

## Induced Reminiscence of Love and Chivalrous Helping

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Published online: 2 June 2009  
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**Abstract** This study tested the effect of semantically-induced thoughts of love on chivalrous helping. A field setting of four hundred and one participants was divided into two groups. One group was interviewed and asked to retrieve the memory of a love episode, and the second group, the control group, was asked to retrieve a piece of music that they love. The two groups encountered another confederate, who inadvertently lost a stack of compact discs when they neared each other. The results demonstrated that participants were more helpful when they were male, when the person in need of help was female, and when they were induced to retrieve the memory of a love episode.

**Keywords** Love · Helping behavior · Sex roles

Much of the work on helping behavior has been conducted in laboratory settings, and thus its generalizability to the real world remains unsure. In addition, studies of sex differences and helping behaviors have given contradictory and inconclusive results. Men have been found to help more than women (Guéguen and Fischer-Lokou 2004). Women have been found to help more than men (Bihm et al. 1979). Other studies have shown little or no sex difference (Boice and Goldman 1981; Monk-Turner et al. 2002). Further, individuals of both sexes have been found to help experimenters of the other sex more often than members of their own sex (Basow and Crawley 1982). Men have been found to help women more than men (Rabinowitz et al. 1997), and men have been found to help women more than women do (Wilson and Kennedy 2006). Women have been found to help women more than men do (Bihm et al. 1979). Women have also been found to help both

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sexes equally, whereas men tend to help women more than they help other men (Juni and Roth 1985). Women have been found to be helped more than men (Long et al. 1996).

In a meta-analytic review of ninety-nine studies, Eagly and Crowley (1986) noted that women received more help than men. Also, men helped more often than women, and were more likely to help women than men. In fact, men's greater propensity to helping others may be due to the fact that most studies of helping behaviors were conducted in public settings, as compared to private settings. The social role theory of helping (Eagly and Crowley 1986; Eagly and Koenig 2006) states that the circumstances of the helping situation will have an impact on the helping behavior. Men and women behave according to their sex roles. The masculine sex role promotes helping that is "heroic and chivalrous", whereas the feminine sex role promotes helping that is "nurturant and caring" (Eagly and Crowley 1986). Men tended to be more helpful when onlookers were present because the social norms about helping became "more salient and prescriptive" (Eagly and Koenig 2006, page 168). Thus, men were encouraged to behave in a way that is consistent with the masculine sex role, which "includes expectations of assertive interventions and polite, chivalrous behaviors" (Eagly and Koenig 2006, page 168).

Some of the contradictory findings cited above may be explained in light of these sex-congruent expectancies. When individuals were expected to help a man who fell in the subway (Piliavin et al. 1975), or to pick-up hitchhikers (Guéguen and Fischer-Lokou 2004), men were more likely than women to be helpful. However, when one was expected, under condition of anonymity, to mail a letter that was mistakenly received, women appeared to be more helpful than men because a woman would take the necessary steps to mail the letter (Bihm et al. 1979). Thus, a face-to-face interaction with a stranger, in a public setting (for example, in a shopping mall or on a busy street), could foster men's helpfulness and inhibit women's helpfulness. Conversely, when asked if they would agree to help a friend, women were more likely than men to provide help, and were more likely to help in a nurturant than in a problem-solving way (Belansky and Boggiano 1994).

Chivalrous helping has been defined as aiming to "protect individuals who are less able and powerful" (Dovidio and Penner 2001, page 180). It can be considered a survival of the codes of honor that were prevalent in the court society of the Middle Ages (Eagly and Crowley 1986). For example, those moral codes of conduct didn't disappear during the French revolution of 1789. Even much later, it was noted that "chivalry was by no means inconsistent with the middle-class work ethic or with political and civic egalitarianism ; a rhetoric of knightly honor also permitted bourgeois males the luxury of thinking themselves to be men of courage and the protectors of women and the weak" (Nye 1998, page 151). However, in 1967, after the last sword duel was known about in France, the tides began to turn as the ideology of chivalry seemed to vanish. Despite this, archaic, symbolic, or anachronistic forms of chivalry may have survived, in which the male was perceived as strong and protector, while the female was perceived as weak, passive, in need of protection, and courteously treated (Moelker and Kümmel 2007). This "benevolent sexism" (Viki et al. 2003) may result in those male prosocial behaviors that were

mentioned above, that is, where women are treated more favourably for no other apparent reason than the fact that they are women.

Lamy et al. (2008) argued that the sex roles and expectations for helping may become more salient when participants are influenced with the idea of love. Love entails a taxonomy of relationship scripts (Forgas 1993) — for example, “love at first sight”, long-standing marriages, platonic relationship. Each of these scripts, or scenarios, involve prescriptive, sex-linked expectations (for example, a man in love should be considerate, a woman should not make the first step, a man should be able to change a flat tire and not ask his girlfriend to do it). Asking someone to retrieve the memory of a love episode could therefore reinforce the awareness of sex roles, including the norms for helpfulness. Thus, in the present research, it was hypothesized that an induced reminiscence of love could trigger helping behavior and, specifically, chivalrous helping.

