

## Some Determinants of Cross-Racial Helping Behavior

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The main hypothesis of the present research was that white Americans will favor black over white help-seekers when both display socially valued characteristics. Male confederates posing as college students telephoned white male subjects and asked them to answer several questions about a consumer product. Confederates identified themselves as Negro or black or used no racial label. In addition, callers used either high, medium, or low levels of assertiveness. One month later, subjects' racial attitudes were assessed. Amount of compliance was greater for Negro callers than for black or nonminority (i.e., no label) callers. Compliance rates declined with increasing assertiveness, especially for minority callers. In the Negro condition helpers had less favorable racial attitudes than nonhelpers. In a second experiment confederates asked males of both races on subway platforms to participate in a brief consumer survey interview. All subjects favored black confederates, and the effect was enhanced when confederates described themselves as college students. In another subway study male confederates asked for change for a quarter. Compliance was greater for white confederates. All results appear to be consistent with the perceived social desirability hypothesis. In addition an ambivalence interpretation of cross-racial altruism is suggested by the obtained attitude-behavior relationship.

Several field studies have recently been done in the United States on white people's responses to black and white help-seekers. In some of them subjects tended to give more aid to white persons (Bryan & Test, 1967; Gaertner, 1973; Gaertner & Bickman, 1971; Graf & Ridell, 1972), whereas in others there were no reliable differences in the racial targeting of altruism (Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969; Hornstein, 1972; Wispé & Freshley, 1971).

In contrast to the American findings, Dutton (1973) has reported that Canadian whites gave more frequent and generally

larger donations to black and Indian solicitors for a nonethnic charity than they gave to white solicitors. The discrepancy in results may simply reflect a national difference, but it seems more reasonable to ascribe it to differences in the research methods employed. Dutton's was the only experiment in which confederates actively sought aid for a humanitarian cause. Only one American study, Bryan and Test's (1967), used a charity appeal, but even this investigation was not comparable to Dutton's because the confederates, who posed as attendants of Salvation Army kettles, were not allowed to speak to potential donors or to make eye contact with them.

Seeking contributions for a worthy non-ethnic philanthropy is generally regarded as an activity that benefits society as a whole, and therefore deserves to be encouraged and supported. Giving money could have the meaning for the donor not only of aiding a particular charity, but also of expressing approval of the solicitor. In this situation

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there seem to be a number of plausible reasons why a black solicitor might be favored over a white one. First, it is probable that many white people perceive segments of the black population as being alienated from, and even hostile to, white values and norms (cf. Campbell, 1971), and thereby potentially threatening to the security and well-being of the majority group. Hence, self-interest alone might dispose the white person to reinforce black behavior that showed support for his values. Another possibility is that perception of the black solicitor's socially desirable behavior would arouse latent sympathy for the racial underdog, which would be expressed altruistically (cf. Schuman & Harding, 1963).

More complex than either of the foregoing one-factor suggestions is the notion of a motive to defend one's self-image as a fair-minded and unprejudiced individual when confronted with minority behavior that challenges one's negative stereotype of the group. Our assumption is that white Americans tend to have racial attitudes that are essentially ambivalent, rather than unequivocally favorable, unfavorable, or neutral. Suggestive evidence from attitude and opinion research in support of an ambivalence hypothesis has been reviewed by Katz (1970), and Katz, Glass, and Cohen (1973). For example, in a survey reported by Campbell (1971) a large proportion of urban whites acknowledged that serious racial inequities still existed, but felt that blacks were "pushing too fast" for change and not doing enough to help themselves. These respondents typically expressed a complex mixture of hostile and sympathetic sentiments. Katz, Glass, and Cohen (1973) reason that this ambivalence creates a tendency toward behavioral instability, in which extremely negative or positive responses toward blacks may occur, depending on how the specific situation is structured. Thus in Dutton's (1973) experiment, where black persons were seen to be engaged in socially valued humanitarian activity, the ambivalent subject was presumably vulnerable to self-accusations of bigotry, and the threat was resolved through suppression of antagonistic feelings and enhancement of friendly, sym-

thetic feelings. The result was an amplified helping response.

