



# Case Study-Influencing Factors of College Students' Prosocial Behavior

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**Abstract.** Prosocial behavior refers to a kind of behavior that accords with the social expectations and has no obvious benefit to the actor himself, but the actor gives benefits voluntarily to the recipient of the behavior. Generally, prosocial behavior could be divided into altruistic behavior and helping behavior. It is a symbol of social welfare and social responsibility. Meanwhile, prosocial behavior is the foundation of harmonious social development and construction. As the youth who shoulder the heavy responsibility of the era of national rejuvenation, college students are the main force in building a harmonious society. Thus, it is significant to research and analyze relevant information about the factors affecting their pro-social behavior. Bases on the case of college students saving lives, the author explores the pro-social behavior from different aspects, for example, the subjects who impose education, behavior motivation, decision making mode and the degree of internalization about the behavior. However, considering the limited resource and information at this this stage, we provide some recommendations to enhance the prosocial behavior of college students from the following aspects, for example, strengthen moral education, set a splendid example and value the reinforcement of peers.

**Keywords:** Prosocial behavior · Altruistic behavior · Psychological development · case study

## 1 Introduction

Prosocial behavior is a broad category that refers to a voluntary behavior by individuals which benefits others to promoting harmonious interpersonal relationships. According to Zeng et al. (2011) [1], prosocial behaviors is one of research focuses on psychology. College students have obvious weakening problems in altruistic behavior during the critical period of physical and mental development, but pro-social behavior is a significant factor of social stability and harmonious development, which could support individuals in getting out of difficulties when faced with some crisis. Therefore, the author believes that the research on the mechanism and contributing factors of prosocial behavior could improve social problems and the college students' ability to adapt to society. Based on the life-saving deeds of a student, this study analyzes the influencing factors behind her behavior.

In China's current "double first-class" construction of the background of the times, a deep understanding of the "first-class" connotation and characteristics of the construction of first-class universities has far-reaching significance and impact. In the report of the 18th Party Congress, it is proposed that the establishment of moral education is the fundamental task of education. How to effectively achieve this fundamental task is the core issue that the universities that are carrying out the construction work of first-class universities must seriously face. The article attempts to explore the value and significance of moral construction on the basis of the evaluation criteria of first-class universities, and discusses the influence and promotion of building a moral community on the common norms, professional ideals, inner motivation and team spirit of universities, so as to help establish the moral authority and academic authority of universities, and then realize the construction and development of first-class universities.

## 2 The Reason Why This Research Question is Important

Recently, most research have concentrates on the influencing factors of prosocial behaviors and these studies guide college students to strengthen their prosocial behaviors. Zhang (2018) [2] have claimed that prosocial behavior is an important part of social development in the growth of adolescents. However, the article explains the influencing factors of prosocial behavior from different perspectives. The author analyzes comprehensively whether these factors could be applied to the case of this study, and whether the development and cultivation of these behaviors could affect other students. Overall, the research would provide more abundant data for the follow-up research.

## 3 Research Methods

### 3.1 Introduction of the Case Study

The article used a combination of interview and observation methods to explore the prosocial behaviors and motivation to engage in the behaviors mentioned above of the interviewee based on existing theoretical research. According to the structure of interview, it could be divided into three types: structured interview, unstructured interview, and semi-structured interview. Interview is a kind of research conversation, which could help researcher obtains the first-hand information from the subject through oral conversation.

This study adopts semi-structured interview method to deeply interview and Chen (2000) [3] found that compared with other methods, the public could understand the implied social and cultural significance and core conceptions through the analysis of interviewees' behaviors and experience by semi-structured interview.

Y is a 21-year-old junior student, who studying nursing in a technical college. She encountered a terrible car accident on her way to work as an intern. The patient was seriously injured and needed urgent help. She was reported by Xinhua News Agency, People's daily, CCTV and other media for her professional operational skills and determination to save patient without hesitation. The altruistic behavior is a typical case of college students' pro-social behavior, which will play a positive role in enriching our cognition of the prosocial behaviors and analyzing its influencing factors.

