

APPEARANCE (ETHNIC ORIGIN) OF REQUESTER AFFECTS THE FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR TECHNIQUE¹

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Summary.—A study was designed to examine the effect of the appearance of the requester within one of the variants of the foot-in-the-door paradigm, that is, the foot-in-the-door with implicit demand described by Ulanowitz in 1975. A confederate (Black vs Blanc vs Beur³) approached the participant in a park and presented a small request. Three steps further, the confederate “accidentally” dropped 30 sheets of paper. Whether or not the participant helped the confederate in retrieving the dropped pamphlets was recorded as the implicit dependent variable. The foot-in-the-door effect was observed solely when the requester was Blanc. This result shows that the foot-in-the-door effect is not as strong as the literature suggests and undermines the usual interpretations of the foot-in-the-door effect in terms of self-perception and commitment.

The basic foot-in-the-door procedure is rather simple: “Once a person has been induced to comply with a small request, (s)he is more likely to comply with a larger demand” (Freedman & Fraser, 1966, p. 195). These authors provided the first experimental demonstration of the foot-in-the-door technique. They observed that California housewives were more than twice as likely to agree to a target request (i.e., to receive a crew of six men to conduct an inventory of products of consumption) when they had first answered eight questions (i.e., a small request), compared with a control group of housewives to whom the target request was presented directly.

Since this original experiment, researchers have tried a large number of variants. In the current experiment, two variants were used: social labeling and foot-in-the-door with implicit demand. Goldman, Seever, and Seever (1982) have shown that the efficiency of the technique should be increased when combined with social labeling. The authors asked students for directions (small request). They were either simply thanked or labeled positively (“You’re helpful”). Then, the target request was delivered: to give two hours of their time for a charity telethon. As predicted, the com-

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²Black refers to the African-French citizens, Blanc refers to Caucasian-French citizens, and Beur refers to North African-French citizens. It was decided to keep these renown and common expressions in France because they reflect the patchwork of French society without being deleterious.

pliance was higher in the positive-label condition (67%) than in the no-label condition (20%). This result has been refined (for review, see Burger, 1999; Fointiat, Caillaud, & Martinie, 2004; Fointiat, 2006). Ulanowitz (1975) proposed a variation of the foot-in-the-door “with implicit demand.” According to the original paradigm, two requests are involved, but only the small request is explicitly formulated. In turn, the target request is not directly presented to the participants, but appears “in an implicit way” (Pascual & Guéguen, 2004). Ulanowitz’s experiment (1975) took place in a supermarket. A first experimenter asked a customer to keep an eye on his bag while he went out to find something he had just lost (small request). After a while, the first experimenter came back, and explained he had found what he had lost. Then, a second experimenter passed by the customer and “inadvertently” dropped a package. The implicit target behavior was to help “spontaneously” the experimenter, by picking up the dropped package. As predicted, these participants were more willing to help the experimenter than participants of a control group, to whom the small request was not presented. These results were replicated (Foehl & Goldman, 1983; Pascual & Guéguen, 2004). The Foehl and Goldman (1983) experiment took place in a shopping area. A confederate approached a pedestrian and asked for directions to a nearby street. All participants provided directions. Immediately afterwards, the confederate dropped 30 pamphlets, and he began to pick them up. As expected, the participants were more willing to help the experimenter (85%) in retrieving the “accidentally” dropped pamphlets (implicit target request) than were participants in a control condition (10%) in which the confederate dropped the pamphlets in front of a participant.

Meta-analyses supported that the foot-in-the-door manipulation reliably increases social compliance from 15 to 25% (Dillard, 1990), and the conditions under which the foot-in-the-door effect can be enhanced have been explored (Fern, Monroe, & Avila, 1986; Burger, 1999). Surprisingly, few experimental investigations have taken into account the effect of the requester variable directly. For instance, Patch (1988) investigated the question of the requester legitimacy, Stimpson and Waranusitkule (1987) and Baer and Goldman (1978) varied the perceived familiarity of the requester, and Harris and Samerotte (1976) showed that compliance was higher when the requester was in need (e.g., he requested assistance to purchase food). In that experiment, participants “appeared to be of Anglo-American ethnic background” and requesters were “men in their twenties, dressed neatly but casually.” As often as not, previous research has not been sufficiently detailed in describing those making foot-in-the-door requests, generally reporting only sex and age. The lack of information might suggest that the foot-in-the-door effect is robust, regardless of the characteristics of the requester and participants.

