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Moral Self-Evaluation: The Missing Link between Prosocial Behavior and Subjective Well-Being

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INTRODUCTION

Growing interest in empirical social research of morality (Hitlin and Vaisey, 2013) has created a demand for precise conceptualizations of moral constructs and reliable tools to measure them. In the last decades, a number of original theory-driven measurement techniques have appeared which allow researchers to shed light on a range of moral perceptions, judgments, and emotions. Some examples include the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham *et al.*, 2012), which allows us to uncover the systems of "intuitive ethics" underlying one's moral decision making, and the Moral Identity Scale (Aquino and Reed, 2002), which reveals how important moral characteristics are to one's self-image. However, until recently, the mechanism of moral self-evaluation as well as the causes and consequences of its intra- and inter-individual variability have received limited attention.

Meanwhile, a person's evaluation of themself as a moral agent has great potential in terms of exploring the causes and consequences of individual social actions, attitudes, and quality of life. Thus, people who, in a survey, reported behaving morally more often (e.g. engaged in charitable behavior and abstained from copying answers during a test), assessed themselves higher on such qualities as honesty, caring, kindness, etc., compared to those who did not engage in moral behavior (Stets and Carter, 2012). The positive relationship between prosocial acts and moral self-evaluation were further confirmed using the experience-sampling method, which required respondents to report their actions and emotions several times a day during a week (Prentice, Jayawickreme, Fleeson, 2020). In turn, some studies show that moral self-evaluation is positively associated with life satisfaction and positive emotions (Jordan, Leliveld and Tenbrunsel, 2015; Prentice *et al.*, 2019).

In this light, moral self-evaluation presents a plausible link in the widely researched positive relationship between prosocial behavior, i.e. activity for the benefit of others, and subjective well-being (Aknin *et al.*, 2019). However, to date, only one paper has empirically explored the mediating potential of moral self-evaluation in relation to one component of subjective well-being, positive affect (Miles and Upenieks, 2021). In addition, insufficient attention is paid to the potential differentiating effect of the relationship closeness between the agent and the recipient, which determines normative and role expectations in a specific situation of interaction. In terms of practical implications, it is an important task for social scientists to uncover the mechanisms of cooperation and factors of subjective well-being, which is becoming even more acute in the context of global crises. In terms of theoretical relevance, an analysis of the purported positive impact of socially shaped moral self-evaluation on subjective well-being should enhance our understanding of the mechanisms of non-aversive social control based on internal reward mechanisms.

The main hypothesis of this dissertation is that moral self-evaluation should mediate the relationship between prosocial behavior and subjective well-being. To test it, we need reliable tools that allow us to measure moral self-evaluation comprehensively and accurately. However, despite the importance of self-evaluation processes in socially-oriented theories of morality (Bandura, 1999; Stets and Carter, 2012), there is still a certain lack of reliable and ecologically valid scales capturing the former. The main difficulty in measuring moral self-evaluation is the self-enhancement bias, i.e. overly positive assessment of one's own qualities, especially salient in the moral context (Tappin and McKay, 2017). People are motivated to maintain favorable moral self-evaluation by living up to their moral standards, but if they fail to do so, a number of defense mechanisms may be activated to avoid negative feelings associated with it (Hitlin, 2008). These cognitive mechanisms are worthy of research in themselves; however, their interaction with certain

scale features may introduce distortions in moral self-evaluation reports, e.g. due to social desirability and focalism. Thus, it is an important task to develop a tool which minimizes the measurement error.

In addition, the sociological approach to moral self-evaluation measurement should be methodologically relativist in nature (Hitlin and Vaisey, 2013), which discourages the use of *a priori* defined universal moral evaluation criteria. Instead, an adequate tool must reflect the cultural context, the actor's perception of the point of view of the other (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; James, 1950) and the mechanisms of social comparison (Tesser, Millar and Moore, 1988), while also being sensitive to social processes shaping moral self-valuation.

