Does Social Approval Increase Helping?
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In order to determine the interactive effects of social response and individual differences in need for approval on subsequent helping behavior, 46 female subjects were either socially rewarded or punished for helping the experimenter. As predicted, subjects who were high in need for approval were subsequently more likely to help a confederate who had dropped books if they had been socially rewarded than if they had been punished. Subjects low in need for approval were unaffected by the previous social reinforcement. Several explanations for these results are offered. The importance of examining interactions between personality and situational variables in research on prosocial behavior is discussed.

Social approval has been found to be an effective reward that increases subsequent helping by both adults and children (Clark, 1975; Gelfand, Hartmann, Cronier, Smith, & Page, 1975; McGovern, Ditzian, & Taylor, 1975; Midlinsky. Bryan, & Brickman, 1973; Moss & Page, 1972; Rushton & Teachman, 1978). For example, children donated more of their winnings to needy children (Rushton & Teachman, 1978) or other players (Gelfand et al., 1975) if they were praised for donating. Likewise, adult subjects who were thanked for the directions they provided a confederate were more likely to help a second confederate who dropped books on the street than were those who were rebuked for their attempts to give directions (Clark, 1975; Moss & Page, 1972). Finally, subjects who had simply been thanked once for accepting electric shocks for a confederate continued to take shocks for her at a much higher rate than subjects who had not been thanked (McGovern et al., 1975).

Clearly, social approval sometimes acts as a reward that facilitates prosocial behavior. However, people differ in their desire for and sensitivity to social approval (Crowne, 1979). In line with current interactionist approaches in social psychology (Blasczyk, 1984a, 1984b), we predict that when social approval is expected for social behavior, it should have a stronger impact on those high in need for approval than on those low in need for approval.

In one previous study that examined this issue (Satow, 1975), when social approval was expected, high need-for-approval subjects did donate more than did low need-for-approval subjects. In Satow's study expectation for social approval was manipulated by asking subjects to donate money to charity under “public” and “private” conditions. Presumably, under public conditions subjects expected approval for helping; under private conditions they did not. Because high need-for-approval subjects helped more than the low need subjects only in the public conditions, Satow concluded that the impact of social approval on helping is influenced by individual differences in the need for approval.

In the present study, social approval and disapproval are manipulated directly. We hypothesize that subjects high in need for approval who are socially rewarded for helping in a given situation will be more likely to help in a subsequent situation than will those who are socially punished for helping. However, neither reward nor punishment is expected to affect the subsequent helping behavior of those low in need for approval.

In Satow's (1975) study it was unclear whether the public nature of the helping motivated subjects to help because they expected approval if they did help or because they feared disapproval if they did not. This is a particularly relevant concern because there is controversy about whether the need for approval measured by the Marlowe-Crowne test used by Satow identifies people who are motivated by social approval or acts anxiety about social disapproval (Millham & Jacobson, 1978).

In the present study, these two alternatives will be considered by examining the pattern of differences between the helping behavior of high and low need subjects. If the high need-for-approval subjects are motivated primarily by the desire for social approval, they will help more than the low need subjects in the reward conditions, but not help less in the punishment conditions. If the high need subjects are motivated by a fear of disapproval, they will help less than the low need subjects in the punishment conditions, but not help more in the reward conditions. If the high need-for-approval subjects are more responsive to both reward and punishment, we predict that the high need subject will help more than the low need subject subsequent to receiving a reward for helping, but will help less than the low need subject subsequent to receiving a punishment for helping.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 44 female Vassar College undergraduates were contacted by telephone and agreed to help the experimenter by participating in a psycho-
logical study. The study employed a 2 X 2 factorial design varying social reinforcement (reward versus punishment) and need for approval (high versus low). Subjects were randomly assigned to the social reinforcement conditions and were assigned to the need-for-approval conditions on the basis of their scores on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Possible scores on this scale range from 1 to 30. Subjects who scored between 1 and 15 were designated low need-for-approval (N = 25), whereas subjects who scored between 16 and 30 were designated high need-for-approval (N = 21).

