

HELPING BEHAVIOURS IN A SHELTERED WORKSHOP FOR THE RETARDED

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Attempts to define mental retardation in this century have amounted to segregating people so labelled into a category separate from so-called "normals." They were thought to be "defective" humans who were often a serious threat to the community. (Fernald, 1912). It was believed they could not delay gratification nor recognise and respond to the needs of others. (Heber, 1962). In short, they were thought to lack a moral conscience: "morality cannot flower and fruit if intelligence remains infantile," (Terman, 1916).

If these concepts were appropriately applied to the retarded, we would not expect to find examples of helping behaviours among them. Current research in this area suggests that a frustrated person, or one who has just experienced failure, is less likely to help another (Berkowitz, 1973); in other words, a person who feels successful or competent is more likely to extend aid to someone in need. (Berkowitz & Connors, 1966). In that competency and performance are salient issues for many retarded people, the studies of Berkowitz and his associates would seem to indicate that helping would be a low probability behaviour among this group.

Other research suggests that helping relationships of an enduring and ritualised nature do occur among the retarded, and that they may clearly be seen as "friendship(s) of a highly human order." (MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1966, p.620). This notion finds support in the present study.

Evidence of helping behaviours among the retarded is found in a sheltered workshop where the present study was conducted. The goal was to provide a detailed description of the frequency and forms of the helping behaviours among this population. Whereas the majority of the literature on helping behaviours is of the experimental nature, this study was intended to focus on a naturally occurring event in an uncontrived setting.

METHOD

Observations were taken in a sheltered workshop located in a large suburban setting. Approximately 200 clients attended the workshop daily. A small percentage of them are physically as well as mentally handicapped. On preliminary observation I noticed that four physically handicapped clients were the recipients of consistent help by the four same people. It is these four dyads that are the focus of the study.

I had been a researcher in the workshop for about one year before undertaking the present study. I was well known to many clients, including the ones under study, and I was generally perceived as a "student," "visitor," or "friend."

Observations were taken over a six month period at twice a week intervals. Direct observations and interviewing were used. The data were recorded in a narrative form using descriptive narrative style. The greatest incidents of helping behaviours occurred before work, during breaks, at lunch, and after work, although

each helper and helpee were also observed for 20 minute periods during work hours. In order to gain a broad understanding of the frequency and nature of helping behaviours in the workshop in general, all observed incidents of helping behaviour were coded whether or not the recipient was one of the four subjects of the study.

THE PAIRS

Don and Dwayne.

Don, a borderline retarded client, is a man in his mid-twenties who is virtually confined to a wheelchair. Dwayne, a severely retarded man in his late 30's with Down's Syndrome, is his main helper. Dwayne's energies and attention during the work day are devoted to Don. Dwayne arrives for work before Don and waits for him by the front gate. When Don arrives, Dwayne rushes over to greet him, help him out of the car, and into his wheelchair. Dwayne bends down to talk into Don's ear and the two laugh and seem generally pleased to see each other. Dwayne pushes Don into the workshop and 'presents' him to his supervisor by saying, "Don's here now." If Don is absent, Dwayne notifies his supervisor as to the cause of the absence and his expected date of return.

Five minutes before the break and lunch bells ring, Dwayne arrives at Don's work-station and wheels him outside, thus avoiding the main onslaught of other clients. At noon Dwayne buys Don's lunch, takes it to him, and clears it away when he's finished. The staff vacillates between accepting this arrangement and telling Dwayne to let Don do more for himself.

Dwayne becomes quite indignant when someone usurps his role as Don's helper. A new client came into the workshop and after being there a few weeks, he pushed Don outside for lunch. With a very troubled look on his face, Dwayne rushed over to the new client, firmly nudged him aside, and took over the task of pushing Don. He explained to me, "he pushes Don to fast."

