at one school that students at another school scored either substantially higher than students at their own school on a test of cognitive abilities (this posed a high threat to the superiority of their own group), while students at a third school scored about the same as students at their school (this was low threat to their own group's superiority). When given a chance to help students at these two schools, participants offered more help to the high-threat school, presumably as a way of reducing the status threat from this rival institution.

Findings such as these emphasize the fact that helping others can stem from many different motives. Like many forms of social behavior, then, prosocial actions are complex not only in the forms they take and the factors that affect them, but with respect to the underlying motives from which they spring. Whatever the precise causes of such behavior, though, it is clear that helping is an important and fairly common part of the social side of life—one with many beneficial effects both for helpers and those who receive assistance.

### **Responding to an Emergency: Will Bystanders Help?**

When an emergency arises, people often rush forward to provide help—as was true in the subway incident described at the start of this chapter. But we also often learn of situations in which witnesses to an emergency stand around and do nothing; they take no action while victims suffer or perhaps even die. What can explain such dramatic differences in people's behavior? Let's see what social psychologists have discovered about this important question.

### **Helping in Emergencies: Apathy—or Action?**

Consider the following situation. You are walking across an icy street, lose your footing as you step up on the curb, and fall, injuring your knee. Because of your pain and the slickness of the ice, you find that you can't get back on your feet. Suppose (1) the block is relatively deserted, and only one person is close enough to witness your accident or (2) the block is crowded, and a dozen people can see what happened.

Common sense suggests that the more bystanders that are present, the more likely you are to be helped. In the first situation, you are forced to depend on the assistance of just one individual and that person's decision to help or not help you. In the second situation, with 12 witnesses, there would seem to be a much greater chance that at least one of them (and quite possibly more) will be motivated to behave in a prosocial way. So, is there really safety in numbers? The more witnesses present at an emergency, the more likely the victims are to receive help? Reasonable as this may sound, research by social psychologists suggests that it may be wrong—dead wrong! The reasons why it may be incorrect were first suggested by John Darley and Bibb Latané, two social psychologists who thought long and hard about this issue after learning of a famous murder in New York City. In this tragic crime, a young woman (Kitty Genovese) was assaulted by a man in a location where many people could see and hear what was going on; all they had to do was look out of their apartment windows. Yet, despite the fact that the attacker continued to assault the victim for many minutes, and even left and then returned to continue the assault later, *not a single person reported the crime to the police*. When news of this tragic crime hit the media, there was much speculation about the widespread selfishness and indifference of people in general or, at least, of people living in big cities.

Darley and Latané, however, raised a more basic question: Common sense suggests that the greater the number of witnesses to an emergency (or in this case, a crime), the more likely it is that someone will help. So why wasn't this the case in the tragic murder of Kitty Genovese? In their efforts to answer this question, Darley and Latané developed several possible explanations and then tested them in research that is certainly a true "classic" of social psychology. Their ideas—and the research it generated—have had a lasting impact on the field. Let's take a closer look at this work.

### **Is There Safety in Numbers? Sometimes, But Not Always**

In their attempts to understand why no one came to Kitty Genovese's aid—or even phoned the police—Darley and Latané considered many possible explanations. The one that seemed to them to be most promising, however, was very straightforward: Perhaps no one helped because *all the witnesses assumed that someone else would do it!* In other words, all the people who saw or heard what was happening believed that it was OK for them to do nothing because others would take care of the situation. Darley and Latané referred to this as diffusion of responsibility, and suggested that according to this principle, the greater the number of strangers who witness an emergency, the less likely are the victims to receive help. After all, the greater the number of potential helpers, the less responsible any one individual will feel, and the more each will assume that "someone else will do it." We should add, however, that

if the person needing help appears to be a member of one's own ingroup, they are more likely to get help (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005).

To test this reasoning, they performed an ingenious but disturbing experiment in which male college students were exposed to an apparent— but fictitious—emergency. During an experiment, a fellow student apparently had a seizure, began to choke, and was clearly in need of help. The participants interacted by means of an intercom, and it was arranged that some believed they were the only person aware of the emergency, one of two bystanders, or one of five bystanders. Helpfulness was measured in terms of (1) the percentage of participants in each experimental group who attempted to help and (2) the time that passed before the help began.

