

## **Prosocial Behaviour: The Limbic Energy Hypothesis Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Prosocial behaviours are the pillars of successful, communal and peaceful societies. They hold the core values and norms that make up humane and habitable societies. Many studies have shown that different social factors are responsible for prosocial behaviours. prosocial or anti-social responses could be translations of positive or negative emotional (limbic) energy, implying that the energy type which saturates a person's limbic system predisposes that person to certain behaviours, not others: irritable, anxious or moody persons are less likely to get along well in a group than those who are attractive and charming. It is persuasive therefore that people who possess negative limbic energy will be less prosocial than those who possess positive limbic energy. Indeed, observations that some communities and social groups are generally more prosocial than others seem to buttress this point. Since prosocial behaviour facilitates development, parents, government officials, teachers, religious leaders and political leaders should create enabling environments that facilitate accumulation of positive limbic energy, which is a prelude to internalization of prosocial behaviour.

***Key words:* Prosocial Behaviours; Social Facilitators; Religion; Culture**

### **Introduction**

Pro-social behaviour is perceived as sacrificial responses which are meted to benefit someone or group that is not attached to the benefactor. Such behaviour is usually welcome in most settings and not only promises healthy group cohesion, but reduces conflicts, and predisposes to improved general well being on both sides. However, notwithstanding the high desirability of such behaviors, they are not always forthcoming,

and many individuals seem not to possess the ability to emit pro-social responses. It is therefore of interest to psychologists that prosociality be explored from different perspectives, hence, this paper seeks to explore some of its roots using the limbic energy hypothesis framework.

The term prosocial behaviour emerged in the 1970s, leading to psychological analysis of the giving, helping, and sharing processes. The nonresponsive bystanders in the brutal Katherine "Kitty" Genovese murder in 1964, as well as the 1960s Civil Rights Movement refuting racial discrimination, prompted keen examination of human nature and the significance of helping others (Knickerbocker, 2003). Prosocial behaviour came to be seen as key to harmonious interpersonal and group interactions. Prosocial moral reasoning has been theoretically and empirically linked to prosocial behaviours, and culture with its values and emphasis on socialization, may influence levels of prosocial moral reasoning. Other significant influences on moral reasoning include education and logical skills. (Carlo, Marcia, Eisenberg, Claudia & Silvia, 1996).

Helping and caring behaviors amongst humans have been known since early history, in respect of communal cultures of native peoples worldwide (Penner, John, Jane & David, 2005). From the evolutionary perspective, early humans' survival relied strongly on the processes of giving and helping. Those who displayed prosocial dispositions were thus naturally selected; they procreated and were able to dominate the ecosystem. Observations regarding group selection shows that if two groups are in direct competition for membership, the group with larger number of altruists will have an advantage over a group of mainly selfish individuals (Penner et al, 2005).

Prosocial behaviours are voluntary acts intended to benefit others. Prosocial acts emerge early in life, soon after babies learn to crawl, and increase in complexity across the lifespan and throughout life (Wentzel, 2013). All segments of human societies throughout evolutionary history have depended on prosocial and cooperative behavior to ensure their

survival and perpetuation. Cultures and patterns of life therefore, are centered on the practices, norms, and institutions developed to ensure prosociality. Though they differ in kind, degree, and organization, the main goal is ensuring the internalization of prosocial behaviours by the citizens or members of the society (Eisenberg, Spinrad & Knafo-Noam, 2015).

Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco & Bartels, (2007) define prosocial as actions that benefit other people or society as a whole, and opines that it characterized by helping that does not benefit the helper; in fact, prosocial behavior is often accompanied by costs. Psychologists suggest that one way this behavior may outweigh the associated costs is human desire to belong to a group. The authors also hold that helping facilitates group work and in turn, provides individuals with immense benefits for the long run.

Prosocial behavior is driven by a combination of egoistic and altruistic motivations. (Knickerbocker, 2003) Arousal and affect theories share the guiding principle that people are motivated to behave in ways that help them attain some goal, and the interpretation of this arousal can shape the nature of prosocial motivation (Penner et al, 2005). With egoistic motivation, self-importance or one's own image is the primary driver for prosocial behaviour (Knickerbocker, 2003). Egoists thus act prosocially when reputational incentives are at stake. An intermediate, mutual benefit occurs when reciprocity is expected – prosocial behavior is thus performed with the expectation of repayment. In contrast, altruists tend to act prosocially regardless of reputational incentives (Simpson & Robb, 2008). Thus, altruistic individuals who are most likely to give in the absence of rewards are those who do not seek reputational gains. However, it is possible for even highly altruistic people to derive some personal benefit from their prosocial actions, even if as seemingly insignificant as of self-worth or personal gratification (Knickerbocker, 2003).

