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EFFECTS OF THE PRESENCE OF CHILDREN ON ADULTS' HELPING BEHAVIOR AND COMPLIANCE: TWO FIELD STUDIES*¹

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SUMMARY

Two field studies investigated complementary aspects of the notion that the presence of children affects adults' helping behavior. In the first, 33 lone women (19 accompanied, 14 unaccompanied by a child), 28 pairs of women (14 with, 14 without a child), and 30 mixed-sex couples (15 with, 15 without a child) encountered an "injured" confederate in parks and parking lots of shopping centers. The main results suggested that it may be the task of fathers to model altruism for children in this situation. In the second study, an adult woman, accompanied or unaccompanied by a child, or a lone child, asked a total of 84 women in their suburban homes to sign a petition which was either "appropriate" or "inappropriate" for children. While an interaction between the age-of-requester and appropriateness-of-petition factors was predicted, only the overall difference between petitions was significant ($p < .01$). Implications of these results were discussed.

A. INTRODUCTION

Much of the research on altruistic behavior has been devoted to its developmental aspects. Aronfreed (1), and Midlarsky and Bryan (15), have studied the acquisition of altruistic dispositions in the process of socialization. Another group of laboratory experiments has been concerned with the effects of models on children's willingness to share with other children (4, 6, 7). Staub (18) has examined the likelihood that children will help a child in distress, as a function of the potential helpers' age. However, virtually no attention has been devoted to the possible effects of the presence of children on helping behavior of (North American) adults. An exception is an experiment by Ross (16), where children were used as passive confederates in an

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attempt to focus responsibility for intervention in an emergency on lone adult subjects. The presence of children increased adults' helping in comparison to a condition involving passive adult confederates.

The objective of the present studies was to provide information, in naturalistic settings, about the relevance of two complementary characteristics of children in determining the frequency and amount of adults' helping behavior and the likelihood that they will grant a request. First, in addition to focusing responsibility for acting in an emergency on adults, children are usually considered as "educational targets": they are supposed to be taught norms and values regarded as desirable by the society, and helping others in need is certainly one such value [*cf.* Leeds' (14) notions on altruism and the "norm of giving," and the Berkowitz-Daniels (2) norms of "social responsibility"]. An emergency provides adults with an ideal opportunity to teach children (who are present when the emergency occurs, but are not involved in it) an important social value by way of practical demonstration: *i.e.*, by acting as altruistic models. This should be particularly true if the children are relatively young, the adults in question are their parents, and the nature of the helping act is such that there is no concomitant danger for the children. In short, one testable hypothesis which can be derived from this discussion is that adults should be more likely to intervene in certain emergencies when accompanied by their children than when not thus accompanied. It should be noted, however, that even if parents are genuinely interested in socializing their offspring, the predicted effect is likely to be obtained only if parents are aware of the experimentally demonstrated fact that at least boys up to 10 years of age are far more willing to emulate a model who acts altruistically, rather than merely preaches altruism (4, 7). Study 1 was designed to test the above hypothesis.

A complementary characteristic of children, potentially also relevant for adult helping, is that they are weak and dependent, or at least are considered such by adults. From the formulations of both Leeds (14) and Berkowitz and Daniels (2), it follows that adults should be more likely to grant a request made by a child, in comparison to that made by an adult. However, this relationship may not be as straightforward as it appears at first. A person deciding whether to grant a request may make attributions not just about the requester's ability to secure the outcome he desires without help from others, but also about the requester's motives, and the legitimacy and appropriateness of these motives. Moreover, these two kinds of attributions (*cf.* 8) may interact. Thus, it is possible that attributions of weakness and dependence made to children-requesters by adults increase the likelihood of the

latter's positive responding only if the request is deemed by adults as one "appropriate" for children to make. Study 2 was designed to test this hypothesis. It is of little importance here whether granting a request is an example of helping or of complying behavior. It has been argued by Konečni (9) that helping and compliance are often governed by similar variables. Moreover, an investigation of variables affecting the likelihood that a request will be granted seems important irrespective of how this behavior is labelled.

