WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CONSIDERATE: DIFFERENCES IN NORMATIVE EXPECTATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

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Being considerate may imply various normative expectations in different cultural contexts. With the help of illustrations from classical and anthropological literature, two patterns were identified, "spontaneous" and "responsive" considerateness. In an experiment designed to test for the hypothesized difference in the connotations of considerateness among persons of different cultural backgrounds, 159 third-grade school children were asked to write brief essays on "An Act of Considerateness." Results support the hypothesis: children of Middle Eastern parents described significantly more responsive acts and less spontaneous acts than children of Western parents. The implications of these findings in terms of predictable aggressive behavior are discussed.

To the casual observer, especially one from a Western country, Israelis appear to be extremely inconsiderate people. In motorists' driving habits, in the noise levels of public places, in the pushing and shoving that goes on in queues - indeed, in a great variety of social activities and social settings, aggressiveness rather than consideration seems to be the rule. On close scrutiny, however, the concept of "being considerate" appears to have two distinct connotations, leading to different normative expectations. The difference revolves around who is supposed to initiate the act of consideration: the considerate person himself or the potential beneficiary. I shall call the first pattern "spontaneous" and the second "responsive" consideration.

There is a large body of research literature on helping behavior, altruism, and what has come to be called prosocial behavior. Although considerateness should reasonably be subsumed under this category, there are only a very few studies that explicitly relate to the concept. Schwartz (1968) used it as one of three indicators of "awareness of consequences" (AC), defining it as "behavior intended to relieve or to avoid aggravating the inferred distress of another person or group." The examples he cites, as well as the term "inferred", suggest that he was thinking of spontaneous considerateness only. Indeed, for reasons that shall be presently elaborated, what Schwartz in his context calls "helpfulness," namely "behavior intended to meet the expressed need of another person or group," is precisely what I shall call in this paper "responsive consideration."

Another study with at least some relevance to our issue is Baldwin and Baldwin's (1970) experiment on children's judgment of kindness as compared to that of adults. In the third pair of 10 pairs of stories used to elicit the respondents' judgment of kindness, a "spontaneous" act of kindness was contrasted with one made in "obedience." The authors found consensus among the adults that the spontaneous act was kinder than the

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obedient one, confirming their hypothesis. Since kindness is a term frequently used in the definition of considerateness (see below), it would follow that spontaneous kindness is closer in meaning to considerateness than a kind act done in obedience.

Most studies however, have focused on explaining prosocial behavior (or the lack of it) with postulated antecedent variables, such as developmental stages (Aronfreed, 1976; Bar-Tal et al., 1980), norm activation (e.g. Hornstein, 1970; Berkowitz, 1972; Schwartz, 1973), or situational variables (e.g. Darley and Latané, 1970; Feinberg, 1977). Even the studies of normative explanations (see Schwartz, 1973, for a concise review) have concerned themselves primarily with the sequence of stages in the cognitive process involved when social or personal norms influence prosocial behavior.

The possibility that the semantic content, and therefore also the behavioral expectations, of the norm of considerateness may vary cross-culturally does not seem to have been considered. Staub (1972), referring to survey data from Almond and Verba (1963), writes that "there are both national and educational differences in the degree to which this value (consideration for others) is held." Cultural differences in the response to appeals for help (Berkowitz, 1966; Feldman, 1968; L'Armand and Pepitone, 1975), as well as in help-seeking behavior have also been noted (Zborowski, 1958; Zola, 1966; Gross and Mcmullen, 1982). But the implicit assumption has been throughout that the connotation of the term itself is the same for all people, regardless of the degree to which they value it or display it in actual behavior.

This study, therefore, follows the research tradition of seeking explanations for the variance in the amount or level of prosocial behavior, narrowing the subject to considerateness only, and focusing on what appears to be an extreme lack of considerate behavior. We leave the beaten track, however, by postulating as antecedent variable differences in the semantic content of this concept, leading to different and perhaps also conflicting normative expectations of others' behavior.

