



# Prosocial Behavior: Helping



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## Helping Research

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

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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



# Evolution

- 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
  - exhibit preferences for helping blood relatives

# Evolution

- 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

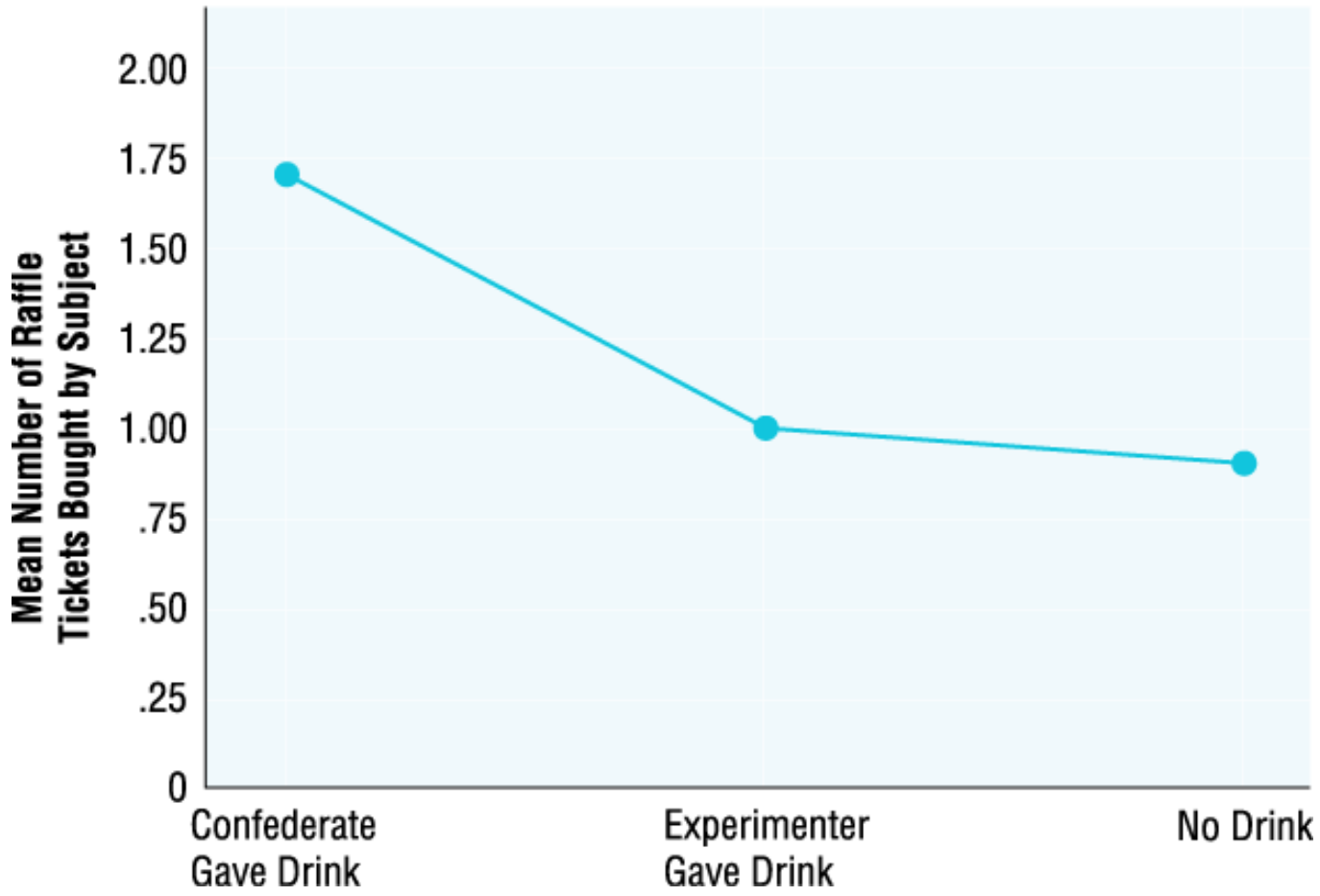
A good example for reciprocal helping





# 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?



# Gender

- 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?



# Bystander Intervention Model

- 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 Rektörlük 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

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"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

# Mood and Helping

- 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

# Attributions

- 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

# Threat to Self-Esteem

- 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)