

## Helping Behavior in Urban and Rural Environments: Field Studies Based on a Taxonomic Organization of Helping Episodes

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Previous studies of urban-rural differences in helping behavior are contradictory. A number of methodological problems in previous research are noted, including the facts that previous studies selected communities on a nonrandom basis and gave little attention to the sampling of helping behaviors. The present research consisted of six studies carried out in a randomly selected sample of 55 cities and towns stratified on the basis of population size and geographical isolation. The six helping measures were systematically selected on the basis of a taxonomy of helping episodes. Results indicated that population size was negatively associated with helping with four of the measures. A planned, formal measure of helping involving nonresponse rates to the Australian census revealed a positive association between city size and helping. The sixth measure was not associated with city size. No other individual-level or community-level variables emerged as substantial or consistent predictors of helping. The pattern of results is discussed in relation to the helping taxonomy employed, and implications for a number of theoretical perspectives are briefly drawn.

Stereotypes about unhelpful, unfriendly urbanites and helpful, friendly small-town dwellers are widely held in our culture. These stereotypes have been documented by social scientists. A study by Krupat and Guild (1980) found that the "typical urbanite" was perceived by a sample of university students as being untrusting and uninvolved with others, and life in large cities was seen as being competitive, impersonal, and anonymous. In another study, Schneider and Mockus (1974) reported that in a survey of university stu-

dents, 79% believed that the likelihood of receiving help from a stranger was greater in a small town than in a large city.

The belief that people in large cities are unresponsive, aloof, and unhelpful can also be found in the work of theorists as diverse as Toennies (1961), Redfield (1947), Simmel (1950), Wirth (1938), and Milgram (1970). Milgram (1970), for example, presented an analysis of urban life based on the concept of overload, arguing that urban dwellers adopt an unresponsive orientation toward strangers and evolve norms of noninvolvement as ways of coping with excessive levels of social and environmental stimulation. Somewhat differently, Wirth (1938) argued that the lack of social integration in large cities is responsible for the alienated, predatory, and antisocial forms of behavior frequently seen there.

However, other social scientists have expressed views more favorable to the prosocial potential of the urban dweller (Fischer, 1976, 1978; Gans, 1962, 1968; Wayne, 1972; Well-

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man, 1972). Gans (1962, 1968), for example, argued that many urbanites live in urban villages that form homogeneous communities in which primary group ties are strong and in which levels of friendliness and helpfulness are high. Fischer (1976, 1978) argued that large cities are capable of supporting a large number of specialized but cohesive subcultures within which individuals are fully integrated and "protected" from the potentially disruptive forces of large-scale urban living.

The best source of data on which to base a decision between these two alternative positions consists of field studies of helping behavior conducted in both urban and small-town settings that directly compare rates of helping. Some authors believe that this evidence generally supports the notion that urbanites are less helpful than small-town residents (e.g., see Korte, 1978, 1981). However, I argue here that previous research is inconclusive for two reasons. First, although a variety of studies found urbanites to be significantly less helpful than small-town dwellers, just as many studies found either the reverse or no difference. Second, much of the research to date suffers from substantial methodological problems. Each of these two points are taken up in turn.

### Review of Previous Studies

To this author's knowledge, 18 field studies have been conducted that directly compared rates of helping in large cities and small towns. Out of these 18 studies, 9 found urbanites to be significantly less helpful than people in small towns (Amato, 1981; House & Wolf, 1978; Korte & Ayvalioglu, 1981; Korte & Kerr, 1975; Levine, Vilena, Altman, & Nadien, 1976; Merrens, 1973; Rushton, 1978; Takooshian, Haber, & Lucindo, 1977; Yinon, Sharon, Azgad, & Barshir, 1981). These nine studies were conducted in five different countries (the United States, Australia, Canada, Israel, and Turkey) and used a variety of helping measures, including helping a victim with a bandaged and bleeding leg, granting an interview, giving directions, giving change, picking up a box dropped on the sidewalk, letting a person use a home telephone, returning an overpayment in a shop, and helping a lost child. The consistency of

these findings across different countries and different helping measures suggests that there may be some truth in the stereotype of the unhelpful urbanite.

However, out of the remaining nine field studies, five found no difference between people in urban and rural settings (Kammann, Thomson, & Irwin, 1979; Korte, Ypma, & Toppen, 1975; Rotton, 1977; Schneider & Mockus, 1974; Krupat & Coury, Note 1), and four found significantly *higher* rates of helping in urban areas under certain conditions (Forbes & Gromoll, 1971; Hansson & Slade, 1977; Whitehead & Metzger, 1981; Amato, Note 2). These nine studies were conducted in four different countries (the United States, Australia, the Netherlands, and Canada) and used a variety of helping measures, including returning "lost" letters, granting an interview, doing a favor for a "wrong number" caller, picking up dropped grocery items, picking up fallen pencils, and assisting a "lost" person reading a map. Consideration of this evidence suggests that although the major trend in the literature has been for urbanites to exhibit lower levels of helping behavior, the number of contradictory findings are sufficient to preclude any generalization at this time. The apparent contradictory nature of this body of research leads to the consideration of a number of methodological problems.

### Methodological Criticisms of Previous Research

The field research on differences in rates of helping between urbanites and small-town dwellers can be criticized on a number of methodological grounds. These include: (a) the sampling of cities and towns, (b) the sampling of subjects, (c) the sampling of helping behaviors, (d) the failure to include cities of intermediate size, (e) the reliance on size as the sole index of urbanism, and (f) the failure to include measures of major population characteristics. These six criticisms are briefly expanded below.

First, previous studies have relied almost exclusively on "convenience samples" of large cities and small towns. Thus, it cannot be determined to what extent the communities studied are representative of a larger

population of communities and to what extent the results can be generalized. Furthermore, it is difficult to "add up" or compare studies because the communities sampled lie along different ranges of the urban-rural continuum. Examination of these studies reveals that the typical "small town" studied ranged in size from 200 people (Amato, Note 1) to over 20,000 people (Korte et al., 1975), and the "large city" studied ranged in size from 250,000 people (Dayton, Ohio; Rotton, 1977) to nearly 10 million people (New York City; Levine et al., 1976).

Second, the selection of subjects within each community studied has been nonrandom (see House & Wolf, 1978, for an exception). Thus, it is not clear to what extent the people sampled are representative of the community studied and to what extent their behavior can be generalized to others in the same community.

