Beauty is in the Eye of the Door Opener: A Study of Chivalry and Female Attractiveness

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze and test the relationship between perceived femininity and acts of chivalry of males as measured by door-opening behavior. Male participants (N=16) were randomly and independently observed under one of two conditions upon their arrival at a Midwestern university on-campus library entrance. The first, “dressed-up” condition involved a female confederate dressed in desirable, feminine clothing; whereas the second, “dress-down” condition involved the same confederate dressed in muted, androgynous clothing. The confederate was to follow the participant as they arrived at the entrance/exit of the library, and participant’s behavior was measured according to their door-opening behavior: either a full hold, half hold, or no hold at all. A Chi-Square was run to test the significance of relationship between variables. Results suggested that there was no significant relationship between perceived female attractiveness and male door-opening behavior. These results suggest that male subjects may indulge in acts of chivalry due to traditional stereotypic behavior versus a desire to interact with their female counterpart; although, the lack of relationship could be due to small sample size. The current study stimulates questions as to what possible variables influences acts of male chivalry, such as door opening in the presence of females.

*Keywords*: attractiveness, stereotypes, chivalry, door opening
Female Attire in Correlation to Male Door-Opening Behavior: A Study of Chivalry

Stereotypically, the women of today’s society have frequently sought after high levels of femininity and attractiveness. It can be seen in magazine ads and television commercials, encouraging women to reach a peak of femininity that their male counterparts will dote after. However, along with these aesthetic gains come predisposed stereotypes, and the attire that a female chooses to wear can dictate how they are perceived in everyday life. The effects of having high levels of these feminine characteristics can be seen wherein women with higher levels of femininity and attractiveness seem to be more profitable and opportunistic when placed in bargaining situations (Solnick & Schweitzer, 1999). For the current study, it was questioned if this type of favoritism would carry-over when correlated with acts of chivalry, such as door-opening.

Accordingly, a meta-analytic review of helping behavior within social psychological literature done by Eagly & Crowley (1986) suggests that chivalrous acts such as door-opening have been predominantly prescribed to male gender roles, in that men will help more often in the presence of a women. Furthermore, Renne & Allen’s (1976) study, wherein multiple factors where examined in relationship to chivalrous acts performed by male participants, significantly determined the presence of gender roles traditionally associated with door-opening behavior, despite society’s forbearing perspective on chivalrous behavior. According to their study, Viki, Abrams, and Hutchison (cite) referred to this pattern of behavior as benevolent sexism; wherein the behavior is determined by a predisposition to keep women in inferior roles, but with a positive overtone. In relation, Ventimiglia (cite date) refers to these types of male/female interactions as the “door-opening ceremony”, wherein the traditional sex roles assigned to men and women suggest that men act as benefactors and women play the beneficiaries allowing the
door to be held for them. Viki et al. suggests that while this kind of male behavior may be seen as prosocial in nature, it is confined to stereotype that women need the help of men. While studies of this sort have had a primary focus on the existence of chivalry amongst new-age feminist perspectives, the research in this instance was focused on feminine stereotypes tied to attire and its direct influence on acts of male chivalry.

In relation, Renne and Allen (1976) reported that women dressed in more “feminine” clothing were four times as likely as their male counterparts to have the door held for them. We know that this behavior of door opening has been described as a gender role and the presence of a woman typically increases the behavior (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). For our study, we sought to investigate whether this effect would be seen when the same female confederate was dressed in both feminine and androgynous attire, reflecting different levels of attractiveness. Conceptually, it was assumed that the level of femininity tied to the attire of a female confederate would generate a significant effect on the number of times a male participant would open a door for them in passing. To test our hypotheses, we independently observed male participants (N=16) and observed their pattern of door opening behavior when followed by a female confederate. Our independent variable, the level of femininity seen in confederate attire, varied across two separate conditions; our confederate was to be “dressed-up” or “dressed-down”. Door-opening behavior of participants was to be measured based upon type of door hold; either full, half, or “no” hold. It was hypothesized that when our female confederate was dressed in the more feminine attire in the “dressed-up” condition there would be a significantly higher number of full holds than in the “dressed-down” condition.
Methods

Participants

Participants (N=16) were unobtrusively observed and assigned by time sampling to each condition (dress-up/dress-down confederate) from the pedestrian population of a Midwestern University library. Eight participants were observed per condition. Requirements for observation were that participants were of the male gender, and entering or exiting through the chosen entrance of the on-campus library. Demographics varied, but are unknown due to level of confidentiality. It was assumed that due to location, most males were either students or faculty of the university.

