

DIMENSIONS OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

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In the day by day life most of us spend a lot of time and effort in order to help our peers. By various actions like: offering some information to a person, working as a team member, being close to a person that is in grief, donating goods or money for charity, we demonstrate solidarity to our peers.

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Despite different cultural models promoting individualism, I consider that forming and developing the prosocial behavior of pupils is a topical issue due to the fact that our society needs positive examples, and one of them is caring and helping the others.

In our attempt to offer a rigorous theoretical frame for the prosocial behavior we confronted the problem of defining the term more precisely; in the theoretical international works one can find at least four terms being close to what the prosocial behavior represents, and namely: mutual help, cooperation, altruism and pro-sociality. In some works these terms are used as synonyms for the prosocial behavior while in other works the same terms refer to different or complementary realities [3].

Today both the altruistic behavior, as well as the prosocial one, are the two terms that are most frequently used in the specialty work, however the tendency to use the prosocial term becomes quite strong. In some theoretical works the term of prosocial behavior was overlapped with the altruistic one. In conclusion we can say that when we refer to altruism in fact we refer to “the behavior in the benefit of the other without any external reward” (Macaulay și Berkowitz 1970), being “against personal interest” (Moscovici, 1994, 1998, Chelcea, S., 2004). Other authors (Knickerbocker, Roberta L., 2002) postulate the fact that when we refer to the prosocial behavior in fact we refer to an activity model, while altruism is the motivation to help others through pure consideration to their needs.

There is not any unanimous, generally accepted definition. In place of “prosocial behavior” there are proffered terms like “altruism” (Albrecht, Thomas and Chadwick), “AIDS behavior” (Doivido, Raven și Rubin, Saks și Krupat), “positive action” (Gergen,

Jutras).

The researches made up to these days paid less attention to the personality and behavior of those who call for help. I cannot say that we can speak about a special type of personality, however day by day observations point out a group of people more liable to call for help, while members of the other group thrive to solve their problems by themselves.

The aids behavior is a voluntary act made for the sake of other person.

- the behavioral acts to be made voluntarily;
- these acts should be made for the interest of other person;
- no reward should be expected.

However, our attempt to delineate the dimensions of the prosocial behavior precisely is limited by some difficulties related to identification of the motivation of a person involved in aids activities of his/her peers. The moment we identify the nature of this motivation, we will be able to define the nature of the prosocial behavior and altruism.

The altruistic behaviors represent a subcategory of the aids behaviors and refer to motivated acts of desire to make good to someone, without expecting any personal rewards. Also it is important to mention that while receiving aids some persons are more likely to thank the beneficent person while the others do not manifest the gratitude even verbally. In this sense Michael McCullough and his assistants (2002) speak about the “dispositional gratitude” as a constant of the personality [3].

In the psychological approach of the prosocial behavior considered by Septimiu Chelcea to be a quite recent process, there are reflections back from Antiquity. The stoic philosopher Seneca considered that we owe gratitude to the person that helped us even if the bad thing he made us afterwards is much bigger. In the work “*De beneficii*” he

wrote: “the reward for a good deed is for the intention of doing it” or “I am grateful not for the fact that it is helpful for me, but for I am pleased to be grateful” [1].

In one of the first published works about the prosocial behavior, Mussen and Eisenberg (1977) postulate that it refers to the actions focused on helping the others or for the benefit of others without any reward for the doer. These repeated actions of the organizer involve some costs, self sacrifice and even assuming certain risks. In some ways Baum, Fisher and Singer understand prosocial behaviors as actions that could have positive consequences for others without anticipating any reward.

In order to speak about a prosocial behavior at least two conditions should be fulfilled:

1. Intention to give help to other persons;
2. The freedom of behavioral choice (Hans Werner Bierhoff, 1980).

Other researchers consider three compulsory conditions:

1. Intention to help;
2. The behavioral act to be voluntary;
3. The person who does the behavioral act should not expect any external reward (V.J. Derloga, J. Grazelak, 1982).

