

Course: Psychology 1A Lab Report 2

Topic: Helping Behaviour

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Submitted: Lab Tuesday 3:00

Cross-sex effects and gender differences in helping behaviour.

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**Abstract**

This study looks at the effect of cross-sex helping and gender differences in helping behaviour. 6 first year psychology students, 3 males and 4 females dropped papers in front of people of the public. The students known as actors, (A) were alone and aged between 20 and 40 years. The study also shows a relationship between that of past research. The findings showed that female and male A's were more likely to receive help from cross-sex helpers than from same sex helpers. Females were found to be twice as likely to receive help and slightly more likely to give help than males. This study could be used to encourage not only cross-sex helpful behaviour but same sex helpful behaviour in society.

Helping behaviour is described as a kind or helpful act that benefits another living being (Myers, 2005, Vaughan & Hogg, 1995) both physically and psychologically (Wispe, 1972). A behaviour that is viewed positively by society is known as pro-social behaviour (Dovidio, 1982). Before someone is willing to help another person, a decision needs to be made, will they or will they not help this person. Generally the helper needs to understand what is happening and assess the costs and rewards, if they do or do not decide to help (Vaughan & Hogg). Dovidio, suggest that increasing costs may not only reduce overall level of helping but may eliminate the cross-sex helping effect.

The bystander effect is a common example, where people will calculate the consequences before they act. Particularly in a populated place where people are less likely to offer their assistance (Vaughan & Hogg). In low cost, non emergency situation, males are less likely to help as opposed to high cost situations (Lantane & Darley, 1970). The cost or reward is the loss or gain of something as a result of helping or not helping. Commonly the cost is the time and effort shared by the helper during the act of helping (Darley & Batson, 1973). However it's also common that the act of not helping can also incur a cost and may provoke an emotional response of feeling anxious, selfish, guilty (Vaughan & Hogg) and sometimes self critical. Norms such as social responsibility, propose that help should be given to those in need, without an expectation for reward (Berkowitz, 1972). However when people are rewarded they are more likely to help again (Grusec, 1982). This is a reinforced behaviour and is either positive or negatively induced (Rushton & Teachman 1978). The recognition for reward can be immediate or long-term (Berkowitz).

Like other behaviours, helping others is a learned response. Someone who feels that they are a helpful person, usually have learned self-attributions of helpfulness (Vaughan & Hogg). These are usually encouraged in adolescents particularly in children (Grusec & Redler, 1980). The decision to help or not help is usually dependent on the environment, the person that needs the help and the individual characteristics of the helper (Vaughan & Hogg). Sometimes assumptions are made about the A, such as the reasons for why they need help. Usually self induced actions, such as substance abuse, are likely to receive less help than if actions were not (Vaughan & Hogg). Also variables such as the sex, mental state and physical seriousness of the person can also manipulate the probability of someone helping or not.

Individual characteristics of the helper are important in understanding the motivations that may influence a person to become involved in a helpful or non helpful act. These include biological aspects of the person such as genes and hormones, more importantly their personal experiences (Vaughan & Hogg). These can include their personality, a constant and their mood, a variable. People in a bad mood tend to be inwardly focused and more concerned with their own welfare than that of others (Berkowitz, 1970). However people in a good mood seem less worried with their selves and more willing to help others (Isen, 1970). Generally the concern for the well-being of others tends to be motivated by empathy (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977), where a person will relate with the emotions of another person. They may also act to make the person feel loved and appreciated (Wilke & Lanzetta, 1970). Helping behaviour is also commonly an opportunity to interact with the other sex, this is known as cross-sex helping (Dovidio, 1982).

Past research shows that cross-sex helping is more likely to occur than same sex helping (Dovidio, 1982). Studies have shown that females are more likely to receive help from males than from other females. Similarly males are more likely to receive help from females than other males (Dovidio). Lantane's (1970) experiment suggests that the sex of the subject makes a considerable difference in the likelihood of someone receiving help. People either alone, in pairs or in threes, asked members of the public for 20 cents at a New York subway. The results showed that females were twice as likely to receive help than males, when alone, and three times as likely when in same sex pairs. It also showed that the cross-sex effect was lost with mixed pairs and threes. People are more likely to help a female than a male and that when a male was accompanied by a female they are more likely to receive help.

This suggests that people are less suspicious or afraid of a female (Lantane, 1970) and therefore more willing to help. Criminology shows that generally, females are seen as far less violent than males and less likely to be involved in a serious crime (Steffensmeier, 2005). Males are less likely to receive help, as people may become fearful that they will take their belongings or harm them (Lantane, 1970). The Kitty Genovese case (Lantane & Darley, 1976) is an example of where some people were unwilling to help for fear of endangering themselves.

Past research also suggests that people who look more attractive are more likely to get help (West & Brown, 1975). Attractiveness influences the likelihood of someone being helped especially from male helpers (Benson, Karabenic & Learner 1976). Males also spent longer helping a female when they were sexually aroused, however females spent less time when they were sexually aroused (Przybyl, 1985).

