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Effects of a Guilt Induction and Guilt Reduction on Door in the Face

The present study explored the role of guilt in the door-in-the-face procedure. Drawing on the guilt-based explanation of door-in-the-face effect, it was hypothesized that the greatest amount of compliance would occur when the rejection of the initial request produced high levels of guilt and the acceptance of the small request allowed participants to anticipate a large reduction in guilt. This hypothesis was tested by presenting participants with an initial large request. Statements accompanying the request were designed to produce either high levels of guilt or low levels of guilt when the request was rejected. After the initial request, participants were presented with a second smaller request that was accompanied by statements that would make compliance with the request either more effective or less effective at guilt reduction. Compliance with the second request was recorded, and the results supported the hypothesis.

Strategies to increase compliance with requests have been extensively investigated in the social-psychological and communication literatures. In these literatures, the multiple-request strategy of door in the face has received considerable attention (Dillard, 1991). The door-in-the-face strategy involves presenting two requests. The first request is a large request, which most persons will reject. After the first request is rejected, a second smaller request is made. The refusal of the initial large request increases compliance with the secondary smaller request (Cialdini et al., 1975). Numerous studies have indicated that when properly performed, the door-in-the-face procedure produces reliable increases in compliance (for meta-analytic reviews of the door-in-the-face studies, see Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984; Fern, Monroe, & Avila, 1986; O'Keefe & Hale, 2001).

A number of explanations for door-in-the-face effects have been offered, including reciprocal concessions, perceptual contrast, and self-presentation.

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The reciprocal concessions explanation proposed that the door-in-the-face procedure causes the requests to appear to be a bargaining or negotiating situation, namely, the small request seems to be a concession when it was preceded by a large request that was rejected and obligates the target persons to reciprocate by agreeing to the second smaller request (Cialdini & Ascani, 1976). The perceptual contrast explanation suggested that the relative size of the two requests causes a contrast effect, namely, the second request in comparison with the large request seems much less costly and the target persons are more likely to comply with a less costly request (Cialdini et al., 1975). Finally, the self-presentation explanation proposed that door-in-the-face effects are caused because of concern about self-presentation when the initial request is rejected, namely, the target becomes motivated to comply with the second request to demonstrate his or her positive qualities (Pendleton & Batson, 1979).

Research examining the validity of these explanations has produced mixed results. The reciprocal concessions explanation has received the most support. For example, a number of studies have found that if there is a delay between the first and second requests, the door-in-the-face effect does not work (e.g., Schwarzwald, Raz, & Zvibel, 1979; Shanab & Isonio, 1980). Presumably, if there is a time delay between the requests, the second request will not appear as a concession. However, more recent work has raised questions about the reciprocal concessions explanation. For example, Bell, Abrahams, Clark, and Schlatter (1996) found in the door-in-the-face procedure that feeling obligated to reciprocate the concession was not a good predictor of compliance.

Also, Tusing and Dillard (2000) found that targets of the door-in-the-face procedure view compliance with the second request as an attempt to help the requestor and not as a response to a concession. This suggested that door-in-the-face effects may be produced by a sense of social responsibility instead of an attempt to reciprocate a concession.

Both the self-presentation and perceptual contrasts explanations have received less support. The self-presentation explanation beyond the initial work done by Pendleton and Batson (1979) has not been supported. For example, Abrahams and Bell (1994) found that in the door-in-the-face procedure, increasing the target person's concern about his or her image was not related to increases in compliance (for another example, see Patch, Hoang, & Stahelski, 1997). In addition, Reeves, Baker, Boyd, and Cialdini (1991) in a comparison of the reciprocal concessions explanation with the self-presentation explanation failed to replicate Pendleton and Batson's original findings on self-presentation. A relatively small amount of research has examined the perceptual contrast explanation. In one of the few direct

examinations of this explanation, Cantrill and Seibold (1986) found that the large request failed to produce a contrast effect. Furthermore, there are a number of other findings in the literature that can be interpreted as inconsistent with this explanation (e.g., Abrahams & Bell, 1994; Cialdini et al., 1975; Goldman, McVeigh, & Richterkessing, 1984).

More recently, O'Keefe and Figge (1997) proposed that the emotion of guilt is responsible for door-in-the-face effects. They suggested that the rejection of the initial request creates guilt in the target person (i.e., refusing to help the requester makes the person feel guilty) that he or she is motivated to reduce. Complying with the second small request gives the target person a means of reducing his or her feelings of guilt. Boster et al. (1999) also suggested that compliance can be a way to gain relief from guilt. They found evidence that positive self-feeling messages (e.g., you will feel good about yourself if you help) produce more compliance than direct requests when participants were experiencing guilt.

