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HELPING A LOST PASSENGER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NUMBER OF BYSTANDERS AND DEPENDENCY OF THE VICTIM IN AN URBAN AND A RURAL COMMUNITY

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One hundred twenty adult male and female commuters participated unknowingly in an experiment conducted inside a regular passenger jeepney. The variables of number of bystanders, dependency of the victim and type of community were arranged in a 2x2x2 factorial design. Altruism, the dependent variable, was measured by the frequency, level and latency of bystander intervention for a lost passenger. Results show that subjects high in dependency status succeeded in eliciting greater intervention. Urban bystanders, except when alone and when dealing with low dependent strangers helped as often as their rural counterparts. Contrary to expectations, the quality of intervention was found to be better when a pair of bystanders rather than a lone bystander were involved.

The sight of a man helping another in need evokes the ascription of an altruistic trait to the benefactor. Altruism as a hypothetical construct reflecting the intrinsic concern of man for the good of others is the most convenient mode of explaining helping behavior. It is assumed to be the underlying force for such acts in which individuals share or sacrifice a valued commodity for no apparent social or material reward.

The same pattern of reasoning in explaining non-helping behavior is misleading and insufficient. The ascription of a negative trait correspondent to nonhelping behavior disregards the fact that environmental factors also exert facilitating and inhibiting forces on helping behavior.

This study attempts to demonstrate the relationship between helping behavior in a low-risk, low-cost demand situation and the following factors: the number of bystanders witnessing the event, the dependency level of the victim and the type of community to which the potential benefactor belongs. The choice of the case of a lost jeepney passenger instead of a high-risk emergency situation provides for a potentially wider application of the findings since low-risk demand situations occur more commonly in life.

Number of Bystanders

According to Darley and Latane (1968) the presence of other bystanders has an inhibiting effect on a particular bystander's response to an event: as the number of bystanders increases, the frequency of intervention decreases. This occurs due to a process referred to as the diffusion of responsibility.

A bystander who is a lone witness to an event is more likely to intervene than one who is in the company of other bystanders. This is so because the lone bystander carries the full responsibility for dealing with the victim. He will also feel all the guilt for not acting and will bear the full blame that others may level for nonintervention.

The presence of other bystanders alters the laws of responsibility and blame. The burden

of helping no longer falls squarely on the shoulders of a particular bystander. Likewise, the ensuing blame or social sanction for nonintervention is partitioned among the bystanders. In short, the presence of other bystanders leads to a diffusion of responsibility. The process makes it more convenient for the bystander to resort to nonintervention.

The studies of Latane and Rodin (1969), Schwartz and Clauser (1970), Harris and Robinson (1973), Campbell (1974), Edwards (1975), Gaertner (1975), and Latane and Dabbs (1975) support the conclusion that the presence of other bystanders leads to a diffusion of responsibility which in turn increases the likelihood of nonintervention. Levy *et al.* (1972) indicates the pervasiveness of the process. Diffusion of responsibility can occur even in such a low-risk low-cost demand situation as answering a door knock.

Dependency of the Victim

The potential benefactor not only reacts to other bystanders. His perception of the victim can influence his decision to help or not to help.

Berkowitz and Daniels (1963) postulate that the perceived dependency of a victim activates a social responsibility norm. This norm specifies that each individual in society is expected to help another who is dependent on him. He must do so even though there seems to be no promise of any material reward.

Thus a victim who is perceived with a high-dependency status is more likely to get help than one with a low dependency status. For instance, Schaps (1972) reports that salesladies responded more frequently to a customer who came in limping with a broken shoe than to one who came in casually looking for a pair of shoes. Gruder and Cook (1972) observe that subjects stapled more questionnaires for an experimenter who claimed he was in a bind and needed the subjects' output within two hours than for an experimenter who claimed he needed the output one week later.

Berkowitz and Connor (1966) caution that the social responsibility norm is weak and must be directly activated in experimental conditions to observe its effects. They stated that the individual will adhere to the norm to the extent that "he is aware of this behavior standard at the time, and motivated to act in accord with it."

Following the suggestion of Berkowitz and Connor, Schneider (1973) used a physical disability cue to arouse dependency. He compared helping a male confederate in a pair of crutches and another who was not physically handicapped. Schneider observed that under the condition of high dependency and low cost of helping, unsolicited intervention for a stranger is virtually assured. The studies of Pomazal and Clore (1973) and Samerotte and Harris (1975) further confirmed that victims who are perceived to be in greater need of help are more likely to get help because their situation arouses the social responsibility of the would-be benefactor.

Type of Community

In 1969, Latane and Rodin proposed that failure to intervene in emergencies seems to be more characteristic of large cities than rural areas. They deduced this from their finding that a pair of subjects who were friends more frequently helped a lady in distress than a pair of strangers. Since bystanders to urban emergencies are more likely to find themselves in the presence of other bystanders whom they do not know, they are less likely to intervene.

