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Male homophobia, touch, and compliance: A matter of the touched, not the toucher

Abstract: Numerous studies have shown that people are more likely to fulfill requests made by a stranger when he or she touches their arm or forearm slightly while asking. In Poland, however, where male homophobia is widespread, interpersonal touch decreases compliance when man touches another man. It has also been demonstrated in previous studies that highly homophobic male participants are especially unwilling to fulfill requests while touched. In this paper the hypothesis that also confederates' homophobia create an additional factor inhibiting compliance with request formulated by men touching other men was tested in two experiments. No relations, however, was found between confederates' level of homophobia and participants' reaction.

Key words: Nonverbal behavior, touch, compliance, social influence

Social influence can refer to such processes as conformity (eg., Asch, 1956), persuasion or attitude change (eg., Böhner and Wanke, 2002; Petty and Cacioppo, 2001), placebo (eg., Dolinska, 1999; 2011), or compliance (Cialdini, 2001). The compliance phenomenon is of particular interest in this article. Psychological literature describes multiple techniques of social influence employed by individuals in order to increase their chance to carry out their requests, suggestions, and wishes. Strategies that have received the most attention include the foot-in-the-door (Freedman & Fraser, 1966), door-in-the-face (Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler, and Darby, 1975), low-ball (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Basset, and Miller, 1978) or disruption-then-reframe (Davis & Knowles, 1999) techniques.

One of the most intriguing among these techniques of social influence is interpersonal touch. As demonstrated in numerous studies, people are more likely to fulfill requests made by a stranger when he or she touches their arm or forearm slightly while asking. In one of classical experiments on the effect of touch, a female confederate asked passerby for a dime to enable her to make a call from

a telephone booth. When she simply asked for the money, she got it from 29% of people. However, when she touched people on the arm while asking for the dime, she received it from 51% of people (Kleinke, 1977). In another study of supermarket hostesses, holding the interlocutor's arm has been shown to increase the likelihood of getting him or her to try a pizza (Smith, Gier, and Willis, 1982). In yet another study, food servers either touch diners on the arm or not touch them at all when asking "if everything was OK with their meals". The results of the experiment showed that touching not only increased tips significantly, but it also caused customers to evaluate the servers and restaurants more favorably (Hornik, 1992). Hornik found also that touching bookstore customers on the arm caused them to browse longer in the store, did more shopping, and evaluate the bookstore more positively than customers who had not been touched. Similarly, Kaufman and Mahoney (1999) found that customers in bars drank more alcohol when they were touched by waitresses than when they were not touched. Gueguen and Fischer-Lokou (2003) in turn, have demonstrated that bus drivers are more likely to

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give a passenger a free ride, if they touch the driver while making the request. In experiments conducted in France by Gueguen (2007) a young man asked young woman to dance with him during the period when slow songs were played. When formulating his request he touched or not the woman on her forearm. It has been shown that touch increased compliance to the request. The persuasive impact of interpersonal touch has been demonstrated in other contexts as well. For example, touch has been found to increase the number of people who agreed to fill in a questionnaire (Hornik and Ellis, 1988) or who agreed to put their signature on a petition (Willis and Hamm, 1980).

Although there is no doubt that touch is persuasive and influential (at least in some situations), the psychological mechanism of this phenomenon seems to be unclear. Most often is pointed out that touch is not only about physical, but also psychological intimacy. That is why we may perceive a person who touches as delicately as nice and friendly, which in turn will incline us to comply with their request (Erceau and Gueguen, 2007; Patterson, and Manusov, 2006). Alternatively, touch may put people in a good mood, making them more likely to comply with requests (Nannberg and Hansen, 1994). Yet another explanation is that people who touch may be more persuasive because, through touch, they augment their image of power (Patterson, Powell, and Lenihan, 1986). However, as Camps, Tuteleers, Stouten and Nelissen (2013) argue, the positive impact of touch depends on a vast array of factors, including context, gender and culture.

