

SELF-REPORTED HELPING BEHAVIOR AND GENDER

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tämä tutkielma käsittelee sukupuolieroja auttamiskäyttäytymisessä. Tutkimus toteutettiin englanninkielisellä kyselylomakkeella internetissä. Kyselylomakkeessa vastaajien tuli kertoa sukupuolensa, johon identifioituvat, ikäryhmänsä, vastata kuuteen avoimeen kysymykseen ja kertoa, miten he käyttäytyisivät erilaisissa kuvitteellisissa tilanteissa, joissa heidän läheinen ystävänsä pyysi heiltä apua. Tilanteet liittyivät kuuteen eri teemaan, joiden on tutkittu vaikuttavan eniten ihmisten onnellisuuteen: psyykinen sekä fyysinen terveys, siviilisääty, raha, työ ja koulu. Lisäksi yhdessä kysymyksessä vastaajien tuli muistella viimeisintä kertaa, jolloin heidän ystävänsä on pyytänyt heiltä apua jossakin asiassa tai valittanut jostain ongelmastaan.</p> <p>Vastauksista etsittiin kolmea eri auttamiskäyttäymisteemaa: samankaltaisten ongelmien/kokemusten jakaminen, toiminnan ehdottaminen ja henkinen tuki. Oletuksena oli, että naiseksi identifioituvat osoittaisivat auttamiskäyttäytymisessään enemmän samankaltaisten ongelmien jakamista sekä henkisen tuen antamista. Miehiksi identifioituvien oletettiin osoittavan enemmän toimintaehdotuksia.</p> <p>Lopullisessa analyysissä käytettiin 23 naisen ja yhdeksän miehen vastauksia. Tulokset paljastivat naisten ja miesten auttamiskäyttäytymisen olevan hyvin samankaltaista ja erot prosenttiyksiköissä olivat vähäisiä.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Most psychologists agree that gender is one of the most important social categories (Weatherall and Gallois 2003, 487) and it is probably one of the first things we notice when we meet a new person. Gender differences have been studied extensively by numerous scholars, researchers and students, and a lot of information is available on what is typical behavior for males, females, and nowadays more and more on other genders that do not fall into the traditional polarized view on gender. Stereotypes on different genders' behavior exist for a reason, but which came first: the behavior or the stereotypes? The behavior we think is typical for each gender can be a prophecy that fulfills itself – people's sex is determined at birth, or even before that, and since that moment they are being told how to act and look accordingly (Cameron 2007, Tannen 1990, 43). This is fortified by the media, other people and society (Cameron 2007, 3–4, 23; Eagly and Koenig 2006, 165). Different sexes may have different genitalia, but our identities go way beyond that. Some scientists explain gender differences by differences in the brain, but this has also been questioned by recent research (Joel 2015).

The focus of this study is to examine gender differences in self-reported helping behavior and question if there are any, focusing on three different categories that the majority of previous studies (Tannen 1990 58,; Eagly 1987, 44–48; Eagly 2009) link to specific genders: suggesting action, problem matching and emotional support. Suggesting specific actions and giving more “concrete” advice has been considered a male attribute, whereas problem matching and emotional support female attributes. Previous studies suggest that males tend to be more solution-oriented in their helping behavior compared to females and females rely more on giving emotional support and problem matching – giving an example of a similar situation from their own lives (Tannen 1990: 51, 58–59).

The aim of this thesis is to see if the gender traits mentioned above are applicable to a targeted convenience sample. The study was conducted with a small sample of 9 males and 23 females aged between 18 to 30 years. The participants can be assumed to be mostly university students, since the request to do the questionnaire was sent to three different university e-mail lists. The participants had to imagine themselves in different kinds of situations where they had to help and advice their friends and describe how they would assume themselves to act. Some situations were more

emotional and others more action-focused. None of the situations required direct action (for example calling an ambulance or helping to carry something heavy), but mainly only discussing the friend's problem. There was also an additional question where the participants were asked to recall a real-life situation where their friend had come to them in need of help and describe their reactions then.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The major inspiration for this thesis came from Deborah Tannen's book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990). In her book Tannen discusses the differences between men and women's conversational style and uses anecdotes as examples. One anecdote is about a woman, Eve, who has undergone breast cancer surgery where her other breast was removed. She is upset about her scar and complains about it to her female friends who have also had surgery. They respond with sympathy and similar feelings about their surgery scars, which makes Eve feel better because her emotions are justified. When Eve tells her husband Mark about her discomfort about how the scars look like, he responds "You can have plastic surgery to fix that". Eve is appalled by this, because having more surgery is the last thing she wants. Mark does not understand why Eve is so upset with his advice, since in his opinion she clearly asked for it. Eve feels like Mark does not like the scars either, even though he convinces her that he does not mind them. This leads to an argument and in the end both are left upset and feeling misunderstood. (Tannen 1990, 49–50)

The example of Eve and Mark probably resonates with numerous people. One of this thesis' aims is to study if this type of difference between genders is notable or could it also work the other way around: a woman tries to offer a solution, but the man is only seeking for sympathy. Since *You Just Don't Understand* was published over 30 years ago, the situation could have changed. Gender roles have shifted and it is becoming more common for people to identify their gender as something different than their sex. In this thesis only the help-giving viewpoint is examined, but from that it can be already seen if men and women do not all fall in to two groups according to their gender so clearly anymore. It can be assumed that the two groups will form, but not necessarily so that one group is dominated by one gender. In *You Just Don't Understand* Tannen tends to divide people into two groups only according to their sex and does not discuss the exceptions. There could be many other contributing factors, such as upbringing, social circles and education. Tannen also gives mostly examples that support her claims about gender differences. The reliability of Tannen's examples can also be questioned – if they are just stories her friends have told her, how reliable and trustworthy are they as a source?

