

EFFECTS OF ANCHOR EXTREMITY, COMMITMENT, AND SURVEYOR

CHARACTERISTICS ON ESTIMATED TIME DONATION:

TWO FIELD EXPERIMENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Two experiments were performed to examine the effects of opinion survey responses of social anchoring, commitment level, sex of subject, relationship between surveyor characteristics and survey issue, and relationship between written and behavioroid response.

Five hundred sixty university students participated in a written survey, and 21 in a follow-up "behavioroid" survey, in which they were asked to estimate the number of hours they would volunteer to help physically disabled students. Experimental subjects in varied anchoring conditions saw the supposed estimates of others prior to responding, and no-influence control subjects also responded. Commitment level was varied by the inclusion of more personal information required from the subject and more direct wording on the survey sheets in the high commitment condition. Lastly, both disabled and able-bodied surveyors were employed.

Results indicate that social anchoring greatly influenced subjects' responses. Commitment level was nonsignificant, although there was a significant difference between written and behavioroid response. Male and females estimated an equal amount of donated time, although males elicited more volunteer behavior. Finally, disabled surveyors elicited more volunteer behavior than did able-bodied ones, with disabled males eliciting the most. These results are discussed in terms of their implications for interpreting opinion surveys.

INTRODUCTION

"Public Opinion" is a term that is widely and loosely used in our society. The population is continuously being bombarded with public opinion survey results. Whether it concerns the nation's favorite toothpaste or candidate for president, opinion survey results are widely utilized in public relations and policymaking (Robinson, 1969). As White (1975, p. 1047) notes, however, such widespread use "seems to reflect an assumption of validity in opinion survey results that substantially transcends any relevant data base." Although opinion surveys of candidate and product preference have demonstrated predictive validity (Crossley and Crossley, 1969), surveys investigating areas with supposedly related, nonreactive measures have not proven their worth (Crespi, 1971; DeFleur and Westie, 1958; Wicker, 1969). It would seem imperative to examine the variables influencing a person's responses to such survey items. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis was to investigate some variables which influence public opinion survey responses.

Because responsiveness to social influence may be lessened when a subject is suspicious of the survey format and/or setting (Adair, 1972), these studies were conducted in a field setting. A survey format similar to White's (1975), which was designed to minimize subject suspiciousness, was used. The survey issue in both experiments was how many hours per week able-bodied university students would be willing to volunteer to help physically disabled students get around campus.

Supposed opinions of others can be defined as social anchors, and these were varied on the surveys made. Results obtained concerning a similar issue (White, 1975) showed that respondents are significantly influenced by this social anchoring effect. Even anchors which were so extreme as to seem absurd elicited positive effects, and the negligible or negative shifts obtained in some studies (Blake, Helson, and Mouton, 1957; Hovland, Harvey, and Sherif, 1957; Whittaker, 1963) were absent.

Since the issue in the present study concerns an altruistic response, the altruism literature is pertinent. Altruism has been shown to be facilitated by observation (Rosenhan and White, 1967) and imitation (Latané and Dabbs, 1975). Since anchoring responses on a survey sheet can be viewed as a modeling device, it was predicted that the results obtained from this study would show the anchor effect on altruistic responses.

In addition to an anchor extremity effect, the degree of personal commitment involved in the response was examined in both studies. It has been shown that increased commitment does decrease the effects of anchoring (Langenes and White, 1975), and it was hypothesized that there would be an interaction between the two variables (Freedman, 1964; Rhine and Severence, 1970). Extreme anchors should have the greatest influence on responses in the low commitment (or low cost) condition. Altruism in adults has been augmented when cost is lowest (Midlarsky and Midlarsky, 1970); in a similar vein, children have been shown to be more willing to share low value items than high value items with "needy" recipients (Zinser, Perry, and Edgar, 1975). It was therefore

hypothesized that personal commitment would be a mediator in the elicitation of opinion responses, and that it would mediate in the same direction as did response cost in these previous studies. An additional, behavioroid, response was examined in the second experiment, when volunteers in the high commitment condition were telephoned after participating in the survey and asked for a schedule of their volunteer hours.