I shall begin by documenting, with the help of illustrative examples from classical Western literature and anthropological sources, the kind of behavior settings that make for either spontaneous or responsive considerateness. This will lead to a hypothesis about the cultural backgrounds associated with the two postulated sets of normative expectations, followed by a report on an experiment designed to test the hypothesis, and its findings. In a final section some implications of those findings will be discussed.

Normative Expectations of Considerateness

According to two well-known dictionaries, to be *considerate* means to be "observant of the rights and feelings of others: showing thoughtful kindness" (Webster's, 1971), or to show "regard for another's circumstances, feelings, etc." (American College Dictionary, 1960). On this score there seems to be widespread agreement, even in Israel. The differences become apparent when one examines the social situations that are presumed to call for such thoughtful kindness, and the behavior patterns that are supposed to express it.

Spontaneous consideration, the prevalent norm in Western countries, includes the expectation that consideration in its purest form should be unsolicited. A genuinely considerate person should think of how his conduct may affect others without being reminded of it, and should adjust his actions accordingly[1]. To cite a few examples from Western literature, Jane Austen, an accurate observer of mind and manners, writes of what she calls "that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others"

(Austen, 1966:119). In the same novel (*Mansfield Park*, 1814) she describes young Edmund Bertram's conduct towards his poor cousin, Fanny Price, in the following terms: "Without any display of doing more than the rest, or any fear of doing too much, he was always true to her interests and considerate of her feelings, trying to make her good qualities understood, and to conquer the diffidence which prevented their being more apparent; giving her advice, consolation, and encouragement" (Austen, 1966:57).

A second example comes from a more recent author, G.B. Shaw. In his play *Man and Superman* (1903), Violet, the pert young lady who has been mistakenly presumed by her relatives and friends to be unmarried and pregnant, claims her rights as a married woman not to be insulted, telling the embarrassed gathering: "However, I quite feel that you have placed yourselves in a painful position; and the most truly considerate thing for me to do is to go at once. Good morning" (Shaw, 1903:46). And she goes.

A final, almost contemporary example of this type of consideration is from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Mrs. Compson, realizing that her seventeen-year-old granddaughter, Quentin, has run away from home, and intuitively convinced that she has committed suicide, just as her namesake uncle had done, (she actually had not committed suicide), exclaims: "The note. At least she would have enough consideration to leave a note. Even Quentin did that."

These examples indicate an implicit normative expectation for considerate persons to be spontaneously mindful of how their conduct affects others, and act accordingly. Both Edmund Bertram and Violet Robinson did not wait to be asked for consideration: they showed it on their own initiative. And, most pertinently for our discussion, Mrs. Compson *expected* Quentin to have enough consideration for her to leave a suicide note without having to be reminded of that obligation.

Responsive consideration, on the other hand, the more prevalent norm in the Middle East, means to accede readily and generously to another's request for help or protection. It does not include proffering assistance where it has not been solicited (Hamady, 1960:29-30). On the contrary, "Understand me, don't give to me," says one Arab proverb (Westermarck, 1931:200), "don't enter through the door until you hear the answer (to your knock)," says another (Westermarck, 1931:241). However, when a person asks you for a favor or for help he puts himself in the position of the weaker party; and then Middle Eastern norms of honor and consideration *require* that you comply with the request (Hamady, 1960:31). If you do so at obvious expense, and, perhaps, also at some personal risk or sacrifice, then you are being genuinely considerate.

Two examples from anthropological literature may illustrate this point. Mohsen (1970) reports that a married woman among the Awlas 'Ali of the Western Desert in Egypt has the right to "throw herself" at a respected man in the community if she feels wronged by her husband and wants to dissolve her marriage. "By throwing herself (on him), this man becomes *obliged* to give refuge to the woman and to start negotiating with her husband to divorce her." He adds that, if the negotiations break down, "the negotiator may find himself in a position where *he has to pay* the husband from his own money" (Mohsen, 1970:230, my emphases).

