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Help-Seeking and Causal Attributions for Helping

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates help-seeking and effects of help-seeking on causal attributions for helping (i.e., what people believe caused help or lack of help). Additionally, it examines self-serving and other-serving attributions (i.e., to augment a person's positive sides and diminish the negative ones). Help-seeking was investigated in questionnaires, describing situations where spouses collaborate in doing household chores. A first study showed that women and men report using direct styles (i.e., explicitly verbalising the requests) more often than indirect ones. A second study showed that spouses inaccurately believe that wives in general would report more indirect and less direct styles than husbands in general. Causal attributions for helping were investigated in four studies with different methods, settings, and types of relationships (questionnaires, laboratory experiment; spouses doing chores, students and strangers doing computerized exercises). Consistent support was obtained for a predicted interaction between helping and the clarity of the request for help in determining the attributions. It is suggested that this finding is an effect of people comparing the behavior of one person with their beliefs about how other persons behave (i.e., consensus). Additionally, the findings did not support the claims that people make self-serving attributions and that the latter would be more pronounced among men than women. However, the attributions were other-serving. The thesis gives a novel understanding of everyday life by combining the issues of help-seeking and causal attributions. It also offers a discussion of the previous literature and of theoretical and applied implications of the findings.

Key words: Causal attributions, communication, consensus, directness, gender, help-seeking, household-management, indirect, prosocial-behavior, self-serving, sex-differences, spouses.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.*
(E. Dickinson)

In everyday life, people regularly turn to each other for help. To seek help involves a number of psychological processes and among them is to identify an appropriate style of help-seeking. At first glance, such a decision might seem unproblematic. Giving it a second thought, though, we can see that different styles of help-seeking involve different consequences, for the one who desires help as well as for the potential helper. The purpose of this thesis is to give an understanding of the styles of help-seeking people report using and, furthermore, whether the styles of help-seeking used influence what people believe cause help to be or not to be provided (i.e., their causal attributions).

Accordingly, this thesis contributes to the understanding of help-seeking as well as to that of attribution theory. The takeoff in two literature traditions is evident in the review of previous literature as well as in the empirical work presented in the thesis. Chapter 2 summarizes research on help-seeking. First, the literature on styles of help-seeking, specifically the clarity of the presented requests for help, is reviewed. Then we turn to sex differences in, and gender stereotypes about, styles of help-seeking. Chapter 3 deals with causal attributions. In the first section of Chapter 3, literature on the influence of situational variations on causal attributions is reviewed. Thereafter, we turn to enhancement tendencies in attributions. Chapter 4 first concludes the literature review and brings help-seeking and causal attributions together. It thereby gives

an account of the research questions examined in the empirical work presented in this thesis. Chapter 4 then gives a brief summary of the empirical work. In Chapter 5 the thesis is concluded with a general discussion of the contributions and shortcomings of the empirical findings.

People prefer to turn to their close others, such as friends and family, when they need help (see Clark, 1983; Wills, 1991). Hence, it is particularly significant to picture help-seeking and the effect of help-seeking on causal attributions for helping within close relationships. The empirical work presented in this thesis starts with an examination of spouses. Thereafter, in order to validate the findings to a broader context, the focus is moved to other types of relationships.

Even though literature describes adventurous instances of helping, most helping occurs in situations where the need is quite ordinary. For example, a person is to do a task or a chore and desires some help along the way. For that reason, the kind of help in focus is of everyday character throughout the empirical work. When spouses are investigated, the help is needed in situations where spouses collaborate in doing household chores (i.e., one person is to do a chore but desires that his or her spouse would do it). Help needed in other types of relationships are investigated through a computerized exercise (i.e., a student does exercises and seeks help from a friend or an unacquainted student).

As will be evident in the literature review, behaviors and thoughts are influenced by situational variables. An elaboration regarding the situation types used in the empirical work presented in this thesis will be presented before turning to the review of the previous literature on help-seeking and on causal attributions. Note that further elaborations are given in connection with the different sections of the thesis. A focus throughout the thesis is similarities and differences between women and men. In line with the terminology used by Eagly (1987, pp. 5-6), the term sex henceforth refers to the grouping of people into men and women based on biological differences and the term gender refers to the meanings that are ascribed to male and female as categories. The term sex difference refers to differences in the thoughts and behaviors of men

versus women, irrespective of the causes of such differences, and the term gender difference refers to differences in the stereotypes people hold about men versus women. In line with the gender model suggested by Deaux and Major (1987; for a review, see Deaux & LaFrance, 1998), sex is regarded in this thesis as part of an interactive process, where people's gender based schemas and expectations contribute to differences in situational constraints for men and women. Another concept that will be used in the thesis is power. In line with the suggestion by Ng and Bradac, power is seen as a relational process and "one person has power over another person when the two stand in a relationship of dominance and submission if person A realizes a goal by successfully committing person B to a course of action that B would not otherwise take, then A must also have power over B." (Ng & Bradac, 1993, p. 3).

Finally, a considerable part of the empirical work presented in this thesis examines situations where spouses¹ collaborate in doing household chores. The study of spousal interaction is of interest, as spouses repeatedly communicate with and act towards one another and such interactions affect people's everyday lives. Research shows that in Western society, the interaction between spouses has changed over the last decades and there is now a gender equality norm (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993; Flood & Gråsjö, 1997; Holmberg, 1993; Kugelberg, 1987, 1999; Martinsson, 1997). However, the situation is complicated. While on the one hand there is the norm about gender equality, on the other hand household chores are regarded as a female sphere and women still do more of the housework and similar activities than do men (Ahrentzen, Levine, & Michelson, 1989; Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Baxter & Kane, 1995; Flood & Gråsjö, 1997; Lundberg, Mårdberg, & Frankenhauser, 1994; Major, 1993; Michelson, 1988, 2000; Roman, 1999a). For example, Kugelberg (1999, pp. 241-242) suggests that despite a tendency for men to be more integrated in the home (e.g., parenting) women still take charge of most housework. Spouses themselves regard conflic-

¹ The term *spouses* refers in this thesis both to married and cohabiting persons, as people in Sweden often enter into long-term heterosexual pair-bonding without legally marrying (Björnberg, 1992).

ting expectations and behaviors concerning equality as a problem (Martinsson, 1997). Spouses are dissatisfied with the distribution of chores (Roman, 1999a, 1999b) and this is reported as one of the reasons for divorce (Wadsby & Swedin, 1992). Research even shows that spouses engage in different activities in order to neglect their perception of a conflict between expectations and actual behaviors when it comes to gender equality in the home (Bittman & Lovejoy, 1993). Taken together, a reasonable conclusion is that even though men as well as women take part in doing household chores, women spend more time doing chores in the home and the chores are regarded as a 'female sphere'. In the empirical work presented in this thesis, the focus in the studies with spouses is on household chores that are typically female but that men as well as women do at least sometimes. Note that out-door chores are not included.

To sum up, the present thesis gives a summary of the previous research on help-seeking and on causal attributions. Furthermore, in the empirical work these two issues are combined by studying the effect of help-seeking on causal attributions for helping. The general aims with the empirical work presented in the thesis were to examine (a) the clarity of the styles of help-seeking spouses report using, and (b) how clarity and enhancement tendencies influence causal attributions for helping.

2. STRATEGIES FOR SEEKING HELP

2.1. DEFINITIONS OF HELPING AND HELP-SEEKING AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE FIELD

Do not wait for extraordinary circumstances to do good; try to use ordinary situations
(J. P. Richter)

Everyone is familiar with helping behaviors; helping is universal (Fiske, 1991, p. 177). However, it is not clear what researchers refer to when the term helping is used. Similar behaviors are labelled differently and there is no agreed-upon definition. Thus, a definition of the terminology used in this thesis is warranted. This section first provides a definition of helping and gives an account of how the concept differs from narrow concepts. Then, the same procedure is undertaken for help-seeking. The term *helping* henceforth refers to the behavior of the person who is expected to provide aid, regardless of motives or mutual interest, whereas *help* refers to a behavior that aids the needy person and *no help* to a behavior that does not aid the needy person. The person who is asked to help is referred to as *the potential helper*.

There are concepts that closely relate to and overlap helping, such as prosocial behavior and altruism. Let us start with the broader term: *prosocial behavior*. According to Batson (1998), the concept was originally used as a term for behaviors opposite to antisocial behaviors. Despite the tendencies in the literature to use the term prosocial behavior as synonymous with helping, it thus originally referred to different kinds of acts that benefit another person and are positively valued by society. Accordingly, the term prosocial behaviors refers to a wider range of behaviors than helping. The other concept, *altruism*, is more narrow than helping. Within sociobiology, altruism has been defined as a person increasing the fitness of another at the expense of his or her own fitness (Buck &

Ginsburg, 1991). However, within psychology the term altruism is often used in a way that includes motivational aspects, and in line with the definition proposed by Batson (e.g., Batson, 1998; Batson & Oleson, 1991) altruism henceforth refers to the motivation to benefit another person. As altruism implies a focus on specific motives for helping, the term altruism is too narrow to correspond to helping.

Before helping takes place, a number of psychological processes occur. One is that the needy person identifies an appropriate style of help-seeking. *Style of help-seeking* henceforth refers to the behaviors used in order to elicit help. As will be elaborated in the next section, people use various styles of help-seeking and these styles differ in how clear the presented desire for help is (e.g., Bornstein, 1998). In line with the suggestion from *speech act theory* (for a review, see Krauss & Chiu, 1998), when literal and intended meanings are the same, speech is direct, whereas when they differ speech is indirect (see also Ng & Bradac, 1993, p. 93). Ng and Bradac (1993, p. 89) provide an example of this difference between direct and indirect speech: “Shut the window, please” is an example of direct speech, while “It is cold in here, Robert” is an indirect speech act. Applied to help-seeking, and in line with the definition adopted by Bornstein (1998), the term *clarity* henceforth refers to whether the needy person uses *direct* styles of help-seeking, that is, explicitly verbalizes a request for help, or *indirect* styles of help-seeking, that is, acts so as to elicit help without directly mentioning help.

Help-seeking occurs in situations that differ in the characteristics of the need for help (for a review, see Nadler, 1991) and two such characteristics are discussed here. The first is the level of the need for help and, in a similar vein, the costs involved in helping for the potential helper. The empirical work presented in this thesis focuses on situations where the need for help is modest and that are likely to involve a small cost for the potential helper. The second characteristic is in what domain the help is desired. The empirical work focuses on instrumental help, namely to do a household chore and to perform a computerized exercise. However, note that this does not necessarily exclude that the helping carries an

emotional meaning. For example, an interview study by Holmberg (1993) indicates that spouses demonstrate fondness by helping one another.

Additionally, help is desired within different types of relationships. A majority of previous studies have been carried out on people who do not know each other or are merely acquainted, and noticeably less is known about helping in close relationships such as marriage and friendship. Because people prefer to turn to their close others for help (e.g., see Wills, 1991) the latter is an important omission. It is not certain whether findings from the studies on helping in casual relationships can be applied to helping in close ones. It has been suggested that the norms governing helping differ significantly depending on how close people are to one another (Clark, 1983; Clark & Mills, 1993; Wills, 1991). For example, close relationships involve mutual disclosure, concern for the other's needs, and mutual dependency. Clark compares helping in different kinds of relationships with the following scenario:

Receiving an offer to help paint your living room from a close friend may result in warm feelings toward the friend ... However, receipt of the same offer from a student in your class may elicit surprise, concern about whether the student desires a closer relationship with you than you desire or feel appropriate, or about just what the student expects from you in return. (1983, p. 281)

Hence it follows that behaviors in helping situations are influenced by the relationship between the needy person and the potential helper. This thesis focuses both on helping in close relationships and when strangers need help from one another.

The literature describes behaviors that are closely related to help-seeking, yet differ from it in significant ways and thus are not to be seen as equivalent to help-seeking. These behaviors include support seeking, information/feedback seeking, and influence/power strategies. *Support seeking* is delimited to the seeking of comfort, to make a person feel good. For example, the term emotional support is used in the literature on caring for the personal and emotional needs of others (e.g., Kunkel & Burlinson, 1999). In addition to support seeking, help can also be sought regarding practical things and issues that are of no emotional importance.

The second group of behaviors related to help-seeking is *information seeking* and *feedback seeking*. As proposed by Lee (1999), the necessity of social interaction differentiates help-seeking from the seeking of feedback and information. Help-seeking involves both the person who seeks help and a potential helper, whereas information and feedback seeking can be achieved without an interaction between persons.

The third group of behaviors is *influence* and *power strategies*. ‘Influence’ and ‘power’ most often refer to the same kinds of behaviors, namely, a person’s potential influence with the effect of getting another person to do something that he or she might not have otherwise done (Johnson, 1976; Offermann & Schrier, 1985; Sagrestano, 1992; Steil & Weltman, 1992). Henceforth, the term *influence strategy* refers also to power strategies. Johnson (1976) defines indirect influence strategies as behaviors that “... occur when the influencer act as if the person on the receiving end is not aware of the influence.” (p. 100). Yet, in the same paper, she also uses clarity in a less conservative way, and more in line with the definition adopted in this thesis. Johnson uses ‘indirect’ to refer to behaviors where “X does not ask Y directly but mentions in Y’s presence some reasons why it is best to do it that way”, and ‘direct’ to refer to behaviors where “X asks Y to do it and explains the reasons why it is best to do it that way” (p. 106). Consequently, even though influence strategies are not to be regarded as synonymous with help-seeking (e.g., influence strategies are more closely related to the implement of power), the fields of help-seeking and influence strategies are related in the sense that one person desires that another person do something.

To sum up, the present chapter focuses on the styles of help-seeking people use, specifically on the clarity of the presented requests for help. The research on phenomena closely related to help-seeking will be reviewed in the thesis, provided that the researchers adopted a similar definition of clarity as the one used here.

