

Ingratiation and Sperm Donation: A Field Study Examining the Willingness of Men to Donate their Sperm

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Abstract

Research has shown that ingratiation influences people's behavior. In this study, the effect of ingratiation on sperm donation request was tested. Male passersby between 18 and 45 years of age and parents of at least one child were asked by a female confederate to become sperm donors. In one condition, the participants were informed that they were typically the type of men that women who need a sperm donor tried to find. It was found that the compliment increased the number of participants who complied with the request for sperm donation. Practical and theoretical interests are discussed.

Key Words: Ingratiation, Compliment, Men, Sperm Donation

In France, the Centre d' Etude et de Conservation des Oeufs et du Sperme humains (CECOS) (Center for the study and the preservation of human ova and sperm) is in charge of collecting, freezing, and preserving spermatozoa. Sperm donation in France is anonymous, based on volunteering, and the donors receive no payment. Since 1973 (the creation of the first center in the country), nearly 50,000 children have been born with the help of the CECOS (Hennebicq, Juillard, & Lannou, 2010). However, a decrease in the number of donors has recently been reported. Most of the studies focusing on sperm donation have focused on the receiving couples (Becker, Butler, & Nachtigal, 2005; Grace, Daniels, & Gillett, 2008) or on the children born from sperm donations (Brewayes, 2001; Golombok et al., 2002). Few studies have examined the motivation of men for sperm donation, and we found no experimental study that tested factors that could examine the effect of psychological factors on sperm donation. In the present study, the effect of ingratiation on sperm donation was tested.

Complimenting others is probably the most common ingratiation method used by people who wish to be perceived as likable. Numerous previous

studies and theories have suggested that complimenting someone else is an effective way to be perceived positively (Gordon, 1996; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Jones, 1990). These studies have clearly shown that compliments are positively related to perceptions of increased likability; research, however, has neglected to study the effect of compliments on behavior and compliance (Bickle, 2003). Many techniques exist in the social psychology literature on how an unknown solicitor can obtain an individual's compliance to a request (see Pratkanis, 2007 for a review). However, few studies have examined the behavioral effects of compliments. In a seminal work on this topic, Seiter (2007) examined the effect of complimenting on tipping behaviors in restaurants. In his study, two female food servers waited on 94 couples eating dinner, and either complimented ("You made a good choice!") or did not compliment the couples on their dinner selections. It was found that waitresses received significantly higher tips when complimenting their customers than when not complimenting them. A second study by this author confirmed the effect of complimenting on tipping behaviors for male and female food servers (Seiter & Weger, 2010). However, the authors found that as soon as the size of the dining party increased, the effectiveness of compliments decreased.

Recent studies generalized the effect of compliments on other customer behaviors. Seiter and Dutson (2007) reported that female hair stylists who cut and styled female customers' hair, and complimented the customers while interacting, received more tips. Dunyon, Goosling, Willden, and Seiter (2010) found that during telephone interactions, fitness equipment salespersons sold more add-on merchandise when complimenting their customers than when not doing so. A recent research also found that a young male confederate who complimented a young woman walking in the street regarding her physical appearance before asking her for a drink was more successful than when no compliment was extended (Guéguen, Fischer-Lokou, & Lamy, 2013). Overall, these studies examining the effect of compliments on behavior and/or compliance found a positive link between ingratiation and compliance. To explain such positive relation, authors stated that the confederate who complimented an individual was perhaps perceived as more likable, which in turn influenced later compliance to a request or helping behavior. Research attests that complimenting increases people's positive perception of the ingratiation (Gordon, 1996; Higgins et al., 2003; Jones, 1990).

In this study, male passersby between 20 and 45 years of age were asked by a female confederate for a sperm donation. In one condition, the participants were informed that they were typically the type of men that women who need a sperm donor were looking for. It was hypothesized that complimenting would be associated with larger compliance with the request.

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of 90 men between 18 and 45 years of age, chosen at random while they were walking alone in pedestrian areas of a town (nearly 75,000 inhabitants) situated on the south coast of Brittany, France. The participants were assigned to the two experimental conditions according to a random distribution: $N = 45$ per condition.

Procedure

Two 20-year-old female confederates acted as solicitors in this experiment. Only one confederate acted at a time. The confederate stationed herself in front of a store and chose a participant walking in her

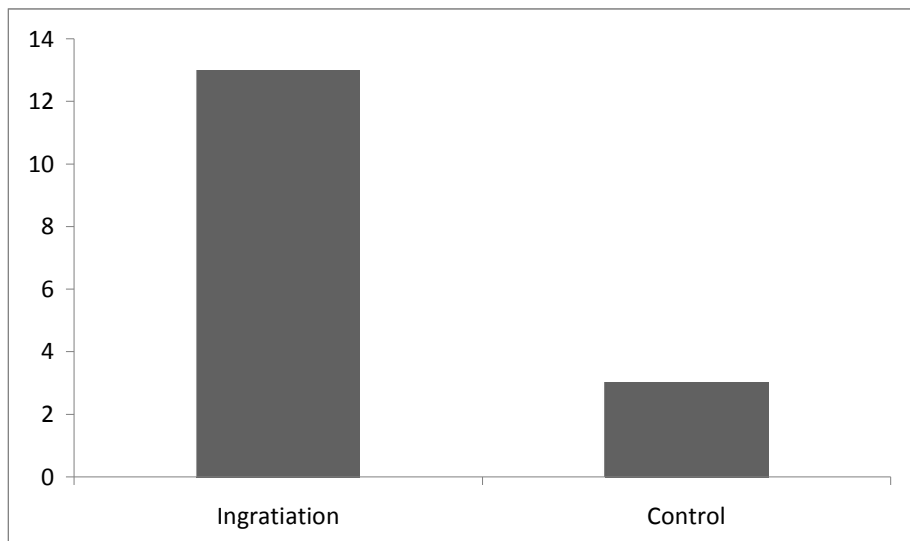
direction. If a child, an adolescent, an older person, or a group of people passed, the confederate waited until a person corresponding to the profile (a man of roughly 20 to 45 years of age walking alone) passed by. The confederate made contact by saying: "*Excuse me, sir. I would like to know if you are aware of the issue of sperm donation in France. Before explaining why I want to talk with you, is it possible to know your age and if you already have a child?*" These two preliminary questions were asked to the participants because in France, only men aged between 18 and 45 and parents of at least one child can become sperm donors. Based on their responses, men who could not be considered as potential donors were thanked, and the confederate explained to them why their participation was excluded.

