

Empathy, Altruism, Morality, and Ethics of Care

Appendix

Katie Hope Grobman

CopernicanRevolution.org

Introduction

You're welcome to use Copernican Revolution activities and essays for your thesis and studies. Having information about scholarly aspects like psychometric data, activity design details, and norm calculations may help. The primary focus of my essays is connecting educated laypersons with psychology. To help people like you, with advanced academic interests, I add an appendix like this one with each activity. Just to be sure it will work for your purposes, please complete each activity yourself before using it with your students or in your classes.

When citing, please reference the activity essay:

<https://copernicanrevolution.org/cognitive-psychology/memory>

A preferred citation in APA style is:

Grobman, K. H. (2014). Essay/Activity Title. CopernicanRevolution.org

Fodder

How can a science of Psychology tell us something about morality? What is morality anyway? Is it our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or instinctive reactions? The psychological exploration of morality considers all of these possibilities and more. One prominent way we can understand morality is caring for others in our thoughts, feelings, and deeds. Within Developmental Psychology, a model based on feelings emerged in response to Lawrence Kohlberg's idea of morality as wrestling intellectually about competing interests. Carol Gilligan (1982) called her model an ***Ethics if Care*** and described Kohlberg's perspective as an ***Ethics of Justice***. You have two scores showing you the extent to which you used each of these ethics to answer a no-win moral dilemma. Within Social Psychology a broad empirical question was asked: why are we altruistic? ***Altruism*** means helping others even when there's nothing concrete to be gained for yourself. A prominent model is the ***Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis***. You have a score for altruism and several scores describing different kinds of empathy.

Ethics of Care

The first famous Psychological model of morality was Kohlberg's stages where we examine how people wrestle with complex, challenging situations to reason toward moral truth. It's exactly how you might expect a moral philosopher to consider morality - like Immanuel Kant. Jean Piaget built his model of developmental psychology on Kant's philosophy, including his ideas about the emergence of morality in children. Kohlberg built his model of children's development of moral on Piaget. But just because philosophers and developmental psychologists thought of morality as an intellectual task, that doesn't mean all people do. Indeed, one contentious feature of Kohlberg's stages was how some groups score a lower average stage than others. In the early studies, adolescent boys (stage 4) outperformed adolescent girls (stage 3). Are boys more morally sophisticated than girls? Or perhaps girls are more likely to consider morality in a different voice (Gilligan 1980). In particular, Carol Gilligan hypothesized boys and Kohlberg, and Piaget, and most of developmental psychology, were drawn mostly to an ***Ethics of Justice***. In contrast, perhaps women and girls are more drawn to an ***Ethics of Care***. Instead of being an intellectual exercise of fairness when reconciling competing rights, you might focus on everybody's feelings, try to avoid harm, and aim to help.

How much did you focus on fairness and justice when you considered the moral dilemma where your parents want you to do different things? How much did you focus on avoiding harm and caring? You have two scores from 0 (not at all) to 50 (considered) to 100 (very much a focus) for each "voice" in your head. For my Psychology students, the average ethics of justice is 70.97 (sd 14.27) and the average ethics of care is 69.86 (sd 14.24). For example, I scored 50 for ethics of justice so I considered fairness and 75 for ethics of care meaning I was more focused on caring, but not exclusively.

Altruism

Are you an organ donor? If so, why? You don't get anything out of it. Do you donate to charity? If so, why? You don't get anything out of it. Do you let people ahead of you in line? If so, why? You don't get anything out of it. Whether big or small acts, we call our choices to help others even when we get nothing tangible in return, ***altruism***. Psychological studies show we engage in altruism for many reasons. Some are circumstances. For example, we might help others because it helps us avoid awkward social situations or we might help somebody because they helped us and it's an expectation in society to 'pay back' favors (called the ***reciprocity norm***). There are also individual differences. Some people just help more often. You have a score from 0 (low) to 100 (high) for how often you do altruistic behaviors.

Most people score around 20 to 40 and people nominated by others as altruistic score about 60 to 80. In my classes, the average Psychology student scores 52.08 (sd 14.76). My score was 76.67.

Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis

What leads to individual differences in altruism, especially if there aren't circumstances evoking it? The empathy-altruism hypothesis is the recognition that empathy is among the best predictors of altruistic behavior, especially when other predictors are absent (like the absence of a reciprocity norm). In scientific studies within Psychology, empathy is usually defined with perspective taking. Various kinds of

empathy are distinguished with sub-scales, such as cognitive empathy (thinking what others think by considering their perspective), affective empathy (feeling what others feel), fantasy realism (internalizing from abstractions such as feeling like you're a character in a novel) and distress reaction (heightened anxiety to others being hurt). You completed the most well-established measure of these four kinds of empathy, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983). Here's a table showing his original dataset (adjusted to the same scale as the activity) and data from my students.

| Empathy Scales | Women (Texas 1980's) N=582 | Women (Calif 2000's) N=342 | Men (Texas 1980's) N=579 | Men (Calif 2000's) N=129 |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Empathy - Fantasy Realism | 66.96 (sd 18.46) | 66.56 (sd 17.54) | 56.18 (sd 20.00) | 62.02 (sd 14.64) |
| Empathy - Distress Reaction | 43.86 (sd 17.89) | 49.20 (sd 14.75) | 33.78 (sd 16.25) | 41.57 (sd 14.95) |
| Empathy - Cognitive Perspective | 64.14 (sd 17.32) | 67.41 (sd 15.38) | 59.93 (sd. 16.86) | 64.95 (sd 15.04) |
| Empathy - Affective Concern | 77.39 (sd 13.67) | 70.68 (sd 14.12) | 68.00 (sd 15.04) | 62.48 (sd 13.38) |

You can compare yourself to any of the samples by looking at the averages and standard deviations. If you add and subtract the standard deviation from the average, you'll get the range of the middle two-thirds of participants. For example, I scored 82 for fantasy realism. Roughly the middle two-thirds of women from Texas in the 1980's score 48 to 85 ($66.96 - 18.46$ to $66.96 + 18.46$). So I can tell I'm on the higher end of typical in comparison to this sample. My scores are all higher than average: 56 for distress reaction, 100 for cognitive perspective (yes, I answered every item at the extreme!), and 77 for affective concern. Generally speaking, women are higher in empathy for all four kinds compared with men.

