

Compliance through direct persuasive appeals: The moderating role of communicator's attractiveness in interpersonal persuasion

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It has been argued that the accessibility of persuasion motives elicits distrust in a communicator's underlying motives and leads to decreased persuasion success. However, this research highlights the fact that salient and positive communicator characteristics (here physical attractiveness) can temper consumers' attributions of selfish motives and lead to increased behavioral compliance when recipients are faced with direct persuasive appeals to get them to do something. This experiment demonstrates that recipients were more likely to comply with an attractive communicator's recommendation when she was forthright about her desire to change recipients' behavior than when she was not. The reverse was true for an unattractive communicator, a finding which indicates that the salience of persuasion motives is likely to become a liability when positive peripheral cues are absent. These effects on recipients' behavioral compliance were found to be mediated by the degree of selfish motives attributed to the communicator.

Keywords: Direct persuasion; Physical attractiveness; Inferred motives; Behavioral compliance.

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Recent research in social psychology and related disciplines has identified conditions under which persuasion attempts backfire because recipients become suspicious about a communicator's true motives (e.g., Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; DeCarlo, 2005; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Main, Dahl, & Darke, 2007). In cases when persuasion motives (e.g., to get someone to change his or her opinions) are salient through a communicator's behavior (e.g., flattery or exaggeration), recipients are likely to distrust the communicator's recommendations and will adjust their attributions for plausible situational constraints (e.g., a commission; Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Fein, 1996; Fein, Hilton, & Miller, 1990). This implies that when recipients come to believe that the motive behind a persuasion attempt is insincere or manipulative, they will likely resist and their compliance will decline (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Forehand & Grier, 2003).

This being the case, it might be reasonable to suggest that persuasion agents should not be overly forthright about their intention—for example, via overt verbal statements—to get recipients to comply with a recommendation or adopt a desired attitude so as to avoid serious setbacks in their persuasiveness (e.g., Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). In other words, communicators should avoid using direct persuasive appeals telling recipients that they want them to comply. For this and other reasons, communicators may be eager to design their appeals as unobtrusively as possible; a fact apparent, for example, in the use of two-sided messages (e.g., Allen, 1991) and other inconspicuous persuasion tactics that try to exploit one of several fundamental psychological mechanisms (see Cialdini, 2001). However, some authors have put forward the idea that there are conditions under which such direct appeals conveying one's intention to persuade do not invariably reduce compliance, but can in fact elevate persuasion success (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Mills, 1966; Mills & Aronson, 1965; Reinhard, Messner, & Sporer, 2006). We will examine this idea next by looking at differences in the success of direct appeals depending on favorable communicator characteristics such as physical attractiveness or likeability.

DIRECT PERSUASIVE APPEALS: HOW TO BECOME A SUCCESS?

In most cases communicators will be better off avoiding overly frank statements about their intention to influence recipients, which is perhaps most obvious when direct appeals come from disrespected salespeople. People are generally inclined to be skeptical about marketing claims and tend to overly distrust salespeople (e.g., Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Gaski & Etzel, 1986, 2005; Main et al., 2007; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). The consequence is that direct persuasive appeals will likely corroborate negative beliefs about these

people. In other cases communicators might lack the underlying ulterior motive that would allow direct persuasive appeals to be attributed to selfishness. For example, a doctor who tells her patient frankly that she wants him to quit smoking should be perceived as caring about his health and that of his relatives rather than as taking advantage of the situation. The direct appeal might thus make the message seem more important and honest, reinforcing its implications and goodwill, which should eventually lead to more compliance (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Applying this reasoning to the general impact of direct persuasive appeals on compliance, it can be argued that being forthright about one's intention to influence may either decrease or increase the persuasiveness of a message, depending on whether a recipient attributes it more or less to selfish motives. In turn, the kind of motive that is believed responsible for the direct appeal may itself be determined by situational circumstances (e.g., welfare vs sales context) or dispositional characteristics (e.g., trustworthiness, attractiveness, or likeability), an assumption that is in line with the basic tenets of attribution theory (see Kelley, 1967, 1973).