In an initial examination of the guilt explanation, O'Keefe and Figge (1999) measured the amount of guilt produced by rejecting the initial request and the amount of guilt reduced by complying with the second request. As expected, rejecting the initial request produced guilt. However, the acceptance of the second request was not associated with a detectable reduction in feelings of guilt. In a second experiment, O'Keefe and Figge found that participants believed that the acceptance of the second request would reduce guilt. Based on this finding, they suggested that it is the participant's expectation of guilt relief that motivates door-in-the-face compliance; specifically, persons comply with the second request because they anticipate it will reduce their feelings of guilt even though compliance may not actually reduce guilt. Consequently, O'Keefe and Figge hypothesized that door-in-the-face effects would only be obtained when rejection of the initial large request produced sufficient feelings of guilt and when the participants anticipated that acceptance of the second smaller request would lead to a significant reduction in feelings of guilt.

The present research has attempted a more direct test of the guilt explanation by actually manipulating the amount of guilt produced by the rejection of the initial request and manipulating the amount of guilt reduction participants anticipate from accepting the second request. In addition, the present research has attempted to establish a relationship between the amount of guilt produced by the rejection of the initial request and the amount of compliance with the second request. It was expected that the greatest amount of compliance with the second request would occur when the rejection of the initial request produced high levels of guilt and participants

anticipated that the acceptance of the small request would allow for a large reduction in guilt.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 73 women and 52 men recruited both from a large urban community and from undergraduates at a large Southwestern university. Participants were recruited using signup sheets that were placed on a bulletin board used by the psychology department's subject pool. Participants from the community were recruited on a voluntary basis with no monetary compensation offered, and student participants were offered class credit in exchange for participation. The average age of the participants was 24, and the range of ages was 18 years to 63 years of age. Of the participants, 77% were of European descent, 8% were of Hispanic descent, 6% were of Asian descent, 5% were of African descent, and 4% were from other groups. Participants were randomly assigned to each of the four door-in-the-face conditions (high guilt/high guilt reduction, high guilt/low guilt reduction, low guilt/high guilt reduction, and low guilt/low guilt reduction) and the single-request control condition.

Procedure

When the participants arrived at the experimental room they were informed that the purpose of the study was to investigate their specific reactions to some current health issues, and they were reassured that their responses would be completely confidential. The participant was then seated at a micro-computer that presented the experimental materials to the participant. First, participants were asked to indicate their sex, age, and racial background as well as their general state of health on a 9-point scale with endpoints of 9 (*good*) and 1 (*bad*). Then participants were required to complete a 30-item questionnaire about their eating habits and other health behaviors. This questionnaire was included to add credibility to the cover story that the experiment was examining reactions to health behaviors.

Door-in-the-face procedure. In all of the conditions when the participant had completed the questionnaire, the experimenter indicated to the participant that he or she had finished the experiment. Then the experimenter signed the participant's experiment receipt form and gave it to the

participant. This form is used by the participant to receive class credit for the experiment. After signing the form, the experimenter reassured the participant that he or she would receive class credit. However, before the participant could leave the room the experimenter indicated to the participant that there was something he or she wanted to talk to him or her about. The experimenter stated that the department of psychology is involved in an important project that is trying to help people by developing ways to promote healthy eating habits. As part of this project, the department is looking for volunteers to keep track of their food that they consume. At this point, the experimenter started the door-in-the-face procedure with the large request. The experimenter said:

We need you to keep a detailed record of your meals for the next 3 months and then mail the record back to the department. This will involve writing down the type and amount of food you consume at each meal. Will you be willing to volunteer to keep this log?

When the large request was rejected, the experimenter made a second smaller request.¹ The experimenter asked the participant, "Will you keep a detailed record of your meals for only 4 days and then mail the record back to the department?" Participants in the control condition were presented with only the single small request to keep a meal record for 4 days and mail it back to the department.

Guilt induction manipulation. To manipulate the amount of guilt produced by refusing the initial large request, an additional statement was made by the experimenter after the initial large request. In the high guilt conditions, the participant was told that "your refusal to record your meals for 3 months will cause considerable damage to the department's efforts to help others eat healthy diets." In the low guilt conditions, the participant was told that "your refusal to record your meals for 3 months will not really damage the department's efforts to help others eat healthy diets."

