

Short Research Note

Valentine Street Promotes Chivalrous Helping

Lubomir Lamy¹, Jacques Fischer-Lokou², and Nicolas Guéguen²¹Université Paris-Sud, Sceaux, France, ²Université de Bretagne-Sud, Lorient, France

Abstract. In a field setting, male passersby ($N = 120$) were asked by a female confederate to indicate the direction of Valentine Street (Martin Street in the control group). Thirty meters ahead, the participant encountered another female confederate who asked for help, claiming that a group of four disreputable-looking male confederates had taken her mobile telephone and refused to give it back. Participants primed with the cognition of "Valentine" helped the female confederate get her mobile phone back more frequently than those primed with the cognition of "Martin." Results are explained in light of the gender role theory of helping, mood maintenance effects, and mood-elicited depth of information processing.

Keywords: valentine, love, gender role, chivalrous helping, priming

In most traditional and modern cultures, men and women occupy different roles. For example, men are executives, soldiers, or politicians, whereas women are school teachers, nurses, or homemakers. Social role theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests that the sex-based division of labor leads to gender stereotypes and to sex differences in behavior. Because of women's greater involvement in child rearing and homemaking, people associate women with communal traits such as *nurturing, kind, sensitive, and helpful*. Because of men's greater involvement as breadwinners, especially in high-status occupations, people associate men with instrumental traits such as *independent, competitive, and self-confident*. And despite dramatic changes that occurred during the twentieth century – i.e., women massively joining the workforce, obtaining access to prestigious careers and executive roles – gender stereotypes remain practically unchanged (Lippa, 2005). Further, social role theory posits that gender roles encompass *descriptive* norms (i.e., stereotypes) and *prescriptive* norms (Eagly, Wood, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2004). Prescriptive norms refer to the social rewards people encounter when they act in line with the expectations about people of their sex, or to social punishments when they transgress these expectations. For example, in the context of dating relationships, to the extent that these norms are endorsed, "women may act nurturant and warm on dates and men may act dominant and chivalrous" (Eagly et al., 2004, p. 275).

Chivalrous helping, or the tendency to "protect individuals who are less able and powerful" (Dovidio & Penner, 2001, p. 180), often includes women among its beneficiaries. In fact, women deserve to be courteously treated, in so far as they are stereotypically perceived as weak, passive, and in need of protection (Moelker & Kümmel, 2007). Despite re-

cent recognition that the rules of chivalry encompass paternalism, benevolent sexism, and contribute to the subordination of women (e.g., Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003), they still survive in Western society. For example, men are supposed to hold doors open for women, to help women unable to carry heavy luggage, or to rescue them if assaulted.

Previous studies of gender differences and helping behavior have found that men and women provide the kind of help that is in accordance with their gender role: The masculine gender role promotes "heroic and chivalrous" helping, whereas the feminine gender role promotes "nurturant and caring" helping (Eagly & Crowley, 1986).

The social role theory of helping (Eagly & Koenig, 2006) also states that when social norms about helping become more salient and prescriptive, individuals will help more frequently. This is notably the case for men in a public setting and when onlookers are present. Men can also be induced to help a stranger by the activation of a helping goal associated with a relationship partner, e.g., a friend (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). Merely activating mental representations of people we appreciate may unconsciously activate the interpersonal goal of helping, even toward a stranger. Other research (Garcia, Weaver, Moskowitz, & Darley, 2002) has found that participants primed with the presence of many other people were less helpful than those who imagined being alone with a friend. In addition, passersby previously induced to retrieve the memory of a love episode were more helpful than those in a control group (Lamy, Fischer-Lokou, & Guéguen, 2008, 2009). Thus, it appears that fostering the awareness of a social or personal norm for helping has an impact on the frequency of helping. However, to our knowledge, no previous study has investigated the possibility of increased

helping in an emergency situation – or *bystander intervention* – as the result of the mere cognition of a single word related to the idea of love.

Previous research on priming has demonstrated that the activation of a concept or mental representation can exert an influence on subsequent information processing or behavior. Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) found that participants primed with words related to the elderly stereotype (e.g., *traditional, retired, Florida*) walked more slowly than those of a control group when leaving the experiment and that participants primed with the concept of rudeness interrupted the experimenter more quickly and frequently than did participants primed with the concept of politeness. After exposure to sentences describing stereotypical dependent behavior (e.g., *can't make decisions*), participants rated a female target who performed the same behavior as a male target as more dependent; and after exposure to stereotypical aggressive behavior (e.g., *threatens other people*), participants rated a male target as more aggressive than a female target (Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993). Moreover, impression formation was unrelated to the explicit memory for primes. Priming effects can take place when subliminal priming techniques are employed (i.e., extremely brief exposure to stimuli). Using this technique, Zemack-Rugar, Bettman, and Fitzsimons (2007) showed that individuals subliminally primed with guilt adjectives were more helpful than those primed with sadness adjectives. Regardless of the duration of exposure to the stimulus, *automatic* or *implicit* social cognition occurs when information processing is made without the person's awareness, intention, possibility of control, or effort (Bargh, 1994). To explain the means by which mental representations can shape social behavior, theorists have hypothesized mental structures consisting of interconnected information or attributes. The main assumption is the *spreading of activation*, the activation of one concept being assumed to spread along a network of meaningfully associated information. Activating the concept of gender, for example, would activate the implicit knowledge structure of gender-linked traits, stereotypes, and norms for behavior. This network of sex-related associations, or *gender schema*, functions as a "prescriptive standard or guide" (Bem, 1981, p. 355) for action.

