

SUMMARY

More than eighty percent of Dutch households donate money to charitable causes. About one in three Dutch citizens are engaged as unpaid volunteer workers in voluntary associations. One out of six has registered as a post mortem organ donor, and about one out of twenty-five donates blood at least once a year. Giving to charity, blood donation, post mortem organ donation and volunteering are examples of prosocial behavior and contributions to collective goods: they require a personal sacrifice, and benefit a group of individuals or society at large. Why do people give time, money, blood, and organs to the benefit of others? Who are the people who give time, money, blood, and organs anyway? In this dissertation, I investigate these questions from two different perspectives in the social sciences: from the perspective of sociology and the perspective of social and personality psychology.

Chapter one - 'Introduction'

In this chapter I present these two perspectives on prosocial behavior. The sociologist argues that the social conditions in which people live are the main determinants of giving and volunteering. People often receive requests for contributions to voluntary associations from friends, family members and others in their social networks. People tell each other that it is a good thing to contribute, putting social pressure on contributing. The psychologist, on the other hand, argues that across a variety of social conditions, some people are more likely to contribute because they have an 'altruistic personality': they are more helpful, empathic, or more able to take the perspective of people in need, while others are more likely to refuse, evade, or forget their duties. To many people, this perspective is attractive because it suggests that people base their prosocial behavior on their personal preferences and values, giving them an individual responsibility for their actions. However, we know very little about the relative effects of personality characteristics and social conditions on prosocial behavior. Sociologists and psychologists have studied prosocial behavior in relative isolation. We know even less about the interactive effects of personality characteristics and social conditions. When do people base their prosocial behavior on their personal preferences and social values? Throughout this dissertation, two hypothetical answers to this question are tested over and over again. The first hypothesis is the low cost-hypothesis, which predicts that people are more likely to act upon their good intentions when it is less costly to do so. The second hypothesis is the weak situation-hypothesis, which predicts that people are more likely to act upon their good intentions when the decision situation is 'weak' – when social norms are not very clear, and when people do not explicitly influence each other because their contributions cannot be observed by others. In 'low cost' and 'weak' situations, people will rely on their personality characteristics and social values to decide about contributions.

To test these hypotheses, an integration of research methods used in sociology and psychology is proposed. Sociologists have mainly studied prosocial behavior with large random sample surveys, showing differences between social groups. Psychologists have mainly studied prosocial behavior in laboratory and field experiments, as a criterion variable for prosocial motives and personality characteristics. While the internal validity of these studies is often high, the external validity of these studies is often limited by the use of student samples and abstract decision making situations such as in the social dilemma research paradigm. In addition, sociological studies rarely include personality characteristics, and psychological studies rarely include social characteristics. In this dissertation, I report five studies investigating effects of social conditions and personality simultaneously on examples of prosocial behavior in the 'real life' among a large sample of the Dutch population.

Chapter two – 'Giving and volunteering in the Netherlands'

In this chapter I present the data that are used in chapters three to seven. The data are part of the Family Survey of the Dutch Population 2000 (FSDP2000), a nationwide household survey conducted by colleagues of ICS Nijmegen (De Graaf, De Graaf, Kraaykamp & Ultee, 2000) among a sample of 1,587 Dutch citizens. Chapter two gives a description of the magnitude of charitable giving, blood donation, post mortem organ donation, voluntary association membership and volunteering among the respondents in this sample, and compares these estimates to other survey data sources such as the 'Giving in the Netherlands Panel Survey' (GINPS). These examples of prosocial behavior are the dependent variables in chapters four to seven. Appendix A gives more detailed information on the design and sampling procedure of the FSDP2000, as well as the measures of personality characteristics and social conditions – the independent variables. To study effects of personality, I used the 'Big Five' Model, which has become the standard in personality psychology in the past two decades. In addition, I studied effects of individual differences in cognitive and emotional empathy and social value orientation.

