

The bystander effect and social control behavior: the effect of the presence of others on people's reactions to norm violations

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Abstract

Observers of deviant social behavior sometimes communicate disapproval directly or indirectly to the perpetrator of a deviant act. This reaction has been termed 'social control'. Three field studies were conducted to explore the influence of the number of bystander-observers on the likelihood of social control. We predicted that the presence of others would inhibit people's tendency to communicate their disapproval to the deviant but only if personal implication was low. In the first study, we measured participants' perceptions of two fictive situations, one in which a deviant draws graffiti in an elevator of a shopping center and one in which a deviant litters in a small neighborhood park by throwing a plastic bottle in the bushes. As expected, participants considered both behaviors to be equally counternormative but felt personally more implicated by the littering behavior in the park. In Studies 2 and 3, the two situations were enacted with confederates of the experimenter. Naïve bystanders served as participants, and social control was the primary dependent variable. Consistent with our hypothesis, we found evidence for a bystander effect in the low personal implication situation ('graffiti in the elevator') but not in the high personal implication situation ('littering in park'). These results make clear that perceived personal implication moderates the extent to which people are inhibited by the presence of others when they decide whether they should exert social control or not. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

It is generally agreed that social norms are powerful determinants of human behavior (Asch, 1951; Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Newcomb, 1961; Schachter & Singer, 1962; Schwartz, 1977; Sherif, 1936; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Social norms are specific to particular groups, as each group creates its own standards for what attitudes or behaviors are acceptable and desirable. What is considered normative in one group may be seen as being a counternormative (deviant) behavior in another group. For example, in France it is considered polite to fill up a guest's wine glass when it is still half full. A host who lets his or her guests empty their wine glasses is considered inattentive. In Germany, on the other hand, it is expected that hosts pour more wine only when the guest's wine glass is empty. Filling up a wine glass that is still half full would be considered

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to be an (impolite) attempt to encourage the guests to drink too much. Although social norms sometimes work against our need for individuation (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) and our desire to maintain control over events in our lives (Burger, 1992), they also fulfill important functions in a group's life: social norms contribute to the group's identity (Brown, 1995), they create the feeling of belongingness (Smith & Mackie, 1995), they provide the individual with guidelines for his or her behavior in ambiguous situations (Sherif, 1936), they render more predictable others' reactions (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990), and they structure situations that would otherwise be chaotic (e.g. the norm to drive on the right side of the road, the norm to form a line).

Given how important social norms are for a group's existence, it is not surprising that individuals generally conform to group norms (Asch, 1951; Sherif, 1936). Those who engage in deviant behaviors are often victims of negative sanctions by other group members, who exert pressure in order to obtain conformity (Schachter, 1951). This process is called 'social control' (Collins & Frey, 1992; Gibbs, 1981a,b; Liska, 1997). For the present purposes, and consistent with past literature, we define social control as any verbal or nonverbal communication by which individuals show to another person that they disapprove of his or her deviant (counternormative) behavior. It should be noted, however, that the term 'social control' has been used to designate a variety of behaviors related to social influence.

A situation that illustrates our use of the term social control is one in which a couple observes another person throwing a plastic bottle in the bushes of a public park. In most Western societies, littering is considered a deviant behavior (Krauss, Freedman, & Whitcup, 1978; Reiter & Samuel, 1980). The couple may decide to ignore the littering. Or they may decide to communicate to the 'deviant' in some way that they disapprove of his or her behavior. They may give the deviant an angry look, they may make a comment to each other (but loud enough so that the deviant can hear), or they may confront the deviant directly and express their disapproval angrily. All these behaviors are called social control, because they attempt to encourage the deviant to conform to social norms.

Social norms appear to be perpetuated by rewards for normative behaviors, and punishments for counternormative behaviors. Group members who behave normatively are seen as more intelligent, competent, confident, and sincere (Eisenger & Mills, 1968; Levinger & Schneider, 1969). Deviant group members, on the other hand, are in a difficult position: they are not liked by their fellow group members, their views are ignored, they are assigned undesirable tasks, they receive less money, and attempts are made to exclude them from the group (Dedrick, 1978; Festinger, 1950; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951; Schachter, 1951). Janis (1982), in his classic work on 'groupthink', reports the brutality with which dissenting group members are brought in line or 'cut out of the loop' in highly cohesive groups.