First, and foremost, Mills and Aronson (1965; Mills 1966) put forth the idea that communicator's physical attractiveness may moderate the effectiveness of direct persuasive appeals, with attractive communicators expected to be more persuasive when using them and unattractive communicators when not using them. In a series of recent studies, Reinhard and colleagues (2006), using home-shopping commercials as the media vehicle for exploring the effect of direct persuasive appeals, found support for this conjecture in the arena of advertising. These studies found that direct persuasive appeals from attractive communicators were more effective in influencing consumers' product evaluations than were persuasive messages that focused merely on the product's benefits. The reverse effect was true for unattractive communicators. Attributions to self-interest were found to mediate these effects. Attractive communicators were perceived as less self-interested when using direct appeals to influence recipients' views, whereas self-interest was for the most part held responsible for unattractive communicator's use of direct persuasion.

Coming up with an attributional explanation, Reinhard and colleagues (2006) argued that social perceivers would typically associate attractiveness with other desirable characteristics (e.g., likeableness, social competence) based on a "what-is-beautiful-is-good" stereotype (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; see also Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Langlois et al., 2000), which leads to differences in the effectiveness of direct persuasive appeals. Specifically, as Weiner (1986) has argued, people are keen to make sense of the behavior of others especially when it is negative or unexpected. Because direct persuasive appeals will normally be associated with concerns of self-interest and thus carry a negative tone, people will easily distrust such a recommendation if it comes from a disliked or unattractive communicator, but not if it comes from a

communicator who is much liked or attractive. The argument thus goes that positive characteristics that are associated with being attractive (e.g., likeable, trustworthy) will likely temper attributions to self-interest when a direct persuasion attempt evokes attributional thoughts in recipients. When using direct persuasive appeals, attractive communicators are expected to be seen as having the recipients' interests at heart, and the latter would therefore be better off letting themselves be persuaded. In contrast, unattractive and therefore not much liked communicators are not believed to possess desirable characteristics with the potential to temper attributions to self-interest (e.g., Griffin & Langlois, 2006), with the consequence that direct persuasive appeals should foster negative expectancies and distrust, which is consistent with negativity bias (Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

In a similar vein, these assumptions correspond with much persuasion research showing that individuals are prone to complying with persuasive appeals because they are cognitively preoccupied or simply fail to allocate cognitive resources to the elaboration of a persuasive message. Instead, they often react spontaneously or mindlessly to persuasive appeals, which means that peripheral cues such as physical attractiveness—for good or for ill—can exert their influence on recipients' behavior (e.g., Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978; Santos, Leve, & Pratkanis, 1994; for an overview see Cialdini, 2001).

DIRECT PERSUASION AND COMPLIANCE: THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Building on the recent findings by Reinhard and colleagues (2006; see also Mills, 1966; Mills & Aronson, 1965), the objective of the present research was to examine recipients' actual decision behavior in response to direct persuasive appeals. From a theoretical point of view this seems worth studying, because attitudes and behavioral intentions do not necessarily predict behavior (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Payne, 1982). Examining the impact of direct persuasive appeals on compliance behavior therefore goes beyond previous findings that show effects on antecedents of choice (e.g., product attitudes).

We tested the persuasive impact of direct appeals in an experiment by providing participants with the opportunity to decide in favor of one of two possible rewards (a ball-point pen vs cash) as payment for their participation in an unrelated experiment. The experimenter (unattractive vs attractive) either directly stated her desire to influence participants' choice in favor of the pen, or simply recommended the product's advantages without directly stating her intent (directly stated vs non-stated persuasive intent). We hypothesized that a communicator's forthrightness to get recipients to decide in favor of a recommended product would lead to greater compliance than simply highlighting the product's qualities. This should be true when the communicator is physically attractive, but the effect should be reversed

for an unattractive communicator. An identical pattern was expected on participants' inferred motives, which in turn should function as a mediator for the effects on the compliance behavior. Recipients were expected to temper attributions of self-interest in case of direct persuasion employed by attractive communicators due to the activation of a likeability heuristic, and to intensify attributions of self-interest when unattractive communicators engaged in direct persuasion. This would imply that recipients will attribute a minimum of self-interest to communicators who recommend that they decide in favor of a certain position (here the recommendation to choose a specific reward) by providing persuasive arguments for that position.