### 3.2 Data Collection

This study mainly uses in-depth interviews and surveys to collect data and records in details through inquiries and conversations. The author conducted an informal interview with Y after the car accident happened but before the public media reporting. The author had a preliminary understanding of Y's growth and learning experience and made an inquiry of the patient, her counselor and classmates. In addition, the research team performed telephone interviews with Y, her parents and peers. The interviews were conducted around these factors that affect her growth and self-development, for example, the impact of society and family education, recognition of peers and the underlying social responsibility. The whole process lasted for about 60 min in total. As the attention of the event continued to raise, the last interview was conducted by face-to-face interviews with the interviewees mentioned above lasted about 60 min as well.

## 4 Factors Affecting College Students' Prosocial Behavior

Generally, the influencing factors of college students' prosocial behavior have focused on the relationship between family and college supporting systems and individual prosocial behavior in existing studies. Most evidence shows that parental support and investment and successful relationships in college could positively influence on adolescents' prosocial behavior, especially in the relationships between peers and counselors. Hence, depending on existing research, the article divides prosocial behavior into external factors, for example, education patterns of family and college, peers support and role model, and internal factors such as the motivation of decision making and internalization.

### 4.1 External Factors

#### 4.1.1 The Model of College Education

The college education has an outstanding contribution to the Chinese society. It undertakes the mission of training qualified builders and reliable successors of socialism. The author inquired Y about the most impressive events in her college. She mentioned that it is an ideal way to improve their ability from the Annual 5.12 International Nurses Day and Wellness Cultural Art Festival. Therefore, the college education should shoulder the responsibility of guiding the thoughts and behaviors of college students.

The author explains that the college education adopts the channel of the first and the second class. It carries out abundant activities to guide the daily behavior of the college students imperceptibly and encourages them to take part in various volunteer service activities actively. For example, the college strengthens students' sense of gratitude and dedication through the volunteer activities for epidemic prevention and control. The result of the above measures in college is to internalize the theory of prosocial behavior and externalize it into practice. Meanwhile, the education in college cultivates students' sense of gratitude and empathy and actively advocate altruistic and helpful behaviors of college students through moral education. The college propagandize the excellent deeds of helping others to college students through public media and encourage the students to participate in volunteer service activities in multiple ways to promote their pro-social behavior.

### 4.1.2 The Model of Family Education

The family education play an important role in the growth and personality improvement of college students. The interviewee Y is the single child whose parents have stable work experience. Based on the interview, the author realized that her parents attach importance to education issues and the atmosphere of family education is democratic. The formation of students' empathy ability could encourage young people to analyze problems from the perspective of others to help them when they fall on hard times. Consequently, the author concluded that parents pay attention to the cultivation of youths' empathy ability of perspective-taking could increase their prosocial behavior. However, some research on adolescence focuses on the positive predictive effect of college support but the influence of parents on students' psychological development and educational support is not significant. Attachment theory believe that the intimate relationships and interactions that an individual forms with early caregivers are internalized as the individual's "internal working pattern", which would produce an effect on their mental representation and behavioral pattern. According to attachment theory, the impact of family education on children gradually decreases as they grow up. The author understand that Y almost had no time to return home during college and had limited communication with her parents. The content of family education was relatively weak compared with her childhood. Nevertheless, the outstanding performance of Y's life-saving behavior occurred in college. Therefore, the author could reasonably speculate that adolescents' prosocial behavior comes from other aspects.

### 4.1.3 Peers Support

The intimacy relationship between individuals and peers increases steadily during adolescence. Favorable peer support could reduce the incidence of emotional and behavioral problem. The campus is an important place for daily life of college students. Individuals and their peers will influence each other in daily interactions. High levels of peer support encourage individuals to trust and accept their surroundings and others. Therefore, individuals would be more motivated to help other people who get in trouble and eventually lead to prosocial behaviors.