In view of the recent criticisms of normative treatments of altruistic behavior (e.g., 10, 12), it should be pointed out that norms are presently used as sources of specific experimental hypotheses, rather than invoked to explain results on a *post hoc* basis.

B. STUDY 1

This experiment was designed, as explained above, to test the hypothesis that adults may be more willing to help in an emergency if accompanied by their children. An additional variable was the sex of help-givers, which is of considerable interest, given the hypothesis being investigated. At this point in time in our culture, the fathers rather than the mothers may be expected to model altruism for the offspring. Such a sex-role prediction is an extension of the more general claim that men should be more likely to help in an emergency than women, which has not, however, received unanimous support in the literature (e.g., 5, 17).

Finally, a test of one aspect of the diffusion-of-responsibility notion (5, 12) was incorporated in the design. Latané and Darley (12, pp. 104-106) found that when two friends could not communicate with each other, they reported an "epileptic fit" as quickly as lone subjects did; however, when two friends were in the same room (13), they did not help a "fallen woman" as often as would be expected on the basis of lone subjects' rate of helping. It was considered desirable to replicate the latter result in a field setting, and to determine whether the decrease in the two-friends cell may be offset by the presence of a child presumably belonging to one of the friends.

The nature of the variables of interest dictated that the research be essentially correlational, involving naturally occurring categories of subjects. It had originally been planned to examine the reactions to an "injured" person of people belonging in 10 such categories: Woman Alone, Two Women, Woman + Man, Man Alone, and Two Men, in each case either accompanied or not accompanied by a child. However, the peculiar scarcity of men, except in the company of a woman, in parks and parking lots of shopping centers, necessitated that the four categories involving Man Alone and Two

Men be eliminated from the design. The remaining six categories, with the help of some separately collected data, nevertheless made possible the tests of the major hypotheses.

It was essential that the need for a helpful intervention on the part of the subjects be salient, without the helping act being too "costly" and involving any conceivable risk when children were present. In addition, the emergency had to be of the everyday-occurrence type. A variant of the "fallen person" situation (13) seemed to satisfy all of these requirements.

1. *Subjects*

Subjects were 119 women and 30 men who were encountered in parks and parking lots of shopping centers in San Diego and Thousand Oaks, California. Only adults who were judged to be between 25 and 45 years of age were counted as subjects. In addition, to be subjects, people encountered had to fit in one of the following six cells of a 3×2 factorial: Woman Alone, Two Women, and Woman + Man, in each case accompanied/not accompanied by a child of 3-10 years of age.

2. *Procedure*

Two pairs of confederates conducted the experiment at different locations and at different times of day. A pair of confederates walked in the same direction, separated by about 15 feet, until the first confederate encountered an adult or a pair of adults who fitted in one of the six classification categories. All encountered subjects who fitted in these categories were included, except in cases where there were other people within a 30-foot radius. The first confederate signalled to his partner the presence of the subject. The second confederate made a few more steps and then stumbled and fell to the ground, clutching his (her) ankle. The falls had been practiced by the confederates until they achieved uniformity and convincingness; they usually occurred about five feet away from the approaching subject(s), and almost directly in the subject's (or subjects') path. Prior to the fall, the second confederate watched the first confederate only, and thus was usually blind to the category of the subjects. Neither confederate established eye-contact with subjects, and no questions addressed to the fallen confederate were answered. After 15 seconds, during which the fallen confederate emitted sounds indicative of moderate pain, he (she) got up, at a signal from the first confederate. If any subjects still inquired about the extent of the confederate's injury, they were assured that no further assistance was