However, an alternative and perhaps more parsimonious account for the hypothesized moderating effect of source attractiveness on compliance processes under direct persuasion might be greater willingness to agree to a request from an attractive as compared to an unattractive communicator (e.g., Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Reingen & Kernan, 1993). This would suggest that recipients will misinterpret a directly stated intent to persuade as a request to do a favor (i.e., doing a favor in choosing the recommended product), an alternative account that we address in the current experiment.

METHOD

Participants and design

A total of 144 students (76 male and 68 female) at a German University participated in the experiment (mean age: 24.33). They were compensated with course credit and an additional reward. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions in a 2 (persuasive intent: directly stated vs not stated) \times 2 (experimenter's physical attractiveness: low vs high) between-participants factorial design.¹

¹ Two control factors were added to the core 2 (attractiveness) \times 2 (persuasive intent) design. First, sex of participant was controlled by assigning roughly an equal number of females and males to each condition, the objective being to rule out the possibility that the hypothesized effects will be limited to cross-sexed interactions. However, the data were pooled over this variable because no effects were observed for it. Second, the arguments with which the experimenter recommended the pen option were orthogonally varied. The experimenter promoted the product with three arguments that were either weak (nice color, pretty design, fits into pants pockets) or strong (precise ink, comfortable handling, smooth writing) combined with the persuasive appeal. This factor was included to examine whether the effects of direct persuasion might be the result of the elaboration of message content rather than a relatively automatic compliance process (see also Reinhard et al., 2006). Strong arguments led participants to evaluate the product more favorably, but the arguments presented in favor of the pen did not affect participants' choice behavior. This result gives reason to conclude that direct persuasion does not seem to affect message scrutiny.

Procedure

Participants were told that they would be involved in a study dealing with their ability to solve mathematical problems. This first phase of the experiment represented a bogus procedure unrelated to the objectives reported here, except that it was included to obscure the fact that the experiment's purpose was to examine compliance behavior in response to direct persuasive appeals. Thus, after participants had undergone a realistic experimental procedure, they had to choose one of two possible rewards as compensation for their participation: two Euros in cash or a ball-point pen. At this point the experimenter took an active part by trying to get participants to decide in favor of the pen, which was actually of lesser value (1.25 Euros) than the cash reward.² To this end, the experimenter used a standardized verbal communication. This communication implied the manipulation of persuasive intent that will be discussed in detail below. Once participants had reached a decision they had to fill out a questionnaire and were thoroughly debriefed by a research assistant. Afterwards, participants were given the opportunity to reconsider their decision and were compensated with their preferred reward.

Manipulated variables

Physical attractiveness. Six female students differing in physical attractiveness were recruited to play the role of the experimenter, a practice that is highly common in research on physical attractiveness (see Eagly et al., 1991). The female experimenters were kept blind about the hypotheses to avoid expectancy biases, but were informed that they would be thoroughly debriefed subsequent to the data collection. All read and signed an informed consent form agreeing to this procedure. The stimulus persons were assigned to one of the attractiveness conditions (low vs high) so that each condition was composed of three stimulus persons in an attempt to avoid confounding with other personal characteristics, thus counteracting concerns of stimulus sampling (Wells & Windschitl, 1999).

² A pretest ($N=30$; 15 female and 15 male participants) showed that participants on average evaluated the pen for 1.41 Euros as significantly less valuable than the two Euros, $t(29)=13.96$, $p<.001$. A further pretest ($N=30$; 15 female and 15 male participants) indicated that participants were less likely to decide in favor of the pen compared to the cash reward of two Euros when they were asked to imagine which reward they would choose as compensation for their participation in a psychological experiment. Overall, 26 out of 30 participants decided in favor of the two Euros, $\chi^2(1, N=30)=16.13$, $p<.001$. Neither pretest showed sex differences.

Persuasive intent. Two short standardized sequences were generated to systematically vary the experimenter's persuasive intent (directly stated vs not stated) used by the experimenter to influence participants' choice in favor of the pen option. In an attempt to circumvent different verbal and non-verbal treatments across conditions (smiling, duration of the interaction etc.), all experimenters were asked to practice the persuasive speech intensively before they had to perform their first session. Across all four versions, participants were thanked for their time spent on the experiment and informed that they would be rewarded. The experimenter announced two possible reward options and informed participants that they would have to select one of them. Participants were then shown both options: a cash reward in the amount of two Euros and a pen of lesser value. At this point, the experimenter began to recommend that participants take the pen and promoted the product with some arguments about its benefits (see also footnote 1). Within the verbal promotion of the product, the experimenter either did or did not state directly her intent to persuade participants to decide in favor of the pen by using three statements (I want you to take the pen; It is my desire to influence your choice; You should take the pen). This means that besides highlighting the product's benefits, communicators in the direct persuasion condition overtly stated their desire to influence participants' choice using the three statements cited above. Thereafter, participants were asked to make their decision.

