Perceived Stigma, Social Identity, and Group Norms as Predictors of Prosocial Giving in a Fandom

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ABSTRACT

People engage in helping behavior for a variety of reasons. Currently unstudied, however, is the role that group stigmatization may play in motivating this helping behavior. Increased perceptions or feelings of stigma have been shown to increase identification with one’s group identity through the rejection-identification model. Other research shows that group identification is associated with greater adherence to group norms, specifically, injunctive norms. If a group’s norms are prosocial ones, it therefore follows that group stigma should be associated with prosocial behavior. The authors propose and test this model in this article relating to the perceived stigma to prosocial behavior in a rarely-studied, highly-stigmatized fan community with strong prosocial norms: fans of My Little Pony. Serial mediation analysis supports this model. Implications and directions for future research in light of these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Charity, Fan Community, Fan Studies, Giving, Helping, Injunctive, My Little Pony, Norms, Prosocial, Rejection-Identification, Social Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Princess Celestia,
Sometimes you can feel like what you have to offer is too little to make a difference, but today, I learned that everypony’s contribution is important, no matter how small.
- Fluttershy, My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic

The question of why people help others at personal cost has been posed by laypersons and scholars alike. Philanthropists may argue that people help because they have an intrinsic motivation to do good and feel good doing it. Misanthropists, in contrast, may argue that all prosocial behavior is driven by selfish or self-serving desires, such as making oneself appear admirable to others. Psychologists have similarly grappled with the question of what motivates helping behavior. Research on the subject has tended to explain prosocial behavior through altruism—giving with no regard for the cost (Batson & Powell, 2003) —or through egoism—meeting some psychological need (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) or providing a monetary incentive (Ariely, Bracha, & Meier, 2009). In the present study, we propose a relatively novel underlying cause for helping behavior: stigma. We test a model where helping behavior is the product of the groups we belong to, their perceived norms, and perceived stigmatization toward those groups (see Figure 1). Since prior research has shown that stigma increases group identification (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Mock, Plante, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2013) and that group identification is associated with group norm-consistent behavior (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), we predict that when members of a group with prosocial norms perceive stigma toward their group, they should be more likely to engage in helping behavior.

We begin by reviewing the literatures on stigma, group identification, and group norms on helping behavior, which collectively form the foundation of our model. We

Figure 1. Proposed model of perceived stigma predicting charitable giving through the influence of fandom identification and injunctive norms
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