

Attitudes Toward the Willingness to Help

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The social psychological issue of bystander intervention and helping behavior has been widely studied in a variety of situations ranging from direct observation of helping behavior to self-report indications of willingness or likelihood of helping. The understanding and insight into how and when people make decisions to help others can be an important one in areas of crime intervention, volunteerism, emergency situations and more. This study examined the effects of perceived responsibility of the person needing help and available time of the helper on willingness to help. The researcher hypothesized that the likelihood of helping would be higher when the helper had more time available and when the requester was perceived to be less responsible for his or her predicament. Results of the study did not support the hypothesis; however future studies could manipulate both the time and responsibility variables in a stronger way.

The social psychological issue of bystander intervention and helping behavior has been widely studied in a variety of situations. These have included, among other things, emergency and non-emergency situations, the cognitive decision making process, the appraisal of costs and rewards in helping, the number of people present in the situation, and the appearance of the victim. The studies have provided insight into understanding how and when people make decisions to help others.

Initial work on this subject was done by Latane and Darley (Latané & Darley, 1968) and showed that the number of people present affected people's willingness to help a victim in an emergency situation. They found that as more people observed the situation, the less likely it was that someone would intervene. Many other studies have continued to look at that factor as well as many others.

One study looked at the willingness of a bystander to help in a situation where a theft was committed, and how a previous commitment to a victim affected decisions to become involved (Schwarz, Jennings, Petrillo, & Kidd, 1980). This is an important issue because crime reporting is often much lower than its actual incidence; in fact some sources say that only half of all crimes are reported. The study found that 100% of the first party commitment (commitment directly to the victim) condition intervened in some manner. The results confirmed previous studies on the relationship between commitment and stopping a crime. "If the un-

sual act is not sufficiently discrepant from a personal norm, or is not labeled as a crime, or does not arouse feelings of personal responsibility, or incurs relatively more costs than benefits, intervention is unlikely" (Schwarz et al., p. 184.)

Another study by Borges and Penta (1977) examined third party intervention and its effects on decisions to help. In the experiment, when people came upon a victim rolling on the ground who appeared to need help, the percentage of intervention increased substantially when they were asked by a third party "should we do something?", compared to when there was no verbal interjection. "The data collected clearly indicated that when a bystander intervened in an emergency situation by asking, "Do you think we should do something?" the probability that the victim would receive assistance by others was increased by 450%" (Borges & Penta, 1997, p. 30). The researchers reasoned that the asking of the question greatly increased the social aspects of the situation and thus increased the rate of intervention.

Another experiment by Ungar (1979) looked at the differences in situations in which the person to be helped was stigmatized or non-stigmatized (i.e., handicapped) and how the amount of effort needed to intervene affected helping behavior. In situations in which the effort involved was higher, the nonstigmatized person was helped more than the stigmatized person. The study examined the concept that there are costs of helping and they are critical in determining the level of help given. Sometimes helping the stigmatized person is uncomfortable for people, and so they may try to justify their reasons for doing so. "One reasonable hypothesis is that the victim's circumstances are attributed to something the victim did or failed to do, thereby reducing the person's responsibility for not helping... Thus, even when the costs of helping have been amplified, the rate of help received by the handicapped may still be affected by the nature of the handicap

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and the attributions made for the victim's circumstances" (Ungar, 1979, p. 28).

Piliavin's cost-reward model was examined in a study which asked participants to read many scenarios and weight their decision making process and the factors in it (Fritzsche, Finkelstein, & Penner, 2000). This procedure is called "capturing policies." While other studies, such as those previously mentioned, have generally used between subjects tests, this study used a within-subjects approach. All participants read 50 scenarios and were asked to pick the factors that influenced their decision; rating them from the least important to most. The results showed that "...across the 50 scenarios the least helping occurred in the one where the costs of helping were the lowest and the costs of not helping were the highest" (Fritzsche et al., p. 573). The researchers also found that "For both males and females, responsibility for the problem was the most important cue...in their statistically-derived policies" (p. 574).

One study examined the effect on helping behavior of perceived patient responsibility for disease onset and belief in a just world. Belief in a just world is the idea that there is justice in the world and that people generally get what they deserve. If people with a high belief in a just world (BJW) become aware of people who are sick but are not perceived as responsible for their disease, they will be more likely to try to restore justice by offering to help in some way. Results showed that participants were significantly more likely to help an individual portrayed as not responsible for disease onset and that helping was most obvious in participants who had a high belief in a just world. Results also showed an interaction between perceived responsibility and belief in a just world.

"Thus we found that individual differences in perceived justice interact with perceptions of responsibility and affect people's willingness to help others. This experiment further extended the effects of implicit theories of responsibility on people's behavioral, characterological, and quality of care judgments...we find that people are less inclined to actually help those who are perceived to have been at fault for acquiring their illness and are particularly inclined to help those who are perceived not to be at fault for their illness" (DePalma, Madey, Tillman, & Wheeler, p. 536). Another study was done on the somewhat conflicting ideas of attribution theory and sociobiology (Greitemeyer, Rudolph, & Weiner, 2003). It looked at which situation would bring more help, an acquaintance that was not responsible for their situation, or a sibling who was responsible for theirs. Attribution theory would predict that a non responsible acquaintance would receive more help than a responsible sibling. However, sociobiology would predict that a sibling, responsible or not, would receive the greater aid.

