

# The Role of Group Size, Gender, Rearing Location, and Personality on Bystander Intervention in Non-threatening Situations

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## Abstract

The current study investigated the potential impact of gender, group size, and rearing location on bystander intervention in a non-threatening situation. Personality traits were also examined. Participants consisted of 47 college students from High Point University. Contrary to the literature, neither one of the independent variables had a significant effect. A significant negative correlation, however, was found between conscientiousness and helping.

## Introduction

The bystander effect states that the more people there are in an emergency situation, the less likely people are to help others.

Why study bystander intervention?

- The failure of bystanders to take action has fascinated social psychologists.
- In 1964, Kitty Genovese was raped and murdered in front of numerous bystanders.
- It is important for us to distinguish what separates those that help from those that do not.

Because the bystander effect has been demonstrated in threatening situations, the current study sought to investigate whether or not the bystander effect is also applicable to non-threatening, everyday situations and to examine contributing factors. Factors of interest included group size, gender, rearing location, and personality characteristics.

### ❖ Group Size:

Researchers have consistently found that group size has a significant effect on the bystander effect; the larger the group size, the larger the bystander effect.

### ❖ Gender & Rearing Location:

The literature regarding the relationship between gender, rearing location, and bystander intervention is mixed and inconclusive.

### ❖ Personality:

As an exploratory piece of this study, I was interested to see if certain personality characteristics were related to bystander intervention.

## Hypotheses

- (1) Larger groups will exhibit less helping behaviors.
- (2) Men will be more likely to help than women.
- (3) Rural participants will be more likely to help than urban participants.
- (4) Rural men will be more likely to help than rural women.
- (5) Extraversion and Agreeableness will be positively correlated with helping behavior.

## Method

47 participants completed the NEO-Five Factor Inventory, a 60-item measure of the traits in the five-factor model of personality, in varying group sizes of 1, 3, and 4 (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As a second part of the study, participants partook in a distracter task while the researcher exited the room and a confederate entered. The confederate pretended to drop a significant amount of paper, pens, and pencils. Each participant was given 60 seconds to help the confederate and given a helping latency score, as a measure of how much time was left before they decided to help. A higher helping latency score reflected that a participant was faster at helping the confederate, whereas a score of 0 indicated no helping at all.



## Results

The results revealed that there were no main effects or interactions of any of the independent variables. Contrary to the literature and our hypotheses, group size and gender did not significantly affect helping. Most of the participants indicated that they grew up in a suburban area and so there was not enough variability to draw conclusions about rearing location.

**Table 1**  
Helping Latency ANOVA

Variable	N	M	SD	F	p
Group Size				.28	.84
1	13	17.75	9.27		
3	18	12.53	8.53		
4	16	8.56	8.15		
Gender				3.10	.09
Male	11	29.72	8.27		
Female	36	6.62	5.76		
Rearing Loc.				---	---
Urban	3	0	0		
Rural	8	9.50	9.48		

## Results (cont.)

Contrary to our hypothesis, extraversion and agreeableness were not positively correlated with helping. Surprisingly, a negative correlation was found between conscientiousness and helping latency. People who were more conscientious were less likely to help the confederate.

**Table 2**  
Personality & Helping Latency Correlates

Personality Traits	Helping Latency (r)
Neuroticism	-.22
Extraversion	-.07
Openness to Experience	.26
Agreeableness	-.28
Conscientiousness	-.30*

N = 47, \*p < .05

## Discussion

What is particularly interesting about this study is that previous research findings were not replicated. Numerous studies have found group size, gender, and rearing location to significantly affect bystander intervention. However, we found no such main effects. One simple explanation for this discrepancy is that there could have been a flaw in the research method, there could have been an insufficient amount of participants, and the low power of the experiment could have impacted the results. Nevertheless, other possibilities need to be explored.

Why is it that this study failed to replicate the results of previous research studies? There must be underlying factors within this particular study that interfered with the results and had more of an impact on bystander intervention than the traditionally studied ones. These factors may have included the time constraint, the implied authority, the distracter task, and the non-threatening helping situation.

Agreeable people by nature tend to be friendly and non-confrontational, and as such, we proposed that they would be more inclined to help the confederate. However, a reverse trend emerged; agreeable people tended not to help the confederate. Agreeable participants may have been more inclined to follow the instructions of the researcher and conform because they also tend to be obedient.

Conscientious people by nature are more reliable and diligent. Conscientious participants may have been more motivated to complete the task, and as such, may have ignored any interrupting stimuli, including the confederate. The time constraint may have further motivated participants to not stray from the task.

Another explanation for participants not intervening may be due to the situation. Some participants may have perceived that the amount of items dropped by the confederate was a manageable load and that she did not in fact need help. Future studies should seek to ensure that substantial help is needed and high power is implicated. Future studies should also explore what happens when there are not clear cut directions and participants are presented with conflicting demands and expectations, as was implicated in the current study. These types of research designs may have higher external validity since there are a number of underlying factors that affect real-life bystander situations.