

The Influence of Different Benefactors on Beneficiary Reciprocity

Shueh-Chin Ting

Professor, Department of Education, National University of Tainan, Taiwan

Abstract

Past research on gratitude showed the intense relationship between gratitude and reciprocity, but it is uncertain whether different benefactors (friends and parents) lead to different results. Hence, this study treats university students as the subjects and probes into differences among university students' direct reciprocity resulting from the same assistance from friends and parents. This study conducts a *t* test on empirical data and finds that university students tend to show direct reciprocity after being assisted by friends in comparison to parents.

Keywords: benefactor, beneficiary, friend, gratitude, parent, reciprocity.

Introduction

After strong economic growth in Taiwan and in comparison to its past agricultural society, mammonism has emerged, life has become more fast-paced, interpersonal interaction has fallen, and people's care and trust have decreased. Disputes and conflicts among people have increased because they tend to be concerned about personal profits. Harmony in society is negatively influenced. Schools are no exception. For university students, their interpersonal conflicts have risen, tolerance has fallen, and selfish departmentalism has been enhanced. This study suggests that it is necessary to ponder a solution to this critical social and school problem. After reorganizing academic research on gratitude, this study realizes that gratitude brings about multi-dimensional benefits. For instance, when grateful people are assisted, it leads to their altruistic behavior even though such behavior requires time or cost (Bartlett, Condon, Cruz, Baumann, & Desteno, 2012). Grateful people possess a healthy state, subjective well-being (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), psychological well-being (Lin, 2015), and others' social support (Lin, 2016). According to Emmons and McCullough (2003), in comparison to participants who wrote about disputes every day or suggested that they are luckier than others, those who wrote about things of gratitude every day for two weeks provided more emotional support to others and

concrete assistance to others. Thus, gratitude in our society is a concept that should be promoted, as it can foster harmonious development of society.

Questions

Although past research demonstrated that gratitude results in reciprocity (Dewani, Sinha, & Mathur, 2016), when benefactors are different, a question arises that has not been answered: Is the degree of beneficiary reciprocity different?. According to people's realistic daily lives, it seems that they respond more to friends' assistance instead of that of their parents. This is an interesting issue and the motivation for this study. Based on above research motives, we present the question of this study as follows. Whether beneficiary show the same direct reciprocity towards the same favor from different benefactors (e.g., parents and friends).

Development of hypotheses

Helping motivation influences gratitude. Weinstein, DeHaan, and Ryan (2010) studied introjected motivation and autonomous motivation. With introjected motivation, the assistance is provided under social pressure, as when assistance is not provided, people will be blamed and feel guilty. However, with autonomous motivation, the favor is not under social norms and is voluntary. The research found, a favor under autonomous motivation, in comparison to that under introjected motivation, tends to result in gratitude. Based on the above, this study infers that parents' care for their children is a social norm and thus favors of a social norm are taken for granted. Conversely, friends' favors are not a social norm. As assistance in a social norm results in lower gratitude, university students' gratitude toward their parents' favors is lower than that to their friends' assistance.

Oxford English Dictionary defines gratitude as having a grateful characteristic and state, and it results in people's kind and positive reciprocity (Simpson, 2009). The reason that gratitude can measure moral behavior is that, after beneficiaries obtain favor from benefactors, they develop motivation and behavior of reciprocity, which is moral behavior related to gratitude (Haidt, 2001). Blau's (1964) social exchange theory argues that social exchange is a voluntary action of reciprocity. People maintain and enhance connection by reciprocity, and hence grateful beneficiaries help benefactors. According to Bartlett and DeSteno (2006), participants who are grateful to benefactors, in comparison to those who are not, make more efforts to help benefactors, which is the concept of reciprocity.

Based on the above, when friends and parents offer the same favor to university students, university students' gratitude to friends is more significant than that to parents. In addition, past research has demonstrated that gratitude results in reciprocity. Therefore, this study infers that since university students are more grateful to friends' assistance, it tends to result in reciprocity. On the contrary, they treat parents' assistance as a social norm, and thus it is more difficult to lead to gratitude and then less reciprocity. Hence, this study proposes H1.