The possibility of a relationship between a survey issue and relevant related characteristics of the surveyor were also explored in the first experiment. Thus, the surveyors were experimenters who were either able-bodied or physically disabled (confined to a wheelchair). In addition to investigating this variable as a main effect, possible interactions with other variables were studied. Various characteristics of recipients of altruism have been studied, such as style of dress (Beebe, Buback, McGlone, and Dinoff, 1972; Chaikin, Derlega, Yoder, and Phillips, 1974; Harris and Baudin, 1973) and sex (Emswiller, Deaux, and Willits, 1971; Latané, 1970). The sex of both recipients and donors of altruism has been studied quite extensively. Results are far from conclusive, however. Some studies indicate that cross-sex helping occurs more frequently than same-sex helping (Thayer, 1973), although the opposite has also been found (Werner, 1974). Generally, males seem to be more likely to offer help than females (Latané, 1970; Latané and Dabbs, 1975), even when solicitors are exclusively male (Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin, 1969) or exclusively female (Bryan and Test, 1967). Although in most studies females have been found to receive significantly more help than males (Gruder and Cook, 1971; Latané, 1970; Latané and Dabbs, 1975), in at least one study the opposite result was obtained

(Emswiller et al., 1971). Sex of experimenter and of subject were also factors in the first study.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 512 university students, half males and half females, all of whom were able-bodied. They were chosen as randomly as possible in outdoor campus settings.

Experimenters

Experimenters were seven undergraduates and one graduate student. They were four females (two able-bodied and two physically disabled) and four males (two able-bodied and two physically disabled). The physically disabled experimenters were all confined to wheelchairs.

Procedure

The procedure for this experiment was originally outlined by White (1975). Each subject was approached by an experimenter and asked if (s)he was a student at the University. To all affirmative respondents, the experimenters said, "Would you please take a minute to participate in a student survey?" Students who agreed to participate were presented with a survey sheet which was attached to a clipboard and labeled "Student Survey--University of Arizona."

The survey sheets in the low commitment condition read as follows: "As you probably know, many physically disabled students find it extremely difficult to maneuver their wheelchairs around campus. We

are interested in determining how many hours per week university students would be willing to volunteer to help physically disabled people get around campus." Each sheet contained spaces for signatures and estimated number of hours. (See Appendix A for sample of survey sheet.) The survey sheets in the high commitment condition (see Appendix B for sample) read as follows: "As you probably know, many physically disabled students find it extremely difficult to maneuver their wheelchairs around campus. We are seeking volunteers who are willing to donate time helping the physically disabled get around campus. Please estimate the number of hours per week you would be willing to donate toward aiding these students." Each sheet in this condition contained spaces for signatures, estimated number of hours, and telephone number. Therefore, the low commitment condition was operationalized by the more impersonal wording and by the lack of a request for a phone number.

Four signatures were "planted" on each survey sheet prior to being presented to the subject, and the estimated number of hours was varied in accordance with the anchoring condition. The estimated number of hours were of three conditions: a range from 8-12, $\bar{X} = 10$ (low anchor), a range from 18-22, $\bar{X} = 20$ (medium anchor), and a range from 28-32, $\bar{X} = 30$ (high anchor). Additionally, a no anchor control condition (on which the subject's was the first and only signature to appear on the sheet) was factorially crossed with all nonanchoring conditions. For further detail, see White (1975).

The survey sheet presented to the subject was, therefore, the vehicle for both the commitment and anchor extremity variables. The

survey sheets were distributed by each experimenter in a randomized order to an equal number of males (32) and females (32).

Data Analysis

Subjects' responses were analyzed by a 2 (sex of experimenter) X 2 (sex of subject) X 2 (commitment) X 2 (physical condition) X 4 (anchor extremity) analysis of variance. In addition, Dunnett's method of comparing control means and treatment means was used to determine differences between anchor means and their control counterparts. Finally, omega square (ω^2) estimates were computed to determine percentage of variance accounted for, and Tukey honestly significant difference comparisons were used for post-hoc comparisons.

Results

Cell means for all conditions appear in Table 1.