Darley and Latané's predictions about diffusion of responsibility were correct. The more bystanders participants believed were present, the lower the percentage who made a prosocial response (offered help to the apparent victim; see Figure 9.5) and the longer they waited before responding. Applying this to the example of a fall on the ice described earlier, you would be more likely to be helped if you fell with only one witness present than if 12 witnesses were present.

Over the years, additional research on prosocial behavior has identified a great many other factors that determine how people respond to an emergency. For instance, Kuntsman and Plant (2009) suggests that race of the victim and the helper may play a role, with black victims less likely to receive help from white bystanders, especially if they are high in *aversive racism* (negative emotional reactions to black people). We discuss evidence concerning the reasons why people don't help in a later section, but it is important to note at this point that group membership of the potential helpers and the person in need can play a critical role in whether helping is received. Overall, however, the bystander effect is clearly an important basic discovery concerning the social side of life with respect to helping between strangers, and one that common sense would not have predicted.

### **Understanding the Bystander Effect: Five Crucial Steps in Deciding to Help—or Not**

As the study of prosocial behavior expanded beyond the initial concern with the number of bystanders, Latané and Darley (1970) proposed that the likelihood of a person engaging in prosocial actions is determined by a series of decisions that must be made quickly in the context of emergency situations.

Indeed, such decisions must be made quickly, or, in many cases, it will be too late! (Recall how quickly Joe Autrey decided to try to pull a stranger who had fallen onto subway tracks to safety, and how quickly he decided to make him lie flat when it was clear that they could not get out before a train arrived.) Any one of us can sit in a comfortable chair and figure out instantly what bystanders should do. The witnesses to the assault on Kitty Genovese should either have called the police immediately or perhaps even intervened directly by shouting at the attacker

or attempting to stop the attack. Indeed, on September 11, 2001, the passengers on one of the hijacked planes apparently responded jointly, thus preventing the terrorists from accomplishing their goal of crashing into the U.S. Capitol (see Figure 9.6). Why did they do so? Perhaps, as Levine and colleagues (2005) note, because they could see each other and interact directly. In contrast, when bystanders fail to help in emergency situations, as in the ones used by

Darley and Latané, they can't interact directly, and this seem to be an important basis for their failure to act. In a similar manner, the students in the laboratory experiment conducted by Darley and Latané (1968) should have rushed out of the cubicle to help their fellow student who was, apparently, having a medical emergency. Why didn't they do so? One answer is that when we are suddenly and unexpectedly faced with an emergency, the situation is often complex and hard to interpret. Before acting, we must first figure out what, if anything, is going on, and what we should do about it. This requires a series of decisions, and at each step—and for each decision—many factors determine the likelihood that we will fail to help. Here's a summary of the decisions involved, and the factors that play a role in each one.

### ***1. Noticing, or failing to notice, that something unusual is happening.***

An emergency is obviously something that occurs unexpectedly, and there is no sure way to anticipate that it will take place or to plan how best to respond. We are ordinarily doing something else and thinking about other things when we hear a scream outside our window, observe that a fellow student is coughing and unable to speak, or observe that some of the other passengers on our airplane are holding weapons in their hands. If we are asleep, deep in thought, concentrating on something else, we may simply fail to notice that something unusual is happening. The passengers on Flight 93 saw the weapons of the hijackers and learned from the captain that the plane was being taken over by these people. In addition, they used their cell phones to learn of the other attacks (e.g., on the World Trade Center), so they knew that something very terrible was occurring, and this made it easier for them to take action.

