

EFFECTS OF DRESS ON COMPLIANCE TO REQUESTS
IN A FIELD SETTING*

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SUMMARY

Neatly and sloppily dressed female confederates (Cs) approached 62 male and 62 female Ss at Boston's Logan Airport and made the following request: "Excuse me. Could you lend me a dime?" Significantly more Ss gave dimes to neatly rather than sloppily dressed Cs (81% vs. 32%) and significantly more males gave dimes than females (64% vs. 50%).

An experiment was conducted to test the hypothesis that Ss would give more compliance to a request from someone who was dressed neatly rather than from someone dressed sloppily. Female confederates (Cs) approached 62 male and 62 female Ss at Boston's Logan Airport and made the following request: "Excuse me. Could you lend me a dime?"¹ If Ss attempted to engage the C in conversation, the request was repeated for a second time. Ss who gave a dime (or any amount of change) were scored as compliers. Ss who did not produce a dime after the first or second request or replied that they had no change were scored as noncompliers. Cs attempted to avoid bias in choosing Ss by administering the treatments randomly to the first adult they saw either sitting or standing alone.

Cs were four female college students who had trained themselves with feedback from observers to behave consistently in terms of gaze, distance, posture, facial expression, and tone of voice. For half of the Ss, Cs were dressed neatly in skirts and nylons. For the remaining Ss, Cs were dressed sloppily in jeans. Each C approached an approximately equal number of Ss in both conditions. Dimes were returned to Ss with a brief explanation of the experiment.

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¹ This request was previously used by Latané and Darley (3, p. 10).

Results from the four individual Cs were not significantly different, and their data were combined. Significantly more Ss gave dimes to neatly rather than sloppily dressed Cs (81% vs. 32%; $\chi^2(1) = 29.4, p < .001$). Significantly more males gave dimes than females (64% vs. 50%; $\chi^2(1) = 6.94, p < .01$).

Results of previous research showing greater influence of well dressed rather than poorly dressed Cs have been attributed to differences in status (1, 4). It seems most meaningful to interpret the present findings in terms of legitimacy. Neatly dressed Cs in an airport would presumably be perceived as having a legitimate need for a dime. Sloppily dressed Cs would more likely be perceived as panhandlers.

The present experiment suggests an extension of the foot-in-the-door technique. Ss who have given money to a sloppily dressed C would be expected to give significantly more compliance to a later request than control Ss or Ss who previously gave money to a neatly dressed C (2).

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