Reciprocal altruism explores the evolutionary advantages of helping unrelated individuals, where the favor is repaid in kind, while indirect reciprocity addresses the receipt of such

long-term benefits or rewards for short-term prosocial acts. Furthermore, altruists are more likely to indirectly reciprocate others' prosocial behaviors (Simpson & Robb, 2008). This contrasts with the direct reciprocity of egoism, where individuals directly return favors to those who have provided past help. Altruistic behavior is thus observed not only when incentives exist, but also when they do not (Galen, 2012).

With a long history in psychology, particularly social psychology, the phenomenon of prosocial behavior combines intrinsic, extrinsic, and reputational motivations (Bénabou & Jean, 2005). A combination of altruism and egoism are integrated with concern for both society and the self. Prosocial behavior thereby encompasses several areas, including biological, motivational, cognitive, and social processes (Leslie & Glomb, 2012).

Considerable number of studies has suggested that, through serving and volunteering, young people can understand their own needs, learn and express their values, realize the world, get related experience and strengthen social competence and relationships. Authorities have shown that there are various crucial factors responsible for prosocial behaviour among diverse people of different cultures (Eisenberg et al, 2015).

### **The Limbic Energy Hypothesis**

This hypothesis holds that from the cradle, the limbic system begins to accumulate both positive and negative emotional energy (limbic energy), the rate and quality of which depends on the health of the system, and impact of the environments. Accordingly, if the environments, are saturated with or are predominantly changed with positive emotional energy, the limbic system become positively charged, but negatively charged with the environments are abusive, depriving unfriendly or negligent. However, since all environments consist of both positive and negative energies, what a person's limbic system becomes eventually charged with depends on the extent to which one charge is able to cancel other. This of course presupposes that in the event of equal or near equal ups and downs" (+ve and -ve charges), the limber system assumes a neutral position or zero charge.

This is however not an absolute zero situation, but could be likened to the resting potential of the neutron, so that additional energy produces a 'spike potential'. The hypothesis thus postulates that humans build up both +ve and -ve energies in their limbic system, and what radiate (manifest through behavior) is the one of which the limbic system is saturated. If it is saturated with positive energy (built up from long standing experiencing of positive emotions), it radiates same, thereby creating a positive magnetic field (aura) around the person. Such a person would possess a calm attractive and charming personality. On the other hand if one's limbic system accumulated more of and is saturated with negative emotional energy, such a person radiates same, and could be described as unattractive, anxious, charmless, moody, irritable, and repulsive (Obi-Nwosu, 2014).

The foregoing implies that some personality attributes must have been developed because of the person - environments interaction at the formative stages, especially those connected with emotional and reward responses. Thus, prosocial or anti-social responses could be translations of positive or negative emotional (limbic) energy, implying that the energy type which saturates a person's limbic system predisposes that person to certain behaviours, not others: irritable, anxious or moody persons are less likely to get along well in a group than those who are attractive and charming. It is persuasive therefore that people who possess negative limbic energy will be less prosocial than those who possess positive limbic energy. Indeed, observations that some communities and social groups are generally more prosocial than others seem to buttress this point. Again, it is persuasive that with positive limbic energy, the reward centers/systems are activated when such socially acceptable behavior are emitted, thereby yielding intrinsic motivation. This could be so because of the dopaminergic pathways in the brain which must necessarily be activated.

Based on this framework, some factors are considered to affect the quality of person - environment interaction, and would equally affect the quality and kind of limbic energy people may possess. These factors as related to prosocial behaviour are discussed.

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## **Education and Prosocial Behaviour**

Prosocial behaviour in the form of sharing, helping, and cooperating is a hallmark of social competence throughout childhood. Of direct relevance for schooling is that prosocial behaviour has been related positively to intellectual outcomes, including classroom grades and standardized test scores (Wentzel, 2013). Display of prosocial behaviour also has been related positively to other socially competent outcomes, including social acceptance and approval among classmates and being liked by teachers. Most scholars assume that cognitive and affective skills such as perspective taking, prosocial moral reasoning, adaptive attributional styles, perceived competence, and emotional well-being which come through education provide a psychological foundation for the development of prosocial behaviour (Knafo-Noam, Uzevovsky, Israel, Davidov & Zahn-Waxler, 2015).

