

The Impact of Shame on Altruistic Behavior of College Students Receiving Assistance: A Mechanism Analysis Based on Multiple Paradigms of Moral Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Shame, as a common emotional experience among college students receiving assistance, presents a unique and complex impact on altruistic behavior. This article is based on the four moral philosophical paradigms of deontological ethics, virtue ethics, emotivism, and social contract theory, and deeply analyzes the internal theoretical texture of the effect of shame on altruistic behavior of college students receiving assistance. Research has found that the shame among college students receiving assistance stems from moral cognitive conflicts related to "lack of autonomy", "lack of moral character", and "contract imbalance", which inhibit altruistic behavior through social avoidance mechanisms. The essence of this difference lies in the cognitive differences between two groups regarding moral identity, sources of obligation, and social relationships. This article proposes based on the theoretical interpretation of moral philosophy that it is necessary to maintain moral autonomy, cultivate contextualized morality, reconstruct sympathetic connections, and improve reciprocal contracts, in order to provide ethical paths for cultivating altruistic behavior of college students receiving assistance and enrich the moral philosophical connotation of supporting education.

Keywords: College students receiving assistance, Shame, Altruistic behavior, Moral philosophy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origin of the Problem

As a special group receiving economic assistance, college students receiving assistance often face identity labels and social evaluations related to "economic dependence" while enjoying the tilt of social resources. Shame becomes an important component of their moral and emotional experience. Altruistic behavior, as the core manifestation of moral practice, is a key link for assisted college students to achieve the goal of "from receiving goodness to transmitting goodness", and it is also one of the core goals of educational support policies. Previous studies have confirmed a significant correlation between shame and altruistic behavior, but research on the beneficiaries often remains at the psychological level, lacking a deep

exploration of their internal ethical logic from a moral philosophy perspective.

The shame among college students receiving assistance is not simply an emotional reaction, but an ethical reflection on their own moral identity, social obligations, and interpersonal relationships. When the recipient experiences shame due to the fact of "receiving funding", their altruistic behavior choice is essentially an ethical decision that involves the interaction of moral cognition and emotional experience. Why does the shame among college students receiving assistance suppress altruistic behavior through social avoidance, while ordinary college students show a decrease in self-efficacy? What are the moral and philosophical roots behind these differences in mechanisms? How to construct a targeted guidance path based on moral philosophy theory? The answers to these questions not only help deepen the understanding of the moral psychology of the beneficiaries, but also

provide solid theoretical support for the work of supporting education in colleges and universities.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Research on the Correlation Between Shame and Altruistic Behavior

Shame, as a form of self-awareness emotion, originates from an individual's perception that they have failed to meet moral standards, and its impact on altruistic behavior is bidirectional. Some studies suggest that shame can stimulate individuals' motivation for self-repair, by compensating for moral deficiencies and reshaping positive self-image through altruistic behavior;^[1] Another part of the research suggests that shame can trigger self-denial and social withdrawal, thereby inhibiting altruistic behavior.^[2] The core of this divergence lies in the differences in moral attribution of shame among different groups. Individuals who attribute shame to "modifiable behavior" tend to repair it through altruistic behavior; If attributed to "stable identity traits", it is easier to choose avoidance.^[3]

1.2.2 Research on the Uniqueness of Shame Among College Students Receiving Assistance

The sense of shame among college students receiving assistance has distinct situational specificity and identity relevance. Related studies have shown that assisted college students are more likely to trigger a sense of shame in economic related scenarios, such as disclosing family privacy and participating in work study programs.^[4] This sense of shame is essentially a sensitive cognition of their identity as "recipients of social support", combined with implicit negative evaluations of "poverty" by society, forming a self-stigmatization mentality. Compared with the shame among ordinary college students, the shame among college students receiving assistance is more easily bound to moral cognition such as "lack of autonomy" and "imperfect morality", and its impact mechanism on altruistic behavior is also more complex.