Milgram (1970), however, posits an alternative explanation for the seeming resistance of urban people to intervene or

offer help to a stranger in need. Accordingly, urban dwellers experience stimulus overload due to the large number of people in cities, the high population density and the heterogeneity of the population. Overload occurs when there are just too many inputs to cope with because successive inputs come so fast that, as an initial input is just being processed, another is already confronting the individual for immediate processing.

The influx of information into the individual's system can be reduced to manageable levels by developing adaptive mechanisms. The filtration of inputs to process is one form of adaptation. With this particular mechanism, the individual chooses those transactions which he considers worth spending time on.

Shenod and Downs (1974), Mathews and Canon (1975) and Korte, Upman and Toppen (1975) provide results supporting the notion that the presence of a high stimulus load can be so distracting to the individual that he becomes less attentive to unfamiliar others who may be in need of help.

Milgram proposes that the ultimate adaptation to stimulus overload in the city is to totally disregard the needs, interests and demands of those whom one does not define as relevant to the satisfaction of personal needs and to develop highly efficient perceptual means of determining whether an individual falls into the category of friend or stranger. Thus he concludes that the disparity in the treatment of friends and strangers ought to be greater in cities than in towns; the allotment of time and the willingness to become involved with those who have no personal claim on one's time are less likely in cities than in towns.

Conceptual Framework

Helping or nonhelping behavior is an active response to a demand situation. The individual engages in a rapid processing of the elements of his environment. Some inputs may lead to inhibition of intervention while others may facilitative.

The sources of such inputs are varied. One such source is presence of the potential benefactors themselves. The presence of other bystanders may lead one to pass off the responsibility of helping to other witnesses. The victim himself is also a source of input. If he looks to be in real need of help, he is more likely to get it. A less evident but equally potent input is the orientation to daily life that the would-be helper has become used to. In communities where people are less often to meet and relate with strangers, people in need of help may remain unattended to.

In the light of the literature reviewed, it is hypothesized that a single bystander, a high-dependent victim, and a rural setting, each taken separately, will facilitate helping behavior more than a paired-bystander, a low-dependent victim, and an urban setting.

It is expected that the said relationships will be reflected in the following conditions:

1. a) The frequency and
   b) the level of intervention will be higher
   c) the latency of intervention will be shorter in a lone-bystander than in a paired-bystanders condition.

2) a) The frequency and
   b) the level of intervention will be higher
   c) the latency of intervention will be shorter with a high-dependent than with a low-dependent victim.

3) a) The frequency and
   b) the level of intervention will be higher
   c) the latency of intervention will be shorter in a rural than in an urban setting.

METHOD

Subjects.– A total of 120 adult male and female commuters participated unknowingly in the study. Forty were randomly assigned to the lone bystander condition while the remaining 80 were grouped into 40 pairs. They were administered a post experimental interview and were debriefed on their participation right in the vehicle.

Materials.– An observation form was used to record the data. It contained the following information: experimental treatment used, day, date, time and place of experiment, seating position taken by participants, the verbal response of the bystander, post-experimental questions on the effectivity of the manipulations and the demographic data consisting of sex, age, length of stay in the area and educational attainment.

A mini-casette recorder was used to insure that the verbal response of the bystander was correctly transcribed.

Design.– The three main variables of the study, the number of bystanders, dependency of the victim and type of community were studied using a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial quasi-experimental design.

The number of bystanders had two levels: lone and paired condition. A bystander refers to a commuter who became a chance witness to a lost passenger riding in the same jeepney.

The dependency of the victim refers to the extent of inconvenience he would experience as a result of missing his destination. In the high-dependency condition, the victim carried either two traveling bags or a milk carton box. In the low-dependency condition, he only carried a clutch bag.

The type of community was differentiated into urban and rural. An urban area was defined as any city or municipality in the country with at least a population density of 250 persons per square kilometer. Its two major characteristics are: the bulk of economic activities occur in offices or factories and a considerable segment of the population are migrants. Quezon City was purposively selected to represent the urban area.

A rural area refers to any municipality with a population density less than 250 persons per square kilometer. Its two major characteristics are: the main source of livelihood is agriculture or fishing and the large majority are indigenous residents of the area.

Bystander intervention was measured in three ways as follows:

1. *Frequency.*– This refers to the number of cases in which intervention occured. It was determined by counting how many subjects engaged in some form of intervention.

2. *Level of intervention.*– This refers to the quality of the subjects' response. This was measured using a pretested rating scale with the corresponding score:

0 = No intervention occured.
1 = The bystander makes a statement of fact.
   a. He addresses the victim and tells him that the vehicle is proceeding away from his destination.
   b. He addresses the driver that a passenger is asking for directions.
2 = The bystander makes a statement of fact and gives directions to the victim.
3 = The bystander makes a statement of fact, gives directions to the victim and makes a command for
   a. the victim to alight already, or
   b. the driver to stop the jeepney to allow the passenger to alight.
4 = The bystander makes a statement of

tact, gives directions to the victim and makes a command for:

a. the victim to alight already, and
b. the driver to stop the jeepney to allow the victim to alight.

