



The Effect of Chivalry on Perceptions of Men and Women

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Chivalry

Responding to their disappointment with current trends toward increasing informality in intimate relationships and to a broader “crisis of civility” in the U.S., several conservative authors (e.g., Shalit, 1999) have proposed a return to a romanticized style of male-female interaction called *chivalry*. What would the effects of such a return be? The purpose of this experiment was to investigate the effect of chivalry on observers’ perceptions of men and women.

Chivalry can be thought of as a cultural script - like the script for a play, chivalry describes the behaviors expected from particular actors in particular contexts. In the chivalry script, men are expected to give preferential treatment to women in the contexts of protection and provision.

The Chivalry Debate

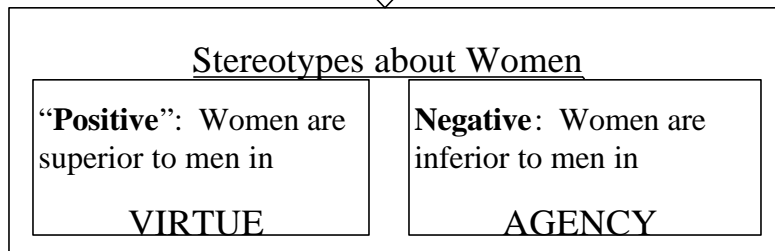
Critics of chivalry point out that the female role in the chivalry script is that of a passive recipient. They propose that chivalry may contribute to a stereotype of women as less independent than men. This view is supported by research on perceptions of recipients of assistance from a teacher (Graham & Barker, 1990) and affirmative action hiring policies (Heilman et al., 1997). In both cases, observers inferred that the recipient of aid had lower ability as compared to someone who had not received any assistance.

Advocates of chivalry counter that chivalry promotes only favorable beliefs about women: that they are more virtuous than men and therefore deserve respect. The idea that women should be put “on a pedestal” is representative of this view.

Or maybe they're both right

My hypothesis is that the chivalry script is related to both positive and negative beliefs about women:

Chivalry 



This proposal modifies Glick & Fiske’s (1996) theory of ambivalent sexism: instead of believing that women are manipulative, chivalrous men consider them incompetent.

Previous Research

Previous research (Altermatt, 2001) indicates that endorsement of the chivalry script is significantly positively correlated both with the belief that women are more virtuous than men and the belief that women are less agentic than men.

Endorsement of the chivalry script is also predictive of *selective* preferential treatment - courtesy, helping, and positive evaluations are given only to women who conform to expectations of high virtue and low agency.

While this research suggests that chivalrous *beliefs* are consistent with both positive and negative beliefs about women, it says nothing about the consequences of chivalrous *behavior*. The present experiment was designed to investigate the effect of merely observing a chivalrous exchange on observers' impressions of the actors.

Methods / Materials

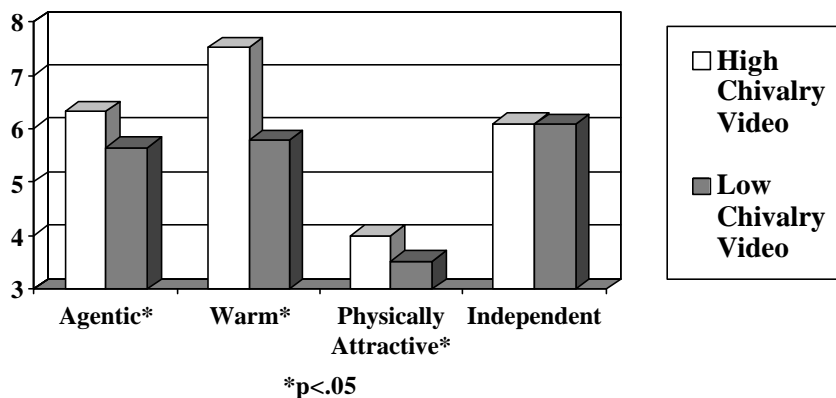
Stimuli

Two videotapes were developed showing a male and female undergraduate either (a) working together at the library or (b) having lunch together at a restaurant. The videotapes were constructed so that the male character had 6 opportunities for chivalrous behavior (e.g., open door, hold chair, etc.). In one version of the videotape (high chivalry), he took advantage of all 6. In the other (low chivalry), he took advantage of none.

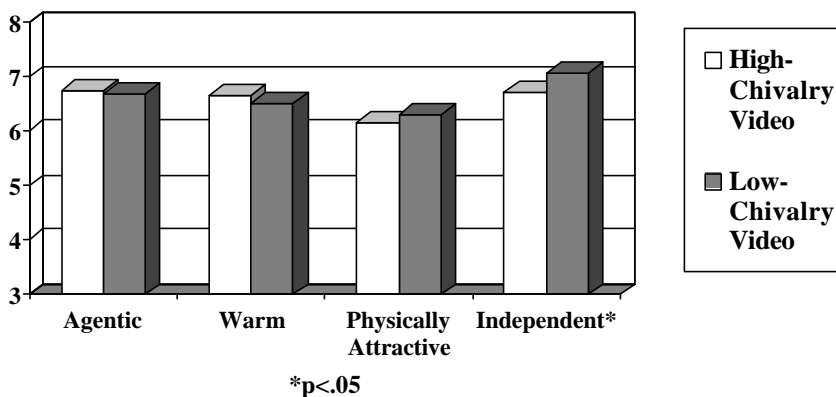
Ratings

After watching a videotape, participants (N=233) rated the characters on 11 traits using a 9-point Likert scale. Ratings were reduced to 4 factors: agentic, warm, physically attractive, and independent.

Rating of Male Character



Rating of Female Character



Summary and Conclusions

- High-chivalry male characters were perceived as significantly more agentic, warm, and (among female participants) physically attractive than the same characters in the low-chivalry condition.
 - Suggests that chivalry is very rewarding for men in terms of social approval.
- High-chivalry female characters were perceived as significantly less independent than the same characters in the low-chivalry condition.
 - Suggests that chivalry puts women at a disadvantage by making them appear less independent than if they had not received chivalrous treatment.