Perceptions of Manspreading

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Introduction
Manspreading refers to males on public transport who sit with legs spread apart to encroach on adjacent seats.

The Oxford Dictionary added manspreading in 2015. Manspreading occurred so often in New York City that public service ads were put in subway cars telling men to refrain (Fitzsimmons, 2014).

The purpose of our study was to examine people’s perceptions of this act via our survey in order to determine its relevance in social media and pop culture.

Participants were given a survey assessing the relationship between four variables: compassion toward others and perceived inconvenience toward an image shown as a function of gender as well as circumstance of the image. We analyzed the results to determine a significant effect of gender and circumstance of image on perceived inconvenience of the situation.

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Method
Participants
N = 109, ages 17-70 (M = 23.63, SD = 12.42)
76% female, 24% male

Materials
Qualtrics (online survey program). Study was distributed via Facebook, Tumblr, Psychological Research on the Net research database, and email.

Procedure
Survey consisted of 8 sections:
- Informed consent
- Demographic information
- Control question
- Randomly assigned image of manspreading conditions
- Response to how inconvenienced participants would be in the given circumstance
- Compassion Scale (Pommier, 2011) assessing self-perceived compassion toward others
- Reaction questions
- Debriefing information

Figure 1: Compassion Level as a function of Circumstance and Gender
Main effect of Gender on participant’s Compassion Levels

Figure 2: Inconvenience Rating as a function of Circumstance and Gender
Main effect of circumstance on participant’s Inconvenience Ratings

Results & Discussion

Data analyses revealed a statistically significant main effect of Gender on participants’ compassion levels, F(1,105) = 8.11, p < .001 with $\eta^2_p = .16$ indicating a large effect size. Females (M = 3.91, SD = .41) depict higher levels of compassion than males (M = 3.44, SD = .57).

Second, there was a statistically significant main effect of circumstance on participants’ inconvenience ratings, F(1,105) = 14.09, p < .001, with $\eta^2_p = .12$ indicating a large effect size. All participants in the Direct Contact condition (M = 2.17, SD = .65) depicted higher inconvenience ratings than those in the Distanted group (M = 1.5, SD = .64).

The main effect of circumstance was not significant to participants compassion levels. There was no significant interaction effect of circumstance and gender on compassion.

Gender also had no main effect on inconvenience ratings. The interaction of gender and circumstance had no effect on inconvenience.

Conclusions

H1: Circumstance will have a main effect on inconvenience ratings. Supported.

H2: Gender will have a main effect on inconvenience ratings. Refuted.

H3: Gender and circumstance will have an interaction effect on inconvenience. Refuted.

H4: Gender and circumstance will combine to have an interaction on compassion levels. Refuted.

A limitation to this study was the use of a male subject to simulate manspreading in our images. Further studies may assess responses to female “spreaders” to more accurately analyze implications of this occurrence. The study also used a convenience sample, consisting of primarily females. A more diverse sample may have influence on results.

These findings contribute to the understudied area of public transport experiences, as well as determining if the phenomenon of manspreading is simply an internet fad or a distinct problem that requires further public attention.

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References


Figure 1: Public Service Ad on New York subway cars
Metropolitan Transportation Authority