What a Coincidence! The Effects of Incidental Similarity on Compliance

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Four studies examined the effect of an incidental similarity on compliance to a request. Undergraduates who believed they shared a birthday (Study 1), a first name (Study 2), or fingerprint similarities (Study 3) with a requester were more likely to comply with a request than participants who did not perceive an incidental similarity with the requester. The findings are consistent with past research demonstrating that people often rely on heuristic processing when responding to requests and with Heider's description of unit relationships in which perceived similarities lead to positive affect. Consistent with the unit relation interpretation, participants did not increase compliance when hearing about an incidental similarity with someone other than the requester or when they believed the feature they shared with the requester was common.

Keywords: *compliance; similarity; unit relationship; request*

For most of us, few days pass without encountering someone who wants to sell us a product, secure a donation, ask a favor, or otherwise seek our compliance to a request. Although the consequences of saying yes are often substantial, a growing body of research suggests that people rarely respond to these requests with thoughtful, reasoned decisions; that is, instead of considering costs and benefits and analyzing the requester's arguments, we typically take a cognitively efficient approach and rely on well-learned scripts or heuristics to guide our response (Burger, Soroka, Gonzago, Murphy, & Somervell, 2001; Cialdini, 2001).

In many cases, this heuristic processing can lead to an increase in compliance when salient cues indicate this is the kind of person we usually say yes to or the type of cause we usually support. For example, we are more likely to comply when requesters are dressed in a manner similar to us (Emswiller, Deaux, & Willits, 1971), are physically attractive (Reingen & Kernan, 1993), have recently done us a favor (Burger, Horita, Kinoshita, Roberts, & Vera, 1997), or interact with us using first names (Garrity & Degelman, 1990). In other cases, automatic processing of requests can lead to less compliance. For example, one team of investigators found that passersby typically turned down requests from panhandlers (Santos, Leve, & Pratkanis, 1994). However, when people were shaken out of their heuristic response with an unusual request (asking for 17 cents or 37 cents), compliance rates rose significantly.

Heuristic processing of requests also was demonstrated in a recent set of studies in which investigators generated fleeting feelings of attraction for the requester just prior to the request (Burger et al., 2001). Participants in one of these studies were led to believe that their personality test scores were similar to those of a confederate. These participants were more likely to agree to a request from the confederate than participants who did not share personality scores with this person. In other studies, the researchers found that sharing a conversation or even sitting silently in the same room with the requester was sufficient to produce increased compliance. According to the investigators, the manipulations resulted in short-lived feelings of attraction, which caused participants to mindlessly respond to the

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PSPB, Vol. 30 No. 1, January 2004 35-43
DOI: 10.1177/0146167203258838

requesters as if they were dealing with friends. Consequently, these participants were more likely to agree to a request than were participants in appropriate control conditions.

Dolinski, Nawrat, and Rudak (2001) found a similar increase in compliance when the request was preceded by a casual conversation with the requester. However, when the request followed a monologue in which the requester spoke without interruption, no increase in compliance was found. The investigators argue that a two-way conversation is characteristic of the way we interact with friends, whereas a monologue resembles an encounter with a stranger. Thus, participants responded to the requester with whom they shared a dialogue as if responding to a friend but reacted to the monologue encounter as if dealing with a stranger. Because the request was identical in both conditions, participants appeared to have responded with heuristic, rather than thoughtful, information processing. The finding is consistent with other studies demonstrating an increase in compliance following a short conversation with the requester (Aune & Basil, 1994; Howard, 1990).

The present set of studies was designed to examine another procedure for increasing compliance by taking advantage of heuristic processing of request information. Specifically, we were interested in situations in which the requester and participant share an incidental similarity, such as the same birthday or being born in the same state. Such similarities provide no relevant information about the requester and logically should not play a role in a careful consideration of the request. Nonetheless, we propose that the perception of an incidental similarity with a requester can lead to an increase in compliance. We base this prediction in part on the work of Heider (1958), who proposed that incidental similarities often create a sense of association between two people. Heider referred to this perceived association as a unit relationship. People are said to form unit relationships when they are aware of a common attribute not shared by those around them. For example, two people from California will see themselves as belonging to a unit relationship if they meet in North Carolina but not if they meet in Los Angeles.