The three suggested motives for favoring black help-seekers—to reinforce conformity behavior, to express sympathy per se, and to defend self-esteem against ambivalence-induced threat—are all intuitively plausible. To the extent that any single one is valid, it should operate not only in Dutton's situation, where the confederate's goal was humanitarian, but also where aid is sought in support of more personal goals that are strongly approved in white society—for example, the achievement goals embodied in the Protestant work ethic. Previous research in the United States has not dealt with this type of cross-racial helping situation. It provides the first hypothesis of the present inquiry: When persons of both races seek limited aid in support of socially valued personal goals, white subjects will tend to favor blacks.

Cross-racial altruism, however, might be affected by the manner in which aid is solicited. Specifically, favoring of black help seekers should be more likely to occur when the solicitor adheres to the conventional norms of courtesy governing the making of requests of strangers, whereas the opposite outcome (i.e., relative rejection of blacks) should be more likely when the solicitor seems to violate these norms by being unduly assertive or by taking for granted the other's compliance. The first part of this prediction follows from the assumption that white people are inclined to encourage minority behavior that conforms to white standards, and the second part is based on a correlative assumption that they are also inclined to discourage minority nonconformity.

Further, the minority person's mode of self-reference might influence the white subject's responsiveness. The term *black*, as compared with *Negro*, probably suggests to many whites a more critical and less conforming attitude toward the main society, because of its association with minority protest. Therefore, the person who identified himself as *black* might elicit less assistance than one who used the word *Negro*. This seemed a plausible prediction in the present study, since most subjects were from a white popu-

lation known to have relatively conventional racial views—middle and lower-middle income males past the age of 30 (cf. Campbell, 1971).

Finally, this research included a measure of racial attitude that it was hoped would be useful in evaluating the suggestions made earlier about motives for cross-racial helping.

#### EXPERIMENT 1

##### Method

The subjects were 2,340 white male adults living in New York City. By means of site inspection and the information provided in 1970 census tract reports, a list of residential blocks was compiled in which median annual family income was between \$10,000 and \$13,000 and racial composition was virtually 100% white. Names and telephone numbers of men living in the blocks were obtained by using voter registration lists in conjunction with telephone directories. Names were randomly assigned to 18 treatments, representing all combinations of the following conditions: three levels of help-seeker's assertiveness, three types of help-seeker's racial identification, and two confederates acting as help-seekers.

In the first phase of the research two male college students, one black and the other white, were used as confederates. Neither was acquainted with the experimental hypotheses. Making telephone calls between 7:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. on weekday evenings, each confederate used every combination of experimental conditions an equal number of times. About 85% of the men called were eventually contacted.

When the subject answered the telephone the following script was used in the low-assertiveness condition:

Hello, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. My name is David Clark. I am in the [racial identification] Students' Self-Help Program at the City College of New York, and I have a part-time job doing consumer attitude surveys. Would you mind answering a few questions about men's shoes? It will take about 5 minutes of your time.

The medium-assertiveness script was the same, except that instead of the words *Would you mind* the phrase *I'm sure you won't mind* was used. The high-assertiveness script was the same as the low assertiveness one, except that in place of the last two sentences the following was substituted: "I'm sure you can give me 5 minutes of your time. I want you to answer some questions about men's shoes." Racial identification was manipulated independently of assertiveness by inserting either *Negro*, *black*, or no label in the script where indicated above. It was assumed that when no label was used the caller would be perceived as white.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As a check on this assumption, a tape recording of the black confederate reading the no-label-low-

The dependent variable was the subject's stated willingness or refusal to be interviewed. If he assented, the confederate terminated the call by asking a "filter" question that "disqualified" him as a respondent, thanked him, and hung up.

