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Favors and Compliance: Partitioning the effect of liking and obligation on compliance.

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Keywords: Compliance-gaining, Pre-giving, Norm of Reciprocity, Obligation, Liking

Favors and Compliance: Partitioning the effect of liking and obligation on compliance.

The extant literature demonstrates consistently that providing a favor to an influence target before soliciting their compliance increases the likelihood of the target's compliance with the influence agent's request. (Marwell & Schmidt, 1967; Regan, 1971; Greenberg & Frisch, 1972; Whatley, Webster, Smith, & Rhodes, 1999). Although the relationship is fairly robust, to date, it remains unclear why the relationship between pre-giving favors and compliance exists. One plausible mediator of the relationship is the target's development of feelings of liking for the agent. A second, equally plausible mediator of the relationship is the target's development of feelings of obligation towards the agent. Causing some of the uncertainty is the existence of conflicting evidence regarding which, if either, mediator embodies the stronger causal force. For example, Regan (1971) attempted a test of the two mediators in question and concluded the stronger of the two to be obligation. Goei, Lindsey, Boster, Skalski, and Bowman (2003) on the other hand performed a similar test and found liking to be the stronger force.

Neither of these two studies however, attempted to control obligation and liking independently within a pre-giving compliance-gaining scenario. As a result, little is known of the necessity of either obligation or liking in the successful employment of pre-giving as a compliance-gaining technique. A firmer understanding of the factors mediating the relationship between favors and compliance allows for the design of compliance-gaining requests that are tailored to specific compliance-gaining situations. Tailoring in turn increases the likelihood of obtaining compliance for that situation. To that end, this study controls obligation and liking independently across three experiments so that the intermediary relationship between the provision of a favor and subsequent compliance with a request can be observed clearly.

Obligation can be characterized as the motivation to perform a task, arising from a feeling of indebtedness towards another that has resulted from the other's provision of a favor. The provision of a favor creates a sense of imbalance, or inequity, in the relationship between the target and agent. Because of this imbalance, the target is motivated to restore equity in the relationship at a subsequent opportunity. The subsequent action in typical compliance-gaining scenarios is compliance with an agent's later request. Gouldner (1960) explicated fully this rationale as the norm of reciprocity which posits specifically that people should, and do, help those who helped them. Therefore, compliance with an agent's request following the presentation of a favor may result at least in part from feelings of obligation engendered in the target arising from the receipt of the favor.

Liking on the other hand is characterized as a sense of affinity for or interpersonal attraction towards another. By providing a favor, the agent portrays that they are generous and kind which in turn stimulates in the target a sense of liking for the agent (Regan, 1971; Whatley et al., 1999). Goei et al. (2003) proposed that increasing liking increases the likelihood of gaining compliance because people are motivated to maintain positive relationships with those who they like. Furthermore, other research demonstrates that people tend to comply more with someone who they have positive relationships with (Baron, 1971; Burger, Soroka, Gonzago, Murphy, & Somervell, 2001). Thus, compliance with an agent's request may in part be due to the target's perception of a positive relationship with the agent who they perceive as generous and kind because of the receipt of the favor.

As aforementioned, a limitation of research in the area of pre-giving and compliance-gaining is an accurate understanding of the strength of obligation and liking in the causal chain between the presentation of a pre-giving favor and compliance with a subsequent request. If the

presentation of a favor produces both obligation and liking in the target, it is important to measure the impact of each on compliance. The ability to parse out obligation and liking from one another and then examine compliance rates makes it possible to determine if both obligation and liking are necessary to impact compliance with the agent's request, or if only one of the two is necessary.

For instance, if an agent performs a favor for a target, the target will likely experience both liking and obligation towards the influencing agent. If however, the agent performs a favor for the target but feelings of obligation are inhibited from developing, the compliant response will arise from the target's liking for the agent. One could imagine this happening where the agent performs a favor for the target but it is a favor that the agent would have done for anybody or on accident (Greenberg et al., 1972). Alternatively, if the agent performs a favor for the target and feelings of liking are inhibited, compliance will arise from the target's feelings of obligation toward the agent. For example, this situation could arise if the agent portrays undesirable personality characteristics. Therefore, the independent impact of liking and obligation on compliance can be observed by comparing compliance rates arising in situations where obligation and liking are controlled systematically against compliance rates observed arising from the same situation where obligation and liking are left to vary naturally as a result of the pre-giving favor.

This study controls obligation by varying whether the target perceives that the agent would have provided the favor for anybody or reminding the target that a favor had been performed for them. Obligation varies, because in one instance the favor is done specifically for the target, while in the other, the favor would have been performed for anybody. In both

instances the agent acts neutrally, taking care not to induce any liking above, or below, that which may have been induced by the presentation of the favor.