Some features of sexual attraction may well be attributed to the hair colour of the person that needs help. Some people believe that blondes are associated with angels and princesses and seem honest and trusting, where as brunettes are associated with witches (Juni & Roth, 1985) and therefore seem untrustworthy. More recently social shifts in attitudes may suggest that blondes are dumber and richer than other women and that brunettes are seen as more intelligent and sophisticated (Urbanska, 1979). According to Juni & Roth, hair colour did not influence helping behaviour and that brunettes received help slightly more than blondes.

The aim of this study is to explain the effects of cross-sex helping and gender differences in helping behaviour. In view of previous studies it was hypothesised that females and males are more likely to receive help from cross-sex helpers than from same sex helpers and that females are more likely to receive help than males.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The study consisted of 6, first year psychology students at Victoria University. These included 3 males and 3 female aged between 20 and 28 years. The helpers were members of the public and were aged between 20 and 40 years.

### *Materials*

Notebooks with loose papers were used as drop material and a paper and pen were used to record the results.

*Procedure*

A group of 3 students were situated out front of a shopping mall. 1 male and 1 female were chosen to act as well as an observer to take down the results.

The A's each dropped their notebooks and papers in front of 2 male and 2 female helpers. The helpers were alone and appeared able to help I.E not carrying things or have a child or pet with them. Once all the drops were made the results were then calculated.

**Results**

The data was collected from 6 students. The experiment consisted of 48 trials. The female A's collected 24 possible responses 12 from a female helper and 12 from a male helper as seen in Table 1. The male A's collected 24 possible responses 12 from a male helper and 12 from a female helper as seen in Table 2. These tables, Table 1 and Table 2 were then compiled into a single table as seen in Table 3. The data shows that females received help from 8 people and males received help from 4 people. Furthermore females received help from 5 males and males received help from 4 females. Female same sex A's received help from 3 people where as male same sex A's received no help as seen in Table 3.

Table 1

*Female actor help or no help received.*

<b>Female Actor</b>		
Gender of Helper	Help	No Help
Female Helper	3	9
Male Helper	5	7
Total	8	16

*Note.* Each cell represents a result out of 12 trials

Table 2

*Male actor help or no help received.*

**Male Actor**

Gender of Helper	Help	No Help
Male Helper	0	12
Female Helper	4	8
Total	4	20

*Note.* Each cell represents a result out of 12 trials

Table 3

*Male and Female actor help received.*

**Male & Female Actor**

Gender of Helper	Male Actor	Female Actor
Male Helper	0	5
Female Helper	4	3
Total Help	4	8

*Note.* Each cell represents a result out of 12 trials

### Discussion

The findings show that the hypothesis was supported and that females and males were more likely to receive help from cross-sex helpers than from same sex helpers. It also supports the hypothesis that females were more likely to receive help than males and slightly more likely to give help than males. However females were slightly less helpful than males in cross-sex helping. These results show that female same sex pairs were more likely to receive help than male same sex pairs, furthermore males received no help from other males, subsequently females received more help overall. These findings were also consistent with that of past research such as Dovidio (1982) and in particular Lantane (1970). Lantane's results were similar, where females were twice as likely to receive help than males when alone. This is interesting considering that costs should be higher in a subway than outside a shopping mall, therefore resulting in less help. Yet it produced similar results. It is therefore likely that the environment has little effect on cross-sex helping.

It is suggested that cross-sex helping is solely gender dependent and that all other variables such as personal experiences, learned attributions, individual characteristics and moods are secondary and apply similarly to that of same sex helping and other kinds of helping behaviours (Vaughan & Hogg). The opportunity to interact with the opposite sex is what makes cross-sex helping a more effective helping behaviour (Dovidio).

The characteristics of the A's are dependent on society and public perception and experiences (Vaughan & Hogg). Subsequently people are less likely to help when they are more concerned with their selves rather than their attitudes toward the A's (Berkowitz). For example it is unlikely that someone will not help an A just because they are blonde or brunette, alternatively they may help this A because they are in a good mood (Berkowitz, 1970). Personality especially moods are more likely to influence helping or non helping behaviour.

The A's may have received less help overall as compared to past research as help was not requested (Lantane, 1976). This suggests that the bystander effect may have resulted in fewer helpers even though they were alone, people may still continue walking past the A thinking that someone else is sure to help them. It's also possible that the A received less help from males as it was a low cost, non emergency situation (Lantane & Darley, 1970).

The method seemed to have a few problems that could slightly manipulate the results. These are likely to be the method where the drop of books would be different between A's. Some of the limitations in this study relate to the population size, were no correlation could be established between some results such as which gender is more likely to give help in cross-sex helping. This study could be used to encourage not only cross-sex helpful behaviour but same sex helpful behaviour in society.

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