

The Impact of Self-Categorization on Motivations and Willingness to Help an Outgroup

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Do motivations and willingness to help an outgroup differ depending how one is self-categorized at the time of helping? A helper who is currently self-categorized as an individual (engaged in cross-group helping) may have different motivations for providing help to an outgroup than a helper who is currently self-categorized as a group member (engaged in intergroup helping). Participants (N = 240) completed an online questionnaire preceded by a manipulation priming self-categorization as either an individual or a group member, with no manipulation provided in a control condition. Participants self-categorizing as individuals (versus group members) were more willing to provide help to an outgroup, and inclusion of the outgroup in the self and empathy proved to be important motivations for this helping. These findings provide initial evidence that willingness to provide help to an outgroup and motivations for doing so will present differently depending on the level of self-categorization of the helper.

Keywords: Self-categorization, outgroup helping, motivation, inclusion of the outgroup in the self, empathy

The act of helping is a mechanism for sharing information and knowledge, a way to redistribute resources, and a primary tool by which people take care of others who may be in need. Recently, psychologists have begun to integrate thinking on intergroup relations and on prosocial behavior resulting in the emergence of a literature on outgroup helping. Although an outgroup is always the target of help in outgroup helping, it may matter whether the helper is thinking of him/herself as an individual or a member of another group. A person may be more or less willing to help an outgroup and may be motivated to help for different reasons depending on what level of self is currently salient. This study will directly investigate the question of how self-categorization processes affect outgroup helping.

Self-Categorization and Outgroup Helping

Every individual possesses a self-concept, or

understanding of the person they are (Turner & Onorato, 2010). Our self-concept contains a collection of possible selves and we will draw from these possible selves (i.e., self-categorize), usually sub-consciously, depending on which of these self-representations is appropriate for the current situation. Humans are able to self-categorize at a personal level – drawing on self-aspects within our personal identity, or a collective level – drawing on self-aspects within our collective identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Wright & Richard, 2010). Personal identity is the level of the self-concept that includes aspects of the self that distinguish us from others. These are our unique, individuating characteristics. In contrast, collective identity is the level of the self-concept that includes aspects of the self that connect us to collections of others. These are our group memberships.

This distinction between personal and collective identity offers the possibility of two

different contexts for outgroup helping – cross-group and intergroup helping (Wright & Richard, 2010). On one hand, someone is involved in cross-group helping when they help the outgroup while self-categorized at the personal level. On the other hand, someone is involved in intergroup helping when they help the outgroup while self-categorized at the collective level. The difference does not lie in how the helper views the target of their help, but how the helper understands him/herself within that context. Given these differences, it is hypothesized that within a given intergroup relationship, the motivations for helping as well as the level of helping behaviours will be different depending on whether the helper is in a cross-group helping context or in an intergroup helping context.

Why Might Self-Categorization Affect Helping Behaviour?

The role of norms. Group norms are informal guidelines for behaviour that dictate what is acceptable for members of the specific group (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). It has been argued that it is normative for a group member to put their own group needs before the needs of an outgroup (Dovidio et al., 1997). However, it is possible for group norms to dictate that group members should provide help that solely benefits the outgroup, without concern for the ingroup. For example, members of a humanitarian group that exists to alleviate the suffering of others should be very concerned about the outgroup, and should not be focused on providing help to benefit themselves. In general, group norms that are ingroup-serving should result in less help provided to the outgroup while group norms that are other-serving should result in more help provided to the outgroup. In addition, group norms should have less effect on a person's motivations and actions when they are self-categorizing as an individual because the rules that guide the behaviour of group members

should be less salient to individuals (Livingstone, Haslam, Postmes, & Jetten, 2011).

Self-serving motivations for outgroup helping. Help that benefits the helper as well as the recipient of help is considered self-serving. Three self-serving motivations have been identified: meaning, impression management, and power.

