

# Helping: The Influence of Anticipated Social Sanctions and Self-Monitoring

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**ABSTRACT** A field experiment was conducted to examine the influence of social sanctions and self-monitoring on willingness to help handicapped persons. Compared to low self-monitoring individuals, those high in self-monitoring tendencies were more likely to offer help if told that significant social rewards were attached to the act of helping, but were less likely to help if led to believe that these consequences were weak. Implications for research on helping and self-monitoring are considered with particular attention being given to the relationship between social sanctions and self-monitoring.

The role of egoism and hedonism in helping has been addressed in many theoretical treatments of prosocial behavior. At issue is what motivates people to help. One approach to this problem is to consider whether the costs and rewards for helping influence decisions to help. Evidence indicates that under most conditions the consequences for helping, whether tangible or intangible, do indeed influence the likelihood that assistance will be given (Lerner & Meindl, 1981, Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981, Schwartz & Howard, 1981, 1982, Staub, 1980).

Even so, there are numerous accounts of persons helping at great cost to themselves and with little or no personal reward. These instances have prompted study of how values such as empathy, self-esteem, and respon-

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sibility influence helping (Rushton, 1980, Staub, 1980) Such values apparently minimize the influence of situation-specific consequences of helping and promote a generalized obligation to help Yet even here, there is evidence that those with "altruistic personalities" are not indifferent to the consequences associated with their behavior (Batson, Bolen, Cross, & Neuringer-Benefiel, 1984)

We wish to take a somewhat different approach to what motivates persons to help Rather than examine whether helping is categorically egoistic or whether helping is determined by altruistic personality characteristics, we wish to explore whether some persons are more responsive to the externally imposed costs and rewards associated with helping than are others If this is the case, then it follows that some of the variation in individuals' willingness to help is not necessarily due to altruistic values, but to variation in responsiveness to specifiable, external consequences for helping

The concept of self-monitoring provides a useful starting point in this analysis (Snyder, 1979, 1983) According to self-monitoring theory, behavioral decisions made in social situations are based on (a) situational and interpersonal definitions of behavioral appropriateness, and (b) the actor's awareness of his or her personal values, attitudes, and psychological state Individuals differ, however, in how they use these two types of information Because of their concern for social appropriateness, high self-monitoring individuals "shrewdly and pragmatically tailor their social behavior to fit situational and interpersonal specifications" (Snyder, 1979, p 101) Their attention to situational appropriateness is such that both the situations within which they act and the persons with whom they interact are chosen to optimize situational benefits (Snyder & Gangestad, 1982, Snyder, Gangestad, & Simpson, 1983, Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982b) Because of this, we presume that these individuals should also attend to the potential for externally conferred social approval or disapproval attached to the act of helping

Low self-monitoring individuals, in contrast, are less concerned with situational appropriateness They are inclined to rely on relevant personal values or attitudes to guide their behavior rather than on what will make them "look good" in the situation (Ajzen, Timko, & White, 1982, Gerstein, Ginter, & Graziano, 1985, Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982a, Tunnell, 1980, Zanna, Olson, & Fazio, 1980) As a consequence, these persons should be relatively indifferent or even reactive to the presence of external rewards for helping (Batson, Coke, Jasnoski, & Hanson, 1978)

There are, of course, a variety of external costs and rewards which can result from helping. However, social sanctions should be particularly salient consequences for high self-monitoring persons. In addition to whatever reinforcement value they might have, normatively based social sanctions carry information concerning what is behaviorally appropriate in a given situation. The presence of frowns, snubs and other negative sanctions serves to remind persons in social interaction that they have passed normative boundaries for acceptable behavior. Likewise, smiles, praise, and other positive sanctions are elicited by acceptable behavior (Shaffer, 1982). This is exactly the kind of information high self-monitoring persons are reported to seek (Snyder & Cantor, 1980). By tailoring their behavior to fit these sanctions, high self-monitoring persons should be able to maximize both the appropriateness of their behavior and the potential for social profit.

How low self-monitoring persons respond to clearly defined social sanctions is less clear. Sanctions congruent with their own values may serve to reinforce them and, as a result, increase the likelihood of prescribed behavior. On the other hand, sanctions which are not congruent may be ignored or may even decrease motivation to enact a particular behavior. This would be especially likely if the sanctions over-prescribed a behavior and, in so doing, minimized the low self-monitoring person's attribution of his or her behavior to personal values and volition (DeCI, 1975).

