

The Lecture Contains:

- Dispositional influences on prosocial behaviour
- Understanding altruistic personality
- Does liking for the victim leads to more help?
- Outcomes of the experiment
- When is victim blamed?
- Interpreting the outcomes of the study

Dispositional influences on prosocial behaviour

- Usually, altruism (unselfish motivation to work for welfare of other) is associated with prosocial behaviour. However, egoism (defined as the exclusive concern for one's own benefit) is also associated with helping other especially when such a behaviour fulfils one's need for approval (through appreciation and other rewards) from others.
- In the research on the altruism, empathy has been emphasized the most. Empathy is understood as a set of following qualities :
 - Genuinely relate with and feel the emotion of others
 - Feeling sympathetic or concerned about the needy
 - Taking the perspective of the needy
 - Feeling of concern aroused for fictional characters (fantasy; emoting while watching movies)

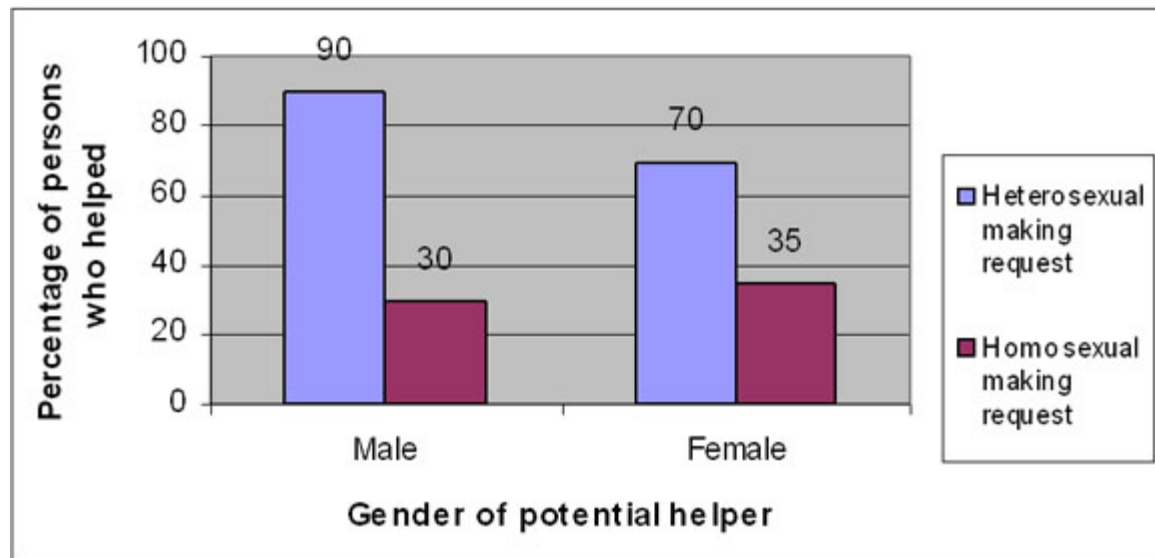
Understanding altruistic personality

- Five components of altruistic personality has been emphasized in the literature (Bierhoff et al., 1991) :
 - Empathy is an important part of their self-concept.
 - They have a belief in a just world; a belief that justice will be done to all our actions and we get what we deserve.
 - They take social responsibility towards helping the needy persons.
 - They have an internal locus of control as they believe that one can act to make a difference in the situation of the needy person. They do not rely of fate or luck.
 - They are low on egocentricism (being self-absorbed or preoccupied with one's own benefits)

Does liking for the victim leads to more help?

