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Establishing Rapport to Increase Compliance

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Abstract

Previous research in social psychology shows that people's willingness to comply with a request depends on variables such as how the request is phrased and a number of other situational factors. One of the situational factors is whether there is an existing relationship between the person making the request and the person who is being asked. In an existing relationship, rapport between the individuals has already been established, and it is more likely that one person will comply with a request made by the other person in the relationship. Through a study of compliance, we measured to see if there was a difference between presenting a questionnaire in written format or as an interview in order to establish rapport. We presented our participants with four levels of compliance. We analyzed the compliance data using an independent samples t test, which showed no significant difference in compliance between the two groups.

Establishing Rapport to Increase Compliance

Compliance is an important and prevalent aspect that is present in a variety of social situations and contexts. The American Psychological Association defines compliance as "a change in behavior consistent with a communication source's direct requests" ("Compliance", n.d.). Many studies have been done on compliance and the factors that affect compliance. Multiple techniques have been found to be effective in increasing compliance along with many other situational factors. The foot-in-the-door technique and the door-in-the-face technique are two widely known techniques that are generally effective in increasing compliance and are used in a wide variety of situations. The door-in-the-face technique has been found to be potentially more effective in increasing compliance. It works to achieve compliance by asking a large request first, which people will most likely reject, then follow up with a smaller request

(Rodafinos, Vucevic, & Sideridis, 2005). Many other factors also influence compliance. Even physical touch has been shown to be effective in increasing a person's compliance (Vaidis & Halimi-Falkowicz, 2008). Findings from other research on physical touch and compliance have shown touch be very influential, and have even shown touch to have a positive influence on a person's compliance to much larger requests as well (Gueguen & Fischer-Lokou, 2002).

Many social factors affect compliance. Research that has been done to look at the effects of the foot-in-the-door technique and the door-in-the-face technique have also looked at the social influences explaining why a person is more likely to comply when these techniques are applied, which often deals with self-perception or a person's thoughts about what others think of themselves in regards to helpfulness (Goldman, 1986). In regards to social factors and compliance, rapport or relationship is a widely used concept that is thought to have a positive influence on a person's compliance to a request. When there is a personal relationship established or a person likes the other, compliance with a request is more likely to occur (Cialdini, 1993, as cited in Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Einarsson, & Einarsson, 2008). Several studies have been done regarding different factors associated with building a relationship or rapport with a person in which compliance was positively affected.

A study by Howard and Gengler (1995) measured the effect of remembering someone's name on compliance. They collected participants who were students in a class in which introductions had previously been established and the professor either remembered the student's name or did not. The students were asked to complete a math questionnaire and the researchers measured the time that the participant took to begin the task and the time it took participants to bring the questionnaire back to the professor as dependent variables used to measure compliance. They found that students whose name had been remembered began the task in less time and

returned the questionnaire in less time than the participants whose names had not been remembered, indicating greater motivation for compliance in the group whose names were remembered (Howard & Gengler, 1995).

Howard, Gengler, and Jain (1997) completed a second similar study of compliance to a second request, which was measured after manipulating whether the participant's name was remembered or not. In this experiment, they took students from a class who had previously introduced themselves and volunteered to participate in a study that dealt with a class evaluation. During their meeting, the professor either remembered the participant's full name or did not remember. After the initial request, the professor then asked the students if they wanted to purchase cookies, which was the measured variable. The researchers also manipulated whether the cookie sale was in another room or in the same room the participant and professor were in. The results of this study showed that the participants whose names were remembered had a greater probability of purchasing cookies and purchased significantly more cookies than the participants whose names were not remembered. Their results supported the hypothesis that there would be greater compliance in those whose names were remembered (Howard et al., 1997). Both of the studies on remembering names and compliance support the idea that developing a more personal relationship, by remembering a person's name, compliance can be increased.