Third, no attention has been given in previous research to the sampling of behaviors. Clearly, the measures used in past research have consisted of convenience samples of helping behaviors. Thus, it is not clear to what extent the helping measures used in previous research are representative of a larger population of helping behaviors and to what extent the findings based on these measures can be generalized to other forms of helping. Comparisons between specific studies are also difficult to make because of the reliance on possibly qualitatively different forms of helping.

Fourth, the failure of most studies to include data from communities of intermediate population size means that it is impossible to determine the shape of the relation between urbanism and helping behavior. Although previous research has assumed that the underlying relation is linear, with only two data points it is impossible to determine whether an observed difference represents a linear or nonlinear relation. Although some studies included "suburbs" as an intermediate step between the big city and the small town (e.g., Rushton, 1978), it is not clear whether a suburb is the functional equivalent of an intermediate-sized city or town.

Fifth, the reliance on city size as the sole defining index of urbanism in past studies poses certain problems in that a variety of structural and population characteristics are

known to vary with city size, such as population density, technological modernization, physical congestion, the existence of varied subcultures, and cosmopolitan tastes and viewpoints (Duncan, 1957; Fischer, 1976). Although it might be expected that many of these aspects of urbanism are positively correlated, individual large cities and small towns can vary substantially in the degree to which they lie along these diverse dimensions. Therefore, finding a behavioral difference between people in areas of high and low population does not necessarily mean that size itself is the cause of the difference. Generally, there has been little attempt made in previous research of this nature to identify the relevant dimensions of urbanism that correspond to actual differences in levels of prosocial and other interpersonal behaviors (for an exception, see House & Wolf, 1978).

Sixth, the failure to include measures of other population characteristics, such as ethnicity and social class, means that possibly important sources of intercommunity variation are left unexplored. These other unmeasured sources of variance in helping rates may either obscure or exaggerate differences between communities differing in population size. This problem can be especially salient when only a small number of communities are studied.

Due to these problems, the research cited earlier should be treated with caution, and it appears that further research addressing the areas outlined above could contribute substantially to the knowledge in this area.

### Contribution of the Present Research

The research to be described here attempted to deal with most of the criticisms outlined above. This has involved (a) a random sample of a large number of urban and nonurban communities, (b) a systematic sampling of helping behaviors guided by a taxonomy of helping, (c) the inclusion of communities at a variety of points along an urban-rural continuum, (d) the consideration of two major dimensions of urbanism: population size and geographical isolation, and (e) the inclusion of data on a variety of community characteristics, including heterogeneity, social class, tourism, and commu-

nity instability. The one major methodological problem that this research was not able to address is the problem of nonrandom selection of subjects. It seems likely that a nonrandom selection of subjects is inevitable if the intention of research is to study spontaneous behavior in public places. About the best that can be hoped for, in most cases, is a systematic sampling of every  $n$ th person, a procedure adopted in the present series of studies.

The problem that this article addresses most directly is that of the sampling of helping behaviors for study. Frequently in social psychological research, differences between conditions or samples are observed for a specific measure, such as picking up fallen books or donating to a charity, and generalizations are then made about helping behavior as such. However, the actual range of helping forms to which the effect may generalize remains unspecified. This issue has been raised by Lau and Blake (1976) and Staub (1978) and has been given extensive treatment by Smithson, Amato, and Pearce (1983).

Consideration of this problem led to the decision to include for study a variety of helping measures, spanning a wide range of helping types. This required the use of a taxonomic classification of helping behaviors. For this purpose, the taxonomy of helping episodes developed by Pearce and Amato (1980) was used. This taxonomy was based on people's perceptions of the similarities and differences between a large sample of helping events. Multidimensional-scaling analyses revealed that people used three cognitive dimensions to distinguish between instances of helping: planned, formal versus spontaneous, informal; serious versus nonserious; and doing versus giving. Replication studies revealed that these dimensions were used by a variety of subject samples including first-year students at two Australian universities, Australian nurses, a community sample in Australia, and first-year students at an American university (Smithson et al., 1983).

This taxonomy was used to generate a sample of helping measures for subsequent use in field research. This strategy ensured that in selecting behaviors for study there would be minimal overlap in the characteristics of each. Also, because the major defin-

ing characteristics that differentiated the measures were known ahead of time, a useful basis existed for accounting for observed differences between helping measures.

Finally, a review of relevant theoretical perspectives was used to guide the selection of a number of community-level and individual-level variables for inclusion in the data set, thus allowing a number of theoretical hypotheses to be tested. The selection of variables is discussed below.

## Method

### *Sampling of Communities*

Consideration of the problems outlined earlier led to three decisions regarding the sampling of communities for the present research. First, a number of communities were studied that lie across as wide a range of the urban-rural continuum and that cover as great a geographical area as possible. Second, the sample of cities and towns was stratified along two major dimensions of urbanism: population size and isolation from a major urban center. Third, because of the difficulty involved in stratifying along more than two dimensions, supplementary data were collected relating to other aspects of urbanism (such as heterogeneity) for each city and town in the final sample.

A list of all the local government areas in Queensland and New South Wales was first obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These were then divided into four levels on the basis of their 1976 population sizes: 999 people or less; 1,000 to 4,999 people; 5,000 to 19,999 people; and 20,000 people or more. The fourth category was somewhat broad due to the relatively small number of cities of this size in the two states. These population ranges approximately correspond to major human settlement levels frequently used in ekistics research (Doxiadis, 1968): the village, the urban neighborhood, the smaller town, and the urban community.

However, although previous research has taken into account population size, the effects of rural isolation have not yet been considered. This last point is especially problematic, for factor-analytic studies of city characteristics have revealed that isolation from a major metropolitan center reduced the "urbanism" of a city, regardless of its actual size (Sherbenov & Flango, 1976). For this reason the local government areas were also stratified on the basis of isolation, which was conceptualized as driving distance from a state-capital city, that is, Sydney or Brisbane (whichever was the closest). On the basis of information provided by state automobile associations, the local government areas were divided into four levels: 399 kilometers or less; 400 to 799 kilometers; 800 to 1,399 kilometers; and 1,400 kilometers or more.

Stratifying the cities and towns on the basis of size and isolation resulted in a  $4 \times 4$  sampling matrix. Local government areas were then randomly selected, without replacement, until each cell in the sampling matrix con-

tained four local government areas. (Some cells finished with less than four cases because there were less than four government areas in the population having the appropriate characteristics.) In addition, Sydney (approximately 3 million people) and Brisbane (approximately 1 million people) were deliberately included to represent the upper limit of the size dimension and the lower limit of the isolation dimension.

The resulting sample contained 61 cities and towns, 34 from Queensland and 27 from New South Wales. Six of the 61 areas were later excluded from the sample during the field-work phase of the research due to a number of practical problems encountered. The 55 communities studied composed 90% of the original 61. These 55 communities covered a geographical range of approximately one third of the Australian continent (see Figure 1).

