

SELF-ESTEEM AND SHARING IN FOURTH-GRADE CHILDREN

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Sixty-four fourth-grade children were given 20 tokens for drawing a picture. They then had the option of donating any or all of the tokens to either "needy children" or for "a class prize." Any remaining tokens could be exchanged for various prizes. The teacher of each child completed the Coopers-Smith Behavior Rating Form measure of self-esteem. Sharing with needy children was positively correlated with self-esteem while the children's retaining tokens for themselves was negatively correlated with self-esteem. Thus, generosity may be related to self-esteem in situations where an individual does not directly profit from the situation.

Children's moods can affect their willingness to share with others. Moore *et al.* (1973) found that children who were told to think about happy things were more likely to share money than children who had not experienced positive affect.

Similarly, one's success experiences can affect generosity. In accord with the "warm glow of success" hypothesis, investigators (Berkowitz and Conner, 1966; Isen, 1970; Isen *et al.*, 1973) found that subjects who experienced success were more likely to donate money or help a confederate than were controls who had not experienced as much success.

There is some evidence, then, that children who are in a good mood or who have experienced success at a task are more likely to share. The question of concern in this study is whether the "good mood" and "warm glow of success" situational findings can be generalized to an individual differences approach. Logically, children who are high in self-esteem have had more success experiences and are likely to be in a better mood (reflecting their outlook towards themselves in relationship to life) than children low in self-esteem. If this is indeed so, then children's self-esteem should be positively correlated to their willingness to share with others. The purpose of this study, then, was to investigate the possibility that those children who are higher in self-esteem are more likely to share.

METHOD

SUBJECTS

The subjects were 64 fourth-grade children from three elementary classes in San Marcos, Texas. Thirty-five of the children were girls, and 29 were boys. The socioeconomic class and ethnic status of the children were varied.

PROCEDURE

The children, seen individually, were asked to draw themselves on a sheet of paper picturing other children. After the children finished this, they were given 20 tokens for drawing the picture and told that they must decide what to

do with them. Two glass jars, each containing 15 tokens, were brought to their attention. One jar was labeled "Class" while the second jar was labeled "Give and Share." The children were told that any tokens they put in the "Class" jar would be used to buy a nice gift for everyone in the class. Tokens donated to the "Give and Share" jar would help poor children whose parents did not have much money to buy them things.

In addition, the children were shown a number of prizes for which they could exchange their tokens. The prizes ranged from very cheap prizes, for example, a pencil costing one token, to more expensive prizes such as a piggy bank costing 10 tokens. The variety of prizes available to the children ensured that the sharing situation was meaningful, that the children who shared would be giving up something of value to them.

The teacher of each child completed the Coopersmith Behavior Rating Form (Coopersmith, 1967) measure of self-esteem. This scale is composed of ten items, each of which is rated on a five-point scale ranging from always to never.

RESULTS

Pearson product-moment coefficients of correlation were computed to examine the relationship between sharing and self-esteem. Self-esteem was significantly positively correlated with sharing with needy children ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$) and significantly negatively correlated with the number of tokens the children kept for themselves ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.05$). The correlation between self-esteem and sharing with the class did not reach significance ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.25$).

DISCUSSION

Some support was found for the hypothesized relationship between self-esteem and sharing. Self-esteem was significantly positively correlated with sharing with needy children and negatively correlated with the children's retaining tokens for themselves. However, self-esteem was not significantly related to sharing with the class.

A possible interpretation of these data is that sharing with one's class is not a very altruistic measure of sharing since the child might expect to enjoy, along with classmates, the nice prize bought for the class. However, sharing with needy children is a more self-sacrificing event because the child does not benefit or gain from this action. This behavior is more similar to measures of generosity used in the "good mood" and "warm glow of success" studies (Berkowitz and Conner, 1966; Isen, 1970; Isen *et al.*, 1973; Moore *et al.*, 1973).

Thus, the results of this study provided evidence which demonstrated that generosity may be related to self-esteem in situations where an individual does not directly profit from sharing activity. Children judged high in self-esteem may exhibit more prosocial sharing behavior than children lacking this attribute.

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