2. 2. STYLES OF HELP-SEEKING

The research on help-seeking has been concerned both with the willingness to seek help and with the styles of help-seeking people use. However, it is noteworthy that the literature foremost focuses on willingness to seek help (Bogart, 1998; Nadler, 1986; for a review, see Fisher, Nadler, & DePaulo, 1983). For example, about ten years ago, Nadler (1991) claimed that:

The majority of the literature on help seeking has conceptualized help seeking as a dichotomous behavior (i.e., seek versus not seek) ... future research that should be directed at the ways in which different individuals in different situations prefer to ask others for assistance. (p. 307)

In a similar vein, Lee (1999) more recently proposed that: “while past research has focused on the factors predicting whether individuals request help when problems arise, little attention has been paid to how individuals request help” (p. 1473). In this section of the thesis, it is suggested that people use various styles of help-seeking and that these styles differ in the clarity of the presented desire for help. As attempts to examine the clarity of the styles of help-seeking people use have been rare, this section offers a general view by summarizing literature both on help-seeking and on behaviors that are related to help-seeking, such as influence strategies. The focus is first on the ratio of direct versus indirect styles of help-seeking and then on possible explanations for why direct or indirect styles should be more commonly reported.

Before summarizing the previous literature, four general methodological considerations regarding the previous research are warranted, as the methodological limitations restrict possible conclusions. The first limitation is that the participants, when asked to report their behaviors, were given no instructions about the situation in which they should imagine themselves (as done in White & Roufail, 1989), making it difficult to know what kinds of situations the findings can be generalized to. Second, a common method in the research on help-seeking and related behaviors has been self-reports. Questions have been raised as to whether self-

reports are affected by ‘self-presentation biases’ (e.g., Steil & Weltman, 1992). However, this is recognized in many of the studies using self-reports (e.g., Bisanz & Rule, 1989; Grant, Button, Ross, & Hannah, 1997; Gruber & White, 1986, Offermann & Schrier, 1985; Steil & Weltman, 1992) and the results are rarely claimed to necessarily reflect true behavior, rather the findings show the behavior people *believe* that they use.

The third methodological issue is the use of open-ended questions versus close-ended questions. Despite a widespread use of close-ended questions (e.g., used in Gruber & White, 1986; Steil & Hillman, 1993; Steil & Weltman, 1992), Gruber and White (1986) suggest that these result in less individualized answers than do open-ended questions. Close-ended questions have also the disadvantage of limiting subjects to a specific range of possible answers (for discussions see Gruber & White, 1986; Steil & Weltman, 1992). Finally, the fourth methodological limitation evident in the previous research is that participants have been asked to remember a real life situation in which they wanted a person to do something (e.g., as done in Steil & Hillman, 1993). This method limits conclusions because of the possible disadvantages of people being systematically biased in what kinds of situations that they come to think of.

2. 2. 1. The Ratio of Direct versus Indirect Styles of Help-seeking

Bornstein (1998) conducted one of the few studies examining the clarity of requests for help. He showed that US college students in their everyday life used help-seeking behaviors that differ in clarity and that direct styles of help-seeking were more commonly reported than indirect ones. However, for the purpose of illuminating the styles of help-seeking used by spouses, Bornstein’s study is restricted. The participants were all college students and, furthermore, no analyses were conducted in order to compare help-seeking in different types of relationships. The latter is a significant omission, because, as Clark (1983; Clark & Mills, 1993) suggested, type of relationship affects thoughts and behaviors in helping situations.

Considerably more is known about the influence strategies people report using. Most of the findings show that people use direct influence strategies, such as a verbal requests, more often than other styles (Steil & Hillman, 1993; Steil & Weltman, 1992; White, 1988; White & Roufail, 1989; for a review, see Carli, 1999). The preference for direct influence strategies seems to be evident at home as well as at work (Steil & Weltman, 1992). Steil and Hillman (1993) showed that the preference for direct influence strategies is also generalizable over cultures (Western, Japanese, and Korean cultures). However, a weakness with Steil and Hillman's study was that, despite different cultural origins, participants were all US college students. Ng and Bradac (1993) take a more conservative position and conclude in their review of communication styles that there are cultural variations in clarity. Thus, despite a considerable amount of research supporting that people report using direct influence strategies more often than indirect ones, the generality of the preference for direct styles of influence strategies is not settled. To sum up, the literature reviewed on the clarity of the presented request for help and on related issues indicates that people report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones.

2. 2. 2. Costs and Benefits with Direct and Indirect Styles of Help-seeking

Research on the willingness to seek help shows that people take into account the perceived costs involved in help-seeking (e.g., DePaulo & Fisher, 1980). This section deals with the costs and benefits in help-seeking as a possible explanation for why direct or indirect styles of help-seeking should be more often reported by spouses. As will be described, the literature indicates that direct as well as indirect styles of help-seeking involves costs as well as benefits, and that people benefit more from using direct styles of help-seeking than indirect ones. This empirical inconsistency can, speculatively, be accounted for by contextual factors. For example, there might be more benefits in using direct styles of help-seeking within a close relationship than among strangers, and especially when helping involves small costs for the potential helper.

Let us start with advantages with direct styles of help-seeking. Benefits with direct styles of help-seeking include that requests for help enhance the relationship between the help-seeker and the one who is asked to help. People seek help when they wish to start or maintain a relationship (for a review, see Clark, 1983) and anthropological research shows that reciprocal helping creates and maintains relationships (Björnberg & Kollind, 1997). To simply ask for help, as long as it is not done directly after having aided the other person, is interpreted to mean that the help seeker wants to start a relationship or values an existing relationship (Mills & Clark, 1982). Thus, the literature shows that there are high benefits involved in help-seeking in close or developing relationships. Regarding marriages, a greater use of direct styles of influence strategies is associated with greater marital satisfaction, as opposed to indirect styles of influence strategies (Falbo & Peplau, 1980; for a review, see Sagrestano, 1992).

As previously mentioned, there are also costs involved in help-seeking. Nevertheless, within close relationships the costs involved in help-seeking are small. For example, the risk of being denied help is small, as close people feel an obligation to help one another (Lisper & Olsson, unpublished data). Helping is generally reciprocal (Wilke & Lanzetta, 1982), that is, people are more likely to help those who have previously helped them, as well as being more likely to seek help if they believe that they can reciprocate the helping. Moreover, even though, on the one hand, research on other types of relationships and on people who are unacquainted with one another suggests that help-seeking is threatening to the needy person's prestige (Nadler, 1991), on the other hand, within close relationships, to reveal that help is needed is not likely to be threatening to the prestige of the help-seeker. People in close relationships already know a lot about one another and are fond of one another (for reviews, see Clark, 1983; Wills, 1991). This is congruent with the finding that when a first impression is positive, negative information is less significant for the final impression as compared to when information is given in the reverse order (Jones, Rock, Shaver, Goethals, & Ward, 1968). To sum up, there is considerable evidence in the previous literature sugges-

ting that people benefit more from using direct styles of help-seeking than from using indirect ones, at least within close relationships.

Contrary to the suggestion that people benefit from using direct styles of help-seeking, the previous research also points to possible advantages with indirect styles of help-seeking. As suggested by *politeness theory* (Brown & Levinson, 1978; see also Ng & Bradac, 1993), direct styles more strongly than indirect styles express the force of a request. Hence, direct styles are less 'face-saving' for the one who is asked to help and, consequently, less considerate to use than are indirect styles (see Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, 1992; Krauss & Chiu, 1998). However, it has been suggested that such a consideration is less common in situations in which the help needed is of everyday character, rather than involving a heavy burden on the potential helper (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990).

An issue that complicates help-seeking from close others is that such people are expected to be sensitive to each other's needs (Clark, 1983). This suggests that a request for help expresses mistrust in the other person. Moreover, spouses demonstrate fondness by helping one another without a request for help (Holmberg, 1993). To conclude, the previous research shows that there are different costs as well as benefits involved in direct and indirect styles of help-seeking, even though it indicates that direct styles of help-seeking involves more benefits than indirect ones.

2. 2. 3. *Sex and Styles of Help-seeking*

This section of the thesis offers a review of the research on sex differences in relation to the clarity of the presented desire for help. As will be seen, there is an empirical inconsistency regarding sex and styles of help-seeking; one line of findings suggests that men use direct styles of help-seeking more often (and indirect ones less often) than women, whereas another line of findings suggests that there is no such sex difference. Little effort, however, has been put into investigating sex differences specifically in the clarity of spouses' styles of help-seeking.

The literature offers possible explanations for the finding that men use direct styles of help-seeking more often, and indirect ones less often, than women (e.g., Sagrestano, 1992). None of these explanations eliminate the others. Women in general have less power than men (see Björnberg & Kollind, 1997; Deaux & LaFrance, 1998; Haavind, 1984; Hare-Mustin, 1992; Holmberg, 1993; Howard & Hollander, 1997), and this may lead to sex differences in the costs and benefits in help-seeking. Direct rather than indirect influence strategies are more often used by persons with high power than persons with low power, and more often by men than women (see Carli, 1999; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Krauss & Chiu, 1998; Sagrestano, 1992; Steil & Hillman, 1993; Steil & Weltman, 1992). In a similar vein, in classroom situations a high-status needy person seems to benefit more from asking for help (vs. not seek help) than a low-status needy person (Nadler, 1999).

More specifically, Lee (1999) offers one explanation for the sex difference in clarity. She shows in a study on 'face-saving' and help-seeking (though not with regard to clarity) that men use face-saving styles of help-seeking when the potential helper has more power than they have, whereas women focus their face-saving efforts on persons with equal power. As indirect styles of help-seeking are more considerate than direct ones (e.g., Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, 1992), this suggests that when the other person is a close other, women but not men use indirect styles of help-seeking (see also a similar discussion by Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001). Also, Sagrestano (1992) concludes in a review of influence strategies that men expect compliance and therefore use direct influence strategies. Converseley, women are less likely to expect compliance and, because indirect influence strategies do not require co-operation from the other person, they use indirect strategies. In addition, Johnson (1976) concludes from her review of research on influence strategies that women are trained to use indirect styles, as they may be seen as 'unfeminine' otherwise. To sum up, the literature indicates that men, due to power differences, use direct styles of help-seeking more often than women, whereas women use indirect styles of help-seeking more often than men.

In contrast to the sex difference suggested in the previous sections, another line of findings argue with the claim that men use direct styles of help-seeking more often than women. Men benefit more than women do also when it comes to indirect styles of help-seeking. For example, Ng and Bradac (1993) suggest that the risk of misunderstanding as a result of indirectness is smaller when the speaker has more power, rather than less power, than the one who is asked to do something. Furthermore, Holmberg (1993) concludes from an interview study with ten couples that women rather than men demonstrate fondness by offering to take over their partners' chores without being asked to help. This suggests that men receive help without the use of direct styles of help-seeking.

In addition, Canary and Hause (1993) conclude from their review of meta-analyses relevant to communication that there are only small effects of sex on communication. In a similar vein, Sagrestano (1992), although having suggested reasons for expecting sex differences, concludes her review of influence strategies by stating that the link between styles of strategy and sex is at best tenuous. Moreover, there seems to be a change over time; more recent studies show less sex differences in communication than did past research (for reviews, see Canary & Hause, 1993; Sagrestano, 1992). Taken together, these findings indicate that men do not use direct styles of help-seeking more often, and indirect ones less often, than women do. Accordingly, there is an empirical inconsistency in the previous literature regarding sex differences in styles of help-seeking and closely related behaviors.

Hence, a review of possible explanations for this empirical inconsistency is warranted. The literature shows that sex differences are situationally dependent. Sex differences in thoughts and behavior are less evident or disappear in situations where men are not seen as superior (Wood & Karten, 1986; for reviews, see Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Deaux & LaFrance, 1998). In addition, what appear to be differences in communication styles due to sex may actually be an effect of power. Steil and her colleagues (Steil & Hillman, 1993; Steil & Weltman, 1992) show that when differences in resources between women and men are controlled, sex differences in influence strategies decrease. Sagrestano

(1992) shows that power differences have a more profound effect than sex on the choice of influence strategies. Nevertheless, note that sex and power often are related (see Deaux & LaFrance, 1998).

Thus, it is significant to elucidate what kinds of situational constraints collaboration in doing household chores involves when it comes to men's and women's styles of help-seeking. The previous literature shows that, even though women in general have less power in the marriage than men (e.g., Björnberg & Kollind, 1997; Holmberg, 1993), household chores belong to a female sphere (e.g., Major, 1993; Michelson, 2000; Roman 1999a). Moreover, wives report that they value benevolence more than their husbands do, while husbands report no such difference (Skaldeman & Montgomery, 1999). Even among children, girls report having greater prosocial self-schemas than boys, for example, girls report that prosocial words better describe themselves than do boys (Froming, Nasby, & McManus, 1998). These findings suggest that women have positive self-schemas for the situations of focus in this thesis and that women therefore find using direct styles of help-seeking warranted. To sum up, there is an inconsistency in the previous literature on sex differences regarding styles of help-seeking. While some studies show that men and women differ, there are also reasons to expect that men and women are similar to one another when it comes to styles of help-seeking.

2. 3. GENDER STEREOTYPES AND STYLES OF HELP-SEEKING

2. 3. 1. Definitions of Gender Stereotypes and Delimitations of the Field

As was the case with helping, also when it comes to stereotypes there is no agreed-upon definition. According to Mackie (1973; for a review, see also Judd & Park, 1993), the word 'stereotype' was originally used by the journalist Walter Lippmann and referred to a metal plate used in printing. In other words, 'stereotype' referred to people using a fixed, pre-fabricated form to perceive persons. In line with the definition adopted

by Hamilton, Sherman, and Ruvolo (1990; see also Jussim, Milburn, & Nelson, 1991; Nelson, Biernat, & Manis, 1990), the term stereotype henceforth refers to prior beliefs about a social group. It is ‘folk knowledge’ rather than a scientific judgement. This thesis is delimited to stereotypes held by a group, rather than to a single individual’s personal stereotypes (see Mackie, 1973). Specifically, the focus is on group averages in perceptions about another group and no claims are made about the agreement among the judges. Neither are there any claims about the extent to which people believe there is a within-group variation in the perceived group.

In this thesis *stereotype accuracy* is also of interest. The adopted definition of stereotypes implies that the question of stereotype accuracy is a matter of empirical inquiry rather than a given characteristic of stereotypes. Stereotypes can be accurate or inaccurate in different ways (for a review, see Judd & Park, 1993). The present thesis adopts one of the definitions of stereotype accuracy suggested by Judd and Park (1993), who:

... define stereotype accuracy not by reference to a neutral point on the scale but simply to ask whether the perceived location of the group on the attribute is an overestimation or underestimation of the actual location of the group. (p. 110)

Thus in the empirical work in the present thesis, a stereotype is inaccurate when people believe that a group of persons on average performs a behavior more often or less often than they actually do.

