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# The Effects of Age, Amount of Modelling, and a Success Experience on Seven-to Eleven-Year-Old Children's Generosity

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The way children see others acting is an important determinant of how they themselves will subsequently behave. This has been amply demonstrated for a variety of moral behaviours, including altruism (Rushton, 1976). The purpose of the present study was to replicate and extend these findings by investigating (a) whether the *amount* of generosity a child observes another engaging in affects the *amount* of generosity the child engages in, and (b) whether there will be a 'modelling effect' even when a period of time elapses between exposure to the model and the opportunity to give. In addition, since previous research has shown that experimentally induced 'good moods' increase altruism, we investigate whether a naturally occurring 'success experience' will increase the children's generosity.

## Procedure

Sixty-eight seven- to eleven-year-old girls played a basketball game and the number of baskets scored out of six was recorded. This constituted the child's 'success experience'. Next the child played on a bowling game that enabled her to win 16 tokens exchangeable for a prize on the basis of the more tokens won, the better the prize. Subsequently she was provided with an opportunity to anonymously donate some of these tokens to a charity thus ostensibly depriving herself of the better prize. Prior to playing the game the child observed an adult model donate either nought, one or eight tokens to the charity. Some children in this latter situation were not tested for three days. The remaining children's generosity was assessed immediately. The experimenter left the child entirely alone to play the game and donate or not. A re-test (again in the absence of the experimenter) occurred 14 days later when children were brought back for another play on the game. Following this re-test, a generalization test consisted of providing the child with an opportunity to share candies with her best friend.

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Table 1: Mean number of tokens donated or candies shared

	<i>No Model</i>	<i>Model Once</i>	<i>Model Eight Times</i>	<i>Model Eight and Then Delay</i>
Donating tokens on immediate test	2.21	4.27	6.11	6.40
Donating tokens on two-week re-test	0.75	2.67	5.06	5.05
Sharing candies on two-week generalization test	4.13	6.20	5.17	7.17

### Results

Table 1 presents the mean number of tokens donated and candies shared as a function of experimental condition. Analysis of variance revealed highly significant differences due to the amount of modelling on both immediate and delayed tests. The modelling effects did not generalize to the somewhat different situation of sharing candies with the best friend. As predicted, the child's naturally occurring success rate on the basketball game related to how generous she would be on the immediate test ( $r = 0.31, p < 0.01$ ) but not on the two-week or generalization test, thus suggesting the effect of a transient mood state. Although the child's age was not related to the immediate test of generosity ( $r = 0.04$ ), it was positively related to both the two-week re-test and the generalization test, with older children being more generous than younger ones (both  $r_s = 0.42, p < 0.001$ ). Individual differences among children in generosity showed moderate consistency across testing situations. Generosity on the immediate test showed a residualized correlation of 0.50 with the two-week re-test and  $r = 0.31$  with candy sharing which correlated  $r = 0.25$  with the two-week re-test.

### Discussion

Children can be induced to behave generously and to share their belongings if they view others behaving generously. This study demonstrated that the amount of modelled behaviour determines the amount of imitated behaviour and that modelling is an effective inducer of generosity even if the child has to wait before being tested. This study also confirmed previous findings that older children tend to be more generous than younger children, that a child having a success experience is more generous than one who does not, and that there is some consistency across measures of generosity, i.e., children who are generous in one situation have a tendency to be generous in another.

### Reference

- RUSHTON, J. P. (1976). 'Socialization and the altruistic behavior of children', *Psychological Bulletin*, 83, 898-913.