1.2.3 Research on Shame and Altruistic Behavior from the Perspective of Moral Philosophy

The four core paradigms of moral philosophy provide important theoretical support for analyzing the relationship between shame and altruistic behavior. Deontological ethics emphasizes that

shame arises from the failure to fulfill moral obligations, and altruistic behavior is a rational choice to make up for the lack of obligations.^[5] Virtue ethics regards shame as a "quasi virtue" and believes that it can drive individuals to improve their virtues through altruistic practices.^[6] Emotivism points out that shame can disrupt the bond of sympathy, thereby affecting the generation of altruistic motives.^[7] The social contract theory holds that shame is an emotional response to the imbalance of reciprocal contracts, and altruistic behavior is an important way to restore contract balance.^[8] Existing research has not yet integrated these theories into the group of college students receiving assistance, lacking a systematic ethical interpretation of the impact of shame on altruistic behavior.

2. THE MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL MECHANISM OF SHAME AFFECTING ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOR OF COLLEGE STUDENTS RECEIVING ASSISTANCE

The impact of shame on Altruistic Behavior of College Students receiving assistance is not simply a linear relationship, but rather operates through specific moral cognitive pathways. Compared with ordinary college students, the shame among assisted college students has a stronger inhibitory effect on altruistic behavior, and the mechanism is more unique. This difference essentially stems from the cognitive differences between the two groups regarding moral identity, sources of obligation, and social relationships. The shame among college students receiving assistance mainly affects altruistic behavior through "social avoidance", which contains profound moral and philosophical logic and can be analyzed from four theoretical perspectives.

2.1 From the Perspective of Justice Theory: Cognitive Bias in Reciprocal Justice

Rawls proposed the "principle of difference" in "A Theory of Justice", emphasizing that biased assistance to vulnerable groups should be based on the premise of "not harming the equal respect of individuals". As beneficiaries of social resource redistribution, the core of the shame felt by college students receiving assistance stems from a cognitive bias towards "reciprocal justice". Under the influence of the implicit moral consensus of

"justice=reciprocity" in society, beneficiaries who have not yet found an explicit path to "repay society" will experience moral pressure due to "breaking the balance of reciprocal justice". This pressure is further amplified in economic contexts, such as filling out funding applications and disclosing family assets, because these behaviors not only expose information, but also serve as a moral confirmation of the inability to avoid seeking help through independent economic means. Shame essentially becomes a self-condemnation of the failure to fulfill reciprocal obligations. Reciprocity justice emphasizes the two-way nature of "help and return", but does not require immediate and equal returns. However, college students who receive assistance often moralize this "unrewarded" state as "their own moral defects", leading to a sense of shame.

2.2 From the Perspective of Kant's Deontological Ethics: Maintenance of Autonomous Moral Identity

Kant's theory of obligation regards "rational autonomy" as the core of morality, believing that moral behavior should be based on the obligation of "self-legislation" rather than external pressure.[9] The sense of shame among assisted college students activates their "non-autonomous" self-awareness. When faced with public helping scenarios (such as participating in volunteer activities that require self-introduction), this behavior is seen as "exposing their autonomy deficit again", which in turn triggers social avoidance. This avoidance is essentially a maintenance of the "integrity of moral identity". College students who receive aid are concerned that publicly helping others will reinforce the label of "pitied recipients" and deviate from the moral ideal of "rational autonomy". Therefore, they protect their remaining autonomy identity through avoidance. In Kant's view, "human beings are ends rather than means", and every rational being should be regarded as a moral subject with autonomous legislative power. The social avoidance of college students receiving assistance is precisely the adherence to this moral principle - they do not want to be seen as "passive recipients of compassion" by others for openly helping others, and do not want their altruistic behavior to be interpreted as "a return on aid", but rather hope to fulfill their altruistic obligations as "rational autonomous individuals".

