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THE RESPONSE TO OLD PEOPLE WHO ASK FOR HELP: FIELD EXPERIMENTS

by

ARTHUR WEINBERGER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1980

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

24 July 1980
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Abstract

THE RESPONSE TO OLD PEOPLE WHO ASK FOR HELP: FIELD EXPERIMENTS

by

Arthur Weinberger

Advisor: Professor Stanley Milgram

Because of the paucity of research concerning helping behaviors toward the elderly, conflicting hypotheses about how the elderly would fare in comparison to younger adults when seeking assistance, and because of pragmatic and theoretical issues, three experiments were devised and conducted in order to examine the frequency of helping behaviors toward young, middle-aged, and old adults. Two out of the three experiments revealed a positive relationship between the age of the help-seeker and the frequency of assistance. Middle-aged adults were helped significantly more often than young adults, and old adults were helped significantly more frequently than middle-aged adults. In order to understand why the elderly received assistance more frequently than younger adults, the help-seekers were evaluated on a number of semantic-differential scales. The results indicated that the elderly project a combination of both "negative" and "positive" characteristics. This combination predisposes persons to favor the elderly over other groups in providing assistance. The relationship between the age of the help-seeker and the frequency of assistance was attenuated in the remaining experiment because the age and related characteristics of the help-seeker were made less salient.

Acknowledgements

The present work originated with merely a germ of an idea; I wish to acknowledge the contribution of all those who helped me nourish it and bring it to fruition.

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I am also grateful to Irwin Katz who, in spite of favoring a different style of research, was flexible and open enough to accept the validity of my own approach, and to compromise in order to let me do it "my way."

Douglas Kimmel was receptive, encouraging, and generous with his time and energies. His relentless attention to detail proved to be extremely valuable and even emotionally gratifying. I am delighted that he served on my committee.

Herbert Saltzstein was an exacting reader. However, his comments, criticisms and suggestions were well seasoned and were profferred in the spirit of scientific rigor and excellence. His presence made the defense a truly stimulating and memorable experience.

No words can describe nor sufficiently thank the contribution of Edgar Borgatta, who did not wish to see me postpone the defense any longer than necessary, and who volunteered to be its acting chairman.

I also wish to thank Jack Fefer for his critical reading of the manuscript, and William Herrick for providing the necessary computer assistance.

The assistance provided by Peter Harris and Frank English in furnishing the needed photographic equipment and know-how often went "above and beyond the call of duty."

Recognition must also go to the 12 confederates for their patience and conscientious dedication to their roles as well as to the more than 2,760 New Yorkers who served as subjects.

Last--but foremost--I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Mindy Glass Weinberger. She not only bore the brunt of my idiosyncrasies and frustrations throughout the stressful period of the dissertation but during the entire course of my graduate training. Her patience, support, assistance and unwavering good spirits were invaluable assets to my work and well-being.

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INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Do the characteristics of the elderly--be they real or imagined--promote or inhibit helping behaviors toward them? Or possibly, but less likely, do they make no difference at all? Research in social psychology indicates that whether or not a person in need of assistance is helped often depends upon the characteristics of the person requiring assistance (Bryan & Test, 1967; Gaertner & Bickman, 1971; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Hurley & Allen, 1974; Katz, Cohen, & Glass, 1975; Katz, Farber, Glass, Lucido, & Emswiller, 1978; Schiavo, Sherlock & Wickland, 1974; Takooshian, Haber, & Lucido, 1977; Wunderlich & Willis, 1977).

In as much as gerontological research shows that old people in our society are relegated to a distinct social category, and that there are identifiable clusters of attitudes associated with this category, it is of considerable importance to inquire what influence these have on prosocial behaviors toward them. This issue is of concern to gerontologists involved with the welfare of the elderly as well as to theoreticians and researchers engaged in understanding the psycho-social dynamics of prosocial behaviors. But in spite of its importance, there has been no systematic attempt to study helping behaviors toward the elderly and consequently very little is known about the social psychology of helping old people. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is twofold: to examine in a limited yet nevertheless meaningful way the capacity of elderly persons to evoke interpersonal assistance; and to stimulate additional research devoted to examining issues pertaining to gerontological social psychology.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The specific question we will be probing throughout this work is: Are the elderly more or less likely to receive assistance than younger adults when making a request? Before we examine this question empirically, it is valuable to review the relevant gerontological and social psychological literature as this material will not only help place the present experimental work in perspective, but will also highlight its value and relevance. This literature review will clearly demonstrate that:

1. There is a marked absence of data on prosocial behaviors toward old persons, those 65 and over.

2. The subjective impressions of the elderly, information on intergenerational behavior and attitudes, and data from the prosocial literature provide insufficient and highly conflicting hypotheses concerning how people are likely to respond to elderly help-seekers.

3. There are pressing pragmatic and theoretical reasons for studying prosocial behaviors toward the elderly.

Before we examine the available research on attitudes and behaviors toward the elderly, though, it is important to clear up a common misconception:

The more than 23 million Americans who are over the age of 65 do not comprise a homogeneous group. On the contrary, it has been suggested that the 65-and-over age group may be more heterogeneous than younger age groups (Bengston, Kasschau, & Regan, 1977; Hall,

1922). To be sure, those 65 and over frequently share certain characteristics. Physical illness and impairment, wrinkles and other features which are often used to differentiate the elderly from younger age groups, undeniably increase in prevalence with advancing years, often curtailing activity even among the vast majority of older persons who live in the community (DHEW, 1978; Shanas & Maddox, 1977; Wilder, 1973). However, these factors are not intrinsic to aging per se. Some people continue to enjoy good health and active lives into their eighties and nineties. The relationship between impairment and aging is largely a statistical one and global statements about "old people" are almost always inappropriate and misleading (Eisdorfer & Cohen, 1980). Consequently, for the purposes of this paper, the terms "the elderly" or "the aged" do not in actuality denote anything other than that persons so designated are 65 years of age or older.

The literature review has been divided into three parts: Attitudes and behaviors toward the elderly; The aged: Their views on being discriminated against, and on the likelihood of receiving help from others; and The study of prosocial behaviors and its implications concerning helping behaviors toward the elderly.

Attitudes and behaviors toward aging and the elderly

Psychological research on attitudes toward aging and the elderly began during the early fifties. The seminal investigations were carried out by Tuckman and Lorge (1952b, 1953, 1958b). For the most part, their results, obtained through paper-and-pencil measures, disclosed attitudes toward aging and the elderly that were interpreted to be stereotypic and negative in content. Old age was perceived as

a period marked by economic hardship, failing health, loneliness, rigidity, and diminishing physical and mental powers. Most subsequent research has tended to follow the work of Tuckman and Lorge, both in methodology and in results. With the proliferation of questionnaires, attitude scales and various paper-and-pencil techniques used to assess intergenerational impressions, an unusually consistent body of data was generated, detailing the substance of these pejorative attitudes:

> Stereotyped views of the elderly uncovered in various studies include views that old people are generally ill, tired, not sexually interested, mentally slower, forgetful and less able to learn new things, grouchy, withdrawn, feeling sorry for themselves, less likely to participate in activities (except, perhaps, religion), isolated, in the least happy or fortunate time of life, unproductive, and defensive in various combinations and with varying emphases (McTavish, 1971, p. 97).

As a result, it became commonplace in the literature to generalize these findings and to assert that American culture is permeated with unwholesome and detrimental views of aging and the elderly (Kastenbaum & Durkee, 1964).

The most extensive study of attitudes on aging ever conducted in the United States, one employing over 4000 interviews, has lent a certain amount of credibility to the validity of this generalization, as it has documented numerically the degree to which the public misperceives the realities of aging (National Council on Aging, 1975). The report indicated dramatic differences between very serious problems actually experienced by the elderly and the very serious problems which the public expects the elderly to experience. For example, whereas only 15% of the elderly indicated that money was a

very serious problem, fully 62% of the public believed the aged to be experiencing financial stress. Sizable differences between actual experiences of the elderly and public expectations were also found in areas pertaining to health, loneliness, poor housing, not feeling needed, and pertaining to not having enough job opportunities.

A widely shared stereotype of the aged American was summarized this way:

> An older person thinks and moves slowly. He does not think as he used to or as creatively. He is bound to himself and to his past and can no longer change or grow. He can learn neither well nor swiftly and, even if he could, he would not wish to. Tied to his personal traditions and growing conservatism, he dislikes innovations and is not disposed to new ideas. Not only can he not move forward; he often moves backward. He enters a second childhood, caught up in increasing egocentricity and demanding more from his environment than he is willing to give to it. Sometimes he becomes an intensification of himself, a caricature of a lifelong personality. He becomes irritable and cantankerous, yet shallow and enfeebled. He lives in his past; he is behind the times. He is aimless and wandering of mind, reminiscing and garrulous. Indeed, he is a study in decline, the picture of mental and physical failure. He has lost and cannot replace friends, spouse, job, status, power, influence, income. He is often stricken by diseases which, in turn, restrict his movement, his enjoyment of food, the pleasures of well-being. He has lost his desire and capacity for sex. His body shrinks, and so does the flow of blood to his brain. His mind does not utilize oxygen and sugar at the same rate as formerly. Feeble, uninteresting, he awaits his death, a burden to society, to his family and to himself (Butler, 1975, pp.6-7).

Another line of research has concentrated upon showing that laymen are not the only ones who are prejudiced against the elderly. Negative attitudes have also been detected among clinical psychology, social work and medical students (Farrar & Bloom, 1967; Spence,

Feisenbaum, Fitzgerald, & Roth, 1968; Wilensky & Barmack, 1966), psychiatrists (House & Gaitz, 1970; Muslin & Epstein, 1980); nurses (Campbell, 1971), personnel specialists (Schwab & Heneman III, 1978), advertisements (Smith, 1976; Francher, 1973), children (Weinberger, 1979), as well as in children's literature (Ansello, 1977, 1978). A review of the meaning and the attitudes associated with senescence in the history of Western philosophy has revealed that the stereotypes existing at the present time have been prevalent in each historical period (Svoboda, 1977).

Before leaving the area of attitudes, it should be pointed out that not all impressions of the elderly are negative; some are favorable. For example, the elderly are at times characterized as good, wise and as loving grandparents (Brubaker & Powers, 1976). Research seeking to discover the conditions leading to favorable impressions of the elderly found that a "representative" 70 year old is judged less favorably than a "representative" 25 year old; however, when personalized information is provided, the 70 year old is judged more favorably than the 25 year old (Weinberger & Millham, 1975). Puzzled by this type of outcome, investigators have asked: "How can it be that people hold negative stereotypes about the elderly and yet form more positive impressions of an older individual than of a younger one who displays the same characteristics?" (Crockett, Press & Osterkamp, 1979). The answer, suggested by the work of these investigators, is that when old people are seen to perform the same activities as younger adults they are then perceived to be exceptions to the norm. That is, they are seen as deviating from stereotyped expectations. This psychological maneuver, needless to say, while attributing positive

characteristics to a select few, acts to retain the traditional negativism found towards the majority of older people.