With few exceptions, social control has been largely submitted to sociological analysis. Sociology textbooks generally devote entire chapters to deviance, the societal reactions to deviance (social control), and the necessity of social control for the perpetuation of social norms. Some sociologists even maintain that the concept 'social norm' can not be defined without reference to social control. According to the labeling perspective (Kitsuse, 1962; Lemert, 1972), behaviors can be considered deviant only if they generate disapproval by other group members. All behaviors that do not provoke social control are by definition normative. We would argue that this position is somewhat extreme because one could imagine behaviors which are clearly deviant but which, at the same time, are not sanctioned by social control because people are inhibited by the presence of others (e.g. the bystander effect demonstrated by Latané and Darley, 1968). However, it is certainly true that norms that prescribe some individual effort in order to protect a public good (e.g. the norm to carry the plastic bottle to the next trash can instead of throwing it in the bushes) are likely to disappear if deviant behaviors are not sanctioned by social control.

Despite the important role of negative sanctions for the perpetuation of social norms, social psychologists have shown relatively little interest in the phenomenon of social control, at least in the

sense used here (i.e. people's reactions to counternormative behaviors in public). Schachter (1951) documented the manner by which group members respond to a deviant confederate: they first try to win him over, but when they see that they cannot succeed they ignore his views, they assign him to undesirable tasks, and they suggest that he be excluded from the group. Dedrick (1978) showed that bystanders exert more social control when the deviant is neutral rather than apologetic, and when a third person is hostile rather than friendly toward the deviant. Kiesler, Kiesler, and Pallak (1967) showed that when people are alone with the deviant they exert more social control when they believe that they have to work together with the deviant in the future than when they believe that they will never see the deviant again. However, when people are not alone with the deviant they are less likely to exert social control when they are committed to future interaction.

The purpose of this article is to examine a factor that might be involved in the production of social control behavior: the number of bystander-observers. The groundbreaking work by Latané and Darley (1968, 1970) demonstrated that the presence of other people decreases our willingness to help a victim in an emergency situation. Later work showed that this 'bystander effect' is not restricted to emergency situations, but occurs in a variety of settings: in the presence of others, people are less likely to take a coupon for a free cheeseburger (Petty, Williams, Harkins, & Latané, 1977), pick up coins and pencils in an elevator (Latané & Dabbs, 1975), answer the door (Levy et al., 1972), report a broken tape recorder (Misavage & Richardson, 1974), or leave a large tip in a restaurant (Freeman, Walker, Bordon, & Latané, 1975). Applied to the enforcement of social norms, these past findings suggest that people are less likely to exert social control when in the presence of other bystander-observers.

Several past studies examined the effect of the presence of others on helping behavior in the case of a theft, and also found a bystander effect (Howard & Crano, 1974; Latané & Darley, 1970; Latané & Elman, 1970). Although there is no doubt that a theft is a deviant behavior, it is unclear whether an intervention by a naive participant can be qualified as social control. We do not know if the person's motivation is to help the victim or to enforce a social norm against crime. Nevertheless, these findings are convergent evidence for the hypothesis that the bystander effect extends to the domain of social control: the greater the number of people present in the situation the smaller should be the individual probability of intervening.

Latané and Nida (1981) discuss three processes that account for the bystander effect. *Audience inhibition* refers to the risk of embarrassment if the situation turns out not to be an emergency. *Social influence* is the process by which each individual takes the inaction of others as an indicator that the expected pattern of behavior is not to do anything. Finally, *diffusion of responsibility* refers to the fact that costs are associated with intervention and costs are associated nonintervention. In the presence of other people the costs of nonintervention are shared, and nonintervention becomes more likely. All three processes are likely to operate independent of whether bystanders notice a victim in an emergency situation or they observe a deviant performing a counternormative behavior.

Despite the overwhelming evidence for the bystander effect, some variables have been shown to moderate this effect. For example, Cramer, McMaster, Bartell, and Dragna (1988) showed that the presence of others does not inhibit the tendency to help an injured victim in an emergency when participants feel personally implicated in the situation. The women who participated in their study were either registered nurses or general education students. As each participant was escorted to the experimental room, she passed a confederate who was dressed up as a workman and was standing on a ladder. Once inside the experimental room, the participant worked either alone or in the presence of a second confederate who pretended to be another participant. Shortly after, there was a loud crash in the hallway, followed by a thud and moans of pain. The second confederate remained inactive and continued to work on the experimental task. When they were alone in the laboratory, both the nurses and the students intervened with an equally high probability. When they were in the presence of an inactive second participant, the intervention rate dropped drastically among general education students

but stayed about the same among registered nurses. Obviously, when individuals feel personally implicated and have the impression that it is their personal duty to intervene, the bystander effect disappears. Note, however, that the feeling of being personally implicated does not affect people's reactions when they are alone.

