Human Altruism Towards Diverse Individuals

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Abstract

Human altruism, the will to help a stranger with no personal gain, was tested in the following study. The researcher dressed in three different outfits that represented three defining social cliques (Emo, Trendy, and Nerdy) and went to two popular stores (Bed Bath and Beyond and Super 1 Foods). The researcher simulated a trip and fall in front of a randomly selected individual and dropped five items from her arms. The number of items picked up by the shopping individual was measured in reference to the different states of dress and store location. The Trendy outfit had a significantly larger number of items picked up than the other two outfits. The Emo outfit resulted in a significantly small number of total items picked up. This study shows how quickly an average individual makes a snap decision based on appearances. Appearances, in this case, changed the willingness to help a vulnerable person who had tripped and fell.

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In this study, human altruism will be tested; a behavior that is costly in the actor but beneficial to the recipient. In this, I will dress myself in three diverse social outfits and see the willingness in individuals at different shopping locations to stray from their regular routine to help me. Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck (2002) found that "A reputation for behaving altruistically is another powerful mechanism for the enforcement of cooperation in public good situations" Situations, such as being in different public locations, can affect the individual's response to a stimulus, and can change the individual's reaction and ultimately their altruistic behavior. The evolution of helping nonkin individuals has been studied and debated for decades. "Others consider the joint evolution of helping and punishing behaviors, whereby a punisher pays a cost to reduce the fitness of other individuals." (Henrich & Boyd, 2001) Boyd and Richerson (2002) found that social behaviors of those around individuals also highly impacts the willingness to change their altruistic behavior. They created something called the 'imitation rule': "conformist-based imitation, whereby individuals imitate whatever behaviors is the most frequent in their local group." If this rule is correct, then it would be reasonable to assume that if an individual witnesses another assist me in helping my dropped items up, and the reward is "worth it" to them, then they will help. Altruism towards nonkin shows a lack of adaptation, either because of individuals are altruistic, or because they unknowingly pick up altruistic behavior from others. (Lehmmann, et al., 2008b) As I briefly mentioned before, personal gain plays an incredibly large role in altruism in individuals. Sachs 2004 found, "The first class of explanations for cooperation is that it may provide a direct fitness benefit to the individual that performs the behavior, which outweighs the cost of performing the behavior." There are no known studies on the difference of altruism based on appearances, however altruism has been

studied for centuries. I will be studying the effect of location (different classes of stores), and

appearance ("nerdy", "emo", and "trendy") and measure the amount of items picked up, if any.

Methods

For this study, participants will be chosen based on their location in the selected stores

(Bed, Bath and Beyond and Super 1 Foods). The participants will be of eighteen years of age or

older. The selection inside the stores will be based on convenience, those who are not in an

obvious rush, but those who are shopping idly or wandering. The materials used are: a notebook,

a set of keys, a bag of chips, a deck of cards, a jacket and the researcher for the items being

dropped. There will also be factors of the researcher's dress, various hair styles, three different

colored jeans, three different styles and colors or shirts, and various amounts of makeup. The

independent variable of this study is the varied appearances of the researcher and the different

the stores. The dependent variable is whether or not the individual helped, if yes, how many

items were picked up, the researcher included. This study uses a within-groups design. The

procedures are as follows: the researcher, dressed in one of three stereotypical dresses, will

approach the individuals as if to pass behind or in front of them, and drop all of the items as the

researcher simulates a trip and fall. The researcher does not rush to pick up the items, but at the

same time attempts to slowly gather the items. The researcher's assistant is out of sight but is

videotaping the subject's reaction and records the amount of items picked up. The subject is

never told that they were part of a study and is therefore unaffected by the study besides the

minimal moral dilemma of aiding the researcher.

Results

After conducting the experiment, it became prevalent that individuals were more

apt to aid the "Trendy" outfitted person over the "Nerdy" and "Emo". The total number of items

