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EFFECTS OF GENDER AND DRESS ON HELPING BEHAVIOR¹

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Summary.—The effects of gender and dress on helping behavior were examined. Perceptions and feelings influencing decisions to help were also investigated in an exploratory manner. 128 subjects were asked by a male or female confederate for 37¢ and afterwards completed a questionnaire. The confederates were either well-dressed or sloppily dressed. Analysis indicated that the woman was helped more than the man but that well-dressed and sloppily dressed confederates were helped equally. Subjects who helped generally perceived confederates to be needier than subjects who did not. Further, subjects who did not help reported greater discomfort from the helping request than subjects who helped.

The results of numerous studies of helping as a function of dress appear inconsistent. Some studies have shown significant differences when the type of dress was controlled (7, 12, 13, 15), whereas others did not (3, 4, 8, 11). For example, neatly dressed female confederates asking for a dime in an airport received money significantly more often than sloppily dressed peers (12). When the confederate attempted to buy an item in a convenience store, however, the dress of the confederate customer did not significantly affect the clerk's decision to allow the confederate to purchase an item when he did not have enough money (3).

These discrepancies appear to vary across testing environments as well as helping behaviors. Interactions between the type of dress and the nature of the request for help have been found (4, 10). For example, poorly dressed confederates asking directions to a thrift shop received more help than when asking directions to an elite tennis club, while well-dressed confederates received the same amount of help regardless of the location for which directions were requested (10).

Benson, Karabenick, and Lerner (2) proposed that helping well-dressed people is due to their perceived attractiveness. They suggested that attractive people are more likable than unattractive people and, therefore, are more apt to be helped. Juhnke, Barmann, Vickery, Cunningham, Hohl, Smith, and Quinones (10) proposed, however, that helping the sloppily dressed individual might be considered normative behavior because sloppily dressed

¹A version of the present study was presented in poster form at the Midwestern Psychological Association conference in May 1994 in Chicago. Thanks go to Dr. Linda Skitka for her help as a consultant and to the management and staff of Edwardsville's Wal-Mart store for their cooperation in conducting the field experiment. Requests for reprints may be addressed to D. A. Long, 408 South Cherry, Lamoni, Iowa 50140.

individuals are viewed as poor or disadvantaged, helping them is considered socially appropriate.

Kleinke (12) suggested that the perceived legitimacy of a woman's need for help explains the effect of type of dress. When the reason for the request is unknown, the well-dressed female is perceived as having a more justifiable reason for making a request and, therefore, will be helped more often. For example, subjects viewed well-dressed female confederates as needing a dime for a phone call, whereas those sloppily dressed were perceived as pan-handlers (12).

The effect of gender on helping behaviors has also been studied extensively. In most cases, in which the gender of the requester was different, women elicited more helping responses than men (3, 6, 11, 13, 16, 17). Eagly and Crowley (5), however, found an interaction between the gender of the requester and the gender of the subject. Male subjects helped female requesters more than males, whereas female subjects helped male and female requesters equally.

There are many hypotheses concerning gender differences in helping, but the most prevalent ones deal with sex roles and the social expectancies associated with them (5, 14, 16). The gender stereotypes that influence helping behaviors assume the perception that women need more help than men. Because women are "expected to behave in somewhat compliant and unassertive ways" (5, p. 286), they are expected to have a greater neediness than men who are expected to behave in chivalrous, "heroic, altruistic" ways (p. 284). Further, it has been observed that women may be perceived as needier than men when requesting aid from charitable organizations (14). Similarly, after helping victims on a crisis hotline, volunteer phone workers of both genders were more willing to keep in touch with female callers than male callers—emphasizing again the perception that women need more help than men (16).

One study (13) indicated an interaction between gender and type of dress. When standing by the side of the road in need of assistance, well-dressed women were helped more than either men or sloppily dressed women by passing motorists.

The purpose of the present study was to examine further the effects of gender and type of dress on helping behavior as well as to supplement results of previously conducted research. Two hypotheses were formulated: the woman would be helped more often than the man, and a well-dressed requester would be helped more than a sloppily dressed counterpart. Researchers have not commonly measured other perceptions affecting helping such as the perceived need of the requester, the perceived pressure to help, and the subjects' discomfort with the request. These perceptual and attitudinal variables were investigated in an exploratory manner.

METHOD

Subjects

One hundred twenty-eight subjects (45 men and 83 women) shopping at rural retail stores participated in the field experiment. There were 32 subjects in each of four experimental conditions. Male to female subject ratios within each condition were representative of the total sample (from 9:23 in the condition with the well-dressed male confederate to 13:19 for the well-dressed female confederate). Subjects were paying customers who entered a check-out line directly behind a confederate. Samples were made at 15-min. intervals for random selection and to avoid subjects viewing previous subject-confederate interactions.