The rapport between Don and Dwayne is typically cheerful, lively, and warm. Their conversation at breaks and lunch time — where they are always together — is often about sports, the job they are doing, or what they did the night before. They laugh a lot, gently tease each other, and generally appear to enjoy each other's company. Dwayne often will put his arm around Don and say, "oh, Don, I love you." On such occasions Don seems a bit embarrassed and shugs off his friend's gesture of affection. It then becomes a joke, of sorts, between them. They both appear aware of the social norm restricting public display of affection between men.

The relationship between Don and Dwayne has lasted several years with basically the same style and pattern. Only once during the six month observation period was there even a minor rift between them. Don told me, "it's good to get away from Dwayne for awhile. Sometimes he makes me nervous. He just goes on and on too much. I can't really say anything; we're good friends." This was a short-lived incident. For the most part, their relationship is without disagreement and friction. The intensity, consistency, cheerfulness, and devotion with which Dwayne fulfills his self-appointed duties for Don indicates that their relationship is as rewarding for Dwayne as it is physically essential for Don.

Ron and Kirk.

Ron is a mildly retarded man in his mid-twenties who has cerebral palsy which renders him almost completely dependent on others for his daily care. His speech consists of grunts and groans.

Ron cannot dress, feed himself, or take himself to the bathroom. He is able to perform only certain jobs in the workshop, and then only with a great deal of assistance from those around him. Ron is the recipient of a lot of verbal support and encouragement from other clients and staff, as well as spontaneous assistance with his work tasks.

For the main portion of Ron's daily care, Kirk, a man of borderline intelligence, is his self-appointed caretaker. They are approximately the same age — mid twenties — though Kirk is a tall, husky man with a 'football player' look about him. Kirk says he volunteered several years ago to take care of Ron and he continues to do so because, "I feel sorry for him and nobody else knows how to take care of him." The dynamics between Kirk and Ron are different than those between Don and Dwayne largely because Ron does not talk. Kirk is as devoted and as consistent as is Dwayne, but he and Ron do not share the same light-hearted banter. Kirk speaks very little to Ron and he does not stay with him at breaks and lunch after he feeds him

Following much the same pattern as Dwayne, Kirk arrives at Ron's workstation about five minutes before the bell rings and takes him outside. At break Kirk deposits Ron at a spot on the patio and leaves to talk to other friends or to dance to the music that frequently plays. At the end of break he simply goes to Ron and pushes him back to his work station. At lunch Kirk takes Ron outside and either buys his lunch or feeds him the one he brings from the residential facility where he lives. Kirk stands next to Ron and shoves his lunch into his mouth, sometimes in whole pieces. It is impossible for Ron to eat without getting most of his meal all over himself. Therefore, part of Kirk's job is to clean him up after lunch. He does this quickly and efficiently, then pushes Ron to a spot where he can watch the others dancing. Kirk then eats his lunch and dances or visits in the time left. When lunch is over he promptly takes Ron back inside.

Kirk is very "normal" appearing and looks quite strong and competent. Yet he often speaks of himself in critical terms. He says he cannot ride a bicycle, and a new job at work sends him into a frenzy because he says he is too slow and "stupid" to master the new task. Supervisors report that Kirk is very insecure about his abilities and requires a great deal of encouragement and support from them. Typical of his comments about himself was this one: "Sometimes I don't have enough confidence in myself. Sometimes I get impatient with myself. I think I'm an idiot." Yet Kirk is a capable, responsible, and dependable caretaker for Ron.

Carl and Cory/Tawna

Carl is a 50 year old blind man who is mildly retarded. He is a capable worker who requires little assistance with his actual work other than to be supplied parts and given basic instructions. Yet he is very dependent on other clients to help him get around at breaks, lunch, and to go to the bathroom. It is curious that he remains this dependant on others. Though he has been given instruction on the use of his cane, Carl refuses to carry it.

During the observation period Carl had two caretakers — Cory, succeeded by Tawna. Cory is a very soft-spoken, moderately retarded, gentle young man whom Carl ordered to do various favours. They were together constantly, even sitting next to each other at their work-station. At breaks and lunch they would walk arm-in-arm outside, and once there, would sit on a bench very close together and seem to be talking very intimately. What conversation could be overheard was often about work, what they had for dinner the night before, or how much money they were making. Carl would ask Cory questions as to the whereabouts of certain people and Cory would dutifully respond. Occasionally Carl would want to visit with someone and Cory would help him find the person.