picked up by bystanders for the trendy outfit was twenty-five; for Nerdy, nine; then for Emo, only one item was picked up. Between the two stores, there was no real correlation. The means and standard deviation for the following outfits are as follows: the mean of Emo was .1000 with a standard deviation of .31623. Nerdy had a mean of .9000 and a standard deviation of 1.10050. Lastly, Trendy had a mean of 2.6000, and a standard deviation of .96609.
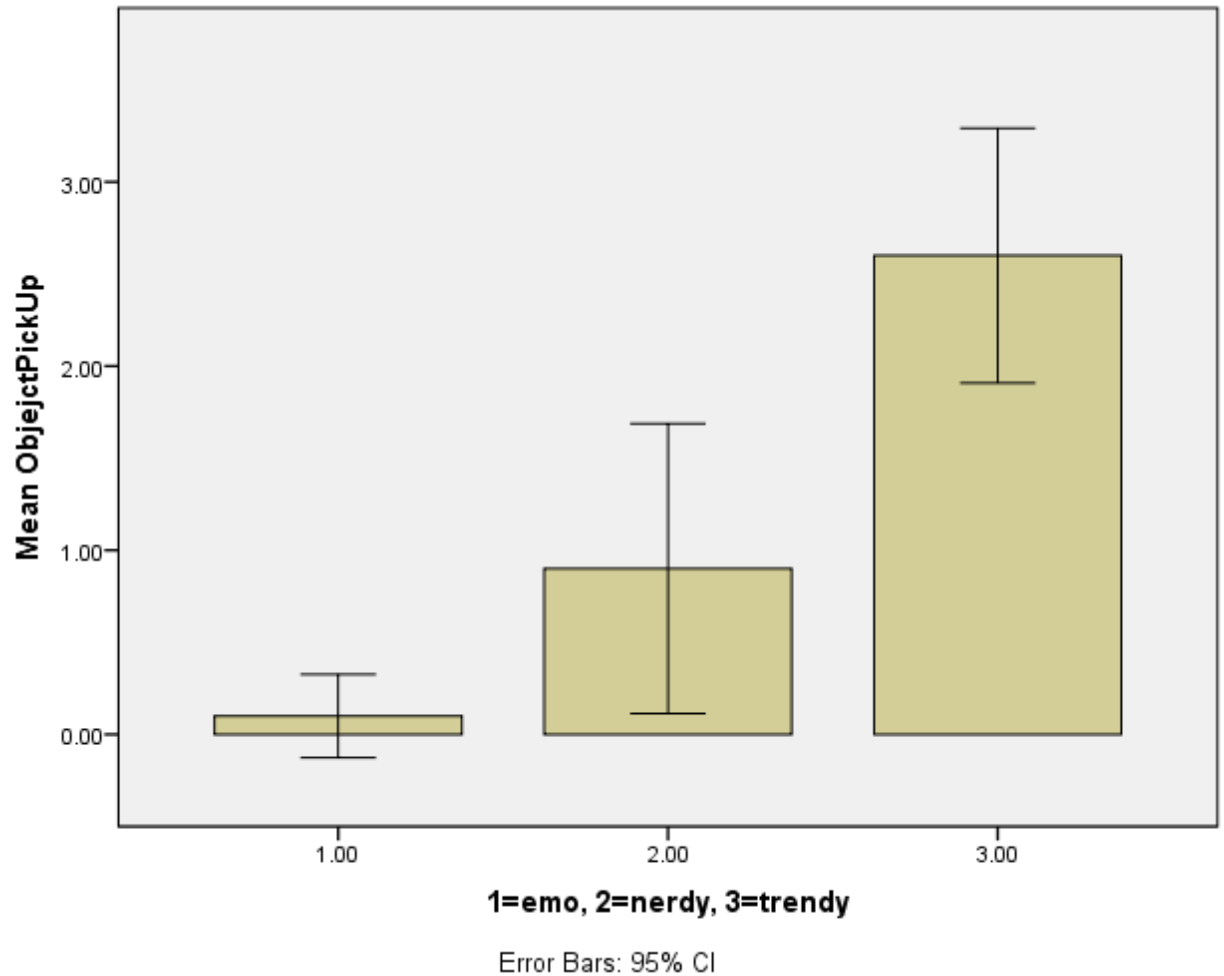
Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The categories of 1=emo, 2=nerdy 3=trendy occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	1.000[1]	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The categories defined by 1=Bed Bath and Beyond, 2=Super 1 = 1.00 and 2.00 occur with probabilities 0.5 and 0.5.	One-Sample Binomial Test	1.000[1]	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of ObjejctPickUp is normal with mean 1.20 and standard deviation 1.349.	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	.000[1]	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

[1]Lilliefors Corrected

As shown in the chart above, the study had a p value of .05, and was significant in the sense of object pickup between the different outfits.

Discussion

In this study, human altruism was tested against different states of stereotypical dress associated with social cliques. These different dresses were: Emo, which can be described as an individual with significantly large amounts of the color black in their dress and hair that covers the eyes. Nerdy consisted of large glasses and hair that is pulled back away from the face, and a graphic tee shirt that has the conception of "nerdy" itself. The Trendy outfit donned white skinny jeans and a popular state of dress with an infinity scarf and light, sparkly makeup. The researcher then went to two different stores and dropped five items in front of a random shopper. The

number of items that were picked up by the shopping individual was measured. One significant difference between the reaction between outfits was when the researcher was dressed in the Trendy outfit, nearly all of the individuals who rushed to her aid immediately picked her up, then bent down to assist her with picking up her items. The other outfits did not receive this treatment, only a few words to assure she was okay, then moved on. When the Trendy-outfitted individual tripped and fell, the shoppers often smiled and assured that it was okay, and that there was nothing to be embarrassed about. The study found that individuals were more likely to aid the Trendy outfitted individual than the Nerdy and Emo individuals. This shows how deeply appearance effects the will to help another person with no personal gain. There appears to be a stereotype around the different social cliques in society, and it in turn affects the kindness of a stranger. Perhaps this bias against individuals who have very outspoken states of dress can come from a social expectation of how to react around these individuals. There is a well-known social bias against "punk" individuals, they are seen as "bad influences". In this study, there was a control with the researcher's physical appearance, the study solely tested the dress of the individual and was not affected by the "looks" of the researcher. Because the individual dropping the items was the same, there existed a control in the physical appearance of the individual and the dependent variable was only the state of dress.

To conclude, there exists a very profound bias in an individual's altruism towards strangers, based solely on their appearance. When the researcher dressed in an outfit that is commonly regarded as attractive, the response was shockingly different from the response of the other two outfits. Shoppers rushed to the Trendy character's aide, speaking in a supporting manner and even going as far as physically helping her up before gathering her items. When the Emo-dressed individual tripped and fell, scattering her items across the floor the subject time and

time again either asked curtly if she was okay or said nothing at all and left the scene. The Nerdy

outfit provoked a response that sits between the two responses. The results show that the

responses were neither significantly helpful nor rude. Many subjects picked up one or two items,

asked if the researcher was okay, then promptly went back to their shopping. Looking into the

study, it is often discomforting to think that an everyday person would make a snap judgement

within the time of seeing the researcher trip and fall, and decide on whether or not to aid a

vulnerable person.

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