Steps in the psychological researches of the prosocial behavior:

1. In the middle 60s the researches concentrated on the norms of responsibility and reciprocity;
2. At the beginning of the 80s the researches were oriented towards the appearing of the spectator and the facts inhibiting the aids behavior;
3. In the 90s the matters of when and why people give help were researched;
4. After 1990 the researches have been concentrated in the direction of clarifying the motivation of the prosocial behavior.

Janusy Reykowski defines the

prosocial behavior as “guidance, help, support; developing of the other persons without expecting any reward”. Or other authors as “action that does not bring benefit except to the one that receives help” [4].

Septimiu Chelcea defines the prosocial behavior as purposeful behavior done during off time and oriented to the support, conservation and promotion of the sociable values. In these definitions we see the necessary and sufficient conditions for the manifestation of the prosocial behavior:

1. Intention to help other persons;
2. Freedom of choice to give help;
3. Giving help out of professional obligations;
4. No reward expectation.

Not every behavior with positive consequences in axiological plan can be characterized as prosocial. It must be intentionally and consciously done.

Paul-Popescu Neveanu defines the prosocial behavior as a process of formation of your own personality according to certain examples and requirements and on the basis of some personal efforts.

Ioan Comănescu considers that in the wide sense the prosocial behavior represents the work with yourself, namely auto modeling of some intellectual capacities, some sentiments, attitudes and personality features.

Andrei Bărnă defines the prosocial behavior as attitude of the human being manifested with the objective to improve own personality.

Steliana Toma considers the prosocial behavior as the behavior that has an objective of self-engagement and making a personal effort for the benefit of others at its basis.

D. Allport in the *Structure and personality development* highlights the fact that “every human being is like all the others, is like others, like no other due to own behavior”.

Chedron and *Fleischman* (2006) suggest that the prosocial behaviors are voluntary acts that are aimed at helping or contributing to the benefit of other individual or a group of individuals and include things like: sharing, comforting, rescuing, and helping.

The term of prosocial behavior means positive actions for the benefit of

others, determined by empathy, moral values, and rather a sentiment of personal responsibility than a wish for personal benefit. Even if similarities exist between these two terms, in order to understand the essence of the prosocial behavior some authors delineate two categories of positive social behaviors:

- Prosocial behaviors that lead to mutual benefits for both parties involved in the process;
- Prosocial behaviors that lead to the benefit of one party only.

Dispe defines the prosocial behavior as the one with positive social consequences that contributes to the physical and psychic benefit of one person.

Eisenberg specifies that it is about committing some voluntary acts with the intention to make good to other person. The behaviors related to this category include: altruism, helping, attraction, intervention of the passer by, charity actions, cooperation, friendship, rescuing, sacrifice, sympathy and trust. It is important to mention that the determinant factor is the social perspective [5].

Starting from this classification there comes the dichotomy regarding the altruistic and non-altruistic motivation in the prosocial behavior of one person. In this way *Garaigordobii* (2005) understands the prosocial behavior as *the socially positive behavior realized for the benefit of others with or without altruistic motivation*. *Bar-Tal* (1982) sets the defining levels of the prosocial behavior and namely: intention, freedom of choice (not job obligation), done without any external reward.

Currently two categories of the prosocial behaviors are generally accepted in the specialized literature: *specific prosocial behavior* and *global prosocial behavior* (*Carlo și Randall*, 2001).

The specific prosocial behaviors refer to behaviors taking place in a specific situation, when the help is requested, while global prosocial behavior refers to altruistic prosocial behavior, complacent prosocial behavior, emotional prosocial behavior, as well as public or socially desirable prosocial behavior.