Several investigations have demonstrated the power of incidental similarities. Participants in one study evaluated Rasputin (the "Mad Monk of Russia") less harshly when they were led to believe they shared a birthday with Rasputin (Finch & Cialdini, 1989). Other investigations find people rate the first letter of their name as more physically appealing than other letters (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Koole, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2001; Nuttin, 1987) and show a similar preference for the numbers of their birth date (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Koole et al., 2001). Decisions about careers and where to live also can be affected by an incidental association with one's name (Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002). Thus, Pelham et al. (2002) found someone named Dennis may become a dentist and someone named Virginia may move to Virginia Beach because of the similarities with their names. The effects of similarities and unit relationships also can be seen in research on "Basking in Reflected Glory" (Burger, 1985; Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). University students in these studies tend to associate themselves with the school's sports teams when the team is successful ("we won") but not when it is unsuccessful ("they lost"). Similarly, investigators found most Canadians attributed the downfall of their national Olympic hero Ben Johnson, accused of using illegal steroids, to situational causes (Ungar & Sev'er, 1989). The researchers argued that the citizens could not dissolve themselves of the unit relationship with Johnson and therefore relied on ego-defensive attributions as if explaining their own failure.

Heider (1958) also argued that unit relationships have an affective component; that is, awareness that you and another individual share a unit relationship is sufficient to generate feelings of attraction. This phenomenon was demonstrated in research in which a pair of individuals participated in a "get-acquainted" conversation while a third person merely observed the interaction (Insko & Wilson, 1977). Subsequent measures indicated that the participants who interacted liked one another more than those who did not. The investigators suggested that this attraction was the result of the unit relationship that formed between the interacting participants. In support of this interpretation, Arkin and Burger (1980) found that manipulating the strength of the unit relationship in this setting, such as by altering the physical proximity of the observer, resulted in corresponding changes in the amount of attraction between participants.

Based on theory and research with the unit relationship concept, we anticipated that even an incidental association between participant and requester would be sufficient to produce a fleeting sense of attraction. As in earlier research (Burger et al., 2001; Dolinski et al., 2001), we expected that participants would process the request in a heuristic fashion and therefore would react to requesters with whom they share an incidental similarity as if responding to a friend. Because we are more likely to comply with requests from friends than from strangers (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987; Williamson & Clark, 1992), awareness of the incidental association should be sufficient to increase compliance to the request.

The following set of studies has the potential to advance our understanding of compliance and information processing in several ways. First, to date, research demonstrating a connection between attraction and compliance has examined either existing friendships or overt manipulations of attraction, such as the false personality test feedback. However, we hypothesize that the effect is far more subtle than previously demonstrated and that it can be triggered in ways that are not immediately obvious. On a practical level, demonstrating an increase in compliance through incidental similarities also would have somewhat ominous implications for protecting ourselves from those who would exploit this effect against us (Cialdini, 2001). Second, by tying the phenomenon to a broader theory, we hope to better understand the hypothesized process underlying the effect. Using the larger theoretical framework introduced by Heider (1958), we should be able to identify situations in which attraction manipulations are more or less effective in inducing compliance. Third, the following studies represent a strong test of the proposed heuristic nature of most compliance decisions; that is, one could argue that participants in earlier demonstrations of the attraction-compliance effect engaged in some sort of rational processing of facts when deciding to comply with the request (e.g., "He seems like a trustworthy person who would not be asking for money unless the cause was legitimate and important"). However, it is difficult to generate reasons to comply with someone who shares, for example, a birthday.

STUDY 1

We manipulated incidental similarity between participant and requester in Study 1 by leading participants to believe they shared a birthday with the requester. Because we share our birthday with only 1 person in 365, this manipulation seemed sufficient to create a perceived unit relationship between the two individuals. We predicted that participants who believed they share a birthday with a requester would comply with a request more than participants not given this information.

Method

Participants. Seventy-five women undergraduates served as participants in exchange for class credit.

Procedure. Participants signed up for what they believed was a study on astrology. Approximately 30 sec after the participant arrived for the experiment, a woman confederate posing as another participant entered the room. The participant and confederate were seated at a table approximately 4 ft across from one another. The experimenter (who was always a woman) explained that the study was interested in testing the claim by astrologers that personality is related to one's birth sign. She distributed a questionnaire to the participant and confederate that asked several demographic questions, including the individual's date of birth. The purpose of the initial questionnaire was to allow the confederate the opportunity to surreptitiously glance at the participant's questionnaire and thereby learn her birthday. The confederate paced herself so that she completed the questionnaire at approximately the same time as the participant.

