
Random Acts of Kindness: How They Benefit the Human Kind and How Technology Is Being Used to Aid in These Acts

In today's world, there is a sense of disconnect between humans. People no longer feel the need to get to know their neighbors or to talk with another person on their lunch break. This is due, in part, to technology and social media. Everyone seems very caught up with their devices. "There are still people who practice such kindness "just because", but far too few of them. in a cynical world, where few give without expecting something in return, self has become king" (Knutson). But what if this new technology, paired with kindness, could change the lives of many? This essay will explore ways in which random acts of kindness benefit humankind and how technology is being used to aid in these acts. Using an experiment conducted by a professor at North Carolina State University on positive deviance using students in her sociology class, this essay will map out the reactions of people receiving random acts of kindness, as well as ways in which these acts came full circle and made the students feel accomplished in their deeds.

Random acts of kindness do not have to be expensive gestures. These acts can include offering to help an elderly person across the street, paying for someone's food order, or giving someone a compliment on their hair. One random act of kindness that I recently witnessed was enacted by one of my coworkers who had gotten into a car accident. He received a large settlement from insurance, and decided to spend some of it on his coworkers. He got all of our cars fixed at his expense, whatever issues our cars had were resolved by the mechanic, and the only thing he wanted in return was for us to bless someone else in the near future. This act will be a positive domino effect, as my coworkers and I will make sure to perform random acts of kindness for others in remembrance of our coworker's generosity.

It is important to note "positive deviance is found in spontaneous acts of kindness. These behaviors fall outside of the bounds of what our society expects from us- they are norm violations, thus they are deviant" (Jones). Unfortunately, in today's society, random acts of kindness are considered outside of the norm. Due to this, there is a wide range of reactions people may feel as a recipient of a random act of kindness including graciousness and rejection, surprise or scrutiny (Jones). In order to test the range of emotions involved in distributing and receiving random acts of kindness, Angela Jones conducted an experiment in her college class involving students performing 12 random acts of kindness over the course of one semester, recording the recipient's reaction, and later analyzing it from a sociological perspective.

Some researcher like Erich Goode, argue that the term "positive deviance" is an oxymoron and that "positive labeling is not a form of deviance because it does not lead to stigma, social degradation, or discreditation" (Jones). After the social experiment has been completed and analyzed, contrary to Goode's belief, stigmatization will even come from positive deviance, in some cases. Goode believed that "deviance is always negative because stigmatization only comes from negative behaviors" (Jones), but this experiment will prove that stigmatization can also come from positive deviance. Other researchers, like Wilkins, agreed that positive deviance

was a term, and that “deviance only refers to that which is not normal, a norm violation may be positive as well” (Jones). Since people in society are not used to receiving random acts of kindness, they may react negatively in some cases, as shown in the experiment. This, however, should not stop people from wanting to be agents of change.

Jones discusses her goals for the experiment, to “balance students’ attention between negative deviance and positive deviance. It also generated opportunities to deal with and discuss the relevance of stigma management and the continuing importance of race and gender for everyday interaction” (Jones). The students began the experiment reluctantly because they knew they would be acting outside of social norms. The students chose to start with performing random acts of kindness, which benefitted their friends and families, but were reprimanded by Jones who stated that this would not produce correct results and that the acts must be performed to benefit strangers. After the students began performing small acts of kindness for strangers, it was interesting to examine the negative reactions by some recipients. One example Jones discusses is when one of her African American male students tried to help an elderly woman bring her groceries to her car. The woman stated that she did not want his help and hurried to her car. “The negative label placed on these young men by most of our society created a situation where his act of positive deviance was viewed in a negative light” (Jones). This proved Goode’s idea wrong and showed that deviance is not always negative, even when stigmatized.