needed, and the confederate left the area. The first confederate had remained close enough to the fall area (inconspicuously positioned behind the subjects) to record the length of time spent by the subjects within a five-foot radius from the fallen confederate, up to the maximum of 15 seconds. In addition, he recorded whether or not help was given, defined as inquiries about the fallen confederate's well-being and offers of assistance. There were thus two main dependent measures. In the case of two-person groups, the second confederate noted which of the two people was principally responsible for the offers of help when these were made; finally, by paying attention to subjects' remarks, bodily movements, gestures, and changes in the direction of walking, this confederate determined whether a subject or subjects noticed the fallen confederate (all subjects clearly did). All confederates (three women and one man, in their early 20's and dressed in neat jeans and sweaters) alternated in the two roles and ran the subjects in the six categories an approximately equal number of times. Given the innocuous, everyday nature of the "incident," and the fact that subjects remained anonymous, it seemed unwise to delay and interrupt the subjects further by debriefing them.

After Study 1 had been completed, a separate investigation was carried out to check for the possibility that subjects in the two Woman + Man cells were drawn from populations different on relevant dimensions; for example, couples accompanied/not accompanied by children could differ on the married/unmarried or courting/not courting dimensions, which could influence the amount of attention they paid to their environment, or affect the likelihood that they would want to become involved with an "injured" stranger. Couples walking in the areas in which the original research had been carried out were approached by a woman in her midtwenties who said she was associated with the "School Board." Weather conditions, times of day, and days of the week were comparable to those of the original study. The "pollster" claimed to be tapping public opinion on a benign issue (construction of bicycle lanes for children). In the course of the conversation, information about a couple's marital status was casually obtained; when a couple was accompanied by a child, it was determined whether the child belonged to one or both adults. No couple refused to divulge information, nor displayed the slightest hesitation in providing it. All couples encountered who fitted in the two critical categories were approached (20 were with a child, and 22 without); none of the couples approached refused to enter the conversation.

3. Results and Discussion

The main results of the experiment are presented in Table 1. An analysis of variance was carried out on the time scores after they had been subjected to a logarithmic transformation. This analysis yielded only a statistically significant interaction ($F = 3.29$, $df = 2/85$, $p < .05$), to be discussed below. Individual comparisons between cells (by the Duncan test) are also presented in Table 1.

The results in terms of the proportion of subjects in different cells who offered assistance (see Table 1) closely paralleled the time data, even though they were only marginally significant. The proportion data were subjected to an arcsine transformation (19) and the interaction tested by means of an appropriately weighted contrast, using the theoretical error term.² The resulting F of 2.75 ($df = 1/\infty$) has an associated p of less than .10, and the residual is < 1 . Thus, it seems that people who stayed for a longer period of time in the presence of the fallen confederate also tended to be more helpful toward this person.

The pattern of the time data suggests that the predicted significant interaction was due to the fact that, when children were not present, a lone woman was more likely to help the "injured" confederate than two-person groups composed of two women, or especially of a woman and a man; however, the presence of a child significantly decreased the helping of lone women, and somewhat decreased that of pairs of women, while significantly increasing the helping responses of mixed-sex pairs. Both the time and helping data for subjects not accompanied by a child (top row of Table 1) gave support to the general diffusion-of-responsibility notion. This is particularly striking when it is taken into account that the probability of at least one individual helping is greater in two-person groups.³ However, given the reasonable assumption that two women walking together may be considered "friends," the nonsignificant difference between the Woman Alone and Two Women (without a child) cells clearly indicated a failure to replicate the Latané-Rodin (13) finding that friends who could communicate with each other helped less than would be expected by the results for lone subjects.

While the main effect of the absence/presence of a child failed to emerge, the interaction indicated that being accompanied by a child differentially affected various categories of subjects. Two points should be made about the bottom row of Table 1 (presence of a child), in comparison to the top row.

² See Langer and Abelson (11) for the rationale of this procedure.

³ Note that the presence of the interaction is *unaffected* by the fact that the probability of at least one individual helping is greater in two-person groups.