The experimenter collected the first questionnaire and explained that she would now administer some personality tests. The experimenter explained that which personality test participants completed depended on their astrological sign. She then turned to the confederate and asked what her birthday was. Half of the participants had been randomly assigned to the similarity condition. In that condition, the confederate gave the birthday she had read on the participant's questionnaire. In the control condition, the confederate gave her real birthday, which was never the same as the participant's. The experimenter then turned to the participant and asked for her birthday. Not surprisingly, participants in the similarity condition typically commented on the coincidence when they gave their answer. Neither the confederate nor the experimenter said anything more about this incidental similarity throughout the rest of the session, and virtually no additional conversation between the participant and confederate occurred until the participant was told the experiment was over.

The experimenter then pulled the appropriate folder(s) from a stack of 12. Each folder was labeled with a different Zodiac sign, although each contained the same personality tests. The participant and confederate completed two short personality tests, although these were included only to reinforce the cover story and were not scored. After collecting the personality tests, the experimenter thanked the participant and confederate, gave them credit, and quickly left the room.

As the participant and confederate began their walk down the hallway leaving the psychology lab rooms, the confederate presented the request. The request was identical to that used in the Burger et al. (2001) studies. The confederate, who was blind to the hypothesis, pulled an eight-page paper from her backpack. She explained that an English class assignment required her to find someone she did not know to critique her essay. She said, "I wonder if you could read this eight-page essay for me and give me one page of written feedback on whether my arguments are persuasive and why?" The confederate added that she needed the written feedback by approximately this time the following day. The confederate waited until she received a clear yes or no answer but did not repeat the request or make any addi-

tional effort to persuade the participant. If the participant agreed to the request, the confederate handed her the eight-page paper.

When the participant and confederate reached the end of the hallway, they were met by the experimenter who said she needed to debrief them about the study and asked that they return to the experiment room. The experimenter then fully debriefed the participant. No participant expressed any suspicion about the coincidental birthday in the debriefing.

Results and Discussion

We compared the number of participants who agreed to the request in the similarity and control conditions. As predicted, significantly more participants complied in the similarity condition (62.2%) than in the control condition (34.2%), $\chi^2(1, N = 75) = 4.80$, $p = .03$, $\phi = .28$; that is, participants were more likely to comply with a request from someone with whom they shared an incidental similarity than from someone with whom they did not.

We interpret these results in support of the unit relationship concept. The participants who discovered that they shared a birthday with the confederate formed a brief unit relationship with the confederate. Consistent with earlier findings, this incidental association appeared to produce fleeting feelings of attraction toward the confederate, which led to an increased likelihood of saying yes to the request. In short, the participants reacted to the confederate in this condition in a heuristic fashion and, instead of considering the costs and benefits of agreeing to the request, responded as if interacting with a friend.

STUDY 2

The purpose of the second study was twofold. First, we wanted to replicate the effect demonstrated in Study 1 using a different incidental similarity and a different request. Specifically, we led some participants to believe that they had the same first name as the requester. In addition, the requester asked for a donation to a charitable cause rather than for a personal favor. We expected that the participants who thought they shared a first name with the requester would donate more money than participants not given this information.

Second, we wanted to eliminate some potential alternative interpretations for the Study 1 results. Specifically, it is possible that being reminded of one's birthday or meeting someone who shares a first name could create unanticipated reactions in our participants that might affect compliance rates. For example, hearing that someone shared their birthday could have put participants in a positive mood. Past research has found that positive affect often increases helping behavior (Isen, Shalker, Clark, & Karp, 1978). Thus, it is possible that an elevated mood could account for the increase in compliance in the first study rather than the perceived unit relationship and subsequent positive affect toward the requester we described. To test this possibility, we told some Study 2 participants they shared a first name with a girl pictured in a poster carried by the requester. This procedure allowed participants to learn that they shared their name with someone and thus experience whatever emotional reaction that awareness might generate. However, because no unit relationship would be formed with the requester in this condition, we expected these participants would be no more likely to agree with the request than would participants in a control condition in which their first name was not brought up.