The results showed that the type of situation determined who would receive more help. In a non life-threatening situation, a non responsible acquaintance would receive help, but in a life-threatening circumstance, the sibling would receive it. "This study documented that intentions to help were affected by multiple causes. Both the attributional variable of judgments of responsibility and the sociobiological variable of kinship relationship... influenced the decision to help...these variables differently predicted intentions to help in specific contexts. In sum, the

more the situation was life threatening, the more the intention to help was influenced by the kinship relationship. .. the lower the stakes of the context, the greater the contributions of judgments of responsibility to the decision to help." (Greitemeyer et al., p. 335).

This study seeks to further examine the concept of perceived responsibility of the victim on helping behavior. The victim in this study will be a close friend. The study also adds another dimension of cost evaluation by the participant regarding the time available and how these will affect his or her decision to be involved in helping. The researcher hypothesized that the likelihood of helping would be different depending on how much time the person had available and on whether or not the requester had a perceived responsibility for their predicament.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were students in Psychology 100 classes at a northeastern public university. Students were given course credit for participating in a research study. There were 41 women (59%) and 28 (41%) men in the study. One respondent did not return demographic information, but was nonetheless included in the analyses. 81% of the participants were 18-25 years old, 12% were 25-40, 6% were over 40. Information in ethnicity revealed that participants were 74% white, 10% African American, 6% Asian, 2% Native American; 3% Hispanic, and 5% other.

Measures/Materials

Materials for this study were a manila envelope that included one of four scenarios and demographic information page for age, gender and race. A white #10 envelope with an informed consent sheet and a green credit sheet was also provided.

The scenarios included two independent variables with 2 levels each, time and responsibility. The time factor was manipulated by having participants imagine that they had an exam to study for either the next morning or in two days. The responsibility factor was manipulated by describing a friend requesting a ride to the airport (a 2 hour drive each way) where, in one scenario there was no responsibility for the request indicated and, in the other scenario, the friend had been out partying the night before and had crashed their car. The dependent variable was the participant's expressed willingness to help the friend as indicated on a 5-point Likert scale. A manipulation check for reasonableness of the request was also included.

Procedures

Manila envelopes with the above referenced materials were placed on the third floor of the Psychology department for students to pick up and return. Some students were given an opportunity to participate in the study in their introductory Psychology

class. The results were returned either directly to the researcher if done in a class, or returned to the third floor of the Psychology department in the box marked "Attitudes towards Helping Behavior."

Results

Analyses of gender, age and ethnicity were done to check for any differences in response. No significant differences were found for these factors, so all were combined for the remainder of the analyses. This study looked at the effect of personal responsibility of the requestor and time available to the helper on willingness to help. Overall results did not reveal any significant differences between groups. There was a significant result for the manipulation check of perceived responsibility.

A 2 X 2 BS factorial was conducted on Question #1, "How likely are you to help your friend?" Results showed no main effect of responsibility, $F(1, 69) = .058, p > .05$, and participants were equally likely to help their friend whether the friend was responsible for their predicament or not. The test also showed no main effect of time, $F(1, 69) = 1.841, p > .05$. Willingness to help did not vary whether participants had only one night or two days to study for an upcoming exam. There was no significance for interaction of time by responsibility, $F(1, 69) = .099, p > .05$.

For Question # 2, "How reasonable is your friend's request?" analysis revealed no main effect of time, $F(1, 69) = .138, p > .05$, and no significant interaction for time and responsibility, $F(1, 69) = 2.058, p > .05$. However, there was a significant main effect for responsibility, $F(1, 69) = 5.937, p < .05$, that is, the more perceived responsibility the requester had for their situation, the less reasonable the participant felt the request to drive to the airport was. The scenario that involved the victim partying, crashing their car, and asking for help, did yield lower scores of unreasonableness. Table 1 shows the means:

Table 1
Means of Responsibility for Reasonableness

Responsibility	Reasonableness	SD	Sample size
None	3.375	1.070	32
Some	2.790	1.043	38

Discussion

The understanding of the multiple factors that go into making decisions to help is a complex one. The topic is important to continue studying so that we can better understand such subjects as volunteerism, intervention in crimes and other emergency situations. As noted by Fritzsche et al., (2000), "Piliavin et al.'s results show that different levels of costs or combinations of the levels do produce different amounts of helping" (p. 563).

The results of this study did not support the hypothesis of a difference in helping behavior based on varying descriptions of

responsibility and time available to help. The lack of significant results may be due to a number of factors. It is possible that the manipulation of the variables, time and responsibility, were too subtle to make a difference in participants' reported willingness to help. Although the responsibility manipulation appeared to be accurate, it was apparently not strong enough to make a difference. Future studies could make the responsibility factor more direct, such as clearly stating that the car was smashed due to the friend's intoxication. Perhaps college students do not feel that intoxication is a "fault", but part of college life and therefore do not judge it harshly. However, since other studies have clearly shown the influence of judgments of responsibility on intentions to help, these results would have to be examined carefully.

The time factor in future studies could be manipulated by hours rather than days, or perhaps give a longer time frame between the two choices to provide a stronger contrast.

It is also possible that students viewed the opportunity to take a friend to the airport not as an imposition on their time, but as a good excuse to escape studying. It is possible that the social obligation of helping a close friend was rated higher than an academic one. Thus, in future studies the conflicting event in the helper's life could be more of a pleasurable event than studying for an exam. Future studies should include participants of all ages in order to get a wider sampling of attitudes.

An additional issue is that this study was based on simulated events, not actual responses to real life requests for help. It is possible that actual responses may differ from participant's self-reported willingness to help. However, as Fritzsche et al., (2000) noted, "participants' paper-and-pencil responses were highly consistent with the findings from both laboratory and nonlaboratory studies" (p. 575).

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