Eagly (1987) supports the argument that women are more altruistic in their helping. Women tend to provide emotional support and counseling and they also show more compassion towards those in need of help. Schulte-Rüther et al. (2008) support this statement, verifying that women get higher scores in empathy tests significantly more often than men, and also perform better in emotional tasks. According to Schulte-Rüther et al.'s neurological study, a typical female brain has better empathizing capabilities whereas the male brain has higher systemizing capabilities.

According to Eagly, the statement that men try to help with concrete actions is somewhat scientifically supported. She discusses about men behaving heroically in helping situations, but how that has gained only "limited evidence", since heroism is mostly needed in quite unusual and extreme situations and not in daily life and regular helping situations. Eagly summarizes this just about this way: not all men are heroes, but most noted heroes are men. Thus, men are more associated with helping acts that require concrete actions. Chivalry is also more of a manly trait; actions like holding the door, carrying the luggage and helping a woman to put on her coat are seen as chivalry and how an ideal man should behave. According to Eagly, women also receive more this type of help than men. She also mentions that this type of "agentic behavior" is expected from men more than from women, as women are stereotypically seen as dependant and submissive. (Eagly 1987, 44–48) Eagly does argue though that the strict division between men and women can be oversimplified and does not take into account the fine details, such as the difference between public and private life (Eagly 1987, 20).

Since Eagly's article *Sex Differences in Social Behavior* (1987) was published almost 30 years ago, many of its statements could be outdated. A more recent article by Eagly, *The his and hers of prosocial behavior: An examination of the social psychology of gender* (2009) still makes similar statements about males' and females' sex roles, though. But it can be argued, that during the 2000s and 2010s the importance of chivalry has decreased and many women do not want to be seen as dependant. For example sharing the bill in restaurants is more common and women want to pay their own share. In western cultures at least individuality and independency are increasingly more valuable traits and for example housewives are even frowned upon. Gender equality has shifted both genders' roles and the lines between feminine and masculine behavioral patterns have blurred noticeably. Eagly's statements give this thesis something to reflect on; has anything changed, and if it has, how?

MacGeorge (2003) introduces findings that support the notion that women are more sympathetic than men in her article. According to her, if men seek emotional support, they turn to women rather than men. This can result from the notion that men perceive the emotional support from men lower in quality and quantity. The article also states that men are more judgmental towards each other if they perceive that their problems are self-caused. This kind of behavior MacGeorge refers to as “ethic of justice”, and women’s nurturing manner of approach as “ethic of care”, which supports the different women’s and men’s helping qualities mentioned earlier in this chapter. MacGeorge also argues that in many studies the importance of gender as an affecting factor has been neglected since there is profound evidence that gender is an important attribute in many aspects, including helping behavior.

Birditt and Fingerman’s (2003) article discusses not only gender’s, but also age’s influence to helping behavior. In article’s study men and women had to think of their emotions last time they were upset with their friend, family member or partner and rate the intensity and duration of those emotions. It was discovered that women rated their emotions to be stronger than men’s and the feeling also lasted for a longer period of time, with the exception of middle-aged and oldest participants. It was also noted that middle-aged and oldest men seek emotional support mostly from their wives, which agrees with most other studies (Tannen 1990, MacGeorge 2003).

A study conducted in Finland between 1984 and 1987 offers very contradicting results compared to other previous research. Salminen and Glad (1992) introduce a study that examined real crisis center phone calls. The callers’ sex was determined by their voice only and no other personal information was gathered. The crisis center workers were volunteers, 22 women and 18 men. The study was very different compared to other studies in that time, since the situations were authentic and not set up or artificial. The results showed that the calls received by women were longer in duration, no matter the caller’s gender, which supports for example MacGeorge’s and Birditt and Fingerman’s statements that men, and in this case also women, tend to seek emotional support from women. What is contradictory, though, is that the callers preferred advice from their own gender, which disagrees with MacGeorge; that men rate emotional support from other men as poorer in quality compared to that from women. Also, both male and female callers helped more female callers by just listening, which disagrees with Eagly’s and Tannen’s results that men would be more

solution-oriented, even though all these publications focus around the same time period. All the three studies' samples are also from first-world western societies, Finland and USA.

What needs to be taken into consideration in Salminen and Glad's research is that it too can be outdated. If the same study was conducted in Finland today the results could be very different. Salminen and Glad also refer to many studies that contradict each other; one sex is more eager to help than the other and vice versa, or no difference was found at all. This puts an evident question mark to the reliability of Salminen and Glad's study and obviously to this thesis as well. Salminen and Glad also made an important notion that the help-receivers attractiveness may also be an important factor in cross-gender helping situations. According to the article, studies have shown that people can be more eager to help an attractive person of the opposite sex, though some studies have also shown opposite results.

Another very important point to be made in this type of research is to distinguish the difference between gender and sex. The Oxford English Dictionary defines sex in the following way: "*Either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and many other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions*", and gender: "*The state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex, or determined as a result of one's sex.*" This thesis is focused on gender, so later when the results of the study for this thesis are discussed, feminine and masculine genders and advice-giving styles are not necessarily possessed by women and men, but they can be mixed. For example, a person whose biological sex is male can identify himself as feminine, masculine, androgynous and so on, or vice versa, and have both masculine and feminine advice-giving qualities.