Many studies on the role of touch as a social influence technique have considered the aspect of the gender of both the toucher and the touched. The majority of studies in which touching the participant proved to increase the chances of request fulfillment demonstrated that this effect was independent of the gender of those involved in the interaction (e.g., Gueguen and Jacob, 2006; Hornik, 1992, exp. 1; Hornik & Ellis, 1988; Smith et al. 1982). In some of the experiments, however, apart from this main effect some minor interaction effects have also been found. Most often, the touch effect was particularly strong when the asked and the asking were of opposite gender (e.g., Brockner, Pressman, Cabitt, and Moran, 1982; Stier and Hall, 1984). However, sometimes the effect was stronger when people involved in the interaction were of the same gender (Willis and Hamm, 1980). Others results patterns have also been recorded occasionally. For instance, in the studies by Patterson, Powell, and Lenihan (1986) as well as Powell, Meil, Patterson, and Chouinard (1994), touch had the strongest effect when both interlocutors were women, and in the study by Hornik (2001), women who touched were more effective than men who touched, regardless of the gender of those addressed with the request. In yet another experiment, touched women were more compliant than touched men regardless of the gender of the requester (Hornik, 1992, exp. 2).

One exception to the findings showing that

interpersonal touch increases compliance is a set of studies conducted in Poland (Dolinski, 2010). In a first experiment a confederate (depending on the conditions: woman or man) came up to the person walking alone near the central railway station and asked him or her to insert a letter into a mail box, posing the request either in a standard way or touching the person's arm while asking. Women touched on the arm as well as men touched on the arm by woman not only agreed more often to fulfill the request (took the letter) but also actually complied with it (i.e., mailed the letter later). Men touched by another man were, however, slightly less inclined to comply with the requests with which they were addressed – they agreed less often to take the letter and mailed the letter less often after they had taken it. In the second experiment, Indian incense sticks were sold in the street. A confederate (man or woman) approached participants, posed the request, and at the same time touched their arm or not. It has been shown that touching a potential female consumer on the arm increases the sale. Also men touched by a female confederate bought Indian sticks more often than men who were asked by a woman in a standard way (i.e. were not touched). The pattern of results was reversed however, when two men were involved in the social interaction. This time touching decreased males' inclination to comply. In the third experiment the participants (men only) first filled out the male homophobia scale and then were asked to fulfill a request, which was or was not accompanied by touch. It has been shown that when participants were requested in a standard way, the likelihood of compliance had no connection with the intensity of homophobia. When participants were touched while asked, however, the results obtained by the participants in the homophobia scale were distinctly connected with their inclination to comply with the request. The more homophobic the participants, the less compliant they were to the man touching them. Poland is a country in which male homophobic attitudes are common (Abramowicz, 2007; Lelleri, 2007). It seems logical that in Poland the ambiguous gesture of touching men's arm by another man can bring associations of homosexual undertone particularly for homophobic males and inhibit their readiness to help.

However, another possible explanation cannot be excluded. As all the male confederates taking part in the three above mentioned experiments were Poles themselves, they could have been at least to certain extent homophobic – being representatives of their own culture. Touch is such a specific form of activity that it seems possible that the confederates could have subtly, although unconsciously, communicated their own homophobic discomfort when touching the male (but not female) participants. So, the confederates' homophobia could thus potentially create an additional factor inhibiting compliance with request formulated by men touching other men¹). The two experiments presented below were designed to verify this possibility.

¹ This idea was originally formulated by Judith Hall – action editor of the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior in her editorial letter concerning my previous paper on touch treated as a tool of social influence (Dolinski, 2010).

Study 1

Overview

Two high-homophobic and two low-homophobic male served as confederates in the experiment, which was carried out on the campus of Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences (Poland). A confederate came up to a man walking alone and asked him to fill in a questionnaire, posing this request in a standard way or touching the person's arm while asking.