### *Selection of Helping Behaviors for Study*

The three-dimensional model of helping developed by Pearce and Amato (1980) was used to select a sample of helping measures, the intention being to choose one helping episode from the extreme end of each of the three dimensions.

For an active, doing form of helping, "picking up fallen envelopes" was chosen. For the passive, giving form of helping, "giving a donation to the Multiple Sclerosis Society" was chosen. "Writing your favorite color for a student working on a class project" was chosen from the nonserious end of the seriousness dimension. The serious situation involved "helping a person who collapses onto the sidewalk, with a bandaged and bleeding leg." "Correcting inaccurate directions which you have overheard being given to a stranger" was chosen from the spontaneous extreme of the planned-spontaneous dimension. For the measure of planned, formal helping, an already-existing data set was used: failing to respond to the 1976 Australian census. For this purpose, completing and turning in a census form was conceptualized as cooperative, helpful behavior toward the government.

Before using these last two measures, however, similarity ratings from six raters were obtained between short descriptions of these measures and a representative sample of 25 other helping forms from the original multidimensional-scaling study reported in Pearce and Amato (1980). In this way the situation would be "mapped" back into the multidimensional helping space by rerunning the MINISSA program (Roskam & Lingoes, Note 3). The situations emerged in the areas anticipated (see Figure 2), indicating that they had the perceived characteristics desired for the present research.

### *Procedure*

The present data set thus consisted of five behavioral field studies and one study based on archival data. For four of the five behavioral studies, two investigators were used, both of whom were men. Their ages were 21 and 27 years. All the investigators dressed casually but neatly during the data-collection procedures. Data were collected during the year June 1979 to June 1980 in each of the 55 communities selected. Reliability checks were carried out for all the dependent variables, and in all

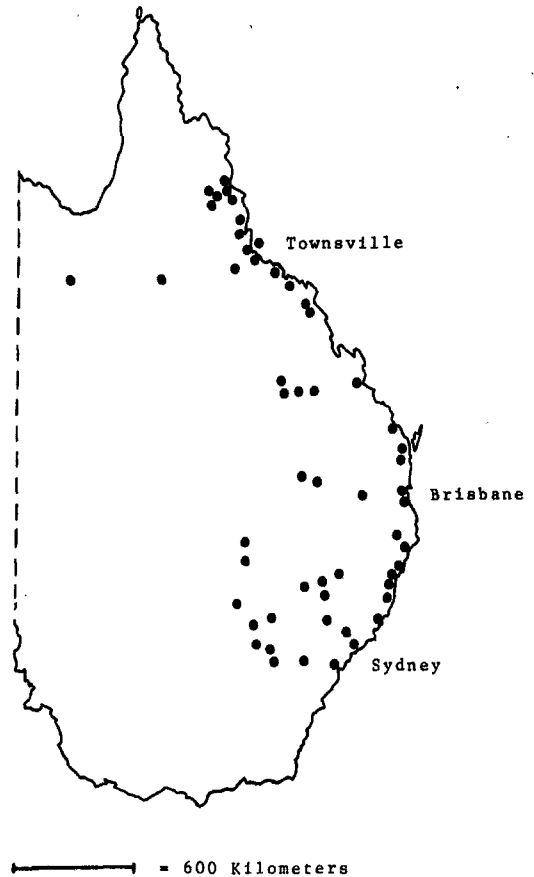


Figure 1. Distribution of the 55 communities in eastern Australia from which data were collected.

cases these revealed high levels of agreement between independent observers. The procedures used for each of the studies are described below. Because of the large number of studies, only the procedure for the first study is described in detail.<sup>1</sup>

### *Compliance With a Color Request*

The procedure for this helping episode began with the investigator standing on the sidewalk in the center of the commercial district. In the larger cities, every third suitable pedestrian passing on the same side of the street was selected to be a subject. Pedestrians were deemed suitable if they appeared to be 16 years or older, were walking alone, were not carrying large numbers of packages, and were in no way physically handicapped. When the subject was approximately 10 feet (3 m) away, the investigator approached the subject and said, "Excuse me. I'm a university student working on a class project here in this

<sup>1</sup> Full details of the procedures used are available from the author.

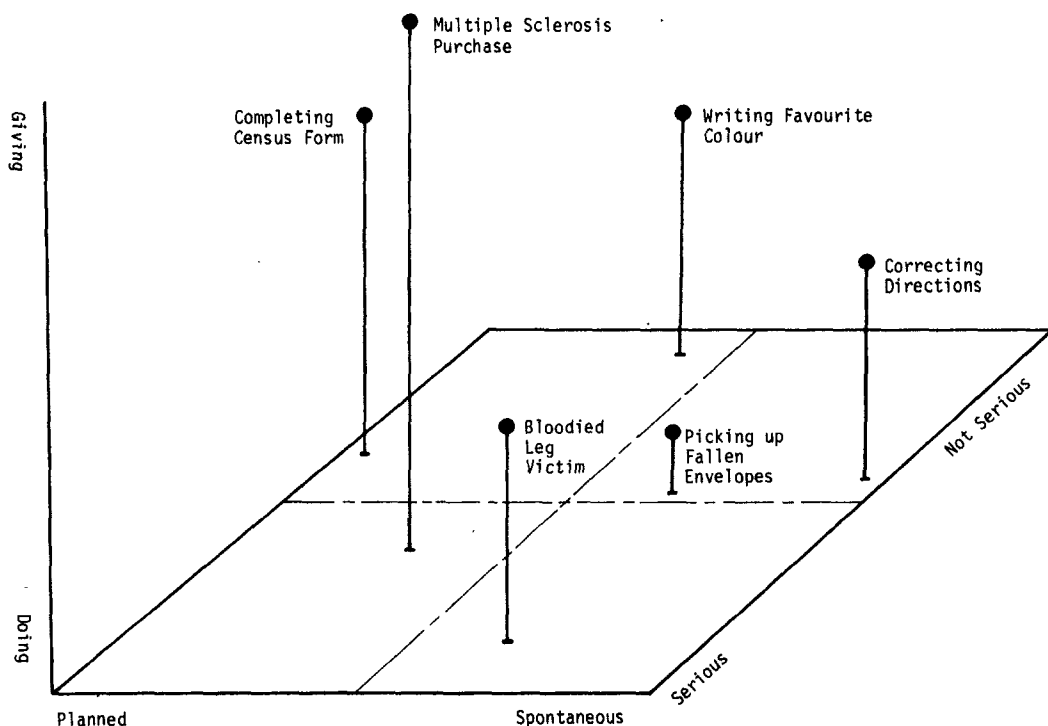


Figure 2. Location of the six helping measures in the three-dimensional taxonomic space.

area. I wonder if you could help me? I'm asking people if they will write the name of their favorite color for me. Would you like to help?" The investigator then produced a sheet of paper on a clipboard and a pen. The paper on the clipboard was numbered from 11 to 20, with the first three or four numbers being followed by color names, all written with a different style of handwriting. If the subject stated a color name, the investigator asked the subject to write it on the paper. If the subject asked what it was for, the investigator simply repeated that it was for a class project.

