Pleasure and pressure based prosocial motivation: Divergent relations to subjective well-being ☆

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Abstract

We propose two fundamentally different motives for helping: gaining pleasure and fulfilling one's duty (''pressure''). Using the newly developed Pleasure and Pressure based Prosocial Motivation Scale, we demonstrated the distinctiveness of pleasure and pressure based prosocial motivation in three studies. Although the two motives exhibited different relations to a variety of personality characteristics, they were similarly related to trans-situational helping. Of particular interest, pleasure based prosocial motivation was positively related to self-actualization, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and positive affect and negatively related to negative affect. On the contrary, pressure based prosocial motivation was unrelated to self-actualization, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and positive affect but positively related to negative affect. These results qualify research showing that prosocial life goals generally increase subjective well-being.
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1. Introduction

Helpful behavior depends on situational variables (e.g., Batson, 1991; Latané & Darley, 1970; Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981) and on stable dispositions (e.g., Bierhoff, Klein, & Kramp, 1991; Eisenberg et al., 2002; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Staub, 1974). Research on both aspects has raised important questions about *why* people help, with a large amount of debate about whether helpfulness is always motivated by egoistic concerns (e.g., Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997) or whether helpfulness can also be an expression of pure selflessness (e.g., Batson, 1998). The present research takes a different perspective on this issue. Specifically, we postulate two broad motives underlying a prosocial orientation as a stable personality variable (i.e., the prosocial personality): *Pleasure* based prosocial motivation and *pressure* based prosocial motivation. In this paper, we introduce a measure of these motives and show that the distinction between the two motivations provides a more complete understanding of the prosocial personality.

1.1. Pleasure and pressure based prosocial motivation

The most frequently mentioned motive in the literature on the motives that underlie the prosocial personality is the motive to gain pleasure from helping. The possibility that a prosocial orientation is motivated by the anticipation of positive affect (pleasure) is acknowledged by virtually all scholars in the field (e.g., Archer, Diaz-Loving, Gollwitzer, Davis, & Foushee, 1981; Batson, 1987; Baumann, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 1981; Cialdini et al., 1997; Harris, 1977; Schaller & Cialdini, 1988; Smith, Keating, & Stotland, 1989; Weiss, Buchanan, Alstatt, & Lombardo, 1971; Williamson & Clark, 1989). Following this research, we call the first motivation that underlies the prosocial personality ''pleasure based prosocial motivation''. Importantly, the motivation to help others in order to gain pleasure can be contrasted with the motivation to fulfill a duty or conform to a social norm—what we call ''pressure based prosocial motivation''. For example, Campbell (1975) argues that helping behavior is motivated by pressure from cultural institutions, Rosenhan (1970) proposed a concept called ''normative altruism'', and Bierhoff et al. (1991) found that people who help in the event of an accident possess a profound sense of duty.

It is of interest that, there are several broader theories on motivation indicating that it may be crucial to distinguish between pleasure and pressure based prosocial motivation. First, the distinction between pleasure and pressure based prosocial motivation is consistent with the long-standing distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, respectively (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985). We conceptualize pleasure based prosocial motivation as more of an intrinsically driven motivation, whereas we conceptualize pressure based prosocial motivation as more extrinsically driven. In addition, Higgins (e.g., 1987, 1989) distinguishes between goals that function as ideals and goals that function as oughts. Ideals are the representation of attributes you would ideally like to possess, whereas oughts are the representation of attributes you feel you should or ought to possess. Further, Higgins (1997) proposed that ideals are associated with a promotion focus (a subjective framing of one's own behavior as approaching), whereas oughts are associated with a prevention focus (a subjective framing of one's own behavior as avoiding). Pleasure based prosocial motivation is conceptualized as involving ideal representations, whereas pressure based prosocial motivation is conceptualized as involving ought representations. Consequently,