Western Research Forum Abstract

Title: In search of the "prosocial personality": Disentangling empathy, compassion, and altruism

Background: Although considerable research has examined situational factors in prosocial behaviour, prosocial traits are poorly defined. The same labels are applied to different constructs, and different labels are applied to the same construct (e.g., "empathy," "sympathy," "compassion"). Furthermore, trait altruism lacks both a solid theoretical definition and adequate measures. The goal of this study is to semantically and statistically distinguish between prosocial constructs by developing a personality scale assessing prosocial tendencies.

Method: A review of literature, drawing from various domains, revealed three constructs that may comprise prosocial personality: empathy (recognizing, understanding, and sharing in others' emotions), compassion (expressing concern for others, seeking to alleviate their suffering), and altruism (selflessly giving/helping). Conceptual definitions of each construct guided item generation, and expert raters evaluated these items prior to administration. The sample will be approximately 300 students.

Planned Analyses: For construct validation, the scale will be compared with other measures of empathy, compassion, altruism, as well as measures of alexithymia, gratitude, and self-compassion. Exploratory factor analysis will examine the underlying factor structure of the items, and items with poor psychometric properties will be discarded. Although it is expected that a three-factor structure will emerge, other factor solutions will be considered. The final scale will be approximately 30 items (10 per subscale).

Conclusion: Besides disentangling these constructs, the scale will also provide theoretical contrast to the Dark Triad/Tetrad. Future studies will attempt to replicate the factor structure of the scale and examine whether empathy, compassion, and altruism differentially predict prosocial behaviour.