

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 132 466

CG 007 981

AUTHOR Zabrack, Merle; Miller, Norman  
 TITLE Group Aggression: The Effects of Friendship Ties and Anonymity.  
 PUB DATE [71]  
 NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Aggression; Behavioral Science Research; Behavior Patterns; College Students; \*Friendship; \*Group Behavior; Group Unity; \*Hostility; \*Patterned Responses; \*Relationship; Research Projects

IDENTIFIERS \*Anonymity

ABSTRACT

The degree of acquaintance among group members (friends or strangers) and the opportunity for group members to observe each other's actions (anonymous or non-anonymous) were manipulated in a 2 x 2 factorial design, to determine the amount of aversive stimulation that would be administered to a target person. When group members could not observe each other, friends and strangers administered aversive stimulation equally often. When others' actions were observable, group members administered the aversive stimulus more often. Furthermore, groups of friends administered it more often than strangers. Differential uncertainty and/or anxiety reduction via social support can explain these results. (Author)

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GROUP AGGRESSION. THE EFFECTS OF FRIENDSHIP TIES AND ANONYMITY

Merle Zabrack and Norman Miller  
University of Southern California

In much of the research on harm-doing and counter-normative behavior, one individual aggresses against another. Focal points of this research include such topics as imitation of aggression (e.g., Bandura *et al.*, 1961), obedience (e.g., Milgram, 1964), and equity processes (e.g., Berscheid and Walster, 1967). Another important focus of considerable contemporary relevance concerns the aggression by several individuals against a victim. In spite of its prevalence, group aggression has only recently been studied experimentally.

Zimbardo (1969) manipulated the identifiability of coacting individuals who administered shock to an anonymous individual. When nonidentifiable, individuals in a group applied shock for longer durations.

Baron (1970) suggested that Zimbardo confounded identifiability with anonymity. Therefore, he manipulated subjects' distinctiveness (high or low identity cues), their anonymity from the victim, and their anonymity from the experimenter. When they believed their actions could be seen by the victim, those who were indistinct from each other aggressed with lower latencies than those who were distinct from each other. However, he also found equally high amounts of aggression for distinct subjects who believed the victim could not see them. Thus, the distinctiveness and anonymity manipulations can be viewed as parallel operations for conferring upon the aggressors anonymity from the victim.

Dion (1970) also manipulated anonymity. Non-anonymous subjects were told that their responses were being monitored individually while anonymous subjects were told that only the sum of the group's responses was recorded. In support of the idea that anonymity increases antisocial behavior, anonymity produced longer aggressive response durations.

Another important aspect of group situations is the relationship among group members. In studies on bystander intervention investigating the affective bonds among individuals, Darley and Latané (1968) found that several observers were less likely than a single observer to help someone in need. But Latané and Rodin (1969) further found that friendship ties among the observers increased their willingness to help. They explained these result by suggesting that friends would be less likely to diffuse responsibility for inaction onto each other whereas strangers would feel less hesitation about doing so.

In a study investigating the effect of group cohesiveness upon the risky-shift, Dion, Miller and Maguan (1971) found support for this interpretation. Highly cohesive groups made less risky decisions than groups that lacked cohesiveness; when group members were made attractive to one another, they were loathe to diffuse personal responsibility, or advocated

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actions onto their fellow group members. Yet, in apparent contradiction to the preceding evidence, Pepitone and Reichling (1955) found more aggression when group cohesiveness was increased.

In the experiments discussed, anonymity was manipulated in a variety of ways. However, in most cases, group members could not observe one another's behavior. The present experiment explicitly manipulated this variable. Based on the literature cited (Zimbardo, 1969; Baron, 1970; Dion, 1970), a main effect of more aggressive responding under anonymity might be expected. However, as noted, these studies did not manipulate the anonymity of group members from one another, but rather from the victim or the experimenter. For the former case, the literature on social facilitation and coaction argues instead for greater aggression under the non-anonymous condition.

The second variable manipulated was the degree of acquaintance among group members (friends or strangers). Predictions for the two types of groups whose members could see each other's actions are also complex. Most of the experiments investigating differential degrees of friendship or cohesiveness among group members indicate that groups of friends are less likely than strangers to diffuse responsibility for an action onto each other. Therefore, in this experiment, the hesitation to diffuse responsibility should lead to less responding in groups of friends than groups of strangers, if the instructions impell group members to perceive joint responsibility for harming the victim. The instructions did not attempt to strongly induce this perception. Further, social support could operate to reduce members' uncertainty about the optimal strategy of responding and/or the anxiety aroused by the thought of distressing another person. This would increase the amount of aversive stimulation administered by groups of friends compared to strangers, since friends are likely to be more accepting of each other and, thus, provide more social support. Social influence processes would indicate similar results, since friends should serve as more effective models for one another than strangers. However, social influence should be cumulative over time whereas social support would manifest itself immediately and show no predictable temporal change.

## Method

### Subjects

Ninety-six undergraduate females from the University of Southern California participated in the experiment in groups of three, with eight groups in each of the experimental conditions.

### Procedure

Subjects were recruited by phone. Only subjects who agreed to bring two female friends could participate. In the "strangers" conditions,

subjects were given a rationale for not bringing their friends and then told to come alone. This procedure guarded against differential selection as an alternative interpretation of any differences found between friends and strangers.