Anchor extremity significantly affected estimates of volunteer hours, $F(3,448) = 58.30$, $p < .0001$. An omega square (ω^2) estimate showed that anchor level accounted for 17% of the variance. Tukey honestly significant difference comparisons show that different results were obtained at every anchor level ($p_s < .01$). Dunnett's analysis reveals that responses obtained in all three anchor levels (high, medium, low) were significantly different from those in the control condition ($p_s < .01$).

Estimates of time contributions were also significantly affected by the physical condition of the experimenter, $F(1,448) = 10.67$, $p < .005$, $\omega^2 = .01$. Disabled experimenters elicited more estimates of volunteer hours than able-bodied ones. The data also show that although

Table 1. Experiment 1: Mean estimates of volunteer hours per week as a function of anchor extremity, commitment, sex of subject, sex of experimenter, and physical condition of experimenter.

	High Commitment				Low Commitment			
	Female Experimenter		Male Experimenter		Female Experimenter		Male Experimenter	
	Able- bodied	Disabled	Able- bodied	Disabled	Able- bodied	Disabled	Able- bodied	Disabled
<u>Female Subjects</u>								
High Anchor	13.56	10.38	17.50	9.69	9.75	10.44	9.13	12.50
Medium Anchor	6.50	7.13	9.63	8.63	8.88	7.88	10.75	13.38
Low Anchor	4.25	5.63	4.75	4.94	4.38	3.13	5.31	8.50
Control	2.69	2.81	2.00	4.38	2.38	2.13	4.25	4.25
<u>Male Subjects</u>								
High Anchor	8.75	9.69	9.13	19.56	6.13	13.88	7.38	16.88
Medium Anchor	11.69	14.19	7.00	15.13	5.50	6.25	6.25	14.13
Low Anchor	9.63	5.50	3.88	10.13	6.38	4.94	3.50	9.38
Control	6.31	3.00	2.13	2.50	2.94	3.19	3.38	2.56

disabled experimenters elicited more volunteer behavior than did able-bodied ones, the differences decreased as anchor level decreased. Where anchor level was controlled for (i.e., was not an influencing factor), no significant difference between able-bodied and disabled experimenters was obtained.

Sex of experimenter significantly influenced subject behavior, $F(1,448) = 7.45$, $p < .01$, $\omega^2 = .01$. Male experimenters elicited more volunteer hours than did female experimenters. There was an additional significant interaction effect between sex of experimenter and physical condition of experimenter, $F(1,448) = 10.30$, $p < .005$, $\omega^2 = .01$. Tukey comparisons here show that disabled males elicited significantly higher estimates of volunteer behavior than did any other physical condition/sex of experimenter combination ($p < .01$).

Although sex of subject was not significant as a main effect, it did enter into significant interaction effects with other variables. The sex of subject X physical condition of experimenter interaction reveals that female subjects estimated the same number of volunteer hours when surveyed by a disabled experimenter as they did when surveyed by an able-bodied one; however, male subjects estimated more hours when approached by a disabled experimenter, $F(1,448) = 10.62$, $p < .005$, $\omega^2 = .01$. Furthermore, while female experimenters, regardless of physical condition, elicited an equal amount of volunteer behavior from males and females, physical condition of male experimenters had a differential effect, depending on subject sex. Male subjects estimated significantly more volunteer hours than did females when approached by a disabled male experimenter, and they estimated significantly less volunteer hours than

did females when approached by an able-bodied male experimenter. The F value ($df = 1,448$) for this sex of subject X sex of experimenter X physical condition of experimenter interaction was 6.08, $p < .025$, $\omega^2 = .01$ (see Figure 1).

Anchor extremity also interacted significantly with sex of subject and physical condition of experimenter, $F(3,448) = 5.38$, $p < .005$, $\omega^2 = .01$. Whereas male subjects estimated they would donate significantly more hours than females to disabled experimenters and significantly less hours than females to able-bodied experimenters in high and medium social anchor conditions, there were no differences in the low anchor and control conditions (see Figure 2).