Questionnaire

Following the experimental interaction, subjects were asked to complete a short questionnaire. Seven-point rating scales measured five factors hypothesized to influence decisions to help. A sixth open-ended item was also included. Table 1 displays these questions. All subjects were given a brief description of the study, including an experimenter's phone number, regardless of whether they agreed to complete the questionnaire.

TABLE 1
QUESTIONS PRESENTED TO SUBJECTS FOLLOWING THE HELPING INTERACTION

1.	To what extent was your decision to give influenced by how much money you had with you (or by whether you had the correct change)?
2.	To what degree did the person's overall appearance affect your decision to give the money?
3.	How pressured did you feel to give the person the requested amount?
4.	How much did you think this person really needed your help?
5.	How uncomfortable did the person asking for money make you feel?
6.	Please indicate below any other reasons why you decided to give, or not to give, the requested amount.

Note.—Questions 1 to 5 were answered on 7-point rating scales: 1 = "not at all" and 7 = "very much."

Procedure

At 15-min. intervals, a male and a female confederate entered separate checkout lines of a rural department store holding a pack of batteries to be purchased. Batteries were chosen as being of relatively neutral status. Confederates were either well dressed or sloppily dressed. For the well-dressed condition, the male confederate wore a coat and tie, slacks, and dress shoes; the female confederate wore a knee-length skirt, a business-type blouse, and high heeled shoes. For the sloppily dressed condition, the male wore stained sweat pants and a tee shirt, a sweat jacket, tennis shoes, and a baseball cap; the female wore attire similar to that of the male, except that a bandanna replaced the baseball cap.

Subjects were those paying customers who stood in line directly behind a confederate. On reaching the cashier with the item, the confederate pretended to be short 37¢ and began to search pockets or purse. The confederate then turned to the subject and asked for the needed change, saying "Excuse me, I seem to be short 37¢. . . . Could you spare 37¢?" A debriefing experimenter observing the interaction recorded the sex of the subject and the occurrence or lack of helping behavior.

If the subject gave the needed change, the confederate took the money, said "Thank you," paid for the item, then exited the store (the debriefing experimenter approached subjects after they had completed their own purchases and returned the 37¢). If the subject did not give the money, a dollar was eventually produced after continued search, enabling the confederate to pay for the item. Regardless of whether help was provided, the debriefing experimenter stopped subjects outside the store, informed them that they had just participated in an experiment, asked them to fill out a short questionnaire, and then gave them a debriefing sheet.

The same male and female confederates were used in both dress conditions. The confederates moved over one line every trial and were never in adjacent checkout lines. Confederates also changed clothes every hour to ensure that all conditions were represented in both the morning and afternoon trials. The two hypotheses tested were that the female confederate would be helped more often than the male confederate and that requesters would be helped more when well dressed than when sloppily dressed.

RESULTS

A saturated log-linear analysis (9) was conducted using SPSS-PC for analysis of the data. Analysis indicated that the woman was helped significantly more than the man (partial $\chi_1^2 = 6.07$, $p < .02$, $N = 128$) but that confederates were helped equally in the well- and sloppily dressed conditions (partial $\chi_1^2 = 0.77$, ns, $N = 128$); see Table 2 for cell counts.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF SUBJECTS WHO GAVE THE REQUESTED AMOUNT AS A FUNCTION
OF GENDER AND DRESS OF THE CONFEDERATE ($N = 128$, $ns = 32$)

Dress of Confederate	Gender of Confederate		Total
	Female	Male	
Well Dressed	29	22	51
Sloppily Dressed	26	21	47
Total	55	43	98

Post hoc saturated log linear analyses including the gender of the subject indicated there were no significant effects. Female and male subjects helped confederates equally regardless of confederates' dress (partial $\chi_1^2 = .50$, ns, $N = 128$) or gender (partial $\chi_1^2 = 0.70$, ns, $N = 128$).

Eighty-five percent of the subjects completed the questionnaire. The constructs from the questionnaire were analyzed using a 2 (gender of confederate) \times 2 (gender of subject) \times 2 (dress of confederate) \times 2 (gave, did not give) between-subjects *multivariate analysis of variance*. A *Wilks test* indicated a significant main effect for the variable ~~gave versus did not give~~ ($F_{5,84} = 2.68, p < .03$). Univariate statistics were significant for two of the five dependent measures; perception of need ($F_{1,88} = 6.05, p < .02$) and feeling uncomfortable ($F_{1,88} = 6.05, p < .02$). Subjects who gave the requested amount perceived confederates as needing help more than those who did not give. Further, subjects who did not give reported feeling more uncomfortable by the request than those who gave the requested amount. Means and SDs are displayed in Table 3.

