

PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR AS AFFECTED BY EYE CONTACT,
TOUCH, AND VOICE EXPRESSION*

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SUMMARY

Eighty-one women and 79 men who were walking on a college campus were interviewed by a confederate (C) who either engaged in frequent eye contact or did not look at the S, touched or did not touch the S, and spoke in either a natural, warm, expressive tone of voice or spoke with a flat, nonexpressive voice. At the completion of the interview, the C dropped several folded questionnaires. Greater helping behavior occurred when the C used an expressive voice rather than a flat voice. An interaction effect was obtained for the eye and touch conditions, with high levels of helping for eye contact/no touch and no eye contact/touch, and low levels of helping for no eye contact/no touch and eye contact/touch.

A. INTRODUCTION

Since altruistic behavior is voluntary, while compliance behavior is requested, it would appear that the processes involved in these two actions are different. But, as has been indicated (5 and 10), altruistic and compliant acts contain similar elements: for both there is no external reward and both benefit another person.

With respect to similarities, it would be expected that procedures which have increased compliance would also be useful for inducing altruism. Following this reasoning, Foehl and Goldman (5) have shown that the foot-in-the-door and the door-in-the-face, two techniques which have been repeatedly found successful for enhancing compliance (3, 6, 8, and 9), would also heighten prosocial behavior. It was the purpose of the present study to examine whether several other variables which have been demonstrated to augment compliance would also enlarge prosocial behavior.

Eye contact and touch have been reported to affect compliance. Kleinke

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found that *Ss* approached by an *E* who continually gazed at them or who gave them a light touch on the arm complied more frequently to the *E*'s request to return a dime which the *Ss* had found in a telephone booth, or to lend the *E* a dime; Willis and Hamm (18) stated that increased compliance was obtained to a petition-signing request when the *Ss* were touched lightly on the upper arm prior to the request; Smith, Gier, and Willis (16) showed that touching of food market shoppers by a food demonstrator induced greater compliance to his request that the shoppers taste a free sample of pizza; and Snyder, Grether, and Keller (17) demonstrated that *Ss* given eye contact by a panhandler were more apt to comply with his request for a small handout.

Having eye contact from or being touched by a requester may lead to more compliance because the requester is viewed as psychologically closer to the target person (14) or is more individuated (4), or because the target person is more aware of the requester's needs (15). Thus, it has been suggested that eye contact and touch create higher levels of intimacy between the target person and requester (11). If intimacy is a factor which produces a higher degree of compliance, it should also induce increased helping behavior: one would be more apt to help another to whom one feels closer.

A variable that has not been explored in either compliance or prosocial behavior studies, but has served as an independent variable in other areas of social psychology, is individual expressiveness. Expressive individuals who use gestures freely, show distinct facial expression, and engage in frequent body movement have been perceived as being more charismatic and more effective at persuasion than less expressive people (7). Vocal expression has also been shown to induce strong impressions of such diverse characteristics as aptitudes, interests, intelligence, and personality traits (12).

The present study examined whether eye contact, touch, and voice expression would affect prosocial behavior.

B. METHOD

Eighty-one adult females and 79 adult males walking on a Midwestern college campus served as *Ss*. Twenty *Ss* were randomly assigned to each of eight groups, with an approximately equal number of males and females in each group.

Two levels of gaze (eye contact, no eye contact), two levels of touch (touch, no touch), and two levels of voice expression (expressive, nonexpressive) were manipulated in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design.

To provide a reason for a confederate (*C*) to make contact with the *Ss*, an intercollegiate athletics attitude scale was devised. The *C*, a male graduate student, approached a passerby and stated, "Excuse me, we are conducting a study of attitudes toward intercollegiate athletics. It will only take two or three minutes of your time. Would you be willing to help?" The *C* then began reading the attitude scale statements. During the administration of the survey, the two levels of each of the three variables were introduced. The *C* either engaged in frequent eye contact with the *S* or engaged in no eye contact. The *C* either spoke in a natural, warm, expressive tone or used a flat, nonexpressive tone. To achieve a nonexpressive tone, the *C* practiced reciting the instructions in a monotone voice. The two principal investigators judged that the *C* was able to do this successfully. On reaching the last attitude item, the *C* stated, "Okay, this will be the last statement," and simultaneously either softly touched the *S* on the shoulder or did not touch the *S*. All combinations, a total of eight, of the variables were carried out with the use of a randomized order. One complete rotation of the eight conditions was conducted before the next rotation began.

Upon completion of the *Ss*' reply to the last attitude item, the *C* "accidentally" dropped 30 folded survey questionnaires which he had been holding beneath a clip board. The dependent variable was whether or not the *Ss* helped retrieve the fallen questionnaires.

C. RESULTS

Ss who helped the *C* pick up the dropped questionnaires were assigned a score of 1 and *Ss* who did not help were assigned 0. Differences between male and female *Ss* across all experimental conditions were nonsignificant; hence the data were collapsed across sex. Mean scores of .59 and .44 were obtained for the expressive and nonexpressive voice conditions; means of .53 and .50 were obtained for the eye- and no-eye-contact conditions; and means of .54 and .49 were obtained for the touch and no-touch conditions. Analysis of variance procedures have been shown to be appropriate for dichotomized data if the degrees of freedom are sufficiently large ($df \geq 20$) (13). This condition was satisfied and an analysis of variance test was performed. The difference for the means of the voice condition was significant, $F(1, 152) = 3.60, p \approx .05$; and the interaction for the eye factor and touch factor was significant, $F(1, 152) = 3.60, p \approx .05$. The means for the no-eye-contact/touch condition and for the eye-contact/no-touch condition were .60 and .58; the means for the eye-contact/touch condition, and for the no-eye-contact/no-touch condition were .48 and .40. Thus, more

help was obtained when there was eye contact and no touching, or touching and no eye contact; and less help was obtained when there were both eye contact and touching, or neither eye contact nor touching. All other differences and interactions were nonsignificant, all F s $> .25$.

D. DISCUSSION

Previous studies have shown that eye contact and touch serve to increase compliance. This may occur because the requester is viewed by the target person as being more intimate (11). The present study found that eye contact and touch would also influence prosocial behavior. However, rather than a summation effect, the results demonstrated that when either eye contact and no touch, or no eye contact and touch were used in combination, voluntary helping behavior was enhanced. When eye contact and touch were either both used or both not used helping behavior was reduced.

The interaction obtained between eye contact and touch is in agreement with the equilibrium hypothesis (1, 2), which states that too great a level of intimacy, as well as too little a level of intimacy, may produce an adverse effect. Consequently, this would result in reduced helping behavior.

Voice expression reported to be influential in human behavior may also serve to induce increased prosocial behavior. Significantly more helping behavior was obtained when the requester used an expressive, warm tone of voice rather than a flat tone of voice.

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