The purpose of the set of studies presented below is to examine whether personal implication plays a similar role in social control behavior. If personal implication is low, we expect to find the classic bystander effect: people's tendency to negatively sanction deviant behaviors should be inhibited by the presence of others. However, if personal implication is high the bystander effect should disappear. We examined people's reactions to two types of deviant behaviors. In one situation, a confederate drew graffiti on the walls of an elevator of a shopping mall. In the other situation, a confederate threw a plastic bottle in the bushes of a small neighborhood park. In each case, the confederate performed the deviant behavior in the presence of one, two, or three naive participants.

We predicted that personal implication would be relatively low in the situation with the graffiti in the elevator. The elevator belongs to the corporate business who runs the shopping center. As such, it is clearly private property that is being used temporarily by the bystander. In addition, a professional cleaning personnel is responsible for the cleanliness of the shopping center. We also predicted that personal implication would be relatively high in the situation with the deviant littering in the small neighborhood park. Informal interviews had indicated that people cherished this park like their front yard. In France, there is a rising consciousness about environmental issues, and public institutions promote the protection of the environment as each individual's personal concern. Finally, the maintenance of the park is paid by the inhabitants' local taxes because the city pays the maintenance workers' salaries. The first study reported below verified that the two situations actually differed on the dimension of personal implication. The second study tested our central hypothesis according to which we should find evidence for the bystander effect in the situation 'graffiti in the elevator' but not in the situation 'littering in park'. Finally, the third study replicated the finding in the park with a different confederate.

STUDY 1

Study 1 was designed to assess people's perceptions of the two types of deviant behaviors. Prior to Study 1, several deviant behaviors in different situations had been considered. We had tested several versions of the scenario in each of the situations. Each time, we observed people's reactions and informally interviewed them about their feelings afterwards. Based on these pretests, we decided that two deviant behaviors were particularly appropriate for our purposes: an individual draws graffiti on the walls of an elevator in a shopping center and an individual throws a large plastic bottle in the bushes of a small neighborhood park. Both behaviors appeared to be equally counternormative and equally inappropriate. However, personal implication seemed to be much lower in the situation 'graffiti in the elevator' than in the situation 'littering in park'. Given that this aspect was central to our hypotheses, Study 1 was conducted to verify empirically if the two deviant behaviors really were on the same level of counternormativeness but differed on the dimension of personal implication.

Method

Participants

A female experimenter approached people in front of the elevator in a shopping mall or in a small neighborhood park and asked them if they would be willing to fill out a short questionnaire.

Participants were approached at the same locations at which the actual studies (Studies 2 and 3) were conducted later. Approximately 60% complied with the experimenter's demand to fill out the questionnaire. In total, 200 participants took part in Study 1, 100 were asked about the situation in the elevator and 100 about the situation in the park.

Procedure

After participants agreed to take part in the study the experimenter briefly described to them the situation. In the condition 'graffiti in elevator', she asked them to imagine that they were entering the elevator together with a young man. As soon as the doors close, the young man pulls out a magic marker and starts drawing graffiti on the walls of the elevator. In the condition 'throwing bottle in park', the experimenter asked participants to imagine that they were strolling on a path in the park and that a young man would pass by. As they pass the young man, he drinks out of a large plastic bottle and throws the bottle in the bushes next to the path.

After having described the situation, the experimenter asked the participants to indicate (1) to what extent they considered this behavior to be counter the norms of our society (on a 9-point scale from 1 = 'not at all' to 9 = 'very much so'), (2) to what extent the behavior was appropriate in the situation (on a 9-point scale from 1 = 'not at all appropriate' to 9 = 'very appropriate'), and (3) to what extent they personally suffered the consequences of the behavior (on a 9-point scale from 1 = 'not at all' to 9 = 'a great deal'). Finally, the experimenter asked the participants to describe in their own words how they would react in such a situation. The responses to the last question were later coded as to whether the participant would somehow express his or her disapproval to the young man or not. All forms of disapproval (an angry look, a loud audible sigh, a comment made to the young man, etc.) were considered to be social control.

Results and Discussion

The mean responses, broken down by experimental condition are shown in Table 1. The data show that participants considered the behaviors equally counternormative, $t < 1$ (graffiti: $M = 7.81$; littering: $M = 7.76$). They also saw the behaviors equally inappropriate, $t < 1$ (graffiti: $M = 1.33$, littering: $M = 1.52$). The latter question was inverted and the two questions were combined into a single deviance score. Again, drawing graffiti in the elevator was seen just as deviant ($M = 8.24$) as littering in the park ($M = 8.12$), $t < 1$. However, there was a marked difference between the two deviant behaviors with respect to the third question. Participants indicated that they felt personally more implicated by the littering behavior in the park ($M = 5.94$) than by the graffiti in the elevator ($M = 4.65$), $t(198) = 3.16$, $p < 0.002$. Finally, approximately seven respondents out of ten indicated

