

# Gender Differences in Bystander Responses to Male Violence Against a Transwoman

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## Introduction

When a man acts aggressively towards a woman in public, bystanders (i.e., third party witnesses) may intervene to promote safety.

Not all bystanders show prosocial responses to men's physical violence against women. For instance, male bystanders are less likely than female bystanders to intend to intervene in helpful ways (Chabot et al., 2009; West & Wandrei, 2002), although not all studies find this difference (e.g., Palmer et al., 2016).

Possible gender differences in intervention may be due to social identification; compared to men, women bystanders may perceive female victims to be more like themselves.

Another explanation may involve gender socialization; "the construction of masculinity in the U.S. includes factors of dominance and the exclusion of femininity, which excludes women and gay men from challenging pre-existing power structures and justifies their lower social statuses" (Weaver & Vescio, 2015). Negative attitudes about women or people who are LGBTQ+ (e.g., Nagoshi et al., 2008) may inhibit men's willingness to help women victims, perhaps especially those who seem to be LGBTQ+.

Without mention of transwomen, past research has focused on bystander responses to violence against presumably cisgender women (who had previously been assigned female at birth). No studies have examined bystander responses to apparent transwomen (women who had previously been assigned male at birth).

Compared to women, men were expected to report less intent to intervene to help a woman victim (H1), especially a transwoman (H2). In addition, compared to women, men were expected to show less sympathy for victims (H3) and greater transphobia (H4).

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Undergraduate, heterosexual, cisgender students ( $N = 107$ ) responded to a scenario of severe male violence against a woman (Chabot et al., 2009). They were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in which the victim was slurred as either a "tranny" or "slut."

### Manipulation

*It is a Saturday afternoon. You're at the mall, sitting at a table in the nearly empty food court when you notice what appears to be a couple about your age arguing nearby. You can't see or hear everything, but you hear the man yell and call the woman "a lying tranny/slut." You see her start to turn around, as if about to leave. In response, the man punches her in the face and throws her to the ground. The woman cries out, notices you, and the two of you make eye contact.*

### Measures

Three items assessed intent to directly intervene to assist the victim, e.g., "Ask the girl if she is okay" (Katz et al., 2015).

Four items assessed sympathy for the victim, e.g., "I feel sorry for the girl" (Katz et al., 2015).

Nine items assessed transphobia, e.g., "I avoid people on the street whose gender is unclear to me" (Nagoshi et al., 2008).

Two items assessed if the victim seemed to be trans, e.g., "If you had to guess, you'd say that the girl is transgender."

## Results

Those assigned to the "tranny" condition perceived the victim as trans ( $M = 5.16$ ) more than those assigned to the "slut" condition ( $M = 2.30$ ),  $t(104) = 7.82$ ,  $p < .001$ .

A 2 (type of slur) x 2 (gender) ANOVA was conducted with intent to intervene as the DV. There was a significant effect of type of slur,  $F(1, 103) = 6.27$ ,  $p = .01$ . Across bystander gender, intervention was lower for the trans victim/"tranny" ( $M = 5.36$ ) than the cis victim/"slut" ( $M = 5.57$ ). There was also a main effect of gender,  $F(1, 103) = 5.51$ ,  $p = .02$ . Across slur conditions, intent to intervene was lower among men ( $M = 4.96$ ) than women ( $M = 5.60$ ). This supported H1. However, there was also a slur x gender interaction,  $F(1, 103) = 5.94$ ,  $p < .02$ . As shown in Fig 1, most men and women intended to intervene when the victim seemed cis. Yet when the victim seemed trans, intent to intervene was lower among men than women, in support of H2.

Independent samples t-tests showed that, across conditions, women reported more victim sympathy ( $M = 6.49$ ) than men ( $M = 5.49$ ),  $t(104) = 3.89$ ,  $p < .001$ , and less transphobia ( $M = 2.61$ ) than men ( $M = 4.34$ ),  $t(104) = -5.85$ ,  $p < .001$ . These findings supported H3 and H4.

## Discussion

Gender differences in bystander behavior emerged only when the victim was seen as trans.

Compared to female bystanders, male bystanders reported less empathy for victims of violence and greater transphobia. In general, men may not identify with female victims. In addition, they may tend to hold negative attitudes towards victims who may be LGBTQ+.

Perhaps due to high victim empathy and low transphobia, women bystanders showed similar intent to help a victim regardless of whether she seemed trans.

Naturalistic research methods are needed to extend these preliminary findings based on responses to scenarios.

Future research is needed to identify barriers to prosocial responding to violence against transwomen and to develop and test interventions to combat these barriers.

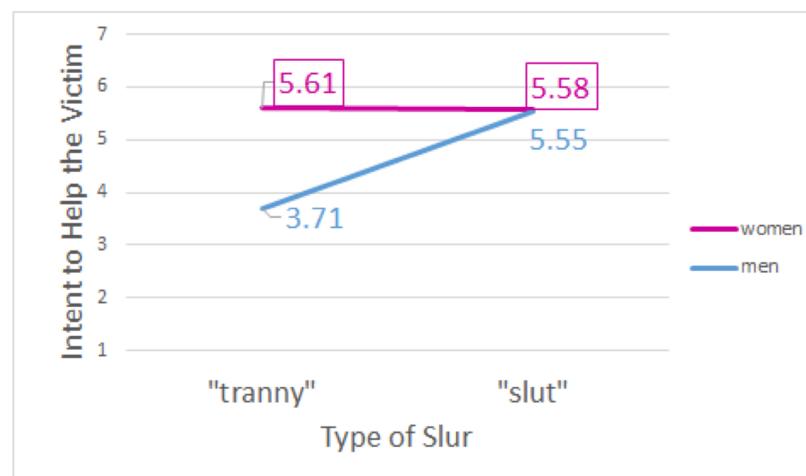


Figure 1