Other studies have been done on the effects of relational aspects on compliance. Millar (2002) conducted a study of compliance in friends versus strangers and their concerns of self-presentation. In this study, participants were gathered to form a group who would be on the receiving end of a request and the other participants were instructed to make requests to the other group of participants. The requests were made to both strangers and friends of the requestors. The requests were also made in two forms, one where the participants received one simple

request and the other that was designed to test the door-in-the-face phenomenon by asking participants one large request and a smaller, simpler request after the initial request. All participants were asked to fill out a health questionnaire, then the request in either form was made which included forms of recording eating habits and after the request, another questionnaire was given to participants asking about their concern for self-presentation. In both compliance measures, the verbal agreement and the actual completion of the request, friends and strangers who received only the initial simple request exhibited nearly the same amount of compliance, but in the door-in-the-face condition, friends of the requestor were significantly more likely to comply than strangers were. Friends in the door-in-the-face condition were also significantly more concerned about self-presentation than strangers in this condition were. This suggests that compliance is affected by concern for self-presentation when there is a relationship established (Millar, 2002).

In a similar study, Kilbourne (1988) compared compliance of friends and strangers and the effect of the foot-in-the-door technique. In this study, the researchers requested various forms of a phone interview, which friends either were asked to complete a simple request, a larger request, or were asked to complete a simple request followed by the large request, or strangers were asked to complete only the larger request. Compliance was measured simply by the verbal agreement to complete the phone interview. The results of this study showed high compliance from friends in all conditions and less compliance from strangers. The results also showed that friends of women were more likely to comply than friends of men were in the large request. Their findings imply that compliance is more likely when there is a relationship established (Kilbourne, 1988).

The present study was designed to determine whether compliance to a request could be increased by establishing rapport. Participants were put into two groups; one group was given a questionnaire in written form and the other was given the same questionnaire as an interview. The interview was given in order to establish rapport between the participant and the researcher. Rapport was not established with participants who received the questionnaire in written form. We then made a second request to all participants, which asked if the participant would be willing to participate in future research, which included varying levels of compliance. The second request was used to measure compliance and the level of compliance. Based on the findings from Kilbourne (1988) and Millar (2002) suggesting that compliance is greater when there is an established relationship between the requestor and the person receiving the request, we predicted that compliance would be greater in those that we established rapport with through an oral interview. The results from Howard and Gengler (1995) and Howard, Gengler, and Jain (1997) also suggested that more personal encounters, for example, remembering a person's name, increased a person's compliance to a request. Based on the findings from those studies, we believe that establishing rapport through the oral interview would create personal encounters with participants and lead to greater compliance to our later request.

Method

Participants

Each of us collected between six and seven students from the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSB/SJU) to participate in this study by asking friends or acquaintances if they would be willing to participate. In total, we had 20 participants that were CSB/SJU students, including 12 women (60%) and eight men (40%). Our participants ranged

from sophomores to seniors. We had seven (35%) sophomores, 11 (55%) juniors, and two (10%) seniors participate in this study.

Materials and Procedure

This study was conducted for a research methods class. We modified an unpublished survey regarding communication patterns and preferences among college students. We modified this survey to create a short, non-personal questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions about communication preferences, attitudes, and use of communication devices, and a section asking for demographic information. The questions regarding communication preferences included questions such as, "On average, how much time do you spend per day communicating in the following ways?" This question was asked for various forms of communication including text messaging, talking on the phone, face-to-face conversations, and a few others, which participants answered on a Likert-type scale the amount of minutes they use those forms of communication per day. The information on communication preferences from the questionnaire was not actually important to our experiment and was not analyzed, but we did use the demographic information from the questionnaire.

Once we collected our participants, we scheduled times for them to come to the library to complete the questionnaire. We administered the questionnaire in two ways, written form or interview, and randomly assigned participants to one of the two groups. The interview form of the questionnaire was used in order to establish rapport with the participants, while those completing the written survey did not establish rapport with the person administering the survey. In the interview condition, an introduction was established with participants and directions were given, and then the interview proceeded with the questions from the questionnaire. The participants in the written survey condition were simply given directions to complete the

questionnaire and consent form, and the participant completed the questionnaire with no interaction with the researcher in the room. To avoid pre-existing rapport, we administered the questionnaires in both forms to the participants who were collected by the other researchers and we did not administer the questionnaires to our own participants.

