



## Relationships between two types of reputational concern and altruistic behavior in daily life



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Altruism  
Reputational concern  
Generosity  
Praise seeking  
Rejection avoidance  
Social norms

### ABSTRACT

Although many studies have shown that reputational cues promote altruism, few studies have focused on individual differences. The present study provides novel evidence indicating that the relationship between reputational concern and altruistic behavior differs according to the type of reputational concern involved and the recipients of altruism. Specifically, the relationships between individual differences of two reputational concerns (i.e., praise seeking and rejection avoidance) and the frequency with which participants exhibited altruistic behavior toward various individuals (i.e., family members, friends/acquaintances, and strangers) were examined. As predicted, neither type of reputational concern was significantly associated with altruistic behavior toward family members. This is understandable, as altruistic behavior toward familiar people is unlikely to lead to a good reputation. Conversely, praise seeking predicted altruistic behavior toward friends/acquaintances and strangers, whereas rejection avoidance did not. These findings are consistent with recent literature suggesting the effectiveness of positive reputation systems to promote generosity, relative to negative reputation systems. Furthermore, rejection avoidance was negatively associated with altruistic behavior toward strangers; we discussed the possibility that this was because such behavior was not very normative. Our findings provide useful insight for future studies examining the relationship between reputation and altruistic behavior.

### 1. Introduction

Altruistic behavior, which is behaviorally defined as the tendency to benefit others at the expense of one's own resources (e.g., Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003), usually leads to a good reputation (e.g., Bereczkei, Birkas, & Kerekes, 2007, 2010; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006). An individual with a good reputation tends to obtain future rewards such as interaction partners (e.g., Barclay & Willer, 2007; Sylwester & Roberts, 2010) or romantic mates (e.g., Arnocky, Piche, Albert, Ouellette, & Barclay, 2017; Barclay, 2010; Phillips, Barnard, Ferguson, & Reader, 2008). These reputational benefits could serve as an incentive for altruistic behavior (for a review, see Barclay, 2012). The present study focuses on the relationship between reputational concern and altruistic behavior.

#### 1.1. Reputation and altruistic behavior

First, we explain why reputation and altruism are closely related from an evolutionary psychological perspective. One important characteristic of human beings is that we behave altruistically with each

other, including genetically unrelated others. However, this is somewhat peculiar because the existence of free riders would prevent the evolution of altruism. If some selfish people gain benefits without behaving altruistically, they may have higher survival and reproductive rates than altruistic individuals. Therefore, some mechanisms that detect and ostracize free riding may underlie the evolution of altruism; one crucial mechanism is reputation (Fehr, 2004). By favoring individuals with a good reputation and rejecting individuals with a bad reputation, the prosperity of free riders can be prevented. Thus, reputation may have an important role in the evolution of altruism even toward genetically unrelated individuals (for a review, see Barclay, 2012).

Previous empirical studies have shown that individuals tend to respond to reputational cues sensitively in deciding whether to behave altruistically. For example, people are more likely to behave generously when their behavior is observed by others (e.g., Barclay & Willer, 2007; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck, 2002). One study has showed that contributions toward public goods increased when contribution amounts were observed by others (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006). Similarly, people competed to be more generous when

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their behavior could affect the decisions of future interaction partners (Barclay & Willer, 2007). The effects of visibility on the promotion of altruism have also been observed in more realistic situations including those involving charity (Bereczkei et al., 2007, 2010). Moreover, people become more generous in situations where others are likely to gossip (e.g., Piazza & Bering, 2008; Wu, Balliet, & Van Lange, 2016a).

While numerous studies have shown that situational factors that activated reputational concern promoted altruism, the relationship between individual differences in reputational concern and the frequency of altruistic behavior has not been examined. However, some studies imply that there are individual differences in the sensitivity to reputation (i.e., reputational concern), which could affect altruistic behavior (c.f., Barclay, 2012). For example, one study showed that, although the mean contribution amount toward public goods increased when individual contributions could be identified, the number of non-contributors did not differ based on whether they were identifiable or anonymous (Rege & Telle, 2004). This may be because non-contributors are not very sensitive to their reputation. Additionally, adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) did not change their charitable donation amount regardless of the presence of an observer (Izuma, Matsumoto, Camerer, & Adolphs, 2011). The study suggested that this is probably because people with ASD are insensitive to reputation during altruistic decision-making. In contrast, narcissism is positively related to altruistic behavior in public (Konrath, Ho, & Zarins, 2016). Although narcissists lack regard for others, they also have characteristics of seeking administration and status (Campbell & Foster, 2007). This suggests that narcissists behave generously in public because they are sensitive about their reputation. Although these studies did not directly examine the individual differences in reputational concerns, these findings imply that reputational concern could be related to altruism. Here, we directly examine this possibility.

