Signe Petersen, Undergraduate - 'Pro-sociality in the light of personality and situations'

A topic which has fascinated psychologists for a long time is prosociality. Why do some people decide to act unselfishly in situations where others decide not to? The individual differences in prosocial behaviour have most consistently been accounted for by the personality trait Honesty-Humility (or HH, from the HEXACO model of personality), yet even HH is not a consistent predictor.

Instead, psychologists have begun to find evidence that situational factors are affording the expression of personality traits, such as HH. That is, it is both the individual's personality characteristics and the situation in which they are acting, which ultimately determines behaviour.

Such situational characteristics, which have been linked to pro-sociality (and its reverse: exploitation), are conflict of interest and power. However, empirically, these characteristics have only been studied separately, and neither accounts for all the variance we see. Furthermore, on a theoretical level, we should expect both characteristics to be present, and for them to interact, in order to afford prosocial behaviour amongst people who score high on HH and vice versa to afford exploitative behaviour amongst those low on HH. This is backed up by recent meta-analyses.

Our project is therefore considering the importance of situational affordances in the context of prosocial vs exploitative behaviour. This is experimentalised in a behavioural game (chicken), where we can systematically manipulate situations to differ on conflict and power, and thus test the link between HH and these both individually and together. Our hypothesis is that if a situation is high on both, HH will be a stronger predictor of prosocial/exploitative behaviour.

Data is not yet collected (we are aiming to publish in the format of a registered report), but a pilot has (successfully) been conducted to test the strength of our manipulations.