Measures

Participants were told that the final questionnaire was used to evaluate psychological experiments in general in an attempt to advance future tests. To this end, the questionnaire was composed of some filler items about participants' evaluation of the experiment as a whole and the concrete environment (e.g., the experiment was very interesting, the lab had a pleasant climate, and the lab was well equipped), accompanied by items that were used to check the manipulations and to measure the hypothesized mediator.

Manipulation check. Participants responded to all items on a scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). We measured participants' evaluation of the experimenter's physical attractiveness via six items (e.g., the experimenter is very attractive; Ohanian, 1990; $\alpha = .91$). Participants' sense of how strongly they felt the experimenter was interested in influencing their choice was assessed via the following two items: "The experimenter explicitly tried to influence my behavior," and "The experimenter explicitly tried to persuade me to decide in favor of the pen," ($r = .39$, $p < .001$).

Inferred motives. We measured participants' attribution of the experimenter's behavior to self-interested motives via six items: "My feeling is that the experimenter has a strong self-interest in recommending the pen," "The experimenter's behavior suggests to me that she must have something to hide," "The experimenter is acting in her own interests by promoting the pen," "My sense is that the experimenter feels confident about the quality of the pen" (reverse scored), "The experimenter tried to convince me to decide in favor of a high-quality product" (reverse scored), and "My feeling is that the recommendation of the experimenter reflects her genuine concern that I should make the right decision" (reverse scored) ($\alpha = .86$). Higher scores on this measure indicate a stronger attribution of self-interest.

Control variables. We also measured participants' evaluation of the experimenter's trustworthiness and expertise via five items, each taken from Ohanian (1990; $\alpha = .87$ and $\alpha = .85$, respectively). A single item measured participants' perception of experimenter's likeability ("The experimenter is very likeable").

Two final items were used to infer whether participants misinterpreted the experimenter's behavior (i.e., the directly stated persuasive intent) as a request to do her a favor, and whether their choice actually reflected doing the experimenter a favor—i.e., "I believe the experimenter tried to ask a favor when she recommended the pen," and "By deciding in favor of one of the choice options I intended to do the experimenter a favor," ($r = .54$, $p < .001$).

RESULTS

Manipulations

Physical attractiveness. A 2 (persuasive intent) \times 2 (physical attractiveness) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of physical attractiveness, $F(1, 140) = 119.58$, $MSE = 0.66$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.83$. Attractive experimenters were perceived as more attractive than unattractive experimenters ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 0.71$ vs $M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.90$). No other effect was significant ($F < 1$).

Persuasive intent. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of persuasive intent, $F(1, 140) = 34.15$, $MSE = 2.78$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.98$. Participants felt themselves to be significantly more influenced in their behavior when the experimenter's persuasive intent was directly stated than when product's benefits were emphasized only ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.67$ vs $M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.66$) No other effect was significant ($ps > .12$).

Compliance behavior (choice of reward)

A logistic regression was conducted to test the hypothesis that the experimenter’s attractiveness linked with her persuasive intent would predict participants’ judgments of choice (two Euros vs pen). Both dummy-coded independent variables (unattractive=0 and attractive=1; directly stated intent=0 no intent stated=1) were entered simultaneously in a first analytical step (see model 1, Table 1). The analysis revealed that among the independent variables only the experimenter’s physical attractiveness was significantly related to participants’ choice of reward, $b(1, N=144)=1.88$, Wald $\chi^2=25.05$, $SE=0.38$, $p<.001$. Descriptively speaking, attractive experimenters were more likely than unattractive experimenters to get participants to choose the pen (66.5% compared to 23.5%). The persuasive intent manipulation was unrelated to the dependent variable, Wald $\chi^2(1, N=144)<1$. As can be seen in Table 1, this first model significantly predicted participants’ choice, $\chi^2(1, N=144)=28.77$, $p<.001$, accounting for approximately 24% (Nagelkerkes R^2) of the variance.

