

The Manchester United experiment

An experiment was carried out to see whether people were more likely to help those people who were similar to them.

In this experiment, fans of the football club Manchester United were asked to complete a set of questions that made them think about how much they loved their team. After they had completed the questions, they were asked to move to a different room. On the way to the other room, they saw someone fall, grab their ankle, and shout in pain. This person was an actor working with the people carrying out the experiment, but the Manchester United fans did not know this.



Did they stop to help?

It depends. The experiment was repeated several times with different fans. Sometimes the person who fell over was wearing a Manchester United shirt. Sometimes they were wearing a Liverpool Football Club shirt. When the injured person was wearing a Manchester United shirt, 92% of the Manchester United fans stopped to help him. However, only 30% of them stopped to help the person in the Liverpool shirt.

This illustrates how feeling part of a group and focussing on our differences to others can make us treat people differently. We help those in our group but not those who are different.

However, a second experiment revealed something more positive. This time the experiment started with questions that made the Manchester United fans think about their love of football, rather than their love of Manchester United. Everything else about the experiment was the same. This time a similarly high number of the Manchester United fans helped the injured person in a Manchester United shirt, but now 70% of them helped the Liverpool fan.

This experiment would appear to show that if people focus more on what they share with other people instead of how they differ, then they are more likely to be helpful and kind to people who are different from them.

Many **humanists** believe that if we can encourage people to see themselves and others as human beings first, then they will be more likely to treat all people kindly and equally.



'We are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us.'

Jo Cox, politician



'As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.'

Virginia Woolf, author



'Being a humanist means being a person that puts human beings first, being a person that doesn't look at humans in terms of their religions, in terms of their tribes, in terms of their races. A person that looks at people because they are human beings like you.'

Kato Mukasa, Uganda Humanists Association