Guilt reduction manipulation. To manipulate the amount of guilt reduction that participants would associate with compliance with the second request, another statement was made after the guilt induction statement. In the high guilt reduction conditions, the participant was told, "However you can do something that was equally helpful by keeping a record for just the next 4 days." In the low guilt reduction conditions, the participant was told, "However you can do something, although it is not nearly as helpful, by keeping a record for just the next 4 days." Participants in the control condition,

which did not receive the large request, were not presented with either the guilt induction or guilt reduction statements.

Measures. The experimenter, after making the small request, recorded the participant's response. If the participant agreed to keep a meal record for 4 days, the experimenter gave the participant the meal record materials and explained how to keep the record and mail it back to the department. After this, the participants were informed that before they could leave they would need to complete a questionnaire (presented by the microcomputer) designed to evaluate the experimental situation. Included in the general questions about the experiment were three items designed to measure the amount of guilt the participants experienced when they turned down the first large request. The participants were asked to indicate (a) how guilty they felt when they turned down the request to record their meals for 3 months on a 9-point scale with endpoints of 7 (*guilty*) and 1 (*guiltless*), (b) whether they thought it was wrong to not record their meals for 3 months on a 9-point scale with endpoints of 7 (*wrong*) and 1 (*right*), and (c) whether they should not have turned down the request to record their meals for 3 months on a 9-point scale with endpoints of 7 (*should not have turned down the request*) and 1 (*should have turned down the request*).

In addition to the items on guilt, there were three items used to assess the participants' affective responses to the experimental manipulations. Participants were asked to indicate how they felt when the experimenter made the large request on three 9-point scales with endpoints of: 9 (*angry*) and 1 (*calm*), 9 (*annoyed*) and 1 (*pleased*), and 9 (*very resentful*) and 1 (*not resentful*). Also, there were items used to assess the participants' perceptions about the size of the large and small requests. Participants were asked to indicate for both the large and small requests (a) the amount of time the task would require on a scale with endpoints of 1 (*short period of time*) and 9 (*long period of time*), (b) how much effort the task would require on a scale with endpoints of 1 (*little effort*) and 9 (*large effort*), and (c) the size of the request on a scale with endpoints of 1 (*small request*) and 9 (*large request*). Participants in the control condition, who did not receive the large request, were not asked questions about guilt, anger, or the size of the large request. When the participants had completed the final questionnaire they were thanked for their efforts and released.

Results

Manipulation check. To examine whether participants viewed the large request as bigger than the small request, the responses to the three questions

about the size of the small request were averaged for each participant (Cronbach's alpha = .89). Also, the responses to the three items asking about the size of the large request were averaged (Cronbach's alpha = .82) for each participant.² Both of these average scores were analyzed in a 2 (high guilt induction vs. low guilt induction) \times 2 (large guilt reduction vs. small guilt reduction) \times 2 (large request vs. small request) analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures assumed on the last factor. A significant main effect was obtained for Request Size, $F(1, 93) = 238.52, p < .001, \omega^2 = .52$. As expected, participants indicated that the large request was larger ($M = 4.65, SD = .94$) than the small request ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.05$).

To examine whether the high guilt induction produced more feelings of guilt than the low guilt induction, the participants' responses to the three items about guilt were averaged (Cronbach's alpha = .94). These average scores were analyzed in a 2 (high guilt induction vs. low guilt induction) \times 2 (high guilt reduction vs. low guilt reduction) ANOVA. As expected, the only significant effect was for Guilt Induction, $F(1, 93) = 21.75, p < .001, \omega^2 = .17$. Participants in the high guilt induction conditions reported more guilt ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.82$) than participants in the low guilt induction conditions ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.26$).

Compliance. The participants' verbal agreement or nonagreement to perform the behavior was examined in a logistic regression. In this analysis, the dependent variable (verbal agreement) was regressed on guilt induction (high vs. low), guilt reduction (high vs. low), and the interaction of guilt induction and guilt reduction. A significant interaction of guilt induction and guilt reduction was the only significant predictor of verbal agreement, $b = 1.96, t = 2.01, p = .04$ (see Table 1). Contrasts examining the interaction revealed that when there was high guilt reduction, the high guilt induction manipulation led to more verbal compliance than the low guilt induction manipulation, $b = 2.19, t = 3.19, p = .001$. When there was low guilt reduction, there were no significant differences in verbal compliance between the high and low guilt induction conditions, $b = .24, t = .34, p > .05$. In addition to the main analyses, individual comparisons were made between each of the experimental conditions and the control condition that did not receive the door-in-the-face request (20% of the participants in the control condition complied). In these comparisons, only the high guilt induction/high guilt reduction condition produced more verbal compliance than the control condition, $b = -2.01, t = -3.12, p = .002$.

