

Impression formation of Utilitarian & Intuitive helping.

In this paper, we present results from several empirical studies on impression formation and decision making in helping situations.

Helping behavior is generally perceived as something very positive and two beneficial side-effects of helping are social rewards and reputation enhancement. However, not all types of helping give rise to the same positive attitudes. Some helping are perceived as morally “better” than others. As a result, people might change their moral decisions if they believe they are being observed.

As a starting point, we distinguish two aspects that potentially influence impressions of helpers. One is the *utilitarian aspect* and refers to the consequences of helping. For example, a helping act that saves four persons should from a utilitarian perspective be seen as twice as good as a helping act that saves two persons. Also, a charitable donation of 500 dollar should be seen as five times as good as a donation of 100 dollars. On the other hand we judge helping on several *intuitive aspects*. Examples of intuitive aspects are the motive and emotional state of the helper, the degree of personal sacrifice and inherent properties of the situations or the victims.

In Study 1, participants read short vignettes about hypothetical persons who commit acts of helping, and then judge their first impressions of these hypothetical persons. In each vignette, two aspects of the helping situation were manipulated factorially in a between-subject design. One aspect was always utilitarian (amount donated or number of victims saved) and the other was always intuitive (emotional reaction of the helper, personal sacrifice, degree of publicity, directness of help, equal distribution of help, proportional efficiency and whether the help was given to identified victims). As expected, impressions towards the helper were generally better predicted by the intuitive factors than the utilitarian factors.

Study 2 was run in three separate phases. We manipulated degree of publicity and asked participants to make choices in helping dilemmas (i.e. there are two groups of people in need, but only possible to rescue one). An *intuitive aspect* (help your boyfriend/girlfriend), a *utilitarian aspect* (help the many), and a *role responsibility-based aspect* (help the person you have a duty to help) was contrasted against each other. For some participants, the decisions were taken anonymously (private condition). Other participants believed that their answers would be analyzed and published on their Facebook-page for their friend to see (public condition).

The results suggest that when the intuitive aspect (help boyfriend/girlfriend) is contrasted against the role-responsibility aspect (help person you have a duty toward), publicity makes the relative weight of the intuitive aspect smaller. On the contrary, when the intuitive aspect is contrasted against the utilitarian aspect (help many persons), publicity makes the relative weight of the intuitive aspect slightly larger. Results from another phase show that people think that they and others are more likely to choose the intuitive choice (save boyfriend/girlfriend), but that they at the same time believe that the utilitarian choice is the morally correct one.