One final interaction that yielded significant results was anchor level X commitment X sex of subject, $F(3,448) = 2.82$, $p < .025$, $\omega^2 = .01$. It seems that males in the high commitment condition tended to estimate a higher number of volunteer hours than did females in the same commitment condition, but in the medium anchor condition only. No other main or interaction effect was significant.

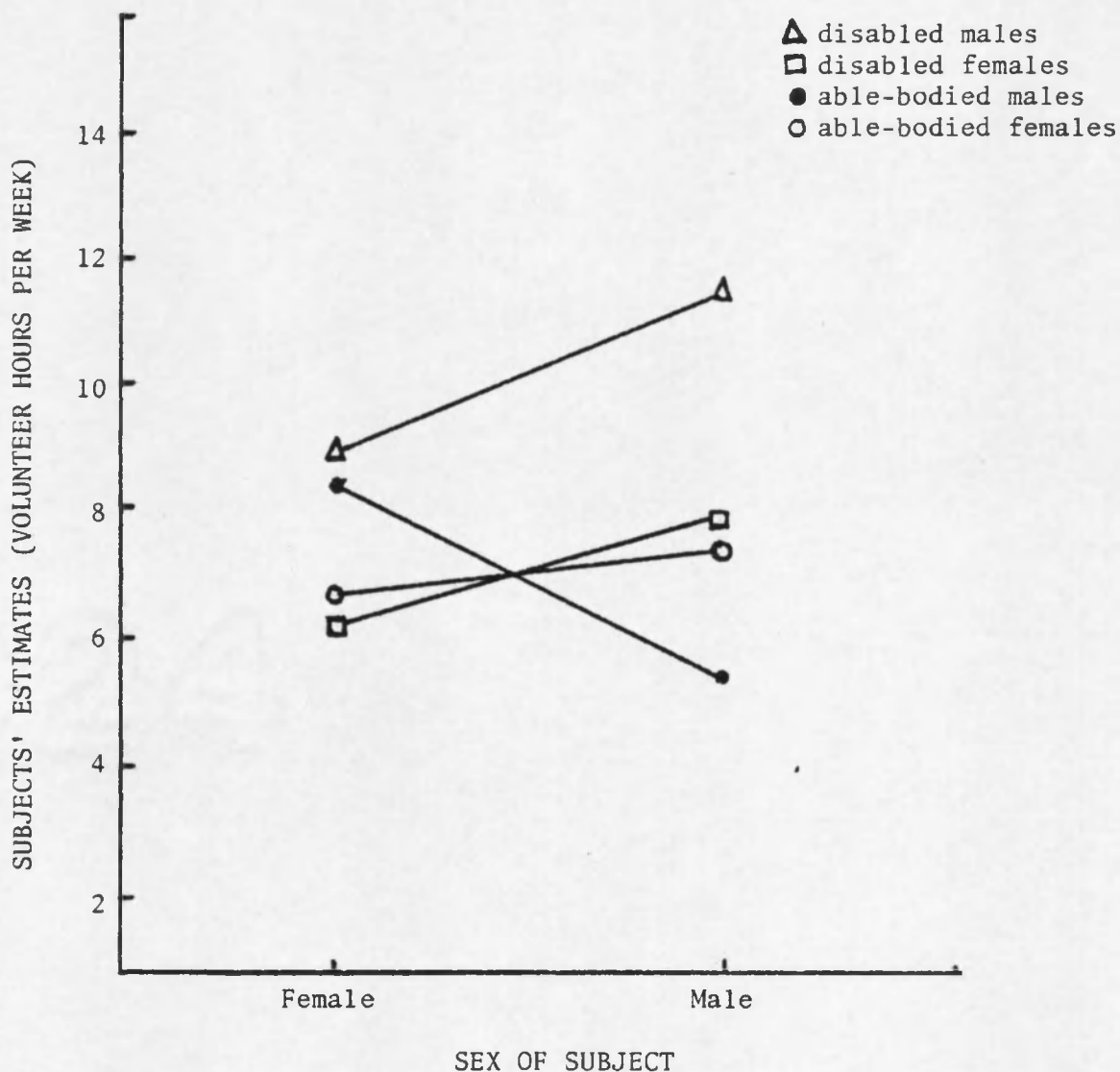


Figure 1. The effects of physical condition of experimenter, sex of experimenter, and sex of subject on the number of hours per week subjects estimated they would volunteer toward helping disabled students get around campus.