2.3 From the Perspective of Morality and Ethics: Adhering to Sincere Virtue

Aristotelian virtue ethics emphasizes that the cultivation of character cannot be separated from the recognition of others, but this recognition must be based on sincere practice of virtues.[10] The shame experienced by college students receiving assistance can activate their deep anxiety about the authenticity of their virtuous behavior. They are concerned that their actions may be interpreted by others as a "compensatory performance" rather than a "natural expression of virtue" in public rescue scenarios. This questioning of the "authenticity of evaluations" has given rise to social avoidance behavior. Virtue ethics holds that true altruistic behavior should stem from an internal sense of virtue, rather than being driven by external pressures or evaluations from others. The social avoidance exhibited by the students receiving assistance is essentially a commitment to the virtue of sincerity. They expect their altruistic behavior to stem from intrinsic virtues such as generosity and friendliness, rather than external goals such as giving back support and avoiding shame. The pursuit of virtue and sincerity makes college students receiving assistance more inclined to choose non-public forms of assistance after their sense of shame is activated, in order to avoid possible misunderstandings and negative evaluations from others.

2.4 From the Perspective of Emotivism: Avoidance of Sympathy Projection Disorder

Hume and Smith's theory of emotivism holds that morality originates from the transmission of sympathy, and altruistic behavior relies on empathy,[11] the ability to project the pain of others onto oneself. If the shame of college students receiving assistance is linked to their experience of being pitied, it may form an "empathy projection disorder": they worry that their helping behavior will cause others to experience similar feelings of being pitied, thereby undermining equal empathy relationships. For example, students receiving assistance may avoid directly helping impoverished peers because they are deeply aware of the shameful experience that comes with being helped by others and do not want others to repeat such feelings. Smith proposed the perspective of a "just observer" in "The Theory of Moral Sentiments", emphasizing that the core of empathy lies in "empathy" and "equal respect".[12] The social

avoidance of college students receiving assistance is essentially the maintenance of equal and empathetic relationships. They attempt to avoid the alienation of altruistic behavior into the reproduction of a new "compassionate relationship" by avoiding direct rescue scenarios. This avoidance does not mean giving up altruistic obligations, but rather a cautious treatment of ethical emotional relationships, reflecting the profound empathy of the assisted students towards the emotional experiences of others.

3. CONSTRUCTION OF PRACTICE PATH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Based on the analysis of the moral philosophy mechanism of the influence of shame on the altruistic behavior of college students receiving assistance, it is necessary to construct a targeted practical path from four dimensions: maintaining moral autonomy, cultivating contextualized morality, reconstructing sympathy connections, and improving reciprocal contracts. This not only alleviates the negative impact of shame, but also stimulates the altruistic motivation of college students receiving assistance.

3.1 Maintaining Moral Autonomy: Reducing Labeling and Ensuring Dignity and Equality

Based on Kant's principle of duty that "human beings are ends rather than means", university funding should reduce the labeling of the funding process and ensure the moral autonomy and dignity equality of the assisted college students. The first is to implement an anonymous funding process, such as anonymous application and anonymous distribution of funding, to avoid the public exposure of the identity of the "beneficiaries" and reduce the shame trigger of "lack of autonomy". The second is to weaken the identity of "beneficiaries". It is necessary to emphasize the ethical value of "social mutual assistance" in funding promotion and education, interpreting "receiving funding" as "mutual support among members of the social community" rather than "passive giving and receiving". The last is to provide funding forms of "autonomous choice", such as allowing college students receiving assistance to independently choose work study positions and participate in public service projects, enhancing their sense of control over the funding

process and strengthening their rational and autonomous moral identity recognition.

3.2 Cultivating Situational Virtue: Designing Altruistic Practices with Low Threshold and High Recognition

The concept of "cultivating virtue practice" based on virtue ethics should be used to design contextualized altruistic practice projects for assisted college students, so that they can improve their virtues and alleviate their sense of shame in the process of practicing altruistic behavior. Firstly, it is essential to develop "non-public assistance channels" such as online organization of sponsored Q&A materials, anonymous donations, online skill coaching, etc., to reduce identity exposure anxiety in public settings and lower the triggering of social avoidance. Secondly, it is a must to design "ability enhancing assistance tasks" that combine the professional advantages and strengths of the college students receiving assistance to carry out targeted altruistic practices, such as providing online academic counseling for students with academic difficulties and skill training for community residents. In the process of assisting others, they can strengthen self-worth identification and alleviate the shame of "imperfect moral character"; Finally, it is necessary to construct a "progressive altruistic practice system", starting from low-intensity and low exposure altruistic behavior, gradually transitioning to high-intensity and open altruistic practice, allowing college students receiving assistance to accumulate confidence in continuous moral practice and gradually overcome the inhibitory effect of shame.