Quite suddenly their friendship dissolved when Cory was transferred to another line. When Carl was asked why he was not with Cory anymore, he responded, "he moved to another line; he doesn't work here anymore." When Cory was asked about Carl, he replied, "I haven't seen Carl in awhile. How is he? Who's taking care of him now?" It seemed that the physical distance between them during work had been enough to end their contact during their free time as well.

Carl went through a short transition period when Cory moved away, but after a few days a women (Tawna) who rides the bus with him, became his regular helper. She would lead him by the hand off the bus and to his work-station. The at breaks and lunch she would pick him up and lead him outside, eat lunch with him, and sit and chat with him until the bell rang. Tawna is an angelic looking mildly retarded, grey haired women in her late 50's. She attends church regularly and spends one day a week volunteering at her church. For this day she arranged ahead of time for someone else to help Carl. When asked why Tawna helps Carl, she replied, "he's blind, you know."

Carl is not as demanding of Tawna as he was of Cory. He says that she is not his "girlfriend," and their relationship does appear to be a platonic friendship. Carl often talks about how different — implying "better" — he is than everyone else in the workshop. He thinks the others "aren't normal," though Tawna is not as "off" as the others. Carl said, "in a place like this you gotta be a little sociable; you can't be too independent." Tawna is not only Carl's guide, she offers him human contact in an environment where he has chosen to partially isolate himself.

Yolanda and Mitch

Of the four physically handicapped people observed, Yolanda is the one who has the most difficulty in soliciting consistent help from others. She is a large and generally unkempt and over-weight woman who has cerebral palsy. She is not disabled to the extent as is Ron and she has normal intelligence. Yolanda's inclination to complain about her life and to present her situation as hopeless and miserable also tends to impair her interpersonal attractiveness. She is able to walk on crutches, though she chooses to remain in her wheelchair most of the time. She can feed and dress herself, and take care of her own bathroom chores. The majority of her requests for help concern being pushed someplace — usually outside for breaks or to a class. The staff believes she should be pushing herself more than she does and they encourage her not to ask others for help. While she is actually capable of pushing herself in her wheelchair, the task is strenuous and laborious. When she does ask for help, it is typically done in the form of a brusque demand; e.g., "take me out" or "you'll have to do this for me."

In spite of these qualities, Yolanda has one fairly consistent helper. Mitch is a moderately retarded client with a severe speech impediment. At times it is nearly impossible to understand him. He not only pushes Yolanda outside for breaks and lunch, he also monitors her in the workshop. When he sees her starting out for the bathroom by herself, for example, he will hurry over and push her the rest of the way. Mitch does not stay with Yolanda at breaks and lunch. Rather he deposits her where she instructs him and leaves to be with other friends. He may push her inside afterwards, though he is not as consistent about this as are the other three helpers.

For the most part the interaction between Yolanda and Mitch seems to be of the most perfunctory nature. At other times they rub noses, tease each other, and generally have a 'playful' rapport. These times usually come when Yolanda is in a 'good mood,' an event which is rare. Most often she is depressed and unhappy with herself and her life.

Yolanda receives help from a greater variety of people than any of the others observed. As many as eight different people may help her in the course of one day. Sometimes the help is spontaneous, sometimes she requests it. Often her requests for help are ignored (9 of 36 denied requests). The staff often tries to protect the other clients from Yolanda's demands by telling them they do not have to do what she tells them. In part this stems from the staff goal of requiring Yolanda to do more for herself, and in part there is a concern about her tendency to dominate other clients.

RESULTS

In 150 observation hours a total 917 incidents were observed at an average of 30 incidents per observation period or six per hour. Of all requests for help observed ($N = 198$), only 18% of them were turned down. (See Table 1). Of the 559 offers of help observed only 5% were declined by the target helpee. Thus, solicitations of help were, for the most part, heeded; and unsolicited help pro-offered nearly always accepted.

