

Status, Apparel and Touch: Their Joint Effects on Compliance to a Request

Nicolas Guéguen

Université de Bretagne-Sud Vannes - France

Research shows that touch can increase compliance to a request. In this study we investigated how a higher social status, operationalized by the apparel of the solicitor, can also enhance compliance. Participants in an experiment were solicited for a street survey. The interviewer (a man) was clothed in a style conveying a person of high, low or intermediate status. While formulating his request, he touched (or did not touch) the respondent. Results show that higher status associated with touch increased compliance to the request.

Touching the arm or shoulder of a person for 1 to 2 seconds when asking for a favor seems trivial. However, this brief nonverbal contact significantly influences compliance. Brockner, Pressman, Cabitt and Moran (1982) showed that a request to return a dime left in a phone booth accompanied by a light touch on the arm increased compliance from 63 % (no-touch control situation) to 96 %. Similarly, when asked for a dime, passers-by complied in 51 % of the cases when touch was used and 29 % of the cases when no-contact was made (Kleinke, 1977a). In the same way, the percentage of a petition signing increased from 55 % (no touch control condition) to 81 % when a slight touch was made during the request (Willis & Hamm, 1980). Hornik and Ellis (1988) found that touch increased compliance for an interview. Hornik (1987) observed that touch increased the number of persons responding to a street survey and increased compliance in answering a subsequent questionnaire.

Also, when touched, people are more persistent when executing a difficult task consisting of answering a long questionnaire on very provocative subjects (Nannberg & Hansen, 1994). Likewise, a simple touch of a client by a waiter or a waitress in a restaurant increases the amount of the tip (Crusco & Wetzell, 1984; Hornik, 1992b; Lynn, Le & Sherwyn, 1998; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986). Willingness to taste products increases when an employee touches shoppers when making the request and increases the selling rate of the product (Hornik, 1992a; Smith, Gier & Willis, 1982). In the same way, Kaufman and Mahoney

Author info: Correspondence should be sent to: Dr. Nicolas Gueguen, Université de Bretagne-Sud Vannes, France.

North American Journal of Psychology, 2002, Vol. 4, No. 2, 279-286.

© NAJP

(1999) showed that when touched by a waitress, patrons of a public tavern consumed more alcohol than patrons who were not touched.

Helping behavior is also influenced by touch. Goldman and Fordyce (1983) found that when people were touched by a confederate during an interview, greater helping behavior was observed toward a confederate who dropped several questionnaires on the ground. When touched, people were more likely to answer telephones for a charity telethon for crippled children (Goldman, Kiyohara & Pfannensteil, 1985).

Given this research showing that touch has a positive effect on compliance to a request, the question arises as to why this effect occurs in interactions among strangers. Research relating to the initiation of touch between people could be used to explain this influence. Research shows that touch is often initiated by individuals of higher status towards individuals of lower status (Hall, 1996; Henley, 1973). The role of touch as a status indicator has support in the literature (Major & Heslin, 1982; Summerhayes & Suchner, 1978). These experimenters asked their subjects to examine a series of still photographs portraying dyadic interactions. In half of the cases, one person is obviously touching the other. The results show that in the touch condition, the "toucher" was evaluated as more dominant than the "touchee," whereas no perceived difference in dominance was found between the two persons when no contact occurred. From these results we can speculate that when a stranger initiates touch while asking for help that stranger is perceived as having a higher status. Although this assumption has not been tested directly with touch, related research has shown that a solicitor wearing high status clothing is likely to experience compliance with his or her request (Goodman & Gareis, 1993).

Numerous studies show that high status people are likely to get help when they solicit it. In most of these studies, the status was manipulated either by the apparel of the solicitor or by status-relevant information given to participants. Kleinke (1977b) showed that people will more readily give a coin to a stranger in the street if the individual is neatly dressed (80 %) rather than to someone whose appearance is slovenly (32 %). These results were more recently confirmed by an experiment conducted by McElroy and Morrow (1994) when the solicitation was aimed at raising money for a charitable organization. Status is also linked with the individual's integrity. Thus, Bickman (1971) has demonstrated that participants would more readily give back the money they had found in a telephone booth to a high status individual when this person argued that it was his/hers, rather than when it was an individual of equal status. These studies highlight an effect of status upon compliance to requests emanating from high status individuals. Nevertheless, the same effect was observed on spontaneous helping behavior. Solomon and Herman

(1977) found that passersby were more willing to help a high-status woman than a mid-status woman who had dropped her groceries while loading them in the trunk of her car.