TABLE 1
MEAN TIME IN SECONDS SPENT NEAR FALLEN CONFEDERATE,
AND PERCENT OF SUBJECTS OFFERING ASSISTANCE

Presence of child	Woman alone		Two women		Woman + man	
	Time spent	% helping	Time spent	% helping	Time spent	% helping
No	13.0 ^a	86	12.1 ^{ab}	71	9.5 ^b	53
Yes	8.8 ^b	74	10.4 ^{ab}	64	13.3 ^a	80

Note: Cells with different superscripts (for the "time-spent" dependent measure) differ at the .05 level. Subjects *without* a child were 14 lone women, 14 pairs of women, and 15 mixed-sex couples. Subjects *with* a child were 19 lone women, 14 pairs of women, and 15 couples. Thus, a total of 119 women and 30 men were encountered.

First, the reversal, in terms of the time data, of the magnitude of Woman Alone *vs.* Two Women cells as a function of the absence/presence of a child, is perhaps worthy of note; the possibility, mentioned in the introduction, that the presence of a child may offset the decrease in the two-communicating-friends cell in comparison to the lone-subject cell (*cf.* 13) received some support. [In cases of helpful Two Women With Child subjects, and when it was possible to determine to which of the two women the child belonged (holding the child by the hand, etc.), the confederate's observations indicated that an (assumed) mother was as likely to help as the other woman.] The second and more important point is that the reversal was even stronger in the Woman + Man With Child cell: couples walking with a child spent more time with the confederate than any other category of subjects. At the anecdotal level, it should be mentioned that these people's offers of help, somewhat surpassed in the sheer frequency of occurrence only in the Woman Alone Without Child cell, were far more often of the "costly" kind (involving driving the confederate home, to a hospital, etc.) in comparison to offers made by all other categories of subjects. Confederates' observations indicated that in both of the Woman + Man cells the helping responses were initiated mainly by men.

On the whole, the following explanations suggest themselves: it is possible that women tend to avoid involving and ambiguous social interactions in the presence of their offspring of whom they are protective, and/or that it is predominantly the fathers, rather than mothers, who are expected in our culture to act as altruistic models for their children. Without the former explanation being completely discounted, the latter is favored by the fact that the situation and the helping act required were innocuous, and by the significant difference between the Woman + Man With *vs.* Without Child cells. The sheer presence of a man in a mixed two-person group was cer-

tainly not conducive to much helping, but the presence of a child drastically increased the helping responses of such groups. Mothers may be held less responsible for teaching altruism to children in this sort of situation both in absolute terms and especially when the father is present. Moreover, the difference between the two Woman + Man cells cannot apparently be explained away by differences on the married/unmarried or courting/not courting dimensions between the populations from which the couples accompanied/not accompanied by a child were drawn. In the mentioned, unobtrusively conducted, poll of 20 couples walking with a child, and 22 couples walking by themselves, it was found that 17 of the former, and 14 of the latter, were married-to-each-other couples ($\chi^2 = 1.49$, *ns.*, corrected for continuity). In addition, in the case of all 17 married couples walking with a child, the child belonged to the couple; in all three cases of unmarried people walking with a child, the latter belonged to one of the adults.

To conclude, the experiment provided correlational evidence for the notion that the presence of a child may affect adults' (parents') helping behavior. More specifically, this may be due to the child's serving as an educational, "socializable" target for its father, more than its mother, at least when helping a stranger in a public place is in question. While some of the data supported the diffusion-of-responsibility hypothesis, the considerable helping in the situation where couples (particularly fathers) had an opportunity to model altruism for their children leads to the conclusion that this may be yet another limiting condition to the generality of this hypothesis.

C. STUDY 2

Four experimental cells were required to test the possibility that attributions of weakness and dependence made to children-requesters (as opposed to adult requesters) by adult respondents would increase the likelihood of the latter's helping only if the request was deemed by adults as one "appropriate" for children to make. The request consisted of asking female adult subjects to sign one of two petitions: one dealt with an issue appropriate for children (construction of bicycle lanes leading to schools); the objective of the other petition was relatively inappropriate for children (lowering the legal drinking age in California to 18). The request was made either by a lone adult female, or by a 12-year-old male child. An interaction was predicted such that the child's request would be granted more often than an adult's in the case of the Bike petition, whereas the reverse was expected for the Drink petition.

