

## **AFFECTIVITY AND EMERGING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

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*Abstract: prosocial behavior has become a distinct theme in the field of social sciences in the last half century, social psychology research having a key role in strengthening this particular area of research.*

*The article describes the relationship between emotional states and prosocial behavior in terms of research on the type of emotion that can generate this type of behavior and empathy-altruism relationship.*

*Keywords: prosocial behavior, empathy, affection, altruism, emotions.*

### **1. Prosocial behavior in psychosociology**

The interest in prosocial dimension of human behavior is relatively recent, being present in several social sciences. Peter Ilut stated that expressing focus on this type of behavior is the prerogative of social psychologists who have created and imposed the term 'prosocial' in the vocabulary of these sciences (Ilut 2004, 79).

The same author also noted that the number of articles on this topic issued in field magazines in the US and Europe have increased in an exponential manner in the recent years: by 1996 over 500 articles had emerged and at the beginning of the 21st century their number went over 10,000 (Ilut, 2004, 80).

The same trend was noticed by John F. Dovidio (1995, apud Chelcea 2003/2004, 183) showing that more than 98% of the psychosociology research on prosocial behavior were published after 1960.

## **2. Altruism vs. selfishness**

Regardless of the cultural universe, there is a long history of behavioral observation and narration of different acts performed by people (of different occupations, age, education level, etc.) in the exclusive benefit of other people, behaviors that were carried out without waiting for reward from the help.

The debate on the origins of altruism is an old subject in the science. Auguste Comte described (in 1875) two types of behavior relief based on different motivations (apud Franzoi, 1996, 476): selfish type ("form of relief in that the ultimate goal of those who grants is to an increase of their own welfare ") and altruistic type (" form of relief in that the ultimate goal of providing assistance is to enhance the welfare of each other without getting anything in return").

The existence of altruism was challenged both by philosophers (under the "hedonic paradox" where even acts the least selfish of an individual can produce a form of reward for that matter) and psychologists (especially those targeting behaviorist who categorically reject the idea that there is a repeated behavior that can occur without any form of reward).

Currently, the controversy over the nature of 'true' altruism has subsided in favor of a more pragmatic approach, aimed to studying and promoting social acts of altruism in cultural contexts clearly defined, whether they may be considered "pure" or hedonic. As the initial controversy, they were developed several theoretical frameworks meant to explain altruism (on the biological, psychological and sociological levels of explication).

Biological level. In the three decades that have elapsed since the enunciation of principles of sociobiology, defined as "the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior" (Wilson, 1975/2003, 26), the effects of this approach have made their presence felt in addressing key psihosociologiei themes. Regarding altruism, this is "the central theoretical problem of sociobiology."

Explained by the influence of genetic factors, altruism can be understood by appealing to the principles of evolution. Such as mechanism is encountered in other species, based on "kinship selection" - whereby individuals tend to support their inbred relatives to survive, thereby increasing the chances of perpetuating the common genetic heritage. Another mechanism underlying altruism and may have broad fundamental principle of reciprocity is anticipated that the individual tends to behave towards others as they expect others to behave towards his own person (reciprocal altruism).

Given that each individual would respect this principle, all individuals could benefit - in a reasonable time – of an helpful behavior. On a given population, assuming a set of moral obligations on mutual altruistic acts will create a population with a genetic adaptation generally increased.

The main criticisms to sociobiology is the fact that the genetic heritage of the human species does not change as rapidly as changing environment and - especially - that basically human behavior is not determined solely by genetic inheritance. People have conscience, that allows them to anticipate the consequences of their behavior and act in selfless manner, sometimes in completely different situational contexts than in the past.

Psychological level. According to the theory of social exchange, interactions between people are guided by economic reasons, and each individual applies to so-called "minimax" strategy: minimizing costs in obtaining maximum personal benefit.

In this context, altruism is explained as possibly, depending on interest, whenever its granting benefits (including recognition, reward and reducing stress levels) are perceived as higher than the costs involved.

Although made in intuitive manner, explaining acts of altruism in social exchange theory are intensely criticized. They can be raised at this point at least two types of arguments:

a) it is unlikely that most people have an accurate perception of cost / benefit within each social interaction;

b) interventions in emergency situations are made frequently in circumstances that do not allow the use of deliberative processes or contain no elements which could suggest some major benefits to the person providing aid.

Sociological level. Regarding the influence of social norms in producing acts of altruism, most frequently cited is the norm of reciprocity and social responsibility, made in relation to the assessment mode of social justice and cultural differences (Franzoi, 1996, 480-481).

i. Norm of reciprocity supposed to be helping those who offered, in turn, help. This rule (designed to maintain fairness in social relationships) explains the discomfort of people who have received help in the past and can not respond with the same "currency".

ii. Social responsibility norm postulates that should help when others are in need and dependent on aid. In this respect, the aid should be proportionate to need it dependent person.

iii. Social justice plays an important role in how aid is granted. A person who believes in the existence of a just world / "just-world belief" award aid only when you believe that the other deserves help. As such, they are excluded those who "deserve" fate, no matter what states other social norms.

iv. Cultural differences are increasingly being addressed in prosocial behaviour studies. Although it could not be proven clear differences between the degree of manifestation of behavior relief different societies, in the public opinion of collectivist type of society (eg. India) the intended relief is present at a much higher level than in an individualistic society (USA).