Yolanda and Carl combined were responsible for half (18 of 36) of the denied requests for help (the other 18 incidents mainly involved workshop clients other than Ron and Don). Their styles of asking for help are similar in that both tend to be demanding and presumptuous, and are viewed by other clients as "bossy." They are not like Don, who while not verbalising a lot of "thank you's" and appreciation, does exude a generally positive aura about him. He is cheerful, friendly, and talkative. Ron does not verbalise or overtly demonstrate his appreciation either, but his obvious needs and cheerful manner are such that he has many willing helpers in addition to Kirk. In general, other clients avoid Yolanda and Carl and ignore or refuse to comply with their requests for help more frequently than with Don or Ron.¹

¹ In category 5 — "routine" helping behaviours — incidents were coded though not actually observed if the incident was part of the ongoing dyad between helper and helpee. For instance, assuming Don and Dwayne were both present on a given day and Dwayne was observed pushing Don out for lunch, that incident was coded, plus Dwayne pushing Don back in from lunch was coded, though not actually observed. In that it was a very rare occurrence that three of the four dyads varied, this method was used. Assumptions like this were not made about Yolanda; only actually observed helping incidents involving her were recorded.

TABLE 1
Helping Incidents Observed in a Six Month Period

	TOTAL	PER CENT
Total Helping Incidents	917	
Observation Hours	150	
Incidents per Hour	6	
Requests for Help	198	21.5
a. Granted	162	17.6
b. Ignored or denied	36	3.9
Offers of Help	599	60.9
a. Unsolicited, proffered	164	17.0
b. Ignored, denied, or reprimanded	28	3.0
c. Routine (to four target people)	367	40.0
Rewards to Helpers	9	.8
a. "Thank you's"	4	.4
b. Reciprocity	5	.4
Other		
a. Positive physical contact (hugs and pats), Encouragement, verbal support, e.g., "keep up the good work."	38	4.0
Gender Differences		
a. Male	555	64.0
b. Female	315	36.0
Antecedents Unknown	113	12.3

During the entire observation period only nine incidents of observable rewards were coded. They included "thank you's" and offers of reciprocity like tying a shoe lace or offering to take the helper to a ballgame. Thirty-eight incidents of physical contact, verbal support, and encouragement were recorded. Carl's regular physical contact with his helper was not coded in this category. In 12% (N = 113) only the behaviour was coded; the antecedents were unknown.

The majority of the helping behaviours were performed by males — 64% vs. 36% by females; (M=555; F=315). This is a surprising finding in light of the social norm which ascribes females with more nurturing and caretaking propensity than males. Only one of the regular helpers — Tawna — was a female. It does not seem to be an issue that there was only one female target person — Yolanda — in that her only semi-regular helper was a male. One of Carl's helpers was a female, the rest were male-male pairs. Some questions arise: Are there different socialisation practices in this population in which males learn nurturing skills typically thought

to be those of females? Does one feature of helping — wheelchair pushing — require certain physical strength, making males better suited to this task? Or are these findings explainable simply in terms of individual differences among these particular males? These issues cannot be dealt with in this paper, but they do illuminate possibilities for further investigation.

The most frequently observed type of helping behaviours (40%) is the "routine" assistance in self-maintenance characterising the relationships between the four target people and their regular helpers. In this category are the behaviours which recur daily and are part of the ongoing relationship between the pairs. Clearly, the frequency with which these "routine" behaviours were observed indicates that they are a salient feature within the four helping dyads.

DISCUSSION

Comparison of the four dyads is difficult in that there are few commonalities among them. The range of intelligence is from severely retarded to borderline. There is a mixture of same-sex and opposite-sex pairs. Interviews with the clients reveal that the four helpers share little common background which might account for their propensity to help. Tawna has a history of taking care of young children; none of the others have such experience with the care of another person. Age is not a factor. Tawna and Dwayne are in their 50's. Mitch, Kirk, and Cory are in their 20's. They are not as a group unique from other clients in the workshop in terms of their behaviour patterns, either disruptive or exemplary. In short, there is no parsimonious explanation as to why these four people help their partners.