Two additional cells were incorporated into the above design, involving an

adult requester, accompanied by a child, soliciting signatures for the two mentioned petitions, in order to test further predictions derived from the general framework of attribution theory. It was hypothesized that in the case of the Drink petition the request of an adult accompanied by a child would be granted even less often than that of a lone child. Presumably, the kind of ulterior motive likely to be attributed by subjects to an adult who involves a child in an issue inappropriate for the latter would be less excusable than that attributed to a child making an inappropriate request; in the latter case, the responsibility for the act could be seen as lying not with the child, but with an adult who, even though absent from the situation, may have coerced the child to make the request. On the assumption that the Drink petition would generally elicit less support than the Bike petition, the Adult + Child Drink cell was expected to be the lowest in the experiment. In contrast, it was predicted that an adult accompanied by a child would obtain a greater number of signatures in the Bike petition than a lone adult, though less than a lone child. In this case, the motives attributed by subjects to the adult accompanied by a child would presumably be "loftier" than for the Drink petition, such as a direct involvement with children, in addition to a general concern for children's welfare. The idea here is that children further enhance the acceptance of adults involved with "good" causes (given the standards of a particular population of respondents), while further decreasing the acceptance of those involved with "bad" causes.

Since a possible source of variation in the present experiment was whether the respondents themselves had children, this information was obtained by experimenters immediately after a subject made clear his decision to sign or not sign a petition.

1. Procedure

The study was carried out by two females in their twenties (clearly over 21) and one 12-year-old male child. Modestly dressed, they knocked on doors of single-family dwellings in a homogeneously middle-class area in San Diego County (Clairemont) on seven weekdays between 3:45 and 4:45 p.m. All houses within several randomly chosen blocks were eligible, with the exception of corner homes. The subjects were women who opened the door and heard the entire request. A total of 104 homes was actually approached, but data could not be collected in 20 either because there was no response, or a man responded, or the interaction was terminated by a potential subject before she heard anything about the objective of the given petition. There were six experimental cells in a 2×3 design (14 women per condition).

The first factor was the type of petition which subjects were asked to sign. When a subject opened the door, the experimenter said, "I am circulating a petition for . . .", and then either ". . . the construction of bicycle lanes," or ". . . the lowering of the drinking age." The experimenter then asked the subject to read the heading of the petition to which she was assigned. These headings read either "I would support a move to construct bicycle lanes on the main thoroughfares leading to and from Clairemont's Public Schools," or "I would support a move to lower the legal drinking age in California to eighteen." On the sheet given to the subject there were always four signatures below the heading, supposedly the endorsements of previously contacted people. The second factor was the "type" of experimenter who was at the door. This was either an adult experimenter alone, or accompanied by the child, or the child alone. In the Adult + Child conditions, the adult always made the request. Houses were randomly assigned to experimental conditions. The two adult experimenters ran an equal number of subjects in the conditions involving adults.

Immediately after a subject responded (positively or negatively), she was politely asked whether she had any children under 21 years of age. The experimenter then thanked the subject and departed.

2. Results and Discussion

The results of the experiment are presented in Table 2. An analysis of variance was carried out on the proportion scores submitted to an arcsine transformation, and using the theoretical error term (11). There was a large main effect of the type of petition ($F = 17.19$, $df = 1/\infty$, $p < .01$); as predicted, the middle-class women in a Southern California community were far more willing to support the construction of bicycle lanes for children than the lowering of the drinking age.

