The effect of cognitive appraisal and emotional experience on interpersonal behavior in situations arousing gratitude

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People tend to show some types of interpersonal behavior after feeling gratitude: reciprocal behavior, expression of apology, expression of thanks, and prosocial behavior. We examined the mechanism of these behaviors in 304 undergraduate students who were presented with three types of situations that produce gratitude: receiving help, receiving gifts, or imposing on others. We asked participants to rate three types of cognitive appraisals (receiving favor, cost to benefactor, naturalness of the situation), two types of emotional experiences of gratitude (contentment, apologetic emotion), and four types of interpersonal behavior. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that receiving benefit basically facilitates reciprocal behavior, prosocial behavior, and expression of thanks. Furthermore, the cost to the benefactor basically facilitates expression of apology. However, some effects of cognitive appraisal and emotional expression on behaviors differed among the types of situations. In particular, the results for imposing on others were different from the other situations. These results are discussed related to the different characteristics of the types of situations.

Keywords: Feeling of gratitude, reciprocal behavior, expression of gratitude, prosocial behavior, social emotion.

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