There are also concepts closely related to stereotype, such as prejudice, discrimination, and sexism. The four concepts resemble one another, as they all rely on prior beliefs about a social group. However, in contrast to the conception of ‘stereotype’, which does not necessarily include behaviors or feelings, *prejudice* includes a negative affect and *discrimination* refers to behavioral components (Fiske, 1998, p. 357), whereas *sexism* refers both to negative feelings and discriminative behaviors directed against women (Ekehammar, Akrami, & Araya, 2000). In the present thesis, the focus is on stereotype and no attempts are made to provide a review of literature on prejudice or discrimination. Neither is

any review offered regarding effects of stereotypes. However, it is noteworthy that the literature shows that stereotypes affect social interactions, for example, by self-fulfilling prophecies and by shaping the way in which information about a person is processed (for a review, see Jones, 1986).

2. 3. 2. Gender Stereotype Accuracy

In this section the perspective is broadened from help-seeking and closely related issues to a review of the literature on gender stereotype accuracy in general. In 1973, Mackie concluded in a review article that little research is undertaken on stereotype accuracy. Since then, the interest in stereotype accuracy has increased and many studies have focused also on gender stereotype accuracy (see Grant et al., 1997). However, about twenty years after Mackie's conclusion, Swim (1994) stated that research on gender stereotype accuracy is still sparse. In her words: "little research has focused specifically on the accuracy of people's stereotypes." (p. 22). As late as 2001, Ryan and Bogart maintained that there are many gaps in the literature on gender stereotypes. In line with these claims, little effort has been made to examine gender stereotypes in relation to the situations of focus in this thesis.

Findings concerning the accuracy of gender stereotypes are inconsistent. On the one hand, some studies show that people overestimate sex differences (Allen, 1995; Grant et al. 1997; Gruber & White, 1986; Jussim et al., 1991; Martin, 1987; Mundorf, Weaver, & Zillmann, 1989). Deaux (1984) found in her review of research on sex differences and gender stereotypes that even though sex differences were few, gender stereotypes were evident. However, on the other hand, other studies show that people are accurate or underestimate sex differences (Briton & Hall, 1995; Hall & Carter, 1999; McCauley, Thangavelu, & Rozin, 1988; Swim, 1994).

Two methodological issues require special consideration here, as they restrict conclusions from the previous research on the accuracy of gender stereotypes (see also discussions by Allen, 1995; Grant et al., 1997; Swim, 1994). The first methodological limitation is that the same participants were asked to describe their behavior as well as the behavior

of other persons, and, because participants can compare these two sets of answers, there is a risk of biased answers. This was done in the studies by Gruber and White (1986), Jussim et al. (1991), and Mundorf et al. (1989), all examples of studies showing that people overestimate sex differences. Hence, it is reasonable to question whether at least some of the obtained differences between actual sex distribution and gender stereotypes result from people comparing these two sets of answers and, thus, to suggest that gender stereotypes should be more accurate using independent measures. The second limitation is that the participants were provided with only brief information about the context in which the behavior they were asked to rate was reported or observed (as done in Britton & Hall, 1995; Hall & Carter, 1999; Martin, 1987; Swim, 1994). For example, participants were asked to rate gender distributions obtained in previous experiments (e.g., in a meta-analysis) without complete information about the methods used in these experiments. Thus, we can not be confident of the kind of situation the participants had in mind when reporting their perceptions of sex differences.

As proposed by Deaux and Major (1987; Deaux & LaFrance, 1998), situational constraints make gender more or less salient and thereby make it more or less likely that gender stereotypes are applied. A further description of the findings regarding help-seeking and collaboration when spouses do household chores is thus warranted. Regarding help-seeking, Western society media and literature, as well as many psychological writings, describe men and women as using different communication styles (see discussions by Canary & Emmers-Sommers, 1997; Canary & Hause, 1993; Deaux & LaFrance, 1998; Fitzpatrick, Mulac, & Dindia, 1995; Johnson, 1994). Canary and Hause conclude in a review article that although meta-analyses suggest that the sexes almost completely overlap in their communication, polarized accounts of men versus women claim that the sexes have little in common. In other words: "that men and women speak separate languages." (Canary & Hause, 1993, p. 136). Thus, people should learn that men and women use different styles of help-seeking. As shown by Biernat and her colleagues (Biernat & Manis, 1994; Nelson et al., 1990), gender stereotypes can be based on what people learn to be true sex differences.

Household chores should also invoke the use of gender schemas, as there is an ongoing debate about sex equality in the home. Furthermore, research on sexism (Ekehammar et al., 2000) shows that Swedish men as well as women report that they are aware of a cultural stereotype that 'women are made to do housework'. Taken together, despite the empirical inconsistency about gender stereotype accuracy, a reasonable conclusion from previous research is that people have gender stereotypes about styles of help-seeking in the kinds of situations of focus in this thesis.

Research shows that when people get more specific information about a person, they reduce their use of stereotypes (Gruber & White, 1986; Locksley, Hepburn, & Ortiz, 1982; Ryan & Bogart, 2001). Consequently, when people form an impression of strangers, rather than of themselves and close others, they should rely more on stereotypes. Gruber and White (1986) conclude that in the absence of specific information about a person, people rely on gender stereotypes. Hence, a possibility is that when people rate men in general or women in general they use gender schemas, whereas when asked about own behavior some other kind of schema is activated, such as a schema of the most favourable way to behave. The study by Gruber and White shows that, in comparison to people in general, people perceive themselves to be more diplomatic and reasonable in their influence strategies. In a similar vein, Sedikides and Strube (1997) claim that people try to maintain a favorable self-perception. To sum up, despite some inconsistencies, the literature indicates that people have gender stereotypes about other men and women in the kind of situations of focus in this thesis.

3. CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS

3. 1. DEFINITIONS OF CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE FIELD

*In the beginning was not the word, not the deed, not the silly
serpent. In the beginning was why?*
(J. le Carré)

Attribution is the assignment of a phenomenon to its origin (Hilton, 1990, p. 65). Attribution theory is usually attributed to Heider (Hovemyr, 1996; Kelley, 1967), who stated that “Attribution in terms of impersonal and personal causes ... are everyday occurrences that determine much of our understanding of and reaction to our surroundings” (Heider, 1958, p. 16). For example, people try to understand why their close ones behave as they do, or the reasons for their own behaviors. This thesis focuses on *causal attributions*, that is, the attributions of events to their perceived causal sources (Heider, 1958, p. 16). The definition adopted here is broader than the one suggested by, for example, Malle (1999), which distinguishes between attributions that are judged as unintentional and that are judged as intentional, where only the unintentional ones are referred to as causal attributions.

Three specifications regarding causal attributions are in order here. The first is that the literature describes different sequential stages in the attribution process (Kelley & Michela, 1980, p. 460). On the one hand, the concern of *attribution theory* is the process by which a person infers or perceives causes and the resulting attributions. On the other hand, *attributional theory* is concerned with the perceived causes and their consequences. This thesis focuses on the former, specifically, it focuses on how situational variations influence the resulting attributions.

The second specification is about the degree of ‘correctness’ in the causal attributions people make. There are models that, on a philosophi-

cal basis, describe conditions that should be met in order to attribute correctly (see Hewstone, 1989, p. 2-6). Correctness of attributions is defined by the statistical likelihood of an event to occur as a result of a specific causal agent. This thesis is concerned with how people attribute under different constraints, rather than prescribing how people should attribute.

The third specification concerns attributions to different causal dimensions. In the present thesis, the focus is on the *internal dimension*, in other words, the amount of cause attributed to the causal agent. For example, if Alice helps, how much cause for the helping do people attribute to Alice? As far back as in 1958, Heider claimed that the 'internal — external dimension' is a causal dimension within which people attribute (p. 82). Note that in the present thesis, no assumptions are made about a negative correlation between causal attributions to the one who acts and to external causes. Nor is any distinction made between attributions to different internal causes. Rather, an internal attribution is any cause assigned to the person who acts, such as mood, ability, intention, wish, and effort. Furthermore, as the thesis explores causal attributions, no attempts are made to focus specifically on dispositional attributions. Nevertheless, note that people seem to use situational information in different ways when they explain why a person acted as he or she did and when they try to infer his or her disposition from the act (Hilton, Smith, & Kim, 1995).

A final elucidation is that, as previously mentioned, the present thesis aims to examine effects of situational variations on how people attribute causes. Consequently, attempts are neither made to give an understanding of the basic cognitive and perceptual processes that mediate such attributions, nor to offer an understanding of the effects of the resulting attributions. However, there is considerable evidence in the previous literature to the effect that attributions are important in people's everyday life, as for example in marriages through their relationship to marital satisfaction (see Baucom, Sayers, & Duhe, 1989; Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Fincham, 1985; Fincham & Beach, 1988; Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987, 1992, 1993;

Karney & Bradbury, 2000; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994; Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981; Senchak & Leonard, 1993).

3. 2. THE EFFECTS OF SITUATIONAL VARIATIONS ON CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS

As previously mentioned, this thesis attempts to understand effects of the clarity of the presented request for help on causal attributions for helping. This issue is not previously accounted for. However, the literature provides accounts of how causal attributions are affected by situational variations in general. The findings suggest that people use situational stimuli in order to attribute and try to figure out the actual causes. One such situational variation is the *consensus* of a behavior, an idea usually attributed to Kelley (1967). In this section of the thesis, the literature review is confined to focus on the effect of consensus on causal attributions², even though other parts of attribution theories also may explain the effect of the styles of help-seeking on causal attributions for helping.

An everyday usage of the word consensus is that there is some kind of agreement or conformity. Within attribution theory, consensus refers to whether there is an agreement between the behavior of a specific person and the behaviors of other persons. When a person's behavior differs from a preconception of how other persons would act in the same kind of situation, consensus is low, whereas when the behavior is in line with the belief about how other persons would act, consensus is high. As stated by Kelley (1967; Kelley & Michela, 1980) in *the consensus principle*, people use information about consensus in order to attribute a behavior. When consensus is low, more of the cause for a behavior is attributed to the person who acts, as compared to when consensus is high.

² The empirical work presented in this thesis does not provide a test of the effect of consensus information on attributions for helping. The principle of consensus (e.g., Kelley, 1967) is rather used as a base for building the model to be tested in the empirical work.

A brief note is warranted here on how the term ‘consensus’ is used in this thesis. Consensus has been used by Kelley (e.g., 1977) when referring to the comparison of a behavior with how other persons act in the same kinds of *situations* (e.g., “Most other husbands do *the cooking* regularly”) and how other persons act towards the particular *target person* (e.g., “My friends always listen to *me*”). The empirical work in this thesis is concerned with the former kind of comparisons. Additionally, the beliefs about how other persons behave can be based on different kinds of information. As summarized by Kassin (1979), one kind of information that people use for determining consensus is their prior beliefs about how other persons generally behave in situations similar to that in question and another kind is people’s knowledge about how specific other persons (i.e., *Person 1, Person 2, and Person 3...*) actually have behaved. Even though the literature summarized in this section includes research on effects of consensus irrespective of type of consensus information used, in the empirical work presented in this thesis consensus refers to the former construction. Moreover, note that even though the literature review focuses on the effects of consensus on causal attributions to the person who acts, people use information about consensus both when they seek information about the one who acts and about the stimuli (Hilton, Smith, & Alicke, 1988; Hilton et al., 1995).

Empirical findings support the claim that people use information about consensus when they attribute (Eastman, 1994; Hilton et al., 1988; Hilton et al., 1995; Kishor, 1994; Smith, Hilton, Kim, & Garonzik, 1992; Van Overwalle & Heylighen, 1995). For example, Eastman (1994) investigated supervisors’ attributions for the behaviors of employees and found that among the different sources of information included in their study (i.e., consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency, see later in this section), consensus was the only one to affect attributions. However, there is empirical inconsistency regarding the support for the effect of consensus on causal attributions. Some studies obtained no support for the assumption that people consider information about consensus when they attribute (for a review, see Ross & Fletcher, 1985) and there seems to be cultural differences in the use of consensus information (for a review, see Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998).

Methodological limitations may contribute to the empirical inconsistency. A common way to study the effect of consensus on causal attributions has been to present people with fake information about consensus. For example, a scenario describes how one person behaves and information is also given about the behaviors of other persons in the same kind of situation (e.g., as used in Eastman, 1994). As suggested by Kelley and Michela (1980, p. 464), consensus can only affect attributions if people give any regard to the information given about consensus. This makes it difficult to study realistic events and, yet, make participants use fake information about consensus, rather than using their own preconceptions about consensus. In support of this suggestion, research shows that manipulated pre-knowledge about how things usually are influences whether people seek consensus information (Hilton et al., 1988). As stated by Hilton and his colleagues: "In particular, subjects may not ask for information that they can already presuppose or at least surmise." (1988, p. 531). Hence, one possibility is that people neither *seek* nor *use* consensus information presented by the researcher if they already have an idea about the likely degree of consensus of a behavior. To sum up, as suggested by Ross and Fletcher (1985): "the appropriate question is not *whether* consensus has an effect on social judgement, but under what conditions it has an impact" (p. 84).

As previously mentioned, the consensus principle is usually attributed to Kelley (e.g., 1967). In Kelley's theorising, the consensus principle is one of three different sources of information people use in order to attribute a behavior internally or externally to the person who acts. Apart from consensus, people consider *distinctiveness*, that is, whether the same person behaves in the same way in *other kinds of situations*, and *consistency*, that is, whether the same person behaves in the same way in the same kinds of situations but on *other occasions*. According to Kelley's (1967) *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Model*, people consider the information about consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency in order to attribute the cause. Behaviors are treated as effects that covary with variations in a single or up to all three of these sources of information (for a review, see also Gilbert, 1998). The effect is, as stated by Kelley, "attributed to that condition which is present when the effect is

present and which is absent when the effect is absent” (1967, p. 194). The ANOVA model has also been referred to as ‘Kelley’s Cube’ and ‘the Covariation Model’ (e.g., Försterling, Bühner, & Gall, 1998). About the ANOVA model, it has even been claimed that “... if any model deserves to be called *the* attribution theory, it is Kelley’s” (Gilbert, 1998, p. 102).

