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REPLICATIONS AND REFINEMENTS

Mimicry and Helping Behavior: An Evaluation of Mimicry on Explicit Helping Request

NICOLAS GUÉGUEN
ANGÉLIQUE MARTIN
SÉBASTIEN MEINERI
Université Bretagne-Sud

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ABSTRACT. Research found that mimicry behavior led to increased helping behavior toward the mimicker and is associated with higher positive evaluation of the mimicker. Furthermore, studies on helping behavior focused only on implicit helping behavior, whereas no experimental study on explicit helping request was tested. An experiment was carried out in which a female student-confederate mimicked or not mimicked a participant during a discussion about paintings and, after that, solicited the participant for a written feedback about an essay. It was found that mimicry increased compliance to the confederate's request.

Keywords: mimicry, request, helping behavior, evaluation

THE CHAMELEON EFFECT (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999) refers to nonconscious mimicry of others' postures, facial expression, mannerisms, and verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Research found that mimicry is associated with higher positive evaluation of the mimicker. (Bailenson & Yee, 2005; Chartrand and Bargh, 1999) and that mimicry leads to enhanced pro-social behavior toward the mimickers. Van Baaren, Holland, Steenaert, and Van Knippenberg (2003) found in two experiments that a waitress who mimicked the verbal behavior of customers in a restaurant by literally repeating their order increased the

Address correspondence to Nicolas Guéguen, Université de Bretagne-Sud, UFR LSHS, 4, rue Jean Zay, BP 92116, Lorient, 56100, France; nicolas.gueguen@univ-ubs.fr (e-mail).

size of her tips. Van Baaren, Holland, Kawakami, and Van Knippenberg (2004) found that mimickers who "accidentally" dropped some pens on the floor were more favorably helped (100%) than participants in the non-mimicry condition (33%).

Then, these later studies seem to show that mimicry is associated with an increase of helping behavior. Furthermore, in these two later studies, only implicit helping behavior was tested, and no direct solicitation of help was addressed by the mimicker. An implicit helping request is a request that is not directly addressed by a solicitor to someone: It is only a situation in which someone decides to help a person in a spontaneous way. On the other hand, an explicit request is a verbal solicitation directly addressed by a solicitor to someone. This situation needs a real social interaction. Many scientists (Bierhoff, 2002) consider using explicit requests a better method to study the determinants of helping behavior, because with such request people are more sensitive to contextual factors of the social interaction, such as smiles, tactile contact, etc. The purpose of our experiment was to extend the research between mimicry and helping behavior, and to test the effect of mimicry on verbal solicitation of a mimicker. Given the previous results, we hypothesized that mimicry would be associated with greater compliance to a request addressed by a mimicker.

The participants were 60 undergraduate female students (19–20 years old) in business administration randomly assigned to the two conditions. In the first part of the experiment, the participant seated in front of a woman-confederate presented as a participant. The two members of the dyad were instructed to describe their personal opinion toward painting photography. During the task, in the mimicry condition, the confederate was instructed to mimic nonverbal behavior of the participant, such as body orientation and position of arms or arms movements. In the no-mimicry control condition, the confederate was instructed not to mimic the participant's nonverbal behavior. The interaction lasted approximately 10 minutes. After that, the participant and the confederate were thanked by the experimenter and left the room. As the participant and confederate began walking down the hallway, the confederate pulled out a 10-page paper from her bag and explained that a French communication class assignment required that she find someone she did not know who will critique her essay. The confederate then asked the participant if she could read her essay. The confederate added that she needed written feedback within 48 hours. The confederate then waited until the participant said "yes" or "no" to her request and then, after the response, debriefed the participant. The verbal behavior of the confederate was registered by a small recorder, and the nonverbal behavior was recorded by a camera placed in the hallway. Two coders blind to the prediction were instructed to view each video-clip and sound record and to evaluate any difference in the two experimental conditions. No difference was found either with verbal or non verbal behavior. A high inter-reliability score was found between the two coders with nonverbal behavior ($r(58) = .94$, $p < .001$) and with verbal behaviour ($r(58) = .91$, $p < .001$).

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In the mimicry condition, 76.7% of the participants complied with the confederate's request (23/30), whereas there was 46.7% in the non-mimicry control condition (14/30). The difference between the two conditions was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 60) = 5.71, p = .02, r = .29$).

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, we wanted to replicate the effect of mimicry on helping behavior, which was only found in two previous studies (Van Baaren, et al., 2003; Van Baaren et al. 2004). Second, we wanted to extend the effect of mimicry on helping behavior to explicit requests addressed by a mimicker toward an individual who was mimicked. The results showed a positive effect of mimicry on compliance to explicit request, and this effect can be extended to explicit verbal helping request addressed by a mimicker. This extension and the replication of the effect of mimicry on helping behavior seem to show that mimicry is a powerful technique to increase helping behavior. For Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng and Chartrand (2003), mimicry could serve to foster relationships with others, and previous studies found that mimicry is associated with higher positive evaluation of the mimicker (Bailenson & Yee, 2005; Chartrand and Bargh, 1999; Maurer & Tindall, 1983). This later effect could explain the link between mimicry and helping behavior. If mimicry serves to foster relationship and is associated to greater liking of the confederate, this could explain the effect of mimicry on pro-social behavior. Helping somebody is a good strategy in fostering social relationships, and we used to help people we like (Burger, Messain, del Prado & Anderson, 2004). If mimicry leads to more positively perceiving someone and if mimicry is interpreted as the desire of the mimicker to create affiliation and rapport, then this dual effect could explain why we help more favorably our mimicker.

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AUTHOR NOTES

Nicolas Guéguen is a Professor of Social Behavior at the University of Bretagne-Sud in France. His research interests focus on atmospherics and consumer behavior, nonverbal influence and compliance-gaining procedures. **Angélique Martin** is an Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Bretagne-Sud in France. Her research interests focus on mimicry and nonverbal influence. **Sébastien Meineri** is an Associate Professor of Social Behavior at the University of Bretagne-Sud in France. His research interests focus on compliance-gaining procedures and nonverbal influence.

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