

Reciprocal favor exchange and compliance

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Three experiments examined the effect of exchanging small favors on compliance to a subsequent request. In Experiment 1, undergraduate participants walked up a flight of stairs to sharpen a pencil for a confederate, and the confederate brought the participants a bottle of water. These participants were more likely to agree to a request from the confederate than participants who had not exchanged favors or who had performed a favor without receiving one in return. The order in which the favors were performed did not affect compliance rates. In Experiment 2, students selling bake sale treats retrieved a “fresh” treat for customers, and customers picked up some spilled pencils for the students. The percentage of customers who subsequently purchased treats replicated the pattern uncovered in the first investigation. In a partial replication of the first experiment, Experiment 3 findings ruled out explanations for the results based on mood and modeling of helping behavior. Taken together, the research suggests that a reciprocal exchange of favors with a stranger may trigger a friendship heuristic that people rely on when responding to a subsequent request.

One morning you pop into a coworker’s office and ask if you can borrow a calculator. As she hands you the calculator, your coworker asks if you could lend her \$5 until after lunch. You readily hand over the money. But as you start to leave, your coworker asks if you would also look over a report she has written and provide her with some feedback. Now that you have exchanged favors once with this person, are you more or less likely to read the report than if she had simply asked you without the favor exchange?

Numerous studies find that compliance to requests can be affected by the norm of reciprocity (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The norm of reciprocity is a social rule that maintains, among other things, that people are obligated to return favors and other acts of kindness (Gouldner, 1960). In compliance

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situations, requesters sometimes perform a small—and often unsolicited—favor for another person. The resulting obligation to return the favor increases the likelihood that the individual will agree to a subsequent request. In the classic demonstration of this effect, Regan (1971) had confederates give real participants a soft drink. Later the confederate asked the participant to buy some raffle tickets. Participants purchased more tickets when they had received a soft drink from the confederate than when no favor was performed, presumably because the participant felt an obligation to return the act of kindness. Subsequent investigations have replicated this effect and provide support for the reciprocity norm interpretation (Burger, Horita, Kinoshita, Roberts, & Vera, 1997; Whatley, Webster, Smith, & Rhodes, 1999).

The power of the reciprocity norm is widely understood among salespeople and other practitioners of compliance, as illustrated by the common use of free gifts inside fundraising letters and free “no-obligation” demonstrations (Cialdini, 2001; Levine, 2003). But what are the limits of this compliance tool? Once we accept a gift or favor, are we forever obligated to return the act of kindness? In some situations, the simple passing of time may take recipients off the obligation hook. One set of studies found that, for the small types of favors typically used in research settings, the obligation to return the favor virtually disappeared when the favor-giver waited one week to make the request (Burger et al., 1997). However, large requests—such as lavish gifts or the proverbial saving of one’s life—are likely to lead to a more enduring sense of obligation.

The present set of experiments was designed to test another possible way for favor recipients to reduce their sense of obligation and thus their vulnerability to subsequent requests. Specifically, by simply returning the favor in some appropriate way, can people reduce their susceptibility to additional requests? Imagine a situation in which A does B a favor, B reciprocates by doing a favor for A, and then A asks B for another favor. A prediction based solely on the reciprocity norm suggests B has no more reason to comply in this situation than someone who has never exchanged favors with the requester. That is, having returned the initial favor, B has evened the score and should feel no particular obligation to do anything else for the requester. One might even argue for a decline in compliance following a mutual favor exchange if B was the last person to do a favor. In this situation, B might consider it the other person’s turn to do something nice.

Although to date the effect of mutual favor exchange on compliance has not been examined, findings from at least one study lend support to the above prediction. Allison, Messick, and Samuelson (1985) solicited donations from college alumni. They asked some alumni for suggestions about how to spend the money before requesting a donation, whereas other

alumni were simply asked to donate. The alumni asked for spending suggestions gave less than those asked only for a donation. The investigators reasoned that the participants felt they had already made a valuable contribution by providing advice, and thus experienced a reduced need to donate money to the fundraiser.