However, the consensus principle has a history in theory building before and after Kelley’s writings. It is usually seen as an application of Heider’s writings (1958) and of Mill’s *method of difference* from the 19th century (see Hewstone, 1989; Hilton, et al., 1988), and Jones and Davies suggested in 1965 that people try to figure out a person’s disposition by comparing his or her behavior with the behavior of most other persons. Examples of modern attribution theories that have further developed and supplemented the ideas in the ANOVA model, are the *Logical Model* (Hewstone & Jaspars, 1987) and the *Abnormal Conditions Focus Model* (Hilton & Slugoski, 1986; for reviews, see Hewstone, 1989; Hilton, 1988). Even though a further discussion of the differences between these models is beyond the scope of this summary, note that all of them share the suggestion that when consensus is high, less cause is attributed to the person who acts than when consensus is low, at least if other sources of information do not give contradictory information.

One further note on methodological considerations regarding attribution research is warranted. A common method has been to instruct participants to imagine that different events occur in their real life and to report the cause for the events on some kind of rating scale (e.g., Eastman, 1994; Higgins & Bhatt, 2001). The use of scenarios, rather than real life events, raises the question of whether the findings are generalizable to real life settings. For example, it might be argued that cues about how to attribute are more ambiguous in real life than in described scenarios (for a discussion, see Eastman, 1994). Nevertheless, attributions for events described in scenarios have been shown to resemble those made for real-life events (Fincham & Beach, 1988; Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981). To sum up, the previous literature shows that people use situational stimuli in order to attribute and, despite some controversy, the find-

ings indicate that people compare the behavior of one person with their beliefs about how other persons would behave, in order to attribute the cause of the behavior.

3. 3. ENHANCEMENT TENDENCIES

3. 3. 1. *Definitions of Enhancement Tendencies and Delimitations of the Field*

Where the optimists see a doughnut, the pessimists see a hole.

Enhancement tendencies is the propensity to augment a person's positive sides, and diminish the negative ones, for example, people protect their self-concepts from negative information (see Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Attributing positive outcomes more than negative ones to oneself is henceforth referred to as *self-serving attributions* and attributing positive outcomes more than negative ones to another person is referred to as *other-serving attributions* (see terminology used by Silvia & Duval, 2001). In this thesis, the focus is on whether situational constraints influence enhancement tendencies in causal attributions.

Within attribution theory, somewhat inconsistent definitions have been offered of self-serving attributions and these definitions differ in rigidity with regard to the internal—external dimension. On the one hand, self-serving attributions are described as a person's tendency to make internal attributions for positive outcomes and external attributions for negative outcomes (e.g., Bridwell & Ford, 1996; Campbell, Sedikides, Reeder, & Elliot, 2000). This definition implies that on a bipolar scale from internal to external causes, in order for attributions to be referred to as self-serving, people should attribute positive events on the 'internal' side of the midpoint and negative ones on the 'external' side. On the other hand, researchers have also used a less rigid definition of self-serving attributions, namely, that it is the tendency to explain own success using more internal (and less external) causes, than what is used when people explain own negative outcomes (e.g., Higgins & Bhatt, 2001).

The latter definition is adopted in this thesis and, moreover, a criterion analogous to this is used to define other-serving attributions.

The phenomenon of enhancement tendencies in attributions consists of two different processes that are usually brought together into one concept. In one of the processes, the person takes credit for successful outcomes and in the other process, he or she denies responsibility for unsuccessful outcomes (see Campbell et al., 2000; Gifford & Hine, 1997). In the present thesis, the two processes are both included in the concepts of self-serving attributions.

3. 3. 2. Enhancement Tendencies in Attributions

The literature shows that situational variables affect how people attribute the causes for behaviors. However, the resulting attributions do not necessarily reflect ‘objectively true’ causes. Rather, the attributions differ from the objective causes in accordance with systematic biases (Heider, 1958). Kelley and Michela (1980) claimed that there is a general tendency to make more internal attributions for positive events than for negative ones and Jones and Nisbett (1971) suggested that people attribute their own and other persons’ behavior differently. In this section, first a review is given of the research on self-enhancing and other-enhancing tendencies in causal attributions and then the literature on effects of sex on enhancement tendencies in causal attributions is summarized.

3. 3. 3. Self-enhancement Tendencies

Heider (1958, p. 171) suggested that people attribute positive outcomes more to themselves as compared to negative outcomes. Self-serving attributions are even claimed as being a natural way of reasoning and a lack of such a bias has been described as evident in psychological disorders and among persons who are depressed (Brown, 1984; Lyon, Startup, & Bentall, 1999). Research supports the suggestion that people make self-serving attributions (Campbell, et al., 2000; Floyd, 2000; Gifford & Hine, 1997; Higgins & Bhatt, 2001; Kunda, 1990; Martinko & Thomson, 1998; McAllister, 1996; for a review, see Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). For

example, self-serving tendencies are evident in attributions about marital events among distressed spouses (Fincham & Beach, 1988). In a questionnaire study, Higgins and Bhatt (2001) asked people to attribute different positive and negative events. To help a friend was one of the events treated as a positive outcome, whereas receiving no help from a friend was treated as a negative outcome. The findings supported that people make self-serving attributions.

The previous research suggests that self-serving attributions can not be accounted for by a single explanation. Instead, a combination of explanations accounts for the phenomenon, such as the motivation to make biased attributions in order to feel good about oneself and the use of cues and schemas that people believe to be valid because of their already positively biased preconceptions (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Kunda, 1990; Martinko & Thomson, 1998).

However, three suggestions from previous research make it reasonable to question the universality of the claim that people make self-serving attributions: (1) Attributions are affected by the type of relationship between the persons involved, (2) Attributions are affected by the sex of the person who attributes, and (3) There are cultural variations in attributions. The first suggestion will be discussed in this section, whereas the second is elaborated in a latter section and the third will not be further elaborated, as it is beyond the scope of this summary (for a review, see Higgins & Bhatt, 2001).

Regarding variations due to type of relationship between the persons involved, the literature provides reasons for expecting that in friendships people facilitate each other's self-serving attributions — however, there are also several indications as to why a close relationship should have the opposite effect (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998; for reviews, see Campbell et al., 2000; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The findings are in favor of the latter suggestion, that is, that closeness reduces the degree of self-serving attributions (Campbell et al., 2000; Sedikides et al., 1998). Nevertheless, methodological limitations in the previous research on self-serving attributions among friends make it warranted to conclude that the

issue of the influence of type of relationship on self-serving attributions is not yet settled. This is further discussed in the paragraphs below.

A first methodological limitation comes from the type of relationships examined. Sedikides and her colleagues (1998) compared in a laboratory experiment the attributions made by persons who by a self-disclosure task were induced to feel closeness with a former stranger with the attributions made by persons who participated with strangers. The findings support the suggestion that friendship reduces the degree of self-serving attributions. However, as the authors point out, induced closeness and naturally occurring friendships are not the same, for example, friendship extends across time, friends belong to the same in-group, and friends desire to maintain the relationship. In a later study, Campbell and his colleagues (2000) dealt with the problem of using induced closeness. They compared the attributions made by persons who participated with a real-life friend and those made by persons who participated with a stranger. The findings still showed that friends were less inclined to make self-serving attributions than were strangers.

Nevertheless, the latter study (Campbell et al., 2000) has problems of its own and two methodological issues yet raise concern about the possible conclusions. First, 'dependent' measurements of attributions were used, that is, the attributions to the participants and to the other person were reported on a shared bipolar rating scale. People tend to make other-serving attributions for their close ones (Baucom et al., 1989; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) and, therefore, it is a disadvantage that it is not possible to separate between a desire to make other-serving attributions and a desire not to enhance oneself. Note that the bipolar scale also has its advantages; it shows how people attribute when they really have to choose between enhancing themselves and another person, which should involve a more difficult decision than would reporting attributions on independent measures. Second, the participants in the study by Campbell et al. (2000) chose to sign up with a friend or alone and, therefore, those who participated with a friend might have differed from the other participants in a way that influenced their causal attributions. In addition, these studies on self-serving attributions (Campbell et al., 2000; Sediki-

des et al., 1998) have examined situations where people work together and receive shared feedback on a common outcome. Hence, the robustness of the findings to situations where individuals succeed or fail is a matter of empirical inquiry.

Turning to even more intimate close relationships, namely, marriages, most of the findings from the research on self-serving attributions are congruent with the research on friends, suggesting that closeness reduces the degree of self-serving attributions. Specifically, non-distressed spouses are less inclined towards making self-serving attributions than are distressed spouses (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 1988; Fincham & Bradbury, 1993, for a review, see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). However, there is an empirical inconsistency concerning self-serving attributions in marriages. Contrary to the finding that people are less inclined to make self-serving attributions in happy marriages, Baucom et al. (1989) showed that spouses who scored high on marital adjustment made attributions for negative events that enhanced themselves, as well as their spouse. To sum up, the previous literature indicates that people make self-serving attributions but that the phenomenon of self-serving attributions is not robust over types of relationship.

3. 3. 4. *Other-enhancement Tendencies*

Love to faults is always blind, Always is to joy inclined
(W. Blake)

Research also shows that people make enhancing attributions for persons other than themselves (e.g., Campbell et al., 2000; Fincham et al., 1987; Sedikides, et al., 1998). On a cultural level, people who make more self-serving attributions also make more enhancing attributions about their family members, as compared to people with a more modest self-serving bias (Heine & Lehman, 1997). This suggests that enhancement tendencies in attributions are evident not only in reported self-perceptions but also in people's attributions about other persons. However, a study by Al-Zahrani and Kaplowitz (1993) shows that people make more positive attributions about in-groups (i.e., the groups that they belong to) than

about out-groups. This suggests that people distinguish between persons when it comes to other-serving attributions.

As was the case with self-serving attributions, depending on type of relationship people are more or less inclined to make enhancing attributions about other persons. The research by Campbell et al. (2000), mentioned in the previous section of this summary, indicates that people attribute success more and failure less to their friends than to strangers. Moreover, the previous literature shows that in even more intimate relationships, such as marriages, satisfied spouses, as opposed to less happily married ones, make other-serving attributions when the other person is their spouse (e.g., Baucom et al., 1989; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992; for a review, see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). For example, Fincham and Bradbury (1992) showed that the more satisfied spouses were with their marriages, the less they attributed hypothetical negative marital events to their spouse. Hence, it is warranted to conclude that the closeness and sense of belonging with the other person influence the degree of other-serving attributions. In summary, the literature indicates that people make other-serving attributions, at least for their close others.

3. 3. 5. Effects of Sex on Enhancement Tendencies in Attributions

*The greatest magnifying glasses in the world are a man's own eyes
when they look upon his own person*
(A. Pope)

If we take the word 'man' used in the quotation above literally – is the same sentence appropriate also to describe the way women attribute? This section reviews research on sex differences in enhancement tendencies in causal attributions, with the main focus on self-serving attributions.

Al-Zahrani and Kaplowitz (1993) suggest that men make more self-serving attributions than women do and the empirical findings support that suggestion (Deaux & Farris, 1977; Sedikides et al., 1998; for reviews, see Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Deaux, 1984). For example,

Sedikides et al. (1998) showed that when people work together in dyads, men assume greater responsibility for a successful outcome than for failures, whereas women's attributions for success and failure do not differ. However, the literature also indicates that a sex bias is not always present (Campbell et al., 2000; Fincham et al., 1987). For instance, the findings by Campbell et al. (2000) showed that, irrespective of relationship, no sex difference was evident in the self-serving attributions.

As previously mentioned, the effect of sex is likely to be modified by situational variations (see Deaux, 1984; Deaux & Farris, 1977). Regarding tasks in a 'male sphere', attributions made by and about men are more enhancing than the attributions for women, whereas regarding typically 'female tasks', the findings have been unclear (Rosenfield & Stephan, 1978; for a review, see Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). Explanations for this effect of an interaction between sex and situation include that the situation influences women's and men's outcome expectations and self-involvement in the tasks to a different extent (see Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Deaux & Farris, 1977; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Rosenfield & Stephan, 1978). In other words, in some types of situations men are expected to perform better and find it more important to perform well than women do, and, thus, in those situations the difference between men's and women's enhancement tendencies in attributions are larger than in other types of situations.

Note that there is a conceptual difference between sex differences in the attributions people make for themselves and whether a person's sex influences the attributions other persons make for him or her. Briefly, the research on how people attribute the behavior of other men and women can be summarized as showing either that people tend to make slightly more other-serving attributions for men than for women, or otherwise, no sex differences and, here also, the type of situation attributed for seems to be relevant (for reviews, see Deaux, 1976; Swim & Sanna, 1996). Summing up, the previous research indicates that whether sex influences self-serving attributions is context dependent, even though more support is provided to the suggestion that men make more self-serving attributions than do women.

4. SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

4. 1. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND AIMS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The general aims of the empirical work presented in this thesis were to examine the clarity of the styles of help-seeking spouses report using and how clarity and enhancement tendencies influence causal attributions for helping. As regards help-seeking, despite the claim that people prefer to turn to their close others when they desire help, the literature review given in this thesis shows that little has previously been undertaken to examine the clarity of spouses' requests for help. Hence, in order to better understand people's behaviors in helping situations, an examination is needed of the styles of help-seeking that spouses report using. Even though little is previously known about styles of help-seeking among spouses, despite some controversy the previous research on related issues suggests that spouses should report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones. Regarding sex differences in styles of help-seeking, despite an empirical inconsistency, the literature review suggests that men should report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than women, whereas women should report using indirect styles of help-seeking more often than men. A further indication from the literature review on styles of help-seeking is that spouses, if asked about the clarity of the requests for help reported by *other* spouses, would believe that there is a sex difference in the answers.