Procedure

Subjects individually completed a self-report inventory that they were told was being validated as a measure of personality. Actually, this inventory was the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. After the subject completed the forms, the experimenter carried out the social reinforcement manipulation. In the reward condition the subject was thanked in a pleasant tone of voice accompanied by direct eye contact and a smile. In the punishment condition the subject was not thanked, received minimal eye contact, abrupt conversation, and a cold or distant facial expression. The subject was then left alone to fill out a questionnaire about the experiment that included checks on the social reinforcement manipulation. Subjects indicated their degree of agreement on 3-point ratings of encouragement and need for approval. As can be seen in Table 1, the experimenter as more encouraging, F(1, 42) = 130.66, p < .001; felt more benefited by their own participation, F(1, 42) = 176.67, p < .001; attributed more benefit to the experimenter, F(1, 42) = 227.71, p < .001; believed they had learned more about their own personality traits, F(1, 42) = 146, p < .001; and indicated more interest in participating in future studies. F(1, 42) = 126.94, p < .001 (see Tabk 1).

In addition, on the scales assessing the subjects' perceptions of encouragement received from the experimenter and their perceptions of the benefits they obtained from the experiment, there were significant interactions between social response and need for approval, F(1, 42) = 6.54, p < .02, and F(1, 42) = 14.69, p < .001, respectively. As can be seen in Table 1, a similar pattern of results was obtained on the two measures. Simpler effects tests on ratings of encouragement from the experimenter showed that both high and low need-for-approval subjects perceived the experimenter as more encouraging in the reward than in the punishment condition, F(1, 42) = 94, p < .001, and F(1, 42) = 37.47, p < .001, respectively. However, in the reward condition high need-for-approval subjects perceived the experimenter as even more encouraging than did low need-for-approval subjects, F(1, 42) = 4.58, p < .05.

Likewise, both high and low need-for-approval subjects felt more benefited in the reward than in the punishment condition, F(1, 42) = 141.16, p < .001, and F(1, 42) = 22.65, p < .001, respectively, but in the punishment condition the high need-for-approval subjects felt even less benefited than did their low need-for-approval subjects.

TABLE 1 Mean Ratings on Questionnaire Items as a Function of Need for Approval and Social Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need for Approval</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reward</td>
<td>Punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimenter’s</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encouragement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit to</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experimenter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit to</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future experiments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personality traits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ratings of agreement were made on 5-point scales.
approval counterparts. F(1, 42) = 25.34, p < .001. Thus, on two measures—perceived encouragement by the experimenter and perceived benefits to the self—the social response manipulation had a stronger impact on high than on low need-for-approval subjects.

Help Given

The principal dependent measure in this study was whether or not subjects helped the confederate pick up the dropped books. A 2 x 2 x 2 (need for approval X social response X help given) design was analyzed according to the contingency procedures outlined by Winer (1962). This analysis revealed an overall effect of social response on helping: Those who were rewarded for helping were more likely to give subsequent help to the confederate than were those who had been punished (70.83% versus 36.36%, respectively), X^2 (1) = 5.51, p < .025. However, as predicted, this effect was qualified by a marginally significant interaction between social response and need for approval on helping, X^2 (1) = 3.02, p = .08. Table 2 illustrates that, as predicted, the high need subjects gave more help after receiving a social reward than after social punishment, X^2 (1) = 6.5, p < .02; whereas low need subjects were unaffected by the type of social response, X^2 (1) = 0, p < .9.

Finally, although high need subjects helped more than low need subjects in the reward conditions and less than the low need subjects in the punishment conditions, these differences were not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

The results support the hypothesis that the effects of social reinforcement on prosocial behavior are contingent on the individual's need for approval. High need-for-approval subjects were more likely to come to the aid of a person who had dropped books when an experimenter expressed appreciation for their help in an experiment than when she treated them rudely. In contrast, low need-for-approval subjects were equally likely to help the confederate pick up her books whether or not they had received approval from the experimenter. These findings suggest that the potential rewards of a helping situation depend on the needs and goals of the helper.

TABLE 2 Percentage of Subjects Who Helped as a Function of Need for Approval and Social Reinforcement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Need for Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reward</td>
<td>85.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punishment</td>
<td>21.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several factors may account for the difference between the helping behavior of the high and low need-for-approval subjects: the difference in the value they attach to social rewards, in their expectancies for those rewards, or in the emotional impact of the rewards.