- Shaw, Borrough and Fink (1994) conducted an experiment to understand whether liking for a victim leads to more helpful responses. They arranged for telephone calls by to strangers where the male caller sounded to be either a homosexual or a heterosexual person. The caller told the stranger that he/she was wrongly called and that was his last coin for making telephone calls to seek help for flattened tyres of caller's car. The caller requested for help from the strangers by calling their either boyfriend or girlfriend. Requesting for help from boyfriend girlfriend was the experimenters' way to sound the stranger about the caller' sexual orientation. Figure 6.2 provides the outcomes of the experiment.
- The outcomes of the experiment makes it clear that when the caller appeared to be a homosexual person, help was not provided as much as when he appeared to be a heterosexual person. This tells us about the tendency of the people helping those who are liked by them.
- It is, however, also noted in the literature that similarity to the victim may be irrelevant if victim's dependency for help is high (Bornstein, 1994).

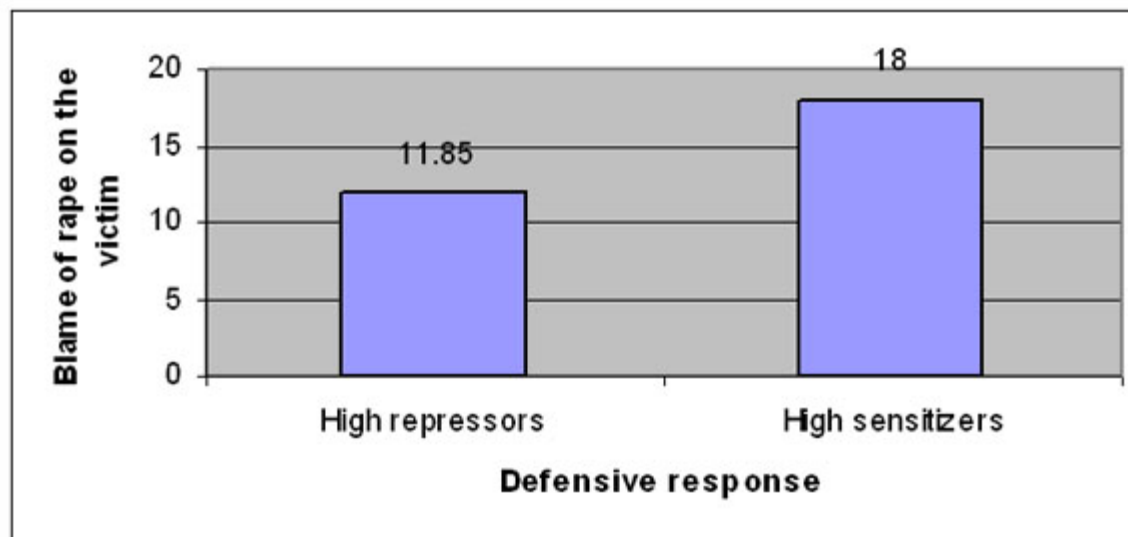
Figure 6.2: Outcomes of the experiment



When is victim blamed?

- Help may be denied to the victim if he/she is perceived to be responsible for his/own conditions. Some concern has been there among the social psychologists to understand the reasons for the phenomenon of 'blaming the victim'.
- Thornton (1992) conducted a study on undergraduate women to understand the type of characteristics of those women responsible for blaming the rape-victim for the assault. It was hypothesized that in case, the victim is similar to persons making judgement (undergraduate women processing the news of sexual assault on another woman), then the 'blaming the victim' will be more if they are sensitizers (who use the defensive response of ruminating or intellectualizing) rather than repressors (who use the defensive style of denial and forgetting). Figure 6.3 provides the outcomes of the study.

Figure 6.3: Outcomes of the study



Interpreting the outcomes of the study

- It is clear from the outcomes of the study that the attitude of 'blaming the victim' was more evident in case of sensitizers rather than repressors when victim was in some ways similar to the person making judgement. The reasons such a tendency may be traced back to the following aspects of the participants cognitive process.
 - Feeling that 'it could happen to me': One becomes disturbed by the receiving the information that someone similar has been victimized. One of the ways to reduce this emotional disturbance is to perceive the victim as different rather than similar. For sensitizers, it was easier to ruminate or think that the victim was dissimilar by blaming her for the assault (probably through the thought of 'I might have been more careful or smarter').