In this study, we didn't specify to the participants which type, or style (Hendrick and Hendrick 1986) of love we were interested in ; nevertheless, when participants were interviewed for the Journal “Love and Feelings” and asked to “retrieve a love episode that had counted a lot” for them, one can argue that in French, these words are non-ambiguous and refer to romantic relationships, especially during the initiation of a relationship. Some participants may have reminded themselves of a divorce, which made them suffer, others may have retrieved memories of a peaceful, “companionate” (Berscheid and Hatfield 1978) love ; but we suppose that most participants reminded themselves of an intimate, passionate, and happy mood relationship.

The purpose of the present experiment was to test whether chivalrous helping occurred more frequently when participants had been asked previously to retrieve the memory of a love episode, than when asked to retrieve the memory of music. Specifically, it was expected that male participants would offer chivalrous helping more often than female participants, which meant helping a stranger who dropped a stack of compact discs. Further, we expected that men would engage in helping behavior more frequently when a woman was in need of help, than when a man was in need of help. Finally, we expected that women would elicit help more frequently than men.

## Method

### Subjects

Four hundred and one (two hundred thirty-five men and one hundred sixty-six women) adult passersby served as subjects. The participants' estimated ages ranged from 30 to 50 years.

### Procedure

The experiment took place in a busy pedestrian street of a medium-sized town (one hundred thousand citizens) in France. The participants were randomly assigned to

two groups. In the Love Reminiscence condition, passersby were asked by a confederate if they could answer a few questions for the journal “Love and Feelings” (a fictitious journal used in this study). Those who agreed were then asked to “retrieve a love episode that has meant a great deal to you,” and to explain “which personality features in your partner have allowed you to feel such an intense emotion?” The confederate wrote down the participant’s answers and thanked him. The participant then continued on his way, for approximately 50 m. There he encountered another confederate, carrying a stack of compact discs, who inadvertently lost his grip when they were near each other, walking in opposite directions. The dependent variable in the present experiment is the participants’ response to this person seemingly in need of help : they helped the confederate to pick up the compact discs scattered on the ground, or simply walked away. It should be noted that the compact discs were never scattered within the participants’ path. Therefore, the participants didn’t have to choose between bypassing the compact discs on the ground or helping. They had only to choose between going straight on their way or helping.

In the control, Music Reminiscence condition, the first confederate asked a passerby if he could answer a few questions for the journal “Twenty-first Century” (a fictitious journal used in this study). Those who agreed were then asked to “retrieve a piece of music that has meant a great deal to you,” and to explain “which features in this music have allowed you to feel such an intense emotion?”

A total of seventy-five confederates (thirty-five male, forty female), ages eighteen to twenty, volunteered to participate in this experiment. All of them were first-year students from the Department of Business at the University of Bretagne-Sud in France. They participated alternatively as an interviewer for the journal or as the “awkward” confederate who lost his stack of compact discs. The participants were selected following a random assignment, in which the confederates (interviewers) were instructed to approach the first man or woman with an estimated age from 30 to 50 years, who appeared alone in the pedestrian zone where the experiment was executed. When a confederate was ready to solicit people he was instructed to use the first request (Love) with the first participant who appeared alone in the pedestrian zone, the second request (Music) with the pedestrian who appeared in the same zone after the interaction with the first participant was finished. With the third participant, the confederate used the first request, the second request with the fourth and so on all along the procedure. With this method, it was not possible for the confederate to select a participant in one of the two conditions. When finishing with a participant, the confederate was obliged to solicit the first participant with an estimated age range from age 30 to 50 years who appeared alone in the pedestrian zone.

## Results

Results from the thirty-five male confederates were not significantly different and their data were combined. We reached the same conclusion for the forty female confederates, which was that their results did not significantly differ, allowing us to mix the data they collected. The number of participants who helped pick up the

**Table 1** Number of subjects who gave help by participant's sex and experimental condition

Sex of passerby	Love ( <i>n</i> =204)		Music ( <i>n</i> =197)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male ( <i>n</i> =235)	67	54.9	40	35.4
Female ( <i>n</i> =166)	31	37.8	25	29.8
Total ( <i>n</i> =401)	98	48.0	65	33.0

compact discs, according to the participant's sex and the experimental conditions, are presented in Table 1.

The number of participants who helped pick up the compact discs, according to the experimental conditions and the second confederate's sex — that is, the one who requested help — are presented in Table 2.