These considerations prompted the following hypotheses. In general, we expected that self-monitoring processes would moderate the motivating impact of social sanctions for helping. In particular, we hypothesized that high self-monitoring persons would be more likely to help if they were led to believe that strong social sanctions prescribed helping, but would be less likely to help when these sanctions were described as weak. We also anticipated that low self-monitoring persons either would be relatively indifferent to social sanctions or would be less likely to help when sanctions were described as strong.

## **METHOD**

### **Overview**

These hypotheses were examined in a "field" experiment. As part of a general survey, self-monitoring tendencies were first assessed. Because self-monitoring tendencies may influence the friends and groups selected by in-

dividuals (Snyder, 1983), self-monitoring and social sanctions are confounded in naturally occurring groups. This was experimentally controlled by introducing information about normatively based social sanctions for helping as part of our student participants' routine classwork (Jackson, 1975, White, 1984). Three versions of social sanctions were presented: strong, weak, and a control condition where no information was given. Sanctions deriving from social norms were presented to insure that students would perceive the sanctions as generalizable and not idiosyncratic to particular social contexts. Students were contacted a month after this and asked if they wished to help read class material to fellow students who were vision impaired. The assessment procedure, sanction lectures, and request for assistance phases of the experiment were presented to respondents as unrelated to each other and were conducted a month apart.

### Participants

One hundred and thirteen undergraduate students were contacted for the final part of the study (79 women, 34 men). Participants were class members of 9 sections of the same course in introductory psychology. Class sizes and sex composition of the classes were similar. Sizes ranged from 22 to 39 ( $M = 27$ ), approximately two times as many women as men were enrolled in each class. Three classes were randomly selected to hear the "strong social sanction" lecture (final  $n = 36$ ), three classes were similarly selected to hear the "weak social sanction" lecture (final  $n = 47$ ), and three classes heard no lecture (final  $n = 30$ ).

### Procedure

During the second and third weeks of the academic term, 185 students participated in the first part of the study by completing a general, hour-long survey; all students received course credit for completing the survey. Contained in the survey was Snyder's (1974) Self-Monitoring Scale.

Part two of the study was conducted four weeks later. Students either heard one of two lectures delivered by the first author or heard no lecture (control group). The lecturer was introduced by the class's instructor as "a faculty member who maintained an area of interest in the general topic of prosocial behavior and altruism. Because the class was studying social behavior, the instructor had asked that the lecturer speak to them." The lecture was not written, but was delivered from notes in what was hoped to be a lively, spontaneous, but consistent manner. Because information on self-monitoring tendencies had not yet been analyzed, the lecturer had no way of knowing the relative proportions of this characteristic in the audience.

Students who heard the "strong social sanction" lecturer were introduced to the topic by reviewing explanations of why bystanders failed to help Kitty Genovese, who was murdered in 1964 in New York City (Rosenthal, 1964). Situational variables were first mentioned. Then research on social modeling, race, mood states, arousal, victim culpability, clarity of the need for helping, and general models of why people help were discussed. Normative explanations were introduced by discussing Campbell's (1975) arguments concerning social morals and Gouldner's (1960) ideas on normative reciprocity.

The concept of normative evaluation was explained using Jackson's (1975) Return Potential Model which describes social approval and disapproval of normatively relevant behavior. Included in the model are measures of the strength of normative social sanctions and the degree to which the norm is consensually accepted within a population. Using several different helping situations, White (1984) has observed that there is a high degree of social consensus regarding the value of helping others. This information was emphasized in the lecture and was used to buttress the idea that those who help others can anticipate strong social rewards, while those who do not help will be disapproved.

The "weak social sanction" lecture was introduced in a similar fashion. After beginning with the Genovese murder, the lecturer once again reviewed situational research on prosocial behavior and helping. Normative explanations were again discussed using the same sources as before, but were refuted by emphasizing Darley and Batson's (1973) arguments against them, their account of the failure of normative guidelines in the "Good Samaritan" parable to influence helping in seminarians was especially emphasized. White's (1984) study was also discussed, but this time his observation that norms for helping are held with relatively low levels of evaluative intensity was emphasized. It was thus argued that even though society considers helping to be desirable, helpers should not anticipate social rewards nor should nonhelpers anticipate criticism. The reason offered for this was that norms for helping are insufficiently motivating to prompt observers to consistently apply such sanctions.

Students in both lecture groups were then asked to anonymously evaluate the lecture. Included on the evaluation form was a seven point bipolar scale concerning how powerful or weak social sanctions for helping were (1 = powerful, 7 = weak). Students ( $n = 68$ ) hearing the strong social sanction lecture reported social sanctions to be significantly more powerful ( $M = 3.66$ ) than students ( $n = 92$ ) hearing the weak social sanction lecture ( $M = 4.92$ ),  $t(158) = -5.33, p < .001$ , one-tailed).

