Prosocial Behavior: Helping
Helping Research

Sparked by the rape & murder of Kitty Genovese on March 13, 1964 where bystanders failed to help for her cries.

Labeled as the “Genovese effect” or “Bystander Intervention”: helping someone in need more when alone than in a group.
Questions to Tackle with:

1. Why do we help?
2. Who is most likely to help?
3. When do we help?
4. Hidden costs for receivers of help?
Definitions

- **Prosocial behavior**: voluntary behavior that is carried out to benefit another person
  - excludes beneficial actions that are not voluntary
  - or not performed with a helping intention

- **Egoistic helping**: the ultimate goal is to increase own welfare

- **Altruistic helping**: the ultimate goal is to increase another person’s welfare (without expecting anything in return)
Why do we help?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
Evolutionary theory suggests it enhances reproductive success.

But how about competition within species for scarce resources like food or mates?

E.g., a chimpanzee emitting a warning call to alert others about a predator.

Kin selection seems to be the answer. They exhibit preferences for helping blood relatives.
Kin selection does not explain why we help strangers

Reciprocal helping: the people you help will return that favor in the future

the cost of helping another person is offset by the later returned help
Social Grooming
A good example for reciprocal helping
Social Norms

- social norms prescribe how people should behave
- promised rewards for conforming and threat of punishment if norms are not obeyed
- norm of reciprocity: maintaining fairness in relationships
  - we feel the need to pay back or return the favors
  - feel discomfort if we can’t
Subjects given a cola by confederate more likely to help him back.
Social Norms

- **norm of social responsibility**: we should help when others are in need and dependent on us
  - need to render help regardless of the recipient’s worthiness and without expectation of rewards

- **norm of social justice**: we should help only when others *deserve* assistance

- most people endorse social responsibility norm, but do not act in accordance with it
Who helps?
- men help more, more likely to help strangers
- men more likely to help in heroic / chivalrous non-routine situations
  - e.g., dangerous situation, with an audience, and a stranger woman in need
- women are more likely to help in nurturing situations
  - e.g., care-taking for children or elderly, giving social & emotional support, doing favors for a friend
- small gender differences among children: girls a bit more helpful than boys
Personality

- **Empathy** is feeling sympathy and caring for others
  - Focus on other’s needs and emotions
  - Motivation to reduce other’s distress
  - (May lead to altruistic helping)

- **Personal distress** is our own negative emotions to a person’s plight
  - Focus on own feelings of anxiety, upset, disturbed
  - Motivation to reduce our discomfort
  - (May lead to egoistic helping)
Learning to Help

- prosocial behavior is also learned through observation and direct reinforcement
- modeling teaches children to engage in helpful actions
- also shows what happens when they engage in helpful (or selfish) behavior
- both what parents say and do are important
When do we help?
A theory of helping that explains whether or not bystanders in an emergency will help in terms of a 5-step decision making process.

Latane and Darley developed after Kitty Genovese murder

asked: what makes people help a stranger in distress?

or rather: why do people fail to help?
Step 1: Notice something unusual happening?  
NO: Exit loop YES: Continue to Step 2

Step 2: Decide something is wrong and help is needed?  
NO: Exit loop YES: Continue to Step 3

Step 3: Think you have responsibility to help?  
NO: Exit loop YES: Continue to Step 4

Step 4: Know the appropriate form of help to give?  
NO: Exit loop YES: Continue to Step 5

Step 5: Decide to implement your form of help?  
NO: Exit loop YES: INTERVENE IN EMERGENCY
1. Is something unusual?

- *stimulus overload effect* explains why ppl in dense urban areas are less likely to help.

- Sometimes not sure if stg is out of the ordinary or not.

- E.g., a man lying on the ground.

- In Kizilay tup gecit,

- In Rektorluk cimleri,

- Or in 100. Yil on the sidewalk?
2. Is it an emergency?

- Some emergencies are unambiguous:
  - e.g., a clear heart attack, stroke, or a rape in progress

- But some may not be
  - The guy lying on the ground: is he sleeping or did he suffer a heart attack?

- Interpretation of the situation is vital
3. Am I responsible?