The attitudinal phase of the research began 1 month later. Samples of compliers and noncompliers were randomly selected from each of the following treatments: black-high-assertion, Negro-high-assertion, Negro-low-assertion, and white-low-assertion.<sup>2</sup> Under the guise of conducting an opinion poll, two new male confederates, both white graduate students, called these subjects. One confederate made all calls for the white-low-assertion condition and the other made all calls for the three remaining conditions. Representing themselves as telephone interviewers for the "Urban Research Associates of New York" the confederates requested subjects to "answer some questions about the coming city election and the problems the future Mayor will have to deal with." The interview lasted about 12 minutes and included questions on a variety of local political issues. Imbedded in the interview were six items about the causes of minority people's problems in three areas: jobs, education, and neighborhood cleanliness. For each area there was an item about discrimination or lack of opportunity and another item about the adequacy of minority people's behavior. For example, the job items were as follows:

(a) It has been said that there aren't enough decent jobs for blacks and Puerto Ricans in New York City. Do you believe this is so, or do you think there are enough decent jobs for blacks and Puerto Ricans?

(b) To the extent that there are jobs available for blacks and Puerto Ricans, do you think that they try hard enough to find them?

There were three possible responses for each item: agree, disagree, and no opinion. These were scored +1, 0, and -1 for favorability of the attitude expressed.<sup>3</sup> Over 70% of the helpers and a similar percentage of the nonhelpers who were called back for the attitude interview were successfully interviewed.

assertiveness script was played to 20 white males who were unacquainted with the research. They then filled out a "voice impression" questionnaire in which an ethnic identity item was imbedded. All 20 subjects incorrectly identified the speaker as white.

<sup>2</sup> Because of the time lapse between the two calls, it was assumed that subjects' responses to the first call would not influence their attitudinal replies. Inasmuch as the attitude data were supposed to shed light on the motivation for favoring minority help seekers, the Negro condition—where such favoring occurred—was sampled extensively. Attitude-helping relationships were not anticipated in the black and no-label conditions.

<sup>3</sup> The internal consistency of the six items, as estimated by Cronbach's coefficient alpha, was .49 ( $n = 160$ ).

### Results

The helping scores (i.e., compliance or non-compliance) were analyzed by means of a  $3 \times 3 \times 2$  (Levels of Assertiveness  $\times$  Racial Identifications  $\times$  Confederates) analysis of variance, with 130 subjects per cell. Helping rates for the various conditions will be expressed here as percentages rather than as means. All three main effects, but none of the interactions, were significant.

For the two confederates the respective levels of helping were 55.1% and 65.5%,  $F(1, 2322) = 18.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . The higher rate of helping was obtained by the black caller. Because there was no statistical interaction of confederates with racial identification or assertiveness, and because (as already mentioned) an independent check had shown that in the no-label condition the black confederate's voice was perceived as that of a white person, it seems justifiable to regard the differential effectiveness of the two confederates as a personality phenomenon unrelated to the hypotheses of the experiment. Figure 1 summarizes the results for the other variables.

Helping scores in the three racial identification conditions were as follows: Negro, 65.0%; white (i.e., no-label), 58.8%; and black, 57.1%:  $F(2, 2322) = 5.90$ ,  $p < .01$ . Between-levels comparisons revealed, as predicted, that the Negro compliance rate was significantly higher than that for white ( $t = 2.55$ ,  $p < .02$ ), and black ( $t = 3.24$ ,  $p < .002$ ).