An important notion in this type of research is to take into account is that in the present day a large number of people do not identify themselves with the gender they were assigned to at birth. According to Johnson and Repta (2002) for example hermaphrodites (nowadays referred to as intersex), transgenders and other additional genders can categorize themselves as male, female or another gender despite of their biological gender. The studies mentioned previously in this chapter discuss this aspect very little, or not at all. For example, Tannen and Eagly both use "men" and "women" as the only two categories for sex and gender. In this study I took this into account by

leaving the gender-option open in the questionnaire, so the participant could decide themselves what gender they want to be considered as. Gender studies often include a test where the participants can score higher on either masculinity or femininity and that score is used when their test result are analyzed in the latter parts of the research. Due to resource limitations, this study does not include that type of a part and the responsibility is the respondents' own.

A recent study by Joel et al. (2015) found out that the human brain cannot be categorized either as a male or a female brain. Over 1400 MRI scans of different brains showed no major differences between men and women, though some features were more common in men's brains and some in women's, such as the thickness of brain tissue in certain areas of the brain. This supports the notion that gender identity comes from the surrounding world and culture and is not necessarily connected to one's reproductive organs. Often gender and sex are presented as very dualistic categories, male and female, but according to this study by Joel et al. there is a lot of grey area in between.

3 METHOD

3.1 Research Questions

The two main research questions in this study were the following:

RQ1: Do those self-ascribed as females focus more on giving emotional support and offering matching problems than men in helping situations and giving advice to friends?

RQ2: Are those self-ascribed as males more solution-oriented and do they suggest concrete actions more than women in helping situations and giving advice to friends?

(RQ3: What characteristics do those who marked themselves as something other than male or female show?)

By these two main questions it can be seen if the underlying hypothesis is supported or not. If the male and female test subjects both fall into their assumed behavior patterns, it can be seen that even though stereotypical gender roles have changed, there are still some psychological patterns that may still change in due time. If the test subjects give mixed results despite their stated gender, it can be seen that at least this sample of young population is somehow different from other test subjects from previous research. The third research question will be discussed if any additional gender-categories appear in the results.

3.2 Data

The research for this thesis was conducted by a questionnaire (see appendix 1) with six imaginary situations where the test subjects had to help and give advice to their friend. The participants had to describe their reactions and what would they do or say to make their friend feel better. The respondents' gender and age were also asked, gender with an open question and age with a multiple choice question. The sample consisted of 9 males and 23 females who answered five out of the six questions. 84% of the participants claimed to be aged between 18 and 24 years and the rest 16% 25 to 30 years old. The request to fill the questionnaire was sent to three different e-mail lists of The

University of Jyväskylä; Russian students, English students and the general language students, YK (Yhdistyneet kieltenlukijat). The questionnaire could be answered online on a platform called Polldaddy.com. The fact that most the respondents can be assumed to be university students can mean the results are significantly different if the sample would have consisted of people with no higher education, since higher education can significantly increase tolerance, for example, towards gender equality (Campbell and Horowitz 2016).

The six situations were chosen based on what people find to be the most important aspects that have an effect on their happiness: health and physical and mental illness, career (in this case both school and work) finance, money problems and experience of poverty, marital status, relationships and standard of living (Borooah 2006; Moore, 2003). In the questionnaire there was one situation concerning marital status, two situations concerning health (one about physical health, one about mental health), two situations concerning career (one about school, one about work) and one situation concerning finance/money problems. In the end there was also one extra question where the participants were asked to recall an actual helping situation from their own lives and describe it. This was added for several reasons: firstly so that it could be seen if there was a clear difference between the participants' behavior in the imaginary situations and the real situation. Secondly, it could have been easier for some participants to describe their own behavior in a helping situation that they actually have experience of, since not all participants had first-hand experience in all of the six situations in the questionnaire.

Some situations were more emotional and one aim was to see if male participants would still suggest some concrete actions, which is the hypothesis. Some were more action-based to see if female participants would still rely mostly on emotional support. The presumption was that female participants would offer more emotional support and sympathy, for example by emphasizing the importance of listening and feelings of empathy, as previous studies discussed in section 1 would suggest. Supposedly females would also offer matching problems by stating that they have had similar experiences and justifying the advice-seekers feelings (Tannen 1990: 50-51). Males would try to come up with a solution to the problem at hand and give concrete examples on what actions the friend should take. Utterances like "You have to do *something*", "Let's go *somewhere*", "If I was you, I would". The males' responses are presumed to include more action verbs and females' more adjectives and abstract concepts.

The methodological approach to analyzing the results was both quantitative and qualitative. In human sciences the lean is usually towards qualitative, but it can easily be used simultaneously with quantitative analysis method as well (Koppa 2009). In this study both methods were decided to be used so that the results would be more comprehensible and the differences between genders could be examined from different viewpoints. Because qualitative analysis was used, the three categories, emotional support, suggesting action and problem matching, that elicited in the results were determined already when designing the questionnaire, so the questions would lead respondents to give such answers where they would show the three categories. The expressions of these three categories were then elicited in the answers and counted, which leans more towards qualitative analysis. The differences between males and females are presented in numbers and statistics and those numbers are then compared. The categorization process was not straightforward, though, since the respondents were not directly asked whether or not they showed these certain aspects in their helping behavior.

