

ORAL EXAMINATION

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF SELF-SACRIFICING PROSOCIALITY IN INTRAGROUP AND INTERGROUP CONTEXTS

DASHALINI D/O P KATNA, PSYCHOLOGY

Abstract

Parochial cooperation theories assume that individuals willingly undertake costly personal sacrifice to benefit kin and non-kin others in their group. Strongly committed members primarily desire and seek to achieve outcomes which enhance ingroup welfare, and consequently become prepared to bear extreme costs to themselves. This altruism to help, however, does not always extend into intergroup contexts and instead, the motivation to harm outgroups may surpass the motivation to enhance the ingroup's welfare. Countering the assertion to create simultaneous, maximal differentiation between one's ingroup and the outgroup, are observations from hypothetical, laboratory-based simulations and real-world contexts where dedicated members exhibit high self-sacrificial readiness to aggress against outgroups without clear and direct ingroup-favouring benefit and/or personal gain. This occurrence challenges the principal premise of parochial cooperation accounts in which not all deeply committed members may prioritize outcomes of ingroup well-being over outgroup harm. There has been limited research investigating this dilemma on why members who are strongly committed to their ingroup would decide to relinquish their individual well-being and undertake costly self-sacrifices that harm the outgroup, as opposed to solely striving to benefit their ingroup. Identifying personal and situational interactions that motivate the positive relationship between self-sacrificing prosociality toward one's ingroup and aggression directed toward the outgroup, would elucidate the decision-making processes of highly committed members who choose to self-sacrifice in intra- and intergroup contexts. The central hypothesis of this thesis predicted that individuals with strong self-sacrificing prosociality towards the ingroup would be most likely to anticipate hostility from the outgroup and in consequence, would retaliate aggressively against the outgroup relative to exclusively ensuring instrumental ingroup benefit, parochial altruism (maximizing intergroup differences), and personal gain. Six studies were conducted to examine how self-sacrificing prosociality toward one's ingroup may relate to aggression directed toward the outgroup through anticipated outgroup hostility. Study 1 (N = 120) hypothesized that self-sacrificing prosociality will predict outgroup aggression across increasing levels of competition to gain incentives for the ingroup. Self-sacrificing prosociality predicted outgroup aggression generally and in the absence of intergroup competition. A mediation analysis showed that individuals who were highly fused to their group expressed greater readiness to self-sacrifice and in turn, aggressed against the outgroup, in the absence of intergroup competition.

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A mediation analysis showed that individuals who were highly fused to their group expressed greater readiness to self-sacrifice and in turn, aggressed against the outgroup, in the absence of intergroup competition. Being protective and vigilant to threats that may hurt their group, highly self-sacrificing members with retaliatory mindsets could be more likely to perceive the mere presence of a non-threatening outgroup as a potential danger. This threat anticipatory mindset could prompt members to self-sacrifice to harm the outgroup relative to solely benefit the welfare of the ingroup. Studies 2 and 3 examined whether highly self-sacrificing members with retributive mindsets could likely anticipate potential hostility from outgroups and pre-emptively retaliate with aggression, even when the outgroup did not pose clear and overt threats to the ingroup. Testing the moderating role of dispositional vengeance, Study 2 (N = 210) showed that self-sacrificing prosociality was associated with heightened outgroup aggression among highly vengeful members, only when outgroup threat was absent. Likewise, Study 3 (N = 106) found that self-sacrificing prosociality was associated with increased outgroup aggression, among members with high anticipations of outgroup hostility, only in the absence of outgroup threat. Findings from the three studies were integrated into a serial mediational pathway from identity fusion to outgroup aggression, through self-sacrificial readiness and anticipations of outgroup hostility. Studies 4 and 5 provided support for this pathway using real group identities, perceptions, and contexts. Study 4 (N = 299) revealed indirect effects of American identity salience on policy support to restrict an Islamic organization that emerged through increased self-sacrificial readiness and anticipated outgroup threat, exacerbated by vengeful thinking. Moreover, this pathway was significant for outcome variables that include support for increasingly violent actions against the hypothetical outgroup and support for harsh policies toward actual terrorist organizations. In an intergroup context with salient outgroup threat, highly self-sacrificing members may strongly anticipate outgroup hostility and appraise actions of outgroup harm as being motivated by concern for ingroup welfare over actions that directly benefit the ingroup, compared to an intragroup context. Study 5 (N = 376) showed that highly fused Americans primed with an intergroup context were more likely to endorse restrictive policies toward foreign organizations that

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threaten U.S. national security, through greater self-sacrificial readiness, anticipated outgroup hostility, and attributions of punitive policies toward potentially threatening foreign organizations as measures of concern for the U.S. Study 6 ($N = 164$) explored whether activating high social identity complexity could reverse the effect of self-sacrificing prosociality on outgroup aggression. Serial mediation models showed that individuals primed with high social identity complexity were less likely to support punitive policies toward an Islamic group, through greater perceived distinctiveness of ingroup memberships, unwillingness to self-sacrifice, and anticipations of outgroup positivity. Building on one another, Studies 1 to 5 consistently demonstrate support for the central hypothesis of this thesis wherein highly self-sacrificing members may anticipate potential hostility from outgroups and harm these outgroups. Study 1 established the positive relationship between self-sacrificing prosociality and outgroup aggression. Studies 2 and 3 highlighted that the relationship between self-sacrificing prosociality and outgroup aggression was most pronounced for members with strong retributive thinking and anticipations of outgroup hostility. Testing the formalized pathway, Studies 4 and 5 found that highly self-sacrificing members expressed greater support for aggressive measures toward outgroups over instrumental ingroup benefit, through heightened anticipations of outgroup hostility. Study 6 showed that the activation of high social identity complexity was associated with decreased support for outgroup aggression, through unwillingness to self-sacrifice and anticipations of outgroup positivity. In sum, this research provides preliminary confirmatory evidence for the positive association between self-sacrificing prosociality and outgroup aggression, through the mechanism of anticipations of outgroup hostility, implying that highly self-sacrificing members may initiate and posture outgroup aggression as a strategic priority in intergroup conflicts.

Proceedings

Duration	Session
5 mins	Chairperson Welcome & Introduction of Panel
30-45mins	Presentation by Student
15 mins	Q&A (by audience – faculty / students)
Break	Audience to leave the meeting
30 mins	Q&A by Panel
15 mins	Chairperson to ask candidate to leave the meeting Private Panel Discussion and Decision on the Oral Examination
15 mins	Candidate invited back by Chairperson Feedback and Outcome of Oral Examination

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