3.3 Refactoring Compassion Connection: Strengthening Emotional Resonance and Eliminating Self-stigma

The theory of "sympathy transmission" based on emotionalism requires emotional guidance and cognitive reconstruction to help assisted college students eliminate self-stigma and reconstruct sympathy connections. The first is to conduct a "peer mutual aid sharing session" and invite senior college students who have received assistance to share their experiences of "from receiving help to helping others", so that they realize that "receiving help and helping others is a normal part of social mutual aid" and reduce self-stigmatization. The second is to conduct "emotional empathy training" to guide assisted college students to transform their own experiences of shame into profound empathy

for others' difficulties, strengthen the understanding that "helping others is an empathetic response to one's own experiences", and reconstruct empathy connections. The third is to create an inclusive and accepting campus culture. The values of "poverty is not shameful, dependence is not terrible, and refusing mutual assistance is the moral deficiency" should be conveyed through themed class meetings, campus propaganda, and other forms, eliminating the implicit negative evaluation of "poverty" by society and creating an inclusive environment for the emotional expression and altruistic practice of college students receiving assistance.

3.4 Improving Reciprocal Contracts: Building Explicit and Participatory Return Platforms

Based on the principle of "reciprocal justice" in social contract theory, a clear and participatory return platform should be established for college students receiving assistance, which helps them achieve a balance of reciprocal contracts and alleviate the shame caused by "failure to fulfill return obligations". Firstly, a "funding public service" linkage mechanism should be established to moderately link economic assistance with public services, providing clear repayment paths for aided students and prioritizing the recommendation of college students receiving assistance to participate in meaningful public welfare projects. Secondly, a "long-term return platform" should be established, such as forming a public service team composed of students receiving assistance, or setting up an assistance fund managed by assisted students, so that students receiving assistance can continue to participate in social return behavior and gradually achieve a balance of reciprocal contracts. At the same time, there is a must to strengthen the concept of "diversified returns" and guide students receiving assistance to realize that the forms of returning to society can be diverse, including direct forms such as material donations and public services, as well as indirect forms such as academic improvement and future contributions to society through career development. This approach can alleviate the "immediate return pressure" of students receiving assistance and reduce the sense of shame caused by "difficulty in quick return".

4. CONCLUSIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

4.1 Research Conclusions

The shame experienced by college students receiving assistance essentially stems from cognitive conflicts between moral identity, social obligations, and interpersonal ethical relationships. Its origin comes from cognitive biases in reciprocal justice, contradictions in the perception of self-sufficient virtues, and differences in the perception of autonomous moral status. From the perspective of moral philosophy, the mechanism by which shame affects the altruistic behavior of college students receiving assistance is social avoidance. This mechanism reflects the individual's demand to maintain autonomous moral identity, uphold true virtues, and avoid empathetic projection barriers. The core difference between the two groups lies in their divergent perceptions of moral identity, sources of obligation, and social relationships. Based on the theory of moral philosophy, the inhibitory effect of shame on altruistic behavior of college students can be alleviated by safeguarding moral autonomy, cultivating situational virtues, reconstructing empathetic connections, and improving reciprocal contracts.

4.2 Research Expectations

This study analyzes the mechanism by which shame affects Altruistic Behavior of College Students receiving assistance from a moral philosophy perspective, but there are still certain limitations. Firstly, theoretical analysis mainly relies on classical philosophical paradigms, lacking the integration and application of modern moral philosophy theories. Secondly, future research can adopt a mixed research approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative analysis, to further validate the rationality of moral philosophy mechanisms. Thirdly, in the future, we can cooperate with the funding management departments of universities to apply practical paths to actual work scenarios, test their feasibility and effectiveness, and provide more targeted theoretical support and practical guidance for student funding and education work.

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