

LAY THEORIES OF PERSONALITY AND HELPING AMONG CHINESE UNDERGRADUATES

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In all agencies, lay beliefs of a person are closely related to frequency, tendency and quality of prosocial behaviors. Potential helpers who hold an incremental theory of personality (belief that a person's attributes are malleable), will be more willing to help socially stigmatized groups than those who hold an entity theory of personality (belief that a person's attributes are fixed (Karafantis & Levy, 2004; West, 2003). Based on this recent evidence, we examined the relationship between lay theories of personality and helping in a Chinese population.

Three hundred and sixteen participants (116 men, 200 women, aged 19-24) were recruited from three universities of Hebei province in China. Data were collected in two phases across a week interval. In the first phase of the study, participants completed measures of lay theories of personality, agreeableness and empathy. Lay theories of personality were assessed by the Measure of Implicit Theory of Personality (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995), which consists of three items and uses a 6-point Likert scale format. Cronbach's alpha for the three items in the present study was .71. Agreeableness was measured by the Agreeableness dimension of the Chinese Version NEO-PI (Leung, 1997), which showed good validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha for this dimension was .74 in the present study. Empathy was measured by the Chinese Empathy Scale (Chen, 2007), Cronbach's alpha for the whole empathy scale reached .87 in the present study.

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In the second phase, participants answered some questions concerning whether they participated in various volunteer activities – and if they did, for how long, – the type of voluntary activities (autonomy vs. dependency oriented help) they preferred to participate in, and former experience as volunteers.

Using the midpoint of the lay theories of personality measure as the cutoff, we divided the participants into entity theorists (169) and incremental theorists (144). No differences were found between the two groups in terms of whether they participated in voluntary activities, $\chi^2(1, 313) = 1.12, p > .05$, and the amount of time they contributed to these activities, $t(313) = 1.483, p > .05$.

However, the two groups differed in their preferred types of voluntary activities. More incremental theorists chose autonomy-oriented helping (88) than dependency-oriented helping (29), $\chi^2(1, 117) = 29.752, p < .000$, and about the same number of entity theorists (67) chose autonomy-oriented as chose dependency-oriented helping (62), $\chi^2(1, 129) = .194, p > .05$. Results also showed that agreeableness, empathy, and experience as volunteers did not mediate the relationship between lay theories of personality and helping type.

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