

TITLE: The Effects of Anonymity on Subject Ratings of Driver Improvement Meetings: Questionnaire Response Bias as a Function of Respondent Anonymity

DATE: December 1975

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REPORT NUMBER: Unnumbered (NRN048)

NTIS NUMBER: None

FUNDING SOURCE: Departmental Budget

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

To determine if self-report information by drivers is more candid if collected under anonymous conditions.

SUMMARY:

Six hundred ninety-two California negligent drivers attending either group educational meetings or individual negligent-operator hearings designed to improve driver attitude and performance were compared on four primary criteria to test whether anonymous responses to questionnaires differed significantly from non-anonymous responses. The questionnaire asked the subjects to rate the quality of their treatment and their attitude toward DMV. Subjects in the group setting did not respond to some questionnaire items as frequently as subjects did in the individual hearings. Contrary to expectations, subjects responding under an anonymous format tended to be less negative in their rating of the experiment and the treatment they received.

Subjects in the group setting emitted shorter responses and more negative responses than did subjects in the individual-hearing setting. There was no interaction between type of session and anonymity, suggesting that anonymity is not a primary factor when collecting the types of information represented in this study. However, the report warned that caution must be exercised in generalizing this finding to other types of information and situations, particularly where the data are of a personal or sensitive nature.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

None.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Published as Questionnaire Response Bias as a Function of Respondent Anonymity in *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 9(4), 249-256, 1977.