

Interpersonal Touch, Social Labeling, and the Foot-in-the-Door Effect

MORTON GOLDMAN
ODETTE KIYOHARA
DOROTHY A. PFANNENSTEIL
*Department of Psychology
University of Missouri at Kansas City*

ABSTRACT. The foot-in-the-door procedure increases compliance for a desired request by preceding that request with an easier first request. Labeling and touch have been shown to affect compliance. This study examined whether these variables would influence the "foot" procedure. Subjects for the study were 120 individuals who were approaching a university library. The results showed that, in comparing individuals receiving a positive label and touch or a negative label without touch, compliance increased with touch and no label, positive label and no touch, or negative label and touch.

THE FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR PROCEDURE, experimentally examined by Freedman and Fraser (1966), has been shown to be remarkably strong with considerable generality. The findings have been explained by means of self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). An individual observing his or her own behavior while granting an initial, easy request decides that he or she is a cooperative individual who is helpful to others. This altered self-perception induces the individual to continue to be helpful and to comply with a second, larger request. Since the publication of the original foot-in-the-door study, additional research has explored variations of the procedure that will increase or decrease its effectiveness (Goldman, Creason, & McCall, 1981; Seligman, Bush, & Kirsch, 1976; Uranowitz, 1975).

The important part that touch plays in a variety of interpersonal relationships has begun to be recognized and experimentally verified (Angulera,

Requests for reprints should be sent to Morton Goldman, Department of Psychology, University of Missouri at Kansas City, 5319 Holmes, Kansas City, MO 64110-2499.

1967; Fisher, Rytting, & Heslin, 1976; Goldman & Fordyce, 1983; Pattison, 1973; Paulsell & Goldman, 1984). Kleinke (1977), suggesting that touch produces a higher level of intimacy between two individuals and proposing that one would be more apt to help another to whom one feels closer, showed that touching an individual while making a request led to increased compliance. Following this lead, Willis and Hamm (1980) obtained increased compliance to a petition-signing request when the subjects were touched prior to the request, and Smith, Gier, and Willis (1982) found that the touching of food market shoppers by a food demonstrator induced greater compliance to the request that the shoppers taste a sample of pizza.

If touching an individual increases feelings of intimacy, then touching used in conjunction with the foot-in-the-door procedure, while making the initial request to a person, might further enhance that person's self-concept of being helpful. Thus, touching added to the foot-in-the-door procedure should additionally increase compliance to the second request. The first purpose of the present study was to test this hypothesis.

Although Bem's (1972) self-perception theory maintains that the behavior of an individual provides him or her with the strongest information concerning his or her characteristics or traits, the theory also indicates that information or a label provided by others may influence inferences about one's own personal dispositions, particularly if they occur in situations when behavior is taking place. Goldman, Seever, and Seever (1982) examined the effect of social labeling on compliance when used together with the foot-in-the-door procedure. When a subject's reply to an initial request was given a positive label ("you have been very helpful"), subsequent compliance to a second request increased; a negative label ("you are not very helpful") decreased subsequent compliance to a second request. The second purpose of the present study was to examine whether interpersonal touch and social labeling used in combination with the foot-in-the-door procedure would affect compliance.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 120 people, mostly students, who were approaching the entrance of the general university library. Traffic into the library was slow but continuous, and the confederates were able, during the time that the study was carried out, to stop each person who was alone and about to enter the library. Twenty subjects were randomly assigned to each of six conditions. The conditions were randomly ordered, and, on completion of each rotation, the conditions were again randomly ordered. Three female graduate students served as confederates.

Experimental Design

Two levels of touch (touch and no-touch) and three levels of the foot-in-the-door procedure (foot, positive-foot, and negative-foot) were manipulated by using a 2×3 between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure

The first confederate approached a subject and asked directions to the Education Building, located several blocks away. All subjects attempted to help the confederate. The subjects were then exposed to one of the six conditions. The foot no-touch condition employed the usual foot-in-the-door technique, an initial, easy request followed by a second, hard-level request. The confederate, after receiving the subject's directions to the Education Building, replied, "O.K., thank you." In the positive-foot no-touch condition the confederate, after receiving directions, replied in an enthusiastic voice, "Thank you very much. You have been very helpful. I appreciate your taking the time to help me." In the negative-foot no-touch condition the confederate replied in an annoyed voice, "You are not very helpful, and I can usually understand directions. I'll have to find someone who can be more helpful." For the foot touch, positive-foot touch, and negative-foot touch conditions, the same corresponding statements were made by the confederate as in the no-touch conditions with the addition that on the conclusion of the statements the confederate touched the subjects on the upper arm.

As the subject continued to walk into the library, a second confederate stationed just inside the lobby and blind to the experimental condition being run approached the subject and stated the hard-level request: "Hello. I am trying to compile a list of people who would be willing to give two hours of their time next month to answer telephones for a charity telethon for crippled children. Would you be willing to do that?" If the subject agreed, his or her name and telephone number were taken, and the subject was told that he or she would be called if needed.

The first and second confederates exchanged positions at the end of carrying out each rotation of the six conditions.

