

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 188 080

CG 014 477

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 TITLE Experiencing Negative Affect About Self or Other: Effects on Helping Behavior in Children and Adults.
 PUB DATE May 80
 NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (52nd, St. Louis, MO, May 1-3, 1980).
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Adults; *Affective Behavior; *Altruism; *Children; *Emotional Response; *Empathy; Helping Relationship; Prosocial Behavior; Psychological Patterns; Self Concept
 IDENTIFIERS *Mood Inducement; *Transference

ABSTRACT

The differential effects of self- and other-directed negative affect on subsequent generosity are explored in two studies, both using a modified version of the direct mood inducement procedure (Moore, 1973). Subjects (N=85) in the first experiment were children aged 7-12. Subjects (N=48) in the second experiment were college undergraduates. Subjects in both studies were instructed to think about and discuss sad incidents experienced by themselves or others prior to the opportunity to help. The prediction was confirmed that children and adults empathetically experiencing negative affects of others would show higher levels of helping than self-focused subjects. Focusing an individual on another's misfortune may encourage altruistic behavior, an effect more marked on male subjects. Since the potential recipients of help were not the targets of the affective arousal, empathy appears to transfer and enhance other charitable behaviors. (NRB)

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Experiencing Negative Affect About Self or Other:
Effects on Helping Behavior in Children and Adults

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CG 014477

Paper presented at the Meeting of the

Midwestern Psychological Association, St. Louis, May, 1980.

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A considerable amount of research has demonstrated that an individual's momentary affective state influences the subsequent expression of prosocial behavior. Children who are experiencing negative affect, generated either by an apparently unsuccessful task performance or the direct inducement of mood, have typically been found to show lower levels of generosity than children experiencing a more positive mood (Barnett & Bryan, 1974; Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973; Rosenhan, Underwood, and Moore, 1974; Underwood, Froming, and Moore, 1977). In studies involving older subjects, however, the relationship between negative affect and prosocial behavior has been less consistent.

Whereas some studies indicate that negative affect inhibits altruism in adults (e.g., Aderman, 1972; Johnson, Hildebrand, & Berkowitz, cited in Berkowitz, 1972), other studies find that negative affect has either no effect or facilitates prosocial behavior (e.g., Berscheid and Walster, 1967; Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Wallace & Sadalla, 1966).

Importantly, in adult studies wherein negative affect has tended to suppress altruism, the individual is led to experience or anticipate some personal misfortune prior to the opportunity to help; in these studies the subject's attention is focused on him/herself. In contrast, in adult studies wherein negative affect is associated with enhanced helping, the individual is typically led to believe that he

or she has either perpetrated or observed another's misfortune prior to the opportunity to help; in these studies the subject's attention is focused on another individual. It would appear that whether experiencing negative affect promotes or suppresses prosocial behavior in adults, and perhaps children, is dependent upon the individual's focus of attention.

The present two studies sought to explore the differential effects of self- and other-directed negative affect on subsequent generosity in young children and adults. Both studies utilized a modified version of the direct mood inducement procedure (see Moore, et al., 1973) wherein subjects were instructed to think about and discuss sad incidents that had been experienced either by themselves or by another individual, prior to the opportunity to help. It was predicted that children and adults who were empathically experiencing the negative affect of another individual would show higher levels of helping than would self-focused individuals since empathizing serves to make the feelings and needs of others generally more salient.

Experiment 1¹. The participants in Experiment 1 were 85 children, 52 girls and 33 boys, ranging in age from 7 to 12 years old. A female graduate student served as the experimenter. The study was conducted in a small room located in the children's school. In the experimental room was a sealed metal donation canister which contained several prize chips at all times to serve as evidence of prior donations.

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Each child entered the room alone and was greeted by the experimenter who explained that she was interested in studying the things that children remember. Before proceeding further, the experimenter awarded the child 30 prize chips for participating in the study. It was explained that the prize chips would be exchanged for prizes after the experimenter had talked with the other children in the school.

Pointing to the donation canister, the experimenter then informed the child that

There are some other children who go to another school a lot like yours who won't have a chance to be in the study and earn prize chips. Later, if you want, you may share with those children by putting some of your prize chips in the donation can. You don't have to share, but you may if you want.

The experimenter then established the treatment and control conditions using the direct mood inducement procedure. Each child was encouraged to discuss, according to experimental condition; either happy or sad incidents that had been experienced either by him/herself or by another child. Children in the control groups were encouraged to discuss affectively neutral information, either about themselves or another child, by asking them questions relatively devoid of emotional content. Each

of the mood induction periods lasted approximately one minute.