To my knowledge, no research has tested the joint effect of status and touch on compliance with a request for help. Research on proxemic behavior and the effect of status of the person soliciting help provides insight into the possible relationship between status, touch, and compliance. McElroy and Morrow (1994) showed, by manipulating status through the clothing of a male confederate, that an individual of higher status, requesting funds for a charitable organization, was granted more money compared to a situation where he was clothed more informally. However, the funds were significantly higher only when the confederate of high status was placed at about 25/30 centimeters of the subject. When the confederate had a lower status appearance, the reverse effect was observed: being close (30 centimeters) led to a significant decrease in gifts compared to a situation where the physical distance was larger (1 meter).

Thus, research suggests that people tolerate or perceive more positively the invasion of their private space if the invader is of higher status. It is possible that the same occurs with touch. Lynn, Le and Sherwyn (1998) showed that touch of restaurant patrons by a waiter produces a different effect according to the age of the customers. A positive effect of touch on tipping was observed when the patrons were younger than the waiter but a negative effect was found when they were older than the server. In accordance with status norms, older people initiate touch more often than younger people. It seems that transgression of this norm led the "touchee" to more negatively evaluate the "toucher," which, in return, decreased tipping behavior.

In the current experiment the effect of status symbols and touch was evaluated. Insofar as studies show that requests emanating from a high-status person have a higher probability of being accepted, and that there is a positive relationship between proxemic and tactile behaviors, we expected increased compliance to a request to be accompanied by increased status of the solicitor. Because people avoid proximity with lower status individuals, we expected that touch of a low status solicitor would lead to less compliance to a request than when the solicitor was of intermediate status.

METHOD

Subjects

The participants were 90 men and 90 women (age range between 30-50 years), selected randomly in malls of an average-sized provincial city in France. Every fifth participant passing by a definite zone was asked to participate.

Procedure

The experiment took place on sunny days. A confederate, a 27 year-old man, solicited the passersby on the street. The confederate claimed to be conducting an investigation for an association of parents of school pupils and asked the participants if they would agree to answer a questionnaire about television programs for children. The confederate added that the questionnaire included ten questions and that it took 2 to 3 minutes to answer it. According to the condition, the confederate was clothed in an elegant way (suit and tie), conventional (clean jeans and tee-shirt, common standard shoes) or in a very neglected way (worn, dirty and torn trousers, hardly clean tee-shirt, dirty hair). These clothing differences comprised the manipulation of status. A manipulation check of the relevance of this attribution was made among a group of 45 persons taken in the street. They were asked to look at the confederate and to evaluate his social status, using a scale with 9 steps ranging from 1 (lower status) to 9 (higher status). The analysis showed a difference according to the apparel of the confederate: 3.28 for the clothing aspect intended to incarnate the lower status, 5.83 for the conventional level and 7.21 for the elegant appearance. While formulating his request, the confederate, in touch condition, slightly touch the forearm of the person. If the person refused, the investigator thanked him. If he/she complied, then the questionnaire was administered. The questions were of the type: "*Which channel do you think offers the best programs for children?, Do you think that the programs for youth are diversified enough?, What would you like to more often see on the TV as youth programs?,*" At the end of the interview, the participants were thanked for their participation.

RESULTS

The dependent variable used in this experiment was the number of respondents who agreed to the request. The results obtained according to gender, status and touch conditions are presented in Table 1 below.

A 2 (touch/no touch) \times 3 (high/intermediate/low status) \times 2 (male/female) log-linear analysis was used to analyze our data. Results showed a main effect of touch ($\chi^2_{(1, 179)} = 7.73, p < .01$). When touched,

participants complied in 38.9 % of cases, compared to 20.0 % in the no-touch control condition. A main effect of status was found ($\chi^2_{(2, 178)} = 41.93, p < .001$) and confirms a linear relation between status and compliance to the request: 58.4 % for higher status, 25.0 % for intermediate status and 5.0 % for lower status. The gender of the participants did not affect compliance ($\chi^2_{(1, 179)} = 0.67, ns$). Status by Touch was the only significant interaction ($\chi^2_{(6, 174)} = 14.28, p < .03$). However this interaction was qualified by differences between the higher status and intermediate status conditions ($\chi^2_{(4, 116)} = 26.88, p < .03$). Indeed, the interaction of Status and Touch in the groups with intermediate status and lower status was not significant ($\chi^2_{(4, 116)} = 8.64, ns$). High status compared to low or intermediate status led to increase in the efficiency of touch, whereas low status compared to an intermediate status did not decrease the effect of touch.