Consequently, the significance of these and other positive attitudes are difficult to evaluate, particularly as they seem to lend credence to the suggestion that the manifestation of certain "positive" attitudes may in fact have their origins in fundamentally negative predispositions toward the elderly (Weinberger, 1979).

Studies of intergenerational behavior have been conducted primarily within the context of familial relations (Hill, 1970; Shanas & Streib, 1965; Townsend, 1957), although some work has also been presented on age strata from a sociological perspective (Riley, Johnson & Foner, 1972).

Until recently the leading view of the American elderly was one which portrayed them as estranged and as rejected by their families (Parsons, 1959, 1964; Burgess, 1960). However, this view has been vigorously challenged as more and more research purports to show this thesis to have been nothing more than a "myth of alienation." According to the latest evidence (Shanas, Townsend, Wedderburn, Henning, Milhoj, & Stehouwer, 1968; Shanas, 1979), most old people in the United States are neither rejected by their families nor alienated from their children.

Unlike the study of intergenerational relationships within families, intergenerational contacts between strangers have received far less attention. One area of inquiry has asserted that medical students as well as doctors who are general practitioners discriminate against the elderly: they see more of, and are more interested in younger patients (Cottrel, 1974; Spence et al., 1968). Similar

charges have been drawn against psychiatrists (House & Gaitz, 1970), and clinical psychology and nursing students (Campbell, 1971; Wilensky & Barmack, 1966).

A study measuring the attitudes of social workers prior to and after field work with the aged found that while the overall incidence of negative attitudes declined as a result of contact, nearly a third of the students displayed higher stereotype scores after the training (Farrar & Bloom, 1967). Mixed results were also found in a study assessing the effects of a course in gerontology on student nurses. While exposure to the course led to more favorable impressions of the elderly, interest in geriatric nursing declined (Gunter, 1971). Another experiment monitoring the effects of interaction between young and old students within an academic setting found that college students evaluated the elderly more favorably prior to rather than following a period of shared classroom experience (Auerbach & Levenson, 1977).

The importance of the environmental context in which the contact occurs has also been pointed out: Subjects who experienced contact with the elderly in a hospital setting gave negative evaluations of the aged, whereas subjects who interacted outside of institutional settings gave favorable evaluations (Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969). A review of the effects of intergenerational contact concluded that:

> Research yields a mixed bag of results. Spontaneous contacts with old people seem to lead to positive attitudes. More formal contacts with the subject of gerontology or with sick old people through courses in gerontology or volunteer programs do not seem to improve attitudes toward the aged. Contacts with the healthy aged do seem to improve attitudes (Bennett, 1976, p.139).

Coinciding with and in part fueled by the accumulation of research

findings, a movement emerged sketching the social and economic consequences of being old. This movement gained an audience and rose to prominence during the decade of the sixties as a result of the appearance of numerous essays devoted to portraying the declining role of the aged in modern society. The elderly as suggested in these articles became targets of "social rejection," "social obsolescence," "cultural devaluation," and "institutional depersonalization"; moreover, it became accepted practice among the young to think of the aged as not "really alive" (Gruman, 1978).

As works in this vein proliferated they generated overwhelming interest and sympathy in the scientific and political communities. And before the close of the decade the term Ageism appeared. The coining of this word provided both a rallying point for these various essays and served to underscore the features they all had in common. Ageism was first defined simply as a "deep seated resentment of one age group by another" (Butler, 1969); but in a later publication it was stated that "Ageism can be seen as a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender." (Butler, 1975, p.12). Moreover,

> Ageism is manifested in a wide range of phenomena, both on individual and institutional levels--stereotypes and myths, outright disdain and dislike, or simply subtle avoidance of contact; discriminatory practices in housing, employment and services of all kinds: epithets, cartoons and jokes (Butler, 1975, p.12).

The most vocal and radical representative of this view and of the notion that aging in our society is painful, humiliating and tragic is Robert Butler, Director of the National Institute on Aging

of the National Institute of Health. In his Pulitzer Prize award winning book, Why Survive? Being Old in America, he argues that the entire social-psychological milieu of the elderly is worse than inhospitable and that Americans both as a nation and as individuals harbor and exercise widespread social rejection toward and disdain of the elderly. Other authors have expressed similar views (Lasch, 1978; Rubin, 1965). While institutional discrimination has been empirically substantiated in the areas of income and employment (Palmore & Manton, 1973; Sheppard, 1970) social discrimination, outside of institutional settings, has hardly been examined, let alone supported. In spite of the paucity of research, Butler maintains that, "At best, the living old are treated as if they are actually dead" (1975, p.xi) and in respect to them, "Neglect is the treatment of choice" (1975, p.xii). It is little wonder then that these and related views have led to the widely held, but equally unverified, belief that social and institutional practices predicated on ageism produce many, if not all, of the debilitating characteristics which have hitherto been considered intrinsic to the processes of aging.

The validity of these and related beliefs are open to debate, and most certainly to empirical documentation. Nevertheless, these indictments cannot be easily dismissed either as the United States Government has lent credence to the view that ageism is a prevalent feature of our society because of recent, and unusually swift, Congressional action on behalf of the aged: In 1974, the National Institute on Aging was created; in 1975, the Age Discrimination Act was passed; and in 1978 the mandatory retirement age was raised to 70 years (Henig, 1978).

While no consensus exists at present concerning the causes of ageism, several explanations have been proposed. The antipathy toward the aged has been attributed to: competition for employment (McTavish, 1971); the presumed problems of older people (Bennet & Eckman, 1973; Kuypers & Bengston, 1973); their inability or unwillingness to pursue the "achievement syndrome" of modern societies (Clark, 1967; Cowgill & Holmes, 1972); rolelessness (Rosow, 1973); their estrangement from younger members of society because of age stratification (Riley, Johnson, & Foner, 1972); and to the fear of disease and death, which the elderly unconsciously symbolize (Knopf, 1975).

An analysis of the material presented in this section reveals a lack of any clear formulation concerning the prevalence and likelihood of prosocial behaviors toward the elderly. What the material does provide--and only indirectly--is a set of conflicting ideas about interpersonal assistance toward the aged. To illustrate, on the one hand the existence of negative attitudes may facilitate prosocial behaviors. If the elderly are perceived to be generally tired, ill, slower and less capable than are younger adults, then they are also likely to be seen as more dependent, in which case, as we will see more concretely when we review the prosocial literature, their probability of receiving assistance is enhanced. On the other hand, the prevalence of negative attitudes toward the elderly may hinder prosocial responses towards them in the same way as pejorative attitudes toward other groups have been thought and shown to foster undesirable behaviors. To exacerbate these conflicting hypotheses even further, if the opinion that there is widespread discrimination and antipathy toward the elderly is taken seriously, then one would

indeed also expect neglect and avoidance behaviors to be manifested in the provision of interpersonal assistance. However, there is no empirical evidence to support such broad generalizations, and even less support for any inference pertaining to helping behaviors. And even if one were to accept the assumption that the elderly do not fare as well as younger adults do when seeking assistance, it still remains to be determined to what extent this is the case.

The Aged: Their views on being discriminated against and on the likelihood of receiving help from others.

The views of the aged themselves constitute another source which merits examination for possible clues to the true nature of the relationship between being old and receiving help. What is it that they themselves think and feel about the realities of old age and the way in which it might affect their chances of receiving help from strangers?

Leaving aside the large body of literary and anecdotal impressions (Sohngen, 1977; Loughman, 1977; Gaitz & Scott, 1975), in which one could find material to support almost any picture of what it is like to grow old in America, a number of studies have been conducted that are worthy of attention due to their efforts to objectify and to typify the daily concerns of the elderly. In the nationwide survey referred to earlier (National Council on Aging, 1975), it was found, for example, that nearly 70% of the respondents over 65 feel that they personally are "very bright and alert," whereas less than 30% of the public see them the same way. Another revealing finding was that only 35% of the public view persons 65 and over as "very good at getting things done,"

whereas better than 50% of the elderly thought of themselves this way. These and similar results suggest that the effeteness of the elderly has been unduly exaggerated, and this further raises the question as to whether and to what degree prosocial responses toward the elderly are differentially affected by these misperceptions. This survey also revealed that while most people, including those over 65, characterized old age as a period of life marked by excessive hardships, fully one-third of the respondents over 65 considered themselves, but not their peers, to be experiencing the "best years of their lives." Another investigation (Kahana, Liang, Felton, Fairchild, & Harel, 1977), prompted by the claim of widespread prejudice and discrimination based upon age, explored personal reports of problematic experiences of older people. Contrary to what one would expect based on the material in the previous section (i.e., Butler, 1975), the investigators reported finding relatively few instances of victimization or discrimination based upon age. They concluded that their

> ...results indicate that while ageism may be a prevalent feature of modern USA society, and while negative stereotypes of aging may be shared by old and young alike, relatively small proportions of older persons report having experienced discrimination or personal rejection. We may conclude, then,that elderly persons do not perceive ageism to be a very potent influence in their personal lives (Kahana, et al., p. 127).

As it was limited to an assessment of experiences with friends, family, agencies and neighborhoods, this study, unfortunately, did not include data on how the elderly perceive the reactions of younger, unfamiliar persons in interpersonal contacts.

A survey which was designed to tap the transportation resources of old people and their degree of satisfaction reported considerable

concern among older people about being helpless when venturing outside of their apartments (Carp, 1971). They expressed various fears: "fear of being alone and helpless in the event of attack; fear of being hit by a car, fear of being 'alone' when in a big city: They not only believed that other people would not be willing to risk 'becoming involved' if they were attacked, they even felt that no one would take the time to assist them with information should they lose their way." (Carp, 1971, p.108). Similar concerns have been reported by other investigators (Carp, 1975; Clark, 1971; Lopata, 1975).

The information presented in this section further confirms the lack of data on helping behaviors toward the elderly and also provides a supportive rationale for generating opposing hypotheses concerning the relationship between being old and receiving help. But it is also instructive because of two very essential and related points: First, it highlights the proposition that at least for some of the elderly, receiving interpersonal assistance is an important issue and directly linked to their degree of satisfaction and welfare; and second, it documents their belief that their needs for assistance would go unheeded in urban communities. Both these points underscore the urgency for research involving the elderly supplicant.

<u>The study of prosocial behavior and its implications concerning bystander assistance toward the elderly help-seeker</u>.