After the completion of the episode, the investigator recorded the details of the interaction on a coding form under the sheet of paper with the color names. The following observations were recorded: the subject's sex, his or her estimated age, and whether he or she complied with the color request.

The investigator also recorded the subject's behavior on a 6-point scale of prosocial involvement. Similar behavioral scales of helpfulness are common in the helping literature (e.g., Darley & Batson, 1973; Weiner, 1976). The six points on the scale were

with the color request. The subject may have spoken briefly or smiled at the investigator.

4. The subject complied with the color request by writing a color name. However, the subject did not speak to the investigator.
5. The subject complied with the color request and spoke up to 30 words to the investigator.
6. The subject complied with the color request, spoke more than 30 words, and smiled. This indicated a prolonged, friendly conversation with the investigator.

The walking speed of subjects was also recorded. This was accomplished by marking a 10-m zone on the sidewalk prior to the initiation of testing. As subjects entered the zone, the investigator used a hidden stopwatch to measure the number of seconds it took the subject to traverse the full 10 m. After these data were recorded, the investigator repeated the procedure by taking the third (or next) suitable pedestrian. Altogether, 291 subjects were observed.

### *Hurt-Leg Episode*

This episode began with the investigator walking along the sidewalk with a noticeable limp. A suitable pedestrian approaching from the opposite direction was selected to be the subject. When the pedestrian was approximately 10 feet (3 m) away, the investigator would suddenly drop to the sidewalk with a cry of pain. Then, while half kneel-

1. The subject did not stop walking and did not speak to the investigator.
2. The subject did not stop walking but spoke briefly to the investigator. Typical comments included "I don't have the time now."
3. The subject stopped walking and listened to the investigator. However, the subject did not comply

ing, the investigator would reveal a heavily bandaged leg, with white cotton gauze covering an area between the ankle and the midcalf. The middle portion of the bandage was generously smeared with a fresh application of theatrical blood. The investigator would continue to kneel and look at the wound until the subject either passed by or offered some form of assistance. The reaction of many passersby during the enactments suggested that the scene was perceived as being highly realistic.

The entire episode was observed by a confederate positioned at a distance of 30 to 40 feet (9.1 to 12.2 m), who recorded the subject's estimated age, sex, and walking speed; whether any form of assistance was offered; and the response of the subject on a 6-point scale of increasing prosocial responsiveness. Altogether, the episode was staged 226 times.

### *Dropped-Envelope Episode*

This episode began with the investigator walking along the sidewalk while carrying a handful of 20 envelopes. A suitable pedestrian approaching from the opposite direction was selected to be the subject. When the subject was approximately 10 feet (3 m) away, the investigator would "accidentally" spill the envelopes onto the sidewalk, bend down, and begin picking them up one at a time. After picking up the envelopes, the investigator recorded the subject's sex, estimated age, walking speed, and whether he or she stopped to pick up any envelopes. The subject's response was also rated on a 4-point scale of increasing prosocial involvement. Altogether, 271 cases were observed.

### *Donating to the Multiple Sclerosis Society*

In this episode investigators attempted to sell packets of greeting cards for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. The investigator stood on the sidewalk in the downtown area and approached suitable pedestrians by initiating eye contact, smiling, and saying, "Excuse me. I'm selling greeting cards for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Would you like to buy a packet? They only cost one dollar."

After termination of the episode, the following data were recorded: the subject's sex, estimated age, and walking speed; whether a packet of cards was purchased; and the subject's response on a 6-point scale of increasing prosocial involvement. Altogether, the procedure was carried out 303 times. During the data-collection periods, the investigators wore the usual badges used by society workers when soliciting contributions, and purchases were accompanied by official receipts. All money collected was given to the North Queensland branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

### *Correcting Inaccurate Directions*

This situation began with a confederate entering a shop in the center of the downtown commercial district. The confederate would approach the counter at which a shop assistant was waiting and would stop to look at a nearby display of goods. After approximately 1 minute had elapsed, the investigator would enter the shop, walk up to the confederate, and say in a loud voice, "Excuse

me. Can you tell me how to get to the post office?" The confederate then gave directions to the investigator that were obviously incorrect. To emphasize the inaccurate nature of the information, the confederate would point in the direction opposite to the correct one. If the shopkeeper failed to intervene at this point, the investigator thanked the confederate and slowly walked out of the shop.

After leaving the shop, the following details were recorded by the investigators: the type of shop, the sex and estimated age of the shopkeeper, whether the shopkeeper corrected the inaccurate directions, and the overall response of the shopkeeper on a 4-point scale of increasing prosocial involvement. Data were collected in a total of 288 shops.

### *Census Nonresponse Rates*

This study was different from the five behavioral field studies described above in that it used nonresponse rates to the 1976 Australian census as a data source. This particular data set was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it would have been extremely difficult to develop and employ a helping measure in a field setting that had the characteristics of being both formal and planned by the subjects. Thus, to be true to the helping taxonomy employed, it was necessary to include one measure that did not involve a "spontaneous" face-to-face encounter between strangers.

Second, the 1976 Australian census was chosen as an alternative data source because of its high quality and availability. The idea for using nonresponse rates was suggested by the study of House and Wolf (1978). In this study, refusal rates to national election surveys were used as a measure of uncooperativeness or unhelpfulness. As House and Wolf noted, surveys can generate behavioral data as well as attitudinal data, and their analysis was able to relate survey refusal rates to various city characteristics such as size, density, age, and crime rates in ways that were theoretically meaningful.

Finally, consideration of the Australian census suggests that it also might have generated useful behavioral data. A strong media campaign was staged by the Australian government in 1976 to get as many households as possible to complete the census form. Census collectors visited individual households shortly after the night of the census taking, and if they were unable to pick up the completed form at this time, they returned at a later date. For any households experiencing difficulty in filling out or returning the census form, telephone numbers were printed on the questionnaire for people to call to receive further information or make alternate arrangements. Given the number of precautions taken by the Australian government, it seems reasonable to conclude that failing to submit a properly completed questionnaire in most cases reflected a degree of uncooperativeness, unconcernedness, or unhelpfulness toward the Australian federal government. In addition, failing to submit a correctly completed census form was a violation of federal law.

