

Interaction Between Gaze and Legitimacy of Request on Compliance in a Field Setting

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ABSTRACT: It was hypothesized that experimenter gaze would lead to increased compliance with a legitimate request and decreased compliance with an illegitimate request. Subjects (95 males, 73 females) in Experiment 1 gave more dimes for a phone call to gazing rather than non-gazing female experimenters. Experimenter gaze did not influence dimes given by subjects for a candy bar. Experiment 2 replicated Experiment 1 with a different legitimacy manipulation and with an additional treatment including both gaze and touch. A significant interaction showed that subjects (56 males, 58 females) gave more dimes for a legitimate request (phone call) when they received gaze alone or gaze and touch from a female experimenter. Subjects gave more dimes for an illegitimate request (buying gum) when the experimenter did not gaze at or touch them.

A number of studies have shown that affective reactions to gaze and close proximity by another person are mediated by attributes of that person and the context of the interaction. Ellsworth and Carlsmith (1968) and Scherwitz and Helmreich (1973) found that subjects liked a favorable experimenter best when the experimenter engaged in high levels of gaze. An unfavorable experimenter was preferred under conditions of low gaze. Subjects in an experiment by Reis and Halek (Note 3) preferred a newscaster

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who looked at the television camera while giving good news and who looked away from the camera while giving bad news. Kleinke, Staneski, and Berger (1975), Kleinke, Staneski, and Pipp (1975), and Scherwitz and Helmreich (1973) have shown that males give unfavorable evaluations to unattractive females but not to attractive females who engage in low levels of gaze in a social interaction. Schiffenbauer and Schiavo (1976) and Storms and Thomas (1977) found that positive attraction of subjects was intensified toward a confederate who sat very close and acted in a friendly manner. In the same studies, negative feelings were intensified when the confederate sat very close and acted in an unfriendly manner. Kahn and McGaughey (1977) reported that physical closeness led to increased liking for an opposite-sex confederate but not for a same-sex confederate.

Research has also shown that gaze and close proximity in positive and negative contexts have differential effects on helping. Baron (1978) found that subjects were more likely to help a high need experimenter who stood close rather than far and less likely to help a low need experimenter who stood close rather than far. Ellsworth and Langer (1976), Ernest and Cooper (Note 1), Kleinke (1977a), Kleinke and Singer (1979), and Snyder, Grether, and Keller (1974) have shown that subjects are more likely to help gazing rather than nongazing experimenters in a situation that is unambiguous and socially appropriate. Ellsworth and Langer (1976) and Reis and Werner (Note 4) have shown that subjects are less likely to help gazing experimenters in a context that is socially inappropriate or ambiguous.

The following two experiments were designed to measure the effects of gaze on compliance with requests that were either legitimate (dime for phone call) or illegitimate (dime for candy bar or gum). It was expected that subjects would find it excusable and acceptable to be disturbed with a request for a dime by an experimenter who needed to make a phone call and that, under these circumstances, experimenter gaze would lead to increased compliance with the request. It was also expected that subjects would find it unacceptable to be disturbed with a request for a dime by an experimenter who wished to buy a candy bar or gum and that, under these circumstances, experimenter gaze would lead to reduced compliance with the request.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Eight female college students served as experimenters, working in teams of two. Experimenters were casually dressed. One experimenter approached a subject and a second experimenter unobtrusively recorded his or her sex and estimated age. Each experimenter approached an approximately equal number of subjects in each condition. Male and female subjects were equally represented among all treatment conditions. Before conducting the experiment, experimenters practiced with role-playing subjects. Observers recorded proxemic and smiling behaviors of experimenters during the practice sessions to ensure that the experimental treatments could be manipulated in a consistent manner. Experimenters were not motivated by their instructor to get "significant" results, they were not informed of experimental hypotheses, and they did not compile their data until the experiment was completed.

Experimenters approached subjects (95 males and 73 females) at Logan Airport in Boston and made a legitimate ("Excuse me. Could you lend me a dime? I have to call someone to pick me up.") or illegitimate ("Excuse me. Could you lend me a dime? I want to buy a candy bar.") request. While making the request the experimenter either gave constant gaze¹ or no gaze to the subject. In the gaze condition, experimenters looked persistently at the subject's face or eyes. In the no-gaze

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF TOUCH BY RACE AND SUCCESS

	Blacks		Whites	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Success related touch	49	65%	13	25%
Other touch	26	35%	38	75%

¹The manipulation of *constant gaze* in the present experiments corresponds with Ellsworth, Carlsmith, and Henson's (1972, p. 303) definition of *staring* as a "gaze or look which persists regardless of the behavior of the other person."

condition, experimenters looked over the subject's shoulder or down toward the ground.² Experimenters had practiced to be able to approach subjects to a distance of .5 m. During the experimental trials experimenters had no conversation with subjects. Subjects who gave the experimenter a dime after the request were scored as compliers. If the subject asked a question or attempted conversation, the experimenter asked for a dime a second time. Subjects who did not produce a dime after the second request were scored as noncompliers. Subjects who replied that they had no change and made no attempt to look for it were also scored as noncompliers. Two subjects who actively searched their purse or pockets for change without success were scored as compliers.³ Experimenters attempted to avoid bias in choosing subjects by administering the treatments for each trial randomly to the first adult they could find either sitting or standing alone in one of the various areas of the airport. After each trial, experimenters returned the dimes to complying subjects with as much explanation about the experiment the subject was interested in hearing.