Concerning causal attributions, despite the support for the significance of help-seeking as well as of causal attributions in people's everyday life, a reasonable conclusion from the literature review is that the influence of clarity on causal attributions for helping remains as a question

for empirical inquiry. In this thesis, a model – *the Clarity × Helping (CH) Model* – is presented and tested in a series of studies, using different methods, in different settings, and within different types of relationships. The CH Model elaborates previous research and gives an account of how people should be expected to attribute helping, when the desire for help varies in clarity. Before describing the model in more detail, note that it is likely that people believe that other persons more often help when direct as opposed to indirect styles of help-seeking are used (this statement is established in a pre-test summarized in Section 4.3.1.). The previous attribution theory supports a claim that when a person's behavior is in line with a belief about how other persons would behave in the same kind of situation, less cause is attributed to the person who acts, as compared to when the behavior differs from the belief about how other persons would behave (e.g., Kelley, 1967). In accordance with this line of reasoning, the CH Model states that the effect of helping on the amount of cause attributed to the potential helper is dependent on clarity. In other words, according to the model there is an *interaction* between the clarity of the request for help and helping in determining causal attributions for helping. The effect of the proposed interaction between clarity and helping can differ in how evident it is, but in its most evident form, when help is given and help-seeking is direct, less cause is attributed to the potential helper than when help is given and help-seeking is indirect, whereas the opposite effect holds when no help is given. Note that the CH Model explains the variation in cause attributed to the potential helper and that such a variation is not necessarily accompanied by a specific variation in cause attributed to the needy person.

In addition, another conclusion from the literature review is that enhancement tendencies determine variations in causal attributions, other than the variation explained by the CH Model. This suggests that people should attribute positive events (such as help) differently than negative ones (such as no help). However, the previous research also indicates that the issues of self-serving attributions and other-serving attributions are complex and are affected by type of relationship and sex. Therefore, the present work aims to examine women's and men's enhancement tendencies in causal attributions for helping within different types of rela-

tionships, that is, spouses, friends, and strangers. Based on the conclusions accounted for in this section, the general aims of the empirical work presented in this thesis and the hypotheses were the following:

GENERAL AIMS

- To examine the clarity of the styles of help-seeking that spouses report using.
- To examine how clarity and enhancement tendencies influence causal attributions for helping.

HYPOTHESES

Styles of Help-seeking

- It is predicted that spouses, men and women, report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones.
- It is predicted that men report using direct styles of help-seeking more often, and indirect ones less often, than do women.
- It is predicted that spouses believe that husbands in general would report being more direct and less indirect, than would wives in general.

Causal Attributions for Helping

- It is predicted that that there is an interaction between clarity and helping, in accordance with the proposed CH Model, in determining causal attributions for helping.
- It is predicted that, irrespective of clarity and type of relationship, causal attributions for helping are self-serving.
- It is predicted that, irrespective of clarity, causal attributions for helping are more other-serving when the other person is a friend than when he or she is anonymous.

In addition to the above mentioned hypotheses, the empirical work presented in this thesis will also examine whether there is, irrespective of clarity and type of relationship, a sex difference in degree of self-serving attributions in causal attributions for helping (about which no hypothesis is formulated).

4. 2. STUDIES ON STYLES OF HELP-SEEKING

4. 2. 1. *A general Note on Methods*

A general note on methods is first warranted. The perceived gender differences in styles of help-seeking that other spouses would report using, as obtained in *Paper I, Study 2*, is compared with actual sex differences in own reported styles of help-seeking as obtained in *Paper I, Study 1*. In order to avoid potential limitations of the previous research (e.g., Jussim et al., 1991; Martin, 1987; Mundorf et al., 1989; Swim, 1994), different persons participated in the two studies and the participants in *Study 2* were given a careful description of the methods used in *Study 1* before they were asked to report the likely sex distribution obtained in that study.

4. 2. 2. *Participants*

Study 1. Participants were 87 married or cohabiting heterosexual couples living in the municipality of Uppsala, Sweden. Originally, 300 randomly selected persons were sent materials and, thus, 29% participated (note, as the contacted persons were asked to only participate if they lived with a spouse a reasonable assumption is that about 64% of those valid for inclusion participated, according to materials provided by the *City board office of Uppsala*, 2000). Of the participants, 98% did domestic work. The couples had been living together for an average of 13 years ($SD = 9$ years). Wives averaged 39 years of age ($SD = 7$ years) and husbands 41 ($SD = 8$ years). As their highest level of education, 22% of the wives and 23% of the husbands had an elementary school degree, whereas the

rest had a high school degree (16% of the wives, 19% of the husbands), a shorter university education (20% of the wives, 15% of the husbands), or a university education of three years or more (41% of the wives, 43% of the husbands). Most participants, 73% of the wives and 78% of the husbands, had paid jobs. Statistics provided by the *City board office of Uppsala* (2000) suggest that regarding background data the participants in Study 1 are representative of the total sample.

Study 2. Participants were 124 married persons (one per couple, 59% women), drawn from the population living in Dalarna in Sweden and sent questionnaires by mail. Of those originally asked, 62% participated. The women as well as the men had been living with their spouses for an average of 17 years ($SD = 8$ years). The women averaged 41 years of age ($SD = 7$ years) and the men 42 ($SD = 7$ years). As their highest level of education, 27% of the women and 31% of the men had an elementary school degree, whereas the rest had a high school degree (48% of the women, 35% of the men) or a university education (25% of the women, 33% of the men). Most participants, 69% of the wives and 90% of the husbands, had paid jobs.

4. 2. 3. *Procedures and Materials*

Study 1. Open-ended questions asked the participants to describe their likely styles of help-seeking in three different situations, namely, doing the dishes, making dinner, and clearing the table. The chores were chosen to be traditionally female yet chores that Swedish men as well as women do at least sometimes. The reported behaviors were content analyzed (Krippendorff, 1980) by two female raters. Reliability of the distributions of answers over the six obtained categories of styles of help-seeking was estimated by having two coders classify the same materials (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967). Percentages of agreed upon groupings reached 80% and Cohen's kappa was .71, implying reasonable interrater reliability (Schweigert, 1994). Open-ended questions were used in order to avoid possible limitations of previous research, such as limiting participants to a range of possible answers and providing participants with answers they would not come to think of on their own accord.

Note that a possible limitation with self-reports could be that people are biased towards providing socially desirable answers and therefore, on the one hand, women could exaggerate their use of direct styles of help-seeking, leading to decreased sex differences, or, on the other hand, participants could exaggerate behaviors that are seen as appropriate for their sex, leading to increased sex differences (see Carli 1999; Swim, 1994). However, the use of questionnaires, rather than methods where answers are given in a more public way, made it more likely that participants in this work provided answers that verified their self-schemas (see Deaux & Major, 1987). Chi-square tests, with clarity (direct vs. indirect) and sex (men vs. women) as independent variables, were performed.

Study 2. A questionnaire began with a thorough description of the methods used in *Study 1*. Then, the three chores were presented, followed by the six categories of styles of help-seeking obtained in *Study 1*. For each chore and each category of styles of help-seeking, the participants rated the likely sex distribution of the answers obtained in *Study 1* on a 5-level scale (from ‘almost only men’, to ‘almost only women’). This measure was chosen in order to be simple for participants to understand. For analyses, the scale was numbered from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating higher frequency of women. Each participant’s answers on a particular category of styles of help-seeking were summed up over the chores to form one mean value per participant and per category of styles of help-seeking. Participants’ beliefs about gender differences in clarity among other spouses was tested with Wilcoxon matched pairs test, with clarity (direct vs. indirect) as independent variable, where clarity was a repeated measures variable, and perceived gender distribution as dependent variable.

4. 2. 4. *Major Findings and Conclusions*

Own styles of help-seeking. Table 1 illustrates the obtained categories of styles of help-seeking and the relative frequency of answers over the different styles of help-seeking across the three types of chores. The findings supported the hypothesis that spouses, men and women, report

Table 1
Own Styles of Help-seeking

Help-seeking	Total		Situation A		Situation B		Situation C	
	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H
1. Ask	58	61	61	65	58	60	54	58
2. Ask, explain	27	18	30	22	30	16	22	17
3. Ask, new division	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	2
<i>Sum Direct</i>	86	80	92	88	88	76	79	77
4. Nothing	7	14	3	8	5	16	14	17
5. Describe situation	4	6	4	3	5	8	4	6
6. Indicate	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
<i>Sum Indirect</i>	12	19	7	11	11	24	19	23
Total	98	99	99	99	99	100	98	100

Note. *W* = Wives; *H* = Husbands; *Ask* = Ask for help or tell the spouses to do the chore; *Ask, explain* = Ask or tell the spouses to help and explain why help is needed; *Ask, new division* = Ask for help and in return offer a new division of chores; *Nothing* = Not do anything to make the spouses understand; *Describe situation* = Describe the needy situation without a request for help; and *Indicate* = Do not say anything but show that something is wrong in another way.

using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones (see Table 1). This was evident in all of the three situations (i.e., dishes, making dinner, and clearing the table). However, as also was evident in all of the three situations, no support was obtained for the hypothesis that men report using direct styles of help-seeking more often, and indirect ones less often, than do women [Situation A: $\chi^2(1, N = 153) = .97, p > .05$; Situation B: $\chi^2(1, N = 159) = 5.6, p < .02$, however, women reported using direct styles of help-seeking more often, and indirect ones less often, than did men; Situation C: $\chi^2(1, N = 151) = .24, p > .05$].

Gender Stereotypes. Regarding gender stereotypes, there was a significant effect of clarity on perceived gender distribution, $T(114) =$

1553.50, $p < .00005$. Indirect styles of help-seeking were perceived to be more commonly reported by women and less commonly reported by men ($M = .55$; $SD = .15$), as compared to direct ones ($M = .47$; $SD = .15$). Thus, the findings supported the hypothesis that spouses believe that husbands in general would report being more direct and less indirect, than would wives in general.

4. 2. 5. *Comments*

The findings show that direct styles of help-seeking were more commonly reported than indirect ones. Additionally, on the one hand, men did not more often than women report using direct styles of help-seeking and women did not more often than men report using indirect ones, and yet, on the other hand, spouses believed that husbands in general would report being more direct and less indirect, than would wives in general.

4. 3. STUDIES ON CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS

4. 3. 1. *A Pre-test of perceived Consensus*

The explanation suggested in this thesis for the CH Model relies on an assumption that people have a preconception about a relation between clarity and helping, and that the preconception states that comparatively more persons help (and less do not help) when help-seeking is direct than when it is indirect. In a separate study, 32 psychology undergraduate students ($M = 26$ years of age, $SD = 7$ years; 73% with experience of living with an opposite-sex spouse; 30% men) reported their beliefs about the likelihood that spouses in general would help in different scenarios describing situations in a home. In these scenarios, clarity also differed. Participants reported their answers on 55 mm visual analog scales (VAS), ranging from *they would not help* to *they would help* and, for analyses, each participant's answers were summed up to one mean value per level of clarity. The questionnaire was distributed in connection with a lecture. A t -test with clarity (direct vs. indirect) as independent vari-

Table 2

Data about the four Studies on Causal Attributions

	Paper II		Paper III	
	Study 1	Study 2	Study 1	Study 2
Participants	Spouses	Spouses	Friends, strangers	Friends, strangers
Type of help	Household chores	Household chores	Computerized exercises	Computerized exercises
Methods	Scenarios, bipolar scale	Scenarios, unipolar scales	Scenarios, unipolar scales	Laboratory experiment, unipolar scales

able, where clarity was a repeated measures variable, and with expected frequency of helping as dependent variable, confirmed the claim that people expect that more persons would help, and less would not help, when help-seeking is direct ($M = 43$, $SD = 10$) than when it is indirect ($M = 34$, $SD = 9$), $t(31) = 4.07$, $p < .0005$. Hence, a reasonable assumption is that there is a preconception that more persons help, and less do not help, when help-seeking is direct than when it is indirect. Note that this finding is not to be treated as indicating that more persons actually give help when help-seeking is direct than when it is indirect.

4.3.2. A General Note on Methods

The research questions regarding causal attributions were examined in four studies (reported in two papers). Taken together, the independent variables were tested using different methods, with different participants, and in different contexts, which should increase the validity of the findings. Differences between the studies are summarized in Table 2.

4. 3. 3. *Participants*

Paper II, Study 1. For *Study 1*, the same sample of participants as in *Paper I, Study 1* was used in this study. In *Study 2*, participants were 51 married heterosexual couples living in the region of Dalarna, Sweden. Originally, 200 randomly selected persons were sent materials and, thus, 25% participated. One reminder was sent. The couples had been living together for an average of 18 years ($SD = 6$ years). Wives averaged 41 years of age ($SD = 6$ years) and husbands 43 ($SD = 6$ years). As their highest level of education, 23% of the wives and 33% of the husbands had an elementary school degree, whereas the rest had a high school degree (31% of the wives, 38% of the husbands), a shorter university education (19% of the wives, 11% of the husbands), or a university education of three years or more (27% of the wives, 17% of the husbands). Most participants, 73% of the wives and 87% of the husbands, had paid jobs.

Paper III, Study 1. Participants were 53 undergraduate psychology students at Mid Sweden University, 37 women and 16 men (the smaller number of men reflects the proportion of women and men enrolled in the classes). They were asked to participate and given questionnaires by their teacher during classes. Women averaged 26 years of age ($SD = 6$ years) and men 29 ($SD = 7$ years).

Paper III, Study 2. Participants were sixty-four persons, 32 men and 32 women, who were recruited through billboard advertisements at Uppsala University or asked to participate by someone who had seen the advertisements. Participants received either a credit toward research requirements or movie tickets, and most were students (94%). Women as well as men averaged 25 years of age (women: $SD = 6$ years; men: $SD = 4$ years).

4. 3. 4. *Procedures and Materials*

Paper II, Study 1. Eight scenarios were presented to each participant (see examples in Box 1), describing everyday marital situations where one spouse is to do a chore and now wants the other person to do it. The participants were instructed to imagine the scenarios taking place in their real

Box 1. Examples of Scenarios used in Paper II.

The examples are here translated into English and they may sound a bit harsher than they do in Swedish.

Example 1.

Direct styles of help-seeking and the spouse does not help.

"It is evening and you are tired after the day. You are cooking dinner when your spouse comes home. He (she) seats himself (herself) in the kitchen and looks through the mail. On the television a program begins that you would very much like to watch, so you walk back and forth between the television and the stove. You say to your spouse: -It's hardly possible to see anything of the program, when I have to cook at the same time. Can't you take over the cooking? You hope that your spouse will take over the cooking but he (she) doesn't."

Example 2.

Indirect styles of help-seeking and the spouse helps.