Procedure and Participants

Before the experiment, a group of 18 male students of Sports Academy in Wrocław were asked to fill in the Attitudes Toward Gays (ATG) subscale of the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ALTG-R) scale by Herek (1998). The average result obtained by the students was 72.18 (SD = 8.26). Two participants who obtained the lower scores (54 and 58) and two who obtained the higher scores (86 and 84) were invited to serve as confederates in the experiment. They were blind to the hypothesis and were trained to behave in a standard and natural way. They practiced administering a light, flat-handed touch to the arm and to formulate the request.

Every second man walking alone and appearing to be adult was chosen to be participant. The condition (touch vs no touch) were randomly ordered. Each of confederate had to ask 50 participants (25 in touch condition and 25 in no touch condition) to complete the questionnaire. The confederate approach the participant saying "Excuse me, I have a request" (in half of the cases, touching the participants on the arm at this moment). The confederate continued "Could you, please, fill in a short questionnaire for me? I need to complete some data on the master seminar. It will take about three minutes". Participants who agreed to fulfill the request were asked to fill in the ATG subscale of ALTG-R scale.

Results and Discussion

The analysis indicated that touched male participants less often agreed to fulfill the request than non touched (36% vs 52% - $\chi^2(1, N = 200) = 5.19, p = .023; \phi = .16$). This pattern of results is similar to previous studies conducting in Poland (Dolinski, 2010), again showing that touching an unknown man by another man in a culture with strong male homophobia decreases the chances of having the request fulfilled. The main aim of the study was, however, more specific: if we suppose that a homophobic male feels uncomfortable touching another man and therefore during this act he subtly, although unconsciously, communicate his homophobic attitude, we should agree that toucher's homophobia could thus potentially create an additional factor inhibiting compliance with request formulated by men touching other men. To check this possibility we have compared the results obtained by each of our four confederates (two high-homophobic and two

low-homophobic). A chi square test showed that the four confederates did not differ in the number of participants they made to agree in touching condition - $\chi^2(3) < 1$ ns., as well as in no touching condition - $\chi^2(3) < 1$ ns. More importantly, each of confederates have obtained the same pattern of results: participants agreed to fulfill the request more often in no-touch condition (52% - for the first confederate, 48% - for the second, 60% for the third, and 48% for the fourth) than in touch condition (36%, 32%, 40%, and 36% - respectively).

Yet another result is worth noting. Among those who have agreed to comply with the request (and thus to fill in the ATG scale), the average level of homophobia was higher in no touch condition ($M = 67.91; SD = 7.14$), than in touch condition ($M = 63.28; SD = 7.28$) - $t(87) = 2.975, p = .004$. Cohen's $d = .638$. Because at the same time, a number of participants who fulfilled the request was higher in no touch condition than in touch condition, it may suggest that touched participants who refused to comply with the request were homophobic rather than no-homophobic.

The results of the Study 1 seems to suggest, therefore, that the results obtained in previous experiments, in which a man touching another man reduced the chances of having his requests fulfilled, are not affected by the level of toucher's homophobia. The study 1 has one limitation however: we can not exclude the possibility that two our students who had obtained the lowest scores in the ATG scale, and who subsequently served as confederates in the experiment did not express their real (i.e. negative) attitudes towards gays, because of the political correctness norm and their need for social approval. Unfortunately, determining their attitudes toward gay men was not completely anonymous (they were aware that the author of this paper would know their scores in the questionnaire).

In the second study therefore, we decided to remove this methodological confusion by creating the condition of full anonymity, where students were not ask to put their names on the questionnaires. In addition, we decided to check if women's attitudes toward gays may modify the effect of touch on compliance with requests.

Study 2

Overview

A group of both male and female confederates, whose attitudes towards gays was previously measured, took part in the experiment, which was carried out on the campus of Sports Academy in Wrocław (Poland). A confederate came up to a man walking alone and asked him to fill in a questionnaire, posing this request in a standard way or touching the person's arm while asking.