Meaning. A person has meaning in their life when they believe their life matters and they have a purpose for living (Steger, 2012). Van Leeuwen (2006) suggests that helping others is a way to provide meaning to life. Through helping and thus improving the lives of others, people may feel that they are contributing to the greater good of humanity. A person may help outgroup members for the sake of enhancing or strengthening their sense of personal or collective meaning.

Impression management. Helping is an effective way to improve the perceptions that others hold about an individual or a group. When a person is confronted with an outgroup depiction of themselves or their group, they will try to confirm positive stereotypes and disconfirm negative stereotypes. Humans are socialized to understand that helping is an encouraged and thus socially-valued behaviour. Therefore, helping outgroup members is a useful approach for disconfirming negative impressions about an individual or a group and creating a positive image for others to witness (Hopkins et al., 2007).

Power. In this context, power refers to the higher status of a group or an individual over a disadvantaged group. The helper can use a helping relationship to ensure that they maintain a position of dominance over the outgroup (Nadler, 2002). The disadvantaged group, who is in need of and continuously accepts the resources of the advantaged helper, can become dependent on the helper's benevolence over time. When help is accepted on an ongoing basis, the recipient acknowledges their dependency

and inferiority to the helper. Therefore, the helper makes their superior status salient and forces the outgroup to become dependent on the provided help.

Other-oriented motivations for outgroup helping. Helping for other-oriented reasons means that the goal of the helper is to benefit the outgroup, without being concerned about benefitting themselves (individually or collectively). Three other-oriented motivations have been identified: moral convictions, inclusion of the outgroup in the self, and empathy.

Moral convictions. Morality develops early in life; some individuals will come to truly value the welfare of others and develop a sense of personal responsibility for others' welfare (Staub, 1991). Helping is then felt to be a moral obligation. Personal responsibility and moral obligation can contribute to altruistic motivation for helping. Therefore, an individual may be more motivated to help an outgroup, especially if it is a disadvantaged group, if their moral convictions dictate that helping those in need is 'the right thing to do'.

Inclusion of the outgroup in the self. As personal relationship closeness intensifies, so do feelings of concern for the other person. Aron and Aron's (1986) concept of *inclusion of the other in the self* explains how another person's identity as well as their welfare and pain can come to be one's own. This notion can be extended to consider how an individual can develop a sense of closeness with an outgroup in a process of including *the outgroup* in the self (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). For this to occur, there must be strong feelings of closeness between the individual and the outgroup (Wright, Aron, & Tropp, 2001; Wright, 2001). In terms of helping, this means that the outgroup will automatically be treated like an ingroup, allowing the individual to truly feel concern about the outgroup's problems and thus willingly providing them with help when they need it.

Empathy. Empathy is the experiencing of the emotions of another (Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002). Empathic feelings include sympathy, compassion, and warmth and can be aroused by taking the perspective of a person in need. Batson et al. (1995) propose that empathy is the source of an altruistic desire to help others. Empathy can also be an effective tool to ameliorate relations between groups. Strong feelings of empathic concern increase caring about others' welfare and can improve attitudes towards the collective group to which others belong. In addition, this can be reflected in more positive actions (including helping) towards the group (Dovidio et al., 2010).

The Current Study

The current study examined whether willingness to help and the underlying motivations for helping differ depending on the level of self-categorization of the helper (cross-group versus intergroup helping). Specifically, I examined the impact of self-categorization on willingness to provide help to sub-Saharan Africans living in extreme poverty.