Following the mood inducement manipulation, the experimenter told the child that she had to attend to other business in the school building but that her assistant would come by in about one minute to ask a few simple questions. The child was reminded that "you may share with the other children, if you want, while waiting for my assistant to arrive." Immediately before departing, the experimenter asked the child to continue thinking about what they had discussed during the session.

After the donation interval, a brief questionnaire was administered to each child. In addition to two manipulation checks, each child was asked to rate how he/she had felt during the mood induction period on an affect scale ranging from 1 (very happy) to 5 (very sad). Upon completion of the study, the children were debriefed in their classrooms and questions concerning the investigation were answered. Finally, all of the children were thanked for their participation and were allowed to select a small prize.

The affect and donation data were analyzed in separate analyses of variance for unequal ns; post hoc analyses of significant effects were conducted with the Newman-Keuls test,

Analysis of the affect responses yielded a main effect of Affect, $F(2,73) = 24.43, p < .001$. Children in the negative affect condition reported feeling significantly sadder ($M = 3.45$) than children in either

the positive affect ($M = 1.93$) or control ($M = 2.18$) conditions; the latter two groups did not differ significantly from one another.

Analysis of the donation data revealed a significant interaction of Discussion Topic (Self/Other) and Affect, $F(2,73) = 3.24$, $p < .05$. As predicted, young boys and girls who had discussed another child's misfortunes donated significantly more prize tokens ($M = 9.47$) than did children who had been saddened by discussing personal misfortunes ($M = 2.71$). The mean number of prize chips shared by children in the remaining discussion topic/affect conditions did not differ significantly from one another, presumably because these conditions did not differentially elicit empathic concerns relevant to helping. The mean donations for these four groups fell approximately midway between the means of the negative-other and negative-self groups.

Experiment 2. The second experiment which I will report today was part of a larger unpublished study involving undergraduates. The design of this study paralleled the critical negative affect conditions in Experiment 1 and will be presented very briefly.

The subjects in this investigation were 48 undergraduates, 24 females and 24 males, who received class credit for their participation. Subjects were again run individually and were instructed to discuss sad incidents that had been experienced either by themselves or by another individual. Following the negative mood inducement (and upon the apparent completion of the study), each undergraduate was asked by a female confederate to volunteer for a non-credit "social attitudes study". The subjects

were informed that they could volunteer to complete at home from 0 to 16 attitude questionnaires, each described as requiring approximately 10 minutes to fill out. The subjects were assured that a stamped return envelope would be provided to each participant in the survey. The major dependent variable was, thus, the number of attitude questionnaires which the subject volunteered to complete and mail back to the department.

In line with the results of Experiment 1, a significant main effect of Self/Other focus was found, $F(1,40) = 7.40, p < .01$. However, this main effect was qualified by the significant interaction of Self/Other and Sex of Subject, $F(1,40) = 7.03, p < .02$. A Newman-Keuls test revealed that whereas males in the Other condition volunteered to complete significantly more questionnaires ($M = 12.42$) than did males in the Self condition ($M = 6.00$), no difference was found for females ($M = 8.17$ and 8.08 , respectively).

The present findings have important implications for our understanding of the mood-altruism relationship and the role of empathy in helping behavior. In addition to affirming the power of induced affect to influence children's and adults' prosocial behavior, finding an important cognitive component -- the source of affect -- helps to clarify the relationship between affect and altruism. Focusing the individual on another person's misfortune and sadness (rather than his or her own) may serve to enhance the individual's tendency to behave altruistically². Since adult males tend to be less empathic than their female counterparts (see Hoffman,

1977), focusing the male's attention on the feelings of another individual (which presumably heightens empathic concern) may have a more marked effect on their subsequent helping than it does for adult females. However, since Experiment 2 was conducted using only a female confederate, a determination of the generalizability of this conclusion to male recipients awaits future research.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the potential recipient in each of the present studies was not the target of the individual's prior affective arousal. The results of a recent study which we conducted with high school students (Barnett, Howard, King, and Dino, Note 1) suggest that empathy for a particular target, once aroused, may transfer and subsequently enhance charitable behaviors enacted for individuals who did not serve as the initial source of concern.

Reference Note

1. Barnett, M. A., Howard, J. A., King, L. M., & Dino, G. A.

Charitable behavior: An examination of the transfer of empathy.

Paper presented at the meeting of the Southwestern Society for

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Footnotes

¹For a more complete description of Experiment 1, see Barnett, King, and Howard (1979).

²This pattern of findings has recently been replicated in a study wherein adult subjects were instructed to attend either to the reactions of a (hypothetical) dying friend or to their own reactions prior to the opportunity to help (Thompson, Cowan, & Rosenhan, 1980).