For those who were retained as potential donors, the confederate proceeded in two different ways according to the experimental condition. In the ingratiation condition, the solicitor said, "*Perfect, you are typically the type of man that women who need artificial insemination by donor are looking for. Did you know that in France, the number of sperm donors is decreasing and that we need sperm donors for couples who are not able to have a child by themselves?*" In the control condition, the solicitor said "*Perfect. Do you know that in France, the number of sperm donors is decreasing and that we need sperm donors for couples who are not able to have a child by themselves?*" Afterwards, in both experimental conditions, the female solicitor explained how a sperm donation is performed and the physical and legal conditions required for sperm donation. At the end of her speech, the solicitor asked the participant for his willingness to become a sperm donor. Participants who refused were thanked. Those who accepted received a form with all the information required on how to become a donor. The order of the experimental conditions was randomized. To prevent possible variation in confederate behavior according to the experimental conditions, the confederates were not informed of the experimental hypothesis. In addition, a pre-test was conducted in the street in order to train the confederate to become familiar with the request and to verify that they acted in the same way in both experimental conditions.

Results

The dependent variable used in this experiment was the number of solicited participants who accepted to become sperm donors. The numbers of donors in the two experimental conditions are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Number of participants who complied with the request



In the ingratiation condition, it was found that 28.9% accepted (13/45) as against 6.7% (3/45) in the control condition. The data were analyzed with the help of a chi-square independent test that revealed a

statistical effect ($\chi^2 (1, 90) = 7.60, p = .006, \phi = .28$).

The percentages of people who complied with the request according to their age range are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Percentage of Donors according to Experimental Condition and their Age Range

Age range	Compliment	No compliment
18-24	38.9%	0%
25-34	36.3%	11%
34-45	16.7%	5.26%

The number of donors in the control condition was not sufficient to perform a statistical comparison. Nevertheless, we found that the number of participants who complied with the request increased in all three age ranges considered. It is worth noting that the effect of ingratiation increased dramatically the behavior of the youngest participants.

Discussion

In this experimental study, in congruence with our hypothesis, it was found that after receiving a compliment from the solicitor, men were more likely to accept to become sperm donors than those who had not received this compliment. This positive effect of ingratiation on compliance was consistent with

findings reported in previous studies examining the effect of compliments on behavior (Dunyon et al., 2010; Seiter, 2007; Seiter & Dunyon, 2007; Seiter & Weger, 2010), even though the behavior measured in this study had not previously been examined.

From a theoretical point of view, the behavioral effect of compliments could be explained by people's positive perception of the ingratiation. A large number of previous studies and theories have suggested that complimenting someone else is an effective method to be perceived in a positive way (Gordon, 1996; Higgins et al., 2003; Jones, 1990). In our experiment, compliments could have increased the positive perception of the solicitor, which, in turn, led the participants to accept the solicitor's argument that more donors were needed and then to comply more readily with her request.

From a practical point of view, this experiment confirms that a short compliment addressed at the beginning of the information phase and solicitation for a donation is an easy way to increase the number of men who accept to become sperm donors. Thus, it would be worth addressing compliments in face-to-face solicitation or perhaps using compliments in advertising. These results also confirm that studying and using the socio-psychological factors associated with greater compliance to a request for sperm donation could be a useful way to enhance the number of sperm donors in future. This experiment has some practical interest for the CECOS, the organization collecting, preserving, and storing oocytes (eggs), sperm, and embryos in France, as a decrease in the number of donors has recently been observed. Our study findings show that ingratiation could be a method used to increase the number of donors. This study involved face-to-face encounters between the solicitor and the men solicited, but the results suggest that an

ingratiation message could be used in a poster campaign. An ingratiation argument could also be used in other solicitation situations, such as solicitation addressed by mail or electronic mail. The ingratiation technique is easy to replicate, easy to use, and easy to adapt to various healthcare-related solicitations (e.g., blood donation) and pro-social requests.

This experiment was a preliminary one, and some methodological limitations exist. The experiment was conducted in France, and the effect of ingratiation reported here cannot be generalized to other countries. Thus, replication in other countries is now necessary. The sample-sizes were moderate, and replication with higher sample-sizes is required. With higher sample-sizes, it would also be possible to evaluate people's receptivity to the ingratiation statement according to the age of the participants. We found that ingratiation seemed to exert a strong effect on young men, and this effect should be examined more closely in future. In this study, female confederates acted as requesters, and it would be worth investigating the effect of male requesters in future studies.

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