However, the main effect of the type-of-requester factor was not significant ($F = 1.05$, $df = 2/\infty$). More importantly, the predicted interaction, which was of major interest, yielded an F of .77 ($df = 2/\infty$, $p \approx .55$). This may have been due to the "basement" and "ceiling" effects for the Drink and Bike petitions, respectively. Unfortunately, the amount of collected pilot data was limited, and did not suggest that the difference in support for the two petitions would be so large. When a request is considered unreasonable and/or controversial by members of a given population, it is apparently not granted irrespective of who makes it. On the other hand, when a request is considered eminently reasonable, it is granted irrespective of who makes it. Furthermore, the validity of these statements was apparently not affected

TABLE 2
PERCENT OF SUBJECTS SIGNING A PETITION

Type of petition	Person making the request		
	Adult alone	Child alone	Adult + child
Drink	43	29	21
Bike	71	86	64

Note: $n = 14$ per cell.

by the degree to which the nature of a particular request directly concerned the person of whom the request was made. Of the 84 women, 61 had children and 23 did not; 33 of those with children, and nine of those without them had been assigned to the Drink petition; 10 of the 33 with children, and three of the nine without children, signed this petition, the proportion signing being almost identical in the two cases. Similarly, in the case of the Bike petition, the difference in the proportion signing was far from significant: 22 of the 28 women with children signed this petition, while nine out of 14 childless women also signed.

D. GENERAL DISCUSSION

By suggesting that children are a source of cues which may affect adults' helping behavior, the present experiments have begun to explore a neglected area of altruism research. In addition, the results may perhaps be profitably discussed in terms of the interplay in the determination of social behavior of situational cues, their interpretation (including attributions made to the source of cues), and the presumably trans-situational, "higher order" factors, such as social norms.

Study 1 showed how various categories of situational cues (emanating from the injured person, the child, etc.) may interact with normative prescriptions ("people in need should be helped"; "children should be taught altruism"). Both situational factors and norms improved the accuracy of prediction, especially when additional qualifiers consisting of both situational and normative components were taken into account ("fathers, rather than mothers, should model altruism for children when helping involves a stranger in a public place"). Norms are perhaps best regarded as statements summarizing the history of exposure to varied behavioral contingencies common to large groups of people in a culture. Thus, when the behavior in question is relatively gross (molar), normative prescriptions, coupled with a reasonably small number of situational qualifiers, may apparently serve as sources of relatively accurate predictions. However, it is clear that the more molecular the behavior of interest, and the greater the desired specificity of pre-

dictions, the greater the number of situational qualifiers needed. Cut-off points on this continuum, beyond which norms would be of negligible predictive value, are presumably dictated by both theoretical and practical considerations. The above proviso qualifies the validity of the Latané-Darley (12) criticism of social norms for their excessive generality. In short, norms may be useful to social scientists, but only up to a point.

Study 2 exposed another side of the issue. Both the existing experimental reports and intuition would suggest that helping behavior should have been affected by the (a) situational cues emanating from the requesters of different age, (b) norms concerned with helping the weak, and (c) attributions made to the requesters on the basis of cues, norms, and factors, such as whether the subjects themselves had children. Yet, this simply was not the case. A different normative prescription, subject perhaps to social-class and type-of-community considerations, accounted for most of the variance. While it is easy to join Latané and Darley (12) in their further criticism of norms for their "conflictingness," and for the fact that any number of them can be invoked to handle different experimental outcomes, it is clear that situational variables fared no better in this experiment.

Study 2 is thus an example of the fact that particular norm-based attitudes (e.g., toward the drinking age and bicycle lanes) may override a variety of situational variables, as well as other normative prescriptions. It is our impression that factors with such robust effects are unjustifiably ignored in the influential literature favoring exclusively situation-specific explanations [see Bowers (3) for a sound critique of situationism]. One of the reasons for this practice may be that such factors are not investigated a great deal, having been adjudged commonsensical and uninteresting, despite the fact that they account for a large proportion of the variance in many situations. Second, there may be a bias against reporting in sociopsychological journals findings indicating stability and consistency of behavior across situations, because of the type of experimental design predominantly used and the almost exclusive reliance on the Fisherian statistical decision procedures in the evaluation of results. Findings of the absence of treatment effects may often be indicative not of weak manipulations, but of the trans-situational stability of behavior.

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