Method

Participants. Eighty-two undergraduate women participated in the study in exchange for class credit. Participants who had unusual first names were not included in the study because, as explained below, the credibility of the manipulation would have been challenged for these individuals.

Procedure. Participants signed up for what they believed to be a study in creativity. An experimenter called the participant a few days before her scheduled session and explained she would have to bring several items with her to the study. Among these items were five $1 bills. This step was included to ensure that participants would have cash with them when presented with the request. Upon arrival at the experimental room, the participant was asked to lay the objects she brought with her on a table top. The experimenter explained that the participant was to write down as many uses for each object as she could imagine. The experimenter provided pencil and paper for this task and then started a stopwatch and left the participant alone in the room. Approximately 5 min later, the experimenter returned, gave the participant credit, and dismissed her from the study.

The experimenters agreed among themselves prior to each session whether the participant's name was common enough that the manipulation would be believable. If the participant's name was deemed too unusual (approximately 10% of the cases), her participation in the study ended after receiving experimental credit. If the participant's name was common enough for her to participate in the study, a second experimenter inconspicuously followed the participant out of the building. This experimenter signaled to a third experimenter waiting outside to indicate the participant's identity. The third experimenter, a female posing as a volunteer for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, approached the participant. The experimenter wore a nametag with the Cystic

Fibrosis Foundation logo and carried a clipboard with a picture of a girl who suffered from the disease.

Participants had been randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In the requester similarity condition, the third experimenter's name tag indicated that she had the same first name as the participant. The name tag was prominently displayed, but the experimenter did not introduce herself by name. The experimenter, who was blind to hypotheses, explained she was collecting money for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. The experimenter showed the participant the picture of the girl and asked the participant to make a donation. Participants assigned to the photograph similarity condition heard the same request, except that the experimenter used her real name (never the same as the participant's), and the girl in the photograph was identified with the same first name as the participant. Participants in the control condition heard the request with neither the experimenter nor the girl in the photograph sharing her name.

Results and Discussion

We compared the mean amount of money donated in each condition. A one-way ANOVA found a significant difference across the three conditions, $F(2, 79) = 4.09$, $p = .02$. A series of a priori t tests confirmed our hypotheses. As shown in Table 1, participants in the requester similarity condition donated significantly more money than those in the control condition, $t(53) = 2.13$, $p = .04$, $d = .59$. The requester similarity participants also donated more money than did participants in the photograph similarity condition, $t(52) = 2.53$, $p = .01$, $d = .69$. The amount of money donated by participants in the photograph similarity condition did not differ significantly from the control condition, $t(53) = 0.45$, $p = .66$.

The results provide additional support for the notion that incidental associations with a requester can lead to significant increases in compliance. The perceived similarity in names between the requester and the participant more than doubled the amount of money donated. Also as anticipated, sharing a name with the girl in the photograph failed to increase compliance to the request. This latter finding suggests that any potential reactions participants had to merely being aware of or hearing that someone shared their first name cannot account for the increased compliance found in the requester similarity condition. If participants had a positive emotional reaction to hearing that the girl in the photograph had the same first name that they did, this reaction did not affect the amount of money donated. Of course, it is also possible that hearing a sick girl sharing their name created negative feelings, and these could have suppressed the desire to comply. Thus, we cannot rule out that mood could have played a role in the participants' responses in this study. Study 3 manipulated unit relationships using an incidental similarity that, unlike birthdays and names, is not likely to have any emotional significance.

TABLE 1: Mean Amount of Money Donated: Study 2

	Mean Amount	*Standard Deviation*
Requester similarity	$2.07	2.13
Photograph similarity	$0.81	1.47
Control	$1.00	1.59

STUDY 3

The results from the first two studies demonstrate that people are more likely to agree to a request from someone with whom they share an incidental similarity than from someone with whom they do not. These findings are entirely in line with previous research demonstrating heuristic processing of information about requests and with Heider's notion of unit relationships and associated positive affect. Study 3 was designed to test the unit relationship explanation more directly. Investigators find the strength of a unit relationship, and subsequent feelings of attraction, vary as a function of the perceived uniqueness of the shared similarity. Returning to the earlier example, the unit relationship between the two Californians meeting in North Carolina will be stronger if they believe that they are virtually the only Californians in the state than if they perceived Californians are common in that part of the country.