Chapter three – 'Who gives what and why? A quasi-experimental study of the power of social and psychological incentives in social dilemmas'

In this chapter I investigate how aspects of the situation in which people decide about contributions to collective goods as well as social conditions and personality characteristics affect the willingness to volunteer and to donate money. This chapter is based on a scenario experiment incorporated in the FSDP2000. In the experiment, the respondents indicated their willingness to give money or time in eight situations with systematically varying combinations of four aspects of the situation in which people decide about contributions to collective goods: (1) material costs, (2) social distance to an intermediary person asking for a

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contribution, (3) efficacy of contributing, and (4) psychological distance to the recipients. The results of the scenario experiment show that the social distance to the intermediary person is the key factor determining the willingness to give time and money: people are more likely to honor requests by persons at a smaller social distance. This result indicates that social incentives have powerful effects on contributions to collective goods. Among the characteristics of the respondents, the level of education is the strongest predictor of giving and volunteering intentions, while personality characteristics typically had smaller effects. Among personality characteristics, empathic concern for others had the strongest effects on giving and volunteering intentions.

Chapter four - 'Anonymous gifts: personal decisions, social backgrounds'

In this chapter I investigate donations to unknown strangers. Charitable giving, blood donation and post mortem organ donation benefit unknown others who cannot reciprocate. The effects of personality characteristics should be largest for this category of prosocial behavior. However, the three examples of anonymous giving turned out to be most strongly related to social conditions. A higher level of education increases donations of money and body parts. Church attendance increases charitable donations, but decreases post mortem organ donation. Personality characteristics showed inconsistent and rather weak effects. Empathic concern only promoted charitable giving, but not blood and organ donation.

In chapters five, six, and seven, I investigated various forms of civic engagement in voluntary associations. The results of these chapters reinforce the conclusions drawn for anonymous giving: participation in voluntary associations is mainly a matter of being in the right social conditions (again: higher education and stronger religious involvement, but also living in a smaller community) rather than being a specific 'type' of person.

Chapter five - 'Participation in voluntary associations: resources, personality, or both?'

In this chapter I investigate membership and volunteering in voluntary associations. Because membership and volunteering are more observable examples of prosocial behavior and may generate generalized reciprocity, I expected that the availability of resources through social capital and human capital would be more strongly related to participation than to giving money, blood and organs. However, the results indicate that all types of participation in voluntary associations are strongly related to social conditions, especially the level of education and religiosity. The personality characteristics of active citizens are less clear than their resources and political values. Personality characteristics often have different effects for different forms of civic engagement. Members of voluntary associations are more empathic than non-members, less conscientious, and somewhat more open to

experience. Emotional stability increases the number of memberships and the likelihood that people volunteer. Volunteers have a more extraverted personality and are more open to experience.

Chapter six – ‘Shifting backgrounds of participation in voluntary associations in the Netherlands’

In this chapter the question is raised why the massive decline of religious involvement in the Netherlands since World War II did not lead to a decline of participation in voluntary associations. Religious involvement has always been the most important predictor of participation in voluntary associations. In the past four decades, secular associations (environmental and human rights organizations, sports clubs and cultural expression groups) compensated for the decline in membership in traditional, pillarized associations (labor unions, political parties). This chapter investigates how the nature of participation in voluntary associations has changed by comparing characteristics of members of pillarized and secular voluntary associations. Three complementary theories are considered to answer the research problem: (1) collective action theory, (2) Inglehart’s theory on postmaterialism, (3) the Five Factor Model in personality psychology. According to the ‘Logic of collective action’, secular associations have used selective incentives to attract members, especially younger people. However, many secular associations that grew in recent decades offered little incentives, but appealed to postmaterialistic values instead. The rise of postmaterialistic values may have compensated for the decline in pillarized participation. Finally, the argument is made that secular associations have grown because they are more attractive to persons who are more extraverted and open to experience, and that these personality characteristics have become more widespread among the Dutch population. The analyses in this chapter support the latter argument, but not the former. Little support is found for the argument that participation in secular voluntary associations is more strongly based on personality characteristics than participation in pillarized associations. Instead, some secular organizations have grown because they offer more selective incentives to members, while others have grown because of the increase in postmaterialistic values among the Dutch population. Furthermore, the rise of the average level of education and extraversion has ensured a stable supply of members and volunteers.

