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Naturalistic Observation: Appearance and Gender Discrimination Reflecting on Helping Behavior in RDFZ Xishan

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Abstract: When people do something, their behavior is often influenced by the object which accepts it. So, when people make helpful behavior, we are studying what kind of people the recipients of help are? Will people help selectively because of the appearance of the people they are helping? Because people are biased. Moreover, with the increasing complexity of society, stereotypes of people are affecting their behavior. They may discriminate against some people, or they may favor some people. Thus, we designed this study to research how external discrimination, including appearance and gender, affects helping behavior. Therefore, through natural observation, we test in the elevator of RDFZ Xishan to explore whether the helping behavior of people is affected by the appearance and gender of the helped. We chose height, body shape, gender, appearance, and making up as independent variables. The proportion of people who are willing to help in the elevator will become the dependent variable. Finally, through the experiment, we conclude that these factors will affect the helping behavior of people to a certain extent, but they will not play a decisive role.

Keywords: *Helping Behavior, External Discrimination, Features, Genders, and Bias*

1. Introduction

Helping behavior is a behavior providing aid to another person, and it is also an action that reveals a part of prosocial behavior in society. The importance of helping behavior is evident. After all, every person may encounter a situation where they need help. This behavior used to be unconditional, which means people will help others when they see somebody need help. However, helping behavior is declining for some reasons as the development of this society. The reasons include greater ethnic diversity and more significant discrimination in the society, greater complexity of society, less trust between people. As a result, we designed this study to research how external discrimination, including appearance and gender, affects helping behavior in a Beijing high school called RDFZ Xishan.

The study we conduct concentrates on the people who are helped by others. Through our research, we expect to know which type of people are more likely to be helped by strangers in the school. It possesses a tremendous contemporary implication as helping behavior plays a vital role in our society. According to our online research, none of the research entirely focuses on people who have helped before. Hence, our research is a more original one.

A study co-authored by four authors and one of the authors named Todd Lucas, a professor at Michigan State University owed a Ph.D., has shown that socially anxious people sometimes consume with an attentional bias. There is a tendency to only concentrate on a few possible options and ignore the rest when we make decisions, which means they are overly concerned and focused on others' appearance (Karakashian, L et al., 2006). Therefore, appearance becomes a more significant determinant in helping behaviors, at least in China, as more mental disorders have become more common across China in recent thirty years. Anxiety disorder is the most common among all these mental disorders. According to a nationally representative survey on mental health conducted by a group led by Huang Yueqin, director of the Division of Social Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine at Peking University's Institute of Mental Health. Furthermore, among the few previous studies that can be a reference, one of the studies done by a Family Nurse Practitioner from the University of Texas, who also received her Masters of Science in Nursing, had proved that some vulnerable groups, like ill victims, are more likely to be helped (Russel, J, 2020). Consequently, we can reasonably guess that people who seem weak are more likely to get help.

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Besides, there are also former researches that provide us information that is indirectly related to our research, and both could be the confounding variables of our research. The first study was a Ph.D. thesis from ProQuest, a website that provides applications and products for libraries, carried out by Neander, L. It examines whether the internal emotions of people and states affect how they give and receive help, and its results show that different genders had different results. For women, the higher their self-esteem, the less likely they were to seek or receive help, and the higher their social status, they were more likely to seek or receive help. The opposite is true for men (Neander, L., 2018). In our experiment, it is easy for us to control the states of all the volunteers since we are doing it in the school. However, it is almost impossible for us to command the emotion and self-esteem of the volunteers. Another study mentioned an experiment did in 1968 that proved the idea of the bystander effect, a tendency for bystanders to be less likely to help others as more bystanders appear. It is another confounding variable in our experiment. The researchers of that experiment, Darley, J. M and Latane, B, hypothesized that the chance for bystanders to intervene in an emergency would be smaller when more people are in that situation, and the result of that experiment also proved their hypothesis (Cieciura 2016). Since our experiment would record the percentage of people who help others, the number of bystanders would affect our experiment somewhat. As a result, the internal emotions and status of people being helped and bystander effect might be the confounding variables of our study, so we need to be familiar with all this information.

2. Method

We mainly use the natural observation method to observe a subject in its standard-setting, controlling a few confounding variables. Firstly, we listed all the factors that might influence helping behavior. They conclude into five groups, gender, height, figure, appearance, and dress-up. Two of the tallest and two of the shortest people in the grade were chosen in the height group. The average height of girls and boys in Haidian is 164 and 175, respectively; the subjects we selected were 10cm or more above (below) the average height. We did not choose a weight for the body type group but terms of "size of the body." We chose "fat" and "thin" subjects that were obvious from their appearance.