We manipulated strength of the perceived unit relationship in Study 3 by telling participants the similarity they shared with the requester was either fairly unusual or quite common. We expected that sharing a rare characteristic would create a stronger unit relationship and stronger feelings of attraction than sharing a relatively common characteristic. Consequently, we predicted more compliance when participants believed they shared a rare characteristic with the requester than when they shared a common characteristic.

Method

Participants. Eighty-eight undergraduate students (83 women, 5 men) participated in the study in exchange for class credit.

Procedure. Approximately 30 sec after the participant arrived at the laboratory, a confederate pretending to be another participant entered the room. The experimenter told both individuals that the study was concerned with the relation between personality and biology. He or she explained that recent investigations have discovered that personality differences often have a

biological source. The experimenter briefly described a few studies that supposedly found an association between personality test scores and biological measures. He or she explained that the present study was designed to replicate a recent experiment that discovered an association between personality scores and base patterns in fingerprints.

The experimenter then used an ink pad and blank paper to take a thumbprint from the participant and the confederate. Next, the experimenter asked the two to complete some personality scales. As in the earlier study, the scales were part of the cover story and were not scored. The experimenter appeared to examine and evaluate the fingerprint sheet while the participant and the confederate completed the scales. The confederate pretended to answer the scale items, completing the scales at just about the same time as the participant. Just before collecting the personality scales, the experimenter checked a sheet to learn to which of three conditions the participant had been randomly assigned.

If participants were assigned to the uncommon similarity condition, the experimenter said, "This is interesting. You both have Type E fingerprints. That's very rare. Only about 2% of the population has Type E fingerprints." Participants in the common similarity condition heard the experimenter say, "It turns out you both have Type E fingerprints. Of course, that's not too surprising. About 80% of the population has Type E fingerprints." The experimenter made no comment about the fingerprints in the control condition.

The experimenter then gave participants their class credit, thanked them for participation, and quickly left the room. While the participant and confederate gathered their belongings, the confederate, blind to hypotheses, retrieved an eight-page paper from his or her backpack and presented the same request used in Study 1. As in the earlier study, the confederate asked only once and waited until receiving a clear yes or no answer from the participant. At this point, the experimenter, who had been waiting outside but within earshot, returned to fully debrief the participant. No participants expressed suspicion about the bogus fingerprint feedback during the debriefing.

Results and Discussion

The percentage of people agreeing to the request in each condition are shown in Table 2. An initial comparison of the compliance rates across the three conditions revealed a significant effect, $\chi^2(2, N = 88) = 7.75$, $p = .02$, $\phi = .30$. Follow-up cell comparisons found participants in the uncommon similarity condition complied significantly more often than participants in either the common similarity condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 59) = 3.85$, $p = .05$, $\phi = .26$, or the control condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 57) = 5.76$, $p = .02$, $\phi = .32$. The common similarity and control conditions did not differ significantly, $\chi^2(1, N = 60) = 0.06$, $p = .80$.

TABLE 2: Percentage Agreeing to the Request: Study 3

Uncommon similarity	82.1% (23/28)
Common similarity	54.8% (17/31)
Control	48.3% (14/29)

The findings thus replicate the effect demonstrated in the first two studies. Participants who thought they shared a rare fingerprint type with the requester complied more than those who did not. Moreover, consistent with the unit relationship explanation, an increase in compliance was found only when the incidental similarity shared by the requester and participant was relatively unusual. When participants learned the shared similarity was common, a weak or no unit relationship was formed with the confederate. As a result, these participants were no more likely to comply with the request than were participants in the control condition. The findings from Study 3 also are notable because the similarity shared by the participant and confederate—fingerprint type—was unlikely to be something participants had emotions about prior to the study. Indeed, the notion of a "Type E fingerprint" was bogus.

