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## SEX AND HELPING BEHAVIOR\*<sup>1</sup>

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### SUMMARY

Four studies using both opposite and same-sex dyads were conducted to examine the relationship between sex and willingness to volunteer to be a subject in an experiment. The degree of contact between the experimenter and subject was varied. In three of the four studies, a significant interaction effect was found, with subjects helping experimenters of the opposite sex more often than members of their own sex. No evidence supporting an ingratiation interpretation was found.

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### A. INTRODUCTION

The study of sex in psychology appears to have followed McGuire's (13) description of the life stages of an artifact. In the first stage, ignorance, researchers seemed unaware of the influence of sex on behavior. Studies have pointed out (3, 8) that a large percentage of research conducted in the 1940's and 50's did not describe the sex distribution of the subjects, and only a small percentage reported any tests for sex differences.

In the 1960's came the passage from the ignorance stage to the coping stage. Though researchers became more aware of the possibility of sex affecting behavior, most of them coped with this by using a single sex in their study. Moreover, according to one survey (8) almost three times as many studies used male subjects than females, and 11% still failed to specify the sex of their subjects.

Finally, psychology seems to be entering the exploration stage. Sex now appears to be studied for its own importance rather than as a secondary factor that had to be controlled.

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The study of helping behavior started in the coping rather than ignorance stage, possibly because there was no experimental research conducted in the 1950's in this area. But among the growing literature on helping behavior only a few studies have been concerned with both the sex of the helper and the sex of the individual being helped. In addition, the almost exclusive use of the same-sex dyads has led to problems of interpretation. For example, Schopler (15) found that females were more likely to help a highly dependent female rather than a less dependent one, while males displayed the opposite trend with other males. Though Berkowitz and his colleagues (1) have attributed this difference to the greater self-concern of the males, since only same-sex dyads were studied, it is not clear whether the sexes do indeed differ in their willingness to help a dependent individual or whether instead both sexes would help dependent females more and dependent males less.

Gruder and Cook (7) note that the effect of sex on helping behavior can be conceptualized in terms of a *personality* effect in which the sexes differ in their helping behavior, a *pure stimulus* effect in which the sexes are helped differentially, or a combination of both effects.

If both opposite-sex and same-sex dyads are used, an interaction effect is possible between the sex of the helper and the sex of the person helped. It may be that like-sex dyads help each other more (a similarity effect) or that members of the opposite sex will help each other more (an ingratiation effect).

The results of previous field and laboratory research on helping behavior that has used both opposite and same-sex dyads are somewhat confusing (2, 5, 7, 12, 16), since they indicate a pure stimulus effect, a personality effect, and an ingratiation effect.

In one of the most recent experiments Gruder and Cook (7) found that there was no evidence for an opposite-sex helping effect. They concluded that evidence supporting an ingratiation model was weak but pointed out that possibly face-to-face contact with a person of the opposite sex might be necessary. Several studies, however, using face-to-face interactions have no evidence of greater opposite-sex helping, though one study (16) using the telephone did find such evidence. It is possible that some form of personal contact is necessary, but not face-to-face contact. Therefore the first experiment relied on the telephone as a means of contact.

Gruder and Cook (7) described opposite-sex behavior as ingratiation. Ingratiation, as defined by Jones is "a class of strategic behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractive-

ness of one's personal qualities" (10, p. 11). In other words, a member of the opposite sex would be helped more not out of selfless altruism but because the helper wanted to look good in his eyes in order to gain something not explicit nor legitimate in the helping relationship. Jones (10) pointed out that it is difficult to determine if doing a favor is an ingratiation tactic that gains attraction or the manipulation of a social obligation. However, in the present research such a distinction is not crucial. It is important to examine if opposite-sex helping is due to the subject's expectations that something will be gained: namely, an opportunity to interact with and possibly date a member of the opposite sex.

To examine whether ingratiation was indeed responsible for opposite-sex helping, the first experiment varied the possibility of dating the experimenter. On the basis of the prevalent norm that the male is the older of the dating pair, it was hypothesized that a male subject called by an older female experimenter would be less willing to help than one called by a younger experimenter and that a female subject called by an older male experimenter would be more likely to help than one called by a younger male experimenter.