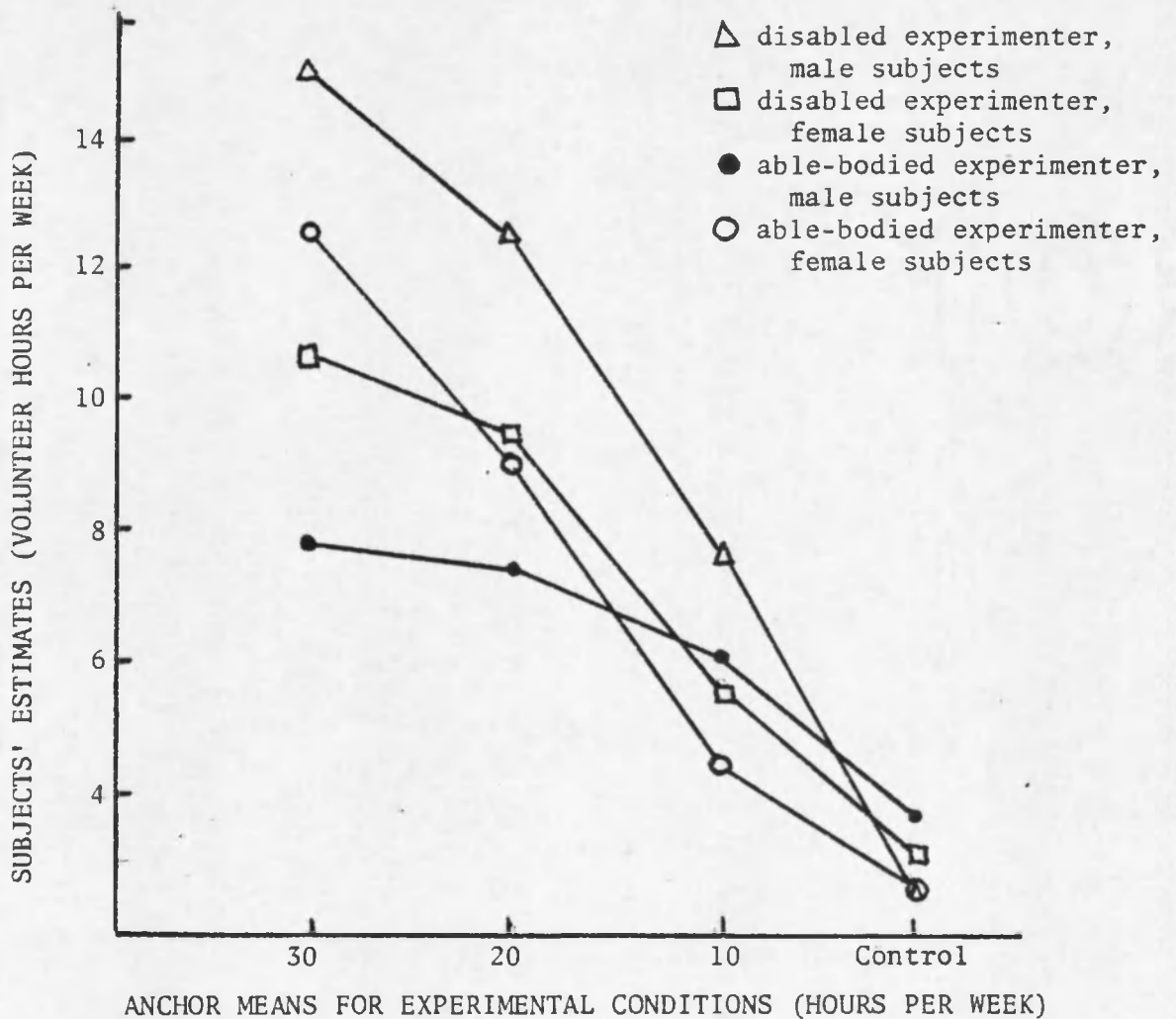


Figure 2. The effects of anchor extremity, physical condition of experimenter, and sex of subjects on the number of hours per week subjects estimated they would volunteer toward helping disabled students get around campus.