For whether to dress up, the object we chose possesses dress-up traces, such as thick makeup or noticeable perfume, hair gel. It is relatively simple to define variables like gender, height, figure, and dress-up since these are more objective variables compared to other variables. Nevertheless, it is harder to determine some variables ourselves, like appearance (pretty and not pretty in our research variables). So we did a brief interview to investigate some volunteer candidates to determine the most "pretty" one and the most "ugly" one in their thinking. We regard these variables as independent variables of our experiment. The rest are variables that need to be controlled, such as space and familiarity with their people. So, we first identified the space in which the experiment took place -- the elevator. There is not much space, but there are enough people to be sure. The elevator avoids the situation where too few people are around, and the helpers are not enough to complete the research.

Furthermore, we decided all the volunteers have to be in the same status. In our case is that we chose students of the same age for the volunteers in our study. Because according to the previous research related to our study, the volunteer status can be a confounding variable in our study, so we should try our best to limit it.

The behavior we choose to be helped with is "dropping some paper," which is the dependent behavior of our study. Dropping some paper is common but complex trouble to clean up on one's own. Moreover, it is not heavy or small to avoid confusion or accidents in the elevator. Then, we determine the time of the experiment -- every day except Weekends at 7:20-7:25, 12:00 - 12:05, and 15:55-16:00, from May 25th to June 3rd, as those periods are the peak hours for elevators which means we can get many helpers with minimal effort.

After determining most of the variables that we could control easily, we began to look for volunteers who were willing to help us in the experiment and met the varying requirements. We ended up with 20 volunteers, two people of different genders for each trait (Table 1).

Table 1 Groups of volunteers

girl	boy	high	short	Heavy	thin	Pretty	unpretty	dress up	not dress up
AB	C D	E F	G H	I J	K L	M N	O P	Q R	S T

Then we guided them to "drop paper" on the elevator in different periods according to the time plan. And then we looked on and recorded the reactions of the other people on the elevator that included the

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action of help picking papers, the tendency to help the volunteer and ask someone else to help the volunteer, the number of people willing to help, and the total number of people in the elevator except the volunteer who responsible for dropping paper and ourselves as we need to calculate the percentage of it. Moreover, two things need to notice during the recording process. The first one is that observers cannot offer to be the first ones to help the volunteer because, according to our background research about the bystander effect, our action will also affect the helpers' actions, which will significantly affect our research data. Furthermore, the second one is that we have to record some unique situations in each case. For example, we encountered a situation a few times that the elevator contained too many people, which caused the crowd situation in the elevator.

Consequently, some volunteers did not complete the "drop paper "behavior, which failed the experiment. Some helpers could not bend over to help others pick up the paper, which also led to inaccuracy in the experiment. Moreover, both of them were because the elevator was too crowd.

3. Result

Based on 17 participants, the study focuses on the people who are being helped by others. Moreover, according to our research, we find different features of them. For data collection and analysis, we figured out the percentage of people who help them. If the percentage is higher than 20%, then the participants with this characteristic of helping frequency are high. After conducting a natural observation study for several days, our group collected the following information based on our study. The data and the information of the study are provided below.

Table 2 The information about the height of the participants and the percentage of people helps them

Participants	Height	Percentage of helping them
A	high	63%
B	high	25%
C	short	60%
D	short	50%

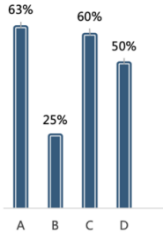

Figure 1: The relationship between the height of participants and the helping frequency

It can be seen from Figure 1 that A, who has a high height, is significantly higher than the other three people. However, B, who also has high height, has the lowest people to help compared to the short height participants. Furthermore, C has 60% people to help, and D is 50% higher than the taller people on average.

Table 3 The information about the gender of the participants and the percentage of people helps them

Participant	Gender	Percentage of helping them
E	Female	25%
F	Male	50%

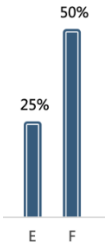

Figure 2: The relationship between gender of participants and the helping frequency

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It can be seen from Figure 2 that the helping frequency of males is 50% and is higher than females. The help frequency of females is the lowest, which is 25%.

Table 4 The information about the weight of the participants and the percentage of people helps them

Participant	Weight	Percentage of helping them
G	high	20%
H	high	50%
I	low	33%
J	low	0%

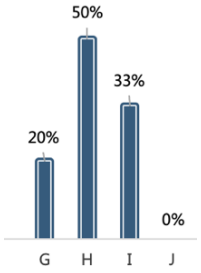

Figure 3: The relationship between the weight of participants and the helping frequency

We noticed that H, which has the highest weight, is much higher than the other three. Compared to I, which has a lower weight than G, it has a higher percentage of 33%, while G has 20% people lend a helping hand. Moreover, the lowest percentage of helping people is J, who only has 0% help J.