Research in social psychology of helping has tended to concentrate mainly upon the qualities of the helper, and upon the interactions occurring among bystanders (Latane & Darley, 1970; Gergen, 1974; Shotland & Johnson, 1978). However, to some extent,

investigators have also examined the role of the help-seeker as it pertains to prosocial processes. Some of the characteristics associated with the supplicant that have been shown to influence the rate of assistance, as independent variables, have included sex (Deaux, 1972; Latane & Dabbs, 1975), race (Franklin, 1974; Gaertner & Bickman, 1971; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Katz, Cohen, & Glass, 1975; West, Whitney, & Schedler, 1975), physical disability (Baker & Reitz, 1978; Katz, Farber, Glass, Lucido, & Emswiller, 1978), appeal style (Kriss, Indenbaum, & Tesch, 1974; Langer & Abelson, 1972), and place of residence (Milgram, 1970). Some of these features, in so far as they correlate with age, would also seem relevant to understanding the responses to the elderly help-seeker. The characteristics of the help-seeker, which warrant close examination because of their import toward the role of the elderly supplicant, are: attractiveness, dependency, and, of course, age.

Little psychological sophistication is needed to presume that help-giving will be greater and will occur more frequently toward attractive than toward unattractive persons. Nevertheless, the initial experiments probing the relationship between attraction and helping were not able to substantiate this common-sense notion (Goodstadt, 1971; see also Krebs (1970) for a review of these early studies); however, more recent and better controlled studies have tended to support it (Gross, Wallston, & Piliavin, 1975; Harrell, 1978; Harris & Baudin, 1973; Pandey & Griffit, 1974; Regan, 1971; Suedfeld, Bochner, & Wnek, 1972). Attractiveness of the help-seeker, whether it is manipulated in terms of his or her pleasantness (Gross et al., 1975), similarity to the benefactor (Emswiller, Deaux, &

Willits, 1971; Hornstein, 1976) or mere physical characteristics (Benson, Karabenick, & Lerner, 1976), has been shown to significantly influence the frequency of assistance: The more attractive confederates were helped more often in these experiments than were confederates who were judged to be less attractive or to be unattractive. The failure of earlier experiments to demonstrate a positive relationship between attraction and helping has been attributed to inadequate experimental manipulations, insufficient sample size, and inappropriate interpretations (Gross et al., 1975).

Based upon these findings, it might be hypothesized that because the elderly differ from younger adults in many physical, social and other characteristics, and because these characteristics do not conform to cultural prescriptions of attractiveness, but rather to their opposite, they would be less likely to receive aid than would younger adults. However, this may not necessarily be the case. The experiments upon which this hypothesis is founded have only demonstrated that attraction is a meaningful dimension to consider when all other dimensions are held constant. Therefore, all that could reasonably be expected is that an attractive old person would be helped more frequently than would an unattractive person of the same age. But, even this expectation may have to be qualified: It is quite possible that attraction is irrelevant to some intergenerational behaviors. The degree of attractiveness of an old person may have little or nothing to do with influencing bystander assistance. This unexplored possibility further highlights why the study of gerontological social psychology is so necessary.

The recipient characteristic which is undoubtedly related to

helping and which has received the most empirical attention has been dependency or degree of need. Dependency may be conceptualized as having an inverse relationship with alternative sources of aid. The fewer resources available to a supplicant to achieve a particular goal, the more dependent s/he will appear to be (Gruder, Romer, & Korth, 1978). Berkowitz and his colleagues were the first investigators to manipulate this variable (Berkowitz & Daniels, 1963, 1964; Goranson & Berkowitz, 1966). They found that subjects worked harder constructing paper boxes for supervisors who were highly dependent upon their rate of productivity than when they were working on behalf of supervisors who were less dependent upon their rate of output. It has since been repeatedly demonstrated, both in the laboratory as well as in the field, that helping responses can be increased through increasing the apparent dependency of the recipient (Berkowitz, 1978; Bickman & Kamzan, 1973; Gruder & Cook, 1971; Krebs, 1970; Midlarsky, 1971; Staub & Baer, 1974; Lesk & Zippel, 1975; Schopler & Bateson, 1965). However, this positive linear relationship dissipates if too much effort is required to help the person in need of assistance or if the anticipated costs of helping are perceived to be inordinately high. This negative side to the relationship between dependency and obtaining aid has been observed in emergency situations. It has been found, for example, that toppling subway "victims" who spurted blood and appeared to be in need of medical assistance (i.e., appeared very dependent) stood less of a chance of being helped than did falling confederates who appeared to be less distressed (i.e., appeared less dependent and consequently less "costly" to help) (Piliavin & Piliavin, 1972; Piliavin, Piliavin, & Rodin, 1975).

It is frequently suggested that dependency facilitates helping because it activates the "norm of giving" (Berkowitz, 1972; Goranson & Berkowitz, 1966) or some similar norm (Leeds, 1963; Staub, 1972). These norms prescribe that we should help those who are dependent on us including, and perhaps especially, the elderly (Leeds, 1963). But while reference to norms and normative explanations of helping abound in the prosocial literature (Gouldner, 1960; Schwartz, 1968, 1970, 1973), their predictive and explanatory utility have come under criticism (Darley & Latane, 1970).

The concept of dependency has also been used to help explain why women receive help more frequently than men (Clark, 1974; Latane, 1970; Morgan, 1973; Pomazal & Clore, 1973). For example, female "stranded motorists" were helped more frequently than male motorists caught in the same predicament (West, Whitney, & Schnedler, 1975). Another study reported finding the same pattern in response to confederates who "accidentally" dropped pencils or coins (Latane & Dabbs, 1975). In addition to frequently explaining this sex difference on the basis of presumed greater female dependency and/or perceived dependency is the notion that the potential cost of helping women is relatively low because they are less likely than men to threaten or actually harm the person who comes to their aid (Bar-Tal, 1976).

The same studies showing that women are more likely to <u>receive</u> help also reveal that men are more likely to <u>give</u> help (West et al., 1975; Latane & Dabbs, 1975). The contention that men are generally more helpful than women has, however, been criticized on the grounds that studies finding this pattern have generally employed helping

tasks that are "masculine." This argument has received support because situations employing "feminine" helping tasks have revealed predominantly female helpers (Deaux, 1972). Nevertheless, it has been maintained that overall women intervene less often than men because it is more costly or "risky" for them to get involved, at least in certain situations as, for example, emergencies (Bar-Tal, 1976).

In view of these results, it is reasonable to conclude that dependency, or more accurately, perceived dependency of the supplicant plays a substantial role in influencing bystander behavior. How might perceived dependency affect prosocial behaviors toward the elderly? Evidence already presented suggests that the elderly are perceived to be more dependent than are younger adults, often to an unwarranted degree. In the event that younger adults are seen as less dependent than are older adults, it follows that the older help-seeker might be more prone to receive assistance than a younger supplicant. But it is also conceivable that an old person seeking assistance would be automatically perceived as "overly" dependent, and hence come to inhibit involvement and subsequent assistance.

Most studies which have looked at the influence of age on helping have focused on the age of the benefactor. These studies, primarily concerned with children, have, with some exceptions (Dlugokinski & Firestone, 1973; Staub, 1970b), found that older children are more prosocial than are younger children, as measured by frequency and amount of donations, sharing responses and rescue behaviors (Handlon & Gross, 1959; Harris, 1971; Grusec, Kuczynski, Rushton, & Simutis, 1978; Midlarksy & Bryan, 1967; Rushton, 1976; Skarin & Moely, 1976). In these experiments--by and large

preoccupied with the effects of modelling--the recipients of assistance are generally charitable organizations, peers, and on occasion, but not too frequently, adults. Unfortunately, because independent, dependent, procedural, and subject variables differed greatly among the studies, comparisons of response rates to these various types of recipients cannot be meaningfully assessed or interpreted.

Likewise, but less often than the age of the helper, the age of the help-seeker has been shown to influence the frequency of assistance. In a study which examined the effects of perceived prior compliance and reactance on donations to charity, female dyads consisting of either children or young adults--half of whom wore costumes, while the other half were in normal attire--solicited contributions to UNICEF on Halloween night (Fraser & Fujitomi, 1972). In addition to finding a significant main effect for reactance which inhibited donations, the most relevant outcome for the present discussion was the observation that, overall, children solicitors obtained significantly higher rates of compliance than did adult solicitors. No differences were reported, however, in the amount donated. That children are more likely to receive assistance than adults has also been noted by investigators employing the "wrong number technique" (Wunderlich & Willis, 1977).

Another experiment, and one directly related to our interest, examined the influence of adult ages and obesity on receiving assistance. The helping situation involved the retrieval of groceries that were accidentally "dropped" (Tipton & Browning, 1972). The investigators reported that both variables significantly affected the rate of assistance: An "old" non-obese confederate was helped by 35%

of the passersby, whereas a young non-obese confederate was not helped by any passersby; while the "old" obese person was assisted by 71% of the subjects, only 10% of them came to the aid of the young obese person. Older persons were helped more, it was reasoned, because they appeared to be more "dependent," more in need of assistance, due to their being perceived as less agile than younger persons.

Although the study by Tipton and Browning is the most relevant work pertaining to helping behaviors toward the elderly, the limitations of their work should be pointed out in order to underscore the need for additional research in the area, and, at the same time, to begin to provide the framework for the present research investigation. In Tipton and Browning's study:

1. Only prosocial responses toward middle-aged persons were observed. The "old" non-obese confederate was 50 years of age, while the "old" obese confederate was 61 years of age: neither of these stimulus persons could or would be considered as being old in the gerontological literature.

2. Instead of using confederates of both sexes, only females were employed as assistants and as subjects. Reactions of male passersby and individuals' responses to male confederates--half of the potential subject population--remain unknown and unexplored. Because previous work has shown sex to influence the probability of giving as well as of receiving assistance (Fisher, DePaulo & Nadler, 1980; Latane & Dabbs, 1975), this omission clearly limits

the generalizability of Tipton and Browning's results.

3. Only a non-solicited, self-motivated voluntary form of assistance was studied. Within this condition, the more advanced age of the supplicant was shown to increase the rate of assistance. But would the same results obtain using a different methodology--one in which there is a direct request for aid? Would the direct appeal of an older person lead to more frequent compliance than would the same request issued by a younger adult? Under these circumstances the ambiguity concerning the need for assistance, unlike in the work of Tipton and Browning, would have been eliminated. Research suggests that such a difference in methodology may be decisive, as ambiguity concerning a person's need for assistance has been shown repeatedly to inhibit prosocial behaviors (Clark & Ward, 1972, 1974; Yakimovich & Saltz, 1971). Consequently, whether supplicant age would continue to make a significant difference when inferences about the need for help were minimized remains unexplored and unknown.

The material in the prosocial literature clearly reveals a lack of data on prosocial behaviors toward the elderly and provides additional grounds for conflicting hypotheses concerning the influence of old age on receiving assistance.

Conclusions and implications of the literature review

No matter where one looks in the literature, the same conclusions prevail: The existing data and views provide conflicting notions as to how the elderly would fare in comparison to younger adults when seeking assistance; that there are pressing and pragmatic theoretical reasons for studying helping behaviors toward old people; and that there is a conspicuous absence of data on helping behaviors toward people 65 and over.

