

Altruism



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Altruism occurs when one individual, while helping others, selflessly incurs a danger to themselves decreasing their chances of survival Sherman (1977).

Two theories develop from altruism, kin selection theory and the theory of reciprocal altruism. Kin selection theory of altruism argues that altruism was developed to increase the survival of relatives Hamilton (1964) and that acts of altruism should be directed towards family rather than non-relatives.

(Trivers, 1971; Cosmides & Tooby 1992) argued that the theory of reciprocal altruism is in fact long-term cooperation and the assistance that is given at the time will be reciprocated another time in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to remember who has helped them before and not offer any assistance to those who have failed to reciprocate. For this theory to be successful it also requires a somewhat stable group as short term, migrating members may not be able to upkeep the promise to perform the required act at a later date. The theories of kin selection and reciprocity, although seemingly different are not incompatible.

Sadly, altruism does not always happen. Environmental factors play a very large part in whether an individual will engage in acts of altruism.

Socialization, modelling and reinforcement play a key role in promoting pro-social behaviour and attitudes Eisenberg & Mussen (1989); Janoski et al.

(1998). When children are exposed to models of kindness and helping, be it from television or from others around them, they are more likely to put the welfare of humans and other animals above their own Sprafkin et al (1975).

Television programmes that show these acts influence a strong positive effect on the viewer's pro-social behaviour Hearold (1986).

The norm of reciprocity and the norm of social responsibility are especially relevant to helping behaviour (De Cremer & van Lange, 2001; Miller et al., 1990). The norm of reciprocity that we should return the favour when someone treats you kindly and the norm of social responsibility expects that we should help others and contribute to society's welfare. When we live by these norms we are reinforced with praise and when we do not we feel guilt and receive disapproval. In society we also notice when others receive praise for adhering to these norms. As humans get older, pro social norms, morals and values are internalized and form strong self reinforcements like pride and satisfaction to maintain pro-social behaviour even when positive reinforcement is not available. Studies by Eisenberg & Valiente (2002) confirm that socialization matters as children are more likely to act pro-socially when raised by parents who have high moral standard and are warm and supportive encouraging their children to feel empathy and to “ put themselves in other people's shoes” (Janssens & Dekovic, 1997; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996).

Beliefs about why and when to help have cross cultural differences such as the study done by Miller (1990) who found that Hindu children and adults in India have the belief that one has a moral obligation to help friends or strangers no matter if the situation is mild or serious. When compared to the India's Hindus' way of thinking, American children and adults differ in their view and feel less obligated to help and regard as more of a choice (Eckensberger & Zimba (1997).

Most pro social acts are done with the expectation of a reward of self reinforcement or a form of reciprocity but humans are capable of committing

a selfless act of aiding someone without concern for one's wellbeing, an act of altruism. C. Daniel Batson's empathy altruism hypothesis suggests that altruism does exist and is caused by empathy which is the ability to put oneself in the place of another and to share the emotions being felt by that person (Batson, 1991; Batson et al., 2002). In an experiment conducted by Batson et al (1981) female students' empathy for another female who was an accomplice to the experiment was increased and decreased by leading them to identify and believe that her values were similar and dissimilar to their own. The experiment is consistent with the empathy altruism hypothesis showing that high empathy participants were most likely to voluntarily change places but is it people reacting out of pure virtue of empathy or is it to avoid the guilt that may plague them for not interfering. The negative state relief model suggests that high empathy cause us to feel distress when we learn of others' suffering and by helping them relieve their own stress it reduces their personal stress making their actions non altruistic (Cialdini et al., 1997).

The term " safety in numbers" doesn't translate well in emergencies and help the victim as the more people present encourages each person not to help because of social comparison or diffusion of responsibility and is more likely to occur when the bystanders are strangers and not kin or friends of the victim Latané & Rodin (1969).

Factors that explain why people may be helpful in some situations but not others.

We are more likely to help when we are in a good mood (Salovey et al., 1991). Pre-existing guilt when we're feeling guilty about something we've recently done increases helping (Regan et al (1972)). Even though feeling guilt and being helpful are two different actions guilt helps increase our likelihood of assisting others. Also when there is a model to follow such as someone helping a motorist or giving blood, this act increases social behaviour (Sarason et al., 1991). When we are not under pressure, have extra time and not in a hurry we help more.

Factors that show why some people may receive help more than others:

Similarity - A person is more likely to help and identify with the victim's situation when the victim things similar to them such as dress, attitudes and nationality (Dovidio, 1984).

Gender - Women and men are equally likely to be helped by female bystanders but women are more likely to receive help more than men when aid is from a male bystander (Eagly & Crowley, 1986).

Perceived Responsibility - When someone is in need of help and their situation is viewed as something caused by factors beyond their control, they are more likely to receive help such as people who have been affected by a natural disaster versus homeless people who are perceived to be unwilling to work (Blader & Tyler, 2002; Weiner, 1996).

Lerner (1980)'s just world hypothesis suggests that people believe that the world is a just place and the rule of karma prevails. They perceive that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. These beliefs have

the effect on some to conclude that persons who have misfortunes such as being raped or contracting AIDS deserve their fate (Ford et al., 1998; Wyer et al., 1985) thereby justifying why they shouldn't help the individual as there is no responsibility to help.

A way to increase Pro-social Behaviour is through " mandatory volunteerism" which is used in the academic and corporate world. Participants' increased volunteerism in later life from these acts are not consistent as seen in research done by (Janoski et al., 1998; Stukas, 1999). Their research show that the outcome depends on personal rewards that the volunteers will receive and the awareness of human needs.

A second approach which is consistent to the social learning theory is the exposure of pro social models to people. This is used to promote blood drives and increase donations (Sarason et al., 1991).

When feelings of empathy are established and people are properly socialized will increase the chances of those people helping others Eisenberg (2000) as well as those who feel a close connection to their communities will feel socially responsible to help others Clark, M (1978).

If society is educated and exposed to helping models and information, bystander intervention may be decreased and the tendency to help others in an emergency, increased Beaman, A. L. et al (1978).