Normativity theories explaining the emergence of pro-social behavior, but does not exhaust the phenomenon and does not provide adequate behavioral weather.

All the above theories (of the biological, psychological or sociological) have in common the fact that provides effective systematization of the various observations made over time to acts of altruism in various cultural contexts.

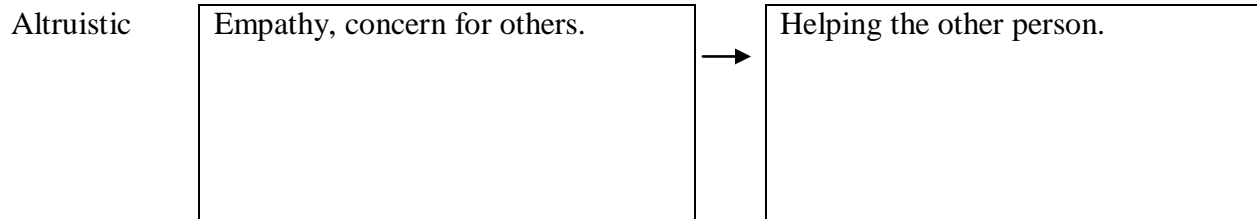
Although most studies on the behavior of aid not directly validate these theories, addressing altruism based on the three levels of explanation (biological, psychological, sociological) has the

advantage of offering a perspective very wide on the manifestation of altruism in the human species.

### 3. Psychological states generating prosocial behaviors

Since the inception of prosocial behavior in psychosociology approach, special attention was paid to mental states, favoring prosocial behavior to occur. A systematization of this research is conducted by John C. Brigham (1990/1991, 291):

Type of motivation	Mental state which influences the motivation for offering help	Final goal of the person offering help
Selfish	The desire to avoid punishment for not intervening (shame, guilt).	Getting in a better mood: good feelings about oneself, self-gratification
Selfish	Positive mood.	Maintaining current state: extending the good mood.
Selfish	A general negative emotional state (bad mood, sadness, depression).	Obtaining a better mood: the negative mood disappears.
Selfish	Negative emotions caused by the needs of the person concerned.	Obtaining a better mood by reducing the level of negative emotions.



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Fig. 1. Psychological states which may lead to prosocial behaviors (after Brigham, 1990/1991, 291)

There is a lot of research on the influence of the factors mentioned above, focused on two directions (Andronic, 2012, 34-35): the relationship between affective state and helping the other person (Berkovitz, 1972; Carlson and Miller, 1987; Carlson, Charline and Miller, 1988 etc.) and the relationship between altruism and empathy (Batson, 1992/1998; Batson, 1997; Cialdini et. al., 1987 Batson and Oletson, 1991; Davis, 1994, etc.).

In general, people who experience positive emotions show a more accentuated trend to help others, a trend that has multiple explanations: the positive affective state leads to a more generous assesment of personal resources (which may be involved in intervention), correlates with a high level of attention to social stimuli, increases the confidence of the person concerned, including in terms of their ability to help others.

There are also negative emotions that may favor the emergence of prosocial behaviors, which in this case are motivated by the need to improve the emotional state of the person offering help ('selfish' altruism), accoring to the model of eliminating the emotional state. In this context, Wilhemina Wosińska (2004/2005, 262) stated that this model works only on negative emotions which impact on one's mood is in one's power to change: *'One of these is represented by guilt that can be estinguished by doing a good deed... Another emotion that triggers prosocial actions is sadness.'*

#### **4. The empathy-altruismrelationship**

The fact that the person who offers help has a certain understanding of the situation of the one in need is a postulate which leads all explanatory theories of prosocial behavior (Ilut 2004, 88), including sociobiology (which sees empathy as a specific feature for beings living in a community, obtained by natural selection). Moreover, there is a long list of great thinkers of the world (Plato, Aristotle, Toma d'Aquino, David Hume, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, etc.) who discovered that empathy by itself leads to altruistic acts.

This statement has been empirically tested by G. D. Batson (1997), who formulated 'the hypothesis of empathetic altruism': empathic emotions produce a motivation which has as ultimate goal the benefit of the person empathy is felt towards. In other words, empathic emotions produce altruistic motivation.

Currently, empathy is addressed in psychosociology as a multidimensional concept. Robert A. Baron and Donn Byrne (apud Ilut, 2004, 89) refers to three dimensions of the concept:

- 1) The cognitive dimension, the ability to understand what a person feels and why;
- 2) The affective dimension, the ability of representing the emotional states of others and their experience;
- 3) The conative dimension (called 'sympathy' by Baron and Byrne), which involves, in addition to feeling the same as the other, also feeling that you have to do something for them.

Empathetic potential is an innate trait, but it is not present in equal proportion at birth and is encouraged differently during primary socialization. Thus, from the age of two years, the differences in individual empathic capacities become obvious (Davis, Luce and Kraus, 1994).

Generally, people know that establishing an empathetic relationship leads to altruism, as suggested by the experiments studying the phenomenon of avoiding empathy, which is the tendency of subjects to evade from coming into contact with people in distress (or from receiving messages about their situation), knowing that they will feel compelled to help them.

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