Although the reciprocity norm suggests that favor recipients can erase the obligation they incur by simply returning a favor, we argue that the use of unsolicited favors by a requester may be even more insidious than it first appears. That is, even after returning a favor, people may be more vulnerable to subsequent requests than they were before the requester initiated the mutual exchange of favors. There are at least two reasons for this expectation. First, exchanging favors may trigger a type of “friendship” heuristic (Dolinski, Nawrat, & Rudak, 2001). That is, people often exchange favors with friends, and thus may respond to a stranger with whom they exchange favors as if interacting with a friend. Several studies find that we are more likely to comply to a request from a stranger when our interaction with that person resembles the way we interact with acquaintances (Burger, Messian, Patel, del Prado, & Anderson, 2004; Burger, Soroka, Gonzago, Murphy, & Somervell, 2001). For example, engaging in a short conversation with a requester prior to the request is often sufficient to trigger the friendship heuristic and increase compliance (Burger et al., 2001; Dolinski et al., 2001). Other research finds performing a favor for a stranger can increase attraction for that individual. Participants in one experiment who complied with an experimenter’s request to return the money they earned for their participation rated the experimenter more favorably than those not asked to return the money (Jecker & Landy, 1969). Second, exchanging favors might lead people to either change the way they think of themselves and/or motivate them to act consistently. That is, it is possible that simply performing a favor causes people to think of themselves as the kind of person who helps others. Studies on the foot-in-the-door effect find that this type of self-perception process often results from complying with a small request (Burger, 1999; Burger & Caldwell, 2003). Similarly, to satisfy a need to appear consistent, people who perform one favor may feel a need to agree to subsequent requests for favors (Cialdini, Trost, & Newson, 1995). If that is the case, then doing one nice thing could lead to a pattern of continued (and consistent) agreement to requests.

In short, despite fulfilling one’s obligation to reciprocate, there are reasons to believe that returning a favor may not reduce the likelihood of complying with a subsequent request. In fact, requesters may find that initiating a mutual exchange of favors is an effective procedure for increasing compliance. We conducted three experiments to examine the effects of reciprocal favor exchange on compliance. Our primary goal was to determine if a reciprocal exchange of favors reduces or increases compliance

to a subsequent request. To that end, we conducted laboratory and field experiments comparing the effects of various types of mutual favor exchanges. Assuming that returning a favor fails to reduce compliance to a subsequent request, our second goal was to test some of the possible reasons for this effect. We included conditions in each of the three experiments to help us answer this question.

EXPERIMENT 1

Participants in this laboratory investigation either did or did not exchange favors with a confederate, and each session ended with a target request from the confederate. In some conditions, the participant and the confederate each performed a favor for one another. We also manipulated the order in which the favors were exchanged. Sometimes the participant went first, and in some conditions the confederate initiated the exchanges. We also included a condition in which only the confederate performed a favor prior to the final request.

Finally, we added a condition in which only the participant performed a favor. We included this condition to look at the possible effects of self-perception changes and consistency motives on our predicted effects. That is, exchanging favors may increase compliance because performing one request causes people to see themselves as the kind of person who says yes to requests. Similarly, people may agree to a second request after complying with an initial request in order to appear consistent. Adding a condition in which only the participant performs a favor allows us to see if either of these effects alone can account for an increase in compliance following a mutual exchange of favors.

Pilot test

We first needed to identify two favors participants would see as roughly equivalent. We generated two favor scenarios that we believed were equal in terms of effort and the extent to which the act would be perceived as a favor. One of these involved a participant who picks up an extra bottle of water and gives it to another participant. The second favor concerned a participant who walks up a flight of stairs to sharpen a pencil for another participant. We presented written descriptions of the scenarios to 48 undergraduates (24 for each scenario). Participants were asked to indicate "How much effort would you say the individual exerted in carrying out this favor?" (1 = Very Little, 9 = Very Much) and "How large a favor would you consider this act?" (1 = Not Very Large, 9 = Very Large). The pencil-sharpening scenario was seen as requiring slightly more effort than the water bottle scenario ($M = 2.96$ and 2.83), but this difference fell short of statistical significance, $t(46) = 0.38$, $p = .71$. Similarly, the pencil-sharpening

scenario was seen as a slightly larger favor than the water bottle scenario ($M = 3.83$ and 3.54), although again the difference was not statistically significant, $t(46) = 0.98$, $p = .33$.