In summary, the purpose of the first experiment was to test whether opposite-sex helping occurs more frequently than same-sex helping and if this effect is related to the potential date appeal of the dependent person.

## B. FIRST STUDY

### 1. *Method*

The design of the experiment was  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  factorial in which the sex of the experimenter, the class or age of the experimenter, and the sex of the subject were varied.

*a. Subjects and experimenters.* The subjects in this experiment were 100 female sophomores and 100 male sophomores randomly selected from Smith College and Amherst College, respectively.

*b. Procedure.* Subjects were called on the phone by the experimenter who said he/she was either a freshman or senior. The caller proceeded to tell the subject: "I need subjects for an experiment in person perception for an introductory psychology course. Your name was selected by random from the college directory. The experiment will take either one, two, three, or four evenings for approximately two hours per evening, at your convenience. The experiment will be held at the (Smith, Amherst) science center. Could you please help me?" If the subject said yes at this point, he was

asked whether he was willing to participate for one, two, three, or four evenings. These subjects were told that they would be called again to arrange a convenient time for the experiment if they were needed. However, they were not called a second time. If, the subject said no, the experimenter then said: "I'm really in need of subjects, are you sure you can't help me? It would be at your convenience." If the subject still refused, the experimenter terminated the call. If these subjects agreed to help, they were told they would be called to arrange a time. When they were called, they were told the experiment was cancelled.

If subjects inquired, they were told that they would not get paid nor receive course credit for participation, and if a particular subject was not contacted after three attempts, a substitute name was drawn.

## 2. Results

A three way analysis of variance was performed on the number of evenings (ranging from zero to four) that the subject had agreed to participate. By use of the number of evenings, the degree of help was taken into account. The only significant effect ( $F = 14.97$ ,  $df = 1/192$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was the sex of subject by sex of experimenter interaction. Males helped females more than other males, while females helped males more than other females.

The same pattern of interaction was found when the percentages of subjects helping were computed. While 76% of the females helped the male experimenter, only 46% helped the female experimenter. In the case of the males, 68% of them helped the female, while 60% helped the male experimenter. A chi-square analysis indicated that only the sex of subject by sex of caller interaction was significant ( $\chi^2 = 8.26$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .025$ ).<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Discussion

Though relative age appeared to have no effect, it is possible that the subjects did not attend carefully to the experimenter's statement of his class, since the class was only mentioned in the experimenter's introductory comments and was not emphasized. The sex of the experimenter on the other hand was obvious throughout the entire conversation. The possibility also exists that the students used in this study do not strictly adhere to the

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<sup>2</sup> Because of controversy over the partialing of chi square the interaction was also analyzed with the use of an arc sin transformation suggested by Langer and Abelson (11). The significance levels obtained from this technique were equivalent to the levels reported in the body of the paper.

date and age norm, since both the male and female subjects were from predominantly single sex institutions where the need to meet someone, anyone, from the opposite sex might be higher than in the general population.

The purpose of the second experiment was to examine the relationship between sex and helping in a different population and with a different method for manipulating the possibility of a date.

## C. SECOND STUDY

### 1. *Method*

The design of this experiment was a  $2 \times 2 \times 3$  factorial in which the sex of the caller, the sex of the subject, and the person who was actually supposed to conduct the experiment (the actual experimenter was said to be either the caller, a male friend, or a female friend of the caller) were varied.

*a. Subjects and experimenters.* The experimenters were three female and four male undergraduates, different from those used in experiment 1. The subjects were 113 male and 110 female students in residence on the University of Massachusetts campus.

Originally 288 subjects were contacted. However, one female experimenter, in violation of the procedure, asked two friends to help her conduct the experiment. Unfortunately, each one conducted only one-third of the design rather than the complete design with one-third of the subjects. These 36 subjects were excluded from the data analysis. The male experimenters made a similar error. All four male experimenters asked four of their friends to assist them. However, this assistance was distributed almost equally across conditions. The 29 subjects these experimenters used were not included in the data analysis.

*b. Procedure.* The experimenter called and said that he needed subjects for either himself, a male friend, or a female friend. The dialogue used in the male friend condition was similar to that of the first study except it began: "Hello, I'm (Wendy Campbell, Jeff Campbell) and I'm calling for my friend Dave Johnson. He needs subjects for an experiment in person perception. . . ." In the "female friend" condition, the pronouns were changed and the name used was Sue Johnson.