### ***2. Correctly interpreting an event as an emergency.***

Even after we pay attention to an event, we often have only limited and incomplete information as to what exactly is happening. Most of the time, whatever catches our attention does not turn out to be an emergency and so does not require immediate action. Whenever potential helpers

are not completely sure about what is going on, they tend to hold back and wait for further information. After all, responding as if an emergency is occurring when one is not can lead to considerable embarrassment. It's quite possible that in the early morning when Kitty Genovese was murdered, her neighbours could not clearly see what was happening, even though they heard the screams and knew that a man and a woman were having a dispute. It could have just been a loud argument between a woman and her boyfriend. Or perhaps the couple were just joking with each other. Either of these two possibilities is actually more likely to be true than the fact that a stranger was stabbing a woman to death. With ambiguous

information as to whether one is witnessing a serious problem or something trivial, most people are inclined to accept the latter, and take no action (Wilson & Petruska, 1984).

This suggests that the presence of multiple witnesses may inhibit helping not only because of the diffusion of responsibility, but also because it is embarrassing to misinterpret a situation and to act inappropriately. Making such a serious mistake in front of several strangers might lead them to think you are overreacting in a stupid way. And when people are uncertain about what's happening, they tend to hold back and do nothing. This tendency for an individual surrounded by a group of strangers to hesitate and do nothing is based on what is known as pluralistic ignorance. Because none of the bystanders knows for sure what is happening, each depends on the others to provide cues. Each individual is less likely to respond if the others fail to respond. Latané and Darley (1968) provided a dramatic demonstration of just how far people will go to avoid making a possibly ridiculous response to what may or may not be an emergency. They placed students in a room alone or with two other students and asked them to fill out questionnaires. After several minutes had passed, the experimenters secretly and quietly pumped smoke into the research room through a vent. When a participant was working there alone, most (75 percent) stopped what they were doing when the smoke appeared and left the room to report the problem. When three people were in the room, however, only 38 percent reacted to the smoke. Even after it became so thick that it was difficult to see, 62 percent continued to work on the questionnaire and failed to make any response to the smoke-filled room. The presence of other people clearly inhibits responsiveness. It is as if risking death is preferable to making a fool of oneself.

This inhibiting effect is much less if the group consists of friends rather than strangers, because friends are likely to communicate with one another about what is going on (Rutkowski, Gruder, & Romer, 1983). The same is true of people in small towns who are likely to know one another as opposed to big cities where most people are strangers (Levine, Martinez, Brase, & Sorenson, 1994). Also, and not surprisingly, any anxiety about the reactions of others and thus the fear of doing the wrong thing is reduced by alcohol. As a result, people who have been drinking show an increased tendency to be helpful (Steele, Critchlow, & Liu, 1988)—another finding that is, perhaps, counterintuitive. But of course, they sometimes show other changes in behavior that are not so beneficial.

### ***3. Deciding that it is your responsibility to provide help.***

In many instances, the responsibility for helping is clear. Fire-fighters are the ones to do something about a blazing building, police officers take charge when cars collide, and medical personnel deal with injuries and illnesses. If responsibility is not clear, people assume that anyone in a leadership role must take responsibility—for instance, adults with children, professors with students. As we have pointed out earlier, when there is only one bystander, he or she usually takes charge because there is no alternative

### ***4. Deciding that you have the knowledge and/or skills to act.***

Even if a bystander progresses as far as Step 3 and assumes responsibility, a prosocial response cannot occur unless the person knows *how* to be helpful. Some emergencies are

sufficiently simple that almost everyone has the necessary skills to help. If someone slips on the ice, most bystanders are able to help that person get up. On the other hand, if you see someone parked on the side of the road, peering under the hood of the car, you can't be of direct help unless you

know something about cars and how they function. The best you can do is offer to call for assistance. When emergencies require special skills, usually only a portion of the bystanders are able to help. For example, only good swimmers can assist a person who is drowning. With a medical emergency, a registered nurse is more likely to be helpful than a history professor (Cramer, McMaster, Bartell, & Pragma, 1988).