Table 1. Questionnaire responses to questions about drawing graffiti in an elevator and littering in a park (Study 1)

| | Graffiti | Littering |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Counternormativity of the behavior | 7.81 (1.81) | 7.76 (1.54) |
| Appropriateness in the situation | 1.33 (0.91) | 1.52 (1.38) |
| Consequences for personal well-being | 4.65 (3.14) | 5.94 (2.61) |
| Social control | 68% | 71% |

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

that they would exert social control both toward the deviant in the elevator (71%) and in the park (68%). Taken together, these results indicate that the major difference between the experimental situations 'graffiti in the elevator' and 'littering in park' was the extent to which people felt personally implicated and responsible for the damaged property.

STUDY 2

The second study was designed to test our central hypothesis according to which we should find evidence for a bystander effect when personal implication is low ('graffiti in elevator') but no evidence for a bystander effect when personal implication is high ('littering in park'). The two situations that had been described to participants in Study 1 were played out by confederates of the experimenter. Naive bystanders served as participants, and their reactions to the deviant behavior was the dependent variable. Of primary interest was the relationship between the number of people who were present in the situation and the incidence of social control.

Method

Participants

For the condition 'graffiti in elevator', clients of a large shopping center in a medium-sized French city served as naive participants. Elevator rides were chosen randomly at different times of the day and on different days of the week. The confederate entered the elevator as soon as there were other people and as soon as he was ready for the next trial. Permission from the director of the shopping center had been obtained and the security personnel had been informed before the beginning of the study. For the condition 'littering in park', individuals who strolled through a small neighborhood park served as naive participants. In both conditions, participants were chosen randomly at different times of the day and on different days of the week. The confederates initiated a new trial whenever they had completed the previous one, and the previous participants were out of sight. The number of bystanders varied between one and three. 442 naive participants took part in the study, yielding a total number of 244 observations.

Procedure

For the condition 'graffiti in elevator', two male students alternated in playing the role of the confederate. The confederate waited in front of the two elevators at the lower (parking) level of the shopping center. When one client or a group of two or three clients entered one of the elevators he joined them, pushed the button for the first floor, and remained standing next to the panel of buttons. As soon as the door started to close, he pulled out a magic marker and drew graffiti on the walls of the elevator. While he was drawing, his back was facing the bystanders. After several seconds he put away his marker, and turned around half way. Just before leaving the elevator on the first floor, he briefly established eye contact with the other people in the elevator. This was done so that the bystanders were given the opportunity to communicate nonverbally. At that time, he also counted the number of people in the elevator. If nobody intervened, he stepped out of the elevator on the first floor and pretended to stroll through the mall. If one or more participants expressed their disapproval to him, he apologized

and asked if he could briefly talk to them. He then informed them that they had just participated in a psychological study and debriefed them. It should be noted that the confederate only initiated a trial on trips from the lower level to the first floor, and never on trips in the other direction. This constraint was applied in order to prevent people who had encountered him entering the shopping mall from seeing him a second time, on their way back to the parking level. Also, only trips on which the elevator traveled from the lower level to the first floor (two total levels) without interruption were counted as valid trials. If the elevator stopped on the ground floor (either because one of the bystanders in the elevator wanted to get off on the ground floor or because someone on the ground floor had called the elevator) the trial was aborted.

For the condition 'littering in park', two female university students served as confederates. They pretended to stroll along a path in a public park. When one individual or a group of two or three individuals were nearby, one of the confederates pretended to drink out of a large plastic bottle and threw the bottle in the bushes next to the path. The bottle hitting the ground made a noise that attracted the participants' attention. The confederates first pretended to ignore the participants. Then, just as they passed them, they quickly established eye contact in order to see if the participants were giving them an angry look. If nobody intervened, the confederates continued to stroll along until the participants were out of sight. If one or more participants expressed their disapproval to them, they apologized, picked up the bottle, and debriefed them.

In both situations, the confederates were dressed in average clothes (blue jeans, jacket, and sneakers), and had no discriminating or unusual features. For ethical reasons, the confederate did not initiate a trial when children or adolescents who appeared to be under 18 years old were present.

