Introduction

- Previous studies have demonstrated that there is a general positive association between lifetime adversity and prosocial behavior (Piff et al. 2010, Orion, Poulin, Friedman & Silver, 2012, Staub & Vollhardt, 2008).
- However, few studies have probed deeper for possible mediating factors that may explain this association.
- Prior studies (Cialdini et al., 1997, 2002; Maner and Gailliot, 2007; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2013) suggest that perceived similarity to others in the form of “oneness” predicts the willingness to help individuals in need.
- The shared nature of certain types of adversity (e.g., bereavement and natural disasters) presents ample opportunities for individuals to perceive themselves as similar to other affected individuals and to feel close to them.
- Notably, people within communities affected by natural disasters do tend to assist each other in coping with the adverse effects of the disaster event. This could be due to the fact that members of a disaster affected community might understand the need to assist one another under a common adverse situation (Kaniasty & Norris, 1995).
- Over the course of one’s lifespan, exposure to adverse events may foster a sense of similarity or closeness with other people who have gone through similar adverse events (Eranen & Liebkind, 1993; Janoff-Bulman, 1992) due to the shared nature of certain life adversities.

Hypothesis

Based on the findings of previous research, we predicted that:
1) Lifetime adversity would lead to greater volunteering.
2) Oneness would significantly mediate the positive association between lifetime adversity and volunteering.

Participants

- Participants were “Workers” on Amazon’s Mturk Service.
- Participants: N = 359 (62.5% Females, 37.5% Males)
- Age: Mean = 33.86, SD = 1.71, Range = 18 - 74.
- Race: 6.8% African-American, 82.5% Caucasian, 4.1% Asian, 1.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.6% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 4.8% Others/More than one race.
- 5.1% of our sample identified themselves as Hispanic.

Procedure

- Once the respondents provided consent, questionnaires that measured the amount of volunteering (past 12 months), self-other overlap with those whom they volunteered to help, and amount of lifetime adversity were administered via an online survey.
- At the end of the survey, participants received referral information and were debriefed.
- A unique payment code was generated for each completed survey to enable respondents to claim a $1 compensation on Amazons Mturk.

Measures

- **Lifetime Adversity.** A questionnaire which measured different categories of adverse life events experienced by the participants - (1) illness, (2) violence/victimization, (3) bereavement, (4) relationship events, (5) financial hardship, and (6) natural disasters. This measure was modified from the Diagnostic Interview Schedule section on trauma.
- **Volunteering.** A self-rated measure of the amount of volunteer work participants have done in the past 12 months. The categories of helping were categorized in accordance to the different types of lifetime adversity: (1) illness, (2) violence/victimization, (3) bereavement, (4) relationship events, (5) financial hardship, and (6) natural disasters.
- **Inclusion of Others in the Self (IOS).** A measure of oneness (self-other overlap) between participants and the people they volunteered to help. Six IOS scales that corresponded to the different categories of lifetime adversity were utilized.

Results

- A regression analysis revealed that total lifetime adversity significantly predicted volunteering in general, $b = .24$, t(352) = 4.72, $p<.001$.
- When we included the overall IOS score (mean of all IOS categories) into the regression model, the beta coefficient dropped from $b = .24$ to $b = .17$, with lifetime adversity still significantly predicting volunteering, t(350) = 3.57, $p<.001$. This suggests that IOS could be a partial mediator.

Discussion

- Oneness significantly mediates the positive association between lifetime adversity and volunteering.
- It should be noted that category-specific self-other overlap mediates the association between its respective type of lifetime adversity and volunteering only for the categories of bereavement and disaster.
- Perhaps experiencing bereavement and disaster adversity allows individuals to relate to others who are currently undergoing these adversities, hence motivating them to include sufferers of adversity as part of the self (oneness).
- In other words, the notion of “having been there” may give individuals who have suffered a certain type of adversity a sense of emotional solidarity that motivates them in helping others that are suffering the same kind of adverse event. (e.g., disaster aid, and charity drives for disasters)
- This is consistent with previous studies that identified oneness as an explanation of why individuals might choose to help each other during times of need (Cialdini et al., 1997, 2002; Maner and Gailliot, 2007).
- Future research should examine if the shared nature of adversity would specifically lead to increased self-other overlap or enhanced perspective-taking abilities.

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