In the existing specialized literature the majority of the researchers include

the following actions into the prosocial behavior: *offering goods to others, helping, reacting emphatically to the situation the others face and cooperating*. (*Eisenberg, Cameron, Pastemack, Tryon*, 1988, *Caprara și colab.*, 2000; *Kerr, Beck, Shattuck, Kattar, Unburu*, 2003; *Diener, Kim*, 2004; *Scourfield, Bethan, Neilson, McGuffin*, 2004; *Hastings, McShane, Parker, Ladha*, 2007, *Moraes*, 2009). This last definition of the prosocial behavior is much more used because big difficulties were faced in establishing the intention behind the prosocial and specific behaviors. Not every behavior with positive consequences in the axiological plan can be characterized as being prosocial. It must be intentioned and done in a conscious way. Presence of the supporting intention of the social values is compulsory. If a person accidentally stays in front of a factory gate and by this fact frustrates a thief’s plan to steal goods out of this economic entity, this does not mean that he manifests a prosocial behavior, even if the consequence is quite positive. We could speak about a prosocial behavior of the respective person if he tried to prevent the theft by own presence. And this is not the only condition. That person wasn’t obliged to be at his working place, and it happened not during his working hours, and he did not expect any external reward (public greetings, prizes, orders or medals etc.)

S. Chelcea appreciates some behaviors as being very easy to identify as prosocial. Other behaviors need more thorough analysis and their including in the prosocial behavior category remains still a doubted issue. According to his opinion, similarly with the cases of the antisocial behaviors, the judgment at the end the behavioral act orients a person.

A major role in unleashing the prosocial behaviors is played by the sympathy towards the certain person. It modifies the perception of controllability of the causal factors. Sympathy is the cause that makes us provide assistance (in most cases) to the persons that seem like us and have personality features similar to ours.

S. Chelcea remarks that there are different models of assistance depending in the responsibility allocation in the situation requiring the prosocial behavior or the perception of responsibility to find

a solution.

According to Chelcea, **four models of assistance** were distinguished:

1) **Moral model** (in the case of high responsibility concerning both the situation and the search for solution);

2) **Illuminist model** (the one who finds himself in critical situation is responsible for the situation he is in, but he is not responsible or has an insignificant role in finding the solution to the crisis);

3) **Compensating model** (bated responsibility for the critical position in which you are, but big responsibility for solving the problem);

4) **Medical model** (the individual has small responsibility both for the problematic situation and for overcoming it).

The Romanian psycho-sociologist warns us that the four models of assistance are not only applied to the individual situations. They can be applied to large groups, even to some nations or countries.

The prosocial behavior is a learnt behavior. The exposure to the prosocial behavior increases the probability of human mutual help: the more we promote the social values through our behavior, the more we will influence others in the sense of manifesting prosocial behavior [6].

From the perspective of the social psychology the prosocial behavior refers to acting in the direction of the values promoted and accepted by the society. These are values that act implicitly or

explicitly at the level of one group or the society etc. When it is about the behavior and especially the prosocial behavior, the social psychology refers to the altruistic behavior, aids behavior, interpersonal attraction, friendship, etc.

Aids behavior is a side of the prosocial behavior because it is defined as an intentioned act, made for the sake of other person. Intention is a key element of the aids behavior. Also the altruistic behavior is considered to be a subcategory of the prosocial behavior. Both of them refer to positive actions aimed to other social actors without any personal rewards for these deeds, in other words in the social psychology, the altruistic behavior is a side of the prosocial behavior when help is provided by a person expecting no reward.

From the perspective of social psychology the negative behaviors can be defined as being opposite to the prosocial ones: engaging in approbating behaviors is not agreed with the group, society, etc.

Conclusions:

1. The prosocial behavior is a learnt behavior;
2. Exposure to the prosocial behaviors increases the probability of human mutual aid: the more we promote the social values trough our actions, the more we will influence the others in the sense of manifesting the prosocial behaviors;
3. Serge Moscovici (1994/1998) remarks that in a society based on competitiveness selfishness is considered to be

normal, while altruism a deviant behavior. The actions made without any interest, focused on benefiting the others or promoting any sacred ideals, for many seem to have selfish and hidden motivations.

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