The assertion variable had a fairly linear effect on helping: low assertiveness, 68.9%; medium assertiveness, 62.3%; and high assertiveness, 54.5%,  $F(2, 2322) = 27.40$ ,  $p < .001$ . The predicted interaction of racial identification and assertiveness was not significant; however, there appeared to be some tendency toward a convergence of Negro and white helping scores as assertiveness increased. In the low-assertion condition compliance scores for the Negro and white help-seekers were 74.6% and 63.1% respectively ( $t = 2.85$ ,  $p < .01$ ), whereas for medium and high-assertion the differences were progressively smaller and nonsignificant (65.1 vs. 59.6 and 55.4 vs. 53.5, respectively). These comparisons provide some support for the prediction

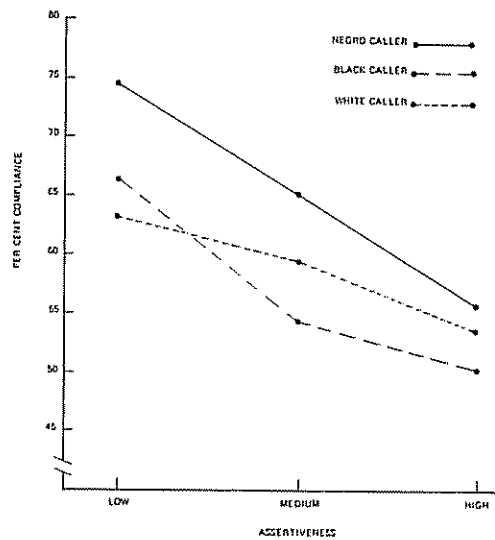


FIGURE 1. Percent compliance for both confederates combined in the various Assertiveness  $\times$  Racial Identification treatments ( $n = 260$  for every treatment).

that relatively high assertiveness would be more detrimental to the minority help-seeker than to the white help-seeker.

Turning to the relation between racial attitude and helping, a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  (High vs. Low Assertion  $\times$  Confederates  $\times$  Helpers vs. Nonhelpers) analysis of variance was done on subjects from the Negro group, using attitude scores as the dependent variable. The number of subjects per cell ranged from 20 to 30, reflecting differences in the size of the helper and nonhelper groups that were being sampled. There was one significant finding, a main effect in which helpers had less favorable attitudes toward minorities than did nonhelpers,  $F(1, 152) = 5.07$ ,  $p < .05$ . The mean attitude scores were, respectively,  $-1.44$  and  $-.51$ .

Analyses were also done on each of the two other conditions where attitude scores were obtained: white-low-assertion ( $n = 40$ ) and black-high-assertion ( $n = 70$ ). In neither condition were helping and attitude related.

### EXPERIMENT 2

The previous experiment showed that the manipulation of racial cues by means of verbal labels had certain predicted effects on helpfulness in a telephone situation. A ques-

tion arises as to whether a minority person would receive favored treatment in a face-to-face situation where the racial cues were the physical characteristics of the help-seeker, and where compliance entailed direct social contact. Accordingly, a new experiment was done in subway stations. Given the racially mixed population of the stations, it seemed appropriate to use both black and white subjects. Also, to further explore the social desirability notion, a status-of-confederate variable was substituted for the verbal-label and assertiveness variables of the first experiment.

### Method

Subjects were 960 male adults who were waiting for trains on subway station platforms. They were approached by confederates posing as hired interviewers and asked to answer some questions about a consumer product. Six new confederates were used, three black and three white, all between the ages of 22 and 27. They were dressed neatly and carried a clipboard and pencil. The independent variables were as follows: race of subjects, race of confederates, age of subjects, and ostensible educational status of confederates. The same number of subjects was used in every combination of conditions.

The experiment was run during weekday off-rush hours in two large subway stations in mid-Manhattan. Only one confederate worked a station at a given time. Starting at one end of a two-track platform he approached black and white men who appeared to be at least 18 years of age and were standing alone. The confederate made an estimate of each subject's age as being under 30 or 30 or older. Confederates' estimates showed agreement of 90% or higher with estimates made by one of the investigators.