The *aim* of this dissertation project is to uncover the role of moral self-evaluation in the relationship between prosocial behavior and subjective well-being while taking into account relationship closeness between the benefactor and the recipient. To achieve it, the following *objectives* are pursued:

- introduce the theoretical and methodological foundations for the research of moral self-evaluation as a multi-faceted construct;

- develop an integrative, theoretical model of moral self-evaluation, explicating its causal relationships to other concepts, including prosocial behavior and subjective well-being;

- provide theoretical rationale for the important part of moral self-evaluation in the relationship between prosocial behavior and subjective well-being with a special focus on the importance of the relationship closeness between the benefactor and the recipient;

- develop culture-sensitive instruments to measure moral self-evaluation, assess and compare them on the grounds of reliability and validity;

- empirically examine the mediation potential of moral self-evaluation in the relationship between prosocial behavior and subjective well-being, while accounting for relationship closeness to the beneficiary using selected measures.

The current project draws on a number of theoretical frameworks. Thus, in line with self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), moral self-evaluation is defined as the result of a comparison of the perception of oneself in the present and internalized moral standards (personal and societal). Conceptualization of subjective well-being follows the multidimensional model which includes positive and negative affect and global judgments of about one's life (Diener, Napa Scollon and Lucas, 2009). This framework also implies that short-lived on-line emotional reactions and more lasting and stable forms of well-being have different formation mechanisms. The hypotheses referring to the mediation potential of moral self-evaluation partly draw on Stets and Carter's (2012) sociological model of moral self, describe in the following section. We suggest that it is important to distinguish between moral self-evaluation and the popular concept of moral identity (Aquino and Reed, 2002). While the latter is typically defined as the degree of centrality of moral qualities in the self-concept of an individual, moral self-evaluation refers to assessing oneself according to these qualities while attaching a certain valence (positive or negative) to this assessment.

In terms of *methodological background*, our assessment of moral self-evaluation relies on the repertory grids technique (Kelly, 1955) which was developed to capture personal construct systems, formed and updated as a result of constant interactions with the environment and allowing one to classify, evaluate and predict events. The technique uses an explicit comparison procedure in order to extract individual constructs using "elements" that are relevant to a specific area, that is, objects of assessment - personalities, situations, etc. (Bell, Bannister and Fransella, 2004). Thus,

it produces a measure based on indirect assessment: the deviations of ideas about one's moral qualities from a personal or socially accepted ideal are calculated by the researcher from respondents' separate ratings, instead of relying on a direct subjective assessment. It helps to reduce the measurement error associated with self-enhancement bias. Moreover, it yields a measurement tool which is perfectly designed to account for several reference standards against which one evaluates oneself as a moral object. Previous studies of Russian researchers, working within psychosemantics tradition, showed that they perform well in uncovering the systems of meanings, applied by individuals or groups in assessment of themselves and others (Petrenko, Shmelev, 1982).

To test our main hypothesis, taking into account several reference standards and potential alternative mediators, parallel mediation analysis is employed (Hayes, 2018). Parallel multiple mediator model presupposes that the predictor variable influences the outcome variable directly, as well as indirectly, through two or more mediators, under condition that no mediator causally influences another. This allows us not only to test the significance and the direction of the path while controlling for other relevant mediators, but also to explore the potential conflicts between them, resulting in a null total effect. To further explore the role of social context in this relationship, we operationalize prosocial behavior as a helping action towards close and distant others, suggesting specific hypotheses for each type of prosocial action. Finally, we also test for the linearity of the relationship between the moral self-evaluation and subjective well-being, expecting that there could be a saturation point after which the marginal effects on happiness could decline (Hitlin, 2008).

The *main results* of the dissertation include:

1. Stable and situational moral self-evaluations are two analytically and empirically distinct phenomena. While both are the results of matching the perceptions of actual self with internal standards, the stable moral self-evaluation remains relatively constant across time and situations, and the latter is produced at a particular moment in time in a particular context. The two aspects of moral self-evaluation have diverging predictors and outcomes.

2. Applying repertory grid technique to measure stable moral self-evaluation returns valid and reliable results, which are less sensitive to self-enhancement bias, compared to direct assessment, and have higher ecological validity.