H1: Under the same favor, university students' reciprocity to friends is more significant than that to their parents.

Research method and research results

This study randomly distributed a total of 500 questionnaires to university students in Tainan, Kaohsiung, and Pingtung and retrieved 472 questionnaires. After eliminating questionnaires with incomplete responses, this study obtained 460 valid ones. Table 1 lists the sample distribution. This study designs two experimental scripts. In script A, parents are benefactors, while in script B, friends are benefactors. After subjects read the experimental script, they were invited to fill in the questionnaire about reciprocity. Among 460 valid questionnaires in this study, 230 subjects had read script A (50%) and 230 had read script B (50%).

Table 1. Research samples (N=460): care of hospitalization

	Category	Number of subjects	Percentage
Grade	Freshman	74	16.1
	Sophomore	86	18.7
	Junior	98	21.3
	Senior	73	15.9
	Master program	108	23.5
	Doctoral program	21	4.6
Gender	Male	232	50.4
	Female	228	49.6
Age	Less than 20 years old	92	20.0
	20~less than 25 years old	241	52.4
	25~less than 30 years old	17	3.7
	30~less than 40 years old	36	7.8
	40 years old and above	74	16.1
How many brothers and sisters do you have (including yourself)	1	133	28.9
	2	168	36.5
	3	112	24.3
	4 and above	47	10.2
College	Humanities	47	10.2
	Law	41	8.9
	Commerce	83	18.0
	Medicine	34	7.4
	Agriculture	38	8.3
	Engineering	71	15.4
	Science	43	9.3
	Education	60	13.0
	Others	43	9.3
Financial source	Totally from the family	94	20.4
	Mostly from the family	110	23.9

Half from the family and half from myself	58	12.6
Mostly from myself	86	18.7
Totally from myself	108	23.5
Others	4	.9

Before showing the content of the experimental script, this study indicated “please read the following scenario three times and then respond to the following question” in order to allow university students who participated in the experiment to be involved in the scenario. The first group of university students (subjects of script A) read the experimental script in which parents took care of the subjects in a hospital. The second group of university students (subjects of script B) read the experimental script in which friends took care of the subjects in a hospital. After reading three times, these university students were invited to respond to the questionnaire on reciprocity to parents (subjects of script A) or friends (subjects of script B). The study measured subjects’ intention toward reciprocity on a 10-point scale and a semantic difference scale. It questioned the subjects about after receiving a favor from parents or friends, what was their intention of reciprocity to their parents or those friends? Experimental scripts (script A and script B) and the questionnaire of reciprocity are shown in appendix.

After retrieving the questionnaires, through the independent sample *t* test, this study attempts to find if the two groups of university students show significant differences of reciprocity in returning a favor from parents and friends. When there is a significant difference, we observe the mean of each group to recognize more significant reciprocity to a favor from parents or friends. The test result is shown in Table 2, as elaborated below.

We first attempt to find if the variances of reciprocity of the two groups are the same. According to the Levene test result, the *F* value is .115 and significance level is .734, but it does not meet the significance level $p < .05$. It matches hypothesis of homogeneous variance. For the row with equal variance in Table 2, the *t* value is -20.749, the degree of freedom is 458, and the *p* value is .000, which is lower than .05. Thus, it meets the significance level $p < .05$. Furthermore, for the mean of reciprocity of the two groups (Table 3), it is 6.50 in the group that receives a favor from parents and 8.29 in the group that receives a favor from friends. In other words, with the same favor from friends and parents, university students’ reciprocity to friends is more significant than that to parents. Therefore, H1 “With the same favor, university students’ reciprocity to friends is more significant than that to parents” is empirically supported by this study.