Hypothesis 1a was that after reading a passage describing the plight of people living in sub-Saharan Africa, participants in the cross-group helping conditions would report that they were more willing to provide help to sub-Saharan Africans than participants in the intergroup helping conditions. Hypothesis 1b involved the motivations for helping and proposed that cross-group helping would be associated with stronger other-oriented motivations (i.e., empathy, inclusion of the outgroup in the self, and moral convictions) than intergroup helping. In contrast, intergroup helping would be associated with stronger self-serving motivations (i.e., meaning, impression management, and power) than cross-group helping. In other words, other-oriented motivations and self-serving motivations would mediate the relationship between *self-categorization* and willingness to provide help. A

control condition was also included in which no prime was given to focus attention on either one's individual or group identity. No specific predictions were made about the control condition. However, it was important to include a control condition to determine whether participants' "default" focus leads to behaviours that are more consistent with self-categorizing as an individual or as a group member.

Hypothesis 2 pertains specifically to the intergroup helping conditions and contrasts two group memberships – Canadians and students. Hypothesis 2a was that participants who were asked to self-categorize as Canadians would be more willing to provide help than participants who were asked to self-categorize as students. This prediction was based on the assumption that the group helping norms of Canadians would be stronger than the group helping norms of students because Canadians are stereotypically thought of to be nice, polite, and generous people. If these stereotypes accurately reflect group norms, this would suggest that participants who are thinking of themselves as Canadians should be willing to provide more help to outgroups than participants thinking of themselves as students. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was that a Canadian identity would be associated with stronger group helping norms than a student identity, and that group helping norms would mediate the relationship between *group membership* and willingness to provide help.

Method

Participants

Participants were 240 undergraduate psychology students at Simon Fraser University (129 female and 111 male). The mean age of the participants was 19.34 (SD = 3.12). They were recruited through the Psychology Department's Research Participation System (RPS). The self-reported ethnicities of the participants were: Caucasian (76), Chinese (66), South Asian (33), Other (17), Korean (9), South East Asian (6),

Filipino (3), Arab (1), Black (1), and Japanese (1). There were 27 participants who chose not to report their ethnicity. In some of the conditions, participants were asked to think of themselves as Canadians, therefore only Canadian citizens were eligible to complete this study.

Design

This study incorporated a 3x2 between-subjects design. The first manipulation produced one of three types of helping relationships by priming a particular level of *self-categorization*: as an individual (cross-group helping); as a group member (intergroup helping); or a no manipulation control. The second manipulation was of *group membership* and involved altering the particular group identity that was to be made salient in the intergroup helping conditions: Canadian or student. Participants in the cross-group conditions were asked to think about themselves as individuals and participants in the control conditions did not receive any identity priming manipulation. However, to fill out the full 3x2 design and to allow for the comparison of group helping norms across conditions, the Canadian or student identity was introduced for the final scale on the questionnaire in all conditions to measure perceived group helping norms. The dependent variable of interest was willingness to engage in three different hypothetical helping behaviours. In addition, six motivations for helping (i.e., meaning, impression management, power, moral convictions, inclusion of the outgroup in the self, and empathy) were measured.

Procedure

Participants signed up for an online study titled "Reactions to World Events". After being randomly assigned to one of the six conditions, they read a passage about poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. To manipulate *self-categorization*, participants were asked to think about themselves either as an individual (cross-group

helping conditions) or as a group member (intergroup helping conditions) or received no instructions to think about themselves (control conditions). Participants in the cross-group helping conditions read the following manipulation:

Take a moment to think about what it means to be you. For example, you could think about personality traits you possess that make you unique from others, and reflect who you are. You could also think about the experiences and values that are associated with your identity and how these relate to your life.

In contrast, participants in the intergroup conditions read the following:

Take a moment to think about what it means to be a student/Canadian. For example, you could think about the ways being a student/Canadian gives you a sense of belonging or identity, and reflects who you are. You could also think about the experiences and values that are associated with being a student/Canadian and how these relate to your life.

Participants were then asked to write an open-ended response about what it means to be them as an individual, or what it means to be a student/Canadian. The manipulation of *group membership* involved varying the specific group that was the focus of their thoughts and writing (Canadian or student). To strengthen the effects of the prime and to attempt to maintain that impact throughout the questionnaire, a small picture was placed at the top right corner of every page (i.e., a maple leaf in the intergroup-Canadian condition, an SFU logo in the intergroup-student condition, and an individual stick person in the cross-group conditions). Participants in the control conditions were not primed to think of the self at all and there was no picture displayed at the top right corner of each page.

