

HITCHHIKERS' SMILES AND RECEIPT OF HELP¹

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Summary.—The positive association of smiling on helping behavior is well established in social psychology. Nevertheless, no study was found for the effect of smiling on hitchhiking success. An experiment was carried out in France where hitchhiking is a legal and common practice. Four confederates, 2 young men and 2 young women, selected for their “average attractiveness” hitchhiked, signaled to 800 (503 men and 297 women) motorists driving along the road on a peninsula. In half of the cases, the confederate smiled at the motorist. Analysis showed that, when hitchhiking women were smiling, motorists stopped more frequently but not when hitchhikers were men. Also, in all conditions, motorists who stopped were male.

The positive effect of smiling on interpersonal attraction and perception is well established in the psychosocial literature. Adding a smile on a facial photograph resulted generally in a more favorable perception of a stimulus person, and this effect was found on multiple personality dimensions. Lau (1982) reported that a smiling person was perceived to be more intelligent than a nonsmiling person. Otta, Pereira, Delavati, Pimentel, and Pires (1993) found that adding a smile led to attribution of more positive scores on the dimensions of leadership, optimism, sincerity, kindness, and so forth. This positive perception enhanced helping behavior (i.e., giving someone directions, helping someone to find a contact lens on the floor, etc.) toward the smiling target. Contrary to other nonverbal behaviors such as touch or gaze, studies of the effects of smiling on help are scarce. Tidd and Lockard (1978) stated that patrons in a bar gave significantly larger tips to a waitress who approached them with a broad smile than with a minimal smile. In a similar vein, Solomon, Zener-Solomon, Arnone, Maur, Reda, and Roth (1981) found that, in a large department store, a smiling female confederate waiting near the elevator door received more help (information about the floor where umbrellas were sold) than a nonsmiling confederate.

A new evaluation of the effect of a smile was made in France with a common request for help: hitchhiking. In France, hitchhiking is legal and seeing hitchhikers on the side of the road is a frequent occurrence. Mermet (2000) found that 78% of people have tried hitchhiking. Of motorists who stopped, 96.3% were men.

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It is known that, in this context, nonverbal factors have a positive effect on the helping behavior of motorists. For instance, Snyder, Grether, and Keller (1974) and Morgan, Lockard, Fahrenbruch, and Smith (1975) showed that motorists stopped more frequently if hitchhikers looked at them straight in the face than if they glanced somewhere else. In two later studies, gaze was reported to have a positive effect on motorists' behavior. Further, research has shown that an apparent positive stimulus had a negative effect on motorists. In a study conducted by Guéguen (2001), 4 confederates hitchhiked; these 2 young men and 2 young women had signaled to 1,600 motorists. Each confederate was holding a sign indicating the place where he or she wished to go. In half of the cases, a funny drawing (a smiling face) appeared on the sign. Results showed that the funny drawing led the motorists to stop less often. Given the unexpected reactions of these motorists, it became interesting to test the effect of smiling on hitchhiking. Since smiling creates a more positive perception of the target, it was expected that smiling would increase the number of the drivers who would stop to help the hitchhiker. According to Mermet (2000) it was expected that motorists who would stop would be males.

METHOD

Subjects

In all, 800 drivers (503 men and 297 women) signaled at the entry of a famous peninsula ("Presqu'Île de Rhuys") in Brittany, France, were the subjects for this study. The experiment was conducted during the beginning of the summer holidays on sunny days. The place where the experiment was conducted was a place where hitchhikers typically waited for motorists. During the summer holidays, a host of young people solicit drivers to get to the sea.