- this is about determining the extent to which you have responsibility to help
- an authority figure nearby, feel less responsible
- presence of other bystanders decreases this
- being given responsibility increases helping
- feeling competent increases taking responsibility
4. How should I intervene?

- Do I know what to do in a heart attack situation? Or the best way to interrupt a fight between strangers?

- Do I panic and become paralyzed with uncertainty under stress?

- For instance, children are prone to feel not confident or skilled in a situation like this
5. Taking action

- even if you know what to do, you might end up not taking action

- perhaps examine costs of helping (fear of getting hurt, going to a police station, or getting blood on your car seats)

- emergencies: under stress, urgency, even danger

- sometimes do stg wrong, or perhaps intervene indirectly
“I can’t call for help – I’m filming this for the TV news.”
Bystander Effect

- bystander effect: presence of others makes it less likely that anyone will help
  - diffusion of responsibility
  - pluralistic ignorance
  - evaluation apprehension
Diffusion of Responsibility

- when there are other people around, we realize that others could also help
- this results in a diffusion of responsibility,
  - the belief that presence of other people makes me less personally responsible
- e.g., place student in separate rooms, discussion through intercom.
- not only the amount of helping, but also the speed
- but when you ask, ppl deny others’ presence have an influence on their helping behavior. why?
Pluralistic Ignorance

- we look at the others in the situation showing *information dependence*
- others around help us interpret the situation as an emergency or not
- everyone acting cool, hence we collectively interpret the situation as nonemergency
- we call this *pluralistic ignorance*
Evaluation Apprehension

- others around also provide evaluations and judgments
- fear of embarrassment (to intervene in a situation that turns out to be a prank) shows *outcome dependence*
- when the situation is less ambiguous, almost everybody helps, regardless of bystanders
- when the situation is more ambiguous, even less help
- we call this *evaluation apprehension*
Decision making perspective

- “arousal:cost-reward model”
  - emotional arousal
  - costs and rewards of helping

- witnessing an emergency arouses emotions and generally experienced as uncomfortable tension

- we help (one way to reduce that tension) when when rewards ↑ and costs ↓
Decision making perspective

- **costs of helping:**
  - loss of time,
  - energy,
  - resources,
  - health (even life),
  - risk of social disapproval and embarrassment if ineffective / unnecessary

- **costs of not helping:**
  - serious harm to the victim
  - public scorn of unhelpful bystander
  - self-blame, guilt, loss of self-esteem
Mood and Helping

- **good mood effect**: good moods lead to more prosocial behavior.

- we are more likely to help:
  - after successes
  - on sunny days (than cloudy)
  - after being offered a tasty treat
  - after finding money
  - listening to uplifting music
  - or a comedian

- even after receiving a smile from some stranger
failure (at an experimental task) and feeling guilty led to more help

perhaps a way of escaping our mood?

doesn’t work when in extreme negative moods such as grief or depression

**Negative state relief model:**

- Bad moods lead to helping than neutral moods when helping is easy and highly rewarding
Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis

- **question**: is all helping egoistic in nature (at least want to feel better about the self)?
- feeling personal distress leads to egoistic, feeling empathy leads to altruistic helping
Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis

- arousal:cost-reward explains helping in response to personal distress
  - if we can flee, we do
  - if we can’t, we help to reduce our own distress
  - hence egoistic in nature

- if we feel empathy, it’s still distressing, but it’s not reduced by flight
  - the more empathy we feel, the more motivated to help the victim’s welfare than attend to our own
more likely to help someone if we think they are deserving
  
i.e., cause is uncontrollable and external

  
more likely to give class notes if the person missed it due to illness rather than laziness
Hidden Costs for Receiver?
Reciprocation Stress

- receiving help makes you feel relief and gratitude, but also embarrassed, indebted, even inferior
- sometimes produces resentment and hostility
- in exchange relationships, sensitive to reciprocity
- **equity theory**
  - help-givers need to allow restore equity or they might be resented
is receiving help self-threatening or self-supporting?

aid is perceived positively and self-supporting if it
- conveys caring for us
- provides real benefits

it is perceived negatively and self-threatening if it
- implies a superior-inferior relationship
- conflicts with self-reliance and independence (important cultural values of individualism)