Four weeks after the lectures were delivered the final phase of the study was completed. Students received a telephone call from an individual who identified him or herself as working with the Office of Handicapped Student

**Table 1**  
**Overall Self-Monitoring and Subscale Scores Across Treatment Groups**

	Normative sanction lecture					
	Strong		Weak		None	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-monitoring scale	11.92	4.42	12.70	3.53	12.53	3.70
Extraversion subscale	1.97	1.63	2.06	1.55	2.13	1.53
Other-directedness subscale	5.47	2.47	5.47	1.79	5.47	2.58
Acting subscale	2.78	1.61	2.96	1.64	2.90	1.24

Note. Self-monitoring subscales are from Briggs, Cheek, and Buss (1980).

Services and the Department of Counseling Psychology Callers, who were one of six graduate students blind to all experimental conditions, asked if the student would be willing to have their name placed on a list of potential readers for visually impaired students. The students were told that their help, if needed, would consist of reading class material to vision impaired students, length of time was negotiable and no special skills were needed. The purpose of the call, it was emphasized, was to insure that enough potential readers would be available to meet anticipated needs. The rate of volunteering to act as a potential reader served as the dependent variable. All students who participated in this final phase of the study were later sent a summary of the research with its method and their role in the study explained. (Volunteers whose help was needed were subsequently contacted by the university's Office of Handicapped Student Services. The number of volunteers exceeded those required and not all were given the opportunity to actually help. As a result, actual helping could not be measured.)

## RESULTS

### Classification Variables

As can be seen in Table 1, scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale are almost identical in each of the three lecture groups. The small differences which are present are not statistically significant. Students scoring 12 or less on the Self-Monitoring Scale were categorized as low self-monitoring individuals, while those scoring 13 or above were defined as high self-monitoring individuals. Scores for Briggs, Cheek, and Buss's (1980) factor-analytically defined subscales of the Self-Monitoring Scale were also calculated. These scores did not vary significantly across the

**Table 2**  
Proportions of Participants Willing to Volunteer as a Potential Helper

Self-monitoring	Normative sanction lecture			Row total
	Strong	Weak	None	
High	80/(15)	40/(25)	65/(17)	58/(57)
Low	48/(21)	68/(22)	62/(13)	59/(56)
Column total	61/(36)	53/(47)	63/(30)	58/(113)

Note Number of subjects receiving request to volunteer in the condition is presented in parentheses

three treatment groups. Each of these three subscales, which Briggs et al. have labeled Extraversion (6 items), Other-Directedness (11 items), and Acting (5 items), were included as dichotomized variables in separate analyses of the hypotheses. These calculations were made to investigate potential effects resulting from more precise conceptualizations of the self-monitoring construct. Students were categorized as low on these scales if their respective scores were equal to or less than 2, 6, and 3. In all cases, the value used for dichotomization was the median for the sample population.<sup>1</sup>

### Self-Monitoring

Recall the predictions we have made. First, high self-monitoring persons will help more if they believe there are strong social sanctions which encourage helping. They will help less if they believe these sanctions are absent. Next, low self-monitoring individuals will be either unaffected by social sanctions to help or will reduce their helping in the presence of strong social sanctions.

These hypotheses were first tested by casting the data into a complex  $2 \times 2 \times 3$  contingency table defined by Help (help-not help), Self-Monitoring (high-low), and Lecture Type (strong-weak-none). Data are shown in Table 2. They suggest a three-way interaction which subsequent chi-square analysis shows to be significant (Winer, 1962) ( $\chi^2(2, N = 113) = 7.58, p < .05$ ). Thus, levels of both Self-Monitoring and Lecture Type must be specified for helping to be successfully predicted.<sup>2</sup>

1 A contingency table comprised of Help, Gender, Self-Monitoring, and Lecture Type was constructed and analyzed. No interaction or main effect for gender was obtained.

2 Unless otherwise noted, all  $\chi^2$  probabilities are two-tailed. Significance was also

Both high and low self-monitoring persons offered to help at virtually identical rates if they were given no information about social sanctions for helping (65% and 62%, respectively). However, when presented with information about social sanctions, differences between these two groups became evident. As shown in Table 2, 80% of the high self-monitoring persons who had previously heard the strong sanction lecture offered to help, while only 48% of the low self-monitors who had previously heard the same lecture did so,  $\chi^2(1, n = 36) = 3.86, p < .05$ . In contrast, only 40% of the high self-monitoring persons who heard the weak sanction lecture offered to help compared to 68% of the low self-monitors who heard this lecture,  $\chi^2(1, n = 47) = 3.73, p < .05$ , one-tailed.