The participants' behavioral compliance with the request (completing the meal record and returning to the department) was examined in the same logistic regression. A significant interaction of Guilt Induction \times Guilt

Table 1
Percentage Verbal Compliance as a Function of the Level of Guilt Induction and Guilt Reduction

Guilt Reduction	Guilt Induction	
	Low	High
Low	20.8	25.0
High	17.4	65.4

Reduction was the only significant predictor of behavioral compliance, $b = 2.37, t = 2.02, p = .04$ (see Table 2). Comparisons revealed that with high guilt reduction, the high guilt induction manipulation led to more behavioral compliance than the low guilt induction manipulation, $b = 1.59, t = 2.16, p = .03$. With low guilt reduction, the difference between the low and high guilt reduction conditions disappeared, $p > .05$. In addition, individual comparisons were made between each of the experimental conditions and the control condition (12% of the participants in the control condition complied). Only the high guilt induction/high guilt reduction condition produced more verbal compliance than the control condition, $b = -2.02, t = -3.12, p = .002$.

Mediating role of guilt. The aforementioned analyses produced results that are consistent with the hypothesis. That is, in the high guilt induction condition, participants reported more guilt than in the low guilt induction condition, and the highest levels of compliance occurred in the high guilt induction condition when the acceptance of the second request is associated with more guilt reduction. However, by themselves these analyses do not demonstrate the mediating role of guilt. To demonstrate mediation, it must also be shown that the mediator (reports of guilt) is related to compliance and that when the effects of the mediator (reports of guilt) are controlled for, the relationship between the independent variable (guilt induction) and compliance is reduced (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

To demonstrate these two relationships with verbal compliance, separate models were constructed for the high guilt reduction and low guilt reduction conditions and analyzed using EQS (Bentler, 1995) (see Figure 1). When the high guilt reduction conditions were examined, as expected, the guilt induction was significantly related to self-reports of guilt (standardized coefficient = .53, $p < .05$), and there was a significant relationship between the mediator (guilt) and verbal compliance (standardized coefficient = .75, $p < .05$). In the model, when the effects of the mediator (guilt) were controlled, the relationship between the independent variable (guilt induction) and verbal

Table 2
Percentage Behavioral Compliance as a Function of the Level of Guilt Induction and Guilt Reduction

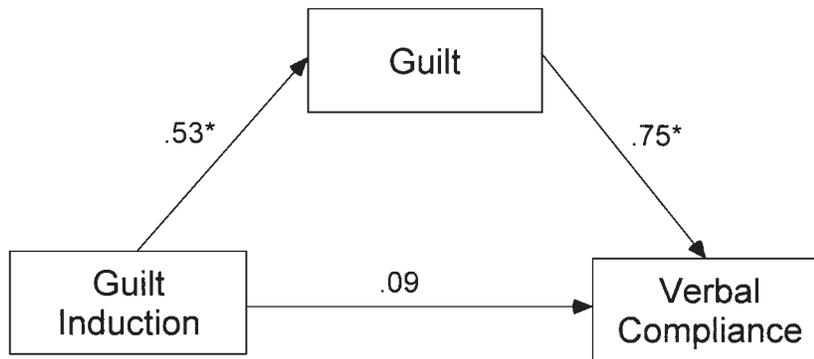
Guilt Reduction	Guilt Induction	
	Low	High
Low	16.7	8.3
High	13.0	42.3

compliance disappeared (standardized coefficient = .09, $p > .05$). When the low guilt reduction conditions were examined, guilt induction was significantly related to self-reports of guilt (standardized coefficient = .33, $p < .05$). Also, we expected that guilt would be related to verbal compliance only when the second request allowed for guilt reduction, and consistent with our view, guilt was not significantly related to verbal compliance (standardized coefficient = .14, $p > .05$); specifically, guilt should only relate to verbal compliance when the second request allows for guilt reduction.