This report explores the effectiveness of the foot-in-the-door tactic while taking into account the appearance of the requester. The intent was first to replicate the foot-in-the-door effect (Uranowitz, 1975; Foehl & Goldman, 1983) and the social labeling effect (Goldman, *et al.*, 1982). Then, the effect of the appearance of the requester was checked. In line with previous research in which the skin tone of the requester (white vs black) was manipulated (Eastwick & Gardner, 2009), it was hypothesized that the foot-in-the-door effect might be observed no matter the appearance of the requester, pointing out the robustness of the technique.

METHOD

Design

The experiment was a 3 (foot-in-the-door: no small request vs basic small request vs positively-labeled small request) \times 3 (requester appearance: Black vs Blanc vs Beur) between-subjects design. The three confederates were dressed in a casual way for young people of their age (tee-shirts, jeans, and tennis shoes). Furthermore, they were selected on the subjective criteria of their skin-tone. Ten evaluators (first-year students from the Department of Psychology) were instructed to examine photographs of the confederates and to identify the ethnic origin of the requesters; all the responses were congruent.

Participants

Anonymous passers-by ($N = 180$; 106 women, 74 men) took part in the experiment. Since the experiment was carried out in a park from 10:00 to 17:00, no demographic information was available. Participants were adults (approximately 20 to 65 years old, walking in the park alone) and Caucasian. Three confederates (Black vs Blanc vs Beur) took part in the experiment. They were blind to the hypotheses. The participants were assigned to three conditions (control, foot-in-the-door, positively labeled foot-in-the-door) in a random order.

Procedure

Similar to Foehl and Goldman's experiment (1983), a confederate approached a passer-by and asked for direction to a beach (small request). At the end of the explanation, the passer-by was politely thanked (basic foot-in-the-door condition) or warmly thanked "You're really helpful" (positively labeled foot-in-the-door condition). After three steps, the confederate dropped 30 sheets of paper (implicit large request). In control conditions, there was no small request: a confederate dropped the sheets of paper in front of a passer-by. Upon dropping the sheets of paper, in all conditions the confederate began to pick them up. According to Foehl and

Goldman (1983), the implicit dependant variable was whether or not the passer-by helped in retrieving the "accidentally" dropped sheets of paper.

RESULTS

All differences between women and men were nonsignificant. Hence, the data were aggregated. Second, none of the passers-by declined the small request.

Logistic regression (logit model) was used to predict participants' compliance (help vs no help) as a function of foot-in-the-door (control vs basic vs positively labeled) and appearance (Black vs Blanc vs Beur) of the requester. The overall regression revealed a significant main effect of the foot-in-the-door [Wald χ^2 (2, $N = 180$) = 6.40, $p < .05$, Cramer's phi, $\phi_c = .13$] and a significant main effect of appearance of the requester [Wald χ^2 (2, $N = 180$) = 15.10, $p < .0001$, $\phi_c = .20$]. Moreover, an interaction of foot-in-the-door and appearance of the requester was observed [Wald χ^2 (4, $N = 180$) = 12.26, $p < .01$, $\phi_c = .18$]. To elucidate the interaction, the effectiveness of the foot-in-the-door technique was explored when the appearance of the requester was analyzed separately. Thus, foot-in-the-door was effective at increasing compliance for the Blanc requester [Wald χ^2 ($N = 60$) = 7.80, $p < .005$, $\phi = .25$]; positively labeled foot-in-the-door also increased compliance when the requester was Blanc [Wald χ^2 ($N = 40$) = 4.0, $p < .04$, $\phi = .31$]. On the other hand, foot-in-the-door did not increase compliance for either the Black requester [Wald χ^2 ($N = 57$) = .17, ns] or the Beur requester [Wald χ^2 ($N = 63$) < 1, ns]. Contrary to the hypothesis, the results indicated that the participants were susceptible to the foot-in-the-door compliance technique only if the requester was Blanc.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS WHO HELPED THE REQUESTER IN RETRIEVING "ACCIDENTALLY" DROPPED PAPERS, AS A FUNCTION OF FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR AND APPEARANCE OF THE REQUESTER