STUDY 4

Although the findings from the first three studies are consistent and provide a straightforward interpretation based on the unit relationship notion, one piece of information remains elusive; that is, in none of the three studies did we measure attraction directly. If a unit relationship was formed with the confederate as a result of the incidental similarity, then we would expect the participant to experience fleeting feelings of attraction for the confederate. Unfortunately, providing this important bit of data is difficult. Assessing attraction directly requires some sort of self-report by the participants. However, we argue that participants respond to the procedures used in the three studies with cognitive shortcuts rather than carefully considering the requests. Asking participants to take a minute to describe their feelings toward the confederate would have destroyed the very heuristic processing we describe. At the very least, questions about how the participants feel about the confederate run the risk of priming thoughts about relationships (e.g., Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996) that would make interpretation of subsequent compliance behavior difficult.

Nonetheless, we argue that if we had measured participants' attraction for the requester just prior to the request, we would have found higher levels of attraction in the conditions in which participants shared an

uncommon characteristic with the requester. For example, Study 3 participants would have reported more attraction for the confederate when they shared an unusual fingerprint type with the confederate than in either of the other conditions. To test this assumption, we conducted a partial replication of Study 3. Participants in Study 4 went through the same procedures used in Study 3. However, instead of measuring compliance, we assessed liking for the confederate. We predicted that people who shared an unusual characteristic with the confederate would have higher levels of attraction for the confederate than would people who shared a common characteristic or participants who did not learn about a shared characteristic. These findings would lend support to our interpretation of the previous investigation.

Method

Participants. Eighty undergraduate students (76 women, 4 men) served as participants in exchange for class credit.

Procedure. We took care to use the same procedures as in Study 3, including same location and same participant pool, with two exceptions. First, just prior to excusing the participants, the experimenter asked the participant and confederate to complete a short questionnaire. The questionnaire asked participants to rate various aspects of the experiment on a series of 9-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *very much*). Directions assured participants that their responses would be confidential. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, each containing three questions. The first two sections asked participants about the experiment (e.g., "To what extent did the research room seem appropriate for the study?") and the experimenter (e.g., "To what extent was the experimenter friendly?"). The last section of the questionnaire was labeled "Other Participant(s)." The three questions in this section asked participants "To what extent was the other participant(s) in the study pleasant and friendly?" "To what extent do you think you would enjoy time spent with the other participant(s)?" and "To what extent do you think you would like the other participant(s) if you got to know him or her?" The second difference between the procedures in this study and those in Study 3 is that the confederate did not present a request in Study 4.

Results and Discussion

Responses to the three questionnaire items asking about attraction for the confederate were highly correlated (rs = .66 to .83). Thus, we summed responses to the three items to form a single attraction measure (α = .89). The means and standard deviations for the attraction measure are shown in Table 3. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference across the three conditions, $F(2, 77) = 6.55$, $p = .002$. As seen in the table, participants in the uncommon similarity condition liked the confederate significantly more than did participants in either the common similarity condition or the control condition (ps = .04 and .002, respectively, Tukey's HSD test). The latter two conditions did not differ significantly ($p = .49$).

TABLE 3: Attraction Scores: Study 4

	Mean	*Standard Deviation*
Uncommon similarity	23.46_a	2.77
Common similarity	20.79_b	3.65
Control	19.56_b	5.16

NOTE: Values not sharing subscripts differ significantly ($p < .05$, Tukey's HSD test).

The findings thus lend support to our interpretation of Study 3 and, by implication, the first two studies. Participants who believed they shared a "fingerprint type" with the confederate had an increase in attraction for the confederate, relative to the control group, only when participants thought the fingerprint type was rare. When led to believe they shared a common characteristic with the confederate, participants showed no increase in attraction. The pattern in these data is entirely consistent with the compliance data in Study 3. We can thus make a reasonable case that participants in the earlier study also experienced a unit relationship with the confederate and an increase in attraction when they believed that they shared the uncommon fingerprint type and that this reaction contributed to the higher rate of compliance in the uncommon similarity condition.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Consistent findings across the four studies demonstrate that a perceived incidental similarity with a requester can lead to increased compliance. This effect complements a growing number of studies that find people typically respond to requests by relying on heuristic information processing. There is no logical reason why the requests used in our studies would be more appealing when delivered by someone with whom we share a birthday, a first name, or fingerprint similarities. Thus, a thoughtful consideration of the request should have produced similar compliance rates between the experimental and control conditions. However, as described by Heider (1958), the incidental similarities we invoked most likely resulted in a perceived unit relationship and a fleeting sense of liking between the participant and the requester. Because participants responded to the request with heuristic processing, they reacted as if the request had come from a friend.