Despite these advances in the field of priming and automatic social cognition, no attempt has been made, to date, to test the influence of the automatic activation of the cognition of love on social behavior. Previous research on love and helping behavior has shown that the cognition of love triggers helpfulness among people solicited by a stranger who needs money to take the bus (Lamy et al., 2008) or even when no explicit solicitation occurs but one witnesses a stranger who "accidentally" dropped a stack of compact discs (Lamy et al., 2009). In both studies, participants were asked to retrieve the memory of a love episode that counted a lot for them, before their helpfulness was tested. In the present research, we reasoned that behavioral effects can be reached in the absence of any direct reminiscence of love or conscious awareness of love scripts, by means of an automatic activation of love. To this purpose, we chose the concept of Valentine as a possible

substitute for love, or at least as one of its attributes. We hypothesized that the priming of Valentine would induce a similar pattern of behavioral consequences – that is, an increase in helping behavior, as compared to a control group – as the one found when participants were asked to consciously remind themselves of a love episode. Also, we attempted to demonstrate that the priming effect of the concept of Valentine can occur even when disconnected from any romantic, relational context. Therefore, male passersby were asked if they could indicate the direction of Valentine Street (Martin Street, in the control group). Further, the experiment took place during the fall, that is, outside the period during which the media remind us of Valentine's Day. In the above-mentioned studies (Lamy et al., 2008, 2009), female passersby were not influenced by the reminiscence of love. Male passersby were influenced by the reminiscence of love, but only when solicited by a female confederate. Moreover, in the present research, the dependent variable was the occurrence of a kind of help that is stereotypically masculine: a chivalrous bystander intervention. For these reasons, we decided to investigate only male participants whom a female confederate had asked for help, that is, when helping behavior is likely to occur.

Method

The experiment took place in a medium-sized town (100,000 citizens) outside the shopping district. Participants ($N = 120$) were male, aged 30 to 50, and were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. In the Valentine condition, participants were asked by a 19-year-old female confederate: "Excuse me, I'm looking for Valentine Street and can't find it. Can you tell me how to get there?" The confederate thanked the participant and he continued on his way. Approximately 30 meters ahead they were approached by another 19-year-old female confederate who said: "Can you please help me? Those boys over there took my mobile phone and don't want to give it back. Could you talk to them and get it back for me?" The confederate showed the participant a group of four 20-year-olds, disreputable-looking boys (also confederates), one of whom was holding a mobile phone. The dependent variable in this experiment was the frequency of helping or, more specifically, the number of participants who went up to the group of boys and asked the one holding the mobile phone to give it back to the female confederate. In the control group, the first female confederate asked for directions to "Martin Street"; there is no Martin or Valentine Street in the city in which the experiment was conducted. Therefore, the participants' typical answer when asked for directions to either street was that they didn't know. None of the participants provided wrong directions. The four male confederates were blind to the experimental condition. The female confederates participated alternatively as the one who asked for directions and the one who wanted her mobile

phone back. The participants were selected randomly: The female confederates were instructed to approach the first man they saw with an estimated age of 30 to 50 years who appeared to be alone on the street where the experiment was being conducted and ask him for directions to Valentine Street. The female confederates alternated between the two conditions (Martin vs. Valentine Street) each time the interaction with the previous participant was finished. With this method, it was not possible for the confederate to select a participant in one of the two conditions.

Pilot testing confirmed that the male confederates' disreputable look was credible. To test this assumption, we compared reactions elicited by two photos showing the group of male confederates (a) dressed the way they looked during the main experiment described above, and (b) the way they looked when they went to class at the university. When asked how confident they would feel (on a 5-point scale) approaching the group alone, participants were less confident ($M = 2.14$, $SD = 1.10$) in the disreputable condition than in the nondisreputable, "casual" condition ($M = 4.38$, $SD = .86$), $t(40) = 7.29$, $p < .001$. In the disreputable condition, 38.1% and, in the nondisreputable condition, 95.2% of the participants stated that they would ask for the mobile phone, $\chi^2(1, N = 42) = 15.42$, $p < .001$. We also reasoned that helping the female confederate could be explained by her level of physical attractiveness. On a 20-point scale, female confederates' physical attractiveness (as evaluated with photos) was just above average ($M = 10.55$, $SD = 2.48$, and $M = 11.08$, $SD = 2.44$, respectively) and did not differ significantly, $t(46) = .74$, ns . Pilot testing also confirmed that male passersby who were asked to indicate what they thought about after hearing "Valentine Street" mostly had (69.4%) cognitions of love or related cognitions such as couples or lovers' holiday. When primed with "Martin Street," no cognitions of love occurred, $\chi^2(1, N = 69) = 35.93$, $p < .001$.