Subjects entered the experimental room and sat at a counter in three adjacent booths. Each contained a black box with a lever. Partitions extending from floor to ceiling prevented subjects from observing one another in the anonymous conditions. Partitions only extended from floor to waist level in the non-anonymous conditions. Subjects sat facing a one-way mirror and could see into another room that contained a table, a noise generator with wires leading back into the experimental room and the black boxes, some papers, and an ash tray with cigarette butts in it.

Subjects first filled out a short questionnaire indicating their feelings at that moment. They then received verbal instructions designed to give them the following beliefs: They were participating in a behavior modification experiment as a team of therapists. They would administer aversively loud white noise to another person. Their task was to reduce the target person's smoking by means of the administration of the white noise. The target person was unaware of the smoking-punishment contingency; instead, she believed the experiment concerned the effects of stress on test performance and thus viewed the noise as a stressful stimulus. The target person could win a sum of money based upon the number of questions she answered on the tests. Although she did not know of the subjects' intention to reduce her smoking, a battery of personality tests indicated that she smoked heavily, especially when under stress.

In addition to administering punishment, subjects were instructed to watch the target's reactions in order to answer an Empathy Inventory after the session. They were told to administer punishment at any time during the session, as long and as often as they wished, by pressing the lever on the black box. Decisions regarding punishment were to be made independently, without discussion. The levers functioned additively; simultaneous depression by subjects increased the intensity of the noise. All subjects were given a sample of the noise and the operator behind the one-way mirror was illustrated to emphasize that the victim would not see them.

Actually, levers were not connected to the noise generator but to an Esterline-Angus pen recorder located in another room. Also, the victim was an experimental confederate. Each session lasted twenty minutes during which the confederate smoked two cigarettes, puffing a fixed number of times at certain preset intervals. She wore a set of headphones hooked to the noise generator and worked at some multiple-choice tests. At the end of the session, subjects filled out Empathy Inventories and then were debriefed.

#### Results

Items designed to assess the effectiveness of the manipulations indicated that subjects in non-anonymous conditions were more aware of

what others were doing than were subjects in anonymous conditions ( $F=13.44$ ;  $df\ 1/28$ ;  $p<.01$ ) and that friends liked each other more than did strangers ( $F=93.09$ ;  $df\ 1/28$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

Frequency and duration of responding were the dependent behavioral measures and were determined from the Esterline-Angus record of each session. For each measure, a summary score was constructed for each group. Results of analysis of variance indicated no significant differences between groups of friends and strangers in the frequency of responding in the anonymous action condition. However, when actions were non-anonymous, the frequency increased for both types of groups (main effect for non-anonymous versus anonymous actions,  $F=6.85$ ;  $df\ 1/28$ ;  $p<.025$ ). Further, there was more frequent responding from groups of friends than groups of strangers (Scheffé test,  $p<.05$ ).

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 Insert Table 1 here  
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The experimental conditions produced no differences on duration of responding.

These results can be explained by the presence of social support when group members could see each other's actions. If subjects were unsure about when to administer the aversive stimulus, the observation that others were adopting substantially similar strategies might allay such self-doubts. If subjects felt any qualms about causing the target person discomfort, the fact that others seemed to be applying the aversive stimulus equally often might reduce their aggression anxiety. Also, there is some indication that friends supply more social support than strangers (Miller and Zimbardo, 1966). If so, friends might more readily administer the aversive stimulus. In support, questionnaire data designed to assess subjects' recollections of feelings while punishing the victim showed that non-anonymous subjects felt significantly better than anonymous subjects ( $F=16.71$ ;  $df\ 1/28$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

Social influence processes were assessed by analyzing the session in terms of time blocks. As mentioned before, if social influence was operating, changes in responding over time would be expected. However, there were no significant effects over time, suggesting that social influence was not important.

#### Discussion

In contrast to results of other experiments manipulating anonymity, more aggressive responding occurred when actions were non-anonymous. This points to an important difference between surveillance by coaxing others in contrast to surveillance by the victim or authority figures. In the first case, social support may be the important element producing the effect. When one feels uncertain, social support might reduce inhibition against impulsive, aggressive responding. Furthermore, any increase in social support should accentuate this effect, as when friends or similar

others rather than strangers, provide the support. The experiment by Pepitone and Reichling (1955) adds further support to this. Highly cohesive groups were more hostile than less cohesive groups. In both cases, though, group members were totally aware of each other's actions.

There are important implications here for crowd behavior. Other investigators (LeBon, 1895; Brown, 1965) suggest that the greater anonymity that a crowd provides for each individual increases their likelihood of aggressive responding. Yet these results suggest that perhaps it is the very non-anonymity of aggressive actions exhibited by cooriented peers that contributes to aggressive responding. This is not to suggest that anonymity from the surveillance of authority is an unimportant issue. Rather, it suggests that the combination of anonymity from authority, on one hand, and non-anonymity of action among crowd members, on the other hand, may be the catalyst for aggressive responding.

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TABLE 1  
MEAN FREQUENCY OF RESPONDING TOWARDS A TARGET PERSON

		Actions	
		Anonymous	Non-anonymous
<u>Groups:</u>	Friends	33	101
	Strangers	34	47