

Prosocial behaviour essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

We have all probably helped other people at some point in our lives and most of us help others many times each day. Our giving of help need not be complex; it may be nothing more than holding a door open for someone loaded with books or shopping or a parent carrying a child and may also help the proverbial old lady to cross the road. For situations like this, we may define helping simply as the giving of assistance to another person (Clarke, D. 2003: 2).

This essay will discuss a topic called pro-social behaviour, it will make emphasizes on the following; theoretical approaches, such as, altruism, egoism, kin selection (inclusive fitness), nature nurture debate, social exchange theory, attribution theory, cultural highlights, gender and help, self image, and religious approaches towards pro-social behaviours; also research done by social psychologist and others interested in studying pro-social behaviour.

DEFINING PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

According to Batson (1998: 282), pro-social behaviour is a ' range of actions intended to benefit one or more people other than oneself behaviours such as helping, comforting, sharing and co-operation, many pro-social acts are not altruistic. For example, if you volunteer to work for a charity to impress your friends or to build up your résumé for future job opportunities, you are not acting altruistically in the pure sense of the term. Pro- social ranges over a continuum from the most selfless act of altruism to helpful acts that are motivated entirely by self-interest (Batson 1998, cited in Clarke, D. 2003: 2).

Altruism is often seen as a specific kind of helping with some additional characteristics that concerns the helper's intentions and benefits.

Researchers such as (Macaulay & Berkowitz 1970, citing Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner 2006: 25) have reserved the term altruism for cases in which the benefactor provides aids to another without the anticipation of rewards from external sources for providing assistance.

However, egoism is when we are motivated by self interest; we help because it makes us to feel good about ourselves (Clarke D, 2003: 5). Pro-social action occurs every time in all human societies (Fiske, 1991, Dovidio, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006) cited Kenrick, Neuberg & Cialdine 2007: 296). However, it seems likely that helping serves some valuable functions, not just for societies but for individuals as well. Indeed, significant research in social psychology point to several goals that pro-social action can serve. We can help (1) to improve our own basic welfare, (2) to increase social status and approval, (3) to manage our self-image, and (4) to manage our moods and emotion (Kenrick, et al 2007: 297).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Our understanding of pro-social behaviour benefits from several broad of theoretical perspectives, for example, an evolutionary approach suggests that a predisposition to help is part of our genetic, evolutionary heritage. A socio-cultural perspective emphasizes the importance of social norms that dictate when we should help people in need. A learning approach proposes that people learn to be helpful, following basic principles of reinforcement and modelling. A decision making perspective focuses on the influence judgment about when help is needed; it also emphasizes the weighting of

costs and benefits in the decision to give help. Finally, attribution theory highlights the idea that our willingness to help depends on the ‘merits’ of the case and, in particular, whether the person is deserving of assistance (Smith & Mackie, 2000: 373).

The first insight was provided by the biologist W. D. Hamilton (1964), who recognised that, from an evolutionary point of view, the actions of an individual are designed not so much to ensure that the individual will survive as to ensure that the genes making up that individual will do so (Tooby & Cosmides, 2005, cited Kenrick et al, 2007: 297). Hamilton (1964) however, proposed inclusive fitness, as a likelihood that one’s own genetic makeup will be preserved not just in one’s own offspring, but also in the offspring of any relatives. The distinction is a profound one for understanding and predicting when helping will occur because it implies that people may willingly accept personal risks and losses if, in the process, they increase their inclusive fitness – the chance that their genes will survive (Kenrick et al, 2007: 297).

Rushton (1989) goes even further and proposes a genetic determinism model. He believes that we do not mate with random strangers but that we seek out lovers and spouses who are more genetically similar to ourselves. It then follows that we are more likely to help those whom we perceive as genetically similar to ourselves, because we have inherited our ancestors’ assumption that this would be the most effective guarantee that similar genes would survive. Of course, those with most genetic similarity are our immediate family, followed by close relatives, and it is these whom we make it our priority to help before others. Support for this view is provided in a study by (Burnstein, Crandall & Kitayama performed in 1994). Not

surprisingly they found that when in a situation such as fire, people reported that they were much likely to help relatives than non – relatives. The study by (Burnstein et al, 1994) can be evaluated as having strength in that their result can be generalised because they studied males and females and their studies were carried out in both Japan and America (Rushton 1989, cited Clarke D, 2003: 16-17).

A number of traditional explanations have been proposed which suggest that pro-social and anti-social behaviour is either part of genetic composition or it is learned. This of course, is the nature and nurture debate. Specific explanations of pro-social behaviour have been provided by psychologists. Those advocating social explanations believe we all internalise a set of norms from the society that we share with everyone else. Those arguing for the cognitive stance can be divided into two groups, some psychologists emphasise the role of emotional arousal, whereas others such as Latane and Darley argue that we make a number of decisions about whether or not to help. Also another cognitive approach suggests we weigh up the costs and benefits and helping in the result of logically reasoned decision – making process (Clarke D, 2003: 10-11).

Although some social psychologists disagree with evolutionary approaches to pro-social behaviour, they share the view that altruistic behaviour can be based in self-interest. Social exchange theory argues that much of what we do stems from the desire to maximize our rewards and minimize our costs. The difference from evolutionary approaches is that social exchange theory doesn't trace this desire back to our evolutionary roots; nor does it assume

that the desire is genetically based (Homans, 1961; Lawler & Thye, 1999; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, cited Aronson, Wilson, & Akert 2007: 347).