A similar pattern of results was obtained when behavioral compliance was analyzed in the same models (see Figure 2). With high guilt reduction, the guilt induction was significantly related to self-reports of guilt (standardized coefficient = .53, $p < .05$), and the self-reports of guilt were significantly related to behavioral compliance (standardized coefficient = .79, $p < .05$). Also, the relationship between the guilt induction and behavioral compliance disappeared when guilt was controlled for (standardized coefficient = $-.01$, $p > .05$). With low guilt reduction, only the guilt induction was related to self-reports of guilt (standardized coefficient = .33, $p < .05$), and guilt was not related to behavioral compliance (standardized coefficient = .25, $p > .05$).

Other analyses. To examine whether the experimental manipulations created anger, the participants' responses to the three items about anger were averaged (Cronbach's alpha = .85) for each participant. When these averages were analyzed in the standard two-factor ANOVA, no significant effects emerged. Overall, the participants reported low levels of anger ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .95$). Another analysis was conducted to explore whether the door-in-the-face procedure produced a contrast effect. That is, did the initial large request cause the second request to seem very small by comparison? To examine this possibility, the participants' average ratings of the size of the second request were analyzed in a single factor (door in the face vs. control) ANOVA. Consistent with the perceptual contrast explanation, participants in the door-in-the-face conditions perceived the second request as smaller ($M = 2.63$, $SD =$

High Guilt Reduction



Low Guilt Reduction

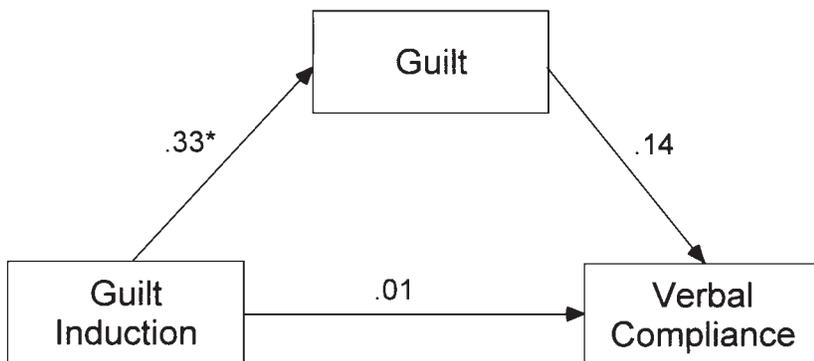
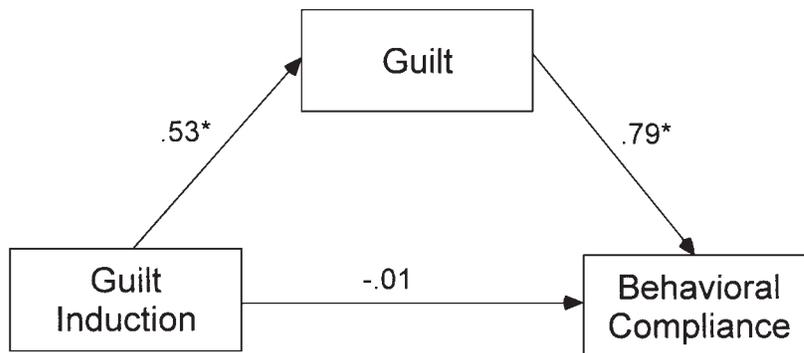


Figure 1. Standardized coefficients for the model examining the mediating role of guilt in the relationship between the guilt induction and verbal compliance
 * $p < .05$.

.99) than participants in the control condition ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.13$), $F(1, 120) = 7.39, p = .008, \omega^2 = .52$. However, the participants perceptions of the size of the

High Guilt Reduction



Low Guilt Reduction

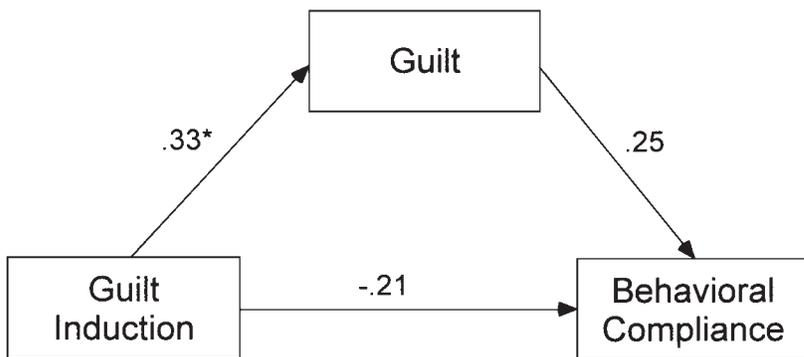


Figure 2. Standardized coefficients for the model examining the mediating role of guilt in the relationship between the guilt induction and behavioral compliance

* $p < .05$.

second request did not predict verbal ($r = -.11, p > .05$) or behavioral compliance ($r = .10, p > .05$).