Chapter seven – ‘The intergenerational transmission of volunteerism’

In this chapter I investigate to what extent parents increase volunteering among their children by setting the right example. If parents volunteer when their children are young, do their children follow this example later on in their lives, when they have become adults? If so, how can this intergenerational transmission of volunteerism be explained? Is it really the result of modeling, or is it some byproduct of other types of intergenerational transmission, such as the transmission of religion, resources, or personality characteristics? I find evidence that there is an

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intergenerational transmission of volunteerism, but that the transmission of volunteerism for religious and quasi-religious ('pillarized') associations was due largely to the transmission of religion and resources. Parental volunteering for both religious as well as quasi-religious ('pillarized') associations increased the likelihood of children's volunteering for secular associations, even controlling for parental and children's religion, education, wealth, and children's personality characteristics. Consistent with a value internalization explanation, this effect was not due to direct social pressure of parents. In addition, I find evidence that personality characteristics of volunteers differ strongly between the three types of voluntary associations. Compared to non-volunteers, volunteers for religious organizations are more extraverted, less open to experience, less able to take the perspective of others and more empathically concerned; volunteers for pillarized associations are less neurotic, more open to experience, and also more empathic; and volunteers for secular associations tend to be more extraverted and open to experience. These specific patterns were obscured in chapter five because all types of associations were collapsed.

Chapter eight – 'Conclusion and discussion'

This chapter summarizes the results of chapters three to seven, and provides answers to the research questions. The first research question was:

P1. To what extent can giving and volunteering behavior be explained by prosocial motives and other psychological characteristics of people and the social conditions in which they live?

The answer to this question is that giving and volunteering behaviors are primarily social behaviors, determined by social conditions. On average, about 30% of all the variance in the examples of prosocial behavior that was explained by the most extensive regression models was due to personality characteristics and social value orientations. The hypotheses that prosocial behavior would be more likely among persons with higher levels of agreeableness, perspective taking and a more prosocial value orientation was rejected most of the time. Empathic concern emerged most often as a typical characteristic of people who contribute money to charities and time to religious and pillarized associations. In contrast, the hypotheses on the effects of social conditions were supported in most of the analyses. The most distinctive characteristic of people who give time, money, blood and organs is their higher than average level of education. In addition, people who are more religious, live in smaller communities, work more hours for pay and earn higher incomes also tend to contribute more.

The second research question of this dissertation was:

P2. In which conditions are individual differences and other psychological characteristics in prosocial motives more strongly related to giving and volunteering?

In all chapters, the hypotheses on how effects of personality characteristics would vary with material costs and social rewards are rejected. The low cost-hypothesis, predicting that personality characteristics would be more strongly related to prosocial behavior when it is less costly, was usually not supported. Neither did the analyses support the weak situation hypothesis that personality characteristics would be more strongly related when social incentives were weaker. It is hard to reject these rejections for methodological reasons, because the low cost-hypothesis and the weak situation-hypothesis were tested in several different ways. It seems that both hypotheses are invalid as general rules for how the effects of personality characteristics vary with aspects of the situation in which people decide about contributions to collective goods.

However, I found evidence in several chapters that specific social conditions such as a higher level of education and religious involvement mediated effects of specific personality characteristics such as emotional stability and empathic concern. It appears that more emotionally stable persons achieve a higher level of education and more empathic persons are more strongly involved in religion and are therefore more likely to give and volunteer. These hypotheses should be considered in future research. A second issue for future research is the effect of the level of education. In the present dissertation, I was unable to explain why the higher educated are more likely to give time, money, blood and organs – although the Family Survey of the Dutch Population contains enough data to test several candidate hypotheses. In the future, I hope to take full advantage of these possibilities. A final issue for future research is that cross-sectional surveys offer only a limited view on the dynamic nature of participation in voluntary associations. It is likely that the effects of social conditions and personality characteristics differ in magnitude in different stages of the participation career. Longitudinal datasets such as the ‘Giving in the Netherlands Panel Survey’ enable a detailed study the dynamics of participation in the future.