Individual difference variables may result in different “subjective values of outcomes” (Mischel, 1977, p. 341). The social response received in one situation may change the estimated potential rewards in the next for both high and low need subjects. However, because the social response to their behavior is more important to the high than to the low need subjects, the same change in expectancies may lead the high need subjects to increase their helping behavior after a reward and to decrease it after punishment, whereas the low need subjects’ behavior remains unaffected.

Alternatively, individual differences may result in different “expectancies about outcomes” (Mischel, 1977, p. 341). In fact, high and low need-for-approval subjects differ in their perceptions of social response. Responses on two of the manipulation checks indicated that high need subjects experienced a greater impact of social response than did the low need subjects. The high need subjects felt more encouraged when rewarded and less benefited when punished than did the low need subjects. Because of their desire for social approbation, high need subjects may be more sensitive to approval and, consequently, more affected by it. In identical circumstances the low need subjects may simply perceive less variation in the social responses they receive than do the high need subjects.

Thus, high and low need subjects may differ in their assessments of previous rewards and their expectancies of future rewards for helping, or they may share expectancies of potential social rewards for helping but attach different value to them. Both of these explanations imply a somewhat rational model of cost and reward assessment of the gains of helping. A different explanation is based on the emotional impact of receiving social reward for helping. Previous research has shown that mood influences helping (Ishen & Levin, 1972). If the experimenter's behavior had a stronger effect on the mood of the high need subjects than on the mood of the low need subjects, their differential helping behavior in the reward and punishment conditions may have been a reflection of these moods.

One potential problem with this interpretation is that although positive mood has consistently been shown to increase helping (Ishen, 1970; Ishen & Levin, 1972; Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973), the effects of negative mood on helping have been more varied (Clark & Ishen, 1982). Although some studies have shown that negative mood leads to a decrease in helping (Moore et al., 1973; Underwood, Froming & Moore, 1977), some have shown that it leads to an increase (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Donnerstein, Donnerstein, & Munger, 1975; Regan, Williams, & Sparling, 1972), and other studies have found that negative mood has no effect on helping (Ishen, 1970; Rosenhan, Underwood, & Moore, 1974).
Thompson and his colleagues have reconciled these conflicting results to some extent by demonstrating that when the negative mood is induced through attention to someone else's misfortune, it tends to increase helping, whereas if the negative mood is induced by attention to one's own state, it is likely to decrease helping (Thompson, Cowan, & Rosenhan, 1980). Presumably, in the present study if the high need subjects were in a negative mood after being punished, the focus would be on themselves. Therefore, the differential helping of high need subjects in the reward versus the punishment conditions is consistent with a "mood" interpretation.

Satow's (1975) study raised questions about the relative importance of anticipated reward versus punishment in explaining differences in helping between high and low need-for-approval people. In the present study neither reward nor punishment alone was sufficient to account for these differences. Rather, it was the combination of reward and punishment that had an impact. This suggests that the high need subjects experience both a greater desire to obtain social approval and a greater desire to avoid disapproval than do the low need subjects.

This study illustrates the importance of considering the interactions between personality and situation in order to understand helping behavior (Blass, 1984a, 1984b; Monson, Hesley, & Chernik, 1982). When the data from this study are analyzed without regard for the subject's need for approval, the previous finding that social approval increases prosocial behavior is replicated. However, when the data are partitioned, a different pattern of results emerges for the high and low need-for-approval subjects. The effects of social response are limited to subjects who have a high need for approval. Previous studies that failed to take this factor into account may mislead us in overemphasizing the role of social approval as an incentive for helping. These findings caution us to be mindful of the diversity of motives for altruistic behavior and to attend to individual differences in the motives elicited by a given situation.

NOTES

1. The second author served as the experimenter.

2. Several statements were omitted from the inventory to prevent suspicion about the experimental procedures (e.g., "I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble.")

3. Because the Marlowe-Crowne scale was not scored until after the subject left, the experimenter was blind to the subject level of need-for-approval while dispensing the social reinforcement manipulation.

REFERENCES


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