There were also many elements related to qualitative studies, such as the way the results were gathered and analyzed. The majority of the questions were open questions and they were analyzed individually. Even though the results were mainly presented in numeric form, also individual answer will be examined and analyzed in the following chapter through qualitative approach (Koppa, Jyväskylän yliopisto 2009). Both qualitative and quantitative approach can be criticized, since they leave a lot of room for error. Analysis done by humans can be argued to never be truly objective, especially in this type of study where only one person analyzed the answers, even though an objective view was pursued.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Analyzing the results

The results were gathered by making a table of each question and analyzing each respondent's answer individually. The respondents had a nine-digit identification number and a letter (M for male, F for female) that indicated their gender, for example M 123,456,789. Then each respondent's who had answered at least five out of the six questions were give a score on how many situations they showed problem matching, action suggesting or problem matching. These scores were then added together to get a total score for both men and female respondents and transferred into a percentage, since there was a significant difference between the amount of male and female respondents. Six phenomena were searched: was there an action suggestion, problem matching and/or indications of showing emotional support, what feelings the respondent imagined he/she would have, what gender the respondent stated the help-seeking friend and what difficulty rating they gave the situation. The main focus of analysis was the possible gender division between the percentage of males and females showing action suggestions, problem matching and emotional support. The criteria for each category (matching problems, suggesting action and emotional support) will be introduced next and afterwards the results of the six imaginary situations and in the end the overall results and the results of the real life situation. The results will be discussed in further detail in the analysis and discussion –chapter.

The criteria for each category were difficult to determine, since no similar study has been done before. The first category, problem matching, is an area virtually no research has been done before, at least in recent times. The second category, action suggestions, proved to be just as hard to find relevant and applicable information on. Majority of previous research on males' action-oriented problem solving has been based on intuition and no clear criteria have been given. The third category, emotional support, is a relatively ambiguous concept so it was tricky to draw a clear line what could be counted as giving emotional support and what was not.

To determine whether or not the respondents showed problem matching, he or she had to give first hand problems and use the first person singular. Second hand problems and general problems were

not counted, but the problem had to stem directly from the respondents own experience. Utterances like “everyone has been there” or “this happens all the time” are too general and therefore not counted as problem matching. For example

“I think this is common for many students, *myself alike*, so I would listen to my friend and *share my own stories of similar situations.*” (own emphasis)

- Respondent M 146,251,865

“First I tell her that that is nonsense. But then I tell her, that I can understand the situation. *I have had those problems as well.*” (own emphasis)

- Respondent F 146,301,339

These two quotes are perfect examples of clearly offering a matching problem, since they both speak in the first person and share their own experiences when they have struggled with the same problems, in the first case the amount of schoolwork and weight in the second. Another example:

“this is an easy situation to be in, because it's so common among students (1), and there is not much you can do about another person's deadlines”

- Respondent F 146,829,792

This is too general and not counted as problem matching, since she does not indicate that she herself is a student as well and has been in this situation.

The criteria for what counts as an action suggestion was probably most difficult to determine. There were many people who offered to do something or asked the friend to do something, but these types of suggestions are relatively vague. The suggestion had to be direct and express something concrete the respondent’s friend should do. For example:

“Start fucking eating less and exercising more.”

- Respondent M 146,412,736

Above the respondent makes it very clear what he wants his friend to do.

“I would probably lend her money if she was really close friend and a trustworthy one, in case it would be a single case, not a regular problem”

- Respondent F 146,829,792

Here the respondent is not as straightforward in her suggestion, but still she has an action that contributes to the solution of the problem. Here is another example of a response that did not count as an action suggestion:

“I *might encourage* them to talk about these feelings to a doctor or a psychologist”
(own emphasis)

- Respondent F 146,330,105

The action is not suggested overtly, but is more subtle. This was not counted as an action suggestion, since the respondent only “might” suggest something. Even if the respondent had left the word “might” out, the suggestion still is not strong enough. If she would have said “I tell them to talk about these feelings...” then the suggestion would have been direct enough to make the cut.

“I would anyways want to hear the situation if she is ready to talk about it and then try to comfort her with a hug.”

- Respondent F 146,307,909

Here the respondent clearly performs a concrete action, but it is still not counted as an action suggestion, because hugging is so strongly connected with emotional support. The respondent herself says that by hugging the friend, she is trying to comfort her, which is also emotional support, which will be discussed next.

Emotional support was determined by whether the participant, for example, indicated feelings of sympathy and encouragement, expressed care, love, interest or understanding (Burlison 2003). This was the highest ranking category perhaps because the definition of emotional support is so wide. Individuals can also value different types of emotional support more, for example preferring someone to just listen to their problems or someone reassuring and justifying their feelings by encouraging them. Here are two examples of how emotional support was expressed by respondents:

“I would encourage her/him to do that if it is something that he/she really wants and needs. I could even offer to make some changes myself so that we could support each other during the 'change' (1)”

- Respondent F 146,173,419

“i would listen the story and comfort my friend. i'd say that there will be a job for them. i'd feel a bit annoyed and also compassionate.”

- Respondent F 146,373,670

Even though most respondents expressed some sort of emotional support, there were still some who did not. For example:

“It depends on their relationship if it was good, violent or I didn't otherwise like the ex-partner.”

- Respondent F 146,302,614

So in this example the respondent does not tell anything about her reaction, just names some things that could influence it. This particular answer did not fit into any of the three categories that were tried to elicit.

