

The Rhythm of Prosociality

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Chanting at football games, singing national anthems, and marching in a band are examples of rituals that bring groups of people together. They all incorporate synchrony, a matching of rhythmic behaviors, which appears to generate cooperation, compassion, helpfulness, and other prosocial behaviors. But scientists haven't fully explored the scope of these prosocial effects.

In a 2016 article in the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, researchers Paul Reddish (National University of Singapore), Eddie M. W. Tong (National University of Singapore), Jonathan Jong (Coventry University), Jonathan A. Lanman (Queen's University), and Harvey Whitehouse (University of Oxford) sought to understand the scope of the prosocial effects of synchrony.

The *extended parochial prosociality model* proposes that synchrony may extend prosocial behavior beyond the performance group to other ingroup members. In contrast, the *generalized prosociality model* suggests that synchrony may extend prosocial behavior beyond the performance group to both ingroup and outgroup members.

The authors investigated the influences of synchrony on prosociality by splitting participants into a synchrony or asynchrony condition. In the synchrony condition, participants were instructed to step on

foot pedals while alternating their feet to stay in time with members of their group. In the asynchrony condition, participants were told to step on foot pedals with the goal of remaining out of time with other members of their group. To establish an ingroup, researchers primed the participants' identity as students of the National University of Singapore. To measure prosocial behavior, they gave participants a form asking whether they were willing to help an anonymous student from either their university (i.e., ingroup) or the local rival university (i.e., outgroup) in another study.

The researchers also had participants fill out a variety of self-report measures assessing potential mediators of the relationship between synchrony and social bonding, and between synchrony and prosociality. These included measures of social bonding, entitativity (i.e., perceiving the synchronized group as a team), perceived similarity to the group, social identification, and identity fusion. Participants also completed self-report measures for several control variables, including: motivation to complete the task; attention directed toward others; predictions of others' actions; perceived difficulty; enjoyment; success of the task; mood; and how well group members knew each other.

The authors found that while a similar percentage of participants in the synchrony and asynchrony conditions were willing to help ingroup students, a greater percentage of students in the synchrony condition were willing to help out-group students than in the asynchrony condition. Although entitativity was found to mediate the relationship between synchrony and social bonding, social bonding itself was not found to influence the relationships between synchrony and prosociality, and the authors suspect other factors may be influencing these relationships.

The authors suggest that collective synchrony may have the potential to bond large groups, even if they do not perform together, and increase cooperation between groups. They call for further research to elucidate the mechanisms underlying these findings.

Reference

Reddish, P., Tong, E. M., Jong, J., Lanman, J. A., & Whitehouse, H. (2016). [Collective synchrony increases prosociality towards non-performers and outgroup members](#). *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 55, 722–738.