3. Stable moral self-evaluation, measured as the discrepancy between real self and social expectations, shows higher convergent and discriminant validity compared to real-ideal discrepancy. These findings highlight the primate of social norm over personal ideal in making specifically moral self-judgments.

4. Stable moral self-evaluation mediates the relationships between life satisfaction and frequent prosocial behavior, but the direct mechanism depends on the relationship closeness to the beneficiary. The positive effect of helping a stranger on life satisfaction is fully accounted for by moral self-evaluation, regardless of the reference standard, while helping close others acts only through lowering the discrepancy between the assessment of one's moral qualities and perceived societal expectations.

5. Situational moral self-evaluation, resulting from a helping act towards both close and distant others, is a significant predictor of event-level subjective well-being, but only when perceived impact is held constant.

The *key scientific contributions* to the field are as follows:

1. The dissertation introduces an original conception of moral self-evaluation as possessing both stable and situational aspects. Their separate empirical analysis allows us to test whether they constitute one multidimensional construct or empirically independent evaluative mechanisms. This is an important addition to the existing models of moral self (Stets and Carter, 2010), which focus on fast reactions and moral emotions while leaving out the importance of slow deliberative cognitive processes in forming enduring self-judgments and self-narratives.

2. The critical analysis of existing conceptualizations and empirical evidence regarding moral self-evaluation resulted in an integrative theoretical model of predictors and outcomes of the construct which highlights the important part of social factors in its formation.

3. A novel scale of stable moral self-evaluation is developed which uses indirect measurement and a larger – compared to previous measures – culture-specific set of moral characteristics generated by Russian speaking participants. This measure increases the validity of the moral assessment due to a wider set of relevant criteria, e.g., those covering relations to in-group and respect for hierarchy (Graham et al., 2012).

4. Operationalizing prosocial behavior via helping close and distant others not only contributes to the further understanding of their differential unmediated effects on subjective well-being, but also clarifies the potentially distinct roles that moral self-evaluation plays in these mechanisms. This allows sociologists to get a more precise idea about one of the internal mechanisms sustaining social order (Parsons and Shills, 1951) as well as about the assessment of the moral worth of a prosocial act depending on social obligations towards the recipient (Deviatko, Bykov, 2021).

5. To our knowledge, the dissertation contains the first experimental test of the effect of prosocial behavior on subjective well-being in the Russian cultural context. This helps to elaborate the results of cross-sectional studies in the region (e.g. "Happy people are …", 2018) in terms of the directions of the causality while further extending the research beyond WEIRD samples (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 2010).

The dissertation results were presented in the *following articles*:

Nastina E. Deviatko I.F. (2023) Different Paths to Happiness: The Role of Basic Psychological Need Satisfactions in Benefiting Close and Distant Others. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships.* No. 0. P. 1–24.

Nastina E. A. (2022) Moderators of the Link between Prosocial Behavior and Life Satisfaction. *Sociological Journal.* Vol. 28. No. 3. P. 57–71 (In Russ.)

Nastina E. A., Deviatko I. F. (2021) Moral Self-Evaluation: Developing and Validating Methodology for Russian-Speaking Populations. *Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes.* No. 2. P. 4–27. (In Russ.)

Nastina E. A. (2020) Conceptualization and Measurement of Moral Self-Evaluation in Social Sciences: Analytical Review. *Sociology: methodology, methods, mathematical modeling.* No. 50–51. P. 7–36. (In Russ.)

The results were also discussed at the conference session "Subjective well-being in Russia and its regions" of the *VI All-Russian Sociological Congress* in 2021 and international *ESRA* conference in 2023, as well as presented in an expert opinion in a monthly analytical issue *SocioDigger* by VCIOM in 2021 and at the regular seminars of Ronald F. Inglehart Laboratory for Comparative Social Research, HSE, Moscow and Morality Lab, University of Toronto.