Foot-in-the-door Condition	Appearance of the Requester						Total	
	Black		Blanc		Beur			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No (control)	1/19	5.2	2/20	10	3/21	14.2	6/60	10
Basic	3/19	15.7	6/20	30	0/21	0	9/60	15
Positively labeled	2/19	10.5	12/20	60	2/21	9.5	16/60	26.6
Total	6/57	10.5	20/60	33.3	5/63	7.9		

DISCUSSION

The foot-in-the-door technique is effective in inducing compliance, despite the fact that the demand is implicit (Uranowitz, 1975; Foehl & Goldman, 1983). In the same way, the results suggest that labeling the small request increases the effectiveness of the foot-in-the-door technique.

In that sense, the results are in line with those obtained previously (Goldman, *et al.*, 1982).

More surprising, both the foot-in-the-door effect and the positively labeled foot-in-the-door effect disappeared if the requester's appearance was Black or Beur. These results are hardly compatible with the theoretical interpretations of the foot-in-the-door phenomenon (Kiesler, 1971; Bem, 1972). Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) is the most common explanation for the foot-in-the-door effect. It posits that people can infer their own attitudes by examining their own behavior, i.e., people have vague ideas about their attitudes and frequently do not know why they engage in behaviors. As applied to the foot-in-the-door procedure, people are said to change their attitudes as a result of seeing themselves agree with the initial small request. Freedman and Fraser (1966, p. 201) also support that position: "Once (s)he has agreed to a request, his/her attitude may change. (S)He may become, in his/her own eyes the kind of person who does this sort of thing, who agrees to requests made by strangers, who takes action on things s/he believes in, who cooperates with good causes." On the other hand, the self-perception explanation also predicts an increase in compliance to the target request when the participants were labeled for agreeing to the small request. According to self-perception theory, labeling may provide information that reinforces the individual's personal attribution for the earlier behavior (i.e., the small request).

Commitment theory (Kiesler, 1971) provides an alternate theoretical explanation for the foot-in-the-door effect: "Commitment corresponds to the conditions in which an action was carried out and enables an attribute to match this action to the person who carried it out" (Joule & Beauvois, 1998, p. 20). In other words, committing first to an innocuous behavior (small request) increases the likelihood of complying with a subsequent larger request. From this point of view, using an appropriate label (i.e., a personality trait) is a means to reinforce the initial commitment. In that case, the personality trait permits high action identification (Wegner & Vallacher, 1986), insuring at least short-term maintenance and the persistence of that behavior.

Neither the self-perception theory nor the commitment theory can account for the results observed in the Black and Beur conditions. In the control condition, few passers-by spontaneously helped the confederate, whatever his appearance. Concerning the small request, each passer-by gave directions, whatever the appearance of the requester (Black, Blanc, or Beur). However, when the opportunity was offered to help the requester (implicit foot-in-the-door), participants were more inclined to help the Blanc requester rather than the Black or the Beur requester. These results might be understood in terms of discrimination (Dovidio, Kawakami,

Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). They may be the expression of a subtle form of racism (e.g., aversive racism; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Aversive racism is individuals with a discrepancy between their prejudicial attitudes at the implicit and explicit levels (Son Hing, Li, & Zanna, 2002). In line with this perspective, the passers-by agreed with the explicit small request, but at the same time, failed to help the out-group requester. Undoubtedly, these results need some refinement, taking into account the characteristics of the passers-by as well as those of the requester. In any case, these results open up a new area of research, combining social influence strategies and intergroup relations as suggested by the recent work of Eastwick and Gardner (2009).

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