## **Gender and Prosocial Behavior**

Gender is one of the factors that influence prosocial behaviour. Several researches have suggested that females differ from males in prosocial behavior, but some found no difference (Brian, 2011). In consonance with the former, Abdullahi and Kumar (2016) reported a study in which they examined gender differences in prosocial behaviour. A total of 60 students (N = 60, 30 Males and 30 Females) participated in the study which took place at Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. They used a Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB) consisting seven dimensions including social responsibility (SR), emphatic concern (EC), perspective taking (PT), personal distress (PD), other oriented moral reasoning (O), mutual concern moral reasoning (M) and self report altruism (SRA) to collect the required data the required. Results of the study revealed significant gender differences on two dimensions of prosocial personality battery, i.e. perspective taking ( $t = 2.04, p < .05$ ) and other oriented moral reasoning ( $t = 2.01, p < .05$ ), females being on the higher side. For the rest of the five dimensions, the differences were negligible, falling far away from the probability level of .05.

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The results suggest that males and females are almost equal on most of the prosocial behaviour dimensions. But, they concluded however, in case of perspective taking and mutual concern moral reasoning that, females are on higher side suggesting that they have better understanding of others' mental state and they are more concerned about morality in the society. This could be because, females react more than males to social stimuli and are more emotional too (Espinosa & Kovářík, 2015). Also, there may be sex differences in prosocial behaviour, particularly as youths move into adolescence. Research suggest that while women and men both engage in prosocial behaviours, women tend to engage in more communal and relational prosocial behaviours whereas men tend to engage in more agentic or volunteering prosocial behaviors (Eagly, 2009).

### **Religion and Prosocial Behaviours**

Religion can be defined as a system of beliefs with certain rituals, and practices, which are learned and demonstrated in places of worship. Religion differs from spirituality in that spirituality is considered as a way of living which predetermines how individuals respond to life experiences. One does not need to engage in any formal religious activities to be spiritual, and spirituality can be used as a flexible and more general term. In addition, while religion may be an expression of spirituality, it is not guaranteed that all religious people are spiritual (Zullig, Ward, and Horn, 2006). Religious people are thought to be more prosocial than non religious people. There is empirical support for a link between prosocial behavior and religion. People who report being more religious also report stringent moral standards (Stark & Bainbridge, 1997). It has been suggested that there is also evidence that religion tends to reduce criminal behavior and positive relation between religious belief and cooperative behavior (Levy and Razin, 2012; Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato & Keltner, 2015).

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### **Geographic Location and Prosocial Behaviour**

Geographic location or residence tends to influence people's behavior of caring and sharing due to their social interactions. For instance, rural residents are more likely to help one another or share things with one another due to the fact that they have been used to community life as opposed to urban residents who are more disintegrated/individualistic (Cook, 2012). This observation effect holds over a wide variety of ways of helping and in many countries. One explanation is that people from rural settings are brought up to be more neighborly and more likely to trust strangers because they were brought up in an environment that fosters trust. People living in cities are likely to keep to themselves in order to avoid being overwhelmed by all the stimulation they receive or because they have no attachment to strangers and have not been socialized into such behaviours. Population density has also been canvassed as a more potent determinant of helping than is population size (Aronson, Wilson and Akert, 2010).

### **Culture and Prosocial behavior**

Cultural differences can influence prosocial behaviour in that someone is likely to help, donate or generally extend a positive gesture to an individual based on cultural affiliation. Some evidence suggests that children in Western societies are less prosocial than children from Africa. Also, collectivist indigenous societies, such as Polynesian societies have also been found to be more pro-social than Western societies. Some individuals are socialized to help around the house. For example, children from Kenya, Mexico and Phillipines are socialized to help in family chores. These same children, according to Cook (2012), scored highest in helping behaviours. For less serious situations, U.S. viewed helping more as a matter of choice whereas Indians saw helping as a moral responsibility. People in collectivist cultures may draw a firmer line between in-groups and out-groups and be more likely to help in-group members and less likely to help out-group members, than people from individualistic cultures, who have an independent view of the self (Aronson, Wilson &

Akert, 2010). From the theoretical perspective, it could be that certain cultural norms impose positive child care behaviours on families, therefore the people eventually develop positive limbic energy and radiate same. Thus they imbibe helping behaviours as a normal and accepted response.

### **Conclusion**

Prosocial behaviours are voluntary behaviours exhibited with the intent of benefiting others. They consist of actions which are beneficial to other people or the society as a whole, such as helping, sharing, donating, co-operating, and volunteering. These behaviours are responsible for peaceful communal co-existence within and across different societies, and they facilitate development. Prosocial behaviours are facilitated by various factors such as; mental hygiene, religion, geographical location, and culture. The limbic energy hypothesis explains that positive emotional energy must be a prelude to prosocial behavior, and since this could be acquired through purposeful manipulation of the environment, stakeholders in very society including; parents, government officials, teachers, religious leaders, and political leaders should do their parts to create the enabling environment, so as to foster prosocial behavior.

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