Data from eight census questions were used. The number of "not stated" responses as a percentage of the total number of households in the local government area was tabulated for each of these questions. Preliminary anal-

ysis revealed that nonresponse rates for the eight questions were highly intercorrelated (mean  $r = .79$ ). A principal-components factor analysis revealed a single factor that accounted for 82.5% of the total variance in the eight nonresponse items. A factor score was then computed for each city and town in the sample based on the nonresponse rates to the eight questions. These nonresponse factor scores were used as the major dependent variable in the analysis.

### *Inclusion of Community Variables*

Theoretical considerations suggested the inclusion of a number of community-level variables in the present data set. First, the writings of Wirth (1938) strongly emphasized the importance of social heterogeneity in determining the superficial and impersonal nature of urban contacts. This view is consistent with studies revealing that perceived similarity leads to higher rates of helping (Staub, 1978, p. 315–318). Therefore, a measure of community heterogeneity was included in the present study. This measure was formed by factor analyzing 20 variables obtained from the 1976 Australian census. A Foreign Heterogeneity factor emerged that had high loadings from two variables: the proportion of foreign-born residents and the proportion of bilingual residents. Factor scores for the 55 cities and towns in the sample were computed, based mainly on the loadings of these two variables.

Gans (1968) argued that the transitory and impersonal forms of behavior sometimes observed in large cities are due to the high degree of residential instability that is often characteristic of central city areas. This suggested the inclusion of a measure of residential instability in the present research. The measure used was a factor score based primarily on three variables: the percentage of people owning their own home, the percentage of people who had lived in the area for at least 5 years, and the percentage rate of population growth in the community during the last 5 years.

A variety of perspectives suggests that the prosocial behavior of the urbanite is affected mainly by the large number of strangers encountered in everyday life (Latané & Darley, 1970; Milgram, 1970; Zimbardo, 1969). In very large cities, this is likely to be determined primarily by size and density. However, in smaller communities the amount of contact with strangers might vary considerably, depending on how geographically distant the town is from a large city, whether the town is on a major transportation route, or whether the town has an ongoing tourism industry. For this reason four variables were examined: the number of visitors in a community during the night of the census taking, the number of per capita hotel and motel rooms, the percentage of the local work force employed in the entertainment industry, and the percentage of holiday homes. These four variables loaded on a single factor that was labeled Tourism. Scores on this factor were used in subsequent analyses.

The information-overload perspective of Milgram (1970) and Cohen (1978) argues that the noninvolvement of urban dwellers is primarily due to the excessive levels of social and environmental stimulation present in urban settings. Therefore, four measures were collected at each testing site: the number of pedestrians

passing a designated spot on the sidewalk during a 10-minute period, the number of automobiles passing a designated point on the street during a 10-minute period, the mean number of stories per building, and the number of signs on the street and in shop windows on the block in which testing was carried out. These four measures intercorrelated highly (mean  $r = .61$ ), and their  $Z$  scores were summed to provide a general measure of information rate for each of the 55 cities and towns.

Finally, information on economic prosperity, or general level of social class, for each area was also obtained. These data were included for two reasons. First, social-class measures have been found to vary with the degree of urbanism of an area (Duncan, 1957). Second, a number of studies have found social-class differences in helping behavior (cf. Berkowitz, 1966; Berkowitz & Friedman, 1967; Muir & Weinstein, 1962; Ugurel-Semin, 1952). On the basis of these considerations, factor scores based on median household income, the percentage of the local work force in blue-collar occupations, and the percentage of residents with less than 10 years of education were included for each community.

## **Results**

### *Comparability of Samples*

A preliminary step in the analysis involved a check on the comparability of the urban and rural samples. Because the subject-selection procedures did not involve a random selection from the urban and rural communities, it is possible that the samples differed in certain "irrelevant" respects, such as the proportions of men and women or the proportions of people in various age categories. To check that the samples were at least minimally comparable, the distribution of men and women and the distribution of ages across the various levels of city size and isolation were compared for each of the five behavioral studies. Generally, the age and sex distributions were approximately the same. If any differences were noted between samples, a check was made to see if either sex or age was associated with helping. If either variable appeared to be related to both helping and either population size or isolation, it was used as a control in subsequent data analyses. The results of this procedure revealed no confounding effects due to the age or sex compositions of the urban and rural samples. A similar procedure was carried out for day of the week and time of day.

Finally, checks were made to see if there were differences between investigators in the rates with which they received assistance. No



instances were observed in which urban-rural contrasts were distorted by differences between investigators.

### *Analysis of Helping Rates*

The next step in the analysis involved a comparison of helping rates for each of the five behavioral studies in relation to community size. For this purpose, the 55 cities and towns in the sample were divided into five levels: 999 people or less; 1,000 to 4,999 people; 5,000 to 19,999 people; 20,000 to 300,000 people; and Brisbane and Sydney. The percentage of people helping in each of the five behavioral studies in communities at each level of population size is shown in Figure 3.

In all of the helping episodes other than the one involving dropped envelopes, there was a clear trend for helping rates to decrease as community size increased. In the color-request episode, the percentage of subjects complying by signing a color name was 82 to 85 in the small communities and dropped to 55 in the two largest cities ( $n = 291$ ; Kendall's  $\tau = -.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). With the inaccurate-directions measure, the percentage of subjects helping by correcting the directions dropped from 70 in the smallest communities to 45 in the two large cities ( $n = 288$ ; Kendall's  $\tau = -.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For the Multiple Sclerosis Society donation, the percentage of

helping ranged from 44 in the smallest communities to only 9 in the largest cities ( $n = 303$ ; Kendall's  $\tau = -.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In the hurt-leg episode, the percentage of subjects intervening in communities at Population Levels 1 and 2 were 46 and 50, respectively, with the percentage dropping to 15 in cities at Population Level 5 ( $n = 226$ ; Kendall's  $\tau = -.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In contrast, the percentage of subjects picking up the dropped envelopes showed little variation, with helping rates being generally low regardless of community size ( $n = 271$ ; Kendall's  $\tau = .03$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