### 5. Making the final decision to provide help.

Even if a bystander passes the first four steps in the decision process, help does not occur unless he or she makes the ultimate decision to engage in a helpful act. Helping at this final point can be inhibited by fears (often realistic ones) about potential negative consequences. In effect, potential helpers engage in "cognitive algebra" as they weigh the positive versus the negative aspects of helping (Fritzsche, Finkelstein, & Penner, 2000). As we note in a later discussion, the rewards for being helpful are primarily provided by the emotions and beliefs of the helper, but there are a great many varieties of potential costs. For example, if you intervened in the Kitty Genovese attack, you might be stabbed yourself. You might slip while helping a person who has fallen on the ice. A person might be asking for assistance simply as a trick leading to robbery or worse (Byrne, 2001). In sum, deciding to help in an emergency situation is not a simple, one-time decision. Rather, it involves a number of steps or decisions and only if all of these decisions are positive does actual helping occur. (Figure 9.8 summarizes these steps.)

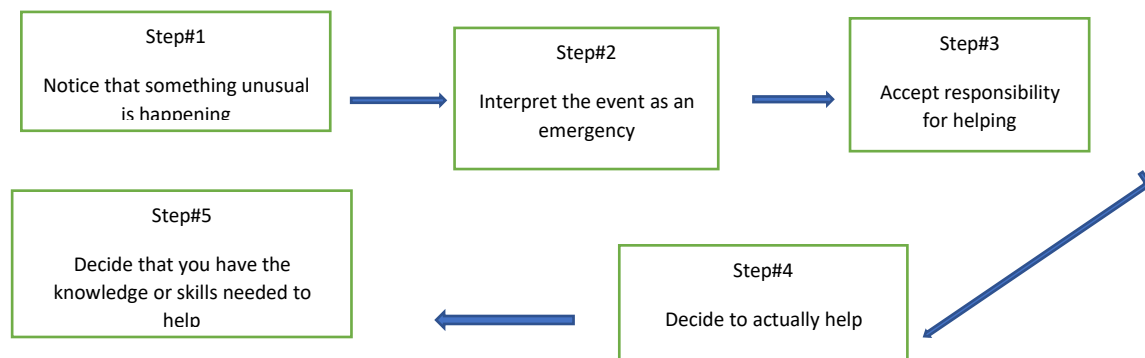


Figure 9.8 Five Steps on the Path to Helping in Emergencies

*As shown here, deciding to actually offer help to the victims of emergencies depends on five steps. Only if these steps or decisions are positive does actual helping occur. (Based on suggestions by Latané and Darley, 1970).*

### Factors That Increase or Decrease the Tendency to Help

As we noted earlier, interest in prosocial behavior by social psychologists was first inspired by the question, why do bystanders at an emergency sometimes help and sometimes fail to do anything? We have already considered one important factor to emerge from research on this question: the number of bystanders present. Here, we examine additional aspects of the situation that influence the tendency to help others. Then, we turn to a number of internal factors (e.g., emotions, personal characteristics) that also influence such behavior.



### **Situational (External) Factors Influence Helping: Similarity and Responsibility**

Are all victims equally likely to receive help? Or are some more likely to get assistance than others? And is the tendency to help others affected by social influence—for instance, by the actions of others who might also help? Research by social psychologists offers intriguing insights into these and related questions.

**Helping People We Like** Most of the research we now discuss has focused on providing help to *strangers* because it is obvious that most people are very likely to help family members and friends when they need assistance. But the situation is less clear-cut when strangers are involved. Suppose, for instance, that you observe what seems to be an emergency, and the victim is a stranger. If this person is similar to you with respect to age, nationality, or some other factor, are you more likely to help than you would be if the victim were very different from yourself—for instance, much older, a member of a group different from your own? The answer provided by careful research is yes—we are indeed more likely to help people who are similar to ourselves than people who are dissimilar (Hayden, Jackson, & Guydish, 1984; Shaw, Borrough, & Pink, 1994). Why? Research by Hodges and colleagues (2010) suggests that part of the answer may involve the fact that similarity to others increases our empathic concern for them, and our understanding of what they are experiencing. This research compared three groups: new mothers, women who were pregnant, and women who had never been pregnant.