4.2 Introducing the results

Below is a bar chart of the response rates of each individual question (appendix 2). Each individual response was analyzed, but in the end the ones who had answered at least five out of the six questions were included to the final results.

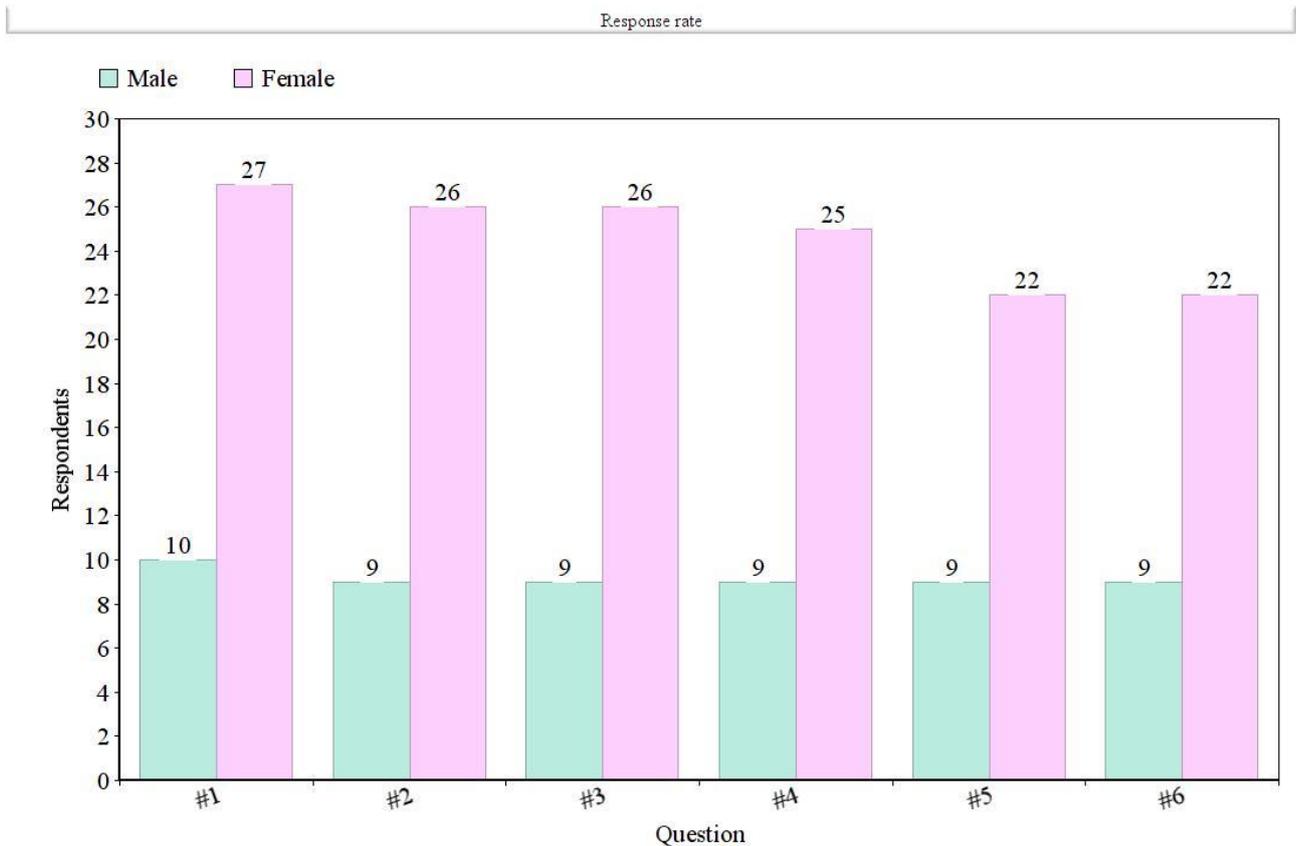


FIGURE 1 Response rate

The first situation was about a friend's breakup with a partner (see appendix 1 for questionnaire). In this particular situation 0% of the male and 4% of the female respondents showed problem matching. The difference is basically nonexistent, since there were 10 males who answered this question and 27 females, so only one female respondent showed problem matching. The percentage for action suggestions were 20% of the male respondents and 11% of the female respondents. The suggested actions were for example "doing something nice together", going for a walk or going

travelling. 70% of the male respondents and 89% of the female respondents showed emotional support.

The second situation was about a friend's depression. This situation was rated as the most difficult for both male and female respondents, males' difficulty average being 3.86 and females' 3.17 (on a scale of one to five). Male respondents showed 0% problem matching, 22% action suggestions and 56% emotional support, whereas the same numbers for female respondents were 19% for problem matching, 54% for action suggesting and 77% for emotional support. This situation could be said not to be particularly action-requiring, but still 46% out of all the respondents suggested some sort of action, such as seeking professional help, which was the top suggestion, watching a movie or TV together or generally doing something to take the friend's mind of the depression. 19% of the female respondents could relate to this situation and claimed they had felt or currently felt depressed themselves.

