Expectations of Help, Reciprocity, and Cheating From Friends and Acquaintances

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
SCHOOL of EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Austen R. Anderson, B.S., & Blaine J. Fowers, Ph.D.

University of Miami, Department of Educational and Psychological Studies,

Abstract

Human relationships are varied and tend to operate according to different norms. Research has shown that ratings of communal relationships (wherein individuals help each other without expectation of repayment) differ depending on relationship closeness, with closer relationships involving helping based on needs rather than expectations of repayment. Evolutionary theory argues that humans are especially adept at detecting "cheaters." Studies indicate improved performance on logic tasks that are embedded with social information compared to formal logic tasks. This suggests a heuristic for cheater detection, a key social capacity. These two lines of research make claims about relationships but have yet to be integrated. We investigated the differences in expectations of friend and acquaintance behavior as it relates to the violation of social rules. Specifically, we investigated the communal and exchange characteristics of two types of personal relationships using explicit measures and cheater detection using cognitive tasks. We assessed these associations using a sample of 277 online participants. We found some support for the use of communal orientation and communal strength in differentiating relationships and in explaining variance in cheater detection performance.

Introduction

- Communal and exchange orientations to relationships have predicted a variety of social behaviors (Clark & Aragon, 2013).
- Cheater detection tasks indicate that people are especially effective at detecting violations of social rules compared to solving similarly formatted logic problems that lack social information (Cosmides, 1989; Fiddick & Erlich, 2010).
- Hrushka (2010) argues from an evolutionary perspective that individuals would more quickly (using a mental heuristic) decide to help close friends than they would decide to help acquaintances.
- There has been no previous research attempting to integrate these various lines of research – communal and exchange orientations, communal strength, cheater detection, and kneejerk helping.

Hypotheses:

- Friends will be rated higher than acquaintances on measures of communal strength.
- Communal orientation will be associated with:
  - Higher communal strength in friends
  - Higher communal strength in acquaintances
- Exchange orientation will be associated with:
  - Lower communal strength in friends
  - Lower communal strength in acquaintances
- Participants will complete cheater detection tasks more accurately than the original Wason selection tasks.
- Incongruent cheater detection tasks will be completed slower and will be less accurate than mixed and congruent tasks, and congruent tasks will be completed quicker and more accurately than mixed tasks.
- Higher communal strength ratings of friends will predict less accurate incongruent cheater detection tasks and slower completion times along with more accurate congruent tasks and quicker completion times.
- Higher communal strength ratings of acquaintances will predict less accurate congruent cheater detection tasks and slower completion times along with more accurate incongruent tasks and quicker completion times.

Methods

Participants:

- 277 online participants

Procedure:

- Self-administered measures and cognitive tasks were delivered online through Qualtrics. Friend and acquaintance ratings were based on a self-identified friends and acquaintances.

Measures:

- Communal Strength: A 10-item measure assessing a person's willingness to help a friend according to the friend's needs (Mills, Clark, Ford & Johnson, 2004).
- Communal Orientation: 14-item self-report measure assessing a person's sensitivity to other's and their own needs – including a desire to meet those needs and to have needs met (Clark, Oullette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987).
- Exchange Orientation: 9-item self-report measure assessing a person's tendency to follow exchange norms within their relationship – helping and being helped contingently (Clark, Taraban, Wesner, & Ho, 1989; Clark & Mills 1994).
- Wason Selection Task: A logic task to test individuals' abilities in formal operational thought (Wason, 1966).
- Cheater Detection Tasks: Six tasks based on the Wason Selection Task that were modified to include social information and to assess individuals' ability to identify violations to predetermined rules (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992). Two tasks would have the "cheaters" be associated with friends (incongruent tasks), two would have the "cheaters" be associated with acquaintances (congruent tasks), and two would be mixed.