OVERVIEW OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Chapter 1 aims to provide the key theoretical assumptions, underlying the following empirical studies which address the mediating role of moral self-evaluation in the relationship between prosocial behavior and subjective well-being. It starts with the critical analysis of the conceptualization and operationalization approaches to moral self-evaluation and develops a theoretical model of the concept. The frameworks of Jordan et al. (2015) and Stets and Carter (2012) were used to demonstrate that moral self-evaluation is commonly conceived of as a specific case of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987) resulting from a comparison of the perception of oneself in the present and the internalized moral standards; however, it is seen as a purely dynamic judgment originating at particular moment in time in a particular context. Drawing on sociological and social psychological scholarship, we argued the necessity for extending the definition of the concept to reflect its multi-faceted nature both in terms of stability (situational vs stable aspects of moral self-evaluation) and the reference standard (individual vs societal ideals). Guided by this extended conceptualization, we classified existing measurement tools (Table 1) and highlighted the novelty and relevance of the scale developed in this thesis, as well as provided a theoretical model of moral self-evaluation which relates it to other relevant constructs including subjective well-being and moral behavior. The model highlights the gaps that require further theoretical clarification and empirical testing, including the relationship between stable and situational aspects of self-evaluation, the impact of moral or immoral behavior on stable moral self-evaluation and a number of mediation mechanisms, one of which is explored in the current research.

Table 1. Approaches to moral self-evaluation measurement

Criteria explicitness/ Criteria selection	Researcher selected	Respondent selected

Content-specific (explicit)	Moral Self-Image scale (Jordan, Leliveld and Tenbrunsel, 2015); Identity standard (Stets and Carter, 2012); Moral identity (Miles and Upenieks, 2018); Interpersonal Adjectives Scale (Wiggins and Heise, 1987)	Moral Constructs Scale (presented in Chapter 2)
Content-neutral (non-explicit)	-	Moral Self-Approval subscale (O'Brien, 1980); Moral need satisfaction (Prentice *et al.*, 2019); Moral self-esteem index (Lu, 2012); Moral self-appraisal (Miles and Upenieks, 2021)

Section two features a review of different theoretical and methodological approaches to well-being aimed to argue the applicability of subjective well-being framework (Diener, Napa Scollon and Lucas, 2009) for the current project while dwelling on its advantages and disadvantages. It is classified as a hedonic approach to happiness, focusing on the personal evaluations of people's experiences and life in terms of good and bad, satisfying and unsatisfying, in contrast to more normative eudaimonic approaches, *a prirori* defining the content of happiness. It is shown that referring to both cognitive and affective as well as passing and lasting evaluations, subjective well-being extends beyond mere pleasure derived from instant gratification of desires which many sociologists including Durkheim (1973), Marx (1971), Marcuse (1991) and Fromm

(2013) regarded as problematic and destructive for an individual and society as a whole. Finally, we demonstrate that while equating happiness with personal experience is sometimes criticized as individualistic and Westcentric, interaction-related factors, including moral self-evaluation and prosocial behavior, should be empirically treated as causes rather than indicators of one's well-being.

Section three systematizes theories and models which uncover the mechanisms underlying the positive link between moral self-evaluation and subjective well-being. Among others, Parsons's (together with Shills, Parsons and Shils, 1951) conception of the relationship between culture, social structure and personality as subsystems of social action implies that aligning need-dispositions with cultural norms brings about internal gratification. The sociometer theory (Leary and Baumeister, 2000) features evolutionary approach to the problem: monitoring of one's acceptance by others through constant self-appraisal process is indispensable for their survival and overall well-being and its results should be associated with strong emotional responses. In turn, Stets and Carter's (2012) model of moral self explicitly places the relationship in the context of social interaction: when the meanings comprising the moral identity standard of a person are activated, people try to match them through engaging in relevant behavior, and if their momentary self-appraisals coincide with the standard, it yields positive emotions such as happiness and pride, while a mismatch of this kind brings about sadness, shame and guilt. The available empirical evidence for the relationship was further explored using a meta-analysis of existing studies on the topic, and significant and moderate relationship ($r = 0.35$) was detected between moral self-evaluation and different components of subjective well-being, including life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect; however, it also highlights the lack of attention to the differential mechanisms linking stable and momentary evaluative judgments about moral self and one's life

or current circumstances. Potential confounders of the observed relationship, including sense of belonging and global self-esteem are discussed.