Method

Participants. A total of 105 undergraduates (23 men and 82 women) served as participants in exchange for class credit.

Procedure. Approximately 30 seconds after the participant arrived, an undergraduate confederate posing as another participant and blind to hypotheses entered the room. The experimenter explained that each participant would be tested on two visual perception tasks. One task required participants to replicate a design by filling in squares on a blank 10 by 10 grid. The second task required participants to draw a line through every *a*, *g*, and *k* on a sheet of paper containing six lines of letters presented in decreasing size. Participants were instructed to work as quickly as possible, but were told that accuracy was more important than speed.

Participants were told they would work on both tasks, but in a different order. To enhance the cover story, the experimenter also informed participants that they would perform the tasks while wearing an eye patch. Left-handed participants would wear the patch over their right eye, and right-handed participants would cover their left eye. Participants were told they could take the patch off as soon as they were finished.

The experimenter then distributed the materials for the first task. Participants working on the design task were given a copy of the design, a blank grid, and a set of 10 colored pencils. Participants working on the letter task were given a lead pencil and a sheet with lines of letters. The experimenter told the participants to begin, and said that he or she would be back in a few minutes.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions. In the confederate favor first condition, the confederate was given the letter task and the participant was given the design task. Pretesting determined that the letter task could be finished in significantly less time than the design task. Confederates quickly completed the letter task, removed the eye patch and said they were going to the rest room. While the participant worked on the longer design task, the confederate went to a nearby refrigerator and retrieved two bottles of water. When returning a few minutes later, the confederate said, "The Biology Club was finishing up some kind of meeting, and they asked me if I wanted one of the bottles of water they had left over. I took one and got one for you, too." The confederate handed a bottle of water to the participant.

At that moment, the experimenter (who had been listening just out of view) returned. When the participant completed the design task, the experimenter distributed materials for the second task, giving the participant the letter task and the confederate the design task. The experimenter again said he or she would be back in a few minutes and left the room. The confederate waited until the participant completed the letter task, then appeared to accidentally break the lead on one of the colored pencils. The confederate said to the participant, "Could you do me a favor? They have a pencil sharpener on the reception counter upstairs in the psychology department office. Could you run up there and sharpen this for me?" The psychology office was located one floor above the lab room. The confederate completed the design task soon after the participant returned with the pencil. The experimenter also arrived shortly after the participant returned.

Participants assigned to the participant favor first condition were given the letter task first, while the confederate worked on the design task. Thus, the confederate asked the pencil-sharpening favor during the initial task. Later, after completing the letter task, the confederate left and returned with the two bottles of water and offered one to the participant.

Participants assigned to the confederate favor only condition were randomly assigned to work on either the letter or design task first. When the confederate completed the letter task, he or she left and returned with the two bottles of water.

Participants assigned to the participant favor only condition also were randomly assigned to work on either the letter or the design task first. When working on the design task, the confederate appeared to break his or her pencil and asked the participant to sharpen it upstairs. As in the other conditions, the confederate left the room for a few minutes after completing the letter task, but in this condition did not return with bottles of water.

Participants in the control condition were randomly assigned to perform either the letter or the design task first. The confederate left the room for a few minutes after completing the letter task, but did not return with bottles of water. In this condition, the confederate also did not ask the participant the pencil-sharpening favor.

The confederate kept conversation to a minimum in all conditions. None of the participants refused a bottle of water, and none failed to perform the pencil-sharpening request. In all conditions, after the two tasks were completed, the experimenter quickly signed credit slips, announced the experiment was over, and left the room. As the confederate and participant were walking out of the lab room area, the confederate pulled an essay from a backpack and said:

I wonder if I could ask you a favor. My English professor wants us to find someone we don't know to read and critique our papers. Could you read this 8-page essay for me and e-mail me one page of written feedback on whether my arguments are persuasive and why? I need to have it by class time tomorrow afternoon.