Discussion

The guilt-based explanation of door-in-the-face effects received strong support. The highest levels of both verbal and behavioral compliance occurred when the rejection of the initial request was associated with high levels of guilt and the acceptance of the second request was associated with high levels of anticipated guilt reduction. These findings are consistent with past research that has demonstrated that more compliance occurs when the second request is presented as being as helpful as the first request (Dillard et al., 1984; Miller, Seligman, Clark, & Bush, 1976). Furthermore, the relationship between the manipulations and both verbal and behavioral compliance appears to be mediated by feelings of guilt produced by refusing the initial request.

Although the present findings are consistent with the guilt-based explanation, a considerable body of research suggests that other mechanisms (e.g., reciprocal concessions and self-presentation concerns) may also produce door-in-the-face effects (e.g., Reeves et al., 1991). However, in the present study, door-in-the-face effects occurred only in the high guilt induction/high guilt reduction condition, and these effects were not found in the other multiple request conditions, namely, compliance in these conditions was not greater than in the single-request control condition. If other mechanisms beyond guilt produce door-in-the-face effects, then it might be expected that door-in-the-face effects would occur in these conditions. For example, a perceptual contrast between the small and large request should still occur even when guilt was low. It seems possible that the manipulations used in the present study to induce and reduce guilt diminished the influence of these other mechanisms. That is, the manipulations focused participants on how their actions would influence the requestor and may have made other elements of the situation (i.e., the relative sizes of the requests) less salient.

Also, in the present study the prosocial nature of the requests may have emphasized the role of guilt. That is, it seems likely that rejecting a behavior that has social benefits would produce more guilt and complying with a prosocial request would reduce guilt more than rejecting or accepting other types of request (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Cermak, & Rosza, 2001; O'Keefe & Figge, 1999; Regan, Williams, & Sparling, 1972). Consequently, in the present study, guilt may have played a larger role than the other mechanisms hypothesized to produce door-in-the-face effects. However, there is

evidence that suggests that when door-in-the-face requests are not prosocial, the door-in-the-face effect disappears (for a meta-analytic review, see O'Keefe & Hale, 2001). Furthermore, several studies examining the door in the face have found denying requests that are only for the benefit of the requestor produce low levels of compliance or may actually produce less compliance than a single request (e.g., Martens, Kelly, & Diskin, 1996; Millar, 2001).

A concern with the use of a guilt induction procedure such as the one used in the present study is the possibility that the procedure could also cause the target of the request to feel angry. There is evidence from other areas of research that guilt induction can increase feelings of resentment and anger (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995) and that anger can reduce compliance and attitude change (Coulter & Pinto, 1995). Fortunately, in the present study, the guilt induction procedure did not produce anger. Participants in the high guilt conditions did not report feeling more angry than participants in the low guilt conditions. However, it is possible that many elements in compliance situations will interact with the guilt induction procedure to produce anger. For example, it is possible that the beneficiary of the request will influence whether a guilt induction produces anger. A guilt induction may lead to more anger when the request is designed to help the requestor than when the request is for a prosocial behavior. That is, persons may view guilt induction as less appropriate when the request is for the selfish gain of the person attempting to induce the guilt. These and other interactions need to be explored in future research.

Future research may also provide evidence for the guilt-based explanation by examining individual differences in guilt proneness. That is, if guilt plays a central role in producing door-in-the-face effects, then individual differences in proneness to guilt should impact compliance. With persons who are more prone to feelings of guilt, the rejection of the initial request should produce higher levels of guilt than with persons less prone to guilt. Consequently, persons more prone to guilt may be more likely to comply with the second request in an effort to reduce their high levels of guilt.

Notes

1. One participant from the high induction/high reduction, one participant from the low induction/high reduction, and one participant from the high induction/low reduction condition agreed to comply with the large request. These participants were dropped from the study.

2. The participants in the control condition were not included in this analysis because they did not receive a large request and did not answer questions about the size of the large request.

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