

Moral imagination: Facilitating prosocial decision-making through scene imagery and theory of mind

Brendan Gaesser , Kerri Keeler , Liane Young (2018)

DOI: [10.1016/j.cognition.2017.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2017.11.004)

Presented by: Maryam Amir

Research Question

Does **the way that we experience the surrounding environment** and episodic details of a helping event also inform our **willingness to engage in the helping behavior** in the first place?

Hypothesis

- **Expt1:** Imagining helping events in a **strong spatial context** would increase one's willingness to help.
- **Expt2:** A larger sample size provided the opportunity to test whether episodic simulation could be used to facilitate prosocial response while taking into account **individual differences** in empathic and prosocial personality traits.
- **Expt3:** Whether episodic simulation's effect on willingness to help observed in Experiments 1 and 2 would translate into **actual prosocial behavior**.

Experiment

- **Expt1:** Series of 21 brief stories describing everyday events featuring a person in need of help. imagine helping the person in need in the future in a familiar/unfamiliar location /to consider the writing style and media source of the story of need + Surveys.
- **Expt2:** Similar analytic approach from Expt1 with larger sample size + empathic/prosocial personality tests.
- **Expt3:** Similar design and analytic approach to Expt 1&2 including a measure that enabled participants to make economic decisions of how much money to keep or give to people in need.

Novelty

- Proposing **A new model** that begins to capture the multifaceted mechanisms by which episodic simulation contributes to prosocial decision-making, highlighting boundaries and promising future directions to explore.

Result

- People **are more willing to help others in specific situations** after imagining helping them in those situations.
- Manipulations of the imagined helping episode increased **actual prosocial behavior**, which also **correlated** with changes in **reported willingness** to help.

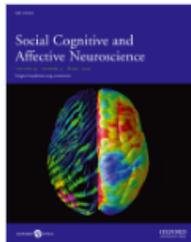
To read more about imagination and prosocial decisions from
IMAGINATION & MORAL COGNITION LAB :

**A role for the medial temporal lobe subsystem
in guiding prosociality: the effect of episodic
processes on willingness to help others** 

Brendan Gaesser , Josh Hirschfeld-Kroen, Emily A Wasserman, Mary Horn,
Liane Young

Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, Volume 14, Issue 4, April 2019, Pages
397–410, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsz014>

Published: 26 February 2019 **Article history** ▼



Volume 14, Issue 4
April 2019

DOI: [10.1093/scan/nsz014](https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsz014)

Preprint

**Episodic Simulation of Harmful Events: When Imagined Harm
Becomes Morally Justified**

July 2018

DOI: [10.31234/osf.io/avrj5](https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/avrj5)

Adam Morris · Brendan Gaesser · Fiery Andrews Cushman



DOI: [10.31234/osf.io/avrj5](https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/avrj5)