

Helping Behavior

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The Good Samaritan Experiment

Most people, in the Western and Middle Eastern worlds, understand the story of the Good Samaritan, and how it relates to helping behavior.

In this famous parable, a Rabbi and a Levite ignore an injured man and pass by, with a Samaritan being the only one to stop and help.

In the modern world, this parable is becoming increasingly relevant. There are many examples of victims of crime being ignored and not helped; you just need to open a newspaper or watch the news on television.

With this in mind, in 1978, an experiment was constructed, by Darley and Batson, to test the possible facts behind this story and study altruistic behavior.

The variables to be tested were the relative haste of the participant, and how occupied their minds were with other matters; it has been argued that, because the thoughts of the Rabbi and the Levite were on religious and spiritual matters, they might have been too distracted to stop and help.

The experiment was constructed as follows:

The experiment researchers had three hypotheses that they wanted to test;

1. People thinking about religion and higher principles would be no more inclined to show helping behavior than laymen.
2. People in a rush would be much less likely to show helping behavior.
3. People who are religious for personal gain would be less likely to help than people who are religious because they want to gain some spiritual and personal insights into the meaning of life.

Religious studies students on a study course were recruited for this experiment, and had to fill in a questionnaire about religious affiliations and beliefs, to help evaluate and judge the findings of hypothesis 3.

The students were given some religious teaching and instruction and then were told to travel from one building to the next. Between the two buildings was a man lying injured and appearing to be in desperate need of assistance.

The first variable in this experiment was the amount of urgency impressed upon the subjects, with some being told not to rush and others being informed that speed was of the essence.

The relative mindset of the subject was also tested, with one group being told that they would be giving lectures on procedures in the seminary, the others that they would be giving a talk about the 'Good Samaritan'.

The experimenters constructed a six point plan of assessing helping behavior, ranging from apparently failing to even notice the victim, to refusing to leave until help was found, and the victim was in safe hands.

The results of the experiment were interesting, with the relative haste of the subject being the overriding factor; when the subject was in no hurry, nearly two thirds of people stopped to lend assistance. When the subject was in a rush, this dropped to one in ten.

People who were on the way to deliver a speech about helping others were nearly twice as likely to help as those delivering other sermons, showing that the thoughts of the individual were a factor in dictating helping behavior.

Religious beliefs did not appear to make much difference on the results; being religious for personal gain, or as part of a spiritual quest, did not appear to make much of a noticeable impact on the amount of helping behavior shown.



The banner features a central logo with a beaker icon and the text "EXPLORABLE Quiz Time!". Below the logo are three quiz cards: "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" (with a pair of red roller skates), "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" (with a fan of colored pencils), and "Quiz: Flags in Europe" (with a Ferris wheel). A "See all quizzes =>" link is located at the bottom right.

Conclusions

It seems that the only major explanation for people failing to stop and help a victim is how obsessed with haste they are.

Even students going to speak about the Good Samaritan were less likely to stop and offer assistance, if they were rushing from one place to another.

It seems that people who were in a hurry did not even notice the victim, although, to be fair, once they arrived at their destination and had time to think about the consequences, they felt some guilt and anxiousness.

This, at least, indicates that ignoring the victim was not necessarily a result of uncaring attitude, but of being so wrapped up in their own world that they genuinely did not notice the victim.

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