Figure 4 shows the mean census nonresponse factor scores for communities at the same five levels of population size. The results of this study are quite different from the results of the five field studies. The highest mean factor score (representing a relatively high level of uncooperativeness in completing the census) was found in the smallest communities, with larger communities generally having lower nonresponse scores (indicating less uncooperative behavior). However, the data also suggested a curvilinear trend, with the lowest levels of nonresponse occurring in the communities of intermediate size. Therefore, the mean scores were subjected to a one-way analysis of variance and test of linearity. This analysis revealed a significant linear trend,  $F(1, 50) = 9.42$ ,  $p <$

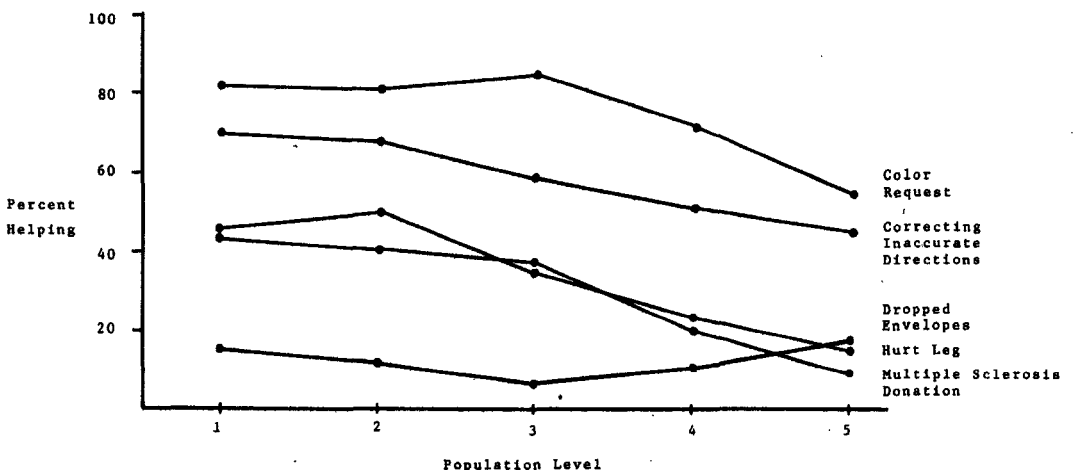


Figure 3. Percentage of subjects helping in communities at five levels of population size in relation to five measures of helping.

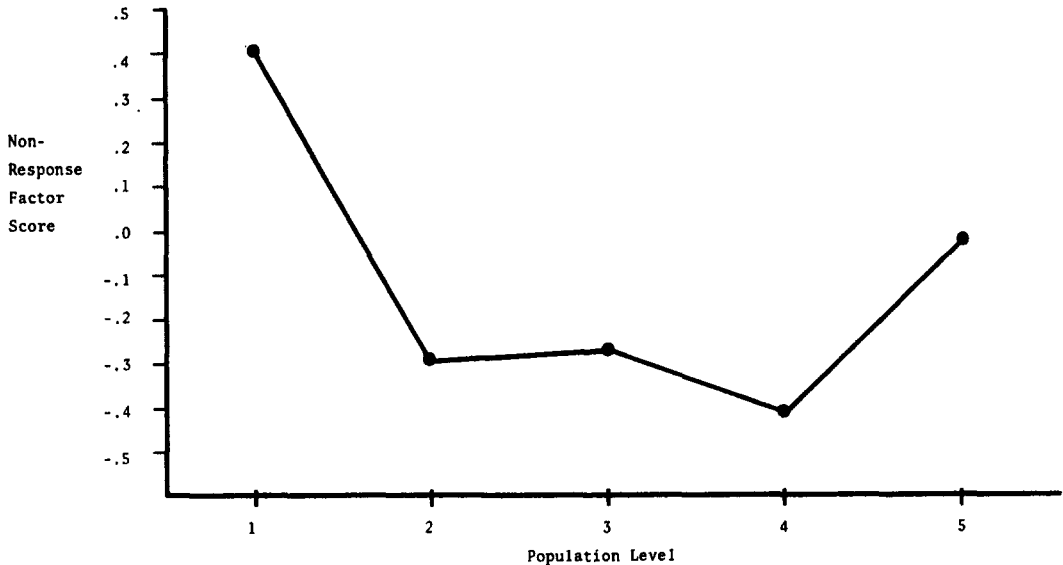


Figure 4. Mean factor nonresponse scores for communities at five levels of population size.

.005, which accounted for 14.2% of the variance in nonresponse rates ( $r = -.38$ ). However, a marginally significant deviation from linearity was also revealed,  $F(3, 50) = 2.34$ ,  $p < .09$ , which accounted for a further 10.6% of the variance.

The next step in the analysis involved an examination of the effects of a number of community-level variables on the six helping measures. Six independent variables were involved: population size, community heterogeneity, geographical isolation, tourism, residential instability, and social class. These variables were entered into six multiple regression analyses, one for each of the six dependent helping measures. For this purpose, the log of population size was used, a procedure that generally yields more interpretable correlations with other variables (Duncan, 1957). For these analyses, the scaled version of each dependent variable was used. As a check, however, the dichotomous variables (0 = did not help, 1 = did help) were also regressed on the community variables. In each case the results from both the scaled and the dichotomous dependent variables were very similar, except that the scaled versions yielded higher correlations. Only the results from the scaled dependent variables are reported.

The results of the six multiple regression analyses can be found in Table 1. For the color-request measure, population size emerged as the only significant predictor of helping. Its negative beta weight ( $-.37$ ) indicates that subjects were less helpful in the larger communities. Altogether, the six predictor variables accounted for 20% of the variance in the prosocial-involvement scale ( $R = .45$ ), with population size alone accounting for 18% of the variance. Although Foreign Heterogeneity and Tourism both had significant Pearsonian correlations with the helping measure ( $r = -.32$  and  $-.24$ , respectively,  $ps < .05$ ), neither emerged as a significant predictor in the multiple regression equation.

For the hurt-leg measure, the only predictor variable to yield a significant association was population size. Its negative beta weight ( $-.53$ ) indicates that subjects were less helpful in the larger communities. Altogether, the six predictor variables accounted for 12% of the variance in the prosocial-involvement scale ( $R = .34$ ), with population size alone accounting for 8%. Although Foreign Heterogeneity yielded a weak but significant simple correlation with the prosocial-responsiveness scale ( $r = -.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), it did not emerge as a significant predictor in the multiple regression equation.