Finally, section four further uncovers the mediation potential of moral self-evaluation in the relationship between prosocial action and subjective well-being. It was proposed that the well-being benefits of prosocial actions are not limited to a short-term emotional experience, but also include more lasting and sustainable outcomes such as global sense of satisfaction with life, which, in turn, may come as a result of cumulative fleeting experiences. The place of moral self-evaluation in this relationship is analyzed alongside other potential mediators, and the importance of socially shaped factors in the relationship is addressed. In particular, we argue that different groups and cultures provide different reference standards used by individuals in their self-assessment in morel terms, which requires culture-specific measures capable of adequately capturing the construct. Group identities also circumscribe how widely people extend their in-group notion of the proper recipients of their moral obligations. In this way, one and the same helping act directed to either a close or distant other, may affect moral self-evaluation and, subsequently, subjective well-being differently.

The empirical part of the project, presented in Chapter 2, included two stages and 6 distinct studies (see Table 2). As can be seen from the overview, while pursuing different aims, the studies build on each other to, first, develop and validate the measurement tools to capture different aspects of moral self-evaluation, and further to address the mediation mechanism using selected measures.

Table 2. Overview of empirical analyses

Study	Stage	Aim	Sample
1		Development and validation of the idiographic version of Moral Constructs Scale (MCS-I)	N = 67, students, 2019

2	Scales Development and Validation	Development and validation of the conventional version of Moral Constructs Scale (MCS-C)	N = 106, students, 2020
3		Evaluation of MCS-C in terms of robustness to self-enhancement bias	N = 47, convenience sample, 2021
4		Adaptation of the Moral Need Satisfaction scale for Russian-speaking samples; test of malleability of stable and situational measures	N = 129, students, 2021
5a	Mediation Hypothesis Test	Analysis of the role of stable moral self-evaluation in the relationship between prosocial behavior and life satisfaction	N = 757, online panel, pre-intervention, 2021
5b		Analysis of the role of situational moral self-evaluation in the relationship between prosocial behavior and positive, negative affect and event-level well-being	N = 305, online panel, post-intervention, 2021

Study 1 covers the development of the idiographic version of the Moral Construct Scale (MCS-I), based on the repertory grids technique (Kelly, 1955). Students at Moscow universities were sequentially offered two tables (see Appendix 1) in paper-and-pencil format. In the first, five elements were presented in columns for comparison: "real self" (the self as the person sees the self); "ideal self" (the self as the person would like to be); "ought self" (the self as the person believes others think the person ought or should be); as well as the most "morally flawless person" and "immoral person" they know. The participants had to consistently compare all the elements in triads, indicating the moral characteristics distinctive of two people yet not of the third, and to formulate the quality opposite to the indicated one. The resulting bipolar personal constructs were used by the respondents to rate the elements on a 7-point scale in the second table. As a result, two real-ideal (RI) and real-ought (RO) self-discrepancies were calculated, which present reverse indicators of moral self-evaluation. Respondents generated 669 bipolar scales containing 700

unique unipolar qualities. Repeated assessment which also included theoretically related measures (moral self-approval, global self-esteem, and life satisfaction) showed that the test-retest reliability of self-discrepancies were rather high ($r_{RI} = 0.82$, $r_{RO} = 0.87$) and construct validity – adequate.

In Study 2, the 18 most frequently mentioned moral traits from the previous experiment were selected to construct the conventional version of the scale (MCS-C), which preserves the grid design and the elements for comparison (see Table 3). HSE undergraduates filled in an online questionnaire containing MCS-C. Convergent and construct validity of MCS-C were tested using the same procedures as in the previous study with an addition of the moral emotions of guilt and shame as theoretically related constructs. It was shown that MCS-C requires less time and the cognitive load associated with the task is significantly lower compared to MCS-I, while the construct validity indicators are higher. This makes this version more convenient for use in mass surveys which include a variety of other measures, including subsequent online assessments in this thesis. Importantly, real-ought discrepancy showed higher criterion and discriminant validity compared to real-ideal discrepancy.