The confederate waited until receiving a yes or no response from the participant, but did not repeat the request and did nothing else to encourage the participant. At that point, the experimenter returned and said that he or she had forgotten to explain what the experiment was about. All three individuals returned to the lab room where the experimenter probed for suspicion and debriefed the participant.

Results and discussion

We compared the number of participants in each condition who agreed to the request. As shown in Table 1, the rate of compliance varied significantly across the five conditions, $\chi^2(4, N = 105) = 17.77, p = .001, \phi = .41$. Specific cell comparisons revealed that participants in the confederate favor first condition (89.5%) agreed to the request significantly more often than control condition participants (51.9%), $\chi^2(1, N = 46) = 5.57, p = .02, \phi = .35$. Similarly, participants in the participant favor first condition (95.0%) complied with the request more than the control group, $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 8.27, p = .004, \phi = .42$. Finally, participants in the confederate favor only condition (85.0%) also agreed with the request more than control condition participants, $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 4.24, p = .04, \phi = .30$. However, participants in the participant favor only condition (57.9%) did not comply with the request at a significantly different rate than the control participants, $\chi^2(1, N = 46) = .01, p = .92$. Compliance rates in the confederate favor first condition, the participant favor first condition, and the confederate favor only condition did not differ significantly.

TABLE 1
Response to target request: Experiment 1

	<i>Percent</i>		
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Refused</i>	<i>Agreed</i>
Confederate favor first	17	2	89.5
Participant favor first	19	1	95.0
Confederate favor only	17	3	85.0
Participant favor only	11	8	57.9
Control condition	14	13	51.9

The findings replicate the basic norm of reciprocity effect. That is, participants were more likely to comply with the target request after receiving an unexpected favor from the confederate than when receiving no favor. However, reciprocating the confederate's favor did not reduce the participants' likelihood of complying with the target request. Participants who exchanged favors with the confederate were more likely to agree to a subsequent request than participants who exchanged no favors. Moreover, the order in which the confederate and participant exchanged favors did not matter. Thus, participants who had exchanged favors were more likely than control participants to agree to the target request even when it was not "their turn" to perform an act of kindness. In short, processes other than a release from obligation appear to be operating when individuals reciprocate favors, and these processes are powerful enough to generate high levels of compliance even when people have evened the score for acts of kindness.

Performing a favor for the confederate without reciprocation was not sufficient to increase compliance beyond the control condition level in this situation. This finding argues against an explanation of the results based on consistency needs or a change in self-perception. Participants in the participant favor only condition were as likely to see themselves as the kind of person who complies and were as motivated to be consistent as those who engaged in a mutual exchange of favors with the confederate. However, only those who reciprocated favors with the confederate showed an increase in compliance relative to the control group. This is not to say that self-perception processes and consistency needs do operate in many situations. However, they were not sufficient in this experimental situation to account for the results.

EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 2 was designed to replicate the findings from the first experiment using different favors and a different request. We also sought to demonstrate the external validity of the effect by replicating the results in a field experiment using a participant population other than undergraduates. We set up a bake sale in front of a supermarket and used passersby as participants. All five conditions employed in the first investigation were also used in Experiment 2.

Method

Participants. A total of 131 passersby (48 men and 83 women) served as participants. Individuals were included in the experiment if they appeared to be over 18 years old and if they were not accompanied by other adults.

Procedure. We set up a table approximately 10 feet from the entrance of a large supermarket. A sign announcing “Psychology Club Bake Sale” and the name of the university was attached to the front of the table. Several Rice Krispy Treats individually wrapped in cellophane were displayed on the table. The table also included some literature for Psi Chi (the psychology undergraduate honors society), some Psi Chi sign-up sheets, and a plastic cup containing five pens. No prices were posted. The experimenters, two undergraduate women, sat behind the table. The experimenters made no effort to attract passersby other than eye contact and a smile. One experimenter was preassigned to interact with participants, while the other pretended to read during the interaction.