### 2. *Results*

Most of the subjects who did agree to help wished to participate for one evening. Because of the skewness of the distribution of responses, a simple

help/not help dichotomy was used instead of the number of evenings as the dependent variable. As was the case in the first study, the only significant finding was the interaction between the sex of the experimenter (caller) and the sex of the subject ( $\chi^2 = 7.76$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Of the males, 72% agreed to help the female experimenter, and only 51% agreed to participate when a male called. In the case of the females, 63% agreed to participate when a male asked, and only 52% agreed when asked by another female.

### 3. Discussion

It appears that there is little support for the ingratiation or social obligation explanation of this interaction. The lack of significance of the "called for" manipulation does not support such an interpretation.

When Gruder and Cook (7) failed to find a sex interaction effect in their research, they suggested that face-to-face interaction might be necessary for this effect to occur. While there was no face-to-face contact in the two previous experiments, the telephone did provide personal contact through verbal communication. In contrast, in the Gruder and Cook experiment, there was no direct contact made between the potential helper and the dependent person, since help was requested through a note left for the subject by the experimenter.

The next experiment was designed to determine if the interaction effect found in the two previous experiments would be found when there was no personal contact between the dependent person and the subject. In addition, the design of the experiment minimized the possibility that the effect previously obtained was due to the manner and style in which males and females verbally interact.

## D. THIRD STUDY

### 1. Method

The design was a  $2 \times 2$  factorial in which the sex of the experimenter and the sex of the subject were varied. In addition, a control group was used to test for any bias related to the different last names.

*a. Subjects.* The subjects were 150 male and 150 female undergraduates in residence in coed dorms at the University of Massachusetts.

*b. Procedure.* Subjects received a letter from another student asking them to participate in an experiment. The letter was of the same form as the dialogue used in the previous two experiments. The letter was signed

with either a male (Larry Hurwitz) or female (Janet Goode) name. Subjects were asked to return an enclosed stamped and addressed postcard indicating whether they would or would not participate by a specified date. Subjects who returned a postcard indicating they would participate were informed by mail that the experiment had been cancelled.

Since real addresses and names were used and there could be some effect associated with using different names, a control condition was run in which 25 males and 25 females received a letter from J. Goode and an equal number from L. Hurwitz.

## 2. Results

Thirty-five percent of the 300 subjects returned the postcard stating whether they would help. Neither the sex of the subject ( $\chi^2 = 2.18$ ,  $df = 1$ ), the sex of the experimenter ( $\chi^2 = .35$ ,  $df = 1$ ), nor the interaction effect ( $\chi^2 = .23$ ,  $df = 1$ ) was significant. In addition, there were no significant differences in return rate between the control J. Goode and L. Hurwitz letters for either male ( $\chi^2 = .47$ ,  $df = 1$ ) or female ( $\chi^2 = 2.00$ ,  $df = 1$ ) subjects.

An examination of the percentage of subjects returning the postcard who agreed to participate in the experiment revealed that more males were willing to help a female experimenter (33%) than a male experimenter (13%) and that females were more willing to help the male (53%) than the female (22%). There was no effect due to sex of experimenter ( $\chi^2 = .35$ ,  $df = 1$ ) nor to the sex of the subject ( $\chi^2 = .11$ ,  $df = 1$ ). However, the interaction effect was significant ( $\chi^2 = 6.21$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .02$ ). The help rate for the different name control letters was not significant for either the male subjects or the female subjects.

## 3. Discussion

Personal contact does not appear necessary for the interaction effect to occur. At the same time it is difficult to explain the discrepancy between the results of the present research and the results of the Gruder and Cook (7) experiment. There are a number of differences in procedure that may account for this inconsistency. However, there appears to be no obvious conceptual explanation available that would link these procedural differences to the different results.

Finally, in the last experiment to be described the same type of helping situation was examined with face-to-face contact.

## E. FOURTH STUDY

1. *Method*

Responses to a face-to-face request to participate in a psychology experiment were determined as they related to two variables, the sex of the experimenter, and the sex of the subject.

*a. Subjects.* The subjects were 158 male and 140 female undergraduates attending summer school at the University of Massachusetts. The experimenters were three male and three female undergraduates different from those used in previous experiments.