Immediately after each trial, the confederates recorded the trial on a coding sheet. They noted the number and sex of bystanders. If one or more persons had exerted social control, they noted the sex, the approximate age, and the style of clothing of the bystander who had intervened first. They also recorded in what form the disapproval had been expressed. The following coding scheme was used: 0 = no social control, 1 = angry look, 2 = loud audible sigh, 3 = comment made to another bystander, 4 = polite comment to the confederate, 5 = comment in aggressive tone to the confederate, and 6 = personal insult in aggressive tone to the confederate. The response 'angry look' (1) was somewhat difficult to code because there were situations in which it was unclear if the bystander was expressing his disapproval or if he or she was simply looking on. The 'loud audible sigh' (2) was also somewhat ambiguous, although less so. The confederates had been instructed to only code the bystander's behavior as an 'angry look' or as a 'loud audible sigh' if they were sure that the participant was communicating disapproval.

Results and Discussion

The different types of reactions to the deviant confederates are listed in Table 2. In slightly fewer than half of the groups, nobody intervened. When at least one individual exerted social control, the participants were relatively discrete. Roughly every second intervention was either an angry look or a sigh (26.6%). The remaining interventions distributed themselves evenly among the three categories 'comment made to another bystander' (10.2%), 'polite comment to the confederate' (8.2%), and 'comment in aggressive tone to the confederate' (9.8%). None of the participants personally insulted our confederate. A list of the most typical oral comments can be found in the Appendix.

In order to analyze the presence of a bystander effect, we tallied, for each level of number of bystanders, the number of trials on which no one exerted social control (response 0) and the number of trials on which at least one person expressed his or her disapproval to our confederate (responses 1 to 6). The percentage of trials on which at least one person in the elevator exerted social control,

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of reactions to the deviant (Study 2)

| | Graffiti in elevator | | Littering in park | | Both situations | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent |
| No social control | 73 | 50.7 | 37 | 37.0 | 110 | 45.1 |
| Angry look | 32 | 22.2 | 20 | 20.0 | 52 | 21.3 |
| Sigh | 12 | 8.3 | 1 | 1.0 | 13 | 5.3 |
| Comment made to another bystander | 3 | 2.1 | 22 | 22.0 | 25 | 10.2 |
| Polite comment to the confederate | 9 | 6.3 | 11 | 11.0 | 20 | 8.2 |
| Comment in aggressive tone to the confederate | 15 | 10.4 | 9 | 9.0 | 24 | 9.8 |
| Personal insult in aggressive tone to the confederate | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 144 | 100 | | 100 | | 100 |

broken down by the number of bystanders and by the experimental situation, is shown in Figure 1 (see solid lines). In both situations, the intervention rate increased with the number of bystanders. When the confederate in the elevator was alone with one other person, social control was exerted on 42.42% of the trials. The intervention rate for a single person was approximately the same in the situation in the park because 41.70% of the bystanders expressed their disapproval. 77.27% of the three-person-groups intervened in the park but the same was true for only 58.82% of the three-person groups in the elevator.

Latané and Nida (1981) argue that raw percentages of intervention do not adequately test the bystander effect. In fact, if one of several persons exerts social control, the same behavior by another person no longer has the same meaning. This problem can be addressed by calculating the expected intervention rates for groups of size two and more. Given the percentage of bystanders who intervene when they are alone with the confederate, what is the expected probability of interventions in two- and three-person groups assuming that the individual probability of intervening remains stable? Latané and Nida proposed the following formula:

$$p_n = 1 - (1 - p_0)^n \quad (\text{E1})$$

where p_0 is the intervention rate when only one bystander is present, n is the number of total bystanders, and p_n is the expected percentage of groups of size n in which at least one individual exerts social control (assuming there is no social inhibition or facilitation). For example, if 42.42% of the alone individuals in the elevator condition intervene, the expected intervention rate for two-person groups is $p_2 = 1 - (1 - 0.4242)^2 = 0.6685$. In other words, if intervention rates are unaffected by the number of bystanders, we would expect that in 66.85% of the two-person groups, at least one of the two people will intervene. The expected intervention rate can be calculated in the same manner for groups of size three, and they are also graphed in Figure 1 (see dotted lines).

A comparison between the observed and the expected intervention rates for the present study revealed that bystanders were less likely to intervene when others were present, but only when the deviant behavior was drawing graffiti on the walls of an elevator. In the situation in the elevator, the more bystanders were in the elevator, the lower the probability that a given individual expressed his or her disapproval to the confederate. Binomial tests revealed that the difference between expected and the actual intervention rates in the elevator was significant for all group sizes (two persons: $p < 0.05$; three persons: $p < 0.002$). In the situation in the park, the individual intervention rates seemed to be