Table 3. Moral Construct Scale (Conventional Variant): Questionnaire Example

Construct	Real self	Ideal self	Ought self	Morally flawless	Immoral
Evil(1) - Kind(7)					
Irresponsible(1) - Responsible(7)					
Deceitful(1) - Honest(7)					
Egotist(1) - Altruist(7)					
Lazy(1) - Hardworking(7)					
Rude(1) - Polite(7)					
Closed(1) - Open(7)					
Cowardly(1) - Brave(7)					
Submissive(1) - Stubborn(7)					
Stingy(1) - Generous(7)					

Selfish(1) - Selfless(7)				
Indifferent(1) - Unindifferent(7)				
Unfair(1) - Fair(7)				
Unfaithful(1) - Faithful(7)				
Brazen(1) - Humble(7)				
Intolerant(1) - Tolerant(7)				
Dependent(1) - Self-sufficient(7)				
Cruel(1) - Compassionate(7)				

In Study 3, we continued with the additional test of the performance of MCS-C. Namely, it was compared to the Moral Self-Image (MSI) scale by Jordan et al. (2015) in terms of its robustness to self-enhancement bias. 47 respondents, recruited through convenience sampling, were randomly assigned to fill in an online questionnaire containing one of the scales stated above, no significant socio-demographic differences between groups were detected. Between-subject design was used due to the high resemblance of the measurement tools. The results indicated that MCS-C leads to a significantly more critical moral self-evaluation compared to MSI, which provides initial evidence for a lower self-enhancement bias of the measure.

While previous studies focused on the measurement of the stable aspect of moral-self-evaluation, Study 4 aimed to adapt and validate the Moral Need Satisfaction Scale (Prentice *et al.*, 2019) to serve as a measure of its situational aspect. It also tested the stable (MCS-C) and situational measures for their malleability: we expected the situational measure to be more sensitive to recent prosocial actions. Additionally, the differential effect of relationship closeness was addressed: since helping a more distant person had been shown to have more moral value than helping kin or in-group (McManus, Kleiman-Weiner and Young, 2020; Deviatko and Bykov, 2021), we assumed that people may derive a higher boost to situational moral self-evaluation from

such an act of kindness, which an adequate measure should be able to detect. HSE students took part in an online randomized experiment which consisted in a recall and a detailed description of their recent behavior followed by moral self-evaluation measures. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (helping close others/ strangers) or a control group recalling a visit to a supermarket or shopping center. As a result, the measure of situational moral self-evaluation demonstrated high reliability and due malleability by responding to a relevant experimental manipulation; however, no differences between experimental groups were detected. In turn, MCS-C, used to measure stable moral self-evaluation was not affected by recalling recent helping actions towards strangers, as expected; however, when helping a friend or family member was described, it even increased the discrepancy between one's perception of self and personal or societal ideals. The two types of moral self-evaluation showed no statistical relation to each other, and only stable moral self-evaluation was related to life satisfaction suggesting that they are empirically distinct constructs. Overall, these results allowed us to carry on with using MCS-C and Moral Need Satisfaction Scale for the measurement of stable and situational moral self-evaluation, respectively.

At the second stage of empirical analyses, selected measures were used to uncover the mechanisms linking prosocial behavior and subjective well-being via moral self-evaluation. Unlike the previous studies, which used student samples, the participants for 5a and 5b were recruited via one of the leading Russian access-panel providers, with quotas for age and gender applied, which ensured the heterogeneity of the sample. Participants were invited to take part in a week-long study of daily practices and emotions for a small monetary remuneration.

Study 5a explores the relationship between the stable concepts using observational data from pre-intervention stage. 757 participants responded to a baseline questionnaire which included