Smith & Mackie (2000: 373) stated that whether or not a person receives help depends in part on the 'merits' of the case. For example, people in a supermarket would prefer to give needy person money to buy milk than cookie dough, presumably because milk is healthier than cookies. A teacher might spend more time helping a student who missed classes because of a death in the family than helping a student who took a vacation to a ski resort.

Attribution theory also affects our emotional reaction to the person in need, i. e. Darren George (1992) studied actual incidents of help giving among college friends and found out student felt more sympathy and less anger towards a friend who had an academic problem that was outside his or her own control than a friend who was personally responsible for his or her own academic difficulties (Smith & Mackie 2000: 373).

A number of authors have attempted to answer these questions and have examined cross-cultural research, coming to the same broad conclusion that there are 'individualist' cultures and 'collectivist' cultures. Nobel (1976), for example believes that individualist cultures, such as European countries, the USA, Canada and Australia, are based on a world view emphasising individuality, uniqueness, difference and competition. Collectivist cultures, which includes Africans, and some Asian countries, are based on groupness, sameness, commonality and co-operation. As a result, collectivist cultures tend to be far more pro-social than others. This

illustration is confirmed in a study of 134 children aged 3-10 years in 6 different cultures: India, Kenya, Okinawa, Mexico, the Philippines and the United States (Nobel 1976, cited Clarke, D. 2003: 49).

With regards to socio-cultural perspective, critics of evolutionary perspectives argue that social factors are much more important than biology in determining pro-social behaviour among people. Donald Campbell (1975) suggested that genetic evolution may help explain a few basic pro-social behaviours such as parents' caring for their young, but does not apply to more extreme instances of helping a stranger in distress (Smith & Mackie 2000: 374).

Culturally, all societies have norms and social responsibility, but the specifics of who we are expected to help and when vary from culture to culture. Joan Miller (1994) systematically compared the beliefs about social responsibility of the Hindus in India and of people in the United States. Hindu culture emphasizes the interconnectedness of people and the obligations of the individual to social group. In contrast, U. S. culture values individualism and self reliance. As a result, Miller believed that people in the United States tend to view the decision to help others as a matter of personal choice, whereas Hindus view the same decision to help in terms of duty and moral obligation. Secondly, a norm of reciprocity says that we should help those who help us. Several studies have shown that people are more likely to help someone from whom they have already received aid (Smith & Mackie 2000: 375).

' The bystander effect on decision to help, others can affect the decision to provide assistance in three ways, first, others serve as sources of potential

aid; therefore, with more observers present, any one of them will feel less personal responsibility for providing that aid, thereby reducing helping. Second, others can serve as sources of information about whether aid is called for, therefore, when others seem passive in the face of a possible emergency, the situation is frequently assumed to be a nonemergency and no one helps. Third, others can serve as sources of approval or disapproval for an aid' (Kenrick et al, 2007: 305).

With regards to gender and help, a number of studies have shown that this is true. In one variation of their studies involving drivers and hitchhikers, Pomazal and Clore (1973) found that male drivers were much more likely to stop for a woman than for a man. In another study by Przybyla (1985), which seemingly placed women in a potentially dangerous situation, showed male participant sexually explicit videotapes and then noted whether they were more likely to help a male or female needing help; as might be expected, they were much likely to help the woman. On the other hand, when female participant were shown sexually explicit videotapes they spent less time helping anyone, whether male or female needing help Clarke D, (2003: 49). On the other hand, most people view women as the more helpful sex; they are rated as kinder, more compassionate, and more devoted to others' welfare than men (Ruble, 1983; Spence & Helmreich, 1978, cited Kenrick et al 2007: 297). According to Bierhoff, H. 2002: 27-18), the explanation of gender difference in pr-social behaviour may be based on analysis of the content of gender roles. The social roles of men and women differ, i. e. men are more likely to be firemen, policemen, or soldier, while women are likely

to do the house work. Therefore, the distribution of men and women in different social roles is far being equal

Our self image is influenced by how we think of ourselves. In a survey by Elizabeth Midlarsky and Robin Nemeroff (1995) they found out that after 50 years of the fact, the self esteem of people who had be rescuers during the Holocaust was still being elevated by the help they had provided. Because pro-social behaviour can affect how we view ourselves, we can use it to manage self-image (self concept). Our self images are sometimes influenced by the characteristics of the groups which we belong. Certain of these groups have code of conduct that encourages pro-social action. All the great religion of the world, for example, includes concern and scarifies for others as important moral principles. We might expect, therefore, more helping on the part of individuals who define themselves as religious (Kenrick et al 2007: 312).

CONCLUSION

We tend to help people as described above and helping makes us to feel good about ourselves in different ways, i. e. some people give their unwanted clothing, shoes, toys and so on to charities, because they felt somebody might benefit from them. We can link this back to religious attribute to pro-social behaviour, that people who listen to the word of God are more likely to act pro-socially when they see a needy fellow.

Finally, linking pro-social behaviour to my practice placement, in School Completion Programme, it is all about empowering the pupil and young adult also retain them into formal education system and prevent early school

leavers. The staffs' helps in identifying and assessing issues raised or observed in the young pupils' lives. It is all about helping the pupil to reach their full potential in the education system which involves activities . i. e. hip up, basketball, homework club etc. Some of the theories used in this essay apply because we helped them for so many reasons, for instance, we might have being helped by somebody else during our time in school, or we are kin to help because of our religious practice.