

Man's Uniform and Receptivity of Women to Courtship Request: Three Field Experiments with a Firefighter's Uniform

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Abstract

Three experiments were conducted with male-confederates wearing or not a firefighter's uniform. In the first experiment, male confederates smiled to young women whereas in the second experiment male-confederates said "hello" to young women in the street. The results shown that's women smiled more favorably and more openly and said "hello" more favorably to the firefighter. In the third experiment, male-confederates asked young-women in the street for their phone number. Results shown than women agreed more favorably to the request of the firefighter. Variations in the person-perception of the solicitor according to the presence versus absence of uniform were used to explain theoretically our data.

Keywords: Courtship behavior, Uniform, Apparel appearance

1. Introduction

Several studies conducted with social psychologists found that behaviors of people are influenced by clothing appearance. It had been found that compliance to various requests is affected by apparel appearance of the solicitor. Bickman (1971) had tested the effect of dress of a stimulus person on the honesty of others. People were approached in phone booths by a male or female confederate wearing suit and tie for male or neat dresses for female or wearing dress of workers for both male and female confederates. Confederate was instructed to ask the stimuli persons if they found a dime that the confederate had left in the booth a few minutes earlier. When the confederate was dressed neatly 77 % of the subjects returned the dime whereas only 38 % returned the dime when the confederate was poorly dressed. Darley and Cooper (1972) found that confederate-campaigners who attempted to hand out political leaflets had a greater acceptance rate when they were conventionally dressed than when they appeared with deviant clothes. Sometimes, a single element of the clothing appearance is sufficient to influence compliance to a solicitor's request. Green and Giles (1973) have found that a smartly dressed male confederate who asked pedestrians to respond to a survey increase the level of acceptance of the pedestrians when he wore a tie than without this tie.

The effect of the uniform on compliance has been given much attention in many studies (Bickman, 1974). Nevertheless, it was most of the times related to direct requests coming from uniformed confederates who epitomized a symbolical authority (the police forces, the army). In an experiment conducted by Bushman (1984) a 47-yr-old male-confederate dressed as either a business executive, a bum, or a firefighter asked pedestrians in the street to give a dime for the parking meter to a 23-yr-old male dressed in blue jeans and casual shirt. Results showed that the dress of the authority increased the number of subjects who complied and decreased the latency between request and compliance. These results were confirmed by a later study using a female-confederate dressed with a uniform.

Our purpose was to test the effect of a male's uniform on women behavior. A recent study conducted by Horgan, Schmid Mast, Hall and Carter (2004), across five studies that included live interactions and videotaped stimuli, forewarned and unforewarned recall tasks, and free recall and recognition recall tasks, showed that women have better memory for the appearance of others than men do. These scientists found that women were more accurate than men at remembering details including clothing. A more recent study of Schmid Mast and Hall (2006) found that women recall the appearance of others better than men do.

In France, firefighters are perceived in a highly positive way by people and the population and it was found that with the girls, a fireman is associated with phantasm and high level of sex-appeal (Mermet, 2006). Three experiments conducted in field settings were carried out in order to test the effect of a firefighter's uniform on the response of girls to courtship solicitation addressed by men wearing of not such clothings effects. Given the sensibility of women for clothing appearance of men and the importance of apparel appearance to evaluate men and the positive evaluation associate toward firemen, we hypothesis that a man with a firefighter's uniform will received more positive response for his verbal and nonverbal courtship request than when he wears civilian effects.

2. Experiment 1

Method

Participants: In the first area where the first experiment was carried out, the participants were 180 young women (ranging in age from 18-25), chosen at random while walking alone in a pedestrian zone of a medium-sized town (more than 70 000 inhabitants) located in the west of France on the Atlantic coast of Brittany. In the second area, 80 young women (ranging in age from 18-25) were tested as they were seated at a pavement area of a bar.

Procedure: The experiment was carried out on particularly sunny days in June 2006. In the first area where the experiment was carried out, the participants were selected following a random assignment in which the confederates were instructed to approach the first young woman in the age group (18 to 25), who appeared alone in the pedestrian zone where the experiment was carried out. In this study, three 20 years old confederates were used.

In a previous work, the physical attractiveness of the confederates was rated by twenty young women who were instructed to evaluate the attractiveness of a group of ten young men. The evaluation was made by using a photo taken of the full face of each target. The confederates were chosen by the experimenter because they received a positive judgment from the women (highest quartile of the distribution). Between this group of 10 young men where our 3 confederates were selected, all of them were volunteers to take part to the experiment and all of them were volunteers as firemen in the town where the experiment was carried out. According to the experimental condition, the confederates wore their firefighter's uniform (only boots, trousers and tee-shirt) or civilian effects (clean jeans, tee-shirt and sneakers).

Each of the confederates acted individually. The confederate was instructed to walk slowly when approached the young woman, gaze her, and smile when he was nearly to bump the young woman. The confederate acted without stopping to walk. He was instructed to note if the young woman reply "hello" or gave him a smile or gave him no smile and non verbal response. If the participant smiled, the confederate was instructed to describe her facial expression with a numerical coding system adopted by DeSantis and Sierra (2000) : 1] "*The participant expressed a partial smile because her lips was not parted*", 2] "*The participant expressed a complete smile because her teeth was visible through parted lips*".

