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Favoring a Norm of Benevolence Over a Norm of Self-Interest

The study examines whether people more strongly approve of self-interested or benevolent action. Previous research suggests a prescriptive norm of self-interest, which discourages selfless, prosocial behavior, and which makes people think negatively about those who engage in benevolent acts. The current study challenges the prescriptive norm of self-interest. We speculate that gender identity acts as a confound in previous studies, masking the norm of benevolence, and falsely indicating a norm of self-interest. To investigate this dilemma, we disentangled gender identity from self-interest. Our findings support the idea that variables other than self-interest are to blame for previous findings that people approve of, and feel comfortable with self-interested action.