Comparisons within self-monitoring classifications also show the differential effect of social sanctions on high and low self-monitoring persons. Among the high self-monitoring persons who heard the strong sanction lecture, 80% offered to help. This figure drops to 40% if the weak sanction lecture was heard and is 65% if no lecture was presented. These differences are in the direction predicted for high self-monitoring persons and are significant across all three treatment conditions,  $\chi^2(2, N = 113) = 6.61, p < .05$ . Most of this effect is due to the 40% difference in volunteering rate between those who heard the strong sanction lecture versus those who heard the weak sanction lecture,  $\chi^2(1, n = 40) = 4.55, p < .05$ . Even though 25% fewer students volunteered to help if they heard the weak sanction lecture than if they heard no lecture at all, the difference is not significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 42) = 1.58, ns$ . The 15% difference between those who heard the strong sanction lecture and the no lecture control group is also not significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 32) = .32, ns$ .

Low self-monitoring persons appear to have been much less influenced by the lectures, even though 20% fewer of them volunteered to help when they heard the strong sanction lecture than when they heard the weak sanction lecture. Neither the overall comparison of the three treatment groups for low self-monitoring persons nor the two treatment group comparisons are significant.

### Subscales

As noted earlier, responses to the Self-Monitoring Scale were divided into the three subscales identified by Briggs et al. (1980). Separate con-

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obtained using Grizzle, Starmer, & Koch's (1969) weighted least-squares approach (GSK) to complex contingency tables.



tingency tables identical to those used with the Self-Monitoring Scale were constructed for the dichotomized product of each of these subscales. Unlike the results for the full Self-Monitoring Scale, none of these contingency tables evidenced statistically significant differences for either the main or interaction effects of the lecture conditions or subscale categorizations.<sup>3</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Do self-monitoring processes influence the likelihood of helping? Apparently they do, but only in an indirect manner. Under the conditions presented in this study, self-monitoring had no directly discernible main effect on helping. Yet when it was considered as a variable which moderated the impact of expected social sanctions, an effect was evident. Indeed, relatively clear support was obtained for the hypothesis that high self-monitoring individuals would be more likely to help when they believed there were strong social sanctions associated with helping. They were almost twice as likely to help when they had been told social sanctions were strong as when they had been told they were weak. Additionally, the effect of the social sanction lecture not only raised helping rates when sanctions were described as strong but also appeared to lower them when sanctions were described as weak. The proportion of helping among high self-monitoring persons who had been told nothing about possible social sanctions fell midway between the two lecture groups. This proportion closely matched the proportion of persons helping across all conditions in the sample.

3 In addition to Chi-Square analysis, the GSK procedure was used to examine differences attributable to subscale differences. Although no differences were obtained for Extraversion or Acting, Other-Directedness produced a significant main effect. After all other effects had been statistically controlled, the effect parameter for Other-Directedness was .409 ( $\chi^2(1, N = 113) = 4.41, p < .05$ ). Although care should be used in interpreting the significant GSK value due to relatively uneven sample sizes across conditions, the estimate suggests that as Other-Directedness changes from low to high there is an increase in the probability of help being offered. Items which comprise the Other-Directedness subscale are described as those which "emphasize pleasing others, conforming to the social situation, and masking one's true feelings" (Briggs et al., 1980, p. 681). This description, plus the lack of an interaction with Lecture Type, may indicate that high Other-Directed persons have a pre-existing belief in the appropriateness of helping—a belief which did not change based on the lecture information.

Low self-monitoring persons, on the other hand, did not vary in their willingness to help as a result of differing expectations for social rewards for helping. Their behavior was relatively consistent across the three social sanction conditions. When compared to high self-monitoring persons, however, they responded to social sanctions in different ways. Expected social rewards appeared to suppress helping among low self-monitors even though these same rewards raised helping rates among high self-monitors. The reverse was true for the expectation of weak rewards. Low self-monitoring persons helped more than their high self-monitoring counterparts.

The question of to what degree helping in this study was altruistically or egoistically motivated leads to different conclusions for high and low self-monitoring persons. For high self-monitoring individuals, external social sanctions appeared to serve as egoistic motivators to help other persons. Although it is possible that these persons may have helped because of altruistic reasons as well, at least some of their motivation was likely tied to their concern over the social rewards for helping, as well to the costs associated with not helping. Others have concluded that extrinsic rewards often serve to undermine rather than to facilitate helping (Kunda & Schwartz, 1983, Thomas, Batson, & Coke, 1981). Yet our observations indicate that high self-monitoring individuals helped more when confronted with extrinsic pressure to help, and not less. It would thus appear that egoism played a significant role in motivating high self-monitoring individuals to help. That they were influenced by egoistically relevant information presented by someone they did not know as long as a month before they were asked to help implies that this motive had considerable strength.