The findings reinforce those from other investigations on social influence processes. This research paints a picture of cognitively thrifty individuals relying on rela-

tively effortless shortcuts as they encounter the daily onslaught of efforts to change their attitudes and behaviors (Cialdini, 2001). It appears that almost any action on the part of the requester that triggers associations with positive emotions or suggests friendliness will set in motion a "I say yes to people like this" heuristic. In our research, sharing an incidental similarity with the requester, such as a birthday or first name, was enough to trigger this response. Other studies find a short conversation, similar clothing, using a first name, and even a few minutes of mere exposure is sufficient to set the heuristic in motion.

The results from the four studies also expand on our understanding of social influence processes and the effects of attraction on compliance. Previous manipulations of attraction in compliance studies were more overt than the incidental associations used here. For example, participants in those studies engaged in a short conversation with the requester or learned of personality score similarities with this person. It is possible that participants used the information they gleaned from the short conversation or test feedback to assess the trustworthiness or sincerity of the requester and that they used this information rather than rely on the proposed heuristic when deciding whether to comply with the request. However, no such thoughtful consideration of information seems likely in the procedures used here. Knowing that you share a fingerprint type with another individual provides no reasonable argument for complying with that person's requests.

We have employed Heider's unit relationship concept to account for the participants' reactions to a perceived similarity with the confederate; that is, we argue that the perceived similarity led the participants to see a "unit relation" association between themselves and the confederate. We should note, however, that this association phenomenon also can be cast within other theoretical models that describe a similar process. For example, Tajfel (1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) identified a minimal group effect in which people randomly assigned to a group of strangers discriminate in favor of their group and against those outside of the group. More recently, Greenwald, Pickrell, and Farnham (2002) found that studying the names of four members of a hypothetical group for 45 sec led participants to associate the group with themselves and with positive outcomes, such as winning. Moreover, the participants made these associations without conscious awareness that they had done so. The researchers dubbed this phenomenon implicit partisanship and suggest that the association is automatic and not the result of mere exposure. Although researchers may someday identify which of these theoretical perspectives best accounts for the perceived association that results from incidental similarities, at this point, it seems clear that an association is formed and this association leads to an increased likelihood of complying with a request.

One question for future research concerns potential limits to the effect. Specifically, if the increased compliance we demonstrated in the studies presented here is the result of heuristic information processing, then any condition that forces the individual out of heuristic processing may reduce or eliminate the effect; that is, although we often rely on scripts or rules of thumb in everyday life, salient cues in the situation often can force us into a more thoughtful consideration of information (Macrae & Johnston, 1998). One possibility is the size of the request (Pollock, Smith, Knowles, & Bruce, 1998); that is, a large price might cause individuals to think about the request and the implications of saying yes and thereby pull them into thoughtful processing. Although this suggestion sounds reasonable, the request used in two of our studies—to provide an overnight written critique to an eight-page paper—was not inconsequential. Moreover, a casual look at television commercials for expensive products such as automobiles suggests that buyers may not always base their purchase choices on entirely rational grounds.

Another question not addressed in our studies concerns gender effects. To control for complications that might arise with women asking men for favors, we limited our participants to women in Studies 1 and 2. Due to student population characteristics, the vast majority of participants in Studies 3 and 4 also were women. Although we have no reason to think the effects demonstrated in this research would not also be found with men participants, the role that gender plays in this process remains an open question.

Finally, the results across all three studies are consistent with a growing body of research in many areas of social psychology that finds people often rely on cognitive shortcuts when processing information (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). In most cases, this heuristic processing probably is efficient. Investing time and effort pondering decisions all day would be exhausting and most likely would leave us frequently in a state of inaction. On the other hand, relying on heuristic processing also can leave us vulnerable to requesters who understand how to exploit this phenomenon (Cialdini, 2001). For example, some automobile dealers reportedly try to match salesperson and customer, such that customers with a Southern accent find themselves interacting with the saleswoman with a similar accent and younger customers are shown around by one of the younger salesmen. Although such tactics may result in better communication and more trust, our findings suggest that these incidental matches alone might contribute to an increased likelihood of agreeing with the sales pitch.

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Received February 25, 2002
Revision accepted February 28, 2003