In the second area where the first experiment was carried out, the participants were seated on a chair at a pavement area of a bar. In this situation, the confederate was instructed to enter in the bar and walked among the chairs. The confederate was instructed to walk slowly when approached the young woman who was seated, gaze her, and smile when he was nearly to bump her chair. As in the precedent

area, the confederate noted the verbal and non-verbal response of the young women and if she smiled, he was instructed to code her facial expression as in the previous study.

Results

The frequency of participant’s smile and the amplitude of her facial expression when the participant smiled were used as dependant variables in our experiment. No difference was found between the three confederates. Hence, data were collapsed across confederates. Furthermore, differences between the responses of the participants were found in the two local areas. Then results obtained in the two areas are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of smiling response of the participant and amplitude of smiling when the participant expressed a smile

Area	Frequency of smiling (in %)		Amplitude of smiling when smiled	
	Fireman’s uniform	Civilian clothes	Fireman’s uniform	Civilian clothes
Pavement area of a bar	62.5 %	17.5 %	M = 1.63	M = 1.21
	N = 40	N = 40	SD = 0.29 N = 25	SD = 0.38 N = 7
In the street	86.7 %	23.3 %	1.72	1.15
	N = 90	N = 90	SD = 0.27 N = 78	SD = 0.40 N = 21

With the participants seated on a chair at a pavement area of a bar, a statistical difference was found between the frequencies of smile in the two experimental conditions ($\chi^2(1, 80) = 16.9, p <.001; r = .42$) and with the amplitude of smile when considering participants who responded with a smile to the confederate ($t(30, \text{two-tailed}) = 65.1, p <.001, d = 23.7$). With the participants tested in the street, a statistical difference was also found between the frequencies of smile in the two experimental conditions ($\chi^2(1, 180) = 74.8, p <.001; r = .54$) and with the amplitude of smile when considering participant who responded with a smile to the confederate ($t(30, \text{two-tailed}) = 147.7, p <.001, d = 29.9$). Then in both areas where the experiment was carried out, it was found that women were more likely to smile and to do so more fully to the confederate with the firefighter’s uniform than to the same confederate with civilian clothing. As it appeared in the data analysis, the effect size of the difference is strong.

2. Experiment 2

Method

Participants: The participants were 180 young women (ranging in age from 18-25), chosen at random while walking alone in a pedestrian zone in the same city where the first experiment was conducted.

Procedure: The experiment was carried out on a particularly sunny days in June 2006. In this experiment, the participants were selected following a random assignment in which the confederates were instructed to approach the first young woman in the age group (18 to 25), who appeared alone in the pedestrian zone where the experiment was carried out. In this experiment, the same confederates than in experiment 1 were used. The confederates wore the same firefighter or civilian effects than in the previous experiment.

Each of the confederates acted individually. The confederate in both apparel conditions made the same verbal solicitation. The confederate was instructed to walk slowly when approached the young woman and gaze her with smiling and to say “Hello”. The confederate acted without stopping to walk. He was instructed to note if the young woman reply “hello”, gave him a smile, or gave him no smile and no verbal response.

Results

The frequency of participant's smile and the amplitude of her facial expression when the participant smiled were used as dependant variables in our experiment. No difference was found between the three confederates. Hence, data were collapsed across confederates. Furthermore, differences between the responses of the participants were found in the two local areas. Then results obtained in the two areas are presented in table 1.

The dependent variable used in this experiment was evaluated by the number of participants who replied "hello" or gave a smile to the confederate when he said "hello" to the participant. As no differences were found between the three confederates then data were collapsed across them. The results obtained show that the firefighter's uniform was associated with greater frequency of participants' response (78.8% → 71/90 with 19/71 with "hello" alone, 7/71 with smile alone and 45/71 with "hello" and smile associated) than civilian clothing (25.6 % → 23/90 with 13/23 with "hello" alone, 4/23 with smile alone and 6/23 with "hello" and smile associated). A 2 (fireman's uniform/civilian clothing) × 2 (verbal or nonverbal response/ no response) chi-square test was used to analyze the data and showed a high significant difference between the two apparel conditions ($\chi^2(1, 180) = 51.3, p < .001; r = .47$). In order to test the richness of the response of the participant toward the confederate a chi-square test was used to analyze the differences between the frequencies of participants who addressed both verbal and nonverbal responses in the two conditions (6/23 in the civilian clothing condition and 45/71 in the firefighter's uniform condition). Again the difference between the two experimental conditions appeared to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, 94) = 9.73, p < .005; r = .31$). Then it seems that the confederate with the firefighter's uniform led to increase the number of positive response of the participant but also increase the richness of the response toward the confederate that appeared more expressive in this condition.

2. Experiment 3

Method

Participants: The participants were 240 young women (ranging in age from 18-25), chosen at random while walking alone in a pedestrian zone in the same city where the first experiment was conducted.