Liking is controlled by varying the agent's behavior towards a third party after the presentation of the favor. Specifically, the agent acts rudely or in a likeable fashion towards the third party. The rude behavior is designed to create the impression that the agent is a foul and insensitive person, hence, not likeable. On the other hand the likeable behavior presents the impression of a caring and considerate person. Obligation in this instance does not vary apart from the change induced by the pre-giving favor.

### Experiment 1

#### Method

*Participants.* The sample consisted of 45 randomly selected people entering one of three predetermined elevators on the fifth floor in a building on a large Midwestern university campus. A random integer ( $i$ ), one to three, was selected and individuals entering the elevator were counted until the  $i^{\text{th}}$  individual entered the elevator, this individual became the subject ( $S$ ). Each  $S$  was subsequently randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions. This was done until there were equal numbers of  $S$ s within each condition. Selection of  $S$ s was restricted to those entering the elevator by themselves and those not carrying large parcels.

*Design.* This experiment was a single factor independent group design that examined compliance rates across pre-giving, pre-giving parsing liking, and pre-giving including liking conditions. The pre-giving condition serves as a control. In this condition a research confederate ( $C1$ ) waited for the  $S$  and held the elevator door open for them. On the second floor another research confederate ( $C2$ ) entered the elevator on crutches. No interaction took place between  $C1$ ,  $C2$ , or  $S$  during the entire elevator ride, until the first floor when the  $C1$  made a request of

the *S* for compliance. In all three conditions, when the *P* enters the elevator the *C1* greets them by saying, “I heard you coming. What floor do you need?” In the parsing liking condition, when the *C2* entered the elevator on the second floor the *C1* stated “*Couldn’t you have taken the stairs? I mean, are they broke or something?*” In the induced liking condition the *C2* on crutches entered the elevator on the second floor. This time, however, the *C1* said to the *C2*, “*I hope you heal up quickly.*”

*Procedures.* Once the *C1* randomly selected a *S* and they were randomly assigned to a condition the *C1* pressed the open door button on the elevator until the *P* entered. To emphasize that holding the elevator was a costly action, the *C1* appeared waiting in the elevator carrying a large stack of textbooks in their arms while a library cart precariously full of more books was parked by their side while holding the elevator door open with a barely free hand. As the *S* entered the elevator, the *C1* delivered the pre-giving, parsing liking, or induced liking message depending on the experimental condition. Interaction between the *S* and *C1* then ceased until the doors closed and the elevator began its trip to the first floor.

The *C1* then discretely paged the *C2* via cell phone who was stationed on the second floor to notify the *C2* to press the down elevator button on their floor so as to make the elevator car stop at the second floor so they could enter the same car as the *S* and *C1*. Once the *C2* entered the elevator; the *C1* initiated an interaction with the *C2* and delivered either the parsing liking message or induced liking message depending on the experimental condition. In all conditions, once the elevator reached the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, *C1* asked the *S*, “*Do you think you could help me carry some of this stuff to my car? I am afraid the ones on the top are going to fall off.*” If the *S* complied with the request the *C1* then asks, “*How much do you think you can carry?*”

*Instrumentation.* The *CI* measured compliance by observing whether or not the *S* helped carry books to the *CI*'s car parked just outside of the building approximately 30 yards from the elevator. The number of items that the *S* assists in carrying is also measured.

## Experiment 2

### Method

*Participants.* The sample consisted of 45 randomly selected people entering one of three predetermined elevators in a building on a large Midwestern university campus. The selection of *Ss* was conducted in a manner identical to that in Experiment 1.

*Design.* Experiment 2 was a single factor independent group design that compared compliance rates observed in response to a pre-giving condition, a pre-giving parsing obligation condition, and a pre-giving including obligation condition. The pre-giving request served as a control, in this experiment. The *CI* waited for the *S* and held the elevator door open for them. On the second floor *C2* entered the elevator on crutches. No interaction took place between *CI*, *C2*, or *S* during the elevator ride, until the first floor when the request is made. In both the inducing obligation and parsing obligation condition the *CI* held the elevator door open for the *S* and waited for the *S* to thank them. After the *S* thanked the *CI*, the *CI* followed with, "*I heard you coming and held the door because this elevator takes such a long time, but don't worry about it. It's what anybody would have done. What floor do you need?*" Once the elevator door opens on the second floor for the *C2*, the *C2* delays at the door implying that he may need help to get on the elevator. In the parsing obligation condition, the *CI* helps the *C2* get on the elevator by holding the door open for him. Conversely, in the inducing obligation condition the *CI* acknowledges by looking at the *CI* but does not hold the door open for him. In order to keep the

*S* from disliking the *CI* for not holding the door open for the *C2*, the *C2* smiles at the *CI* to show that he is not offended by the lack of help.