The state of research thus dictated the necessity of examining in a very preliminary way helping behaviors toward a number of different adult age groups, and under a variety of different conditions. Consequently, three experiments were devised and conducted. Each of these experiments had a single goal: to examine the reactions of people toward elderly help-seekers as compared to younger adults. How would characteristics associated with the elderly affect people's willingness to help them? Would their characteristics inhibit, promote, or have no effect on the frequency of assistance?

Rather than investigating reactions to extreme needs or emergencies, the experiments examined the more typical forms of everyday assistance. Unlike emergencies, these situations reflect more accurately people's volition to get involved. Therefore, while the nature of the help requested varied among the experiments, each one provided an opportunity to refrain from or to involve oneself with an old person. With this in mind, the experiments embodied both male and female help-seekers, direct requests for assistance, and above all, supplicants who met the social definition of old.

In order to develop some psychological insight concerning the outcome of the experiments, a follow-up study was conducted in which the help-seekers were evaluated on a number of semantic-differential scales.

The very absence of any plausible rationale or tangible data precluded the formulation and experimental manipulation of any set of hypothetical constructs aiming to isolate the social-psychological mechanisms responsible for influencing assistance toward the aged; this type of research is possible only after exploratory work has uncovered the direction and extent of helping responses toward different age groups.

Hypotheses

Given the absence of any plausible theoretical perspective in the literature, and the total lack of data pertaining to the aged supplicant, the most appropriate source from which to derive predictions seemed to be the prosocial area because of its preoccupation with and actual empirical demonstration of some of the conditions affecting the willingness of people to help one another. Consequently, previous results and trends reported in the prosocial literature provided the foundation for the following hypotheses:

1. Based upon the work of Tipton and Browning (1972), it was predicted that the elderly will be helped more frequently than younger adults.

2. Female help-seekers will be assisted more frequently than male help-seekers. Investigators have generally reported

finding higher rates of helping toward women than toward men (Bar-Tal, 1976; Latane & Dabbs, 1975).

3. Male subjects will provide help more frequently than will female subjects, as males have been shown to provide help more frequently than females (Latane & Darley, 1970; Latane & Dabbs, 1975; Piliavin, Piliavin, & Rodin, 1975).

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Subject characteristics

Twelve-hundred passersby in New York City served as subjects. Of the total sample, 57% were male and 43% female. Seventy-five percent were judged to be white, 19% as black, and 6% were classified as "other." Thirty-two percent of the subjects were judged to be under 30 years of age; 64% between 30 and 64 years old; and 4% were thought to be 65 years old or older.

Confederate characteristics

Four young, middle-aged, and old confederates were employed to play the role of the help-seeker. The 12 confederates were recruited through a number of sources, including colleges, newspapers, senior citizen centers and organizations. Two males and two females were included in each age group in order to minimize the possibility of differences other than age influencing the results. The four young adults were all 20 years old. The two middle-aged males were both 47 whereas the middle-aged females were 42 and 46 years old. The old male adults were 71 and 84 years old; the old female confederates were likewise 71 and 84 years of age. In order to maintain some uniformity over the help-seekers' mode of apparel, since differences in clothing have repeatedly been shown to influence the willingness of passersby to offer assistance (Schiavo, Sherlock, & Wicklund,1974; Suedfeld, Bochner, & Wnek, 1972), the confederates were required to wear neat, casual clothing. They were further encouraged to wear the same outfit

during each experimental session. Female help-seekers did not wear slacks, and none of the confederates wore jeans.

Test site and procedure

The experiment was conducted in parts of the mid-Manhattan area. The test area extended from 34th Street up to 59th Street, bounded by Third Avenue and Avenue of the Americas. The initial placement of each confederate was selected randomly from all the available avenue blocks located within the test area. However, tourist sites as Rockefeller Center, Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Radio City Music Hall, and similar City attractions were not included in the sample pool of locations.

Subjects were selected randomly from among mid-Manhattan pedestrians. The method of random selection consisted of approaching the fifth passerby who walked toward the confederate from a given direction. Only individual passersby were included in the count on each trial. In order to facilitate the possibility of selecting the fifth passerby and, at the same time, to maintain some control over pedestrian density, as pedestrian density during piloting was shown to have negative effects on compliance, data were collected only on Mondays through Fridays and only between the hours of 10-12 A.M. and 2-4 P.M. The experiment and those that follow were conducted during the months of May through September of 1979. The temperature ranged between 60 to 85 degrees during days on which data were collected. No data were collected during rainy days nor on days which the probability of rain was forecast to be more than 50%.

In approaching pedestrians for assistance, confederates avoided standing near street corners or their immediate vicinities

as these locations contained far too many not readily controllable variables: Depending on the condition of the traffic light, walking speeds would accelerate, deccelerate, or come to a temporary halt. Consequently, in order to allow for more uniformity in the walking rate of subjects, confederates were always situated within the middle two-thirds of a city block.

From this location, when a randomly selected subject was within a distance of approximately 2 to 3 feet, the confederate approached him/her, visibly holding a Kodak Tele-Instamatic 608 Camera, and said: "Excuse me, would you please take a picture of me?" Following each trial, as soon as the last subject was out of sight, the confederate entered the nearest building or store entrance and recorded on prepared index cards the sex, race, and perceived age of the subject, whether or not s/he had complied, and the subject's verbal, and if relevant, non-verbal responses. After this information had been recorded, the confederate reentered the experimental area and repeated the above procedure. Each confederate approached one-hundred subjects.

The experimenter concealed himself among crowds of city sunbathers, passengers waiting for a bus, or among window-shoppers, and observed each experimental encounter in order to record any additional details about pedestrian behavior as well as to be available to the confederates should they have needed any clarification or assistance at any point in time.

Results

The dependent variable was whether or not subjects complied with the request. Preliminary analyses revealed no significant differences

in compliance rates between the same-sexed confederates within any age group.[1] Consequently, the helping rates for the two confederates in each cell were pooled. The pooled values, expressed in percentages for purposes of exposition, are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Percent Helped by Confederate Age and Sex

	Young Adults	Middle-aged Adults	Old Adults
Male	49%	72%	77%
Female	66%	75%	86%

Note: N=200 in each cell.

Inspection of this table shows that, for both sexes, compliance and age are positively related: The frequency of helping increases linearly with the age of the help-seeker.

The helping scores, presented in Table 1, were analyzed by way of a 2 (sex) x 3 (age) analysis of variance. The results revealed a significant main effect for confederate age ($F=29.95$, $df=2$ & 1194, $p < .001$), confederate sex ($F=14.31$, $df=1$ & 1194, $p < .001$), and a marginally significant interaction ($F=2.89$, $p < .06$).

Multiple comparisons, using the Scheffe's test at the .05 level of significance, supported the first hypothesis that the older help-seekers would be helped more frequently than younger supplicants: The middle-aged supplicants were helped significantly

more frequently (74%) than young adults (58%), and the old supplicants were helped significantly more frequently (82%) than middle-aged adults (74%).

The second hypothesis was also supported: Helping was significantly more frequent toward females (76%) than toward males (66%). However, differences between males and females were significant only within the young adult age group.

Additional comparisons among cells revealed that: Middle-aged (72%) and old (77%) male confederates received significantly higher rates of assistance than young male confederates (49%), whereas no significant differences were detected between the two older male groups. Old female help-seekers received significantly higher rates of assistance (86%) than young adult females (66%). But no significant differences were found between middle-aged (75%) and old (86%) females.

The third hypothesis was also borne out: Help was provided more frequently by male (77%) than by female (62%) pedestrians ($x^2=28.15$, $df=1$, $p < .001$).

The remaining subject characteristic found to influence rate of assistance was age. The older the pedestrian, the less likely s/he was to help: Subjects judged to be less than thirty years old helped significantly more frequently (79%) than subjects judged to be between 30 and 64 years of age (67%). This middle-aged group, however, helped substantially more often than the group of subjects perceived to be 65 years old or older (50%).

EXPERIMENT 2

Method

Subject characteristics

Of the 1200 subjects, 58% were male and 42% female. Seventy-four percent were judged to be white, 18% black, and 8% were classified as "other." Thirty-two percent of the subjects were judged to be under 30 years of age; 63% were thought to be between 30 and 64 years of age; and 5% were seen to be 65 years old or older.

Confederate characteristics and procedure

This experiment employed the same confederates and procedure described in the previous study. What varied was the nature of the request. In this instance the confederate approached each subject, displayed a sheet of paper containing travel directions (see Figure 1 below) and said: "Excuse me, would you please read these subway directions to me? I just had some eye drops put into my eyes and they haven't worn off yet."

The paper containing the travel directions was designed not only to convey legitimacy concerning the confederates' plight, but also to make the help needed appear to involve more than a mere moment's worth of time and effort on the part of passersby. Authenticity regarding the help-seekers' predicament was made implicit by having placed the name, address, and phone number of a fictitious doctor, located in the mid-Manhattan area, on the uppermost part of the paper containing the travel directions. Moreover, the travel directions pertained to the Albert Einstein Hospital Opthalmology Department. This destination

Figure 1. Reading Request Stimulus

A.P. IRWIN, M.D.
380 MADISON AVENUE
NEW YORK, NY 10016

212-679-5590
212-679-5591

DIRECTIONS TO ALBERT EINSTEIN HOSPITAL

1300 MORRIS PARK AVENUE, BRONX, N.Y.

(THE OPTHALMOLOGY DEPARTMENT IS LOCATED ON THE THIRD FLOOR)

BY CAR: TAKE THE EAST RIVER DRIVE NORTHBOUND TO BRUCKNER EXPRESSWAY (278 EAST), EXIT TO THE BRONX RIVER PARKWAY, NORTHBOUND. FROM THERE CONTINUE APPROXIMATELY 5 MINUTES TO PELHAM PARKWAY EXIT. FOLLOW PELHAM PARKWAY EASTBOUND TO EASTCHESTER ROAD, AND USING SERVICE ROAD MAKE A RIGHT TURN ONTO EASTCHESTER ROAD. CONTINUE PAST SECOND TRAFFIC LIGHT AND BEAR RIGHT TO HOSPITAL.

BY BUS: TAKE THE PELHAM PARKWAY EXPRESS BUS ON MADISON AVENUE NORTH TO WHITE PLAINS ROAD AND PELHAM PARKWAY SOUTH. ON THE PELHAM PARKWAY SOUTH WEST CORNER TAKE THE #12A BUS TO EASTCHESTER ROAD. WALK SOUTH ON EASTCHESTER ROAD (RIGHT) 2 BLOCKS AND BEAR RIGHT AT SECOND TRAFFIC LIGHT--WALK UP STEPS TO HOSPITAL.