Results

Six people who persistently attempted conversation after the second request were not included in the sample.⁴ There was no significant relationship between subjects' estimated ages and their compliance in the experiment. Results for individual experimenters did not interact with the experimental treatments (McGuigan, 1963) and their data were combined. A test of the predicted interaction between experimenter gaze and legitimacy of request with an arc-sine transformation (Langer & Abelson, 1972) was significant ($z = 2.03, p < .05$). When the request was legitimate, subjects gave significantly more compliance under conditions of gaze rather than no-gaze ($z = 2.59, p < .01$). When the request was illegitimate, experimenter gaze did not significantly influence compliance of subjects ($z < 1$). Tests for main effects showed that significantly more subjects complied when the request was legitimate rather than illegitimate (76% vs. 42%; $z = 4.58, p < .001$) and that male subjects complied significantly more often than female subjects (75% vs. 43%; $z = 4.27, p < .001$).

²In a previous unpublished study we found no difference in compliance with experimenters who gazed over subjects' shoulders or down toward the ground.

³These subjects convinced experimenters that they were sincere in searching for the dime. Deleting these subjects or scoring them as noncompliers would not significantly change the results of the experiment.

⁴These people were randomly distributed throughout the treatment conditions.

EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 1 was replicated with two modifications. It was determined during the debriefings that some subjects in Experiment 1 interpreted the request for a dime to buy a candy bar as legitimate because the experimenter might be genuinely hungry. The illegitimate request for Experiment 2 was changed to: "Excuse me. Could you lend me a dime? I want to buy some gum." The legitimate request remained the same: "Excuse me. Could you lend me a dime? I have to call someone to pick me up."⁵ In order to study the effects of increased intimacy during an illegitimate request, a third treatment was added to the original gaze and no-gaze conditions. This treatment included touching the subject on the arm or shoulder at the onset of the request and gazing throughout the request.

Method

Subjects were 56 male and 58 female adults at Logan Airport in Boston. Six female college students served as experimenters, working in teams of two. The experimenters dressed casually and were trained to be consistent in manipulating the experimental treatments in the manner described in Experiment 1. Experimenters followed the same procedures for selecting subjects, manipulating experimental treatments, scoring compliance, and debriefing that were described in Experiment 1.

Results

Data were analyzed with log-linear analysis (Shaffer, 1973).⁶ Special comparisons were computed with partitioned chi-square tests (Castellan, 1965). There was no significant relationship between subjects' estimated ages and their compliance in the experiment. Results for the six experimenters did not interact with the experimental treatments and their data were combined. No significant differences were found between the Gaze-Touch and Gaze-No Touch treatments and these conditions were

⁵After the experiments were completed, 27 male and 31 female students from Boston College rated the legitimacy (1 = illegitimate; 10 = legitimate) of requesting a dime for a phone call, a candy bar or gum at an airport. Overall ratings for phone call, candy bar or gum were significantly different ($M_s = 9.56, 2.21, 2.96$; $F(2, 112) = 242, p < .001$). Ratings of candy bar and gum requests were not significantly different. There were no main effects or interactions involving rater sex.

⁶This type of analysis was used in Experiment 2 because the arc-sine model described by Langer and Abelson (1972) is only appropriate for 2 x 2 designs. Analysis of data from Experiments 1 and 2 with ANOVA results in exactly the same conclusions.

TABLE 2
 FREQUENCY OF CROSS AND SAME GENDER TOUCH BY RACE AND GENDER

<u>Touch Initiator</u>	<u>Cross Gender</u>	<u>Same Gender</u>
White Females*	25	11
White Males*	27	11
Black Females*	35	11
Black Males	33	29

*difference significant at the .05 level.

combined. In the following presentation of results, the mean of the Gaze-Touch and Gaze-No Touch treatments is defined as the *high intimacy* condition and the No Gaze-No Touch treatment is defined as the *low intimacy* condition.

The predicted interaction between gaze and legitimacy was supported by a significant contrast testing the Intimacy x Legitimacy interaction ($\chi^2(1) = 23.3, p < .001$). Special contrasts within the legitimate and illegitimate conditions shown in Table 2 resulted in the following conclusions. When the request was legitimate, subjects complied significantly more under conditions of high versus low intimacy (76.3% vs. 27.8%; $\chi^2(1) = 12.2, p < .001$). When the request was illegitimate, subjects complied significantly more under conditions of low versus high intimacy (55.0% vs. 28.9%; $\chi^2(1) = 3.79, p < .05$). Results in Table 2 were not significantly influenced by subject sex and data for male and female subjects were combined.