The full spectrum of empathy is a scale I'm working on to be a more balanced version without strong correlations to impression management. The scores tend to be around 50.

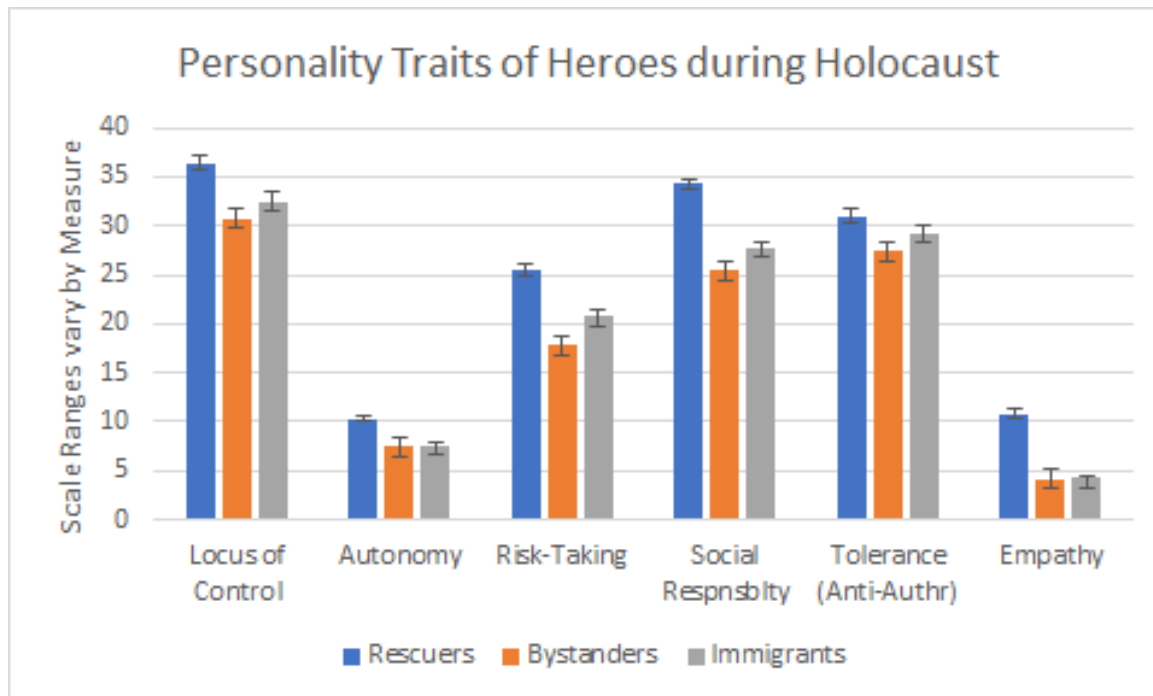
Empathy predicts altruism, such as volunteerism in adults (Unger & Thumhuri, 1997). Children from 2nd to 6th grade showed pro-social behavior was more common for those with higher affective concern and cognitive perspective (Litvack-Miller & McDougall, 1997).

Who Chooses to be a Hero?

No matter how bad things get, there are always redeemable examples. Look for the heroes. During the Nazi Holocaust, most people weren't Nazi's. Most people were bystanders, which makes sense given how likely you could end up being killed if you helped others. So who chose to be heroes? Who risked their lives to help people who looked different, acted different, or prayed differently? In 1991, using diaries of holocaust survivors, Midlarsky, Jones, & Corley (2005) identified and found 80 heroes who immigrated to the United States and were never interviewed about their experience. They also found comparison groups of bystanders and immigrants from similar regions. They interviewed them with various measures to find out how personality might distinguish the groups.

Rescuers had notably distinct personality profiles (see figure). Rescuers had a greater locus of control and greater sense of personal autonomy. That is, they believed they were independent people in control of their own destiny regardless of the choices others made. They were willing to take calculated risks. They believed everyone had a social responsibility to do good for the larger community and they were tolerant of people who are different (opposite of the F-scale). But of all the differences, the single

largest was - empathy.



Citation of first study for each underlying construct:

Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 113–126.

Liddell, D. L., Halpin, G., & Halpin, W. G. (1992). The measure of moral orientation: Measuring the ethics of care and justice. *Journal of College Student Development*, 33(4), 325-330

Rushton, J. P., Chrisjohn, R. D. & Fekken, G. C. (1981). The altruistic personality and the self-report altruism scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 2, 293-302.

Additional Information about Activity for Researchers:

The empathy scale is Davis's 28-item version of the IRI but on a 7-point Likert scale. The measure of altruism was adapted from Ruston's original scale but with fewer items, some different items, and a more precise frequency scale (still 5 point). The ethics of care versus

justice vignette was adapted from Liddell's dissertation; I chose this item since multiple subsequent papers include this vignette in short forms and it contains 4 items each for care and justice. To make interpreting the activity more intuitive for students, I did a linear transformation of each scale to range from 0 (low) to 100 (high). Please note, linear transformations do not impact standardized statistics like t-ratios, correlations, or p values.