"The two of you have just had dinner and now you alone are washing the dishes. It's usually you who does that after dinner. Your spouse is sitting in the living room listening to music. Recently you started an evening course and today you have a lot to prepare for the classes. You hurry with the dishes, at the same time as you say to your spouse: - Today, I've really got a lot to do! You hope that he (she) will take over the dishes and so he (she) does."

life. Chores used were washing clothes, making dinner, making an evening snack, and washing dishes after a meal. Each of the four chores was used twice in the questionnaires, once in a scenario with direct style of help-seeking and once in a scenario with indirect style of help-seeking, making a total of eight scenarios presented to each participant. The eight scenarios also varied according to helping (help, no help) and perspective (whether the participant himself or herself, or his/her spouse was the potential helper) and, accordingly, eight conditions were presented to each participant: (a) direct + no help + self, (b) direct + no help + other, (c) direct + help + self, (d) direct + help + other, (e) indirect + no help +

self, (f) indirect + no help + other, (g) indirect + help + self, and (h) indirect + help + other. After each scenario, the participants were asked to report their causal attributions for the helping on a bipolar VAS, ranging from *to him/her* to *to myself*. The bipolar scale was chosen in order to examine whether spouses make self-serving attributions when they have to choose between attributing the cause to themselves or to their spouses and, thereby, it enables a comparison with the findings by Campbell and Sedikides and their colleagues (Campbell et al., 2000; Sedikides et al., 1998). Data were analyzed in a 2 (Clarity: direct vs. indirect) \times 2 (Helping: help vs. no help) \times 2 (Perspective: self vs. other) \times 2 (Sex: male vs. female) Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) with sex as a between-subjects variable and clarity, helping, and perspective as within-subjects variables. The amount of cause attributed to the potential helper, versus to the needy person, was the dependent variable.

Paper II, Study 2. The methods followed those in *Paper II, Study 1*, with one significant modification: In order to enable separate examinations of attributions to the potential helper and to the needy party, the measurements of causal attributions was changed from a bipolar scale into unipolar scales, that is, separate measurements for the cause attributed to each causal agent (ranging from *not at all* to *to a great extent*).

Paper III, Study 1. The methods followed those in *Paper II, Study 2*, with two significant modifications regarding type of relationship and type of help needed: Students were asked to attribute helping a same-sex friend or an anonymous same-sex student by doing computerized exercises (word puzzles), rather than asking spouses to attribute helping by doing a chore in their spouses' place. Also, the independent variable of 'perspective' was excluded and participants were always told to be the potential helper. Questionnaire instructions stated that the participants participated in an experiment where they solved word puzzles on a computer. Another person (friend or stranger) participated at the same time but had been assigned other word puzzles. They further stated that the participants and the other person were allowed to communicate with each other over e-mail and to ask one another for help. After a while the participants described in the questionnaire received a request for help (direct

or indirect) whereupon they either helped or did not help. Data were analyzed in a 2 (Clarity: direct vs. indirect) \times 2 (Helping: help vs. no help) \times 2 (Relationship: friend vs. stranger) \times 2 (Sex: men vs. women) ANOVA with sex as a between-subjects variable and clarity, helping, and relationship as within-subjects variables. The amount of cause attributed to the potential helper and to the needy party, respectively, were the dependent variables.

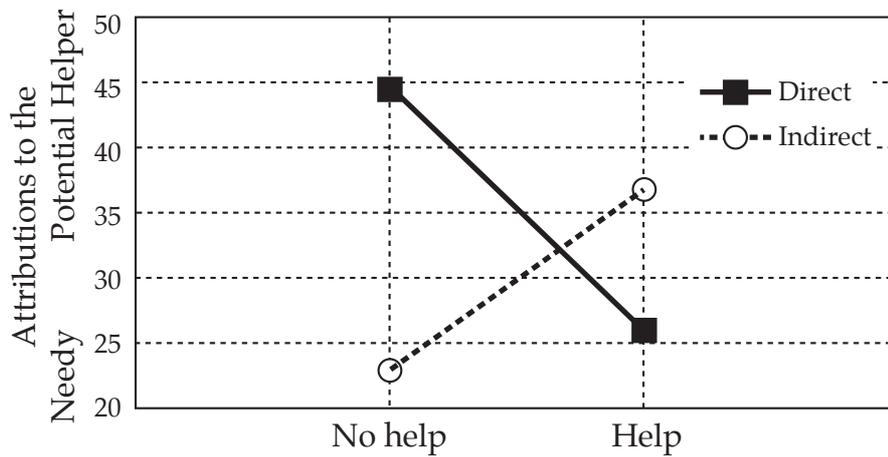
Paper III, Study 2. The methods followed those in *Paper III, Study 1*, with one significant modification: The methods used were a laboratory experiment, in which the participants experienced in real life what was previously described in written scenarios. The design was a between-subjects design, in which only the assignment to the conditions of clarity was manipulated. Accordingly, the design was a 2 (Clarity: direct vs. indirect) \times 2 (Helping: help vs. no help) \times 2 (Relationship: friend vs. stranger) \times 2 (Sex: men vs. women) factorial between-subjects design.

4. 3. 5. Major Findings and Conclusions

The CH Model. In all four studies, there were significant two-way interactions between clarity and helping in determining the attributions to the potential helper [*Paper II, Study 1*: $F(1, 149) = 177.20, p < .0001$; *Paper II, Study 2*: $F(1, 74) = 10.48, p < .002$; *Paper III, Study 1*: $F(1, 49) = 8.32, p < .01$; *Paper III, Study 2*: $F(1, 56) = 4.48, p < .05$]. As can be seen in Figure 1, the interactions between clarity and helping in each of the four studies were in accordance with the interaction predicted by the CH Model. Thus, the findings supported the hypothesis that there is an interaction between clarity and helping in determining causal attributions for helping.

Self-serving attributions. The findings from three of the four studies did not support the suggestion that people make self-serving attributions for helping. Specifically, in *Paper II, Study 1*, in which perspective was manipulated, there was a significant two-way interaction between helping and perspective, $F(1, 149) = 4.64, p < .05$. Nonetheless, the findings

A The effect of Clarity Helping on the Allocation of Cause between the Needy Person and the Potential Helper



B The effect of Clarity Helping on the Amount of Cause Attributed to the Potential Helper

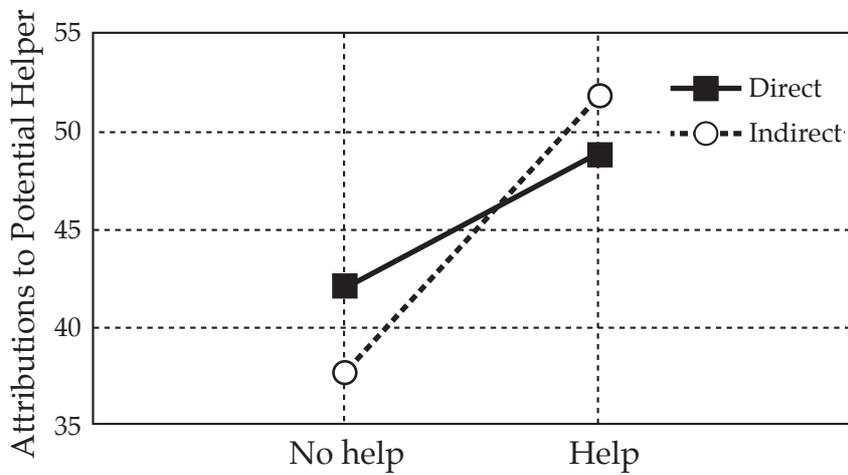
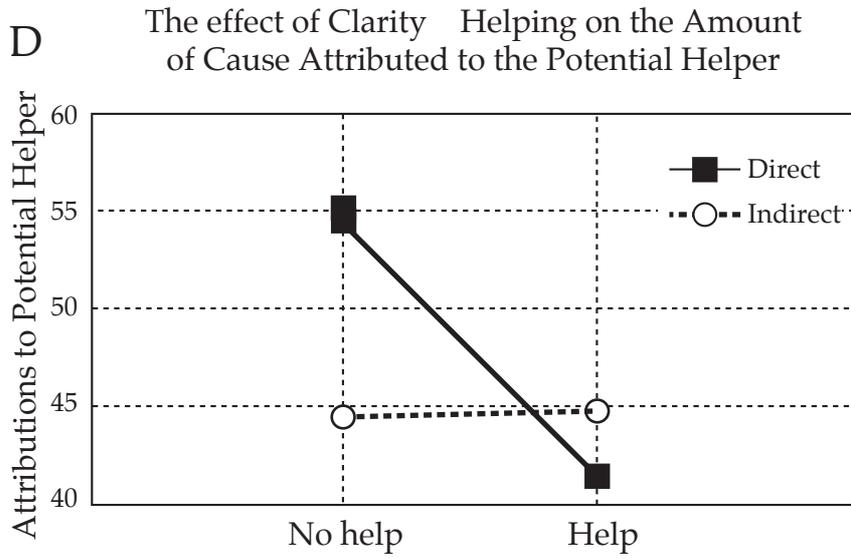
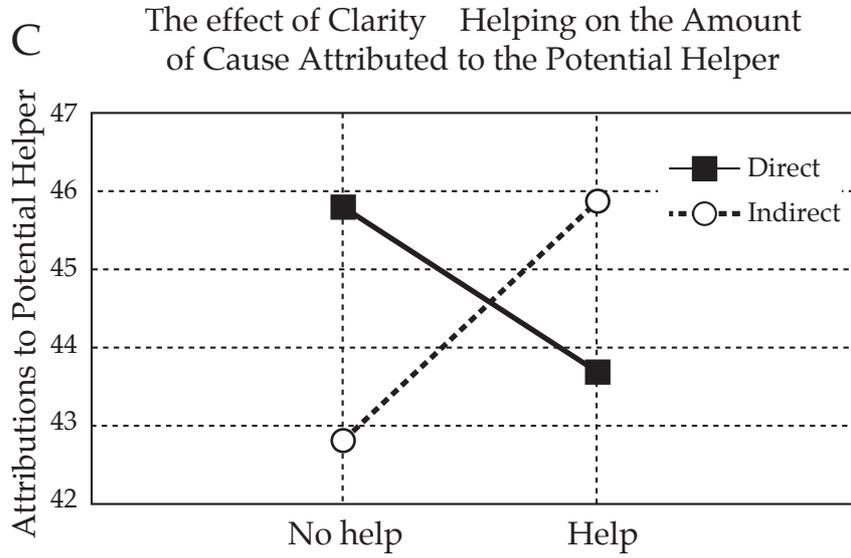


Figure 1. (facing pages)

The effect of an Interaction between Clarity and Helping on Causal Attributions for Helping in (A) Paper II, Study 1, (B) Paper II, Study 2, (C) Paper III, Study 1, and (D) Paper III, Study 2



were not in accordance with the pattern stated by the suggested 'self-serving attributions'. In *Paper III, Study 1* there was no main effect of helping, $F(1, 49) = .03$, $p > .05$ on the attributions to the participant himself or herself. Finally, in *Paper III, Study 2* there was a main effect of helping on the attributions to the participant himself or herself, $F(1, 56) = 4.46$, $p < .05$, but the findings show that when help was not given, more cause was attributed to the participant himself or herself than when help was given. Hence, these three studies did not support the claim that people make self-serving attributions. Conversely, in one of the four studies, namely *Paper II, Study 2*, there was a main effect of helping on the attributions both to the potential helper, $F(1, 74) = 47.16$, $p < .0001$, and to the needy person, $F(1, 82) = 53.17$, $p < .0001$ even though there was no two-way interaction between helping and perspective, $F(1, 82) = .01$, $p > .05$. The findings of the latter study show that when help was given, irrespective of perspective, more cause was attributed to the potential helper as well as to the needy party, than when help was not given. However, a possible explanation for the latter finding is a general tendency to make more internal attributions for positive events than for negative ones, irrespective of causal agent (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

Other-serving attributions. The findings from all of the four studies supported the suggestion that people make other-serving attributions. Specifically, in *Paper II, Study 1*, as previously mentioned, there was a significant two-way interaction between helping and perspective. The findings show that when help was not given, the same amount of cause was attributed to the participant himself or herself and to the spouse, whereas when help was given, more cause was attributed to the spouse. The findings of *Paper II, Study 2*, as previously mentioned, showed that when help was given, more cause was attributed to the spouse as well as to the participant himself or herself, than when help was not given. In *Paper III, Study 1* there was a main effect of helping on the attributions to the needy person, $F(1, 47) = 11.97$, $p < .001$. When help was given, the participants attributed more cause to the other person, than when help was not given. In addition, in this study there was a two-way interaction

between helping and type of relationship, $F(1, 47) = 19.60, p < .0001$. When help was given, more cause was attributed to the other person when he or she was a friend than when the needy person was a stranger, whereas when help was not given, less cause was attributed to the needy person when that person was a friend than when he or she was a stranger. The latter finding supports the suggestion that people make more other-serving attributions when the other person is a close other, than when he or she is a stranger. Finally, in *Paper III, Study 2* there was a main effect of helping on the attributions to the other person, $F(1, 53) = 39.75, p < .00001$. When help was given, more cause was attributed to the other person than when help was not given. Note that type of relationship was excluded as an independent variable in the latter study, as a majority of the participants helped when they participated with a friend, whereas few of them helped when the needy person was a stranger.

Sex difference in self-serving attributions. The findings did not support a suggestion that men make more self-serving attributions than women do. Specifically, in *Paper II, Study 1* there was a significant three-way interaction between helping, perspective, and sex, $F(1, 149) = 10.44, p < .005$. Nevertheless, the findings were not in line with the claim that men made more self-serving attributions than women. In none of the remaining three studies was a significant interaction between helping, sex, and perspective (*Paper II*) or between helping and sex (*Paper III*) obtained: *Paper II, Study 2*: to the potential helper, $F(1, 74) = .11, p > .05$, to the needy person, $F(1, 82) = .78, p > .05$; *Paper III, Study 1*: to the potential helper, $F(1, 49) = .37, p > .05$; *Paper III, Study 2*: to the potential helper, $F(1, 56) = 2.05, p > .05$.

4. 3. 6. Comments

The findings establish that the effect of whether help is given on causal attributions for helping is influenced by how clearly the desire for help is presented. The CH Model proved to be a robust tool for explaining the causal attributions. In addition, the findings do not support the suggestion that people make self-serving causal attributions for helping. Rather, a reasonable conclusion is that people make other-serving causal

attributions, especially when the other is a close one. Finally, no support was obtained for a suggestion that there is a sex difference in degree of self-serving attributions in causal attributions for helping.