Results and Discussion

The percentages of help elicited by the two female confederates were very similar (26.7% vs. 30%, respectively), $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = .16$, $p = .68$, ns , so this factor was not included in the analysis. Twenty-two (36.7%) of the participants who had been asked to provide directions to "Valentine Street" helped – that is, asked the disreputable-looking male confederate holding the mobile phone to return it. Only 12 (20%) of participants primed with "Martin Street" helped, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 4.10$, $p = .043$.

The present research provides evidence that chivalrous helping, whether it is detrimental to women or not, still exists, and that it can be activated by a single word. It demonstrates that the mere cognition of Valentine enhances men's helpfulness toward seemingly distraught young women. One possible explanation for these results is in line with the social role theory of helping (Eagly & Crowley, 1986) and priming effects in social cognition. As our pilot study showed, the cog-

nition of Valentine is strongly associated with the cognition of love. The representation of romantic love entails a variety of relational scripts and gender roles (Forgas, 1993). Therefore, activating the concept of Valentine appears to result in the activation of the concept of love, which includes among its attributes gendered norms about how men and women should behave. The spreading of activation among these semantically connected mental representations might, thus, reinforce the awareness of gender norms such as: (a) a man should be brave, (b) a man should provide assistance to a helpless woman. Activation of such gender norms could, in turn, enhance the probability of being helpful in a relevant, male-typical context of bystander intervention. However, two main restrictions must be made to this reasoning. First, in the present study, we did not intend to measure the awareness of such gender norms. Therefore, their greater awareness in the Valentine condition, compared to the control group, can merely be hypothesized. Second, it can be argued that the activation of the concept of love is not a necessary step in this line of reasoning because the concept of Valentine itself entails representations of gendered norms. Previous research has shown that Valentine's Day involves strong representations about how men and women should behave on this day, including a sense of obligation or pressure to conform to social norms (Shelley, 2007). However, Valentine, compared to love, can be considered a narrower concept. Its scope includes notably offering a gift and a greeting card with words of love to the beloved one, but not necessarily showing bravery to rescue a helpless female stranger. Further research would need to control for the scope and attributes of such concepts as love and Valentine, and consequently, for the potential limits of spreading activation among such associative networks.

An alternative explanation of the present results consists of a mood maintenance effect (Carlson, Charlin, & Miller, 1988). Thinking of Valentine may induce a positive mood, which in turn increases a participant's helpfulness in order to maintain his or her good mood. In this context, however, confronting the group of male confederates might have appeared potentially stressful or even dangerous, as pointed out by the pilot study. Avoiding this stressful situation would have appeared to be the best way to keep one's good mood, unless the risk of getting angry or physically threatened was counterbalanced by a strong awareness of truly being a man, that is, being rewarded for conformity to the norm of male chivalrous or heroic helping. Further, this mood maintenance effect implies that the cognition of Valentine prompts positive feelings. Our pilot study tended to confirm this, but one must keep in mind that for some people Valentine implies cognitions of love "obligations," sad feelings, or a greater awareness of being single (Shelley, 2007).

A third possible interpretation of our results is that positive moods, which were possibly induced in most participants when primed with Valentine, may be related to faster, less analytic information-processing strategies (Berkowitz, 2000; Schwarz & Bless, 1991). Sad people appear to engage more often than their happy counterparts in detailed, slower pro-

cessing of information and may seek to avoid risk taking. In the present research, we may have induced participants to feel happy (Valentine condition) or to feel a neutral emotional state (Martin condition). If so, those with positive mood may also have been induced to reason less about the request of the female confederate. They may have undervalued the risk of potentially dangerous consequences in case of an intervention. They may also have been less risk-avoidant than participants who were not in a positive mood.

These findings provide the first demonstration that priming a concept strongly associated with love, in the absence of any romantic context or deliberate reminiscence of a love episode, can influence behavior. However, some limitations should be acknowledged. The present study did not include measures of participants' mood or activation of gender roles. These measures would be needed in future research in order to clarify which theoretical interpretation fits the data best. In addition, although pilot testing showed a strong association between the concepts of Valentine and love, the generalizability of the current findings is limited because it remains unclear whether participants' reactions resulted from the cognition of Valentine, the cognition of love, or both together. Therefore, further research would need to replicate these findings with an even clearer induction of love (e.g., with a prime that could be presented as a person's last name such as *Lamoureux* (lover), which is quite common in France).

Despite these limitations, the findings are the first to address the question of automatic, nonconscious effects of love priming on helping behavior. They also broaden the scope of possible consequences of love, which have hardly been explored in the existing literature, in sharp contrast to the numerous studies devoted to the causes of love.

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Lubomir Lamy

Université Paris-Sud
IUT de Sceaux
8 avenue Cauchy
FR - 92330 Sceaux
France
lubomir.lamy@iut-sceaux.fr