In the third situation a friend's job application had been rejected. Again, female respondents showed more problem matching at 19% compared to males' 0%. Female respondents also showed more action suggestions (38%) and emotional support (92%), though if the total number of respondents is taken into account, the differences are very minimal, since there were significantly more female respondents. 33% of the male respondents showed action suggestions and 89% emotional support. An interesting notion about the action suggestions was that all the males who suggested an action suggested looking for another job. The females' suggestions were a lot more varied and included actions like "taking a walk" or watching a movie, and also looking for another job. In this case it could be said that females, even though they showed more action suggesting than males, did not necessarily always do so in order to find a solution to the problem, but as a part of consoling their friend. In this questionnaire, male respondents suggested actions that were directly related to the problem, like in this case trying to find a new job.

The topic of the fourth situation was a friend having money problems. 11% percent out of male respondents showed problem matching. Female respondents' percentage was 24%. Action suggesting was shown by 44% of male respondents and 88% of female respondents. In this situation females showed most action suggestions. For males it was tied with situation five and six with the highest number of action suggestions out of all six situations. Top action suggestion was

lending money to the friend. Other actions suggested were for example buying the friend a meal or groceries, giving financial advice and making a budget. Emotional support was shown by an equal percentage of both male and female respondents, 54%. This situation was rated the second highest in difficulty for both genders and multiple respondents stated that it is an awkward topic to discuss, especially if they themselves have money and are financially secure.

The topic of the fifth situation was a friend wanting to lose weight and get healthier. Here 33% of the male and only 18% percent of the female respondents offered matching problems. 44% of male respondents and 50% of female respondents suggested actions. Actions suggested were relatively similar and most respondents suggested exercising, walking or going to the gym together. Emotional support was shown by 67% of the male respondents and by 68% of the female respondents. All males who described their feelings somehow felt encouragement or sympathy, whereas females were also concerned about possible eating disorder and the motives behind the wanted weight loss. The average difficulty rating was almost the same for both genders, 2.17 for male and 2.19 for female respondents.

The sixth and last imaginary situation in the questionnaire was about a friend stressing about his or her workload and upcoming deadlines. Matching problems were offered by 44% of male respondents and 36% of female respondents. Male respondents' action suggestion percentage was 44%, almost the same as the female respondents', 45%. 56% of male respondents and 68% of female respondents showed emotional support towards their friend. This situation was related as the easiest of all the six situations with averages of 1.3 for male respondents and 1.8 for female respondents. In this case I thought that the high amount of problem matching is due to the fact that all the respondents can be assumed to be students and possibly employed as well, so more respondents have had this exact situation happen to them, whereas the in earlier situations some respondents stated that they have never been in that type of a situation. This, naturally, leads into lower percentages in problem matching.

After analyzing each of these six questions' answers individually, an average percentage was given to both male and female respondents. For example, there were nine male respondents who answered at least five out of the six questions. All nine male respondents had a total of 54 opportunities to show problem matching, action suggesting and emotional support, since they all had six questions

to answer. Occurrences of indications of something out of these three categories were then counted together and divided by the total number of chances they had, so the result was an average percentage of how much they showed each of the three concepts measured.

Out of all of the six questions, the nine male respondents who answered at least five out of the six questions showed problem matching in 14% of the situations. Actions were suggested in 43% of the situations and emotional support was given in 63% of the situations. There were 23 female respondents who answered at least five out of the six questions. These female respondents showed problem matching in 21% of the situations, gave action suggestions in 43% of the situations, the exact same percentage as that of male respondents', and showed emotional support in 73% of the situations. These numbers can be seen in the bar chart below (appendix 3).