All participants then completed a questionnaire containing the measures of motivations for helping, willingness to engage in several forms of help, perceived group helping norms, and demographic information. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants viewed a debriefing page and received a 6-digit code which they could email to the researcher to receive their research credit and be entered into one of five draws for \$20.

Measures

Motivations for helping.

Self-serving motivations. This 20-item scale ($\alpha = .82$) measured the degree to which self-serving motivations would influence participants' decision to provide help. The measure was developed for the purpose of this study, influenced by previous theorizing on strategic helping by van Leeuwen and Täuber (2010). The scale is made up of three subscales assessing each of the three self-serving motivations: meaning, impression management, and power. Each item was preceded by the statement: "I would help sub-Saharan Africans..." followed by items for each subscale, for example: "to establish a clear purpose in life" (meaning subscale), "to be perceived by others as warm" (impression management subscale), and "to gain a sense of control" (power subscale). Responses were made on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Other-oriented motivations.

Moral convictions. This 2-item scale ($\alpha = .85$) measured moral convictions regarding helping. The measure was adapted from van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2012) to focus specifically on helping. The two items were: 'My feelings about helping others are connected to my core moral beliefs or convictions' and 'My feelings about helping sub-Saharan Africans are connected to my core moral beliefs or convictions'. Responses were made on a 7-point

Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Inclusion of the outgroup in the self. This single item measured the degree to which sub-Saharan Africans are felt to be included in the self. The measure was adapted from Aron, Aron, and Smollan's (1992) *inclusion of the other in the self* (IOS) scale. Participants selected one pair of circles to best describe their relationship with sub-Saharan Africans from a set of seven Venn-like diagrams, each depicting two circles with increasing overlap. The two circles were described as representing the self and sub-Saharan Africans.

Empathy. This 6-item scale ($\alpha = .90$) measured empathy felt towards sub-Saharan Africans. The measure was taken from Batson et al. (1999) and asks participants to report the degree to which they are currently feeling six emotions (i.e., sympathetic, warm, compassionate, soft-hearted, tender, and moved). Responses were made on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Willingness to help. This 3-item scale ($\alpha = .85$) measured the degree to which participants were willing to engage in three hypothetical helping behaviours. These helping behaviours included donating to UNICEF, volunteering time to UNICEF, and collecting signatures for a petition on behalf of UNICEF. UNICEF was described as a means to help sub-Saharan Africans specifically. Responses were based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Group helping norms. This 4-item scale ($\alpha = .79$) measured the degree to which participants perceive values and behaviours associated with helping to be normative for their group. An example question is: 'What percentage of students/Canadians would make a donation to support sub-Saharan Africans?' Responses were entered in percentage format, from 0% to 100%.

Demographic information. This section included all of the variables used to describe the sample (i.e., age, sex, ethnicity).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Motivations. The three self-serving motivations (i.e., meaning, impression management, and power) were highly related to each other and formed a single reliable scale ($\alpha = .82$). In contrast, the other-oriented motivations (i.e., moral convictions, inclusion of the outgroup in the self, and empathy) were not highly correlated and did not form a reliable scale ($\alpha = .56$). As such, in all subsequent analyses the three self-serving motivations were collapsed into a single scale, while moral convictions, inclusion of the outgroup in self, and empathy were treated as separate variables.