Data in Table 3 show differences in reactions to experimenter gaze and touch by male and female subjects. These differences are explained by a significant Subject Sex x Intimacy interaction ($\chi^2(1) = 18.0, p < .001$). Special comparisons within the two subject sex conditions resulted in the following conclusions. Male subjects complied significantly more under conditions of high intimacy versus low intimacy (73.0% vs. 26.3%; $\chi^2(1) = 7.88, p < .01$). Female subjects showed a nonsignificant tendency to comply more under conditions of low versus high intimacy (52.6% vs. 33.3%; *ns*). Results in Table 3 were not significantly influenced by legitimacy of request and data for legitimate and illegitimate conditions were combined.

TABLE 3
FREQUENCIES OF BODY AREAS TOUCHED
BY RACE AND GENDER

<u>Initiators of Touch</u>	<u>Back</u>		<u>Shoulders</u>		<u>Arms</u>		<u>Hands</u>		<u>Other*</u>	
	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S
Black Females	4	1	0	1	5	1	24	8	2	0
Black Males	2	0	2	0	0	2	25	27	4	0
White Females	4	1	0	1	11	1	5	8	5	0
White Males	2	3	10	0	9	4	5	3	1	1
Total C touch	12		12		25		59		12	
Total S touch		5		2		8		46		1
GRAND TOTAL		17		14		33		105		13

(C) Cross-gender
(S) Same-gender

N = 15 black males, 16 black females
35 white males, 27 white females.

*(Other) includes chest, butt, legs and embraces.

DISCUSSION

The present experiments supported the hypothesis that experimenter gaze would lead to increased compliance with a legitimate request. The hypothesis that experimenter gaze would lead to decreased compliance with an illegitimate request was supported only in Experiment 2. It was also seen that subjects in Experiment 2 were more willing to comply with an illegitimate rather than legitimate request when the experimenter did not gaze at or touch them. This finding is consistent with the suggestion that a person who avoids eye contact while engaging in a mildly inappropriate behavior may win the sympathy of others by appearing tactful, embarrassed, or humble (Ellsworth & Carlsmith, 1968; Libby & Yaklevich, 1973; Modigliani, 1971; Reis & Halek, Note 3).

Experimenter touch did not significantly intensify the effects of gaze in Experiment 2. This was probably because of the already strong effects of the gaze treatment. Experimenter gaze and touch have been shown to serve additive functions of increasing subjects' compliance with neutral requests in situations where overall levels of compliance were lower (Kleinke, 1977a). Both male and female subjects in Kleinke (1977a) and Experiment 1 showed increased compliance with gazing rather than non-gazing (female) experimenters. Lack of increased compliance by female subjects in Experiment 2 when they received gaze (and touch) may reflect the aversive nature of intimacy from a stranger of the same sex. (Kahn & McGaughey, 1977). Similar results were reported in a study showing that male subjects were less likely to help a male confederate who had previously violated their personal space (Konečni, Libuser, Morton, & Ebbeson, 1975). The conditions under which intimacy from a same-sex person is perceived as acceptable or aversive must be clarified in further research.

It is not known what variables account for differences in compliance between Experiment 1 and Experiment 2. Experimenter dress (Kleinke, 1977b) in the two experiments was relatively consistent but data are not available for experimenter attractiveness and assertiveness and for environmental factors (Cunningham, 1979) that might have influenced subjects' moods. Another question that is not answered by the studies considered here is the degree to which subjects experiencing gaze or close proximity from an experimenter were influenced by (a) attributions about the experimenter and his or her motives; (b) intensification of affect through involvement with another person; or (c) self-labeling of arousal caused by the experimenter's gaze or close proximity. Reis and Halek (Note 3) isolated attributions by manipulating gaze from a newscaster on a television screen. Attributions about an experimenter who engaged in close proximity were also emphasized for explaining the results in experiments by Kahn and McGaughey (1977) and Konečni et al. (1975). Ellsworth and Carlsmith (1968), Reis and Werner (Note 4), and Snyder, Grether, and Keller (1974) explained their data on experimenter gaze on the basis of intensification. Ellsworth and Langer (1976) combined intensification and arousal explanations by defining the stare as eliciting "attention, arousal, and a sense of interpersonal involvement." Baron (1978), Kleinke (1977a), Schiffenbauer and Schiavo (1976), and Storms and Thomas (1977) based

their studies on a combination of intensification and arousal explanations. Storms and Thomas (1977) manipulated the attribution of choice and found similar results when a confederate sat close to subjects under conditions of choice and no choice. Patterson (1976) based his intimacy-arousal model on self-labeling of arousal. Baron (1978) found significant correlations between self-ratings of affect and helping. None of the experiments summarized in this article, however, included physiological measures. Kleinke (Note 2) reported data showing that subjects in a "biofeedback" experiment had lower heart rates when they received 85% gaze rather than no gaze from a confederate. This was presumably because subjects engaged in behaviors associated with environmental intake under conditions of 85% gaze and in behaviors associated with concentration and environmental rejection under conditions of no gaze (Hassett, 1978). The systematic study of attributions, intensification, and physiological arousal is an important problem for future research.

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