*b. Procedure.* Every third person who looked as if he might be a student was stopped by either a male or female experimenter as he/she entered the Campus Center and asked: "Excuse me, are you a student here? An undergraduate?" If the person said yes to both questions, he was counted as a subject. The dialogue then used was the same as in the previous studies.

2. *Results*

Neither the sex of the subject ( $\chi^2 = .32, df = 1$ ), the sex of the experimenter ( $\chi^2 = 1.92, df = 1$ ), nor the interaction effect ( $\chi^2 = .52, df = 1$ ) was significant. Thus, in the face-to-face situation, sex had no effect on helping behavior. Overall, 51% of the students agreed to help the experimenter.

3. *Discussion*

Since the results of this study showed no significant main effects nor any significant interaction effect, this study replicates the finding of no interaction effect in the previous face-to-face experiments. Though the limited amount of information available makes speculation hazardous, it is possible that factors other than sex become important in these situations. In non face-to-face situations the only personal information known about the experimenters is their name and sex. In a face-to-face situation the physical appearance and manner of the experimenter may play an important role. Some recent studies on interpersonal attraction lead one to believe that physical appearance is an extremely important factor. The different levels of physical attractiveness of the experimenters used in the present study is an unknown quantity and could have interacted with helping behavior.

Another somewhat related possibility is that the sex of the experimenter

may be more important in the abstract. Receiving a phone call or letter from someone of the opposite sex may generate fantasies in the recipient that would not occur in a face-to-face meeting. This has been known to happen in blind date situations. As long as there is no visual contact the subject can imagine that he is talking to that ideal person of the opposite sex.

A criticism that may be leveled against the present research is that it is based primarily on verbal behavior rather than actual helping behavior. However, Rosenthal and Rosnow (14), in discussing the volunteer subject, stated that three out of three studies indicated no sex differences in the number of subjects who said they would participate in an experiment but failed to show up. Thus, we can assume that the results of the present research would be reflected in actual participation.

## F. GENERAL DISCUSSION

On the basis of the four experiments presented it appears that these college students tended to help persons of the opposite sex more often than those of the same sex in situations in which there was no face-to-face contact. In addition the results of the first two experiments seem to rule out an ingratiation explanation of this interaction effect. The subjects did not appear to be concerned with either the date potential or the sex of the person that they were actually going to interact with in an experiment they were volunteering for. There are, however, a number of other possible explanations for the results that may apply to American college students:

### 1. *Discrimination and Dependency*

Some research has indicated that females devalue the female role in general, as well as each other's specific performances (9). This would lead women to feel that another female's request for help in an experiment is not as valid or important as a man's request, thus reducing the dependency of the experimenter. Since it has been shown in a number of experiments that dependency was positively related to helping, it would therefore be expected that females would help males more.

Males may also see the work of other males as more important than females. However, some research has suggested that males tend to help the less dependent individual (15). In addition, males may feel more competitive or threatened by other males in an academic setting. This would all seem to lead to males helping females more than males.

## 2. *Sex Role*

A sex-role explanation involves an examination of the traditional roles of males and females. An important aspect of the traditional male role is that of protector and provider for the female. In assuming this role males would be more likely to help females than males. The traditional female role that would be relevant in this situation is the woman as the nurturer and supporter of the goals and achievements of the male. In fulfilling this role she is more likely to aid males than females. The operation of these roles to produce an interaction effect probably depends upon the type of help that is needed. In the present situation it is appropriate for both males and females to help so the type of help is not confounded with sex role.

## 3. *Liking*

A simpler explanation is that members of the opposite sex like each other more than members of the same sex. Since liking of strangers has been shown to be positively related to helping behavior (4), one would expect to find a sex interaction effect. There are, however, some limitations to this explanation. Most studies rating the liking of same and opposite sex strangers have failed to find that opposite-sex strangers evaluate each other more positively than same-sex strangers. But, one recent experiment (6) found that males liked females more than males, but females liked males more only when the females were sexually aroused. This relationship does suggest new directions for future field research, but probably does not account for the interaction effect found in this study. Regardless of which explanation is the correct one, it is clear, in the present research, that the sex interaction effect is a reliable one.

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