Following their completion of the questionnaire, participants from both groups were asked the same question regarding their willingness to participate in further research. We gave participants four options to respond to the second request with increasing levels of compliance. The four different levels of participation that the participants could select included an online survey (3-5 minutes), a survey with follow up questions (10 minutes), an interview (15 minutes), or not willing to participate. Participants were given a sign-up sheet to select at which level they were willing to participate. The participants' responses to this request were our measure of compliance.

After responding to the request on the sign-up sheet, participants were immediately debriefed and told that there would be no additional research that they would participate in. We explained that the options given to them were designed to measure compliance. In our debriefing, we explained why we used some deception in the study, which was important for measuring the effect of rapport on compliance, and that their responses to the questions about communication preferences on the questionnaire would not be used for analysis. We also explained in detail the methodology of our experiment, the purpose of the experiment, and our hypothesis.

Results

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the group who received a written questionnaire and the group who completed an interview on their level of compliance

with an additional request. Compliance was measured on a scale from one to three, with one being the lowest level of compliance and three being the highest level of compliance. There was no significant difference in the level of compliance between those who completed the written questionnaire ($M = 2.5$, $SD = .71$) and those who completed the interview questionnaire ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .97$), $t(18) = .264$, $p = .80$.

Discussion

Kilbourne (1988) and Millar's (2002) findings suggested that compliance was greater when there was a relationship established between the requestor and the person receiving the request, and the results from Howard and Gengler (1995) and Howard, Gengler, and Jain (1997) suggested that similar factors in establishing rapport, like remembering a person's name, also increased compliance. We predicted that the participants who completed the questionnaire through an interview would be more likely to comply with our second request than the group who completed the written questionnaire because rapport had been established. Our results did not support this prediction and did not match results from previous research. Compliance was roughly the same in both the interview condition and written questionnaire condition. Our results suggest that compliance was roughly the same regardless of if there was a relationship established or not; our participants gave high levels of compliance regardless of the form of the questionnaire they were assigned to.

There are a few reasons that could explain why we got these results. First, although we did not administer questionnaires or interviews to the participants that we gathered ourselves, the participants we used may have been more helpful and more likely to comply because they were our friends and knew that we were involved in the research. There had been some rapport that had already been established because our participants all personally knew someone involved in

the research. We think that we may have gotten different results if we would have had a more random sample of people who did not know any of the researchers involved.

Another reason why we could have gotten the results that we got was that there was a sign-up sheet where the participants could see other participants' responses to the second request that we used to measure compliance. Because participants could see other participants' responses to the request, it may have influenced their decision to comply with the request. Instead of using a sign-up sheet to measure compliance, we should have used a separate sheet for each participant so that they could not see what other participants selected.

Along with giving each participant an individual sign-up sheet to select their willingness to comply with our second request, we could have had greater differentiation between the levels of compliance. All of our levels of compliance were relatively simple and did not require much effort for the participant; even the large request was not very difficult or time consuming. We could have established better levels to measure compliance. It also would have been helpful and beneficial to have a larger sample of people and we may have seen different results.

Our results were not consistent with findings from similar research studies, but they may have been affected by other factors rather than our independent variable. Suggestions for further research on this topic would be to have better manipulation of the dependent variable with more differentiation between the levels of compliance and to make sure that participants do not know what the other participants had done in terms of compliance to the request. We would also suggest using a sample of people who do not know any of the researchers involved. It would also be interesting to manipulate whether the person conducting the interview is a man or a woman and see if the participants are more likely to comply based on the gender of the interviewer. Although we did not find a significant effect of rapport on compliance, other research indicates

that rapport does have a positive effect on compliance, and with a few improvements and changes to this study, we may find similar results.

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