Example cheater detection task

Imagine you know a local cafe owner who wants to allow for individuals to pay as much as they want for the drinks they order. The owner likes the idea of letting their customers decide on how much they value the drinks and service. The owner leaves a box on their counter with a sign that says:

"If you order a drink, please leave some money"

The cards below represent four individuals who you know that went to the cafe. You see one side of each of four two-sided cards. One side of the card tells you whether or not the person ordered a drink and the other side tells you whether that person left any money.

Select only those cards you definitely need to turn over to see which individuals disobeyed the sign.

[Friend #1 Name] ordered a drink	[Acquaintance #2 Name] did not order a drink	[Acquaintance #1 Name] left some money	[Friend #2 Name] did not leave any money

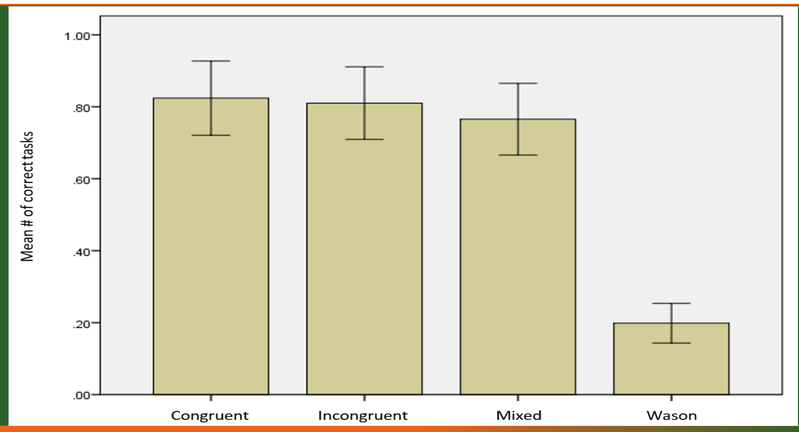
Results

- Difference in communal strength ratings: Mauchly's test indicated the assumption of sphericity was violated, $X^2(5) = 242.97$, $p < .001$. The Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used ($\acute{\epsilon} = .62$) and results indicate significant differences in ratings $F(1.86, 508.86) = 492.86$, $p < .001$. Friend ratings were significantly higher than acquaintance ratings, $p < .001$.

Results cont.

Communal/exchange orientation and communal strength: After controlling for gender, age, SES, race, and ethnicity, average friend communal strength was positively predicted by communal orientation ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$) and was negatively predicted by exchange orientation ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$). In a separate regression model average acquaintance communal strength was positively predicted by communal orientation ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), but was not significantly predicted by exchange orientation ($\beta = .04$, $p = .50$).

Cheater detection accuracy: Using a repeated measures chi-square analysis with a negative binomial distribution we found that there were no main effect of cheater detection condition on accuracy ($X^2(2) = 1.35$, $p = .52$). We also investigated the main effects of communal orientation, exchange orientation, and the average communal strength ratings of friends and acquaintances. The main effect of average acquaintance communal strength on accuracy was significant ($X^2(1) = 5.14$, $p = .02$). None of the other main effects were significant. In investigating the interaction of communal orientation, exchange orientation, friend communal strength and acquaintance communal strength, with the cheater detection condition, only the interaction between communal orientation and condition was significant ($X^2(2) = 9.60$, $p = .01$). In this interaction, a higher communal orientation predicted lower cheater detection accuracy in the incongruent cheater detection task (i.e. those in which named friends were the "cheaters" and named acquaintances were "innocent"; $\beta = -.71$, $p = .002$).



Discussion

- We found additional support for the ability of communal strength to differentiate between relationship types.
- We also found support for the positive association between a communal orientation and friend communal strength while an exchange orientation was negatively related to friend communal strength.
- A communal orientation was positively related to acquaintance communal strength while exchange orientation was unrelated to acquaintance communal strength.
- We did not find support for the main effects of within-subject conditions on accuracy on novel personalized cheater detection tasks.
- Further analyses indicated that a communal orientation can affect an individuals proclivity to accurately perceive a friend's rule-breaking behavior.
- More research is needed to investigate how heuristics operate differently in multiple relationship types.