Participants were randomly preassigned to one of five conditions. When participants in the requester favor first condition asked about the price of the treats, the experimenter replied, “Hold on, let me get you a fresh one.” She then stood up and retrieved a “fresh” Rice Krispy Treat from a box approximately 10 feet away. Thus, the experimenter performed a favor for the participant by retrieving a fresh treat. When she returned, the experimenter set the treat on the table. However, when sitting down she “accidentally” knocked the cup containing the pens on the ground in front of the table. After the participant picked up the pens and cup, the experimenter responded by saying thanks. At that point, the experimenter announced that the price of the treat was \$4.

Passersby assigned to the participant favor first condition also received a favor when the experimenter retrieved a “fresh” treat and performed a favor by picking up the cup of pens. However, the order in which these events occurred was reversed. Participants in the requester favor only condition also received the “fresh” Rice Krispy treat. However, the experimenter did not knock over the pens, and thus these participants had no opportunity to perform a favor for the experimenter. When individuals in the participant favor only condition asked about the price of the treats, the experimenter knocked the pens over and waited until the participant picked up the pens before announcing the price. The experimenter did not retrieve a “fresh” treat in this condition. Finally, when control condition participants asked about the price of the treats, the experimenter simply replied, “We are selling these for four dollars each.” No additional effort was made in any condition to persuade the participant to purchase the treat. Every participant who saw the experimenter knock over the pens and cup quickly picked these items up.

Results and discussion

We compared the number of people who purchased a treat in each condition. As shown in Table 2, the pattern of results from Experiment 2

TABLE 2
Response to target request: Experiment 2

	<i>Percent</i>		
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Refused</i>	<i>Agreed</i>
Requester favor first	18	8	69.2
Participant favor first	19	7	73.1
Requester favor only	21	4	84.0
Participant favor only	10	16	38.5
Control	10	18	35.7

mirrored that found in the first investigation. As in Experiment 1, an analysis of all five conditions produced a significant overall effect, $\chi^2(4, N = 131) = 20.59, p = .001, \phi = .40$. More important, participants in the requester favor first condition (69.2%) purchased a treat more often than participants in the control condition (35.7%), $\chi^2(1, N = 54) = 4.79, p = .03, \phi = .30$, and participants in the participant favor first condition (73.1%) also complied more than the control condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 54) = 6.14, p = .01, \phi = .34$. Participants in the requester favor only condition (84.0%) once again were significantly more likely to purchase a treat than participants in the control condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 53) = 10.77, p = .001, \phi = .45$. However, the participant favor only condition (38.5%) did not produce more compliance than the control condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 54) = .00$. Compliance rates in the requester favor first condition, the participant favor first condition and the requester favor only condition did not differ significantly.

The findings replicate exactly those from the first experiment. In both investigations, regardless of who went first, participants who exchanged favors with the requester were more likely to agree with a subsequent request from that individual than participants who received no favor. As in Experiment 1, we also found no increase in compliance relative to the control condition when the participant was the only one to perform a favor. The results demonstrate the robust nature of the effects uncovered in the initial investigation.

The combined results from the two experiments provide a clear answer to our primary question. Although returning a favor may satisfy an individual's need to reciprocate an act of kindness, it does not reduce the advantage an unsolicited favor gives to the requester. People are vulnerable to subsequent requests from someone who does them a favor even after they have fulfilled their obligation to reciprocate. In both experiments, these individuals were just as likely to agree with the target request as participants who received a favor they had not yet reciprocated. Why might this be so? It is likely that self-perception changes and consistency motives operate in some situations to prolong the effect of the initial favor. However, these

processes alone did not appear powerful enough in either Experiment 1 or Experiment 2 to account for the increase in compliance. Most likely, the participants reacted to the requesters in our investigations as if they were interacting with friends. It is possible they even felt a fleeting sense of liking for this stranger, and that small increase in attraction might have been powerful enough to lead to the increased compliance (Burger et al., 2001). But even without an increase in liking, participants who exchanged favors with the requester may have responded to a type of friendship heuristic (Dolinski et al., 2001). That is, because the interaction resembled the type they have with friends, participants may have responded to the target request as if it came from a friend. Although this account seems most probable at this point, we conducted a third experiment to test two other possibilities.