3. *Latency.*– This refers to the reaction time of the bystander to the victim's plight. It was measured from 1 to 120 seconds. When no intervention occured after two minutes, the behavior was classified as nonintervention and the experiment was terminated.

Procedure.– There were three persons in the experimental staff. The first member was the male confederate who acted as the lost passenger. The second was the jeepney driver who was hired and briefed for his role. The third member was the observer who sat beside the driver and observed through the rear view mirror the reaction of the bystanders. He also measured the latency of intervention with a hidden stopwatch.

The passengers were given 15 seconds to settle down before the first phase started. The victim then engaged in a 15-second attention-getting act during which he appeared to be scanning the roadsides for landmarks.

To introduce his case, the victim leaned forward slightly toward the driver's position but his gaze was directed far ahead on the road. Without looking at anyone he asked: "Will this pass by_____ ?" After this question, the victim continued scanning the roadside until intervention occured. He did not repeat his destination unless the bystander asked for clarification. He listened silently to the instructions of the bystanders and limited his own reactions to looking towards the direction the helping bystanders pointed to. The victim did not ask nor did he volunteer any answer.

The victim did not make any effort to stop the jeepney even after he had received directions from the bystanders. Thus the bystanders had the option to command the driver to stop the jeepney. The experiment was terminated only when the alloted 120 seconds was over or when the bystander told the driver to stop the jeepney.

RESULTS

Post-test.– The post-experimental interview indicated that the bystanders were all in a position to help since they claimed familiarity with the destination of the victim. The bystanders also easily identified that the victim was in some kind of trouble. Finally, all participants claimed they did not know that an experiment was going on and their ensuing behavior was a natural response to a contrived situation.

Main Findings.– The frequency of bystander intervention did not vary significantly in each of the three independent variables. It is worth noting that the lost passenger received some form of help in three of four cases.

The level of intervention varied significantly only for the number of bystanders ($F=7.57$, 1 and 72 df, $p<.01$). However, the results were contrary to expectations. The quality of intervention was better from a pair of bystanders than from a lone bystander.

The latency of intervention differed significantly according to the dependency of the victim ($F=4.55$, 1 and 53 df, $p<.05$). The high-dependent victims were attended to faster than the low-dependent victim.

The latency of intervention also differed significantly by type of community ($F=5.21$, 1 and 53 df, $p<.05$). Bystanders in the rural area responded faster than their urban counterparts to the case of the lost passenger.

There was a significant interaction effect of dependency of victim and type of community ($F=5.10$, 1 and 53 df, $p<.05$). The urban bystander responded more slowly than his rural counterpart to a low dependent victim.

However, he responded as fast as his rural counterpart to a high-dependent victim.

Finally, there was a three factor interaction effect ($F=5.38$, 1 and 53 df, $p<.05$). The urban bystander responded more cautiously than his rural counterpart to a low-dependent victim, particularly if the urban bystander was the lone witness.

Incidental Findings

1. Paired bystanders are likely to influence each other's behavior. When one member of a pair intervenes, the other is likely to support. If one remains passive, the other is likely to be passive too.

2. Group status seems to operate among acquainted pairs of bystanders. The lower status member deferred intervention to the higher status member.

3. Urban bystanders appear more conscious of the delineation of functions. Intervening urban bystanders claimed that the victim was addressing the driver for directions as he would be the most logical person to ask. On the other hand, the rural bystanders claimed they were the ones being addressed by the victim.

4. Rural bystanders are more willing to interact longer with the victim as they spend more time giving directions.

DISCUSSION

The study failed to give support to the concept of diffusion of responsibility resulting from the presence of other bystanders. The paired bystanders responded as frequently as the lone bystander. It may be that the Filipino's high regard for social acceptance influences him to offer help as readily in the presence of others as when he is a line witness to an event.

As for the finding that the paired bystanders exhibited a higher level of intervention contrary to expectation, this is regarded as a technical drawback of measurement. Intervening pairs of bystanders complemented each other's response thereby resulting in a higher level of intervention.

The occurrence of intervention initially appears unrelated to the dependency of the victim. The high-dependent victim does not elicit significantly more frequent intervention or a higher quality of intervention. What the dependency factor provides is a cue for decision-making on the part of the helper. A clear indication of a need for help can spell the difference. If the potential helper takes a long time to decide that help is needed, his behavior may be interpreted by another bystander as inaction and the latter will be guided accordingly in responding to the victim.

Finally, this study gives a slight indication that urban-rural differences in responding to strangers in need is starting to develop. Urban bystanders, especially when alone with no one to validate their impressions, are less likely to respond to a stranger who does not seem to be in urgent need of help. On the other hand, the rural bystander is still at ease in relating with strangers regardless of their state of dependency.

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