EXPERIMENT 2

Introduction

This study was performed for the purpose of further investigating commitment as a possible variable in survey response behavior. Since commitment seemed to be an irrelevant factor in the first study, this study was designed to increase the disparity between the two commitment levels, so as once again to ascertain if "cost" to the subject plays a significant role in influencing a subject's survey response. It was again predicted that extreme anchors would have the greatest effect on responses in the low commitment condition.

A supplemental, behavioroid, measure was obtained in this study in the form of subjects' responses to a follow-up telephone inquiry regarding the exact schedule of hours subjects would volunteer each week. Since this can be viewed as an increase in "cost" to the subject (i.e., his commitment toward actually volunteering is even greater than it was when he signed the survey sheet), it was predicted that the number of hours elicited via telephone would be less than those elicited by the survey sheet. The purpose of obtaining this measure was to shed some light on how generalizable surveys of this nature are to actual behavior. It was predicted that survey responses would not accurately coincide with people's behavioroid responses.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 48 university students, all of whom were able-bodied. They were chosen as randomly as possible in outdoor campus settings.

Experimenter

The experimenter was a female, disabled, graduate student in psychology.

Procedure

The procedure for obtaining survey response was basically the same as in the first experiment. There were, however, a few changes. The survey sheets in the low commitment condition were of essentially the same format (see Appendix C for sample). The survey sheets in the high commitment condition (see Appendix D for sample) read as follows: "As you probably know, many physically disabled students find it extremely difficult to maneuver their wheelchairs around campus. We are seeking volunteers who are willing to donate time helping the physically disabled get around campus. Please estimate the number of hours per week you will donate toward aiding these students." The last line was changed from ". . . would be willing to donate . . ." as it appears in the first study in order to increase disparity between the two commitment conditions. Also, the sheets in the high commitment condition contained spaces for students' names, estimated number of hours, address,

and telephone number. Address was included to increase the disparity between the high and low commitment conditions.

Anchor extremity was varied the same way as in the first study, except this time there were only two anchor conditions: a range of hours from 8-12, $\bar{X} = 10$ (low anchor) and a range from 28-32, $\bar{X} = 30$ (high anchor). No anchor-control sheets were distributed in this study. The survey sheets were, once again, the vehicle for both the commitment and anchor extremity variables, and they were distributed by the experimenter in a randomized order.

Within ten days after the survey was administered, all subjects in the high commitment condition ($N = 24$) were contacted via telephone. The experimenter said to each subject, "I understand you participated in a student survey during the past week. Could you please tell me how many hours you'd be willing to donate toward helping disabled students get around campus?" Respondents who answered "zero" were then thanked for their participation and the conversation ended. All other respondents (i.e., those whose answers were greater than zero) were then asked to set up an exact schedule of hours during the week which they would be willing to volunteer. Each of these subjects was then debriefed as to the nature of the study and thanked for his participation and willingness to volunteer. They were also given the option of having their names given to an organization on campus which exists primarily to help disabled students and which actively seeks volunteers for that purpose.

Data Analysis

Subjects' responses to the written survey were analyzed by a 2 (anchor extremity) X 2 (commitment) analysis of variance. In addition, an omega square (ω^2) estimate was computed to determine percentage of variance accounted for. Subjects' telephone responses were analyzed by a t-test, and an additional 2 (anchor extremity) X 2 (written vs. telephone response) analysis of variance was performed.

Results

Anchor magnitude on the written survey once again influenced the number of volunteer hours, $F(1,44) = 20.468$, $p < .0001$. By omega square estimate, this accounted for 28% of the variance. The written survey response analysis revealed no other significant main or interaction effects. Table 2 shows the cell means for all conditions.