Procedure: The experiment was carried out on a particularly sunny days in July 2006. In this experiment, the participants were selected following a random assignment in which the confederates were instructed to approach the first young woman in the age group (18 to 25), who appeared alone in the pedestrian zone where the experiment was carried out. In this experiment, three 20-year-old confederates were used. As in the first experiment, the physical attractiveness of the confederates was evaluated by a group of young women. The confederates were selected on the basis of the high physical attractiveness score each one received. This condition was used because pre-test evaluation showed that it was difficult to obtain the phone number from young women in the street. This avoided creating conditions where the ceiling effect of compliance was low. The confederates wore the same firefighter or civilian effects than in the two previous experiments.

Each of the confederates acted individually. The same verbal solicitation was made by the confederate in both the control and the experimental conditions: *"Hello. My name's Antoine. I just want to say that I think you're really pretty. I have to go to work this afternoon but I wonder if you would give me your phone number. I'll phone you later and we can have a drink together someplace"*. In both conditions, after formulating his request, the confederate was instructed to wait 10 seconds, and to gaze and smile to the participant. If the participant accepted the confederate's solicitation, the confederate debriefed her. She was told that she had participated in an experiment on social behavior. A preprinted information form was then given to the participant who was asked to provide information for the experiment (name, age, address, phone number). Information concerning the role of the experimenter and our laboratory web site was also indicated on the form. This information procedure

was used in accordance with the suggestion of the ethical committee of the laboratory when the three experiments were presented to the committee. In the preprinted information form that was given to the participant, the address of the web site presenting this project was printed and the personal phone number of the director of the laboratory was given. To date (the third experiment was done in July 2006) no participant had phoned to obtain information about this research. The encounter ended with the confederate saying, *“Thanks for your participation and I’m sorry that I’ve taken up your time. Perhaps we could meet another time. Bye!”*. If the participant refused, the confederate was instructed to say, *“Too bad. It’s not my day. Have a nice afternoon!”* and to wait for another participant.

Results

The dependent variable used in this experiment was evaluated by the number of participants who agreed to the request. As we found no differences between the three confederates then data were collapsed. The results obtained show that the firefighter’s uniform was associated with greater compliance to the request (21.7 % → 26/120) than civilian clothing (8.3 % → 10/120). A 2 (fireman’s uniform/civilian clothing) × 2 (compliance/no compliance to the request) chi-square test was used to analyze the data and showed a significant difference between the two apparel conditions ($\chi^2(1, 240) = 8.37, p < .005; r = .18$).

3. Discussion

In three different experiments conducted in various field settings, it was found that when a man wore a fireman’s uniform, implicit nonverbal courtship behaviors (experiment 1), implicit verbal behaviors (experiment 2) or explicit verbal behaviors (experiment 3) were associated with a significant level of positive female’s responses toward the man than when he wore civilian effects. Clearly, the magnitude of the effect size of the difference of female’s responses in this three experiments attests that a firefighter’s uniform is very attractive for women.

Why such effects occurred? In France, population has a very good opinion of their firefighters because they help others but also because most of them are volunteers apart from their professional activities. So they are perceived in a highly positive way and it had been found that with the girls, a firefighter is associated with sexual-phantasm and high level of sex-appeal (Mermet, 2006). So, perhaps, when women saw a positive behavior expressed by a firefighter toward them, then such sexual attraction associated with this professional representation and clothing appearance led women, in return, to express positive response toward the firefighter. Horgan, Schmid Mast, Hall and Carter (2004) and Schmid Mast and Hall (2006) found that women recall the appearance of others better than men do. This effect is perhaps explained because women are more accurate to judge people by the help of their appearance (Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers & Archer, 1979) and are more accurate at judging other people with respect with personality characteristics (Vogt & Colvin, 2003). Of course, desirable trait characteristics are associated with the presence of a firefighter’s uniform because the mission of the firefighter is to help, to serve and to protect people and their goods. Then positive traits such altruism, self-denial or courage is connected with firefighters and such personological characteristics are highly attractive for women (Figueredo, Sefcek & Jones, 2006). Under an evolutionary perspective, it can be argued that for women the risk associated with an error when selecting a partner is higher than for men because women have to make children and to raise them. That is why perhaps appearance is important for females to judge men because apparel appearance is important to evaluate the social status of men. A host of previous studies routinely shows that across cultures men and women differ in several mate preferences. Men more than women value physical attractiveness in a long-term mate whereas women more than men value good financial prospects and higher status in a long-term mate (Buss, 1998; Kenrick, Groth, Trost & Sadalla, 1993; Shackelford, Schmitt & Buss, 2005). In France where a high level of young people are unemployed, the presence of a uniform is associated with a professional occupation (military service does not exist) and, then, with

financial resources. Because, this aspect of occupational status is important for women a man with a uniform could become more interesting as a possible partner for them.

In conclusion a man with a firefighter uniform led to increase his social attractiveness (financial status), his personological attractiveness (positive personality characteristics associated with such occupation) and, perhaps, his physical attractiveness (physical traits associated with this occupation such as athletic). All together, it was not a surprise to show that women in these three experiments have addressed positive signs and behaviors toward our firefighter-confederates.

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