Even more explicit is Pierce's (1971) discussion of the concept of honor in the Middle East. Referring to Fulinain (1928), he writes: "A man can demand protection for himself, and sometimes for his family, from anyone except a member of the group against which he is feuding. A Middle Easterner is honor-bound to give this protection. Failure to respond to an appeal for protection results in serious loss of honor" (Pierce, 1971:54).

When spontaneous consideration is encountered in the Middle East, it can be understood by indigenous people in different ways. At best, it will be taken as plain foolishness. Almond and Verba (1963), in their cross-national survey of "civic culture", found that the proportions of respondents who had chosen "to be generous, considerate of others" as the most admired quality (out of a list of eight characteristics) varied considerably among the five countries studied: U.S. (59%), U.K. (65%), Germany (42%), Italy (25%), and Mexico (36%). Note that Italy, the country nearest to the Middle East, had by far the lowest proportion (Almond and Verba, 1963:265).

But spontaneous consideration may also be seen as a sign of weakness or dishonesty, because in the Middle East one does not waive a right or forego an advantage unless one has to, or is asked to do so as an act of considerateness. "An Arab feels that a gift ought to be questioned on the assumption that an apparently selfless donor is not to be trusted" (Laffin, 1975:96). The unsolicited rendering of assistance or bestowal of support, in short, an act of consideration by Western standards, is also suspect because it carries the implication that the recipient is in need of it; and that may well be a sign of condescension or even a deliberate insult.

In sum, in the West, consideration is an act of thoughtful kindness, which the more fortunately placed party should spontaneously show to the other. In the Middle East, it is also an act of thoughtful kindness, but one which an honorable person is obliged to perform if he is asked to do so, and to which, moreover, the disadvantaged party is entitled, once he has demeaned himself before the other by asking for it. Whereas in the West an unsolicited act of consideration is exemplary social behavior, in the Middle East it is not only silly, but may easily be construed as an affront.

THE EXPERIMENT

Israel is a dynamic and volatile meeting place for Middle Eastern and Western cultural patterns. Of the Jewish population, roughly 60% either were themselves born in countries with Middle Eastern culture or belong to families who came from there. They are known as "Sefaradim." The rest of the Jewish population is more westernized, and called in Hebrew "Ashkenazim." In addition, there is of course the Arab sector, which is clearly of Middle Eastern cultural origin, though Western influences have made themselves felt, especially in the cities. It could be, therefore, that the apparent lack of consideration is really a case of culture conflict, defined by Wirth (1931) as a situation "where the individual belongs to a group in which certain forms of conduct have a different meaning and where there is a difference of emphasis in values from that in the dominant society".

If that is correct, we should hypothesize that Ashkenazim will expect more spontaneous consideration than Sefaradim, and Sefaradim more than Arabs. For responsive consideration the hypothesis is reversed: Arabs should expect more of such consideration than Sefaradim, and the latter more than Ashkenazim. The following experiment was designed to test this hypothesis.

149 third-grade primary school children from four schools in different parts of the country were asked to write short essays describing "An Act of Considerateness"[3] (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Children in the Four Schools According to Parents' Ethnic Origin.

School	Ashkenazi	Sefaradi	Arab	Total
Carmel	23	1	-	24
Hadarim	19	10	-	29
Hofit	16	48	-	64
St. John's	-	-	32	32
Total	58 (39%)	59 (40%)	32 (21%)	149 (100%)

We chose third-graders for the experiment because older students or adults would be aware of the more dominant Western cultural norms even if they themselves did not necessarily accept them, so that responses might have been contaminated by perceived social desirability. With nine-year-olds there is still a fair chance that parental norms and values will not be entirely superseded by the Western-oriented socialization of the schools. On the other hand, it was impracticable to ask still younger children, because they would not be able to express themselves clearly enough to permit analysis.

Not surprisingly, most of the children recounted incidents from their daily lives. Many wrote of making room for an elderly person in a bus, or giving alms to a beggar. Some children made use of a story which they had obviously studied together in class.