BY SUBWAY: TAKE LEXINGTON AVENUE #4 (WOODLAWN) TRAIN UPTOWN TO THE BRONX, AND GET OFF AT THE FORDHAM ROAD STATION. FROM THERE TAKE THE #12A BUS EASTBOUND ON FORDHAM ROAD, APPROXIMATELY 15-20 MINUTES TO EASTCHESTER ROAD. WALK SOUTH (RIGHT) ON EASTCHESTER TWO BLOCKS AND BEAR RIGHT AT THE SECOND TRAFFIC LIGHT--WALK UP STEPS TO HOSPITAL.

was meant to allay any suspicions on the part of pedestrians and to convey credibility concerning the location and predicament of the help-seeker. The request also appeared more formidable than it actually was since, on initial impression, it appeared as if the entire page needed to be read to the supplicant; only after having stopped to comply could subjects fully realize that what was involved was the reading of a mere five lines.

Results

The dependent variable was whether or not subjects complied with the request. Preliminary analyses revealed no significant differences in compliance rates toward the same-sexed confederates within any age group. Consequently, the helping rates for the two confederates in each cell were pooled. The pooled values, expressed as percentages, are presented in Table 2 below. Inspection of this table reveals that

Table 2. Percent Helped by Confederate Age and Sex

	Young Adults	Middle-aged Adults	Old Adults
Male	58%	68%	83%
Female	61%	84%	85%

Note: N=200 in each cell.

frequency of helping is positively related to the age of the supplicant, although the helping scores for the two older female groups are virtually identical.

The helping scores, presented in Table 2, were analyzed by way of a 2 (sex) x 3 (age) analysis of variance. The results revealed a significant main effect for confederate age ($F=34.25$, $df=2$ & 1194, $p < .001$), confederate sex ($F=7.17$, $df=1$ & 1194, $p < .008$), and a significant interaction ($F=3.18$, $p < .05$).

Multiple comparisons, using the Scheffe's test at the .05 level of significance, supported the first hypothesis that older help-seekers would be helped more frequently than younger supplicants: The middle-aged supplicants were helped significantly more frequently (76%) than young adults (60%), and old supplicants were helped significantly more frequently (84%) than middle-aged adults (76%).

Comparisons between males and females supported the second hypothesis: Females were helped significantly more frequently (77%) than males (70%). However, differences between males and females were significant only within the middle-aged group.

Additional comparisons revealed that: Old male confederates were helped significantly more often (83%) than both middle-aged (68%) and young adult males (58%). However, there was no significant difference found between the two younger male confederate groups. Both middle-aged (84%) and old (85%) female supplicants were helped significantly more frequently than females in the young adult group (61%). But there was virtually no difference between compliance rates shown toward the two older female groups.

The third hypothesis was also supported: Help was provided more frequently by male (76%) than by female (69%) pedestrians ($x^2=5.68$, $df=1$, $p<.01$).

EXPERIMENT 3

Method

Overview and procedure

This experiment employed the "wrong number" telephone technique developed by Gaertner and Bickman (1971). Briefly, the technique involves calling a "wrong number" and then using a fabricated but plausible rationale to have the subject call the "intended" person or party and relay some message.

In order to reach an equal number of male and female subjects, the phone calls were conducted during weekdays between 6-9 P.M. Each confederate delivered the full script to 30 subjects, the phone numbers having been randomly selected from the Manhattan Telephone Directory. Because of answering services, unanswered telephones, busy signals, and children answering, 1228 numbers were dialed to attain the 360 subjects. When an adult answered the phone, the confederate role-played the following scenario:

Caller: Larry/Jane?

Subjects' typical response: This isn't Larry/Jane...you have the wrong number.

Caller: Oh, wait a minute! Please don't hang up! I am at a public telephone and I just used my last dime. I was calling my friend to tell him/her that I will be late in getting to the college library (Young Adult Condition), PTA meeting (Middle-Aged Adult Condition), senior citizen center (Old

> Adult Condition). I am on my way there now. Would you do me a favor? Would you please call him/her and let him/her know that I will be late in getting to the college library/PTA meeting/senior citizen center. I'll give you the number OK?

If the subject agreed to make the call, the caller provided a prearranged phone number and thanked the subject. When the subject called to deliver the message, which was typically less than a minute after the original request was made, the experimenter answered, took the message, and thanked the subject for his/her assistance. Subjects who refused to comply, but did not hang up, were relieved of any concern as the confederate added after a brief pause: "Oh, one second...I just found another dime. Everything is fine now. Sorry for troubling you."

In order to be rated as helpful, the subject had to place the call and relay the message provided by the confederate. If the subject hung up before the confederate was able to complete the script, the response was classified as a premature hang-up and was excluded from the analysis. Subjects who declined to help or who hung up after the caller finished his/her script were rated as non-helpers.

Manipulation check

In order to determine whether the age of the callers were accurately perceived, 15 male and female adults who ranged in age from 22 to 68 ($\bar{X}$=41) were asked to estimate the age of the callers based on a tape-recording of their actual readings of the experimental script. The judges estimated the average age of the young adult callers to be 24

(SD=4.09), middle-aged callers to be 44 (SD=11.53), and the old callers to be 68 (SD=11.08). Additional support for the effectiveness of the manipulation for the extreme age groups was obtained from the subjects themselves. Not infrequently, compliant subjects prefaced the relaying of the confederates' message by having said: "A young/old/man/woman just called me..." In spite of having called during the evening hours, female subjects outnumbered (61%) male subjects (39%).

Results

Preliminary analyses revealed no significant differences in compliance rates between the same-sexed confederates within any age group. Consequently the helping rates for the two confederates in each cell were pooled. The pooled values, expressed as percentages, are presented in Table 3. Inspection of this table reveals reduced differences in rates of compliance by age as compared to the previous two experiments.

Table 3. Percent Helped by Confederate Age and Sex

	Young Adults	Middle-aged Adults	Old Adults
Male	63%	65%	68%
Female	68%	63%	75%

Note: N=60 in each cell.

The helping scores, presented in Table 3 above, were analyzed by way of a 2 (sex) x 3 (age) analysis of variance. The results revealed both main effects and the interaction to be non-significant indicating that neither the sex nor the age of the caller, nor their joint effects had any influence on frequency of assistance.

Additional analyses revealed that almost as many phone calls were placed on behalf of male (66%) as female (69%) confederates. Similarly, telephone calls were made almost as frequently by female (66%) as male (69%) subjects. This experiment, thus, failed to support any of the hypotheses.

EVALUATION OF THE CONFEDERATES

Method

Overview and procedure

In order to glean some insights into why older adults were assisted more frequently than younger adults, as age may stimulate the response but does not adequately explain why it occurred, an independent group of subjects were recruited to evaluate the confederates on a series of semantic-differential scales. Thirty male and female subjects, ranging in age from 22 to 53 ($\bar{X}$=37) participated in the evaluations. Subjects were asked to rate each of the confederates on 23 7-point bipolar scales and to estimate their age (see Figure 2 below). With the exception of the Likely/Unlikely to need help item, which was specifically devised for this study, the dimensions were derived from previous research (Eisdorfer & Altrocchi, 1961; Nunnally, 1961; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). The scales were presented randomly, and half of them were keyed in the opposite direction to control for position effects. In order to disguise the purpose of the study, subjects were told that they were participating in a study dealing with impression formation.

The presentation consisted of 12 sets of standard 35mm color slides. Five different slides of each of the 12 confederates who participated in the first two experiments were contained in each set. The first slide in each set consisted of a full-length body shot of the confederate while the remaining four slides depicted him/her in various portrait shots, including a profile. All portrait

Figure 2. Scales of Semantic Differential Instrument

Unattractive	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Attractive
Sick	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Healthy
Poor	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Rich
Weak	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Strong
Delicate	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Rugged
Passive	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Active
Slow	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Fast
Unfriendly	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Friendly
Tense	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Relaxed
Unpleasant	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Pleasant
Cold	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Warm
Sad	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Happy
Insincere	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Sincere
Dangerous	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Safe
Discourteous	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Courteous
Incompetent	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Competent
Likely to need help	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Unlikely to need help
Dependent	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Independent
Unfortunate	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Fortunate
Unintelligent	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Intelligent
Unpredictable	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Predictable
Strange	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Familiar
Young	---:---:---:---:---:---:---Old

photographs were uniform in that they were non-expressive. The presentation of the confederates' photo sets were randomly determined. Each slide was projected on a standard size screen for 5 seconds, which yielded a total viewing time of 25 seconds for each confederate. Following the presentation of a set, subjects were given 90 seconds to evaluate the confederates. This sequence was repeated until all the confederates were seen and evaluated. After the ratings were completed, subjects were debriefed and participated in a question-and-answer period.

Results

The data within each age group were combined and multiple comparisons by age were conducted on each dimension. This method of analysis appeared most appropriate as well as parsimonious because in the first two experiments the analysis by confederate age revealed a significant relationship between the age of the help-seeker and frequency of helping, the two same-sexed confederates in each cell did not receive significantly different rates of assistance, and because the place of the age category for the only two reported sex differences varied between experiments. The Duncan multiple comparison procedure was used at the .05 level of significance to test whether perceptions on each dimension varied by age of the confederates. Comparisons of the three age groups on each dimension, using mean scores, are presented in Table 4 below.

Old adults, in comparison to young adults, were rated as significantly less attractive, healthy, wealthy, strong, rugged, active, and fast. However, the old, in contrast to the young adults,

Table 4. Mean Score Comparisons of Young, Middle-Aged, and Old Adults

Semantic-Differential Scales	YA	MAA	OA	Significant Comparisons
Unattractive-Attractive	5.04	4.14	3.94	a,b
Sick-Healthy	5.58	4.86	4.06	a,b,c
Poor-Rich	4.14	4.33	3.74	a,c
Weak-Strong	5.01	4.47	3.58	a,b,c
Delicate-Rugged	4.27	4.08	3.56	a,c
Passive-Active	4.97	4.21	3.87	a,b
Slow-Fast	4.89	4.13	3.49	a,b,c
Unfriendly-Friendly	4.28	4.30	4.85	a,c
Tense-Relaxed	4.12	4.01	4.88	a,c
Unpleasant-Pleasant	4.83	4.57	5.15	a,c
Cold-Warm	4.37	4.13	5.04	a,c
Sad-Happy	4.08	3.73	4.48	a,c
Insincere-Sincere	4.41	4.53	5.25	a,c
Dangerous-Safe	4.71	4.76	5.84	a,c
Discourteous-Courteous	4.62	4.93	5.42	a,b,c
Likely-Unlikely to need help	4.49	4.25	3.82	a,c
Incompetent-Competent	4.73	5.03	4.85	
Dependent-Independent	4.51	4.92	4.37	b,c
Unfortunate-Fortunate	4.44	4.44	4.13	
Unintelligent-Intelligent	4.92	4.98	4.71	
Unpredictable-Predictable	4.17	4.23	4.44	
Strange-Familiar	4.73	4.53	4.92	
Young-Old	2.18	4.73	6.37	a,b,c

Note: The higher the score the more "positive" the evaluation. YA=Young Adults; MAA=Middle-Aged Adults; OA=Old Adults. a-YA x OA, $p < .05$; b-YA x MAA $p < .05$; c-MA x OA, $p < .05$.

were perceived to be significantly more friendly, relaxed, pleasant, warm, happy, sincere, safe, and courteous. They were also seen as significantly more likely to need help.