Materials

For the purpose of this study one female experimenter was chosen as the confederate and used as the manipulated variable between the two conditions (dress-up confederate versus dressed-down confederate). The second experimenter was reserved for observations and recording. For the dressed-up condition, the confederate wore bright clothing considered to be more feminine (backless dress, heals, fanciful scarf, earrings). For the second, dress-down condition, the confederate wore muted-color clothing considered to be less feminine and more androgynous (sweatpants, crew neck t-shirt, sneakers, no accessories). The confederate held a smartphone throughout the length of the experiment as to conceal the motives of the study and to appear preoccupied. An observation log created by the research team was used in order to record the type of door-opening behavior exhibited by the participant. In order to generate a as large of a sample as possible, the front entrance doors of the library were utilized due to heavier foot traffic with more opportunities for observations. In order for unobtrusive observations, the
observer made use of a library table to remain as concealed as possible and conserve a naturalistic environment.

**Procedures**

An experimental, between-subjects design was used to test the hypothesis that perceived femininity has a direct, significant influence on the patterns of male door-opening behavior. Observations and recordings took place at a Midwestern university on-campus library, during the early morning hours of the day (approximately 9a.m) when most students typically arrived to campus. Participants were assigned to conditions by time sampling based upon their arrival at the chosen entrance/exit of the library. Participants were observed individually, and observation duration per participant lasted approximately 10-30 seconds, and condition duration lasted until 9 observations were achieved.

To test the hypothesis that female attractiveness has an influence on male chivalry, the confederate was to approach the male participant upon arrival at the entrance/exit of the library. The confederate was to be dressed according to conditions (dress-up/dressed-down), and observations were based upon the type of door-opening behavior exhibited by the participant. To conceal intent, the confederate acted to be invested in their smartphone as they followed behind the participant. Door-opening behavioral patterns were measured as followed: “full hold” in which the participant opened the door and stood aside as the confederate passed, “half hold” wherein the participant held the door after they had already passed the threshold or lightly bumped the door with their foot or hand to keep the door from fully shutting on the confederate, and “no hold” in which the participant ignored the confederate and let the door shut behind them.

For the purpose of the study, deception was necessary in order to create a naturalistic observation of participant door-opening behavior. No instructions were provided for the
participants, as they were assumed to be unaware of their involvement in the experiment.

Overall, sixteen trials were recorded, totaling sixteen male participants. No debriefing was required for participants, as they were unaware of participation, and no other observations were recorded in order to protect participant identity.

**Results**

To test the hypothesis that female attire has a significant influence on male door-opening behavior, a chi square test for independence was conducted to determine the correlation between expected values and observed values of male door opening behavior across conditions. Results showed no significant difference across conditions, \( \chi^2(2, N = 16) = .856, p < .05 \). While the number of full, half, and “no” holds differed in relation to our independent variables, it was not significantly so; therefore, we fail to reject our null hypothesis showing that female attire has no significant effect on male door-opening behavior.

**Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to detect the level at which perceived femininity and attractiveness would have a significant effect on acts of chivalry. Conceptually, it was hypothesized that the level of femininity tied to our confederate’s attire (dressed-up/dressed-down) would have a significant effect on door-opening behavior of male participants. Specifically, it was hypothesized that when acting in the “dressed-up” condition, significantly more male participants would perform “full holds” for the female confederate. Results from a between-subjects Chi-Square test of significance showed no significant influence of the level of feminine attire of our confederate on male door-opening behavioral patterns.

Minimal limitations can be seen in our current study. Firstly, due to time constraints we were limited to a small sample size. If replicated with a significantly larger sample size, it could be
possible that more of an effect would be seen from our independent variables on door-opening behavior. Secondly, only two experimenters participated in the current study. With one experimenter working as the confederate, only one experimenter was used in recording of observations, leaving room for experimenter bias. Future replications wherein multiple observers were present would be advised.

While no significance was found in our study, replications of the current study on a larger scale could be deemed important. Identifying the variables that affect male behavior within our current society could shed light on understanding the existence of traditional gender roles.
References

