

Taxi! Taxi! - No - Police! Police!

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What happens when speeders see a police car? What happens when speeders see a taxi? What if the police car is made to look like a taxi?

In the Halton Region, just west of Toronto, Ontario, the police decided to disguise unmarked police cars to look like taxis by placing the familiar taxi-style light on the top of the cars. When a taxi is available, the light is on, when a cab is in service or otherwise unavailable, the light is off. In this case, however, instead of having the word Taxi or Cab or the name and the telephone number of the cab company on the sign, the sign included the phone number for the police and the word, Police.

A spokesperson for the police stated that the reason for the identified tactic is to reduce the number of deaths caused by aggressive driving and to reduce the number of automobile accidents; the stated reason is not to nab those who commit traffic offences. The spokesperson also indicated that the approach was very successful; it is not clear, however, whether success refers to the number of speeders caught or to a reduction of deaths. Nonetheless, some believed that such an approach gave the police an “unfair advantage.” As a result, the tactic was discontinued by the police.

Questions:

1. Using the correct learning theory, explain what happens when speeders see a police car? when speeders see a taxi?
2. Using the correct learning theory, explain why speeders did not slow down when they saw the police car disguised as a taxi?
3. Why was the identified tactic used by the police successful in terms of catching speeders?
4. Over the long term, once drivers learn of this tactic being used by the police to catch speeders, they may start reacting to any taxi sign they see by slowing down. Using the appropriate learning theory, explain why this would occur.
5. Using the concepts of Gestalt, stimulus generalization, and stimulus discrimination, explain why consumers did not slow down if they saw the sign atop the “police” car?

Note. The facts related to this situation are drawn from the following article: Wilkes, J. (2009, May 22). Halton police stop making cruisers look like taxi cabs. *Toronto Star*, p. GT1.