Table 1

*Standardized Partial Regression Coefficients for Six Community Variables in Relation to Six Helping Measures*

Predictor variable	Color request	Hurt leg	Dropped envelopes	Multiple Sclerosis Society donation	Correcting inaccurate directions	Census nonresponse
Population size (log)	-.37**	-.53**	-.05	-.51**	-.15*	-.37*
Foreign Heterogeneity	-.07	.09	.07	.11	-.09	.39*
Geographical isolation	-.10	-.07	-.06	.04	-.01	.05
Tourism	.11	-.08	.15*	-.07	.04	.26*
Residential instability	.05	-.12	-.01	-.00	.08	.01
Social class	-.07	-.08	.12	.02	-.16*	.01

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

In the dropped-envelopes episode, only one predictor variable—Tourism—yielded a significant association with the scaled measure of helping ( $\beta = .15$ ). Its positive beta weight indicates that subjects in communities with high levels of tourism were slightly more likely to give assistance to the investigator. However, the amount of variance accounted for by Tourism was quite small (2.6%), with the other five predictor variables accounting for only a further 2%.

Population size was the only predictor variable to yield a significant association with helping in the Multiple Sclerosis Society donation episode. Its negative beta weight ( $-.51$ ) indicates that subjects in larger communities gave less help than subjects in smaller communities. Altogether, the six predictor variables accounted for 20% of the variance in the helping measure ( $R = .44$ ), with population size alone accounting for 18%. Foreign Heterogeneity had a significant negative Pearsonian correlation with helping ( $r = -.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but did not emerge as a significant predictor in the multiple regression analysis.

For the correcting-inaccurate-directions measure of helping, two independent variables emerged as significant predictors. Population size yielded a beta weight of  $-.15$ , indicating that subjects in larger communities were somewhat less likely to help. Social class also yielded a significant beta weight of  $-.16$ , indicating that subjects in areas of higher overall social class were somewhat more likely to be helpful. However, the amount of

variance accounted for in this analysis was quite small. Population size and social class together accounted for 6% of the variance, with the other four predictor variables accounting for a further 1%. Although the Foreign Heterogeneity measure yielded a significant simple correlation with helping ( $r = -.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ), it did not emerge as a significant predictor of helping in the regression equation.

Finally, for the census-nonresponse measure, three independent variables emerged as significant predictors of helping. The negative beta weight for population size ( $-.37$ ) indicates that residents of larger communities had a lower nonresponse rate on the 1976 census. Foreign Heterogeneity was positively associated with nonresponse rates (.39), indicating that communities with a high proportion of foreign-born and bilingual residents had higher nonresponse rates. Finally, Tourism was positively associated with nonresponse rates (.26), indicating that communities with high levels of tourism had high nonresponse rates on the 1976 census. These variables together accounted for 30% of the variance in nonresponse rates ( $R = .55$ ). Although the isolation variable was positively associated with census-nonresponse rates ( $r = .27$ ,  $p < .05$ ), it did not emerge as a significant predictor in the regression equation.

As a final step in the analysis of data, Pearsonian correlations were computed between the subject's walking speed and the scaled and dichotomous helping measures for the behavioral studies involving the color request,

hurt leg, dropped envelopes, and Multiple Sclerosis Society donation. Walking speed was not significantly associated with any of the helping measures ( $p > .10$ ).

### Discussion

I stated earlier that previous research on the topic of urban-rural differences in helping behavior suggests a lower rate of prosocial responsiveness on the part of urban dwellers. However, I argued that this generalization was problematic in light of the considerable amount of contradictory evidence and the existence of methodological and sampling problems in previous work. Nevertheless, the overall trend of the present series of studies supports the notion that people in large cities are less helpful toward strangers than are people in small towns. With respect to the five behavioral measures of helping employed, four revealed significant negative associations with community size. This was the case both when the percentage of people helping was broken down across levels of population size and when scaled versions of each helping measure were regressed on a number of community variables, including population size.

A close look at Table 1 reveals that with most measures, the rate of helping was approximately the same in communities of up to 19,999 people (Population Level 1 to Population Level 3), with the major decline in helping rates beginning in communities of more than 20,000 people (Population Level 4). Thus, it would appear that when communities reach a size of between 20,000 and 300,000 people, prosocial forms of behavior between strangers are inhibited. The median size of communities in the sample at the fourth level of population size was 28,483, indicating that even in cities of relatively small population size, a decreased tendency to engage in helping behavior was evident. It also can be observed in Table 1 that the helping rate in the dropped-envelope episode did not follow the same pattern as in the other studies, with helping rates being generally low regardless of community size. It seems likely that this particular measure was not sensitive enough to pick up differences between urban and small-town samples.

It can also be seen in Table 1 that there were consistent differences in the level of helping generated by each episode. Regardless of community size, the color request generated the highest rate of helping. This was probably partially because the assistance required was directly solicited, making the situation unambiguous for the subject. It is probably also a result of the nonserious nature of the helping episode (its major defining characteristic in the helping taxonomy), making help giving both easy to provide and perhaps even enjoyable. In this context, Staub (1978) argued that nonserious forms of helping are likely to involve less cost on the part of helpers. The inaccurate-directions episode generated the second highest level of helping, which possibly also reflects that the situation was relatively unambiguous and that helping was relatively easy to provide.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society donation and the hurt-leg episodes generated consistently lower levels of helping, regardless of the population size of the community. This is most likely because the type of help required in these two studies was somewhat more difficult to provide. The major defining characteristic of the Multiple Sclerosis Society donation was that it was high on the giving dimension of the helping taxonomy. Research by Smithson et al. (1983) indicates that people are much more reluctant to engage in forms of helping that require giving than they are to engage in forms of helping that involve doing. Generally, the norm for giving appears to be less strong than the norm for doing, at least in Australian culture. In relation to the hurt-leg episode, Staub (1978) argued that serious forms of helping are generally more costly to provide. Furthermore, it seems likely that serious situations, such as the present one, are likely to be more ambiguous and present bystanders with an unusual event requiring some sort of cognitive definition. Previous research has shown that situations of ambiguity inhibit help giving (Clark & Word, 1972). Finally, helping rates were generally very low in the dropped-envelope episode, possibly because the investigator's need for assistance was seen as being fairly low and no help was directly requested.

The census-nonresponse measure yielded

results that were quite different from those of the five behavioral field studies. With this measure, the highest nonresponse rates (and therefore the highest level of uncooperativeness) occurred in the smallest communities. This contradictory result may be due to a number of reasons. First, it is apparent that this measure was different from the other five measures in that it involved the use of archival rather than observational data and was based on an aggregate rather than an individual level of analysis. Thus, the differences in the nature of the data may be responsible for the somewhat "deviant" nature of the results.