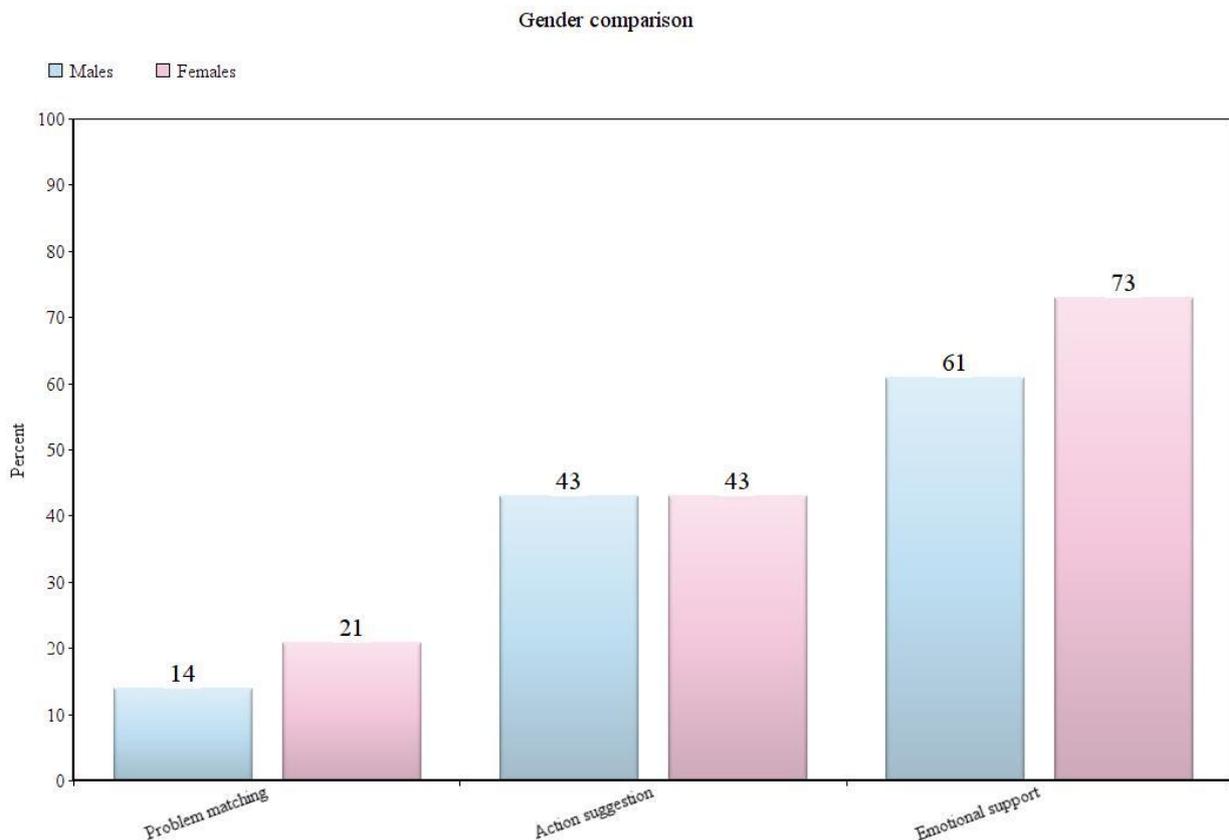


FIGURE 2 Gender comparison

After the six imaginary situations the respondents were asked to recall the last time a friend had come to them with a problem. The real life problems fell into the previously mentioned categories

that affect people's happiness (mental and physical health, money/finance, school, work and marital status) well, though 34% of respondents did not state the topic of the problem. 29 people answered this question and the most popular topic of problems was marital status, concerning things such as not having a partner, a break up or arguments with a partner. In this real life situation 0% of the male respondents gave matching problems, 25% gave action suggestions and 88% showed emotional support. 14% of the female respondents offered matching problems, 14% suggested actions and 90% showed emotional support.

4.3 Discussion

The results of this study were quite contradictory compared to previous studies. First of all, even though the respondents clearly divided themselves into males and females, there was no large gap between the amounts of problem matching, action suggesting and emotional support they showed in their responses (see appendix 3). One of the most interesting findings was that the amount of action suggesting was exactly the same for both male and female respondents, even though it has been considered mainly a male attribute. Female respondents showed more problem matching and emotional support, but the difference was only about ten percentage points. An important notion is that only one out of nine male and one out of the 23 female respondents did not show emotional support in any situation.

The differences between the male and female respondents are very minimal. If we take a look at the research questions again, we can see that the original hypotheses were superficially met, but since there were a significantly smaller number of male respondents, we can say that they, in fact, were not met. The research questions were:

RQ1: Do those self-ascribed as females focus more on giving emotional support and offering matching problems than men in helping situations and giving advice to friends?

RQ2: Are those self-ascribed as males more solution-oriented and do they suggest concrete actions more than women in helping situations and giving advice to friends?

I would especially like to highlight the difference in emotional support, which is 12 percentage points. Even though there were only nine male respondents, they still managed to as high a score as

61%. If there had been more male respondents, the score could probably be even higher. So even though previous research has argued that males are somehow less capable of giving emotional support, it can be seen that, at least in this case, it is not so. In Finland, the stereotypical male “does not speak nor kiss” and it can sometimes be a hindrance for males that you are not supposed to show emotion.

An interesting phenomenon repeated through the whole questionnaire was what I will call a “gender slip”. Respondents, who were mainly gender neutral in their answers, sometimes accidentally “slipped” to mention a specific gender. For example, the answer would begin by the respondent referring to his or her friend as “he/she” but then later only as “she” or vice versa. The slip was to “she”, never to “he”. None of the respondents mentioned the help-seeking friend to be male in the imaginary situations; the friend was always referred to as he/she, the friend or they-singular, or female. In the real-life situation male friends did come up in the answers in 16% (three out of 19) of the cases where the friend’s gender was specifically mentioned.

Even though, in this study, the male and female respondents were grouped together, the variation inside the gender groups was relatively high. For example one male respondent suggested actions in five out of the six situations, one in zero situations. The answers varied everywhere between those two numbers, though no one suggested action in all six situations. Problem matching was the weakest category for men with only 14% of the respondents presenting matching problems, but here too some variation could be seen: the highest number of situations where problem matching was shown was three and the lowest zero. The female respondents’ answers varied even more, between 0 out of six to six out of six in emotional support and action suggestions and 0 out of six and five out of six in problem matching. Problem matching scores were low for female respondents as well, and only 4% had a score over three out of six. When most female respondents scored high, over four out of six, in emotional support, so did male respondents.

5 CONCLUSION

Examining the results of this particular study, it can be seen that there are no significant differences in helping behavior between males and females when problem matching, action suggestions and emotional support are considered. Females showed seven percentage points more problem matching and 12 percentage points more emotional support indications than males. The percentage for action suggestions was 43% for both genders. Since there were over two times more female than male respondents, the results are of course not applicable to the larger population, but they still show that neither are the some of the previous studies applicable to this small sample.

The sample consisted of 32 respondents, nine male and 23 female, which is too little for making any further assumptions, though. If the male sample would be larger, there could have been a clearer cut (or even smaller differences) between the two gender groups and the results would have more reliability and validity. The fact that the respondents are mostly university students can also have an effect on the results, since people with higher education tend to be more tolerant and aware of, for example, transgendered people (Campbell and Horowitz 2016).