Other reactions from recipients ranged from offended when one of the students paid for their order of food, to shocked when a student paid their parking meter, to gracious when a student offered up their spot a computer in the computer lab, to reluctant when the recipient thought they may have been targeted as a love interest. One young woman was told that it was “not a woman’s place” to perform acts of kindness like this, bringing to light beliefs on gender roles in a patriarchal society. A lot of times men don’t want to be helped by women because men want to be the dominant one in the situation. This taught the students involved in the experiment many sociological lessons like differential association, the social construction of reality, gender roles, and stigma management.

Jones’s experiment involving random acts of kindness taught many lessons, including how it feels to perform deviant behavior, the ramifications of this, such as “how deviance is socially constructed in such a way that it reinforces the stereotypes that seem to penetrate all corners of our society, and how their place in the social structure affects their interactions with others” (Jones). Students were able to explore their own ethnocentric beliefs, possibly leading to positive change within. Even the students that received negative reactions still agreed that the random acts of kindness probably started a chain of positivity in society, and I believe that they should continue performing these acts in hopes that one day it would become a norm so that recipients didn’t ever have to be suspicious.

With the technology that we have today, and platforms such as GoFundMe, a fundraising website where you are able to raise funds for yourself or others, performing random acts of kindness is easier than it was in the past. In one instance, Harry Styles, a member of the band One Direction, saw a photograph of a four-year old girl battling stage four cancer. This photograph had gone viral on the Internet, and the family’s GoFundMe link was attached to the photograph. Styles decided to reach out to the family and eventually send a recorded greeting to the girl wishing her well and assuring her that she had his prayers. After this occurrence, the family’s GoFundMe account got a massive amount of donations, which went to paying off

medical bills. One GoFundMe was made for an elderly Latino man who was still working hard selling popsicles at his popsicle stand to support him and his wife. Over \$150,000 was raised for them (Llamoca). This shows the power of technology today. Another instance involved when Amy Poehler wrote a book and described the time she went to Haiti to help all the people in need there. “I wondered if I was just doing this as some kind of ego trip. Then I decided I didn’t care. Not enough is made of the fact that being of service makes you feel good”. (Page 305, Poehler). Her experience made her feel compassionate for all of the people that needed love and support. “People are very bad and very good. A little love goes a long way”. (Page 309, Poehler).

Yet another example of random acts of kindness and the chain of positivity that they create is Leon Logothetis, a man who travelled the country in 2007 – his budget was \$5 a day for his reality show. To survive, he relied on the kindness of strangers for necessities like food and shelter. To show his gratitude and pay it forward, he is now offering free rides in six cities and called it the Kindness Cab (Eldridge). This example shows how Logothetis was positively affected by the acts he received, as he was travelling, and how he was inspired by them to start up his Kindness Cab. It is with no doubt that getting a ride in the Kindness Cab will positively influence one person, and they will do something nice for someone else, who will do something nice for someone else. Being an agent of change means taking a blessing that was given to you and blessing someone else in the near future. This blessing does not have to be extravagant, or expensive, but making a goal to perform one random act of kindness within a certain period of time could bring a copious amount of good to our society- a society that desperately needs good. The “be nice” movement seems to be gaining some steam of late. A year or two ago, anonymous “layaway angels” started paying customers’ accounts at Kmart and other retailers. Now, there are [many Web sites](#) devoted to ways of making others happy in small ways (Carns).

In conclusion, being an agent of change does not mean that you have to move mountains. Being an agent of change can just mean going out of your way to help others on a day to day basis so that they feel compelled to help someone else in their time of need. One day, these acts will not be viewed as deviant, but as the social norm. “One of the most compelling aspects of this is its ability to build a community in a subtle manner by encouraging kindness among strangers” (Jones). This change is available for everyone to make, you do not need money or fame to do so. Holding the door open for someone carrying groceries, or putting a few quarters in someone’s parking meter so that they will not get a ticket may mean more to someone that we even know. The subtlety of these acts makes them easy to accomplish, and all the more beautiful when the chain of positivity unfolds.