Acts of Kindness: Motives, Acts and Reactions

Lydia Chandler

Dalton State College
Abstract

This paper will discuss random acts of kindness the researcher witnessed and participated in, how it made them feel, and how others feel about acts of kindness and good deeds.

Keywords: kindness, self righteous, helpful
Acts of Kindness: Motives, Acts and Reactions

Is it true that it is human nature to be selfish? Do people really help others solely because they want to? Why do people perform these kind acts? How do people respond to acts of kindness? This paper will discuss all of these questions as well as provide examples of acts of kindness, whether people think before they act on being kind, and many other aspects and questions that come to mind when people think of acts of kindness and paying it forward.

First, this paper will define acts of kindness, along with some possible motives and factors that play into the decision to act, and how others react. Next, it will discuss the results of a survey about random acts of kindness which was administered to classmates. Thirdly, it will talk about how the researcher took it upon herself to perform two specific acts of kindness: complimenting strangers and holding the door for others. It will talk about the motives behind the researcher’s act, how those people reacted, and how the researcher felt afterwards. It will also discuss acts of kindness performed for them and how the researcher felt about them. Finally, this paper will conclude whether the researcher believes humans are selfish and act solely on behalf of themselves and their public image, or if humans are kind on behalf of others.

According to an article titled “Reactions to Random Acts of Kindness” (2000), which was published in the Social Science Journal (2000), a random act of kindness can be defined as “something one does for an unknown other that they hope will benefit that individual” (Baskerville, 2000, p. 294). The researcher suggests that some motives people have for performing these acts include, but are not limited to, improving their self-image, feeling bad for someone else or feeling obligated to help, seeing a situation that they could improve, and wanting to cheer someone up. “Reactions to Random Acts of Kindness” (2000) provides additional factors that influence others to help people. Some of these include “the number of
other people around, the feeling of control over one’s self, how assertive one is, and how good one feels about one’s self” (Baskerville, 2000, p. 294). It goes on to say that some people who are in a bad mood act kindly and help others to improve their mood (Baskerville, 2000, p. 294). Women are more likely to perform acts of kindness, according to an article titled “Social Heuristics and Social Roles: Intuition Favors Altruism for Women but Not for Men” (Barcelo, 2016, p. 390). According to the same article, women are “expected to behave altruistically, and are punished for failing to be altruistic” (Barcelo, 2016, p. 389). This may be due in part to the expectation that women be caring and protective. This is a good example of gender roles society has put in place. People who receive acts of kindness typically respond in a positive manner but depending on the person who helps someone else, the act, and the recipient, the reactions can vary. Studies show that women respond somewhat more positively to certain acts of kindness, such as being given a flower, than men do (Girard, 2004, p. 1025).


**The Basics: Questions 1-3**

Of the ten people who responded to this survey, there were five males and five females. Their ages varied: seven were between the ages of 17 and 24 and three were between the ages of 25 and 31. The ethnicities of these individuals fell under two categories: Caucasian and Hispanic. Six were Caucasian and four were Hispanic (English 3000 Survey, personal communication, 2017).
Specifics: Questions 4-8

When asked if they considered themselves nice people, seven said yes while three claimed they were somewhat nice (English 3000 Survey, personal communication, 2017). When asked about immediate examples of kindness, each respondent included multiple examples. The examples included the following: opening and/or holding doors, donating time, food, clothing or money, volunteering, complimenting others, and picking up dropped items. One stated that they think of “anything that you can do to help another” (English 3000 Survey, personal communication, 2017). Another stated that they listen to other peoples’ problems and ask them how their day is going (English 3000 Survey, personal communication, 2017). Six participants reported performing those acts often while four reported that they don’t. When asked if they think before they perform an act of kindness, three said yes and seven said no. Upon asking the participants what specific acts of kindness they perform, they responded as following: eight reported complimenting someone, nine reported holding the door, and four responded by saying they pay for others’ meals and drinks (English 3000 Survey, personal communication, 2017).

The Researcher’s Experience

The researcher complimented people, and held the door for others for a week, and the experience was good. The researcher claims that holding the door is like second nature to them, so they usually don’t think about it. They also claim that they are not a very assertive person, so complimenting complete strangers was a bit out of their comfort zone, therefore the motive for complimenting people was almost solely due to this paper. The strangers the researcher complimented thanked her for her kind words and some even struck up a conversation with the researcher. These reactions changed the researcher’s mood from being nervous to feeling relieved.
Approximately ninety-five percent of people said “thank you” or at least smiled or nodded in approval when the researcher held the door for them. Some were more enthusiastic than others. About five percent of people did not notice or acknowledge the researcher’s kind act. She felt indifferent to those who did not thank or acknowledge her act, but when others acknowledged it, she mostly felt good about their reaction. Sometimes the researcher felt indifferent based on their mood at that moment.

The researcher got injured and had a bad limp one day and a few people acted kindly towards her. Some held the door, which made the researcher thankful and react positively. A few people the researcher personally knew asked if she was okay and expressed concern for her condition. One stranger asked if she was okay, which made her feel a bit shocked that the person approached her. Another person driving by on campus slowed down and asked if the researcher needed a ride. After politely declining the offer due to the short distance she was walking, the driver reiterated their concern, asking “are you sure? I noticed you were limping?” (Anonymous, personal communication, October 30, 2017). The researcher was a bit baffled by these acts of kindness but was very grateful for these strangers expressing their concern.

**Conclusion**

After extensive research and daily experimentation and observation, the researcher concludes that humans can be selfish from time to time, but they can also be kind without expecting anything in return. The researcher believes that those who express concern for others, and offer to help, come across as kinder. Those who hold doors, help carry items, and perform other similar acts, seem to be regarded as polite. Complimenting others appeared to brighten not only the day of the one complimenting, but also that of the one receiving the compliment. After providing this survey and interpreting personal experience, it is safe to say that it is always a
good idea to perform a random act of kindness. It doesn’t even matter how big or small of an act it is. In the wise words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “In life, you can never do a kindness too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late” (Girard, 2004, p. 1026).
References