Table 2. Difference test of reciprocity in the two experimental scripts: care of hospitalization

	Levene test of equal variance		t test of equal mean			
	F	Significance	t	Degrees of freedom	Significance (two-tailed)	Difference of mean
With equal variance	.115	.734	-20.749	458	.000	-1.791
Without equal variance			-20.749	452.922	.000	-1.791

Table 3. Means of reciprocity in the two experimental scripts: care of hospitalization

	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean of standard error
Reciprocity	Parents	230	6.50	.875	.058
	Friends	230	8.29	.974	.064

Conclusions

Favor is the essential condition to result in gratitude. Although relationship between gratitude and reciprocity has been demonstrated in past research, when benefactors are different, are reciprocity effects different? This study helps fill in the gap in the literature, by comparing friends with parents of university students and realizes that with the same favor from friends and parents, university students' reciprocity to friends is more significant than that to parents. Thus, the identity of benefactors shows an effect on beneficiary reciprocity. The findings of this study can provide a reasonable explanation for the current state of society that children are indifferent to parents' devotion, yet are more sensitive to friends' contribution.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for practice

This study realizes that university students' reciprocity to friends is more significant than that to parents, which is consistent with modern parents' complaints. University students tend to be indifferent to parents' favors, but generally speaking, they show more positive reaction to friends' assistance. This study is supported statistically. Therefore, it is the phenomenon shown by most of children. Hence, this study suggests that parents should be relaxed, accept this general phenomenon, and be prepared in order to accept their children's low reciprocity.

2. Suggestions for follow-up research

According to this study, with the same favor, university students' reciprocity to friends is more

significant than that to parents. However, this study is a cross-sectional research and inquires about the intention of reciprocity at the time of receiving the favor. However, if the time of reciprocity can be extended to study long-term reciprocity intention, then the answers might not be the same. As to long-term reciprocity intention, parents' favor can be more significant. In this study, reciprocity refers to short-term reciprocity intention. Hence, friends' favor is more significant. This study argues that university students are with their parents for the long term, and thus reciprocity is unnecessary for the short term, which can be a reasonable explanation.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan for the financial support (MOST 106-2410-H-024-012-SSS).

References

- Bartlett, M. Y., Condon, P., Cruz, J., Baumann, J., & Desteno, D. (2012). Gratitude: Prompting behaviours that build relationships. *Cognition and Emotion*, 26(1), 2-13. doi: 10.1080/02699931.2011.561297
- Bartlett, M. Y., & DeSteno, D. (2006). Gratitude and prosocial behavior: Helping when it costs you. *Psychological Science*, 17(4), 319-325. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01705.x
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Dewani, P. P., Sinha, P. K., & Mathur, S. (2016). Role of gratitude and obligation in long term customer relationships. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 31, 143-156. doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.01.005
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377-389. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.84.2.377
- Emmons, R. A., & Shelton, C. M. (2002). Gratitude and the science of positive psychology. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *The handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 459-471). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review*, 108(4), 814-834. doi: 10.1037//0033-295X.108.4.814
- Lin, C. C. (2015). Gratitude and depression in young adults: The mediating role of self-esteem and well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 87, 30-34. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2015.07.017
- Lin, C. C. (2016). The roles of social support and coping style in the relationship between gratitude and well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 89, 13-18. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2015.09.032
- Simpson, J. (2009). *The Oxford English dictionary* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Weinstein, N., DeHaan, C. R., & Ryan, R. M. (2010). Attributing autonomous versus introjected motivation to helpers and the recipient experience: Effects on gratitude, attitudes, and well-being. *Motivation and Emotion*, 34(4), 418-431. doi: 10.1007/s11031-010-9183-8

Appendix

Script A

Hi,

This is an academic research questionnaire that investigates university students, explores the issue related to gratitude, and analyzes your valuable data provided in order to contribute to education. Your personal responses will be kept confidential, and please feel free to answer the questions as best as possible.

The responses to the following questions are based on your personal situations. There are no correct answers, and honesty matters. Finally, thank you for your precious opinions.