*Procedures.* Procedures followed along the lines set in Experiment 1. The *CI* held a large number of books while holding the door open for the *S*. Once the *S* entered the elevator the *CI* delivered one of the three experimental inductions. Again, the *C2* entered the elevator on the second floor and all verbal interaction ceased until the elevator reached the first floor. All interaction then ceased until the *C2* entered the elevator on the second floor. After the elevator reached the first floor the *CI* made a request for the *Ss* compliance. Specifically, the *CI* asked, “Do you think you could help me carry some of this stuff to my car? I am afraid the ones on the top are going to fall off.” If the *S* complied with the request the *CI* then asked, “How much do you think you can carry?”

*Instrumentation.* The *CI* measured compliance by observing whether or not the *S* helped carry books to the *CI*'s car parked just outside of the building approximately 30 yards from the elevator. The number of items that the *S* assists in carrying is also measured.

### Experiment 3

#### Method

*Participants.* The sample consisted of 540 randomly selected people entering one of three predetermined elevators in a building on a large Midwestern university campus. A random integer (*i*), one to three, was selected and individuals entering the elevator were counted until the *i*<sup>th</sup> individual entered the elevator, this individual became the subject (*S*). Each *S* was subsequently randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions. This was done until there were equal numbers of *Ss* within each condition. Selection of *Ss* was restricted to those entering the elevator by themselves and those not carrying large parcels.

*Design.* This experiment took the form of a 3 (parsing liking, inducing liking, liking) X 3 (parsing obligation, inducing obligation, obligation) X 3 (direct request, debt request, no request) factorial design. All conditions consisted of a research confederate (*CI*) delivering a series of messages to the *S* intended to induce the various states of obligation and liking.

In the parsing obligation condition the *CI* held the elevator door open for the *S* and waited for the *S* to thank them. After the *S* thanked the *CI*, the *CI* followed with, *“I heard you coming and held the door because this elevator takes such a long time but don’t worry about it. It’s what anybody would have done. What floor do you need?”* In the inducing obligation condition the *CI* again held open the door of the elevator for the *S* but this time stated the following after the *S* thanked them, *“I heard you coming and held the door because this elevator takes such a long time.”* In the obligation condition, no interaction takes place between the *CI* and the *P*.

In the parsing liking condition a second confederate (*C2*) wearing a knee brace entered the elevator at the third floor as it traveled down to the ground level. The *CI* then stated to the *C2* *“Couldn’t you have taken the stairs? I mean, are they broke or something?”* In the inducing liking condition the same *C2* wearing a knee brace entered the elevator at the third floor as it traveled down to the ground level. This time, however, the *CI* say to *C2*, *“I hope your knee heals up quickly.”* In the liking condition, no interaction takes place between the *CI* and the *P*.

Three different compliance gaining request were made. As the *CI* and *P* reached the first floor one of three messages were delivered; in the direct request the *CI* stated to the *P*, *“Do you think you could help me carry some of these books to my car? I am afraid the ones on the top are going to fall off.”* Furthermore, as mentioned, obligation arises from a feeling of indebtedness and a motivation to erase the debt. Therefore, a debt request of the general form, *“You owe me*

*compliance because of past favors*” (Marwell et al., 1967) was employed. In this condition, the *CI* phrased their compliance-gaining request as, “*Do you think you could help me carry some of this stuff to my car? Remember, I held the elevator door open for you.*” In the final condition, no request was made, but instead the *CI* waited to see whether or not the *P* offered to help carry any of the *CI*’s books.

*Procedure.* Once the *CI* randomly selected a *S* and they were randomly assigned to a condition the *CI* pressed the open door button on the elevator until the *P* entered. To emphasize that holding the elevator was a costly action, the *CI* appeared waiting in the elevator carrying a large stack of textbooks in their arms while a library cart precariously full of more books was parked by their side while holding the elevator door open with a barely free hand.

As the *S* entered the elevator, the *CI* delivered either the parsing obligation, inducing obligation, or obligation message. Interaction between the *S* and *CI* then ceased until the doors closed and the elevator began its trip to the first floor. The *CI* then discretely paged the *C2* who was stationed on the third floor via cell phone to notify them to press the down elevator button on their floor so as to make the elevator car stop on their floor so they could enter the same car as the *S* and *CI*. After the doors closed the *CI* then initiated interaction with the *C2* and delivered either the parsing liking, inducing liking, or liking message depending on experimental condition. Again, interaction ceased until the elevator reaches the first floor. At this point the *C2* left the scene and the *CI* initiated interaction with the *S*, delivering a request for compliance. The *CI* delivered either the debt request, direct request, or no request depending on the experimental condition. In addition, in all conditions, except the no request condition unless help was offered, another request was made, “*How much do you think you can carry?*”

*Instrumentation.* The *CI* measured compliance by observing whether or not the *S* helped carry books to the *CI*'s car parked just outside of the building approximately 30 yards from the elevator. The number of items that the *S* assists in carrying is also measured.

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