What the four helpers do share in common is the consistency and reliability of their caretaking activities. All four were self-selected helpers and all have sustained their relationships with their partners over time. All of the dyads are resistant to attempts by staff, who often think the helpee should be doing more for himself, to extinguish the helping acts. None of the helping behaviours are rewarded externally either by staff, other clients, or the helpee himself. None of the helpers boast about their helping to other clients or staff. What sustains the relationship for the helper is unclear.

What then are some plausible explanations for these helping behaviours? External reward would be one, except no evidence of this is found in the observations. Another is internal reward. In fact, Bandura (1977) concludes that most behaviours are "performed in the absence of immediate external reinforcement. Some activities are maintained by anticipated consequences, but most are under self-reinforcement control." (p.129). The reward is not the behaviour itself or the feedback from it; "rather it is people's self-reactions to their own performance that constitute the principal source of reward." (p.106). External rewards may even reduce "intrinsic motivation by creating the impression that one's behaviour is externally prompted and by weakened feelings of competence and self-determination." (p.107).

One form of intrinsic reward is altruism: "selfless devotion to the welfare of others," (*Standard College Dictionary, 1973*). However, this concept is impossible to deal with in the confines of this study. Indeed, attempts to label any human behaviour as "selfless" is fraught with difficulties. What was observed was four pairs of relationships which revolved around the perceived needs of one person and the fulfillment of them by another. Clearly, both members of the dyad were reaping

benefits from their interaction. Whether or not to label these helping behaviours as "altruistic" is premature, not to mention, impossible, at this point.

A more plausible explanation is that the helper is obtaining intrinsic rewards through feelings of usefulness. As Eric Hofer says, "a sense of usefulness is more important to the quality of life than abundance or even freedom." (Hofer, 1978). The opportunities for the retarded to fulfill a "usefulness need" are severely limited. It is most often they who are the target of helping services, as they are a dependent population. Therefore an opportunity for a retarded person to be useful to someone else in a very real and meaningful way, is a rare and important event.

The usefulness explanation was partially confirmed by a brief visit to a local high school for multiply handicapped students. There also, low-functioning retarded students voluntarily push those in wheelchairs. The school once had an official group called "The Pushers," but one year, due to a change-over in administration, the group was not organised and it was found that the people who needed it got pushed anyway; it was unnecessary to structure or supervise the pushing.

Similar to the sheltered workshop, students who push others at this school are devoted and responsible to those who need help. Teachers report that pushing someone in need is a prestigious thing; it gives the pusher a sense of responsibility. One counsellor said that most of these young people have been dependent on others all their lives and this is one of the few chances they have to really do something of benefit for someone else. This is consistent with the view that the "usefulness need" is one plausible explanation for the durability of these helping behaviours.

In addition to suggesting that intrinsic rewards such as a "usefulness need" may be a major motivating factor in the helping behaviours under investigation, the present study also indicates that helping behaviours cannot be studied exclusively in the laboratory under experimental controls. In a naturally occurring setting, helping is a complex issue which does not lend itself to a convenient and expedient explanation. The existing literature on helping behaviours does not provide for an appropriate discussion of what was observed in this study. If anything, the issue of what motivates the helpers and what sustains these relationships can be seen as more complex than ever. In addition, the literature on helping among the retarded is essentially non-existent. What is significant about this type of research is that it strongly indicates the need for a fresh approach in the study of the mentally retarded, one which does not attempt to define their deficiencies and handicaps, but one which takes a serious look at the positive and healthy aspects of this population.

SUMMARY

Helping behaviours were studied in a sheltered workshop for the retarded. subjects were four physically handicapped clients and their helpers. The dyads were observed over a six month period at twice a week intervals. The helpers were found to be consistent, reliable, and devoted caretakers, and the relationships resistant to extinction. The findings are discussed in terms of external vs internal rewards and altruism. Implications for a different, more positive approach in the study of the retarded is suggested.

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