All three groups watched videotapes showing new mothers, in which they described their experiences in this role. The participants then completed measures of empathic concern (e.g., how moved they felt in response to seeing the video), a measure of empathic accuracy, and their self-reported ability to understand the person shown in the video. It was reasoned that new mothers would be most similar to the woman shown in the tape, pregnant women would be less similar, and those who had never been pregnant would be least similar to the new mothers. If similarity increases empathy generally, then the three groups (new mothers, pregnant women, women who had never been pregnant) should differ on all three measures. However, if similarity influences some aspects of empathy more than others, they might differ only on some components. That's precisely what was found. Similarity to the person in the tape influenced empathic concern, but did *not* significantly influence empathic accuracy. So although similarity is an important factor influencing empathy, it seems to primarily influence the emotional component of empathy, not the cognitive component (i.e., empathic accuracy).

### **Helping Those Who Are Not Responsible for Their Problem**

If you were walking down the sidewalk early one morning and passed a man lying unconscious by the curb, would you help him? You know that helpfulness would be influenced by all of the factors we have discussed—from the presence of other bystanders to interpersonal attraction. But there is an additional consideration, too. Why is the man lying there? If his clothing is stained and torn and an empty wine bottle in a paper sack is by his side, what would you assume about his problem? You might well decide that he is a hopeless

drunk who passed out on the sidewalk. In contrast, what if he is wearing an expensive suit and has a nasty cut on his forehead? These cues might lead you to decide that this man had been brutally mugged on his way to work.

Based on your attributions about the reasons for a man lying unconscious on the sidewalk, you would be less likely to help the victim with the wine bottle than the one with the cut on his head. In general, we are less likely to act if we believe that the victim is to blame (Higgins & Shaw, 1999; Weiner, 1980). The man in the business suit did not choose to be attacked, so we are more inclined to help him.

### **Exposure to Live Prosocial Models**

In an emergency, we know that the presence of bystanders who fail to respond inhibits helpfulness. It is equally true, however, that the presence of a helpful bystander provides a strong *social model*, and the result is an increase in helping behavior among the remaining bystanders. An example of such modeling is provided by a field experiment in which a young woman (a research assistant) with a flat tire parked her car just off the road. Motorists were much more inclined to stop and help this woman if they had previously driven past a staged scene in which another woman with car trouble was observed receiving assistance (Bryan & Test, 1967). Even the symbolic presence of one or more helping models can increase prosocial behavior. Have you ever visited a museum and then, on the way out, passed by a large glass case asking for donations? Often, the museums will place money in the case (including a few bills of large denominations—\$10s or \$20s)—in an effort to increase donations. And the tactic works: many people passing the case think “Others have donated, so perhaps I should too” and then they actually reach into their pockets or purses for a donation.

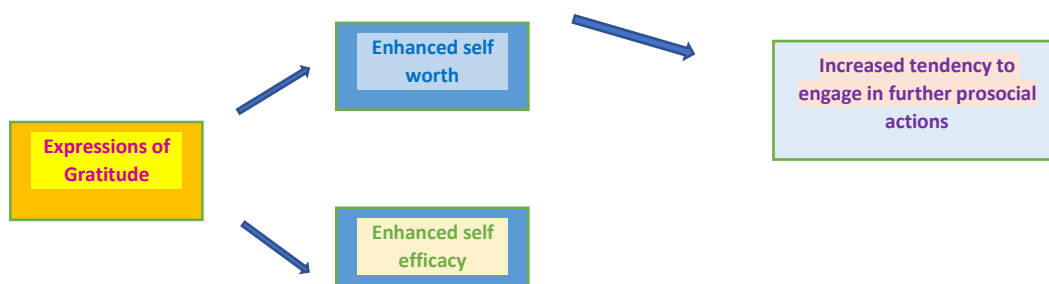
### **Gratitude: How It Increases Further Helping**

Everyone wants to be appreciated, and where helping others is concerned, that often implies that the recipient of the help says “Thank you!” in no uncertain terms. While some people who engage in prosocial behavior prefer to remain anonymous, most want to be thanked for their help publicly and graciously. In fact, as we noted before, some request that schools, hospitals, or buildings be named after them in recognition of their help (in the form of financial gifts). It is far from surprising, therefore, that gratitude—thanks expressed by the recipients of help—has been found to increase subsequent helping. “Thank me,” helpers and donors seem to say, “and I’ll do it again.” Research findings provide strong support for such effects, indicating that when helpers are thanked by the beneficiaries of their assistance, they are more willing to help them again—or even to help other people (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001).