Middle-aged adults were perceived as less attractive, healthy, strong, active, and less fast than young adults. However, middle-aged adults were seen as significantly more independent than young adults.

The elderly, in comparison to middle-aged adults, were seen as significantly less healthy, independent, wealthy, strong, rugged, and less fast. In contrast, they were seen as significantly more friendly, relaxed, pleasant, warm, happy, sincere, safe, courteous, and as more likely to need help.

Young adult confederates were judged to be on the average 21 (SD=2.98) years old. Middle-aged confederates were judged to be 47 (SD=4.96) years old. And old confederates were thought to be 70 (SD=4.00) years of age.[2]

DISCUSSION

The experiments we have just examined have been designed and carried out to probe one primary question: Are the elderly more or less likely to receive interpersonal assistance than are younger adults when making a request? The answer, based on the results, is that, at least in the situations examined, the elderly do not receive assistance any less frequently than younger adults. On the contrary, two out of the three experiments reveal that the aged receive substantially higher rates of assistance than younger adults and in the third, there was no difference in the frequency of help-giving among the age groups.

Consequently, the most important finding to surface from this work is that old help-seekers are not neglected but are favored over younger adults as indicated by frequency of assistance. But while the data supporting this conclusion are relatively straightforward, several issues have to be raised and discussed in order to obtain a richer understanding of the significance and ramifications of the results. These issues, to be discussed in turn, deal with:

1. Why the elderly received substantially higher rates of assistance than younger adults.

2. Why the help-seekers' age was significantly related to the frequency of assistance in the experiments conducted on the street, but not over the telephone.

3. Reasons why sex differences varied between Experiment 1 and Experiment 2.

4. Replicability, generalizability, and validity of the findings.

5. Serendipitous findings and "non-findings."

Why the elderly were helped more frequently than younger adults.

Perhaps the most central question which has emerged from this investigation is: Were the older adults helped more frequently than the younger ones in Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 because of prevailing negative stereotypes which emphasize their deficiencies, or because of positive qualities that the aged may project or actually possess? Part of the answer may be gleaned from the confederate evaluations. Young adults were rated higher on dimensions which would minimize assistance by passersby, whereas the aged were rated significantly higher just on those items which would facilitate assistance by passersby. That is, young adults, in comparison to old adults, were perceived to be more healthy, strong, rugged, wealthy, active, and fast. They were also seen as less likely to need help. In contrast, old people were seen to be more friendly, relaxed, pleasant, warm, happy, sincere, safe, and courteous. However, young adult confederates were thought to be more attractive--a characteristic found to foster helping responses. Differences between old and middle-aged adults on these dimensions yielded a similar pattern. The portrait suggested by these evaluations is that while the old are seen more negatively than younger adults on various physical dimensions, they are seen more positively on dimensions dealing with what might be termed personal approachability. That is, the old are perceived to be more congenial, receptive, and trustworthy than younger

adults.

While the connection between compliance rates and the direction of confederate evaluations, especially for the extreme age groups, is impressive and suggests a cause and effect relationship, a causal interpretation should not be adopted without reservation. Partly this is because we do not know how much of a perceptual difference is necessary to evoke a difference in behavior and partly because of the possibility that attributes other than those measured were responsible for the differences in compliance rates. It is possible, for example, that respect and honor, values that have been traditionally applied to the elderly, still exert some positive influence in their favor when seeking assistance. Although the relationship between the frequency of compliance and confederate evaluations does provide a great deal of face validity, a causal connection has not, by any means, been actually demonstrated. Nevertheless, until further work probing the connection between supplicant age and compliance yield other and more plausible interpretations, the suggested link between perception of the confederates and rates of assistance remains the most reasonable explanation for the observed relationship.

We can, therefore, take leave of this issue by acknowledging that both negative and positive perceptions enter into prosocial responses toward the elderly. However, the actual relative weights of each of these perceptions cannot be meaningfully assessed in the absence of direct contextual and experimental manipulation.

Variation between the experiments leading to differences in results.

Why did the experiment conducted over the telephone, unlike the first two experiments, reveal no relationship between the help-seeker's age and the frequency of receiving assistance? A likely explanation for these two different outcomes may be attributed to contextual and methodological differences. One of these differences is associated with the subject, the other with the confederate.

Turning to the factors associated with the subject, it is readily apparent that subjects in the two studies are in radically different environments when approached for assistance. In one, the subject is in the privacy of his/her home. In the other, he/she is on the streets of New York City. This difference, it is suggested, not only permits but actually predisposes potential helpers to focus on distinct aspects of the helping encounter, which in turn influences whether or not aid will be extended, and towards whom. Let us now examine how this may happen.

Unlike at home, people on the street are not only en route and probably in a hurry to get to where they are going, but are exposed to innumerable and excessive sources of stimuli. Burdened by this "stimulus overload" (Milgram, 1970) pedestrians, according to Milgram, establish perceptual and behavioral priorities forming particular "patterns of noninvolvement" with fellow pedestrians. This invisible armor is strengthened even further by the increased risk of danger present in public places, especially when approached by a stranger.

> Encounters between strangers pose special problems. Strangers have little or no information about one another except that information which can be ascertained through immediate observation... The point we wish to make is that there are always risks to

> be run in enganging a stranger in interaction. There is the possibility of generating a set of obligations that one is not prepared for or is unwilling to pay off, the possibility of damage to one's presented self-image, attacks on one's identity, boredom, loss of time, and even the chance of physical danger (Karp, Stone, & Yoels, 1976, p. 106).

It is on account of the possibility of such adverse consequences that, before anything else, passersby focus on the characteristics of the help-seeker, and only subsequently on the nature of the help being sought. As virtually nothing is known about the help-seeker, who is just another stranger, it stands to reason that judgment about whether s/he is safe or dangerous, sincere or insincere, dependent or independent is likely to take precedence. Only after these or similar decisions have been made does attention come to be riveted on the nature of the help being sought.

However, in the experiment conducted over the telephone, this attention process may be reversed: Attention comes to be riveted first on the characteristics of the help being sought and only subsequently on the characteristics of the solicitor. This shift in sequence and/or emphasis is facilitated by the absence of "stimulus overload" and the lack of threat of physical danger.

The other major difference between these two types of studies pertains to the mode and extent of the help-seeker's presence. Unlike the physical presence of the help-seeker in the first two experiments, in the telephone experiment, aside from the script, only the voice of the supplicant is available for cues concerning the characteristics of the caller. This in and of itself reduces the likelihood and viability of reaching a decision to help or not to help on the basis of help-seeker characteristics, since only a

fragment of supplicant characteristics, and perhaps not even a very important one, is available for reaching a decision. By its very nature, then, this technique constricts both the availability and significance of supplicant characteristics. This suggests that if the age of the supplicant is to influence the rate of compliance, the physical presence of the help-seeker is necessary. A fragment of the supplicant, as his/her voice, for example, may be insufficient to lead to a difference. In essence then, the circumstances surrounding the telephone experiment are substantially different from those prevailing in the other two studies. In those studies, information about the supplicant is available through a variety of perceptual modes which can serve as the basis for making prosocial choices; however the telephone experiment precludes any visual cues. The plausibility of this view is not based strictly on the absence of a relationship between age and helping but also on the additional findings that neither the sex of the confederate nor that of the subject had any effect on the frequency of assistance.

While data from other studies using the "wrong number" technique have shown compliance to be related to other supplicant characteristics such as race (Gaertner & Bickman, 1971), the effect was based on a very small proportion of the sample: "It should be stressed... that for 88% of the white subjects, the race of the victim did not seem to affect whether or not they helped " (Gaertner & Bickman, 1971, p. 221).

But even if race was shown to be more substantially and reliably related to compliance rates, it would still not follow that age should fall into a similar pattern. Just because some characteristics have

an effect does not mean that all will or should! This point of view is particularly persuasive when there are fundamental differences among supplicant characteristics. The psychological and behavioral consequences of age and race are bound to differ and it's not very difficult to project why this may be so. People do not have expectations of undergoing racial changes, but they do have expectations of aging, and of experiencing its consequences. Therefore, the analysis offered suggesting qualitative differences between studies finding and not finding a correlation between the age of the help-seeker and rate of compliance may still be a useful one for understanding the differences in results. The validity of these assumptions, of course, will ultimately have to be determined by actual research directly manipulating the relevant variables.

Before we leave this topic of discussion, it should be pointed out that the lack of a significant difference in the telephone experiment should by no means be taken as an unimportant finding or that the experiment was a failure. This is because it is important also to know, given the conflicting nature of the gerontological literature, when and under what circumstances the elderly are treated as are other adults. By failing to reveal a difference, the telephone experiment, then, provides not only an instance where the age of the supplicant does not affect rate of assistance, but also invites future research to examine more systematically the relationship between the supplicant's physical presence and the frequency of assistance.

Reasons why sex differences varied between Experiment 1 and Experiment 2.

Perhaps the most perplexing question yet to be discussed is why the age category in which sex differences were observed vary between Experiment 1 and Experiment 2. If we reexamine the findings reported in the results section and compare the data reported in Table 1 with the data in Table 2, we observe that in the first experiment the only substantial sex difference occurred within the young adult group, whereas in the second experiment the only substantial sex difference occurred within the middle-aged group. At present there is no theoretical rationale or model that could readily account for this "shift" in sex differences between experiments. However there is one leading clue: As only the type of help sought varied between the two experiments, confederates, test site, and general procedure not having been modified in any way, it can only be surmised that the differences between the nature of the requests led to the "shift" in sex differences. But why?

Before we can answer this, it is first necessary to understand why sex differences occurred in the first place. Only afterwards will it be possible to trace the reasons for the particular places in which they have actually occurred. Various writers have pointed out that aging is not identical for males and females (de Beauvoir, 1972; Shanas, 1962) and have identified a "double standard of aging" (Sontag, 1972). Furthermore, numerous studies have described the manner in which males and females are differentially evaluated (McKee & Sheriffs, 1957; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968; Urberg & Labouvie-Vief, 1976). These perceptual

differences, no doubt, are of relevance in so far as they contribute to behavioral differences associated with aging. In a very general way, then, it could be surmised why it would be unrealistic not to expect any differences between the way men and women are treated, including when seeking assistance. And it would be even more unrealistic to suppose that these differences would remain constant throughout the life-cycle. What remains to be really understood, then, is why sex differences occurred where they did.

Two points appear relevant to this analysis: First, what the commitment to help actually consists of; and second, whether the nature of the request is more appropriate for one sex than the other. Compliance in the Camera Experiment consists mainly of looking through a camera. In short, looking=helping. Combining this with the observation that the most frequently photographed and displayed persons in our culture are young and attractive females, it follows that not only are most people going to be more inclined to look at a young female than her male peer, but that they will also find the request more acceptable from her than from him.[3] Because this phenomenon pertains primarily to younger people, distinctions between older male and female help-seekers are far less obvious and, therefore, they are not subject to such discrimination. Investigators have speculated about a "normal unisex of later life," suggesting that some sex differences disappear or become attenuated in later life (Gutmann, 1975, 1977).

