Examining Sex Differences in the Evaluation of Advice Interactions

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When individuals have problems or need to make decisions, they often seek and receive support in the form of advice, defined as recommendations about what to do, think, or feel. These recommendations can be either appreciated or unwelcome. It is often claimed that men are problem-solvers who like to give advice, whereas women tend to focus more on discussing the problem and providing sympathy, and, correspondingly, that men value advice more than women. If this is true, men and women may encounter problems providing support to each other. In this research, I examined sex differences in giving and receiving advice in interactions between college student friends. Participants came to a lab and discussed a real, current problem with a friend. After the interactions, participants reported whether they gave or received advice and rated the quality of the advice and their satisfaction with the conversation. There were 362 dyads, in which 154 women and 93 men reported giving advice and 168 women and 78 men reported receiving advice. I used independent-sample t-tests to compare male and female givers and recipients’ average evaluations of advice quality and conversational satisfaction. The only statistically significant difference was that female advice recipients were slightly more satisfied with their conversations. These findings contradict the claim of large sex differences in the evaluation of advice interactions, in turn disputing the general assumption that men and women solve problems in very different ways.

Research advisor Erina MacGeorge says, “Prior studies of sex differences in advice exchanges have typically relied on hypothetical scenarios or recall of past interactions, both of which may be biased by sex stereotypes. Emily’s work on immediate evaluations of real interactions indicates that college men and women perceive these exchanges similarly.”