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URBAN-RURAL DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL INTEREST AND ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOR

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Research on altruism has often focused on the effects of altruistic *vs.* selfish modeling on *S* altruism.¹ Hansson, Slade, and Slade² found that urban *Ss* were more likely than were rural *Ss* to respond selfishly in the presence of a selfish model, and to act altruistically when presented with an altruistic model. The authors explain their results in terms of Milgram's urban-overload theory.³ In complex urban societies individuals behave on the basis of economy rather than more complicated considerations such as social interest.

The present research is a partial replication of the Hansson *et al.* study with both behavioral and attitudinal measures of altruism for urban and rural *Ss*. Undergraduate student *Ss* were categorized as urban (populations greater than 100,000, $N = 41$) and rural (populations less than 100,000, $N = 80$) for the modeling and self-report data.

While waiting to perform a learning study task, *Ss* were asked to volunteer aid to a bogus social welfare organization. A confederate, ostensibly also waiting to perform the task, modeled either of two conditions: volunteering or refusing to fill in the information card needed of all volunteers.

A chi square analysis of urban *vs.* rural by positive *vs.* negative modeling influence and volunteering *vs.* nonvolunteering yielded a significant value, $\chi^2 = 10.12$, $p < .05$. An inspection of the table revealed that urban *Ss* followed the model significantly more often than did rural *Ss* in the negative influence condition. However, under the positive modeling condition, rural *Ss* more closely followed the model by volunteering significantly more often than did urban *Ss*.

¹ Stevick, R. A., Dixon, P. N., Willingham, W. K. Locus of control and behavioral versus self-response measures of social interest. *J. Individ. Psycho.*, 1980.

² Hansson, R. O., Slade, K. M., & Slade, P. S. Urban-rural differences in responsiveness to an altruistic model. *J. Soc. Psycho.*, 1978, 105, 99-105.

³ Milgram, S. The experience of living in cities. *Science*, 1970, 167, 1461-1468.

Thus, there is mixed support for the Hansson *et al.* findings. Their conclusion regarding urban *Ss*' susceptibility to model influence coincides with the present findings for the nonaltruistic condition but not for the altruistic condition. In the latter, rural *Ss* showed a greater inclination to follow the model. This suggests the likelihood that rural persons may demonstrate greater altruism than do *Ss* from urban populations.

In order to measure urban-rural differences in altruistic attitudes, the Social Interest Index⁴ was administered to all *Ss*. This scale measures the Adlerian concept of social interest, defined, in part, as a feeling of cooperation or empathy. No significant differences in social interest were obtained [$F(1, 119) = 2.48, p > .05$].

Certainly the emphasis of the Hansson *et al.* study on the importance of the urban-rural factor as a useful mediator variable is also supported by the present study, which confirms the complexity of the variable.

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⁴ Greever, K. B., Tseng, M. S., & Friedland, B. U. Development of the social interest index. *J. Consult. & Clin. Psycho.*, 1973, 41, 454-458.

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