Another sex difference of note is that compliance rates are far greater for middle-aged females than for middle-aged males in the second study in which help was requested in reading directions to the

eye clinic. Why then, it may be asked, did helping behaviors toward females in this age category increase so that females received significantly higher rates of assistance than males? Two recent studies provide some hints. One of these studies compared perceptions toward young, middle-aged, and old male and female stimulus persons (O'Connell & Rotter, 1979). Of the three groups, sex differences on dimensions of autonomy and effectiveness were found to be greatest between middle-aged male and female stimulus persons. On both of these dimensions, males were rated significantly more positively than females. The other study, prompted by the notion that women are perceived to age more rapidly than men (Williams, 1977), investigated age categorization of male and female stimuli persons belonging to five different age groups (Kogan, 1979). The investigation, indeed, found that female stimuli persons were attributed middle-aged and elderly status at an earlier age than were male contemporaries.

The prosocial literature has amply pointed out that perceived need or dependency increases the probability of receiving help. Therefore, if middle-aged females are also perceived to belong to an older social category than males of a similar age, then it follows, given the findings in the present experiments, that they would be helped more frequently.[4]

The only problem with this interpretation is that it is equally applicable to the first experiment which failed to uncover a sex difference in this age group. Why, it may be conjectured, if this reasoning is valid, did not a difference in the middle-age category materialize in both experiments? We suspect that the reason for the lack of a similar sex difference in the first experiment may have to

do in part with factors already discussed, but more so with the relative "non-essential" quality of the request. What we mean is that in the second experiment the help-seeker was in a more dire predicament, that is, was more dependent.[5] The effect of this increased dependency, while also more congruent with the traditional female role of the "dependent-female" acts to widen even further, we suggest, the existing perceived sex differences which, for example, previous research has shown to exist in respect to effectiveness and autonomy (O'Connell & Rotter, 1979). It may also act to influence, if not the actual perceived age, then perhaps the "functional-age" of the help-seeker.[6]

Our discussion of sex differences stemming from the present work also has numerous implications for the general study of prosocial behavior:

1. Sex differences in frequency, and probably also in magnitude of assistance may or may not be consistent throughout the life-cycle of male and female help-seekers. This is very important to recognize as it may lead to a reevaluation of sex differences already reported in the literature given that almost all of these differences have been observed in respect to supplicants who were young adults.

2. Sex differences in giving as well as receiving help may exist even when the help required is "sexually neutral," as was observed in Experiment 2.

3. Sex differences in receiving assistance vary with the type of help needed.

4. The relationship between attraction and helping is much more complex than hitherto conceived and demonstrated. While the literature has demonstrated that attraction facilitates helping behaviors, in the present work the elderly were helped most frequently in spite of the fact that they were seen as least attractive.

Replicability, generalizability, and validity of the findings.

Experiments are of limited value without considering issues related to replicability, generalizability, and validity of the findings. Consequently, no research report could be complete without paying attention to these concepts, and now we will examine each of these in turn in relation to the present work.

The question of whether any set of results could be replicated is a primary one in any social-psychological investigation. Concern, though, about replicability of the present results, could be reduced somewhat if we compare the results of the first two experiments in which the help-seekers' age was related to the frequency of assistance. Young, middle-aged, and old adults were helped respectively by 58%, 74%, and 82% of pedestrians when asking to have their pictures taken, and by 60%, 76%, and 84% when requesting to have subway directions read to them. Also, as one would expect from these figures, the overall rates of assistance in these experiments were very similar: 71% of pedestrians complied with the photography request, whereas 73% assented to reading the subway directions. Because of the frequency of assistance toward each group, and because the overall rates of assistance are so remarkably alike, the results appear to be stable

enough to be duplicated using the same procedure and not only through the exact same helping requests but also perhaps through requests of a "similar" nature. This possibility leads us straight into a discussion of generalizability. However, this will be pursued, and in more detail, by pointing to some of the limitations intrinsic to the present work.

We wish to begin discussing the limitations of the present work by stressing the view that the obtained rate of compliance both overestimates and underestimates the actual compliance rate toward people seeking these and similar forms of assistance. The reason for underestimating the "true" rate of compliance is because of having applied the scientifically necessary but artifactual criterion of selecting subjects randomly. In essence, what this required is to have selected subjects irrespective of their sex, race, age, "looks," rate of walking and numerous other characteristics. However, under ordinary, nonexperimental, circumstances random selection is not likely to be applied criterion. Indeed such a form of selection would be foolish if not outright stupid on the part of people seeking assistance. "We know, for example, that when we are lost we ask only <u>certain</u> persons for directions " (Karps, Stone, & Yoels, 1977, p. 106). In other words, people genuinely seeking assistance from strangers first "size up" and thereby make a variety of evaluations and decisions as to who is likely to be a capable, safe, and willing helper. Certainly, using this more realistic approach, passersby who appear unfriendly, incapable, dangerous, or in too much of a hurry stand less of a chance in being solicited than passersby with more favorable characteristics. In short, what is being argued is that people seeking

assistance would elicit higher rates of compliance when relying on subjective cues than when relying on a method of random selection. This notion could easily be tested by having confederates select subjects on the basis of subjective impressions and on the basis of random selection.

That the observed compliance rate represents an overestimate may be attributed in part to selected confederate characteristics, and in part to other variables. All of the confederates who participated in the present work were all reasonably well-dressed, white, middle-class people. Based on the prosocial literature, help-seekers with "less favorable" characteristics would receive assistance less frequently. Variables other than those associated with the help-seeker also acted to overestimate the "average" rate of compliance. For example, data were gathered only during certain hours of the day, and only on days when the weather was comfortable and sunny, and only in a limited section of the City. Had data been collected during rush hours, during the night, or under less favorable environmental conditions, a drop in compliance would likely have been observed. While we do not also mean to imply that under these sort of circumstances the pattern of results would also have undergone modification, this possibility cannot be ruled out entirely either. From the present work, then, we have no way of knowing what compliance rates might be like toward fourteen-year olds, blacks, Hispanics, and tourists of various ages making similar requests. Consequently, caution must be exercised when generalizing the present results to other parts of the city, let alone the country, as well as to type of help-seekers and conditions other than those investigated.

The confederates were young, middle-aged, and old adults. We may nevertheless ask: Did any variable(s) other than the help-seekers' age lead to differences in results? This question can never be answered definitively. However, our confidence in assuming that variation in the age of the supplicant led to the observed variation in rates of compliance can be strengthened by noting that:

1. The two experiments conducted on the street yielded similar results. As supplicant age increased, so did the frequency of assistance. It is highly unlikely that any unselected, random, variable(s) would neatly reappear in both experiments and replicate the effect.

2. Compliance rates for the two confederates in each age and sex category were not significantly different in either of the first two experiments, and with relatively few variations between experiments, indicating further the reliability of the independent variable.

3. The applied experimental procedure appears robust enough, coupled with the size of the sample, to have guarded against the intrusion, and systematic operation, of unknown variables.

These reassurances, while insufficient to rule out the <u>possibility</u> that variables other than those manipulated produced the variation in results, certainly inveigh against such a <u>probability</u>.

In spite of our efforts to allay doubts about the soundness of the results, one gnawing and central question remains: True, the results are noteworthy and conform to the hypotheses, but do they have any

relevance to the vicissitudes of everyday life? The best answer to this is provided by Bibb Latane, one of the leading investigators in the area of prosocial behavior, and his colleague James Dabbs:

> Although picking up pennies [or reading subway directions or the taking of photographs] may not seem like...the burning social issues of our time, in an increasingly urbanized society it becomes increasingly important for people to accommodate to each other in small ways as in large. Our hunch, in fact, is that the quality of the small transactions we engage in has a disproportionate influence on the quality of our life (Latane & Dabbs, 1975, p. 192).

It should be stressed that while there is a marked difference between our work and that of Latane and Dabbs, in view of the fact that their research dealt only with a voluntary form of assistance, their comments are apropos concerning questions of relevance pertaining to the present work.

Serendipitous findings and "non-findings."

In any experiment two classes of phenomena always emerge: events related and events unrelated to the hypotheses under investigation. Typically, only the former are tabulated and described in the literature. However, on occasion, such "unrelated" events may also be of considerable value as they may extend our understanding of the variable(s) under study, and/or illuminate something independent but nevertheless valuable in its own right. We will now describe two sorts of phenomena that fall into this category: One deals with behaviors that actually emerged, while the other with behaviors that failed to emerge during the course of research.

During the several months of collecting data, the experimenter

noticed many instances of helping between strangers that seemed to occur rather routinely in the streets of New York City. Passersby were repeatedly seen giving each other directions, cigarettes, time of day, and returning dropped packages and/or articles of clothing to their rightful owners. However, one particular incidence of help-seeking and giving is worth relating in some detail because it vividly exemplifies the reality of old people asking for help.

During an experimental session, while in the midst of recording the reactions of passersby to requests for assistance, the experimenter was approached by a woman in her late sixties, perhaps older, impeccably dressed, and asked if he would hold her arm because she was feeling very weak. The experimenter replied, "Certainly." But as he reached out to hold her, the woman fainted. Grabbing her around the waist, the experimenter tried to hold her upright, but she was too heavy for him, and he gently eased her onto the sidewalk. As he bent over her, not knowing what to do next, passersby began to look and some stopped and formed a circle around them. Among the crowd were some construction workers who just a few moments ago were working at a nearby manhole. The experimenter looked up at one of them and said: "Would you call an ambulance?" At this someone else in the crowd yelled out, "No, you'd better call 911, they are faster!" The construction worker then disappeared into the corner drugstore. Meanwhile, a well-dressed man, in his early forties, leaned toward the woman lying on the pavement, who had by now regained consciousness, and began questioning her: "Do you have a heart problem?...Do you have asthma?" The woman did not reply. The experimenter and the man then told her that an ambulance was called and that it would arrive

shortly. At this, almost frightfully, she replied that she did not want an ambulance, and seemed to be very displeased, if not angry, that they dared to call one. The construction worker reappeared and the experimenter asked him whether an ambulance was called. He replied, "Yes, the store-owner called for one." Upon hearing this, she once again protested against going in an ambulance, and stated that she wanted to go to 62nd Street. Thereupon the man asked her if that is where she lives. She replied, "Yes." He next asked her if there was anyone home. Again she replied, "Yes." The man then entered the gutter and hailed a taxi. As he and the experimenter lifted her up and into the taxi, the woman thanked them profusely for their assistance. The man told the cabbie that she was not feeling very well and that she wants to go home. "She will tell you the address," he said to him. He closed the door of the taxi and in a moment the taxi was gone. The man then looked at the experimenter with what appeared to be a look of satisfaction, accompanied perhaps by a trace of a smile, and without any further exchange, the experimenter and the Good Samaritan parted company.[7]

This incident illustrates rather directly the supportiveness displayed by the public toward an old person in need of immediate attention and assistance. Furthermore, it contradicts the proposition that pedestrians surrounding a victim who is in the presence of a helpful other or model will actively refrain from offering assistance even when asked to do so (Solomon & Grota, 1976). Specifically, our experience runs counter to the view that:

> In the heart of New York City, for instance, this act of helping [by a model or helper] often causes a crowd to gather around the formerly neglected and ignored victim. However, the crowd tends to be a curious rather than a helpful one. In fact, should it be

> intimated to the bystanders that they too might have to become involved, they tend to vanish as quickly as they had gathered shortly before (Solomon & Grota, 1976, p. 34).