A third confederate debriefed the subjects, explaining that there was nothing distinctive about the subject that caused him or her to be chosen other than the fact that he or she was alone. The confederate discussed the purpose of the study and answered all the subjects' questions.

Results

The dependent variable measure was the type of response subjects gave to the second, helping request. Subjects who agreed to help were assigned a score of one, and subjects who declined were assigned a score of zero. Dif-

ferences between the data collected by the two confederates and differences between the compliance of male and female subjects were nonsignificant; hence, the data obtained by the confederates and male and female scores were combined. If the degrees of freedom are sufficiently large ($df \geq 20$), analysis of variance procedures have been demonstrated to be appropriate (Lunney, 1970), a requirement satisfied in the present study ($df = 114$).

The first analysis examined whether touching combined with the "foot" procedure would increase compliance. The mean score (.40) for the foot touch condition was significantly greater than the mean score (.05) for the foot no-touch condition, $t(114) = 2.54, p < .02$.

The second analysis examined whether touch factorially combined with social labeling would affect compliance. A 2×2 analysis of variance, in which the two levels of the first factor were touch and no-touch and the two levels of the second factor were positive-foot and negative-foot, were carried out. Differences between the means for touch (.30) and no-touch levels (.33) were nonsignificant, $F(1, 114) < 1$, and differences between the means for the positive-foot (.28) and negative-foot levels (.35) were also nonsignificant, $F(1, 114) < 1$. The interaction, however, was significant, $F(1, 114) = 5.33, p < .025$. Increased compliance was obtained for the touch negative-foot ($M = .45$) and no-touch positive-foot ($M = .40$) conditions, and decreased compliance was obtained for the no-touch negative-foot ($M = .25$) and touch positive-foot ($M = .15$) conditions.

Discussion

The study demonstrated that touch added to the standard foot-in-the-door procedure increased compliance. Touching an individual may increase feelings of intimacy and may enlarge that individual's self-concept of being helpful when the initial request in the foot-in-the-door procedure is made. This would account for the added helpfulness occurring for the second request.

Using the standard foot-in-the-door procedure, it was shown that a positive label without touch and a negative label with touch enhanced compliance in comparison to a positive label with touch or a negative label without touch. The positive label without touch emphasized to the subject his or her helpfulness and possibly led to an increased feeling of being a cooperative individual. These results are similar to those presented by Goldman et al. (1982). However, when the positive label and touch were combined, the subject may have felt that this was too affirmative a response for such a small favor, giving directions to a nearby building. He or she may have simply believed that the confederate was a flatterer and may not have obtained information about himself or herself which would alter the self-image. Reduced compliance was obtained in the negative label without touch condition, which again was similar to the results presented by

Goldman et al. (1982). However, touch used in conjunction with the negative label may have served to nullify the effect of the label. Touch may have served as a catalyst to arouse the need to compensate for what the subject felt was an unfair statement about his or her helpful behavior. Thus, the subject may have attempted to discount the negative label by agreeing to perform the second task. Steele (1975) hypothesized that an individual may try to improve his or her image and compensate for a negative label by performing a positive act, and perhaps touch accentuates this process.

It should be noted that American college students served as subjects and that the results may be American bound.

REFERENCES

- Angulera, D. C. (1967). Relations between physical contact and verbal interaction between nurses and patients. *Journal of Psychiatric Nursing*, 5, 5-21.
- Bem, D. (1972). Self-perception theory. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 6). New York: Academic Press.
- Fisher, J. D., Rytting, M., & Heslin, R. (1976). Hands touching hands: Affective and evaluative effects of interpersonal touch. *Sociometry*, 39, 416-421.
- Freedman, J. L., & Fraser, S. C. (1966). Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 195-202.
- Goldman, M., Creason, C. R., & McCall, C. G. (1981). Compliance employing a two-feet-in-the-door procedure. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 114, 259-265.
- Goldman, M., & Fordyce, J. (1983). Prosocial behavior as affected by eye contact, touch, and voice expression. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 121, 125-129.
- Goldman, M., Seever, M., & Seever, M. (1982). Social labeling and the foot-in-the-door effect. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 117, 19-23.
- Kleinke, C. L. (1977). Compliance to requests made by gazing and touching experimenters in field settings. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 13, 218-223. 218-223.
- Lunney, G. H. (1970). Using analysis of variance with a dichotomous dependent variable: An empirical study. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 7, 263-269.
- Pattison, J. E. (1973). Effects of touch on self-exploration and the therapeutic relationship. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 40, 170-175.
- Paulsell, S., & Goldman, M. (1984). The effect of touching different body areas on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 122, 269-273.
- Seligman, C., Bush, M., & Kirsch, K. (1976). Relationship between compliance in the foot-in-the-door paradigm and size of first request. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 33, 517-520.
- Smith, D. E., Gier, J. A., & Willis, F. N. (1982). Interpersonal touch and compliance with a marketing request. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 3, 35-38.
- Steele, C. M. (1975). Name-calling and compliance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 361-369.
- Uranowitz, S. (1975). Helping and self-attributions: A field experiment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 852-854.
- Willis, F. N., & Hamm, H. K. (1980). The use of interpersonal touch in securing compliance. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 5, 49-55.

Received December 8, 1983

Copyright of Journal of Social Psychology is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.