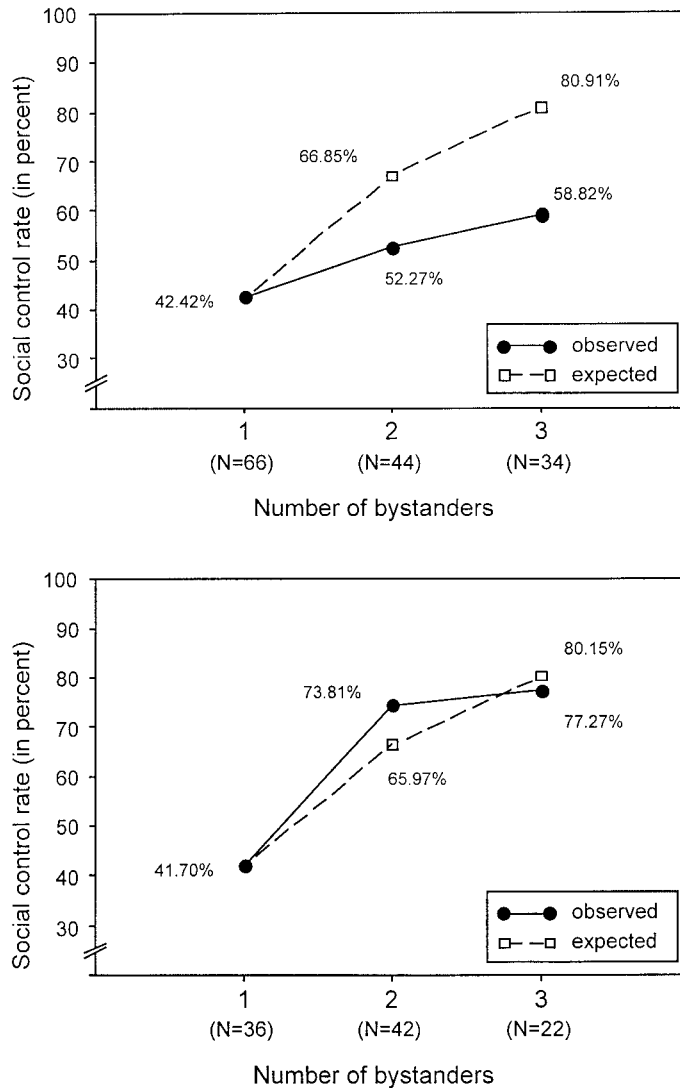


Figure 1. Observed and expected social control as a function of the number of bystanders in Study 2. The top panel shows the results of the situation 'graffiti in elevator', the bottom panel those of the situation 'littering in park'

unaffected by the number of bystanders. Both in two- and in three-person groups, the individual probability for exerting social control was approximately the same than when participants were alone. Binomial tests showed that the difference between expected and actual intervention rates did not significantly differ from each other (all p 's > 0.50).

These analyses provide strong support for our central hypothesis. When personal implication is low, as in the situation in the elevator, the presence of others inhibits participants' tendency to exert social control. However, when personal implication is high, as in the situation in the park, the frequency with which individuals express their disapproval to the confederate is not affected by the number of other people who also observe the deviant behavior.

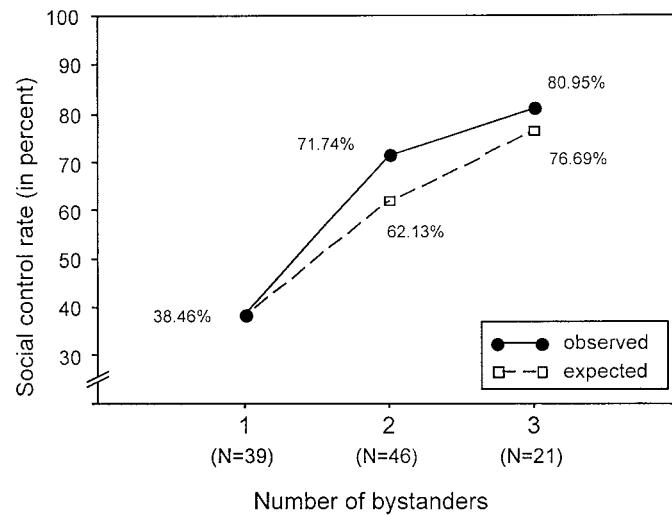


Figure 2. Observed and expected social control as a function of the number of bystanders in Study 3