TABLE 1 Percentage of Compliance to the Request According to the Conditions of Touch, Status and Participant Gender

| | Higher Status | Intermediate status | Lower status |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Touch | | | |
| Women participants | 86.7 | 33.3 | 6.7 |
| Men participants | 73.3 | 26.7 | 6.7 |
| Total | 80.0 | 30.0 | 6.7 |
| No Touch | | | |
| Women participants | 46.7 | 20.0 | 0.0 |
| Men participants | 26.7 | 20.0 | 6.7 |
| Total | 36.7 | 20.0 | 3.4 |

Note: There were 15 participants in each group

DISCUSSION

Present findings have shown that when the "toucher" was of higher status, there was a significant increase in compliance to the request. This findings confirms the first prediction. Additionally, touch generally increased compliance to a request. These results confirmed those of previous studies (Brockner, Pressman, Cabitt & Moran, 1982; Goldman & Fordyce, 1983; Goldman, Kiyohara & Pfannensteil, 1985; Hornik, 1987; Hornik & Ellis, 1988; Kleinke, 1977a; Smith, Gier & Willis, 1982; Willis & Hamm, 1980). Compared to the intermediate status condition, the high status condition increased compliance to the confederate request, whereas the low-status condition led to a decrease in compliance. Again, such results confirm those of previous studies on helping behavior (Bickman, 1971; Kleinke, 1977b; McElroy & Morrow, 1994).

Contrary to our expectations, touch, compared to non-touch, did not lead to decrease compliance to the request of the low-status confederate. However the absence of an effect must be interpreted with caution. The percentage of compliance to the request was near zero in both levels (touch/no touch) where the status was manipulated. It is possible that the subjects avoided any interaction with the solicitor. Therefore, this avoiding effect does not fully permit the study of the effect of touch on participants' compliance. It is possible that our confederate frightened the participants in the low status conditions, which led them to avoid any contact with him and thus to refuse his request in both conditions.

Surprisingly, no gender effect was found in this experiment. Research had shown that men are more resistant to the effect of physical contact (Fisher, Rytting & Heslin, 1976) especially when the toucher is a male (Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin & Shores, 1992). A possible explanation of this absence of gender effect is that the present research was conducted in France, whereas most of the studies cited above were conducted in the United States. Studies have shown that French people are more accustomed to tactile contact than American people (Field, 1999; Jourard, 1966). Perhaps this familiarity led male participants to react positively to tactile contact with a stranger.

Why a stronger effect of touch in combination with higher status? Several explanations are possible. Each of them would require empirical support.

It is possible that touch makes status become more salient and thus mediates a component traditionally associated with status: expertise. Hornik (1987) showed that touch enhanced this perception of competence and professionalism attributed to an investigator. It is thus possible that a reminder of this perception occurred when the "toucher" was of higher status, thus increasing the probability of complying with the request.

It is also possible that being touched by a person of higher status is interpreted as a sign of validation for the self. Howard, Gengler and Jain (1997) found that a sign of respect from a high status person directed toward a low status person enhanced compliance to a request compared to a situation where this sign was not granted. We know that high status people are more likely to initiate touch toward low status people (Hall, 1996) but studies have shown that low status people are more likely to seek tactile contact from high status people (Juni & Brannon, 1981). Perhaps there is a need for implicit recognition among people of lower status. If this sign of recognition is forthcoming, it may predispose the low-status target to comply. This interpretation could explain the results observed by McElroy and Morrow (1994). They showed that the reduced physical distance between a male confederate of high status and a target

person when formulating a request led to more compliance than in a comparable condition where the physical distance was larger. However, this effect could not be explained only by the reduction of distance between the subject and the confederate. When the same physical distance manipulation occurred with a requester of intermediate status, the opposite effect was obtained, less compliance with the request.

The explanations proposed here are speculative, and further research is necessary to evaluate the processes or cognitive states activated by tactile contact of a high status solicitor. Personality evaluations of the "toucher" and the self-esteem of the participants must be considered. A *post hoc* control of the participant status could also be made, in order to see if there are differences in touch susceptibility according to the status difference between the "toucher" and the "touchee."