Table 5 The information about the appearance of the participants and the percentage of people helps them

Participants	Appearance	Percentage of helping them
K	most people like	50%
L	most people like	25%
M	most people do not like	14%
N	most people do not like	0%

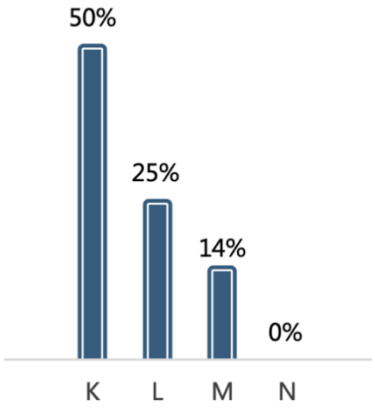

Figure 4: The relationship between appearance of participants and helping frequency

Figure 4 and Table 5 show an apparent difference between appearance and the percentage of people who help them. Participants K and L who have good appearance have 50% and 25% people help them, which is more than the helping percentage of M and N who have the appearance that most people do not like.

Table 6 The information about makeup participants and the percentage of people help them

Participant	Make up	Percentage of helping them
O	make up	0%
R	make up	20%
P	did not make up	50%

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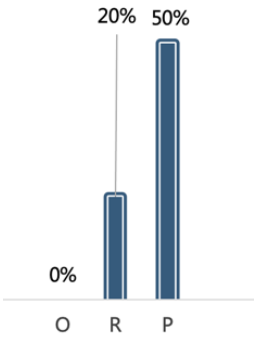

Figure 5: The relationship between whether to make up and helping frequency

The figure shows us that P obtains 50% help which is significantly larger than makeup participants. Moreover, O, which makes up only has 0% of people, helps this participant. And even though R, who is makeup, gets 20% help, the percentage of people helping R is still smaller than the percentage of P, which does not make up.

4. Discussion

Our research focuses on the relationship between the different features and genders and the percentage of people being helped. Based on our results, we will analyze and discuss the results in five different features and genders in the following paragraphs.

For the different heights of participants, we could see people who have short height have a higher percentage of people to help. There is no significant effect between different heights and the percentage of people lend a helping hand. However, if we calculate the average data of participants with relatively short height (55%), it will be found that they are larger than those with tall height (44%). Indeed, according to our previous assume which we thought short-height people were more likely to get help, the results corresponded with our expectations. Importantly, we consider that short people are more likely to be helped because they seem to be weaker than taller people. When they meet difficulties, they may seem complicated to solve their problems, so it is easier to get help from the people around them.

Somewhat surprisingly, as for the different gender of participants, we found that males are more relatively get help than females. Frankly, before we do the study, we consider that females are more likely to be helped because they appear smaller and fragile. Moreover, we did our study in high school; the result shows that more people help males than females probably because boys are more active in school. Research suggests that boys are more prevalent in elementary school than girls because they are more active than girls. (Patricia A. et al., 1992)

For the different weights of participants, we could notice that people who have high weight are more likely to get help. We assume that the phenomenon is possible because people with high weight seem harder to pick something up. Hence, people around them are more likely to help them when they see their paper drop, while people who have low weight seem to be able to move around more efficiently, and those around them who see their paper drop may think they can pick it up, so they are less likely to help them.

In the "good-looking" and "not good-looking" groups, those who were more beautiful or handsome in the popular definition received more help, on average, which is in line with our expectations. We think this may be because people are more likely to help people they think are attractive. Furthermore, studies have shown that people want to make a better impression when attractive people see them. So, they are willing to help them get some attention. More good-looking people will be more popular, so more people will be familiar with them and willing to help them.

As for the "makeup or not" group, those who do not makeup received more help, on average. It is not what we expected. We believe that a well-dressed person will look more refined and, as mentioned above, better looking and toned. So, we guess that people who make up are more likely to be helped. Nevertheless, the people who do not makeup got more help because they seem more down-to-earth and need help. Because the people who have no sense of existence because they do not dress up look more like vulnerable groups. Moreover, the people who makeup often let strangers feel distant; people tend not to actively socialize with them and, therefore, do not actively help them.

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Overall, our comprehensive study was as expected - their appearance and gender influenced helpful behavior, but it was not deterministic. Everyone has different aesthetic preferences and inclusiveness. This result is also within the range of our expectations. Furthermore, we plan to publish our research results to the public on a famous essay website in China called China National Knowledge Infrastructure. We will also make some public speaking in a few Beijing high schools, including our school, trying to eliminate or ease the appearance and gender discrimination in helping behaviors and let people be more helpful to everyone.

Nevertheless, confounding variables still occur in our study, which made our study results less accurate. Bystander effect and internal emotion are two confounding variables discussed in the introduction part. There is a limitation of people who are the helpers, which means the subjects of our study might be simplex, which will affect our research result. Furthermore, some people who are one of the participators of our study used to say what we were doing out loud in the elevator, which was during our research time, even though we had already reminded them not to tell others before the research. As a result, turning it into an experiment may help us get results with higher accuracy as we can control the confounding variables in our study. For example, we can choose various places to conduct our experiment, which can ease the singularity of people who play the role of helpers in our study. Furthermore, more time means we can enrich our data, making our results more accurate.

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