Despite of leaving the gender question open in the questionnaire, no one stated themselves as anything except male or female. We cannot know if some people who are biologically male stated themselves as females or vice versa, since the respondents were not asked their biological sex specifically. Since the study for this thesis was conducted in Finland mostly among Finnish students, the limitations of Finnish language should also be considered: Finnish does not include specific words for both “sex” and “gender”, but uses only one word “sukupuoli” (though “sukupuoli-identiteetti” is sometimes used for “gender”). Therefore the difference between sex and gender could have been misunderstood or ignored by some respondents.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – questionnaire

Whats is your gender? (Open question)

What is your age? (Multiple choice)

- 18-25
- 25-30
- 30-35
- 35-40
- over 40

(Introduction)

Imagine yourself in the following situations where your friend comes to you in distress and think of the following questions:

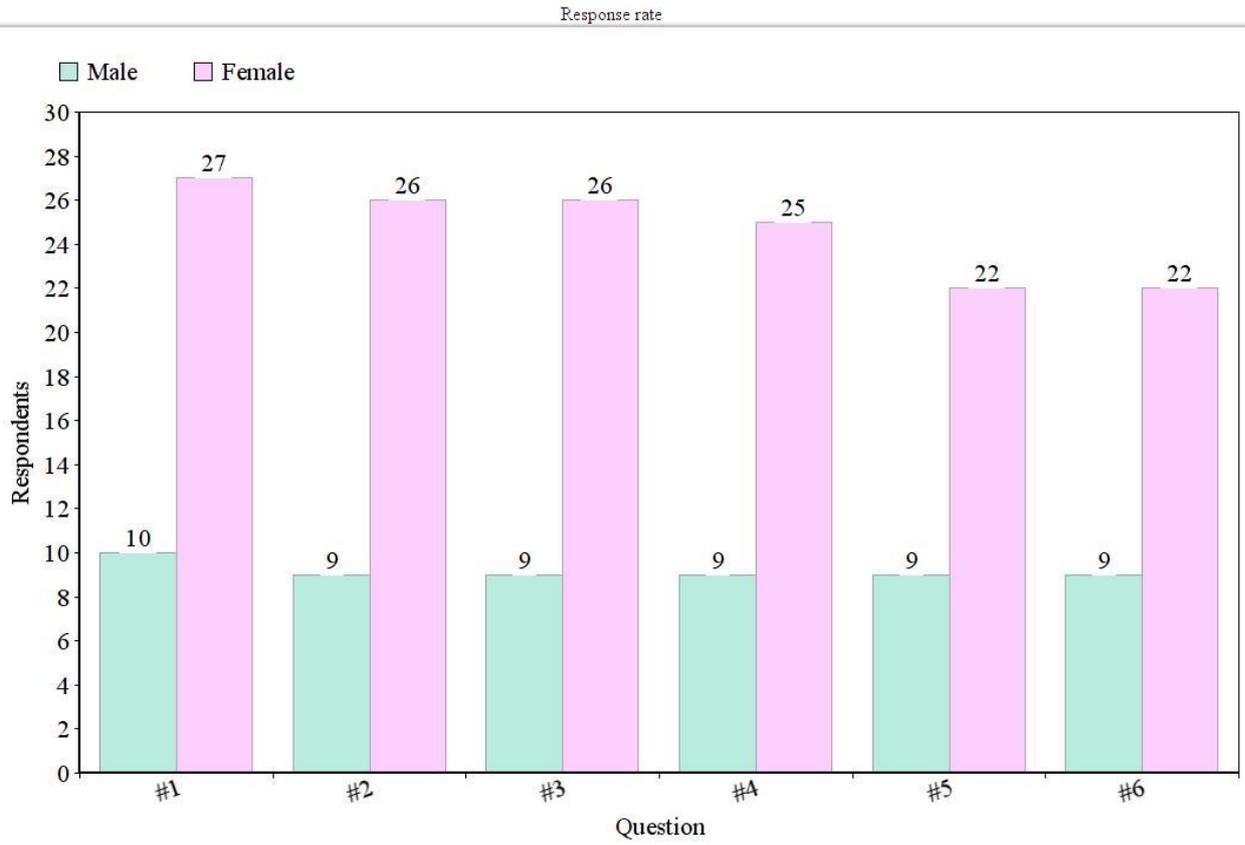
- How would you react and assess the problem?
- What would you say? How could you help your friend and make him or her feel better?
- How would you feel if this happened in real life? (annoyance, anger, frustration, happiness, anxiety, relief, compassion, sadness, heroism et cetera)
- Rate from 1-5 how easy would it be for you to be in this situation if it happened in real life (1= very easy, 5= very difficult, 0 = I cannot say).

If you can, give reasons why you thought the situation was easy/difficult (for example if you knew what to say that would be helpful or supportive or if you have already been in a similar situation which you think you handled well)

Please also specify your friends gender if you imagine a specific person asking for your help.

1. Your close friend comes to you and tells you he/she has broken up with his/her partner.
 2. Your friend has been feeling really depressed lately and you discuss it with him/her.
 3. Your friend applied for a job he/she really wanted but did not get it.
 4. Your friend has problems with money and is concerned it will not last until his/her next paycheck, student allowance or social support.
 5. Your friend is complaining to you about his/her weight being too high and thinks about changing his/her eating and exercising habits.
 6. Your friend is struggling with his or her workload and upcoming deadlines and complains about it to you.
- + Think of the last time your friend came to you in distress in real life. How did you react then and what did you say?

Appendix 2 – The response rates



Appendix 3 – The results graph