Low self-monitoring persons, as has been reported in numerous other studies, appeared to be less interested in the social rewards and costs attached to their behavior. It would appear that their decision to help or not to help was based on factors other than expected social sanctions. Prior research would suggest that personal values and moral obligations to help would be likely considerations in decisions made by this group's members. It is of note that strong sanctions for helping resulted in lower rates of volunteering among low self-monitors than among high self-monitoring individuals. This reduced willingness to help as the result of extrinsic rewards is very similar to that reported by Kunda and Schwartz (1983) and Thomas et al (1981). When these rewards were absent, volunteering was higher among low self-monitoring individuals than among high self-monitors.

Interpreting how and why self-monitoring processes influenced our results is somewhat difficult. Snyder (1974) originally reported the Self-Monitoring Scale to be an internally consistent measure of five interrelated personality characteristics (i.e., concern with social appropriateness, attention to social comparison information, ability to control self-presentation, use of self-presentational ability, and cross-situational consistency). However, both Briggs et al. (1980) and Gabrenya and Arkin (1980) subsequently identified a more complex psychometric structure in Snyder's scale. More recently, Lennox and Wolfe (1984) have gone so far as to propose a major revision of the scale.<sup>4</sup> We anticipated that the subscales proposed by Briggs et al. would assist us with the task of interpreting the data, but none of these subscales was associated with meaningful amounts of the variance in helping.

The present study was not designed to resolve issues concerning the psychometric structure of the Self-Monitoring Scale. However, the data closely follow the pattern predicted by Snyder in several statements regarding this scale and concept (1974, 1979, 1983). Persons scoring high on the scale appeared to be more concerned with maximizing the benefits of a particular course of action than did persons who scored low. Despite the fact that it is comprised of some clearly disparate elements, it then may be that Snyder's scale captures a molar construct which transcends its component parts. And it would certainly appear that a major part of this construct is the tendency to maximize social outcomes through attention to social information. Perhaps this is most clearly shown by the comparisons of high and low self-monitoring persons to the lectures. High self-monitoring persons were more likely to volunteer to help in the presence of information indicating that there were social rewards for doing so. In the absence of such rewards, far fewer of them offered help. Low self-monitoring persons, on the other hand, did not offer help more frequently under conditions of maximum reward. They either appeared to have been indifferent to information about social rewards or behaved contrary to this information.

Several additional issues are left unanswered by our results. First, it is unclear whether helpers attend more to costs or rewards prior to making their decision to help. Both of these elements were included in the lecture. Additional research is needed to determine whether high self-monitoring persons were attending to the costs of helping, the costs of not

4 This scale was unavailable prior to data collection.

helping, the rewards for helping, or the rewards for not helping. Next, it is not clear whether costs and rewards are more cognitively salient to high versus low self-monitoring persons or whether low self-monitoring persons simply choose to ignore these consequences. Third, rates of helping for both high and low self-monitoring persons may vary as a function of the person needing assistance. Handicapped persons, such as those portrayed in the present study, may activate atypical motivational processes resulting in alterations to the perceiver's usual cost-reward analyses (Gerstein et al., 1985). Finally, the nature of our task may have minimized the expected costs for both helping and not helping. All of the potential helpers could successfully complete the task (i.e., read to the vision impaired) and hence would not be embarrassed by failure. Nor were there other significant personal risks for helping. The costs for not helping were also minimized because helpers were to be part of a pool of volunteers. Thus, our results may be restricted to situations having these characteristics.

Kerber (1984) has raised the interesting possibility that persons who vary in their tendency to behave altruistically may also vary in their tendency to perceive rewards and costs in the same helping situation. He reports that persons who score high on measured altruism are those most likely to perceive helping as most rewarding and least costly. Kerber's data are not directly comparable to ours. However, they too show that helping is the result of an interaction between personality and situational variables. This interaction, in turn, determines the motivation to act.

Taking these issues into consideration and presuming that further research supports our observations, it would seem that under the right conditions of social pressure high self-monitoring persons may prove to be just as socially responsible as their "principled" low self-monitoring counterparts. There is an irony in this. The egoism of high self-monitoring persons—their interest in maximizing social outcomes—causes them to attend to other persons. Perhaps because of this egoistically motivated attention, they may be more likely to recognize the need others have for their help. As a result, the situationally needy may be most likely to be helped by the socially needy—if the latter think that they too will benefit.

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