Of the 24 high commitment condition subjects who participated in the initial survey, 21 were followed up in order to obtain the behavioroid measures. Three participants (two in the high anchor condition and one in the low anchor condition) could not be located by either telephone or mail. Ten of these follow-up subjects estimated the number of volunteer hours to be greater than zero, and all but one of these set up an exact schedule of hours they would volunteer each week. Eight of those ten students were willing, at the end of the telephone interview, to have their names and schedules submitted to the department on campus which could utilize the volunteer manpower. The mean number of behavioroid volunteer hours was 4.6 in the high anchor condition and 1.27 in the low anchor condition and this difference proved to be

Table 2. Experiment 2: Mean estimates on written survey of volunteer hours per week as a function of anchor extremity and commitment level.

	High Commitment	Low Commitment	\bar{X}
High Anchor	12.17	7.83	10.00
Low Anchor	3.25	3.75	3.50
\bar{X}	7.71	5.79	-

significant, $t(df = 19) = 7.80$, $p < .001$. Therefore, even when the anchors were no longer visibly present to the subjects, their prior existence had a prolonged influence on their response.

The analysis of variance performed on the behavioroid and written measures revealed, once again, a significant anchor extremity effect, $F(1,41) = 17.45$, $p < .005$. There was also a significant decrease in the number of volunteer hours initially estimated in writing on the survey sheet and in the number later obtained via telephone, $F(1,41) = 10.60$, $p < .005$. The mean number of hours volunteered on the written survey was 6.75, and the mean number of hours volunteered later on the telephone was 2.86. No significant interaction effect was found.

DISCUSSION

Although it is generally conceded that being a free, independent thinker is a positive attribute, it appears from this study that our own opinions and judgments are greatly influenced by what others believe. It seems likely that university students would know approximately how much available time they would have to volunteer to help disabled students get around campus; yet their responses varied considerably when they were able to observe the number of hours that other students had supposedly estimated. These anchor effects in both studies on an altruistic response were congruent with those of White (1975), and as with his studies, the use of a natural setting and research design which minimized subject suspiciousness may have facilitated the obtained results.

The implications of this are far-reaching in terms of opinion and attitude polls. It seems that our responses to polls can be largely dependent upon how others have responded. Since results of surveys and polls are often used in formulating a decision or policy, their validity in this regard is highly questionable. The assumption of pollsters that each respondent is revealing his own, independent opinion may not be accurate. This demonstration that opinions and attitudes are likely to be a product of social influence greatly undermines the usefulness of opinion surveys, if respondents are aware of others' views. It must be remembered that in the first study, responses within all three anchoring conditions differed not only from one another, but also from the control

counterparts. This shows the tremendous potency of a social anchor influence. Results of the second study further reinforce this. Long-lasting anchor effects were demonstrated, since they remained an influence on subjects' behavior up to ten days after they were presented to the subjects.

The degree of personal commitment involved in the response did not affect subjects' estimates. This result is contrary to that obtained in other studies (Freedman, 1964; Langenes and White, 1975; Rhine and Severence, 1970). It was expected from these previous investigations that the extreme anchors would have the greatest effect on estimates in the low commitment condition; altruism has, in the past, been increased when cost is lowest (Midlarsky and Midlarsky, 1970; Zinser et al., 1975). The failure of both these studies to support this anchor-commitment relationship is indeed intriguing, especially after the second study was devised to increase further the disparity between the two commitment conditions. It is possible that degree of personal commitment may be influential on some specific kinds of issues and not on others. If commitment is issue-specific, it would be interesting to discover under what types of conditions it does play a role in decision-making. It is possible that this opinion survey, regardless of wording and information asked for, was perceived by subjects as being "remote" from actual behavior, and therefore cost was too low in both conditions to elicit differential responding. It is noteworthy to point out, additionally, that the behavioroid measure in the second experiment may be construed as a measure of intensified personal commitment, as the subjects were taken one step further than the survey in actually carrying out what

they estimated they would do. A significant decrease occurred between their original estimate and one in which they came even closer to actually doing the volunteering. Therefore, it is conjectured that personal commitment may become a salient factor only when cost to the subject is relatively high. Further investigation regarding this variable would be extremely useful in clarifying the effect of personal commitment on opinion surveys.