STUDY 3

Although the results of Study 2 are entirely consistent with our predictions, Study 2 has a major drawback. The two situations differed not only on the dimension of personal implication but also with regard to the confederates. In the situation 'graffiti in elevator', a single male confederate performed the deviant behavior but in the situation 'throwing bottle in park', the confederate was female and was accompanied by a same-sex friend. We do not know if the observed differences between the two situations were really due to the different levels of personal implications, as we claim. In order to address this confound, we conducted a third study. We enacted the situation in the park again, but this time with a single male experimenter. In all other respects, Study 3 was identical to the 'throwing bottle in park' condition of Study 2. 194 naïve participants took part in the study, yielding a total number of 106 observations. The results of this third study are shown in Figure 2.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the results closely replicate those of Study 2. The intervention rate for alone bystanders is slightly lower (38.46%) but nevertheless comparable to that observed in Study 2 (41.70%). As before, individuals in two- and three-person groups showed no evidence of social inhibition or social facilitation. Binomial tests showed that the actual intervention rates for two- and three-person groups were not significantly different from the expected intervention rates which had been calculated from the percentage of alone bystanders who exerted social control (all p 's > 0.50). These results make clear that the differences observed in Study 2 are not due to the different confederates but can be attributed to the different level of personal implication.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The goal of the present series of studies was to examine the bystander effect in the realm of social control behavior. Study 1 showed that bystanders felt personally more implicated when the counter-normative behavior occurs in a small neighborhood park belonging to the city than when it takes place in a large shopping center. In Study 2, some participants observed a male confederate drawing graffiti

on the walls of a shopping mall elevator. Here, we observed the classic bystander effect. The more people were in the elevator, the smaller the individual probability of exerting social control. Other participants observed two female confederates littering in a park. As predicted, we found no evidence of a bystander effect such that the individual probability of intervention in the park was unaffected by the presence of others. Study 3 replicated the situation in the park but this time with a male confederate who was alone. The results showed the same absence of a bystander effect that had already been observed in Study 2.

These studies witness to the important role that personal implication plays for the occurrence of the bystander effect. As in Cramer et al.'s (1988) study with the registered nurses, personal implication did not affect participants' responses when they were alone. In both the situation 'graffiti in elevator' and 'littering in park', approximately four out of ten alone individuals expressed to the confederate that they did not approve of the deviant behavior. Personal implication comes into play when participants are in groups. The presence of others has an inhibiting effect but only when individuals do not feel that they are personally implicated in the situation. Obviously, personal implication attenuates the effects of the processes that have been shown to contribute to the bystander effect. Although our data do not speak to this issue, one might speculate that in situations with high personal implication, individuals do not consider the risk of embarrassment if the situation turns out not to be deviant act (*audience inhibition*), that they do not take the inaction of others as a guideline for their own behavior (*social influence*), or that they do not think that the costs of non-intervention are shared in the presence of other people (*diffusion of responsibility*).

Of course, one cannot deny that the two situations in Study 2 differ on a number of dimensions, and each of these dimensions might be responsible for the disappearance of the bystander effect in the situation 'littering in park'. For example, participants in the elevator were in a closed space from which they could not escape whereas participants in the park were in an open space in which it was relatively easy to ignore the deviant behavior. It should be noted however, that this difference should work in the opposite direction than the one obtained in our study because it has been shown that the bystander effect is attenuated when people are in a closed space (Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969). A second potential difference is that the participants in the situation 'graffiti in elevator' were more in a hurry and were more focused on themselves than participants in the situation 'littering in park'. After all, people are less stressed when they stroll through a neighborhood park than when they rush from store to store in order to get their shopping done. Although this difference arguably influences the overall intervention rate, we have no theoretical reasons to believe that being in a hurry influences the bystander effect.

Perceived deviance can not account for the difference between the situation in the elevator and the situation in the park. Study 1 respondents indicated that they considered the behaviors equally counternormative and equally inappropriate. This is important because perceived deviance is likely to be a major determinant of social control behavior. The more counternormative a behavior is perceived to be the more likely it is that someone will express disapproval to the deviant actor (Gibbs, 1981b). To summarize, the two experimental situations in Study 2 differ on a number of dimensions. The dimension which we consider most important is the feeling of being personally implicated by the deviant behavior and having a sense of responsibility for the damaged property. This dimension is theoretically most relevant because it directly relates to the process of diffusion of responsibility. In addition, the results from the questionnaire study are consistent with this idea. Future research might address the role of other dimensions, such as the openness of the space or the preoccupiedness of the participants.

One could argue that small, structured groups with frequent face-to-face contact use the carrot and stick approach to enforce group norms: they reward normative behaviors and punish deviant behaviors. However, in large, unstructured groups, positive reactions to normative behaviors are

fairly exceptional. It is unlikely that a bystander in the park would have congratulated or thanked our confederates if they had thrown the plastic bottle in the trash can. Likewise, if a smoker decides *not* to smoke in a non-smoking area, the probability that someone will express appreciation to him or her is very low. What happens in large unstructured groups, however, is that deviant behaviors are negatively reinforced through social control, at least sometimes. Both the bottle-throwing passer-by and the cigarette-smoking individual in the non-smoking area are at risk receiving negative feedback from one of the bystanders. Whereas small groups seem to use both the carrot and the stick, large, unstructured groups seem to rely solely on the stick. More research is necessary to verify this claim. If it is correct, social control is arguably one of the most important mechanisms by which social norms are perpetuated in large social groups.