Sincerely,

Professor Shueh-Chin Ting, Department of Education, National University of Tainan

I. Respondents' basic information

1. Grade: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior
 Master program Doctoral program
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Age: Less than 20 years old 20~less than 25 years old
 25~less than 30 years old 30~less than 40 years old
 40 years old and above
4. How many brothers and sisters do you have (including yourself)? 1 2
 3 4 and above
5. College: Humanities Law Commerce Medicine
 Agriculture Engineering Science Education Others
6. Financial source: Totally from the family Mostly from the family
 Half from the family and half from myself Mostly from myself
 Totally from myself Others

Please read the following scenario three times and then respond to the following question.

Scenario of script A:

My body has been in a healthy state and I rarely catch a cold. Perhaps it was the reason that I was careless about my body. Several days ago, I visited one scenic park and freely enjoyed the food and drinks at noon. However, after 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I got a stomachache and immediately returned to my rent house. After I returned to my rent house, I suffered from vomiting, diarrhea, and spasms. I called my parents who immediately stopped their work to drive me to the hospital emergency room. The physician diagnosed my situation. With the result, the physician suggested hospitalization. Since I was weak, the physician reminded me to be careful when getting out of the bed to go to the toilet to avoid falling. Since there was temporarily no available hospital bed, that night we stayed in the emergency room. My parents accompanied me on the chair. After noon of the next day, I was transferred to the general ward. I stayed in the general ward for three days and when I had approximately recovered, they left the hospital with me. Over those four days, my parents took care of me and helped me get on and off the bed without complaints.

Regarding your hospitalization, there is the following question to ask you. There is no correct answer, and you only have to respond to the question honestly. After receiving your parents' favor, do you have the intention of reciprocity to them now? What is the degree of reciprocity intention now? From 1 to 10, based on your reciprocity intention to your parents now, please circle one of the following numbers.

Extremely low 1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10 Extremely high

Script B

Hi,

This is an academic research questionnaire that investigates university students, explores the issue related to gratitude, and analyzes your valuable data provided in order to contribute to education. Your personal responses will be kept confidential, and please feel free to answer the questions as best as possible.

The responses to the following questions are based on your personal situations. There are no correct answers, and honesty matters. Finally, thank you for your precious opinions.

Sincerely,

Professor Shueh-Chin Ting, Department of Education, National University of Tainan

I. Respondents' basic information

1. Grade: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior
 Master program Doctoral program
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Age: Less than 20 years old 20~less than 25 years old
 25~less than 30 years old 30~less than 40 years old
 40 years old and above
4. How many brothers and sisters do you have (including yourself)? 1 2
 3 4 and above
5. College: Humanities Law Commerce Medicine
 Agriculture Engineering Science Education Others
6. Financial source: Totally from the family Mostly from the family
 Half from the family and half from myself Mostly from myself
 Totally from myself Others

Please read the following scenario three times and then respond to the following question.

Scenario of script B:

My body has been in a healthy state and I rarely catch a cold. Perhaps it was the reason that I was careless about my body. Several days ago, I visited one scenic park and freely enjoyed the food and drinks at noon. However, after 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I got a stomachache and immediately returned to my rent house. After I returned to my rent house, I suffered from vomiting, diarrhea, and spasms. I called my two friends who immediately stopped their work to drive me to the hospital emergency room. The physician diagnosed my situation. With the result, the physician suggested hospitalization. Since I was weak, the physician reminded me to be careful when getting out of the bed to go to the toilet to avoid falling. Since there was temporarily no available hospital bed, that night we stayed in the emergency room. My two friends accompanied me on the chair. After noon of the next day, I was transferred to the general ward. I stayed in the general ward for three days and when I had approximately recovered, they left the hospital with me. Over those four days, my two friends took care of me and helped me get on and off the bed without complaints.

Regarding your hospitalization, there is the following question to ask you. There is no correct answer, and you only have to respond to the question honestly. After receiving your two friends'

favor, do you have the intention of reciprocity to them now? What is the degree of reciprocity intention now? From 1 to 10, based on your reciprocity intention to your two friends now, please circle one of the following numbers.

Extremely low 1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10 Extremely high