Primary Analyses

Hypothesis 1a and 1b. I hypothesized (1a) that participants in the cross-group conditions would report that they were more willing to provide help than participants in the intergroup helping conditions. No predictions were made about the control conditions. A 3x2 *self-categorization* (intergroup, cross-group, and control) by *group membership* (Canadian and student) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the measure of Willingness to Help yielded a significant main effect of *self-categorization*, $F(2, 233) = 4.69, p = .01$. The main effect of *group membership* was not significant, $F(1, 233) = .18, p = .67$, nor was the interaction effect, $F(2, 233) = 1.39, p = .25$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Fisher LSD test indicated that although participants in the cross-group helping ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.47$) and the control ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.52$) conditions did not differ significantly, both were significantly more willing to help than those in the intergroup helping conditions ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.45$).

I hypothesized (1b) that moral convictions, inclusion of the outgroup in the self, empathy, and self-serving motivations would mediate the relationship between *self-categorization* and willingness to provide help. To test this multiple mediation, I used the bootstrapping approach to estimate the indirect effect of *self-categorization* on willingness to provide help through each of the four motivation measures. Since I had no specific predictions for the control conditions and this condition produced levels of helping very similar to the cross-group helping condition, the control condition was not included in this analysis. Consistent with hypothesis 1b, the indirect effect through inclusion of the outgroup in the self was significant (IE = .13, SE = .07, 95% [CI] = [.03, .29]). However, there were no significant indirect effects through morality (IE = .02, SE = .04, 95% [CI] = [-.03, .14]) or self-serving motivations (IE = .00, SE = .03, 95% [CI] = [-.06, .07]). In addition, this analysis showed a strong relationship between empathy and willingness to provide help, $\beta = .39$, $t = 3.38$, $p < .01$. However, the unique effect of *self-categorization* on empathy was not significant, $\beta = .24$, $t = .27$, $p = .21$, thus the indirect effect of *self-categorization* on willingness to provide help through empathy was not significant (IE = .09, SE = .08, 95% [CI] = [-.03, .30]). This suggests that the manipulation of *self-categorization* has the greatest influence on inclusion of the outgroup in the self, and only inclusion of the outgroup in the self and empathy are uniquely related to helping in this context.

Hypothesis 2a and 2b. I hypothesized (2a) that within the intergroup helping conditions, those who were self-categorizing as Canadians would report more willingness to provide help than participants self-categorizing as students. In addition, I hypothesized (2b) that the Canadian identity would be associated with stronger group helping norms than the student identity, which would in turn lead to higher willingness to provide help. To test these two hypotheses, I used the bootstrapping approach. Consistent

with hypothesis 2a, the direct effect of *group membership* on willingness to provide help was significant, $\beta = -.64$, $t = -2.05$, $p = .04$ indicating that participants thinking about themselves as Canadians (M = 4.02, SD = 1.52) were more willing to provide help than participants thinking about themselves as students (M = 3.57, SD = 1.35). However, the indirect effect through group helping norms was not significant, (IE = .19, SE = .15, 95% [CI] = [-.02, .58]), indicating that the effect of *group membership* on willingness to provide help was not mediated by group helping norms.

Discussion

Self-Categorization

The results of this study provide preliminary evidence that thinking of oneself as an individual leads to more willingness to provide help to an outgroup than thinking of oneself as a group member. However, participants in the control conditions, who did not receive any manipulation of *self-categorization*, were just as willing to provide help as participants in the cross-group conditions. This suggests that when providing help to an outgroup, thinking of oneself as an individual may be the default. It is, of course, possible that this particular default view of the self when helping an outgroup is specific to our sample of students at a Canadian university (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, these data support the idea that it may not be necessary to remind the helper of their individual identity, as thinking of oneself as an individual may be the default self-representation.