life satisfaction, MCS-C, usual frequency of help towards close others and strangers, and control variables. The parallel mediation analysis (Fig. 2) using these data implied that the effect of helping a stranger is fully accounted for by moral self-evaluation regardless of whether the enactor compares themselves with their personal ideal or social expectations (β 0.17 [0.003, 0.040] и β 0.19 [0.003, 0.042], respectively). At the same time, helping family and friends affects only the real-ought moral (mis)match (β = 0.13 [0.001, 0.037]), which, in turn, partly explains its effect on subjective well-being, leaving space for other potential mediators. Thus, the results provide evidence for the mediation effect of moral self-evaluation while highlighting the importance of normative expectations of generalized other in this mechanism.
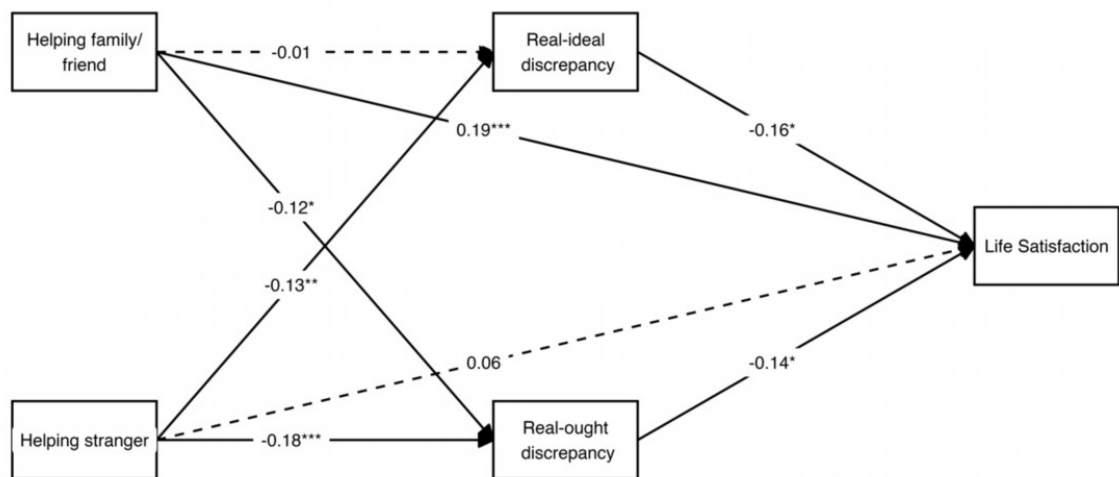
Figure 2. Path model for effect of usual frequency of helping family/ friend and helping stranger (as compared to control condition) on life satisfaction through stable moral self-evaluation indicators. The effects are controlled for gender, age, education, and financial situation. p-values: *< .05; ** < .01; *** < 0.001

Study 5b uses a one-week happiness intervention scenario to test whether situational moral self-evaluation resulting from helping acts towards close and distant others predicts higher week-long positive affect and event-level well-being while also lowering negative affect, even when other potential mediators are taken into account. Participants were panel users from the previous