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

This section first provides a discussion of the contributions of the empirical work presented in this thesis and an integration of the findings with the previous literature on help-seeking and causal attributions. Then, it presents a discussion of possible limitations of the work and of which questions that would benefit from further inquiry. At the end, a short concluding remark about the contribution of this thesis is given.

5. 1. CONTRIBUTION OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

This thesis contributes to a broadened understanding of spouses' help-seeking behaviors as well as to further focus attribution theory on helping situations. The focus throughout the thesis has been on the clarity of the presented request for help. Besides describing the clarity of the requests that men and women report that they and spouses in general would use, the work assumed an attributional perspective and help-seeking was treated as a situational variable that affects causal attributions for helping. The thesis demonstrates the significance of combining research on help-seeking and on causal attributions in order to give a better understanding of everyday life.

Styles of Help-seeking

As mentioned earlier, little effort has previously been undertaken to picture styles of help-seeking when spouses collaborate in doing household chores. The literature on other relevant topics indicates that people report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones (e.g., Bornstein, 1998; Carli, 1999) and that this preference for direct styles of help-seeking can be explained by the benefits involved in help-seeking (e.g., see Clark, 1983). However, the literature review also showed that previous findings are not clear on this issue (e.g., see Ng & Bradac, 1993).

Accordingly, the first aim of the empirical work was to examine the clarity of the styles of help-seeking reported by spouses. This was examined in *Paper I, Study 1*. The findings supported the hypothesis that spouses report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones. This finding is also in line with our unpublished data (Olsson, unpublished data from an undergraduate essay by Waern), which suggest that husbands and wives report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones also when the measurements of the styles of help-seeking are changed to close-ended questions, rather than open-ended questions.

Besides increasing the understanding of spouses' everyday life, the findings might have implications for the conduct of research on helping. In the vast majority of research on whether or not people help, participants are presented with a clear desire for help (for reviews, see Batson, 1998; Krebs & Miller, 1985). This thesis supports the validity of the use of direct styles of help-seeking. Nevertheless, the participants reported that they would also use indirect styles of help-seeking and, even though this should be no surprise, advantages with the use of an indirect style of help-seeking also need to be taken into consideration in research on helping.

As could be seen in the literature review, there is an empirical inconsistency in the previous research regarding sex differences in help-seeking and similar behaviors. While some studies indicate that men and women are likely to differ in the clarity of their requests for help (e.g., see Carli, 1999; Sagrestano, 1992), other findings indicate that men and women should be more similar than different (e.g., Sagrestano, 1992). In accordance with the first line of findings, the first study in *Paper I* was conducted in order to examine the hypothesis that men report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than women, whereas women report using indirect ones more often than men. However, the findings did not provide support for the expected sex difference. A possible explanation for this finding is given by the suggestion that sex differences are less pronounced when it comes to female areas (for a review, see Deaux & LaFrance, 1998). In other words, in a traditionally female area such as

household chores (e.g., Major, 1993; Roman, 1999a), women should expect themselves to use the same styles of help-seeking as men.

Futhermore, the literature review indicated that people have stereotypes and that these stereotypes are overestimations of the actual sex differences (e.g., Allen, 1995; Gruber & White, 1986). In order to examine the stereotypes spouses hold about the styles of help-seeking that men and women report using, and to address potential limitations of the previous research on stereotype accuracy, in the second study in *Paper I*, married persons were asked to report their beliefs about the likely frequency of women versus men who reported using each of the styles of help-seeking obtained in *Paper I*. The findings supported the prediction that spouses believe that husbands in general would report being more direct and less indirect, than would wives in general. Hence, the findings suggest that spouses inaccurately overestimate the amount of husbands in general (and underestimate the amount of wives in general) that report using direct styles of help-seeking, while they overestimate the amount of wives in general (and underestimate the amount of husbands in general) that report using indirect styles of help-seeking.

The above mentioned finding is in line with the claims that people assume that there is a gender polarisation and overestimate sex differences (e.g., Allen, 1995; Martin, 1987). The finding is also in line with the suggestions that people have gender stereotypes without applying them on specific persons (Deaux & Major, 1987; Locksley et al., 1982) and that people learn to believe that men are more direct in their communication than are women. A possible post hoc explanation for the discrepancy between own behavior and gender stereotypes is that, when asked about the sex distribution among other spouses, a gender schema is activated, whereas when asked about own behavior, spouses focus on the most efficient way to act. This explanation would be in line with the finding that self-enhancement tendencies are more evident in the beliefs about own, as compared to about others', use of power strategies (Gruber & White, 1986).

There are important possible consequences of a discrepancy between beliefs about own behavior and gender stereotypes. For example, people

misunderstand one another, as stereotypes affect information processing (for reviews, see Hamilton et al., 1990; Jones, 1986) and, as will be discussed in the next paragraphs, people seem to compare their behavior with their beliefs about how other persons would behave, in order to attribute the behavior (e.g., Kelley, 1967).

Influence of Styles of Help-seeking and Enhancement Tendencies on Causal Attributions

Besides examining the styles of help-seeking that spouses expect themselves and other spouses to use, the empirical work presented in this thesis tried to bring the understanding of the effects of help-seeking one step further, by assuming an attributional perspective. Causal attributions are significant in everyday life, for example in marriages through their relationship to marital satisfaction (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1992, 1993; Karney et al., 1994). In *Paper II* and *Paper III*, help-seeking was treated as a situational variable and it was tested whether help-seeking influences causal attributions for helping.

This thesis presented and tested a model, the *Clarity × Helping (CH) Model*, that specifies that the effect of helping on the amount of cause attributed to the potential helper is dependent on clarity. In other words, according to the model an interaction between clarity and helping determines the amount of cause attributed to the potential helper. The CH Model was tested in a total of four studies and using different methods, in different settings, and within different types of relationships. The findings of each of the four studies supported the prediction that there is an interaction between clarity and helping, in accordance with the proposed CH Model, in determining causal attributions for helping. Thus, the CH Model was clearly able to predict the obtained findings.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the CH Model explains causal attributions for helping in a broad context. *Paper II* showed that the CH Model explains variations in spouses' attributions for helping one another by doing household chores when the participants are asked to imagine situations as taking place in their real life. The first study reported in *Paper III* confirmed that the CH Model is valid, not only for explaining

how spouses attribute when they collaborate in doing household chores, but also for explaining attributions made in another context, that is, when students help one another with computerized exercises. Finally, the second study in *Paper III* confirmed that the CH Model is valid, not only when people attribute for described scenarios, but also when they attribute for real-life behaviors. Based on these findings, it can with reasonable confidence be stated that the CH Model explains causal attributions for helping and that people consider how clearly the desire for help is presented when they attribute helping.

The support for the CH Model obtained in Study 2 shows that situational constraints influence not only attributions among strangers and friends, but also among spouses. Hence, how spouses attribute is not merely fixed by individual differences and situational variations should be included in the future study of attributions among spouses. Recently, Karney and Bradbury (2000) made a similar claim. They concluded from the longitudinal research on spouses' attributions that future marital research should focus on Kelley's (1967) model of attributions, even though they provided no such data.

Speculatively, the obtained support for the CH Model is in line with the suggestion that people compare the behavior of the potential helper with the preconception of how most persons would have behaved. The pre-test of perceived consensus indicated that people expect that more persons give help when help-seeking is direct than when it is indirect. Therefore, when help-seeking is direct people should be expected to attribute giving help less, and not giving help more, to the potential helper than when help-seeking is indirect. Moreover, the support for the CH Model does not seem to reflect an effect of an interaction between clarity and helping on the causal attributions to the needy party (note that these data are not presented in the summary of the findings presented in this thesis). This strengthens the notion that people focus on the potential helper when they attribute helping and, in order to attribute, compare the behavior of the potential helper with their preconception of how other persons would have behaved. It follows that the findings were congruent

with the claims made in the consensus principle (Kelley, 1967) and similar lines of reasoning (see Kassin, 1979).

Nevertheless, the variation in causal attributions to the potential helper predicted by the CH Model and obtained in the findings presented in this thesis can be due to different underlying processes, all sharing the idea that causal attributions for helping are influenced by a preconception that more persons help when help-seeking is direct than when it is indirect. For example, alternative explanations are offered by the discounting and the augmentation principles (Kelley & Michela, 1980), suggesting that people use causal schemata, that is, preconceptions about how different causes contribute to a specific effect. The *discounting principle* states that people attribute less cause to the person who acts if they believe that other possible causes of the behavior also are present, whereas the *augmentation principle* states that people attribute more cause to the one who acts if they believe that a behavior occurs despite the presence of factors that should inhibit the behavior (Feick & Rhodewalt, 1997; Kelley & Michela, 1980). As people believe that more persons help when direct styles of help-seeking are used than when indirect ones are used, the discounting principle implies that people should give less weight to the person as a possible cause for the giving of help when help-seeking is direct than when it is indirect. The augmentation principle implies that people should augment the causal role of the person in question if he or she helps even though the help-seeking was indirect. An effect analogous to this should be evident when help is not given.

Another conclusion from the review of the previous attribution literature was that enhancement tendencies determine variations in causal attributions, besides the variation explained by the CH Model. The empirical work presented in this thesis examined women's and men's self-serving attributions and other-serving attributions for helping within different types of relationships (spouses, friends, and strangers) and when attributing for different kinds of helping behaviors (household chores and computerized tasks). The previous literature showed that people make self-serving attributions (e.g., Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Floyd, 2000; see also Heider, 1958). It also indicated that closeness reduces the degree

of self-serving attributions and increases the degree of other-serving attributions (e.g., Campbell et al., 2000).

The findings did not support the claim that people make self-serving attributions, however. That is, when help was given, the participants did not attribute significantly more to themselves than they did when help was not given. Only in one of the four studies on causal attributions, the findings were congruent with the suggestion that people make self-serving attributions, namely, in the first study in *Paper II*. When help was given, more cause was attributed to both of the causal agents than when help was not given. An alternative explanation for the latter finding is a general tendency to make more internal attributions for positive than for negative events (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Note also that the only support for the suggestion about self-serving attributions was obtained in one of the marital studies, that is, where people attributed their interaction with a most intimate close other. Nevertheless, taken together the findings neither provided support for the claim about self-serving attributions nor for the claim that people, irrespective of to whom they attribute, make more internal attributions for positive than for negative events. Instead, the findings suggest that the amount of cause people attribute to themselves for giving or not giving help is motivated by forces other than self-serving tendencies. However, the latter suggestion requires further investigation, as self-serving motives may be evident in many forms and the findings run counter to those of Higgins and Bhatt (2001) regarding attributions for, among other things, helping.

The literature review indicated that people make other-serving attributions, at least for their close others, although methodological issues limited the possible conclusions from the reviewed research on enhancement tendencies in causal attributions. The findings of *Paper II* and *Paper III* supported the suggestion that people make other-serving attributions. Additionally, the findings indicated that people make more other-serving attributions when the needy person is a friend than when he or she is anonymous. Hence, there is by now strong support for the claim that people make other-serving causal attributions.

A possible explanation for the finding that the participants made other-serving attributions also for a stranger is that the stranger still belonged to their 'in-group' (i.e., a group with which the person identifies himself or herself). The needy stranger was said to be a student and most of the participants were students. This is in line with the previous finding that there is an in-group bias in other-serving attributions (Chatman & von Hippel, 2001). Because the findings of three of the four studies did not support the claim that people make self-serving attributions, however, it is unlikely that the findings reflect the general tendency suggested by Kelley and Michela (1980) to make more internal attributions for positive events than for negative ones. To sum up, regarding enhancement tendencies in causal attributions, a reasonable conclusion is that people do not make self-serving attributions in the type of situations examined in this thesis. On the contrary, further research can be expected to show that people make other-serving attributions, at least when the other is a close other.

Finally, the literature review indicated that a person's sex influences his or her degree of self-serving attributions, but also that an effect of sex is context dependent (e.g., see Deaux, 1984). Thus, the research presented in this thesis was designed also to examine whether there is a sex difference in the degree of self-serving attributions in causal attributions for helping, about which no hypothesis was formulated. None of the four studies supported a claim that men make more self-serving attributions than women. It is worthwhile to note that, in *Paper II*, the participants attributed helping their opposite-sex spouses, whereas the participants in *Paper III* attributed helping a person of the same sex as themselves. Yet the findings were replicated, and this strengthens the belief that men do not make more self-serving attributions for helping than do women.

As the lack of support for the suggestion that men make more self-serving attributions than women was repeated over situations that differ in the type of help needed, a speculative suggestion is that helping, at least in non-emergencies, is a sphere in which men do not make more self-serving attributions than do women. This explanation is in line with

the finding that women have more positive self-schemas when it comes to helping, and similar behaviors, than do men (see Froming et al., 1998; Skaldeman & Montgomery, 1999). Another possibility is that the lack of significant sex differences in self-serving attributions is culturally dependent – that there are no sex differences in degree of self-serving attributions among Swedish participants, irrespective of kind of behavior for which attributions are made (for cultural differences in degree of self-serving bias, see, e.g., Higgins & Bhatt, 2001). Findings show that in Sweden, even though men have more power than women do, there is greater gender equality than in for example the United States and Canada (Baxter & Kane, 1995). To understand sex differences in self-serving attributions, these suggested explanations need to be further examined.

5. 2. POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The empirical work presented in this thesis is based on different methods, each with different advantages and drawbacks, and some methodological issues will be discussed here. Methodological considerations raised by the previous research have been discussed in the review of the literature on help-seeking and causal attributions given earlier in this thesis and some of these issues will be briefly mentioned again, in order to discuss how the present work addressed the previous limitations.

Styles of Help-seeking

In the studies on styles of help-seeking presented in the empirical part of this thesis, open-ended questions asked spouses to report their styles of help-seeking. A possible limitation with open-ended questions is that participants report whatever first comes to mind and that this does not mirror the behaviors they would have reported had they been given possible alternatives. However, it is not likely that this was the case in the present thesis, as the obtained findings closely mirror our data from a

study presenting the categories obtained in this paper in the form of close-ended questions (Olsson, unpublished data).