EXPERIMENT 3

Although the findings from the first two experiments are consistent with the notion of a friendship heuristic, two other interpretations of the results are possible. First, individuals who engage in an exchange of favors also witness the performance of altruistic behavior. Past studies find that people are more likely to help those in need after watching others engage in helping behavior, in part because thoughts related to altruistic behavior have been made cognitively accessible (Bryan & Test, 1967; Sarason, Sarason, Pierce, Shearin, & Sayers, 1991). Thus, watching the confederate (and themselves) act altruistically during the favor exchange may have triggered a general helping heuristic that guided participants' behavior when responding to the subsequent request. Second, it is possible that the mutual exchange of favors put participants in a good mood, and that this mood then contributed to the increase in compliance. Again, past studies find that receiving a favor can elevate positive mood, which makes people more likely to help others (Isen, Shalker, Clark, & Karp, 1978).

Experiment 3 was designed to test these explanations. If the mutual exchange of favors results in either the modeling or mood effects described above, then participants in these conditions should increase their rates of compliance regardless of who makes the request. However, if something like a friendship heuristic is responsible for the effects uncovered in the first two experiments, then we would expect an increase in compliance only when the request is made by the person with whom the participant exchanged favors.

Method

Participants. A total of 105 undergraduates (22 men, 83 women) served as participants in exchange for class credit.

Procedure. Each session consisted of one participant and two confederates blind to hypotheses posing as participants. One confederate was already waiting in the lab room when the participant arrived, and the second confederate arrived a few seconds later. As in Experiment 1, the experimenter explained that the investigation was about visual perception and that participants would engage in some perceptual tasks. The experimenter then presented three tasks, explaining that time limitations would allow each participant to perform only two. The first two tasks were the design and letter tasks used in the first experiment. The third task required participants to find and circle nine words in a “word search” game. The words were embedded either forward or backward in a large grid of letters. The experimenter demonstrated the task by locating and circling the first word for the participants. As in Experiment 1, participants also were told they would wear a patch over one eye while performing the tasks, and that which eye was covered depended on whether they were right- or left-handed.

The experimenter then distributed one task each to the two confederates and the participant. The real participant was always assigned the word-search task, while the first confederate was given the letter task and the second confederate was given the design task. Participants had been randomly preassigned to one of three conditions. In both the same requester and the different requester conditions, the first confederate completed the letter task quickly. Using the same procedures as in Experiment 1, the confederate left the room and returned with three bottles of water, two of which he or she gave to the participant and the second confederate. If participants were assigned to the control condition, the first confederate left the room, but returned a few minutes later without the water. In all conditions, the second confederate worked at a pace that would allow him or her to complete the task at approximately the same time as the participant.

The experimenter returned to the room soon after the first set of tasks was completed and distributed the second task. This time the real participant was given the letter task, the first confederate was given the design task, and the second confederate was given the word-search task. In both the same requester and the different requester conditions, the first confederate waited until the participant completed the letter task. Then, as in Experiment 1, the first confederate broke a pencil and asked the participant to sharpen it. During this time, the second confederate continued to work on the word-search task. In the control condition, the first confederate simply worked on the tasks without breaking a pencil or asking a favor.

The experimenter returned at approximately the time the confederates finished their tasks and announced that the experiment was over. In the same requester condition, the experimenter signed the second confederate’s credit slip first, and the second confederate quickly left the room. The

experimenter signed the first confederate's credit slip next, then the participant's slip, and the experimenter then exited the room quickly. While the first confederate and the participant were leaving the laboratory area together, the confederate asked the participant the same paper-feedback request used in Experiment 1. In the different requester condition, the first confederate's credit slip was signed first, and the second confederate was left to ask the request. In the control condition, the experimenter alternated between signing the first or second confederate's slips first, thus alternating which of the two confederates asked the request.