study, who returned to fill in the second questionnaire a week later and complied with the task. At the end of the baseline questionnaire, they were randomly assigned to one of experimental groups or to the control group and received a corresponding task. Those in the experimental conditions were asked to be especially kind to a) a close family member/ a friend or b) a stranger/ a person they hardly know during the following week; suggested example acts of kindness were provided. Participants in the control group were asked to remember what they would be doing in the first half of the following day. In a week, they returned to describe in detail one activity relevant to their condition and then completed situational moral self-evaluation and subjective well-being measures together with control variables. The results (Fig. 3) provide evidence for the fact that situational moral self-evaluation mediates the relationship between event-level recent prosocial acts and well-being even when the sense of belonging is tested as an alternative mediator ($\beta_{fam/fr}$= 0.19 [0.050; 0.355]; β_{str} = 0.21 [0.053; 0.383]). However, this effect takes place only if and when kind acts match routine acts in self-perceived effectiveness. At the same time, more enduring types of subjective well-being including positive and negative affect were not affected by prosocial behavior, indicating that the positive effect of feeling moral as a result of a certain one-shot action is rather short-lived and does not transform into a more lasting subjective well-being increase.
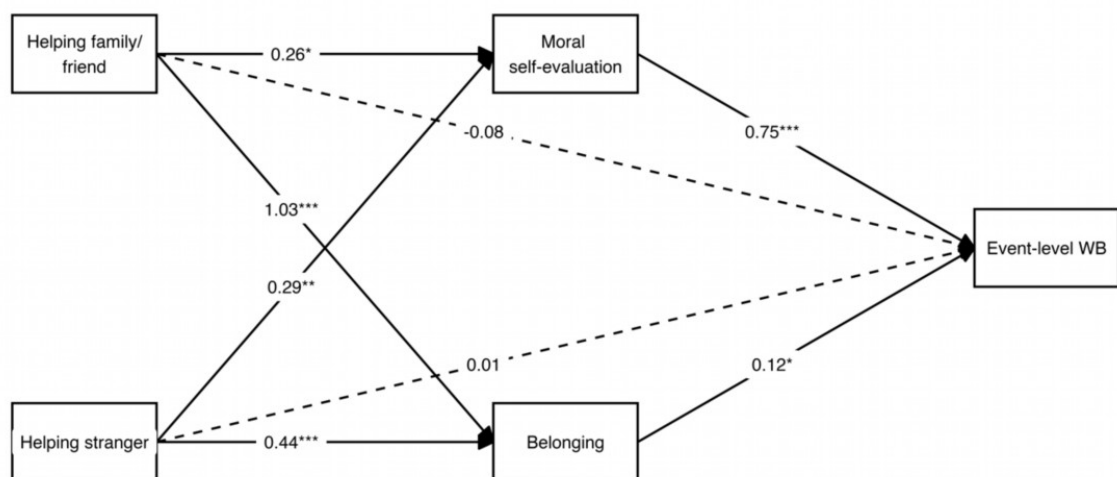
Figure 3. Path model for effect of helping family/ friend and helping stranger (as compared to control condition) on event-level well-being through situational moral self-evaluation and sense of belonging. The effects are semi-standardized path coefficients controlled for self-perceived effectiveness. p-values: *< .05; ** < .01; *** < 0.001

Overall, our results support the hypothesis about the indirect effect of prosocial behavior on subjective well-being through moral self-evaluation, shedding light on the internal mechanisms sustaining social order (Parsons and Shills, 1951). They also reveal that stable and situational aspects of moral self-evaluation are theoretically and empirically distinct implying different behavioral and cognitive mechanisms of their formation, which adds to the current model of moral self in sociology (Stets and Carter, 2012). Moreover, it is demonstrated that social context plays an important part in this relationship: helping close and distant others affects well-being through somewhat different paths.

Another important contribution of this dissertation is the mew measure of stable moral self-evaluation. In its idiographic version, it can be used to explore systematic differences in the content and complexity of moral subsystems of different groups, e.g., those with varying social standing (Lamont, 1992). The conventional version can be used in surveys exploring different aspects of morality in Russia. Due to its wider scope of moral criteria, including those tackling in-group loyalty and respect for hierarchy, is provides a better fit for the cultural context, as compared to the previous measures. In this way, our work contributes to the project of the new sociology of morality (Hitlin and Vaisey, 2013) by exploring the social processes shaping a morally relevant construct with a culture-specific tool, as well as by engaging with data about practices and experiences in natural settings which increases the ecological validity of the findings.

There are still certain limitations which could be addressed in future research on the topic. Thus, we could not replicate the causal relationship between benefitting others and situational subjective well-being until a control variable was included. This may either imply that kindness

interventions, in general, are less likely to induce subjective well-being because participants may not find their assignment desirable, or point towards culturally specific emotional regulation norm, associated with moral behavior (Simonova, 2021).

As for more enduring aspect of subjective well-being, life satisfaction, analysis of cross-sectional data cannot empirically uncover the direction of causation. One of the possibilities is that the relationship in question may be reciprocal: helping behavior creates a positive feedback loop with resulting happiness stimulating new kind acts (Aknin, Dunn and Norton, 2012). A longer kindness intervention could provide further evidence in this regard.

Finally, we demonstrated that the nature of the relationship between prosocial behavior and subjective well-being can be significantly affected by socially determined factors such as relationship closeness to the beneficiary and reference standard. However, there still remain a number of important moderators to be considered including values and identities, which can further enhance our understanding of the mechanisms of non-aversive social control.

DISSERTATION CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE ROLE OF MORAL SELF-EVALUATION IN LINKING MORAL BEHAVIOR AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 3

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