Yet it is important to keep in mind that there were no follow-up questions asking about how the participants would behave if the initial efforts to receive help failed. Nor were there any specifications given about whether or not the participants should report their first choice of styles of help-seeking. Most of the participants described only one behavior per situation and when more than one answer was given, only the first one was included in the analyses. White and Roufail's (1989) findings on sex differences in influence strategies indicate that the correlation between first-choice strategy given by men and women is higher than the correlations between last-resort behavior. Future research should, thus, address the styles of help-seeking men and women report that they would use if their first effort to seek help fails.

One alternative to open-ended questions would be to ask men and women to rate how likely they are to use certain styles of help-seeking, but there are at least three possible limitations with this and similar alternatives. First, by using close-ended questions the participants are limited to a given range of possible answers that might not cover their likely style of help-seeking. Additionally, close-ended questions require that we have pre-knowledge about the styles of help-seeking people believe that they use. Second, biases could result from providing participants with styles of help-seeking that they would not come to think of on their own accord (e.g., see discussions by Gruber & White, 1986; Steil & Weltman, 1992). Similarly, Gruber and White (1986) suggest that open-ended questions result in more individualized answers than do close-ended questions. Third, questions asking participants to give ratings, such as of how often they use a behavior, may be biased as women decide upon whether they commonly use a behavior by comparing themselves with other women, whereas men use another standard of comparison, namely, other men (see Biernat & Manis, 1994). Thereby, a rating such as 'rarely' does not carry the same meaning when reported by a woman and by a man. The latter would make it difficult to compare answers given by women and men.

Content analysis was used in the work presented in this thesis to analyze the styles of help-seeking the participants reported that they would use. It is probably possible to obtain other categories of styles of help-seeking from the data, as there can always be more than one single meaning evident in answers. However, the sampling, or 'physical' units, were analyzed and, according to Krippendorff (1980), that increases the reliability of the procedures.

A limitation in the previous research on own styles of help-seeking and similar behaviors has been that the participants, when asked to report their behaviors, were given no instructions about the situation in which they should imagine themselves (e.g., White & Roufail, 1989). This makes it difficult to know what kinds of situations the findings can be generalized to. In order to address this possible disadvantage, in the empirical work presented in this thesis, the participants were asked to report their likely styles of help-seeking if they desired help with specific household chores. Note that without further testing, we can not be certain that the findings are valid for describing help-seeking in other types of situations.

Important to note is also that the empirical work in this thesis examines the behaviors people *report* that they would use. Also, in the study on gender stereotypes the participants were asked to report their gender stereotypes regarding the styles of help-seeking that other spouses would report using. The behaviors people report using are not to be treated as true behaviors (see discussion by Grant et al., 1997). Hence, it remains for future research to address how the self-reported styles of help-seeking and the gender stereotypes are related to 'true' styles of help-seeking. In other words, whether the preconceptions about own behavior or the gender stereotypes are the most accurate measure of how spouses really behave when they want the other person to do a household chore.

Another issue that would benefit from further attention is how attributions mediate an effect of a difference between the perception of own behavior and the perception of how wives in general or husbands in general behave. For example, a wife who uses direct styles of help-seeking might attribute the help-seeking more to herself than does a husband

who uses direct styles of help-seeking, as the wife believes that her behavior is low in consensus with that of wives in general. On the contrary, the husband's behavior is high in consensus with that of the beliefs about husbands in general.

A possible limitation in the previous research on gender stereotype accuracy has been that the participants were provided with only brief information about the context in which the behavior they were asked to rate is reported or observed (e.g., Hall & Carter, 1999; Swim, 1994). Therefore, it is not certain what kind of situations the participants had in mind when they reported their beliefs, making it difficult to compare gender stereotypes with measures on true sex distribution. This was dealt with in the present work by giving the participants in the study on gender stereotypes a careful description of the methods used in the study where data on own styles of help-seeking was collected.

Finally, the samples used in the two studies on help-seeking might have implications for the validity of the findings. One shortcoming is that many of the originally asked persons did not participate. This is a common problem in marital research (e.g., Eastman, 1994; Gordon, Baucum, Epstein, Burnett, & Rankin, 1999). Even though the background data suggests that the participants in the study on own styles of help-seeking are representative of the population, it is not sure that the samples are fully representative of the populations in the issues in focus in this thesis. For example, the participants may be more satisfied than spouses in general and this might influence their answers. Only one to two reminders were sent and, thus, there was not much pressure to participate. This is an ethical question, however. Researchers need to decide how much they should intrude on people's private lives and, especially as the originally contacted spouses had not signed up for research participation or the like, little effort was done to 'force' people to discuss with their spouse whether they should participate. An alternative procedure that decreases the intrusion on people's private lives is to advertise in papers or put up signs asking people to report their interest. Nevertheless, note that this would not solve the problem of the risk of biases in the sample, in relation to the population.

The participants in the study on own behavior and in the one on gender stereotypes were drawn from different populations. Hence, the discrepancy between sex differences in own reported behavior and gender stereotypes could have been affected by differences between the samples, such as by different levels of education. However, both samples included persons who lived in Sweden with a spouse of the opposite sex. Note also that the participants in both of the studies were similar in age range and this is important as gender roles have changed (e.g., see discussion by Swim, 1994). As previously mentioned, having different samples is an advantage and overcomes limitations in the previous literature (e.g., Jussim et al., 1991; Mundorf et al., 1989), as participants are not led to compare own reported behavior and the gender stereotypes. In addition, research on spouses' influence strategies (Steil & Weltman, 1992) shows no relationship between style of influence strategy and characteristics such as the ways in which responsibility for household chores, childcare, and decision-making are shared. Research on 'emotional openness' (Jussim et al., 1991) shows that education was not related to gender stereotype accuracy.

Influences of Styles of Help-seeking and Enhancement Tendencies on Causal Attributions

An advantage of the studies on causal attributions presented in the empirical part of this thesis is the variety of methods used. As the methods were changed over the studies, the risk of possible biases due to methodological limitations decreases. Across the four studies, the rating scales for measuring causal attributions were changed, the set-up included scenarios as well as real-life behavior performed in a laboratory, the sample of participants was recruited from different groups, the contexts included helping by doing a household chore in the shared home as well as helping by doing another person's computerized exercise, and repeated measurements as well as between subjects design were used. The main features that remained constant over these studies were the variation in clarity and helping. Taken together, this mixture of methods increases the possibility that the support for the CH Model was not an artefact.

In *Paper III*, the participants were asked to attribute helping when the same kinds of situations were described in scenarios and performed in real life. Note that different samples of participants participated in each of these studies. The replication of the findings shows that two different research methods lead to similar variations in causal attributions. This indicates that asking people to imagine described scenarios is a valid method for examining how people attribute helping. This suggestion is in line with previous findings showing that questionnaires are useful in the study of attributions (Fincham & Beach, 1988; Madden & Janoff-Bulman, 1981).

A possible limitation with the empirical work presented in this thesis is that rating scales were used to measure causal attributions throughout the studies. An alternative to rating scales is open-ended questions asking people to report their causal attributions. The latter would enable conclusions about the causal agents people consider on their own accord. Future research should address whether the CH Model is valid for explaining the variation in cause attributed to the potential helper also when open-ended questions are used. Nevertheless, note that when Elig and Frieze (1979) in an empirical study compared different measurements of attributions, rating scales scored higher in inter-test validity than did open-ended questions.

It is noteworthy that causal attributions were measured on two different kinds of rating scales in this thesis. Specifically, in the first study in *Paper I* the participants reported their attributions on bipolar scales with one causal agent on each end of the scale. This increases the risk that the attributions to the potential helper and to the needy person are dependent on one another. In other words, the more cause a participant wishes to attribute to the needy person, the less he or she also has to attribute to the potential helper. In the rest of the studies, separate scales for each causal agent were used. The former measurement enables a critical examination of whether spouses prefer to enhance themselves or their spouse when they have to choose between either alternative. The latter measurement seems preferable, however, as there is not much empirical support for a suggestion about a negative correlation between attributions to different

causal agents (for a review, see Hewstone, 1989, p. 31). Note also that the causal attributions were measured in questionnaires throughout the studies, making the findings vulnerable to the previously mentioned possible limitations with the use of self-reports. In order to reduce the risk of presentation biases in the laboratory experiment, the participants were informed about the anonymity of their answers on the questionnaire and students who took classes given by the experimenter during the time of data collection did not participate.

Another possible shortcoming with the empirical work presented in this thesis comes from the fact that the participants were asked to report causal attributions rather than merely asked to describe their reactions in the situation. This might at first glance appear as a peculiar criticism. However, the previous literature indicates that situational variations influence whether or not people are inclined to produce causal attributions versus to not at all attribute (for a review, see Hewstone, 1989). For example, Weiner (1985) suggests that people are more likely to attribute when an event includes non-attainment of a goal and/or is unexpected. Accordingly, an important issue for future research to address is whether people spontaneously are more likely to attribute, versus not attribute, depending on an interaction between clarity and helping.

Furthermore, the framing of the question that was used to ask the participants to attribute might have biased the participants to be more or less inclined to focus on the situation of the potential helper, and, thus, to take the styles of help-seeking into consideration. Hence, a disadvantage of the empirical work presented in this thesis is that the framing of the causal question was the same throughout the studies. McClure and Hilton (e.g., 1998) showed that when asked to *explain* an act, people are less inclined to focus on the goals of the actor, and more inclined to focus on the preconditions, as compared to when asked for *why* the act occurred. In addition, a reasonable suggestion from the previous research (McClure, Hilton, Cowan, Ishida, & Wilson, 2001) is that everyday behaviors elicit more ‘why questions’ (and, thus, more goal explanation and less focus on preconditions), than do less ordinary behaviors. Therefore, future research should address whether the CH Model is valid in

explaining causal attributions irrespective of the framing of the request that elicits the participants to report their attributions. Moreover, it would be useful if future research also examined the CH model in situations where the helping is costly for the potential helper.

Unlike the rest of the empirical work presented in this thesis, the second study in *Paper III* was a laboratory experiment. Similar experimental setups have resulted in several important findings on how situational variables affect thoughts and behaviors in helping situations. For example, they have demonstrated a relation between ‘empathy’ and helping (e.g., Batson & Ahmad, 2001; Batson & Moran, 1999). There are many advantages with the use of laboratory experiments. It facilitates study of behaviors that are performed in reality, as compared to behaviors described in questionnaires, and yet to draw conclusions about causal relationships between variables. The latter is more difficult to obtain with the same certainty using for instance observational methods. A possible limitation with the use of laboratory experiments is a difficulty to generalize the findings to real life. Conversely, the findings of the laboratory experiment reported in the empirical part of this thesis confirmed the findings of the studies on causal attributions for everyday helping in the home. Hence, a reasonable conclusion is that the findings are valid also outside the laboratory.

An important issue in all research is ethical considerations (for further discussions see Aronson, Wilson, & Brewer, 1998; Batson, 1998, p. 307). Like many previous studies using laboratory settings, in this work there was a dilemma: on the one hand, there was a wish to inform participants in advance of everything that would happen during their participation, and, on the other hand, there was a risk of biased findings if the participants have had full information about the methods beforehand. In none of the studies on causal attributions, participants were informed about the research hypothesis before their participation. In the laboratory experiment, the participants were in addition initially given the instructions that they could communicate with another participant over e-mail. As the participants were informed at the end of the session, they could not really send e-mails to the other participant and the e-mails they had

received during the session were sent by the experimenter. In order to avoid possible negative consequences for the participants, during the session participants could only use pre-fabricated sentences and before the session they were informed that the experimenter would read all mails. After the session, a careful debriefing was undertaken. None of the participants reported being distressed after the experiment. Note that previous research examining the effects of experimental procedures indicates that people neither object to these kinds of deceptions, nor are they adversely affected (for a review, see Aronson et al., 1998). For example, Smith and Richardson (1983) showed that participants who had been deceived did not evaluate their experience of the participation less positively than those who had not been deceived. Concerning awareness biases, in order to reduce the risk that participants had previous knowledge about the research project, psychology students were only allowed to participate in the laboratory experiment if they were in their first year.

Unlike the other three studies of causal attributions reported in the empirical part of this thesis, in the laboratory experiment assignment to the conditions of helping was determined by the participants' choice to help or not help, in response to the request for help. The likelihood of helping was not manipulated, as we wanted participants in all conditions to attribute the same situation, except for the styles of help-seeking used. A limitation with this procedure is that it is not certain that the same variables that made people help or not help not also influenced their causal attributions. For example, more persons helped when the needy person was a friend than when he or she was a stranger. Nonetheless, the findings of the laboratory experiment replicated those of the questionnaire studies and, therefore, a reasonable conclusion is that the findings are not biased by this procedure. Note also that the participants were quite evenly distributed over the conditions of helping, irrespective of sex and styles of help-seeking.

The studies on causal attributions aimed to increase the understanding of how clarity and enhancement tendencies influence causal attributions for helping. A final suggestion for future research is to move beyond this delimitation. Future research should, within the same kinds

of situations, further explore the processes behind the obtained findings, as well as possible effects of the resulting causal attributions. For example, the *methods of agreements and differences* provide contradictory explanations for how people compare a person's behavior with their preconception of consensus (e.g., see suggestions by Cheng & Novick, 1990; Van Overwalle & Heylighen, 1995). It would be interesting to see research that further applies such lines of reasoning to the context of focus in this thesis. Possible effects that need further attention is how people's styles of help-seeking and their causal attributions influence the likelihood of a happy everyday life, at home as well as in other types of situations.

5. 3. CONCLUDING REMARK

In the beginning of this thesis it was claimed that different styles of help-seeking involve different consequences. The research presented in the thesis has given a further understanding of the styles of help-seeking spouses report using when they collaborate in doing household chores and, furthermore, of the effect of help-seeking on causal attributions for helping. Additionally, the research contributes to the discussion of enhancement tendencies in causal attributions. The present findings indicate that, even though spouses believe that men would report being more direct and less indirect than would women, husbands as well as wives report using direct styles of help-seeking more often than indirect ones. Furthermore, the findings show that the effect of helping on the amount of cause attributed to the potential helper is dependent on the clarity of the presented request for help. Hence, the present thesis combines the issues of help-seeking and causal attributions. Thereby the thesis contributes with a novel understanding of everyday life.

6. REFERENCES

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