A more interesting explanation involves the position of this helping measure in the multidimensional helping taxonomy used as a sampling guide. Correctly and completely answering the questions on the census questionnaire was a form of helping high on the formal, planned dimension of the taxonomy. It is possible, then, that people in small towns are indeed more helpful across a range of helping situations that require informal, casual, spontaneous behavior. However, a form of helping such as filling out a census form, which is highly formalized, planned, and even bureaucratic, might be an alien form of helping with which people in small towns of less than 1,000 people are not familiar. Thus, the formality and unfamiliarity of the task may have decreased the level of assistance provided by small-town dwellers.

This tendency may have been reinforced because the assistance was being provided to the federal government. In-group/out-group considerations may be relevant in this context. It is likely that people from very small communities have fewer dealings with governmental bureaucracy and may resent it more when it intrudes into their everyday lives. As opposed to a person encountered on the local sidewalk (even if the person is a stranger), the federal government may represent a distant and faceless group of people to whom the small-town dweller feels little responsibility or obligation. This being the case, small-town residents may have been doubtful or even suspicious about the purposes for which the census questions are being used.

Thus, although a general trend was observed for small-town people to be more helpful than their urban counterparts, this did not hold for a form of helping that was highly formal and planned. This is consistent with the commonsense image of the small-town resident as being helpful in a casual and spontaneous way.

Later development of the helping taxonomy by Smithson and Amato (1982) and Smithson et al. (1983) resulted in the discovery of a fourth cognitive dimension. The best interpretation of this dimension appeared to be personal, intimate versus impersonal, anonymous helping. Because this dimension was not included in the present research, all the forms of helping used in this series of studies actually fell into the anonymous region of the helping space. However, a number of studies have investigated personal forms of behavior between friends and relatives in urban and rural areas. The general finding from this line of research appears to be that people in large cities have just as many friends, see them as often, and are as intimate with them as are people in small towns (Franck, 1980; Glenn & Hill, 1977; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Key, 1968; Reiss, 1959; Sutcliffe & Crabbe, 1963). This suggests that rates of personal helping, the kind of help one is most likely to give a friend, may be the same in large cities and small towns. If this is true, it means that the unhelpfulness of urbanites is also limited to those forms of helping in the anonymous and impersonal region of the taxonomy. This conclusion is consistent with a recent analysis provided by Korte (1980) of urban-rural social relationships.

### *Theoretical Considerations*

The results of this research have implications for a number of theoretical perspectives. First, the data are broadly consistent with the information-overload perspective formulated by Simmel (1950), Milgram (1970), and Cohen (1978) in that helping rates were generally lower in the larger and more overloaded urban settings. The measure of environmental load collected at each testing site had a correlation of .90 with the log of community

size. Thus, the environmental-load measure for the downtown districts was virtually indistinguishable from population size as such and could essentially have stood in for it in any of the analyses reported earlier.

However, it is interesting to note that helping rates began to decline in cities of only slightly more than 20,000 people. Past discussions of overload have generally implied that overload does not occur until population size is quite large. That helping rates were lower even in moderately sized communities indicates that it may be necessary to conceive of "partial overload" under conditions of moderate social/environmental stimulation as opposed to the common image of overload as an all-or-nothing short-circuiting response to intense levels of stimulation. This point also has implications for other perspectives, such as deindividuation theory (Zimbardo, 1969) or urban-stress-pathology theories (Alexander, 1973; Glass & Singer, 1972). It seems unlikely that residents of moderately sized communities experience the extreme loss of self-restraint under conditions of crowding, arousal, and intense stimulation postulated by Zimbardo (1969) to account for urban antisocial behavior. Likewise, it seems unlikely that a decrease in the helpfulness of residents of moderately sized cities can be accounted for by reference to the high levels of urban stress encountered there. Alternate theories, such as the social-inhibition perspective of Latané and Darley (1970) appear to accord better with the finding of a gradual decrease in helping rates.

The theoretical perspective of Wirth (1938), which emphasizes the effects of population size, density, and heterogeneity, is also generally consistent with the present data set. The heterogeneity measure employed in the present research, however, only yielded a significant independent association with helping rates in the census-nonresponse study. In this particular case, communities with higher levels of foreign-born and bilingual residents had higher nonresponse rates to the 1976 Australian census. However, the heterogeneity measure also yielded negative Pearsonian correlations with four of the other measures: the color request, the hurt leg, the Multiple Sclerosis Society donation, and the correc-

tion of inaccurate directions. These associations did not emerge in the multiple regression analyses, which was probably because of the existence of a moderate correlation between population size and the heterogeneity measure ( $r = .35$ ). Thus, greater Foreign Heterogeneity may have been contributing toward lower helping rates, but because it shared variance with population size, it did not emerge as an independent predictor in its own right.

The finding that community instability had no relation with helping in any of the six studies provides no support for Gans's (1968) assertion that residential instability, rather than population size, is responsible for the impersonal and superficial forms of interpersonal behavior found in urban areas. Furthermore, a pace-of-life explanation for lower rates of helping in urban areas (Fischer, 1978) was also not supported by the present data: In not one of the four behavioral studies involving pedestrians was walking speed significantly associated with helping. Furthermore, explanations based on the assumption of differences in population structure between urban and rural samples (Fisher, 1976; Gans, 1968) were not supported by the present research. Although samples from urban and rural areas occasionally differed in their age and sex compositions, neither age nor sex could account for the differences in rates of helping between large and small communities. Furthermore, the communities in the present study differed substantially in their level of social class, yet this variable only accounted for a small amount of the variance in one measure (correcting inaccurate directions). Thus, a compositional explanation for behavioral differences, based on differing population structures, was not supported in the present series of studies.

Finally, the Tourism and geographical-isolation variables did not yield substantial or consistent findings in relation to helping rates. Although the Tourism factor was positively associated with helping in the dropped-envelopes study, it was negatively associated with helping in the census-nonresponse study. The latter finding might be interpreted to indicate that people who are traveling are less inclined to fill in a census questionnaire, thus

contributing to the higher nonresponse rates in cities with high numbers of travelers.

Further research may help to differentiate more clearly between various theoretical explanations, indicating which can account for intercommunity variation in levels of helping behavior most adequately. In the present series of studies, population size emerged as the strongest and most consistent predictor of helping rates, with other variables only occasionally having an effect. However, I argue here that explanations for urban unhelpfulness must take into account the nature of the helping in question. The present research suggests that urban unhelpfulness is mainly limited to spontaneous and informal (rather than planned, formal) types of helping and to impersonal and anonymous helping between strangers (rather than to personal, intimate helping between friends). Failure of researchers to consider the location of their measures in a larger taxonomic or organizational scheme can only exacerbate the problem of noncumulative research in relation to helping and other areas of interest in social psychology.

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