### 1.2. Two types of reputational concern: Praise seeking and rejection avoidance

There are two types of reputational concern (e.g., Kawamura & Kusumi, 2017; Wu, Balliet, & Van Lange, 2016b): seeking a good reputation (i.e., praise seeking) and avoiding a bad reputation (i.e., rejection avoidance). These concerns are distinctive; one study has showed that these concerns predict different types of response to one's evaluation from others (Kojima, Ohta, & Sugawara, 2003). The relationships between these types of reputational concern and altruistic behavior could also differ. In terms of praise seeking, it may be positively related to altruistic behavior. As described above, altruistic behavior generally leads to a good reputation. Given that the concern for seeking a good reputation promotes behavior that leads to such a reputation, it would be positively related to altruistic behavior. In contrast, the individual difference of rejection avoidance is not much positively related to altruistic behavior as it is to praise seeking. By definition, people with high rejection avoidance may be motivated not to take actions that would be disliked by others. This purpose can be achieved by merely suppressing selfish behavior; to avoid rejection, people only need to ensure that they are not more selfish than others and do not actually have to behave more altruistically than others. Corresponding to these notions, one study showed that eye-like image (i.e., subtle cue suggestion that one is being watched) promoted altruistic behavior, and this effect was mediated by the expectation of a good reputation rather than concern about punishment (Oda, Niwa, Honma, & Hiraishi, 2011). In addition, a recent review suggested that positive reputation systems (e.g., awards and certificates) were more efficient in promoting generosity, relative to negative reputation systems, in modern society (Wu et al., 2016b). Therefore, we consider that praise seeking, rather than rejection avoidance, could be related to altruistic behavior.

### 1.3. Difference in altruistic behavior according to the recipient

Altruistic behavior could differ according to the recipient of the altruism; for example, people's altruistic behavior toward family members, friends/acquaintances, and strangers could differ. Previous research has suggested that the relationship between psychological traits (e.g., Big Five personality traits) and altruistic behavior differed according to the recipient of altruism (e.g., Oda et al., 2014). Regarding the relationships between reputational concern and altruistic behavior, previous research has suggested that altruistic behavior toward familiar recipients, relative to altruistic behavior toward distant recipients, is less likely to result in a good reputation. One study showed that charitable donors with personal connections to recipients were considered less charitable relative to those without this connection (Lin-Healy & Small, 2012). Therefore, altruistic behavior toward familiar people (e.g., family members) is less likely to be associated with reputational concern relative to altruistic behavior toward distant recipients (e.g., strangers).

This hypothesis is also supported by the evolutionary perspective, whereby the evolution of altruism toward family or friends/acquaintances can be explained by factors other than reputation. For example, the kin selection mechanism could explain the evolution of altruism toward family members (Hamilton, 1964), in that individuals who help their genetic relatives are likely to pass their own genes on the next generation. Altruistic behavior toward friends/acquaintances could also be explained by direct reciprocity (Trivers, 1971), whereby recipients repay the altruistic individual directly. However, altruism toward strangers is unlikely to lead to genetic or direct benefits; the evolution of this type of altruistic behavior is explained only by future benefits gained via reputation. Therefore, the proportion of the variance in altruism toward strangers explained by reputational concern is likely to be larger relative to that explained by altruistic behavior toward family members or friends/acquaintances.

### 1.4. Aim and hypotheses

The current study examined the relationships between two types of reputational concern and altruistic behavior. Our hypotheses are described below:

**Hypothesis 1.** Praise seeking will be positively associated with altruistic behavior, but rejection avoidance will not.

**Hypothesis 2.** The strength of the relationship between praise seeking and altruistic behavior will increase as the social distance between the recipient and the individual performing the altruistic behavior increases.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

We recruited 416 Japanese participants (208 men and 208 women) aged between 20 and 59 years ( $M = 39.8$ ,  $SD = 11.13$ ), using the Macromill online research system (Macromill, Inc. Tokyo, Japan). Participants completed the Praise Seeking and Rejection Avoidance Need Scales (PSRA; Kojima et al., 2003), Self-Report Altruism Scale Distinguished by the Recipient (SRAS-DR; Oda et al., 2013), and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980; translated into Japanese by Himichi et al., 2017). Although they also answered another questionnaire, we did not report the results, as these questionnaires were used for a different purpose. The present study was approved by the ethics committee at the institution with which the authors were affiliated.

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