A systematic sampling procedure was followed whereby the man standing closest to every second pillar on alternate sides of the platform was contacted, provided a train was not standing or approaching on either side. The pillars were far enough apart to make it unlikely that a new subject would have witnessed the confederate's prior encounter. Periodically, the confederate tallied the total number of subjects in each condition, so that he could fulfill his preestablished quotas. All confederates were rehearsed and then observed for at least an hour, to insure procedural uniformity.

The script for the high-status condition was as follows:

Excuse me, sir. I'm a student at City College and I work for a marketing research company in my spare time. We are doing a survey of people's attitudes about cleaning fluid. Could you give me a few minutes of your time to answer some questions about cleaning fluid?

In the Low Status condition the reference to being a student was omitted as follows: "Excuse me, sir. I'm working for a marketing research company . . ."

If the subject replied that he was afraid he might miss his train, the confederate assured him that the interview would be broken off if necessary. Subjects who complied were then asked a "filter" question that "disqualified" them as respondents, and the contact was terminated.

### Results

Data of the three black confederates and data of the three white confederates, respectively, were pooled. Then a  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$  analysis of variance was done on the helping scores (Race of Subject  $\times$  Age of Subject  $\times$  Race of Confederate  $\times$  Status of Confederate). There were 60 subjects in every cell; for all effects to be reported,  $df = 1/944$ .

The most important finding was a main effect of race of confederate: 84.6% of subjects helped black confederates and 68.5% helped white confederates ( $F = 37.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Next, high-status confederates elicited more compliance (79.6%) than low-status confederates (73.3%); for the difference,  $F = 5.80$ ,  $p < .025$ . There was also a main effect of age ( $F = 64.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with young subjects complying more (86.8%) than old subjects (66.4%).

In addition, there were three interaction effects, for which the helping scores are shown in Table 1. Age of subjects interacted with race of confederates ( $F = 4.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ): The effect of age was stronger for white confederates than for black confederates. Race of subjects interacted with age of subjects ( $F = 5.05$ ,  $p < .025$ ): White subjects showed a stronger effect of age than did black subjects. Finally, there was a marginally significant interaction of confederates' status and confederates' race ( $F = 3.71$ ,  $p < .06$ ), indicating that the black confederates produced almost the entire main effect for status.

### EXPERIMENT 3

Given the high incidence of violent crime in the subways, and the belief of many people that most of the crimes are perpetrated by minority youths, it is conceivable that subjects in Experiment 2 complied with the black confederates' request as much out of fear as for more positive reasons. The exist-



TABLE 1  
COMPLIANCE PERCENTAGES IN SUBWAY INTERVIEW  
EXPERIMENT FOR THREE INTERACTION EFFECTS

Age of Subject $\times$ Race of Confederate		
	Young subjects	Old subjects
White confederate	81.7	55.4
Black confederate	92.1	76.7

Race of Subject $\times$ Age of Subject		
	Young subjects	Old subjects
White subjects	88.3	61.7
Black subjects	85.4	70.4

Status of Confederate $\times$ Race of Confederate		
	High status	Low status
White confederate	69.2	67.9
Black confederate	90.0	78.7

Note.  $n = 240$  in all cells.

ence of this possibility might be seen as damaging to our interpretation of the results in terms of the perceived social desirability of the help-seeker's behavior. Therefore, a third experiment was carried out, in which the fear potential was at least as strong as in the prior study, but the nature of the confederates' request did not suggest that favoring of blacks should occur.

#### Method

This study was done in the same subway stations as the previous one; it had 800 subjects, equally divided into age and racial groups. Three black and three white confederates were used, of whom five had been used in the prior study. The sampling procedure and the dress of confederates were the same. The confederate approached each subject by saying: "Excuse me, do you have change of a quarter?" As he said this he held out his hand with a quarter in the upturned palm. The subject was judged to have complied with the request if he reached into his pocket and brought out coins for inspection. It was assumed that most subjects would not know exactly how much change they had with them, so that a negative reply without searching would be tantamount to a rejection. If the subject offered change for the quarter the confederate completed the exchange, thanked him and moved on. If not, he was also thanked, and the confederate moved on.