The essays were classified according to the children's parents' ethnic origin: Ashkenazi Jewish, Sefaradi Jewish, and Arab Christian. Subsequently, three coders separately coded the essays by the nature of the described act, as either spontaneous or responsive. Agreement among coders was over 90%, and disagreements were resolved by majority vote. The following typical examples illustrate the two patterns, translated, of course, from the original Hebrew or Arabic.

(1) Once, when I was sick, I asked my brother to bring me a cup of water. So he ran and brought me a cup of water (K.B.S., RESPONSIVE).

(2) One day, when I went with my mother, we took the bus. I saw a pregnant woman with her little daughter, so I got up and gave her my seat (L.M.,SPONTANEOUS).

Table 2: Spontaneous and Responsive Acts of Considerateness, as Described by Third Graders with Different Cultural Backgrounds.

Background	Spontaneous Considerateness	Responsive Considerateness	Total
Jewish Ashkenazi	46 79.3%	12 20.7%	58 100%
Jewish Sefaradi	36 61.0%	23 39.0%	59 100%
Christian Arab	14 43.8%	18 56.2%	32 100%

$\chi^2 = 11.7992$; 2 d.f., $p < .01$

As may be seen from Table 2, the data support our research hypothesis, the differences being statistically significant. The association is not very strong, to be sure (phi = .28), but we must bear in mind that the dominant culture in Israel is Western, and

that most third-graders have received considerable doses of this culture ever since they attended kindergarten. It would be a sorry comment, indeed, on the quality of their teachers if they had left no mark at all on their students over a period of four years.

It could be argued that, just as in Baldwin and Baldwin's (1970) experiment, "obedient" kindness was merely judged less kind than "spontaneous" kindness (but not really different), so here also the difference that was found in proportions of responsive considerateness and spontaneous considerateness is only a matter of degree. Apart from its ethnocentric implications, such an interpretation of the data would not explain why so many Ashkenazim in Israel do not show noticeably more spontaneous considerateness than other Israelis. But even if this were so, the different normative expectations and potential for culture conflict would remain unchanged.

IMPLICATIONS

Let us assume that the distribution of very considerate, moderately considerate, and inconsiderate persons in Israel was at one time close to normal, and similar to that found in other countries. Our findings should lead us to expect that, over time, there would be more than the normal number of cases of frustrated legitimate expectations of consideration from others. The Middle Easterner will see in the considerate Westerner's behavior condescension or stupid solicitousness on the one hand, and on the other hand an inconsiderate lack of response where it is clearly the other's duty to help and protect even though it is at some cost or danger to him. The Westerner will see in the considerate Middle Easterner's behavior a confusing mixture of callous rudeness in some situations, and effusive and perhaps also slightly vulgar demonstrations of assistance in others, where he himself sees hardly any difference between them.

To illustrate this point, here is an example from the daily doings on the roads and highways in Israel. Take two motorists, both considerate drivers, and each of them expecting consideration from the other. One is driving on the main highway, the other is trying to exit from a side road and to merge with the traffic. If they are both Westerners, the first will probably slow down to allow the other to merge, and the latter will do so, thanking the other with a nod, a wave of the hand, or perhaps even a smile. If both drivers are Middle Easterners, the first will ignore the second unless and until the latter makes the conventional obsequious gesture with outstretched arm and upturned palm, and catches his eye, asking with a look to be allowed into the path of travel. In that case the considerate Middle Easterner will not only slow down; he may even brake hard and risk a back-collision, while simultaneously making the distinctive expansive gesture with outstretched forearm to underline his act of consideration: "t'faddal!" ("be my guest!").

But, say the first driver is a Middle Easterner and the second a Westerner. The Westerner, expecting consideration, will wait in vain for other drivers to allow him to merge. Since he would do so himself if the positions had been reversed, he will probably feel frustrated and angry, with predictably aggressive effect on his own subsequent driving behavior.