Results and discussion

The numbers of participants who agreed to the target request in each condition are shown in Table 3. An analysis of compliance rates found a significant effect across the three conditions, $\chi^2(2, N = 105) = 7.92, p = .02, \phi = .27$. As seen in the Table, participants in the same requester condition (85.7%) agreed to the target request significantly more often than participants in either the control condition (60.0%), $\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 4.62, p = .03, \phi = .26$, or the different requester condition (57.1%), $\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 5.67, p = .02, \phi = .28$. Participants in the different requester and control conditions did not differ significantly, $\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 0.00$.

The findings argue against an interpretation of the first two experiments based on either modeling or mood. The exchange of favors led to an increase in compliance only when the person who had engaged in that exchange was the one who presented the final request. Participants in the different requester condition saw the same altruistic behavior and would have been put in the same mood as participants in the same requester condition. Nonetheless, they were no more likely to agree with the request than participants in the control condition.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

According to the norm of reciprocity, people who receive an unexpected favor feel obligated to return that favor. Consistent with the reciprocity

TABLE 3
Response to target request: Experiment 3

	<i>Percent</i>		
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Refused</i>	<i>Agreed</i>
Same requester	30	5	85.7
Different requester	20	15	57.1
Control	21	14	60.0

norm and past research, participants in our experiments were more likely to agree to a request after they had received an unsolicited favor from the requester. However, satisfying their need to reciprocate did not lessen the participants' vulnerability to a subsequent request from this same individual. In all three experiments, participants who engaged in a mutual exchange of favors with the requester were just as likely to comply with a second request as those who had not yet reciprocated the act of kindness. Moreover, this effect was found regardless of the order in which the participant and the requester performed their favors.

Clearly, psychological processes other than the reciprocity norm come into play when a favor is performed. In all three experiments, these processes were powerful enough to increase compliance even after participants paid off their socially prescribed debt. We have identified several processes that may contribute to this effect. It is likely that a mutual exchange of favors taps into consistency needs and alters the way individuals think about themselves. That is, to be consistent, people who perform one favor for the requester may feel a need to honor a second request. In addition, performing the first favor might cause people to think of themselves as the kind of person who helps others or helps this particular individual. Either of these processes could contribute to an increased likelihood to agree with a subsequent request after a mutual exchange of favors. However, consistency needs and self-perception processes alone could not explain the increased compliance we found in the first two experiments. Participants in those investigations who performed an unreciprocated favor for the confederate were no more likely to agree with the subsequent request than participants who had performed no favors. Changes in mood and the effects of modeled altruism also do not appear responsible for the increased compliance in the mutual exchange conditions. Experiment 3 participants who engaged in a mutual favor exchange showed no increase in compliance when the request came from someone other than the person with whom they had exchanged favors.

To this point, the most likely explanation for the effect appears to be that a mutual exchange of favors triggers a type of friendship heuristic. Past studies demonstrate that people typically respond to requests with heuristic processing, and that we often respond to someone who acts like a friend as if interacting with a real friend. Doing favors for one another is characteristic of friendships (Clark, Ouellette, Powell & Milberg, 1987; Williamson & Clark, 1992). If a mutual exchange of favors triggers a type of friendship heuristic, then we should not be surprised that people exchanging favors with strangers are more likely to agree with a subsequent request.

The findings also have some unsettling implications. Although psychologists often identify unsolicited favors as an effective technique for salespeople, recruiters, and the like, our results suggest we may have fewer

defenses against this tactic than we realize. No doubt there are practical limits to using reciprocal favor exchange as a compliance-inducing tactic. Because heuristic processing is quick and fleeting, the window of opportunity a requester has between exchanging favors and presenting a subsequent request probably is short-lived. The size of the request may also play a role. Researchers find that large requests sometimes cause people to engage in a thoughtful consideration of the request, which then overrides the effects of heuristic processing (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978; Pollock, Smith, Knowles, & Bruce, 1998). Nonetheless, fulfilling our sense of obligation by reciprocating an unexpected favor does not necessarily let us off the hook. In fact, it may make the hook even harder to remove.

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