The present results show that it is possible to increase the persuasive effect of touch by manipulating the appearance of the "toucher." Consequently, we might all imagine survey organizations using this knowledge in order to reduce their investigation costs and to increase sample sizes.

REFERENCES

- Bickman, L. (1971). The effect of social status on the honesty of others. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 85*, 87-92.
- Brockner, J., Pressman, B., Cabitt, J., & Moran, P. (1982). Nonverbal intimacy, sex, and compliance: A field study. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 6*, 253-258.
- Crusco, A., & Wetzel, C. (1984). The midas touch: The effects of interpersonal touch on restaurant tipping. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 10*, 512-517.
- Field, T. (1999). Preschoolers in America are touched less and are more aggressive than preschoolers in France. *Early Childhood Development and Care, 151*, 11-17.
- Fisher, J., Rytting, M., & Heslin, R. (1976). Hands touching hands: Affective and evaluative effects on interpersonal touch. *Sociometry, 39*, 416-421.
- Goldman, M., & Fordyce, J. (1983). Prosocial behavior as affected by eye contact, touch, and voice expression. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 121*, 125-129.
- Goldman, M., Kiyohara, O., & Pfannensteil, D. (1985). Interpersonal touch, social labeling and the foot-in-the-door effect. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 152*, 143-147.
- Goodman, M., & Gareis, K. (1993). The influence of status in the decision to help. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 133*, 23-31.
- Hall, J. (1996). Touch, status, and gender at professional meetings. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 20*, 23-44.
- Henley, N. (1973). The politics of touch. In P. Brown (Ed.), *Radical psychology*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Hornik, J. (1987). The effect of touch and gaze upon compliance and interest of interviewees. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 127, 681-683.
- Hornik, J. (1992a). Effects of physical contact on customers' shopping time and behavior. *Marketing Letters*, 3, 49-55.
- Hornik, J. (1992b). Tactile stimulation and consumer response. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19, 449-458.
- Hornik, J., & Ellis, S. (1988). Strategies to secure compliance for a mall intercept interview. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 52, 539-551.
- Howard, D., Gengler, C., & Jain A. (1997). The name remembrance effect : a test of alternative explanations. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 12, 801-810.
- Jourard, S. (1966). An exploratory study of body accessibility. *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 5, 221-231.
- Juni, S., & Brannon, R. (1981). Interpersonal touching as a function of status and sex. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 114, 135-136.
- Kaufman, D., & Mahoney, J. (1999). The effect of waitresses' touch on alcohol consumption in dyads. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 139, 261-267.
- Kleinke, C. (1977a). Compliance to requests made by gazing and touching experimenters in field settings. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 13, 218-223.
- Kleinke, C. (1977b). Effects of dress on compliance to requests in a field setting. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 101, 223-240.
- Lynn, M., Le, J.-M., & Sherwyn, D. (1998). Reach out and touch your customers. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 39, 60-65.
- Major, B., & Heslin, R. (1982). Perceptions of cross-sex and same-sex nonreciprocal touch : it is better to give than to receive. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 6, 148-162.
- McElroy, J., & Morrow, P. (1994). Personal space, personal appearance, and personal selling. *Psychological Reports*, 74, 425-426.
- Nannberg, J., & Hansen, C. (1994). Post-compliance touch: An incentive for task performance. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 134, 301-307.
- Roese, N., Olson, J., Borenstein, M., Martin, A. & Shores, A. (1992). Same-sex touching behavior: The moderating role of homophobic attitudes. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 16, 249-259.
- Smith, D., Gier, J., & Willis, F. (1982). Interpersonal touch and compliance with a marketing request. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 3, 35-38.
- Solomon, H., & Herman, L. (1977). Status symbols and prosocial behavior: The effect of the victim's car on helping. *The Journal of Psychology*, 97, 271-273.
- Summerhayes, D., & Suchner, R. (1978). Power implications of touch in male-female relationships. *Sex Roles*, 4, 103-110.
- Stephen, R., & Zweigenhaft, R. (1986). The effect on tipping of a waitress touching male and female customers. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 126, 141-142.
- Willis, F., & Hamm, H. (1980). The use of interpersonal touch in securing compliance, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 5, 49-55.