#### Results

The helping scores were evaluated by means of a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  analysis of variance

(Race of Subject  $\times$  Age of Subject  $\times$  Race of Confederate), with 100 subjects per cell. There was one strong effect: white confederates received more help (54.5%) than black confederates (38.3%), with  $F(1, 792) = 20.48$ ,  $p < .001$ . Also, there was a weak tendency for whites to comply more than blacks. The respective rates were 49.0% and 43.8%,  $F(1, 792) = 2.73$ ,  $p < .10$ .

#### DISCUSSION

The results show that minority help-seekers were favored over whites when both displayed the same socially desirable characteristics, and that prominority bias tended to diminish as the self-presentations of both black and white help-seekers became less positive. Thus, as confederates in the telephone experiment became increasingly assertive, there was less tendency to favor the Negro caller over the white caller. The fact that assertiveness adversely affected compliance rates across all three types of racial identification underscores the reasonableness of our interpretation that a norm of courtesy was being violated.

Another variation in the telephone study that can be linked to social desirability was black versus Negro self-identification. The label *black* did not elicit the same favored treatment as the term *Negro*. This was predicted on the assumption that for many subjects, *black*, as compared with *Negro*, would imply a more critical and less conforming orientation toward white norms and values.<sup>4</sup>

Social desirability seems also to account for the interaction effect of interviewer's race and educational status on compliance in the first subway experiment. Favoring of the black confederate was twice as great in the college

<sup>4</sup> Although there is no direct evidence to support this assumption, it is consistent with the rather conservative views that subjects expressed in the attitude interviews. The mean racial attitude score for all subjects tested was on the negative side of the scale. Answers to other items revealed a similarly conservative outlook. For example, on a question about how to deal with the problem of street crime, a large majority (67%) advocated a "get-tough" policy of more arrests and stiffer jail sentences, whereas only 33% felt that it was at least equally important to provide better job and educational opportunities for the poor.

student condition as in the nonstudent condition. Working one's way through college is a time-honored cliché of the Protestant ethic, American style, which apparently still evokes an image of commendable achievement striving.

Finally, in the one situation where white help-seekers were significantly more successful than blacks—asking for change for a quarter—the confederate exhibited no strongly positive characteristics, and was not visibly engaged in a socially valued activity. However, given the concern about subway crime in New York, subjects may have been fearful of being bilked, robbed, or aggressively panhandled when asked by a stranger to display money. But despite this element of ambiguity in the last experiment, the overall pattern of results in all three studies supports the social desirability interpretation.

Earlier in this paper three possible motives for helping the minority person were suggested: to express sympathy, to encourage conformity, and to maintain self-esteem. The notion of an unambivalent sympathy motive is discredited by the evidence from the attitude scores, which shows that subjects who complied with the Negro caller's request were more inclined than noncompliers to attribute the problems of blacks to their inadequacies, rather than to racial discrimination. But this tendency of compliers to criticize the black group is consistent with the idea of a motive to reinforce socially desirable behavior in members of a group perceived as alienated from white norms and values. It is also compatible with the defense of self-esteem conception, which is derived from Katz, Glass and Cohen's (1973) racial ambivalence hypothesis. An ambivalence interpretation of the results of the first experiment would state that the criticism of blacks in general and the favorable response to the Negro help-seeker were convenient, low-cost modes of resolving attitudinal conflict in different settings. The "political poll" provided an opportunity to justify one's dislike without completely ruling out the possibility of sympathy, whereas granting the small request of an individual black with socially desirable traits was

an easy way to express sympathy and prove one's fairmindedness without having to disavow negative feelings about the group as a whole.

Future research can test the ambivalence interpretation by measuring attitudinal ambivalence and helping behavior independently of each other in the same subjects. Future research should also investigate the alternative possibility of a motive to reinforce conformity to white norms.

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