But why, specifically, do expressions of gratitude facilitate further prosocial actions? According to Grant and Gino (2010), two clear possibilities exist. First, being thanked may add to the sense of self-efficacy—helpers feel that they are capable and competent, and have acted effectively (and in good ways). Second, it may add to helpers’ feelings of self-worth, their belief that they are valued by others. Which, if either, is more important? Research by Grant and Gino points strongly to the latter: Expressions of gratitude increase helping by

increasing helpers' feelings of self-worth. In their research, Grant and Gino asked participants to help another student by suggesting ways in which this person could improve a cover letter being sent with a job application. In one condition, the person helped offered thanks, saying "I just wanted to let you know that I received your feedback on my cover letter. Thanks, you so much! I am really grateful." In another condition, he did not express such gratitude, saying merely "I just wanted to let you know that I received your feedback on my cover letter." In both conditions, this person then asked for help with a second cover letter. As expected, a higher proportion of participants who were thanked for their help agreed to help again (55 percent vs. 25 percent). In addition, gratitude increased both self-efficacy and feelings of self-worth, but—and this is crucial—only boosts in self-worth were related to subsequent helping. These findings were repeated in several other studies, including one conducted with volunteer fundraisers for a university. These people were either thanked or not thanked for their help by the manager of the fundraising project, and once again, those thanked showed more helping—they made 50 percent more calls than the people not thanked. Furthermore, this effect of gratitude was, as in the earlier study, mediated by increases in self-worth, but not by increases in self-efficacy.

Overall, then, it appears that gratitude increases helping in a very straightforward way—by making the people who are thanked for their help feel that they are indeed valued by others, especially by the people who benefit from their prosocial actions. Clearly, then, saying thank you is not only the polite and correct thing to do if you receive help from another person—it is also an effective strategy for increasing the likelihood that they will help you again if the need arises.



#### Expressions of Gratitude: Why They Increase Prosocial Behavior

*Expressions of gratitude from the recipients of helping have been found to increase helpers' tendencies to assist the same people (or even others) again. Gratitude increases helpers' self-efficacy and feelings of self-worth, but only the latter contribute to increased helping on future occasions. This is one more reason to always say "Thank You!" when you are helped by another person.*

## Emotion and Prosocial Behaviour: Mood, Feelings of Elevation, and Helping

**Positive Emotions and Prosocial Behaviour** Many ingenious studies have been performed to investigate the potential link between good moods and helping. In general, this research indicates that people are more willing to help a stranger when their mood has been elevated by some recent experience—for instance, listening to a comedian (Wilson, 1981), finding money in the coin return slot of a public telephone (Isen & Levin, 1972), spending time outdoors on a pleasant day (Cunningham, 1979), or receiving a small unexpected gift (Isen, 1970).

**Negative Emotions and Prosocial Behaviour** A negative mood or emotion is most likely to increase prosocial behaviour if the negative feelings are not too intense, if the emergency is clear-cut rather than ambiguous, and if the act of helping is interesting and satisfying rather than dull and unrewarding (Cunningham, Shaffer, Barbee, Wolff, & Kelley, 1990). Feelings of Elation and Helping Others When we see another person engaging in a kind or helpful act, this can have a strong effect on our emotions. In particular, it can trigger feelings of *elation*—it can make us feel inspired, uplifted, and optimistic about human nature.

## **Gender and Prosocial Behaviour**

Each other emotional support. Although men, too, form friendships, they are often focused on activities—people with whom they play tennis or golf, or with whom they discuss investments. The implications of these differences is that women are more likely to engage in prosocial actions when these involve people with whom they have personal relationships rather than with strangers, while men may be just as likely to help a stranger as a friend. For instance, research findings indicate that men are more likely than women to receive awards for heroism—helping others when doing so involves risking their own lives.

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