Procedure

Four people, 2 men (ages 20 and 21) and 2 women (ages 19 and 20), were the confederates. All were first-year students from the Department of Business at the University of Bretagne-Sud in France and volunteered to participate as confederates in this experiment. Both female and male confederates were selected by two other male and two other female evaluators who were asked to select confederates based on their physical attractiveness. These evaluators were instructed to examine photographs of students carefully and to select men and women who were of "average attractiveness." After that, these students were asked to participate, and all agreed. One confederate stood at the side of the road at a place with good visibility for motorists and with a broad road zone, making the stop and the restarting of vehicles quite easy and safe. The experiment took place between 2 p.m. and 5

p.m. during weekends on particularly sunny and pleasant days at the beginning of summer. The confederates were dressed in a casual way for young people of their age (tee-shirts, jeans, and tennis shoes of light colors). Each confederate was standing alone on the side of the road. The confederates had received instructions to look each driver in the eyes. They were instructed to smile at the 20 first motorists then not to smile at the next 20 motorists, and so on. A pretest had shown that the drivers could actually see the smile of the confederate. If a driver stopped, the driver was categorized as a helper. The confederate was then instructed to debrief the participant. He explained to the driver that he was conducting an experiment on hitchhiking. Then, the driver was warmly thanked for help. When each confederate had signaled 200 drivers, the experiment was stopped.

RESULTS

All the drivers but one who stopped were men. Therefore a decomposition according to the sex of these drivers was not possible. Since no differences between the confederates of same sex were found between the two men and the two women, data were aggregated for each sex of confederate. The number of drivers who stopped, according to the confederate's sex and the experimental conditions, are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF SUBJECTS WHO STOPPED BY HITCHHIKER-CONFEDERATE'S FACIAL EXPRESSION AND SEX

Sex of Confederate	Smile ($n=400$)		No Smile ($n=400$)	
	n	%	n	%
Male ($n=2$)	18	9.0	12	6.0
Female ($n=2$)	38	19.0	21	10.5

Note.—There were 200 drivers per condition.

A log-linear statistical method was used to analyze the data. A main effect of smiling was found [$\chi_1^2(N=800)=6.76, p<.01$]. When confederates smiled, 14.0% of the drivers stopped, whereas only 8.3% stopped in the nonsmiling condition. A main effect of the confederates' sex was obtained [$\chi_1^2(N=800)=10.81, p<.002$]. Female confederates (14.8%) were more likely to get a ride than male confederates (7.5%). A significant interaction between the confederates' sex and the experimental conditions was found [$\chi_4^2(N=800)=17.93, p<.002$]. *Post hoc* comparisons showed that smiling had an effect with female confederates [$\chi_1^2(N=400)=5.82, p<.02$], whereas it had no effect with male confederates [$\chi_1^2(N=400)=0.16, ns$].

DISCUSSION

According to the data found by Mermet (2000) most of the drivers who stopped were men. Perhaps women do not want to pick up hitchhikers because of the potential danger, whereas men feel less endangered.

In the experiment, female confederates received more help than male confederates. These results are congruent with the research on helping behavior which has shown that males help women more favorably than other men (Bickman, 1974; Dovidio, 1982). Smiling on the part of the confederate was associated with the number of drivers who stopped and offered rides to the hitchhiking confederates. Again, these results are congruent with those in the literature on helping behavior (Tidd & Lockard, 1978; Solomon, *et al.*, 1981). Perhaps, the fact that only female confederates were helped more favorably when they smiled might reflect that our female confederates were more attractive. Reis, McDougal, Monester, Berstein, Clark, Seidl, Franco, Gioioso, Freeman, and Radoane (1990) claimed smiles increased the physical attractiveness of a target.

These results confirmed the association of smiling on helping behavior as well as its extension to another situation. However, this effect of smiling on success in hitchhiking was observed only when the hitchhiker was a woman. Research on smiling and interpersonal attraction and perceptions have shown that smiling was related to enhanced positive perception whether the target is a man or a woman (Lau, 1982). However, research on smiling and helping behavior indicated women, when smiling, received more help than men from male subjects (Tidd & Lockard, 1978). Perhaps smiling and helping behavior is not only related to positive perception of the target. Otta, *et al.* (1993) and Reis, *et al.* (1990) observed smiling and physical attractiveness of a target were related. In this experiment, perhaps female confederates were viewed as more attractive when smiling, so they were helped more by the male motorists (cf. Mims, Harnett, & Nay, 1975; Benson, Karabenick, & Lerner, 1976; Harrel, 1978). Further, this relation was very clear when the solicitor was a woman and the potential helper a man (Wilson, 1978). This aspect of the perception of the physical attractiveness of the hitchhiker when smiling or not could be addressed empirically.

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Accepted February 23, 2004.