

Can I Trust You? Exploring How Gender and Familiarity Affect Trust Between Teenagers

Callie Cinque, Souhegan High School

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Can I trust you? Currently, in the field of Neuro-Psychology, few breakthroughs have been made in regard to indicators of trustworthiness between individuals and how a man's or woman's instincts may differ. The aim of this experiment was to understand whether familiarity and gender play a role when it comes to trust. I hypothesized that strangers or recently acquainted individuals will tend to cooperate and be more trusting than pairings who know one another well; and that opposite gender pairings would be more inclined to trust each other due to societal expectations of appearing courteous.

The experiment involved a spread of female-female, male-male, and male-female pairings. These were across three familiarity levels: close friends, acquaintances and strangers. Participants (N= 120, 76 female vs. 44 male) were asked to face their partner and decide whether to share or steal a reward without consulting or talking about it to the other participant involved. While they were not in each other's sight (by means of cardboard partition), they were asked what they thought their partner would pick. The results of the experiment supported the trusting and cooperative behaviors proposed in the hypothesis. Overall, 43 trials (72%) ended with a result of the reward being shared, 13 (22%) with a result of successful defection (steal/share), and 4 (6%) with a result of unsuccessful defection (steal/steal). This result indicates that subjects were more likely to share than steal. Across all familiarity levels, female participants chose to share 88% of the time, whereas male participants chose to share 75% of the time. While differences between genders were inconclusive, because of the lack of statistical power from the small sample of male participants, the effects of familiarity suggest that people are more likely to share their cookies with strangers than with their closer friends.