In a second analytical step, the interaction term of experimenter’s attractiveness \times persuasive intent was entered into the model (see model 2, Table 1). As hypothesized, the interaction term significantly predicted participants’ choice, $b(1, N=144)=2.71$, $SE=0.86$, Wald $\chi^2=9.87$, $p<.005$, increased the χ^2 value compared to model 1 by 11.34 ($p<.001$), and resulted in a significant overall fit, $\chi^2(3, N=144)=40.11$, $p<.001$, that

TABLE 1
Logistic regression analysis

	<i>Model 1^a</i>	<i>Model 2^b</i>
Model χ^2 (df)	28.77 (2)	40.11 (3)
Statistical significance	.001	.001
Nagelkerkes R^2	.24	.33
Change in χ^2		11.34
Statistical significance of $\Delta\chi^2$.001

<i>Parameter estimate results following stepwise modeling</i>							
<i>Model</i>	<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Parameter estimates</i>				<i>model</i>	
		<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Wald χ^2</i>	<i>p</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
(1)	Attractiveness (A)	1.88	0.38	25.05	<.001	28.77	<.001
	Persuasive Intent (PI)	-0.35	0.37	0.86	>.35		
(2)	A \times PI	2.71	0.86	9.87	<.005	11.34	<.001

Logistic regression results of participants’ choice behavior as a function of experimenter’s attractiveness, persuasive intent, and argument quality ($N=144$). ^a=model 1 consists of the two independent variables (step 1). ^b=model 2 consists of the two independent variables and the attractiveness \times persuasive intent interaction (step 2).

accounted for approximately 33% (Nagelkerkes R^2) of the variance. In descriptive terms (see also the first section of Table 2): attractive experimenters were more likely to get participants to decide in favor of the pen when they directly stated their intent compared to when they merely highlighted the product's benefits (75% vs 58%). In contrast, unattractive experimenters were less successful in the former than the latter condition (8% vs 39%).

Inferred motives

An ANOVA revealed that attractive experimenters' behavior was less likely to be attributed to self-interest than the behavior of unattractive experimenters ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.53$ vs $M=4.87$, $SD=1.35$); $F(1, 140)=11.75$, $MSE=1.71$ $p<.001$, $d=0.52$. Moreover, the predicted attractiveness \times persuasive intent interaction was significant, $F(1, 140)=31.99$, $p<.001$, indicating that while attractive experimenters' behavior was attributed less strongly to self-serving motives in case of direct persuasion as compared to the control condition ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.43$ vs $M=4.84$, $SD=1.29$; $d=1.06$), the reverse was true for unattractive experimenters ($M=5.38$, $SD=1.26$ vs $M=4.35$, $SD=1.25$; $d=0.79$). As illustrated in the second section of Table 2, this pattern mirrored that of participants' choice behavior.

Mediation analyses

We conducted regression analyses proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) to test whether the effects found on participants' choice behavior are mediated by the inferred motives that participants believed to be behind the experimenter's behavior. In step one, the attractiveness \times persuasive intent

TABLE 2
Physical attractiveness and persuasive intent

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Persuasive intent</i>		
	<i>Directly stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>M</i>
Choice of reward			
Unattractive	3 (8%)	14 (39%)	17 (23.5%)
Attractive	27 (75%)	21 (58%)	48 (66.5%)
Self-interested motives			
Unattractive	5.38 (1.26)	4.35 (1.25)	4.87 (1.35)
Attractive	3.40 (1.43)	4.84 (1.29)	4.12 (1.53)

Number of chosen pens (percentages in parentheses) and means for inferred motives as a function of experimenter's physical attractiveness and persuasive intent ($N=144$). The higher the scores, the stronger participants' preference to choose the pen option, and the more strongly the experimenter's recommendation is attributed to egoistic motives (percentages or standard deviations are presented in parentheses).