A relationship between survey issue and relevant related characteristics of the surveyor was found to exist; that is, disabled experimenters were more likely than able-bodied ones to elicit volunteer behavior for helping disabled students get around campus. Possible reasons for this can only be conjectured. A subject may experience increased guilt and decreased self-esteem in refusing to volunteer to help, when asked by a member of the group seeking help, especially when (s)he perceives that others have volunteered. This is supported by the fact that disabled experimenters did not elicit more volunteer hours than able-bodied ones when anchor level was controlled. In addition, the subject's awareness of the necessity of his help may also be augmented when the subject is actually confronted with the individual to whom the aid may be offered. An example of this is a national telethon, where disabled individuals afflicted with the disorder for which money is being collected appear on television to appeal to the general public for their cause. It is noted that these telethons also continually broadcast how much money individual people have donated (large sums are particularly emphasized), thereby establishing high anchor conditions

for the public to respond under. Another possible explanation is that disabled people may elicit more cooperation in general, for whatever reason, and they may elicit higher estimates on any survey issue.

Males elicited more volunteer behavior than did females, and this result was contrary to many previous studies (Gruder and Cook, 1971; Latané, 1970; Latané and Dabbs, 1975) but was in agreement with the study by Emswiller et al. (1971). Since the results in this area are so inconclusive, it can be hypothesized that whether members of one sex are more likely to receive help may depend on the particular situation or different contextual cues. In this particular situation, disabled males may be viewed the most sympathetically by the general population. Our societal norms indicate that males are generally viewed as independent, capable, healthy, and strong, and perhaps the resulting perceived incongruity between disability and masculinity influenced subjects in a way (e.g., guilt, pity) that caused them to estimate more volunteer behavior. This is further substantiated by the fact that male subjects were more affected by the experimenter's physical condition than were females. Females tended to estimate an equal number of volunteer hours regardless of the experimenter's physical condition. Perhaps males in our society feel a greater need to help and protect those people less fortunate than themselves. All female experimenters seemed to elicit an equal amount of helping behavior but disabled males elicited more volunteering behavior from males and able-bodied males elicited less volunteering behavior from males. This was especially true when they thought others had estimated a large amount of volunteer time. This may be the result of some guilt-identification issues. Implications of this

in terms of sex-role stereotypes may be that despite the ongoing human liberation movement, some male-female role stereotypes still do exist.

Therefore, the research indicating that males are more likely to offer help than females (Bryan and Test, 1967; Latané, 1970; Latané and Dabbs, 1975; Piliaven et al., 1969) was only partially supported by the first experiment. It seems that when survey issue and relevant surveyor characteristics are related (particularly characteristics which may instill guilt or lower self-esteem), male respondents are more likely to be affected. While the fact that this result was only partially supported may indicate that values and norms regarding sex stereotypes in this society are changing, it also indicates that some traditional views remain.

A behavioroid measure was included in the second study in an effort to determine how generalizable behavior is from this type of opinion survey. The results tend to support previous findings (Crespi, 1971; DeFleur and Westie, 1958; Wicker, 1969) as well as White's (1975, p. 1047) statement that, "the validity of surveys eliciting responses standing in abstract or topographically remote relationships with the acts presumably indexed by the surveys remain suspect." The data here showed a marked decrement in amount of volunteer time elicited as the response moved down the "verbal-behavioral" continuum. This questions the accuracy and practical usefulness of opinion surveys as a tool for estimating actual behavior. It appears that subjects overestimated on the survey sheet the amount of time they would be willing to volunteer, and one cannot help but wonder if the behavioroid measure is also an overestimation.

It is therefore imperative that the limits of opinion surveys be realized, both by those who administer them and by those who attempt to make decisions based upon their results. The studies reported here indicate not only that people are not independent and free-thinking, but also that they often do not accurately estimate what their own behavior will be.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF SURVEY SHEET USED IN EXPERIMENT 1 IN THE LOW COMMITMENT CONDITION

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF SURVEY SHEET USED IN EXPERIMENT 1 IN THE HIGH COMMITMENT CONDITION

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE OF SURVEY SHEET USED IN EXPERIMENT 2 IN THE LOW COMMITMENT CONDITION

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF SURVEY SHEET USED IN EXPERIMENT 2 IN THE HIGH COMMITMENT CONDITION

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