With the support and encouragement of her peers, Y participated in volunteer teaching activities in the remote and poor areas, which was widely recognized by the academy.

Through the interview with Y, the author realized that the creation of harmonious collective atmosphere and the support of peers play an important role in students' altruistic behavior, meanwhile, the college could improve the level of mental health of college students by cultivating and strengthening their prosocial behavior.

## 4.2 Internal Factors

### 4.2.1 Behavior Motivation and Decision-Making Model

The prosocial motivation theory considers the mechanism of individual motivation is complex and it is determined by the individual's value in altruistic behavior. To discuss whether motivation could be transformed into prosocial behavior, there are other

factors besides motivation source. In general, individuals would carry out the behavior mentioned above only when they evaluate their own ability. Latane and Darley (1970) proposed a decision-theoretic model for the process of prosocial behavior. They considered prosocial behavior is a process from acquiring cognition to implementing action. There are four steps for individuals to judge whether they need to carry out prosocial behavior, including attention to the event of prosocial behavior, judgment of emergency, closeness of the event to the individual and the choice of intervention behavior. The psychologist Eisenberg (1987) [4] put forward the theory of prosocial behavior, which is resemble the Latane theoretical model. The author reviewed the whole process of Y's prosocial behavior and concluded that the sense of responsibility drives the individual examine the patients' physical conditions. The implementation of prosocial behavior fully verifies the motivation and decision model theory.

#### 4.2.2 Behavioral Learning and Internalization Degree

Bandura (1977) [5] presented in the social learning theory that the factors restricting the prosocial behavior of individuals are mainly social factors. Psychologists Peck and Morgan (1978) [6] believed that individuals could improve the moral sense of prosocial behavior through a well-designed learning process and the main learning methods covered classical and operant conditioning, observational learning, and reinforcement learning. Psychoanalytic theory hold that the concept of self-identity has a significant impact on the understanding of prosocial behavior, and the cognitive process plays an important role in the occurrence of behavior. Cognition is a learning process, which plays an important role in the implementation of behavior. According to Bandura (1986) [7], the degree of individual socialization is the foundation of prosocial behavior through learning and imitating moral behaviors. The college set up moral education courses which would enhance her understanding of prosocial behavior. The theory mentioned above provides a reasonable explanation for Y's saving behavior in an emergency.

## 5 Conclusion

In sum up, the factors influencing prosocial behaviors mainly include college education mode, family education model, peer support and the degree of behavioral learning and internalization. Compared with other factors, the effect of immediacy of family education mode on prosocial behavior of college students is not significant. In addition, all elements are interrelated and influence each other. Therefore, the author recommend that parents should be strengthened in childhood education and the quality of moral education should be promoted by college to create a better atmosphere of peer support. Above all, individuals should internalize their prosocial thoughts and enhance their prosocial behaviors through observation, imitation and reinforcement, which make them has the ability to utilize pro-social decisions to enhance the prosocial behaviors of college students.

The new era of university moral education has problems such as asymmetrical development of moral and intellectual education, deficiency of moral subjects and compartmentalization of education space, etc. It is necessary to clarify the impact of instrumental education on substantive education in the process of moral education. The construction of

university moral education in the new era can be carried out in the following three aspects: firstly, to reconstruct the value of university moral education in the new era, “replanting” the duality of physical and instrumental values; secondly, to shape the responsibility of university moral education in the new era, actively responding to the requirements of moral education objectives of the triple responsibility objects, such as the management system, university students and society; thirdly, to maintain a practical reflection on university moral education in the new era, striving to strike a balance between the individuality and sociality of students in the new era. The third is to maintain a practical reflection on moral education in the new era, aiming to cultivate “moral people” with conscience, discipline and love in a balanced education of students’ individuality and sociality.

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