condition predicted participants' choice of reward, $b(1, N=144)=2.71$, $SE=0.86$, Wald $\chi^2=9.87$, $p<.001$. In step two, inferred motives also predicted the choice behavior, $b(1, N=144)=-0.57$, $SE=0.13$, Wald $\chi^2=18.43$, $p<.001$, and in step three, the effect of the two-way interaction on the choice behavior was reduced when inferred motives were entered into the analysis, $b(1, N=144)=1.81$, $SE=0.93$, Wald $\chi^2=3.81$, $p>.05$. Sobel tests (Sobel, 1982) showed that inferred motives carried the influence of the two-way interaction on choice behavior ($z=2.30$, $p<.05$). In addition, when inferred motives were entered into the model, the χ^2 value increased by 7.89 ($p<.005$) and improved the model's overall fit, $\chi^2(4, N=144)=48.00$, $p<.001$. This model accounted for approximately 38% (Nagelkerkes R^2) of the variance.

Control variables

When experimenters' perceived likeability, trustworthiness, and expertise were subjected as dependent variables to separate ANOVAs, main effects were found in all three analyses—likeability: $F(1, 140)=23.83$, $MSE=1.05$, $p<.001$, $d=0.81$; expertise: $F(1, 140)=8.47$, $MSE=0.88$, $p<.01$, $d=0.48$; and trustworthiness: $F(1, 140)=8.81$, $MSE=1.15$, $p<.01$, $d=0.49$. In line with research on the consequences of the “what-is-beautiful-is-good” stereotype, attractive experimenters were perceived as more likeable ($M=6.35$, $SD=0.89$), more trustworthy ($M=5.67$, $SD=0.90$), and more expert ($M=5.33$, $SD=0.83$) than unattractive experimenters (likeable: $M=5.51$, $SD=1.14$; trustworthy: $M=5.14$, $SD=1.22$, and expert: $M=4.87$, $SD=1.03$). All three analyses did not reveal any other significant effect ($ps >.25$).

The request misinterpretation hypothesis was analyzed by conducting an ANOVA on the favor index. This analysis did not reveal any significant effect ($Fs <1$). The favor index also did not predict choice behavior.

DISCUSSION

Effects of direct persuasion on compliance: The moderating role of physical attractiveness

This experiment sought to demonstrate that being forthright about one's intentions might have positive consequences under certain conditions in interpersonal persuasion. The reported findings confirmed this possibility and provided some insights into the processes involved. First of all, existing research on the consequences of the salience of persuasion motives on consumer responses has largely focused on the antecedents of choice behavior (e.g., product and marketer evaluations, purchase intentions) rather than choice behavior itself (e.g., Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Main et al., 2007; Reinhard et al., 2006). Given

this lack of direct evidence about the impact of directly stated persuasion motives on compliance behavior, we created an experimental procedure in an attempt to simulate choice behavior while simultaneously not losing control over experimentally relevant variables.

The results of this experiment show that communicators can increase their persuasiveness—leading to more behavioral compliance (i.e., choosing a recommended product) on the part of recipients—when they are forthright about their persuasion intentions. Irrespective of recipient's sex (see footnote 1), we found that this is true when the directly stated intent to influence recipient's choice comes from an attractive communicator, but the effect reverses when it comes from an unattractive communicator. Given that physical attractiveness is believed to be associated with an array of desirable personal attributes (e.g., likeability, expertise, and trustworthiness), a fact that is shown here and elsewhere (e.g., Eagly et al., 1991), we found that this positivity bias also permeates attributions of motives underlying a communicator's direct persuasion attempt. When recipients are faced with forthright persuasion intentions and do attempt to make sense of the reasons behind it, they come to an effortless conclusion based on stereotypic expectations associated with peripheral cues that are salient in the immediate situation (here physical attractiveness). The consequence is that while participants discount the role of self-interest as the reason behind direct persuasive appeals in the presence of an attractiveness cue, in its absence those attributions are intensified. These attributions have been shown to mediate recipients' choice behavior. However, because the quality of arguments delivered by the experimenters to recommend the product did not affect participants' choice behavior (see footnote 1), whereas the attributions did, one might conclude that these results argue for less deliberate and thus "maladaptive" choices made by recipients in response to attractive experimenters' appeals—especially in the direct persuasion condition. The latter argument is nicely illustrated by the fact that the pen-option was clearly the inferior choice (see footnote 2).