The present results shed some light on the similarities and differences between helping behavior and social control. Both involve a target person (either the 'victim' or the 'deviant') and one or more naive participants who have to decide whether they should intervene or not. In both cases, intervention is associated with costs such as the fear of misinterpreting the situation or the risk of eliciting a negative reaction in the target person. And in both cases, nonintervention is associated with costs such as guilt about not having helped a victim in an emergency, or about not having intervened to prevent a deviant behavior.

The major difference between the two types of behaviors is that helping is a positive act whereas social control behavior involves a negative communication to a stranger. Similarly, individuals exerting social control take more risks than do individuals who help, because they might be seen as trouble makers by other people observing the situation, or might instigate an argument with the deviant. Although not reported in the present article, it was quite difficult to find situations where a significant proportion of participants exerted social control. We set up several situations in which a confederate violated a social norm and in which virtually no one intervened (e.g. throwing paper on the sidewalk, emptying a car ashtray on the sidewalk). In general, it appears that people are considerably more willing to help than to exert social control. Given that the costs of intervention are higher in social control than in helping behavior this is not at all surprising.

The fact that social control is essentially a negative behavior does not necessarily imply that it is not valued in Western societies. One might argue that communicating disapproval to a deviant serves higher order positive goals such as the goal to have a clean park or the goal to protect the social norms that promote co-existence (Smith & Mackie, 1995). Indirect evidence for this idea comes from the comparison between actual and imagined social control in our studies. Although seven out of ten individuals indicated that they would exert social control in Study 1, only four out of ten individuals actually did in Studies 2 and 3. Obviously, people think that they will exert social control, but they underestimate the situational forces that inhibit it.

CONCLUSION

As we mentioned in the introduction, the concept of social norm is central to social psychological reasoning. Despite this centrality, few researchers actually have examined how social norms are perpetuated in large, unstructured groups consisting of individuals who do not know each other. Sociologists and psychologists agree that people tend to sanction desirable and undesirable behaviors differently: normative behaviors are rewarded by positive sanctions (e.g., encouragement, leadership status in the group, etc.), counternormative behaviors are punished by negative sanctions (e.g. social control, outsider status in the group, etc.; Gibbs, 1981a; Meier, 1982; Schachter, 1951). We suggested that small groups with frequent face-to-face contact use both positive and negative sanctions to

perpetuate social norms, whereas large, unstructured social groups such as regional or national communities tend to perpetuate social norms solely through negative sanctions.

Assuming that social control is an important element in the perpetuation of social norms, it would also be interesting to examine the factors that increase or decrease the probability that someone will communicate his or her disapproval to the perpetrator of a deviant behavior in a given situation. Do individuals in power positions exert more social control than individuals with low power? Are older people more likely to sanction a deviant behavior than young people? If yes, why? Is it because older people grew up in a society that had more social norms (or more restrictive social norms) than our current society? Or is it because older people have the maturity and the psychological resources that are necessary to exert social control? Or is it simply that older people are afraid of change?

Are some deviant behaviors more likely to generate social control than others? One might predict that individuals are more likely to intervene if the deviant behavior has a direct negative impact on them. For example, cutting in line and the failure to recycle are both deviant behaviors. However, in the first case, there is a direct and immediate negative impact on the individuals standing at the end of the line: they will have to wait longer. Is it true that people are more likely to exert social control if their own time or money is being spent? If yes, what happens to social norms that protect large, collective properties such as the maintenance of our sidewalks, parks, play grounds, and natural parks? Here, deviant behaviors do not have a direct negative impact on people. If it is true that social control is more unlikely in these situations, how are norms protecting large, collective properties being perpetuated?

Unfortunately, the studies reported in this article do not address these important questions. However, they provide a first step in a series of studies that work toward the construction of a model explaining the perpetuation of social norms. Given how central social norms are to theorizing in social sciences we would suggest that more research on social control would be of utmost relevance for both psychologists and sociologists.

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APPENDIX: TYPICAL COMMENTS OBSERVED IN STUDIES 1 AND 2

Comment made to another bystander (coded as response #3):

- When I see that!
- Gee, isn't that incredible?
- It takes some nerves to do that!

Polite comment to the confederate (coded as response #4):

- You don't have to write here!
- That's not very nice!
- Why are you doing that?

Aggressive comment to the confederate (coded as response #5):

- Where's this going to get you? How old are you?
- Can't you find anything else to do?
- Are you pleased with that?