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General Motivation Domains & Behavioral Specificity Across Motivations

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Introduction

The present study sought to understand adolescents’ motivations both for engaging in prosocial behaviors (donating and volunteering) and abstaining from health risk behaviors (marijuana use and sexual intercourse). Both types of motivation are socially positive as they promote positive behaviors and discourage negative behaviors.

While many studies have focused on one set of behaviors or the other (either prosocial or health-risk), this study now compares adolescent’s motivations for both types of behavior and how these relate to behavioral outcomes. This allows us to discover whether prosocial motivations correlate only with prosocial behaviors or if they also correlate with health-risk behaviors and vice versa.

Much of current research has focused on the motivations behind engaging in behaviors. We assert, however, that motivations exist, not only for participating in behaviors, but also for abstaining from behaviors.

Methods

Adolescents (N = 419; 44% female; 15-18 yrs.) completed an online questionnaire in which they reported the frequency of their marijuana use, sexual intercourse, volunteerism, and donating.

Additionally, they rated items pertaining to their motivation to engage in volunteering and donating (10 items each), and to abstain from marijuana and sex (8 items each). These scales were based on the Prosocial Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

Weighted composite scores were created that index the relative internalization of motivation following previously used procedures (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

Results

The findings of this research were twofold:

1) General Motivation Domains: Nine significant correlations (p<.05) were found which roughly divided the correlation table into quadrants. (see Table 1)

2) Behavioral Specificity: Multiple regression analysis revealed that each behavior was only significantly predicted (p<.001) by one motivation. (see Diagram 1)

Discussion

• Motivation Domains: The correlation table shows that both prosocial motivations are strongly correlated with both prosocial behaviors and are not strongly correlated with health-risk behaviors. Likewise, both abstinence motivations are strongly correlated with both health-risk behaviors and are only partially correlated with prosocial behaviors. This pattern shows that specific motivations are actually a small part of a larger overarching motivation domain.

• Behavioral Specificity: Multiple regression analyses indicated that though motivation domains do exist, motivations are also behavior-specific. Though they are related to each other, only one motivation score uniquely accounted for the variance of each behavior.