Although the current study demonstrated that cross-group helping seemed to lead to more willingness to provide help to an outgroup than intergroup helping, this may not always be the case. This study also suggests that willingness to provide help is dependent on the group membership that is made salient – there was more willingness to help when thinking of oneself as a Canadian than as a student. Furthermore, it

may be possible for group helping norms to be influenced by current events (for example, the SFU United Way Campaign could have increased the group helping norms of students) so that current events increase or decrease willingness to provide help. These ideas lead to the possibility that some groups at certain times could be willing to provide even more help than individuals. Therefore, although participants in the cross-group conditions were more willing to provide help to sub-Saharan Africans than participants in the intergroup conditions in this study, it may be possible for group members to provide just as much help or more help than individuals. The primary implication of the main effect of *self-categorization* is that in a given context, the level of identity that is currently salient can influence willingness to provide help. However, it is likely that whether it is individuals or group members who provide more help will depend on the current context or even the outgroup who is in need.

Motivations for Outgroup Helping

It may be that feelings of inclusion of the outgroup in the self provided a partial explanation for the higher level of helping found in the cross-group helping context than in the intergroup helping context because inclusion of the outgroup in the self involves the *individual* developing a sense of closeness and connection with a group (Wright et al., 1997). Therefore, this particular motivation for helping may only be relevant in the context that directly alludes to the individual self. Perhaps the personal/relational nature of the inclusion of the outgroup in the self motivation makes it particularly relevant to the cross-group helping context.

Empathy was also a strong predictor of outgroup helping, but *self-categorization* did not have a significant effect on empathy. Therefore, both participants in the cross-group and the intergroup helping conditions were motivated to help by empathy. This suggests that empathy, an

other-oriented motivation, may always be an important predictor of helping, regardless of how one is currently self-categorized.

Unexpectedly, self-serving motivations did not mediate the relationship between *self-categorization* and willingness to provide help. Participants in the cross-group and intergroup conditions showed about equal levels of self-serving motivations for helping. Perhaps self-serving motivations not only make group members more inclined to help, but individuals as well. Past literature on outgroup helping has suggested that groups may be motivated to help disadvantaged groups to gain meaning (van Leeuwen, 2006), improve impressions of their group (Hopkins et al., 2007), or gain power (Nadler, 2002), but it can be argued that individuals could also be motivated to help the disadvantaged for these same reasons but at the individual level.

Specific Group Memberships

The current study showed that participants thinking about their Canadian identity were more willing to provide help than participants thinking about their student identity. It was predicted that this result would emerge because Canadians would be perceived to have stronger group helping norms than students. However, group helping norms were not found to be a mediator of this effect. Therefore, something else must account for why being a Canadian leads to higher willingness to provide help than being a student. Perhaps participants thinking about themselves as Canadians are reminded of the ample resources that Canadians possess in comparison to sub-Saharan Africans and feel like they have enough resources to be able to help. In contrast, participants thinking about themselves as students may be reminded of the financial struggles and the busy lifestyle that is associated with being a student, which decreases their willingness to provide help. This explanation could account for why student helping norms are

perceived to be comparable with Canadian helping norms, yet their willingness to help is significantly lower.

During November 2013, the time of data collection, there was a great deal of advertising for the SFU United Way Campaign. The goal of this fundraising campaign was to raise funds for local agencies and programs that provide support to children and seniors living in poverty, as well as to provide support for programs that help prevent bullying among children. This may have created a confound for the current study because it could have reminded participants of their identity as an SFU student and depicted SFU students as particularly helpful. This may have temporarily inflated participants' perceived group helping norms of students. Thus, it may be that at another more neutral time we might have found the predicted higher group helping norms for the ingroup Canadians compared to students, and this would have strengthened the preferential influence of the Canadian identity in producing outgroup helping.

Conclusions

In summary, the findings of the current study suggest that self-categorization does indeed have an impact on willingness to provide help to an outgroup and the relevance of at least some of the motivations for doing so. When self-categorization was manipulated, people who were thinking about themselves as individuals tended to be more willing to provide help than people who were thinking about themselves as group members, and it appears that greater inclusion of the outgroup in the self when thinking of oneself as an individual may be at least one of the reasons for this. In addition, it appears that feelings of empathy may also be a strong motivation for outgroup helping, but empathy can be experienced in both a cross-group and an intergroup helping context.

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