Another and quite serendipitous observation relates to the way in which a sizeable proportion of helpful pedestrians initially reacted when they were approached for assistance. Instead of immediately stopping to listen and to help the supplicant, 24% of helpers walked past the persons seeking assistance, without giving any indication that they would comply with the request. It was only after having walked past the supplicant that these pedestrians returned and aided the confederates. This phenomenon, which we have termed the Walk-By-Return-Response, may be described behaviorally as follows. The help-seeker approaches a pedestrian for assistance. The pedestrian does not stop to comply or give any real indication that s/he will comply, and walks past the supplicant. Generally, after a distance of a few feet, the pedestrian turns around, walks back to the help-seeker, and complies with the request. This sequence of "interaction" is illustrated in Figure 3 below. While typically pedestrians walked past the supplicant only a few feet, it was not altogether uncommon for some to walk as far as a quarter and even as much as a half a city block, before abruptly turning around and rushing back to help. The Walk-By-Return-Response occurred less frequently toward older than toward younger help-seekers, but the age of the supplicant had a non-significant effect on its appearance.

Milgram's (1970) concept of "stimulus overload" may also be used to understand the Walk-By-Return-Response. The mid-Manhattan area, as is generally well-known, teems with one form or another of legal

Figure 3. The Walk-By-Return-Response

The sequence of the Walk-By-Return-Response is illustrated in the top two rows. The bottom rows indicate the same phenomenon (though somewhat less clearly).

and illegal entreprenuerial enterprise aimed at capturing pedestrian attention and participation. It is not unusual for passersby to be handed leaflets, or to be offered merchandise by both shady and unshady dealers, be drawn into a card game and be panhandled--all within a distance of one or two city blocks. In order not to be distracted by these and other such "opportunities" pedestrians learn to develop and exercise "patterns of noninvolvement" with the vagaries of "street-life." A form which such coping mechanisms may take is to filter out, or to be less than attuned to legitimate requests made by others. Consequently, a sizeable proportion of pedestrians are not prepared to stop for a stranger, even when directly solicited for assistance. However, as soon as they realize what the request is, and judge it to be legitimate, they return, comply, and frequently apologize for having walked past the help-seeker.

But some passersby, of course, never return to help. Their response to a stranger's request is most frequently a "no response." Fully 78% of all non-helping was of this "no response" type, which consisted of walking past the supplicant as if s/he did not exist or as if a request had never been made. The other two types of non-compliance consisted of excuses pertaining to either being in a hurry (15%) or being unable to read without glasses or take good photographs (7%). The Walk-By-Return-Response is, no doubt, further enhanced by the harried walking pace of many mid-Manhattan pedestrians: It is simply more difficult to stop when walking at a rapid than a more leisurely pace.[8]

The implications of the Walk-By-Return-Response should not be limited to social psychologists interested in urban behavior, but

should also be of value to cognitive psychologists interested in studying mental processes outside the laboratory, as it exemplifies how previous expectations and/or habits influence the perception of and processing of innocuous verbal and visual input.

The other category of phenomenon which is worthy of discussion pertains to behaviors that failed to occur during the course of experimentation: namely, uncivil and criminal behaviors. This observation is of some pertinence for experiments conducted in a city such as New York which has a reputation of being a "jungle," rampant with innumerable, needless, and vicious crimes, and whose residents often live in fear of one another. The magnitude and extent of these fears could be better sensed by realizing that New Yorkers consider street-crime to be the City's number one problem (Carmody, 1974), and that they are haunted by the fear of crime even in their dreams (Milgram, in Duncan, 1977). The fears and risks that strangers arouse came also to be voiced by respondents seeking to play the role of the confederate. During the initial interview, a number of applicants when told that the experiments involve interacting with strangers in the mid-Manhattan area, praised the research, but lost much of their incoming enthusiasm and declined to participate. Even those who agreed to participate expressed concern. It is very telling that each and every one of the confederates, during rehearsal of the experimental procedure, asked: "What if someone should run off with the camera? What should I do then?"[9]

But as it turned out, not a single one of the 1200 strangers approached tried to run off with the camera. It might be argued that no one attempted to abscond with the camera because it was relatively

inexpensive. Perhaps. But this is doubtful because during piloting a middle-aged female confederate approached well over one hundred subjects brandishing an expensive-looking 35mm Minolta Camera without any mishap whatsoever.

It is further pleasing to report that no form of physical or verbal abuse was heaped upon any of the 12 help-seekers in any of the more than 2400 interactions with strangers in the mid-Manhattan area. The rudest response consisted of glares, issued most frequently by middle-aged and expensively-dressed females.

The behavior of people contacted in the telephone experiment is also comforting and worth noting. Some of the confederates, particularly the men, in making their request expected to be told to "Go to hell!" and worse. However, not in any of the 360 trials were such expletives ever voiced. Non-compliant subjects either typically hung-up or said, "I cannot do that for you," or "I am sorry, but I don't know who you are and I cannot do that for you." Moreover, the confederates as well as the experimenter were pleasantly surprised by the general good nature of New Yorkers when interrupted by a wrong number telephone call, and by their attentiveness and responsiveness to the caller's plight. Most of the confederates were so moved by the frequency and generosity of their fellow New Yorkers that they left the laboratory feeling their faith in human nature, if not restored, greatly uplifted.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Three experiments were conducted in order to examine how the elderly fare in comparison to younger adults when seeking assistance. The experiments did not uncover any evidence indicative of ageism in the prosocial realm: Pedestrians did not exhibit any reluctance to get involved with the elderly, nor any other form of "contact inhibition"; neither did they manifest a lack of interest or concern with requests made by old people seeking assistance. On the contrary, in two of the three experiments conducted, the elderly were helped more frequently than adults in any of the other age groups tested. This pattern of results was attenuated in the remaining experiment because the age and related characteristics of the help-seeker were made less salient due to environmental and methodological factors. A follow-up inquiry suggested that the higher incidence of helping toward the elderly may have been prompted by their projection of both "favorable" and "unfavorable" characteristics, such as safety, courtesy, dependency, and physical frailty.

The absence of any form of behavioral ageism toward the elderly indicates a need for reevaluating the significance of some of the research and views promulgated in the gerontological literature (i.e., Butler, 1975; McTavish, 1971), at least in so far as they relate to prosocial behaviors toward the elderly. Therefore, the present findings warrant the conclusion that it is just as inappropriate to make sweeping generalizations about the public's aversion towards and avoidance of the elderly as it is about making generalizations about old people themselves.

Having determined that the elderly are not subject to the adverse consequences of ageism when seeking assistance, and that there is a significant and reliable relationship between the age of the help-seeker and the rate of assistance, the present work contributes to both the gerontological and the prosocial literature. This investigation provides an empirical bridge between these two bodies of research. It is hoped that this bridge will serve to foster and contribute to the development of gerontological social psychology, an area long neglected within the domain of social psychology.

FOOTNOTES

1) Unless otherwise indicated, statistical significance throughout this work refers to the satisfaction of $p < .05$.

2) The fact that the old confederates were judged to be younger than they actually were and that young adults were judged to be somewhat older than their real age, is probably more a function of the phenomenon of "regression toward the mean" than an indication of the help-seekers not having looked their age.

3) This view should not be dismissed as entirely sexist: Major magazines for women contain an unusually large number of photographs of women; hardly any of men. Moreover, everyday observation shows that women "scrutinize" and "inspect" other women rather routinely. Consequently, females looking at other females is an accepted and prevalent form of behavior.

4) The validity of this argument is not to be denied on the basis that the approximate age of both middle-aged male and female confederates were accurately perceived as it is not calendar age that is of consequence but perceived "social age" and its correlates.

5) Students in a number of classes judged that a person unable to read and seeking assistance is more dependent than a person seeking to have his/her photo taken.

6) Although this analysis has provided tentative, and admittedly highly speculative, formulations concerning the appearance of sex differences and their variation between experiments, it has not offered any provisions concerning an equally important issue: Given that sex differences failed to occur in the oldest age group in any of the experiments, it is reasonable to ask what this may be attributed to and whether <u>any</u> sex differences are likely between old male and female help-seekers. Part of the answer may be extrapolated from previous research (O'Connell & Rotter, 1979). This work found old male and female stimulus persons to be perceived more alike on factors pertaining to effectiveness and autonomy than males and females in any other age category tested. This led the investigators to speculate that: "The weakening of strong sex differences here suggests that in old age the perception of sexual identity is blurred and one is seen merely as 'old'" (p. 226). But these authors are also quick to point out that: "A person is not labeled as uniformly old but is characterized as old with respect to different facets of his/her being...an individual has several ages which relate to his or her different abilities...this research seems to indicate that perception of aging varies with different indices of aging" (p. 226). This very much leaves open the possibility of discovering sex differences within this age group as well in respect to

still unexplored forms of helping requests. It further reaffirms the view, already supported by the results of the present experiments, that differences in helping associated with the age of the supplicant will vary accordingly with the form of help sought.

7) Following the incident and after having regained his composure, the experimenter realized that perhaps he should have accompanied the woman to her house, which was only a few blocks from the scene; but failing that, he should have at least questioned the Good Samaritan. Was he a doctor? Why did he decide to intervene? What did he think was wrong with the woman? Answers to these and related questions are of immense value to any inquiry probing the relationship between help-seeker characteristics and the frequency of assistance. But because the sequence of events took place so rapidly and unexpectedly, both these opportunities were lost. Failure to capitalize on these opportunities was further exacerbated by the experimenter's attempt to be simultaneously a participant as well as an impartial observer.

8) It is quite conceivable that pedestrians manifesting the Walk-By-Return-Response were walking at a faster pace than pedestrians not exhibiting this behavior. Should further studies bear this out, then the social-psychological explanations we have been pursuing will have to be reevaluated and revised. However, it should also be recognized that explanations based solely on rate of walking will be difficult to demonstrate, as probably a person's ambulatory rate is also a function of, at least to some degree, stimulus overload and related factors.

9) Confederates were told not to jeopardize their safety on account of the camera, should such an incidence arise, as the loss of the camera would simply be added on to the cost of the experiment. They were further reassured that the experimenter would be nearby during the course of each trial, and that he would come to their assistance in case of any emergency.

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