A log-linear statistical method was used to analyse the data. A main effect of the induced reminiscence of love was found [ $\chi^2$  ( $N=401$ )=8.71,  $p<.01$ ]. When participants were induced to retrieve the memory of a love episode, 48% helped the confederate pick up the compact discs, whereas 33% helped in the Music condition. *Post hoc* comparisons showed that inducing the idea of love had an effect with male participants [ $\chi^2$  ( $N=235$ )=9.01,  $p<.01$ ], whereas it had no effect with female participants [ $\chi^2$  ( $N=166$ )=1.20, n.s.]. Moreover, inducing the idea of love had an effect when the second confederate (the one who requested help) was female [ $\chi^2$  ( $N=223$ )=7.58,  $p<.01$ ], whereas it had no effect when the second confederate was male [ $\chi^2$  ( $N=178$ )=1.66, n.s.].

## Discussion

Our results demonstrate that the likelihood to help is significantly shaped by the sex of the passerby, the sex of the person in need of help, and the reminiscence of love. These results appear to support the social role theory of helping (Eagly and Crowley 1986; Eagly and Koenig 2006): male participants provide more help than females in an urban, public setting and after they have been made more aware than previously of sex roles, through the reminiscence of a love story. It can also be noticed that the kind of help that was required by the situation was not specifically “feminine” (for

**Table 2** Number of subjects who gave help by confederate's sex and experimental condition

Sex of confederate	Love ( <i>n</i> =204)		Music ( <i>n</i> =197)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male ( <i>n</i> =35)	33	39.8	29	30.5
Female ( <i>n</i> =40)	65	53.7	36	35.3
Total ( <i>n</i> =75)	98	48.0	65	33.0

example, nurturant and caring). The kind of help that is offered by an individual may be determined by his sex (“chivalrous” men versus “caring” women), but must also fit to a context. For example, a recent experiment (Miller and Werner 2007) showed that in a professional context (helping behavior toward a coworker with a disability), females did not prove to be more helpful than men. Conversely, women appear to provide more emotional support than men in intimate (that is, friendship or mating) relationships (Van Yperen and Buunk 1990; George et al. 1998).

One possible explanation for these male-female differences in helping is that females are relationship “experts”, that is, have a better relationship awareness than men (Acitelli and Young 1996). Thus, in contrast to males, female participants who were influenced to retrieve a love episode might not have been more aware than before of male-female sex roles and norms. They were aware of these norms prior to the experiment. This could explain why the reminiscence of love does not appear to affect female participants.

For male participants, it could be suggested that they conformed to the masculine sex role that expects them to provide help to “weak” or “helpless” women ; but it is also possible that they forecasted the benefit of being helpful. The “ingratiation hypothesis”, that is, the “opportunity to interact with and possibly date a member of the opposite sex” (Bickman 1974, page 45) has not proved yet to be linked to helping behaviors, but another kind of reward could be the smile, the glance or the thankful words of the girl who elicited help. Previous research has shown that an expectation of mood enhancement is linked to various helping behaviors (Sprecher et al. 2007), but this study focused exclusively on a relational (friendship) context. Moreover, as initial feelings of sympathy for a person in need are connected to subsequent helping (Amato 1986), further research would need to control for the physical attractiveness of female confederates.

From a practical point of view, one relevant question concerns the reminiscence of love that is induced by movies or television programs. Movies may perpetuate romantic myths and stereotypes, which, in turn, shall influence our social and personal decisions — and notably “the ideas of how men and women should relate to each other” (Natharius 2007, page 183). For example, believing that “the man should not be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman” (Galician 2004, page 163) may strongly induce the acceptance of unequal status among spouses. Therefore, men may be exposed to fictional romances and nevertheless maintain abusive or violent behaviors. One must also keep in mind that exposure to violent television has an effect on laboratory measures of aggression, whereas the impact on “real-life” criminally violent behavior has not been yet convincingly demonstrated (Savage 2004). In line with these arguments, it can be asserted that the present experiment brings a little advancement to research devoted to the impact of love on real-life prosocial behaviors. Television programs that induce the idea of love may trigger benevolent behaviors, at the condition that these programs were free of sexist stereotypes. Moreover, the differential impact of two differing kinds of programs should be tested : fictions that involve strangers (actors) falling in love, and information programs that would lead the audience to retrieve the memory of one of their *own* love episodes. Watching strangers on TV falling in love may not be sufficient to trigger benevolent behaviors.

The process illustrated by the present study might also deserve an investigation of new ways of intervention when domestic violence against women occurs. It may be that responses such as advertising the domestic violence laws or explaining (to women) where to go for help are not sufficient and should be confronted to interventions based on spouses' (especially husbands') retrieval of their happy mood or initial feelings of love. It is probably much more difficult to hurt a person with whom one is in love — or even *has been* in love — than someone who no longer reminds us of any positive feeling.

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