TABLE 3
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR QUESTION RESPONSES
AS A FUNCTION OF GAVE VERSUS DID NOT GIVE

Question Number and Content	Gave		Did Not Give	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Amount of Money	2.3	1.9	3.3	2.4
2. Over-all Appearance	2.7	2.1	2.8	2.0
3. Pressure to Give	1.6	1.1	2.8	2.0
4. Perception of Need	4.5	2.1	3.2	2.4
5. Uncomfortable	2.0	1.4	3.6	2.1

A direct discriminant function analysis was performed using the five questionnaire variables, subjects' gender, confederates' gender, and confederates' dress as predictors of helping behavior (giving or not giving the requested amount). Twenty-five of the total 128 cases were excluded from the analysis because at least one discriminating variable was missing. One discriminant function was calculated ($\chi_8^2 = 27.11, p < .001$), accounting for 100% of the between-group variability. The discriminant function separated givers from nongivers, with group centroids at $-.25$ and 1.26 , respectively. The loading matrix of correlation coefficients between predictors and the discriminant function (displayed in Table 4) yielded only one predictor—Uncomfortable—with a loading greater than $.50$. Nongivers reported feeling more uncomfortable by the request for money than givers (see Table 3 for means and SDs).

Pooled within-group correlation coefficients among the predictors are also shown in Table 4. Of the 28 correlation coefficients, 4 would reach statistical significance (at $\alpha = .01$) if tested individually. The reported degree to which the confederate's appearance affected subjects' decisions to give (cf. 2, Table 1) correlated with the dress of the confederate ($r_{106} = -.28, p < .01$), how uncomfortable the request made them feel ($r_{106} = .36, p < .01$),

and how pressured they felt to give the requested amount ($r_{106} = .29, p < .01$). Decisions to give were indicated to be more affected by the confederate's appearance when well dressed than when sloppily dressed. The reported extent to which the confederate's appearance affected subjects' decisions to

TABLE 4
RESULTS OF THE DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION ANALYSIS OF
QUESTIONNAIRE AND DICHOTOMOUS VARIABLES

Predictor	r^{\dagger}	F_{101}^{\ddagger}	r							
			2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	
1. Gender of Confederate	-.38	4.43	.00	-.08	-.05	.13	-.02	.00	.05	
2. Dress of Confederate	.32	2.71		-.02	.00	.01	-.11	-.04	-.28*	
3. Gender of Subjects	-.15	0.09			.04	.01	.11	.00	-.01	
4. Money	.29	3.33				.03	.23	.17	.23	
5. Neediness	-.29	4.77					-.12	-.24	-.06	
6. Pressure	.24	10.26						.64*	.29*	
7. Uncomfortable	.62	15.79							.36*	
8. Appearance	-.24	0.03								
Canonical R	.49									
Eigenvalue	.32									

*Correlation coefficients would be significant at $\alpha = .01$ if tested individually.
 $\dagger r$ s for predictor variables with the discriminant function. \ddagger Univariate.

give was greater when they felt pressured and uncomfortable by the request for money. Reported feelings of being pressured and uncomfortable by the request were correlated ($r_{106} = .64, p < .01$), indicating that the more pressured subjects felt by the request the more uncomfortable they were with the request.

DISCUSSION

The present study replicated findings in which women received help more often than men (3, 6, 11, 13, 16, 17). This "gender effect," however, cannot be interpreted as such in the present study. Because the same male and female confederates were used throughout the study, the effect could have been associated with a personal characteristic other than gender such as height, attractiveness, or geniality.

No significant differences for dress of the confederates were indicated in the present study, corroborating the findings of previous research (3, 4, 8, 11). Kleinke's (12) legitimacy theory states that, when the purpose of a request is unknown, well-dressed individuals will be helped more often than those sloppily dressed because their request will be seen as more legitimate. Although no explanation *per se* was offered in the present study for why confederates were short of funds, the purpose of the request was evident. It is reasonable to assert, therefore, that well- and sloppily dressed confederates

were helped alike because they were perceived as having equally legitimate reasons for making the request.

The greatest consequence to research on helping behaviors that the present study offers is procedural as much as corroboratory. The use of questionnaires immediately following the helping request was shown to be a practical tool for measuring perceptual and attitudinal variables associated with these interactions. When asked to respond to questions about their behaviors, nongivers reported feeling more pressured and more uncomfortable during the helping interaction than did givers. Nongivers, whether angered or embarrassed by the helping request, likely were just as uncomfortable in afterwards recalling their refusal or inability to help. Givers, on the other hand, were doubtless encouraged by the remembrance and recognition of their altruistic actions. Follow-up studies can explore these and other attitudes and perceptions that may influence helping responses.

Helping is more likely to occur in rural settings than in urban ones (18). Although spontaneous helping is less predictable than planned helping, it nevertheless correlates with social network variables. Rural communities are, for example, associated with larger social networks than urban ones, e.g., number of years lived in the same neighborhood, number of neighbors known on a first-name basis, number of club and organizational meetings attended (1). In the present study, 77% of the total sample assisted the confederates in their request. Follow-up studies can increase the variability of helping responses by raising the amount of money requested or by conducting the field experiment in urban or mixed rural and urban settings.

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