We can expect still more trouble if the first driver is a Westerner and the second a Middle Easterner. The considerate Westerner, seeing the other driver, will of his own accord slow down if possible. The Middle Easterner may interpret this either as poor driving and, preferring to remain behind such an unsafe driver, pointedly ignore him, or he may see the other's behavior as a sign of weakness or silliness, and seize the obvious chance without as much as a nod to the Westerner. In either case the Westerner will

again feel frustrated by the other's "rudeness". Worse still, the Middle Easterner may perceive the other's behavior as an act of condescension. Feeling insulted by the implication that he is not skillful enough to merge without help, he will either refuse the offer, or accept it with deliberate slowness and force the other driver almost to a stop, to demonstrate his needing no favors.

In short, the chances are that acts of considerateness by either party will be misinterpreted by the other and negatively reinforced. The more considerate people that become thus frustrated, the greater the probability that other considerate people will be similarly frustrated. Because, if we accept the theory that frustration leads to anger, and anger to aggressiveness (Dollard, 1939; Berkowitz, 1962; Rule and Nesdale, 1976), two positive feedback cycles of increasing aggressiveness are activated, making for a rapid decline in considerate behavior of either kind. This is presented schematically in Figure 1.

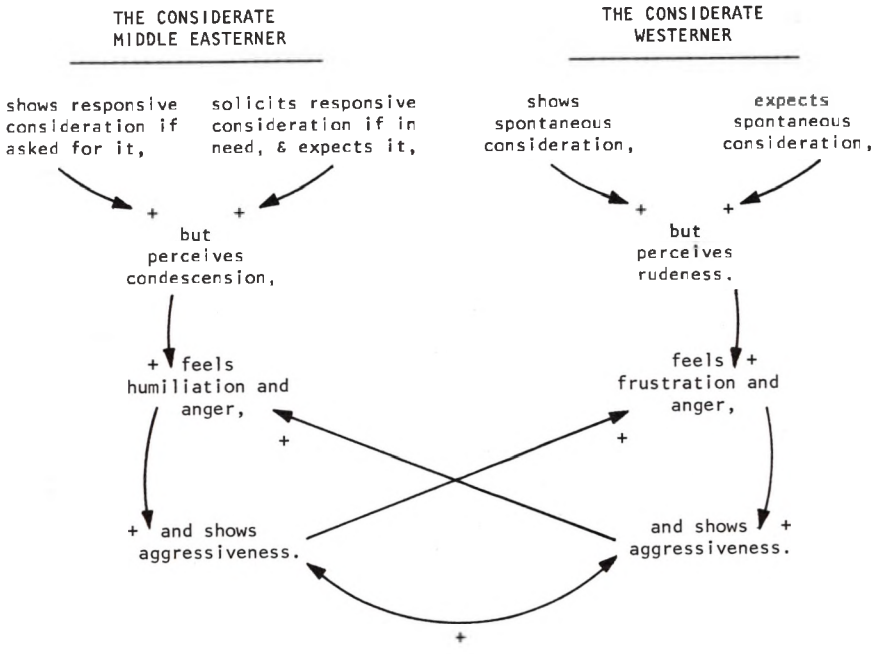


Figure 1. A Causal Loop Diagram

Under such conditions of culture conflict, therefore, progressively decreasing considerateness and increasing aggressiveness are almost inevitable. A situation is bound to develop, in which consideration by any definition will be rare, strange, and possibly deviant. This bespeaks ill for the quality of life ahead, unless deliberate action is initiated to break the existing feedback cycles. A realistic awareness of the nature of this problem is a small but necessary first step towards such deliberate action.

FOOTNOTES

1. In reality the situation is not always quite so simple. For a discussion of some intriguing variants see: Langer and Abelson (1972).

2. Blau (1955:108-109) describes a similar situation: "By asking for advice, he implicitly pays his respect to the superior proficiency of his colleague." In Middle Eastern terms, the consent to give advice was an act of consideration, since it was formally forbidden, so that the advisor put himself on the wrong side of the rules in giving it. Darley and Latané (1970:85) make essentially the same point.

3. In Hebrew, "hithashvut bazulat," - this term is much more commonly used and less abstruse in Hebrew than its English equivalent. Only four out of the 126 Hebrew-speaking children did not understand what was meant. In Arabic, it was rendered by "al ehtimam bilaharim."

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