In sum, direct persuasive appeals seem to advance communicator's effectiveness in interpersonal encounters so long as positive communicator characteristics are salient in the persuasion setting, cues that alter recipient's perceptions of self-interest that are believed to lie behind a communicator's product recommendation. Clearly, direct persuasion seems to be an asset relative to the mere recommendation of the product for attractive persons, whereas for unattractive persons it is more of a handicap. These results go over and above existing findings showing that attractive persons are generally more effective than unattractive persons in shaping consumer behavior and attitudes (e.g., Caballero & Pride, 1984; Chaiken, 1979; Petrosius & Crocker, 1989), this being especially true if a contingency exists between endorser and product type (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Bower &

Landreth, 2001; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990). Overall, attractive experimenters were quite successful in getting recipients to comply, whereas unattractive experimenters were not, this being true across the persuasive intent conditions. Given that attractive people are assumed to be more persuasive than their unattractive counterparts in changing others' attitudes and getting what they request (e.g., Buck & Tiene, 1989; Chaiken, 1979), this finding gives reason to believe that participants did not correct for this bias when confronted with persuasive arguments in favor of the pen. If this is true, one would expect unattractive communicators to be—at least—equally effective as attractive communicators in getting recipients to comply when they provide convincing arguments (i.e., in the non-direct persuasion condition).

Rival explanations for the effects of direct persuasion

At first glance, the recent discussion obviously seems to favor an explanation based on the attribution of motives participants believed to lie behind a direct persuasive appeal. However, there is an alternative account for the observed findings that needs to be considered. One possibly more parsimonious explanation is a preference-for-complying-with-an-attractive-requester account (see Burger, Soroka, Gonzago, Murphy, & Somervell, 2001; Cialdini & Trost, 1998). The findings may simply reflect people's tendency to be more willing to comply with a request of an attractive than an unattractive person. This would imply that participants took the direct persuasive appeal as a request by the experimenter, being more likely to accept it mindlessly in the case of an attractive experimenter and more likely to deny it in the case of an unattractive experimenter. Our data, on the other side, indicate that participants did not feel that they were doing the experimenter a favor by taking the pen. There were essentially no differences across conditions in this regard, a fact that might seem to rule out this alternative explanation. However, this alternative account may be based not only on the notion of doing a favor; any request may qualify in this regard, so that the measure used here was perhaps not sensitive enough to fully eliminate this possibility. This interpretation would also prefer to treat the attribution of self-serving motives as a consequence of choice behavior rather than as an antecedent. This would suggest that participants automatically complied with a request from an attractive experimenter, and afterwards, when asked to evaluate the experimenter's self-interest, they rationalized her behavior as less self-serving. Because the current data restrict us from elaborating more on this alternative without becoming overly speculative, future research is needed to clarify this issue.

However, the presented findings may more readily correspond to the notion that people want to affiliate with others they perceive as attractive and/or likeable (e.g., Miyake & Zuckerman, 1993). Much research has been devoted to the phenomenon that attractive people are held in high regard by others both with respect to desirable personal attributes (e.g., Eagly et al., 1991) and desirable social outcomes, such as number of friends and success at finding ideal romantic partners especially in short-term relationships (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). As a consequence, both men and women are motivated to make a good impression on attractive people, keeping track of the opportunity to become friends/allies or romantic partners, thereby accepting high social costs such as telling lies to feign similarity (e.g., Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1999). Transferring this reasoning to the findings of the current experiment, one might argue that the direct persuasive appeal stated by an attractive woman might allow participants to believe that she was showing interest in them (or even flirting with them). Going along with her recommendation thus would imply reciprocation of this interest. On the other side, people may not have wanted to go along with an unattractive communicator's direct recommendation in order to avoid being perceived as reciprocating interest and liking. Although one would perhaps expect differences in attributed liking across conditions, an assumption that is not supported by our data, this reasoning would also fit with the finding that self-interest mediated compliance. Specifically, a person who is perceived as signaling interest in us is—perhaps—less likely to be blamed for having ulterior motives for that behavior (i.e., this would be flattering for the self). If an unattractive person is engaged in signaling interest, we might perceive this behavior as less trustworthy and exploitative. However, since we cannot conclusively disentangle the reported rival explanations for the current findings, we must call for future research to shed further light on the processes involved in human compliance following direct persuasion.

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