Procedure and Participants

A total of 44 confederates (22 women and 22 man), average age 19-20 years old, were used in the experiment. All the confederates were undergraduate students of Sports Academy in Wrocław (non of whom served as a confederate

in a Study 1). The confederate received 5 copies of ATG scale and an envelope. One copy was marked with “Me” on the top of the page and should be completed by confederate. Two other copies were marked with letter “T” and yet two others with letters “NT”. All confederates were blind to the hypothesis and practiced administering a light, flat-handed touch to the arm and to formulate the request. Like in the Study 1 they approached the male participant on the campus, saying “Excuse me, I have a request” (in half of the cases, touching the participants on the arm at this moment) and continued “Could you, please, fill in a short questionnaire for me? I need to complete some data on the master seminar. It will take about three minutes.” Every man walking alone and appearing to be adult was chosen to be participant. The condition (touch vs no touch) were randomly ordered.

The participants were 176 male passersby; every confederate approached four men. Participants who refused were thanked. Those who complied were given the questionnaire to complete. In touch condition participants were given the questionnaire marked “T”, whereas in no-touch condition – the questionnaire marked “NT” was used. Finally, the confederate located a set of five questionnaires into an envelope, sealed the envelope and delivered it to the author of this article. (Of course, in case where the participant refused to comply, the questionnaire remained empty).

Result and Discussion

Log-linear analysis indicated the confederate gender effect and confederate gender x condition (touch vs no touch) interaction. Participants complied more often when they were approached by women (72%) than by men (56%) - $\chi^2(1, N = 176) = 14.43, p = .001, \phi = .28$. Whereas in conditions in which a female confederate approached a man, touch increased the chances that he would agree to fill in a questionnaire (82% complied with this request in the touch condition and 61% in standard condition; $\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 4.53, p = .034, \phi = .23$), in conditions in which a male confederate approached a man, an opposite was true – touch decreased compliance with the request (34% complied in the touch condition and 57% in standard condition; $\chi^2(1, N = 88) = 4.29, p = .039, \phi = .21$).

To verify the role played by toucher’s homophobia in a situation in which a request is accompanied by a touch on the arm, the logarithmic-linear regression analysis was performed. The toucher’s homophobia scale results and their gender were considered as predictors of compliance with the request to fill in a questionnaire in two experimental conditions. The average results obtained by male confederates in the ATG subscale of the ALTG-R scale by Herek (1998) was 70.31 (SD = 7.08). The average results obtained in this measure by female confederates was much lower: 55.91 (SD = 8.62); $t = 12.12, p = .001$, Cohen’s $d = 3.74$. This difference is in line with the results of prior studies which also indicate that men hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuals than women (e.g., Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin, and Shores, 1992). The logarithmic-linear regression has shown that confederates’

homophobia had no impact on participants’ agreement to fulfill the request ($\beta = .013$, ns for male confederates and $\beta = .014$ for female confederates).

Since the participants’ level of homophobia is known only for those who complied with the request to fill in the questionnaire, this factor could not be included into regression analysis. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that like in Study 1, the average level of homophobia was higher in no touch condition ($M = 70.25$; $SD = 6.71$), than in touch condition ($M = 64.40$; $SD = 8.18$); $t = 2.43, p = .02$, Cohen’s $d = .80$, when participants were approached by male confederates. Because again a number of participants who fulfilled the request formulated by a man was higher in no touch condition than in touch condition, it may suggest that touched participants who refused to comply with the request were homophobic rather than no-homophobic. When female confederates approached participants the average level of homophobia was similar in both conditions ($M = 71.89, SD = 7.39$ in touch condition; and $M = 70.11, SD = 7.42$ in no touch condition) - $t < 1$, ns.

General Discussion

A situation in which a man touches another man is much less common than the situation in which a woman touches another woman. Greenbaum and Rosenfeld (1980) for instance, observed people meeting at an airport and found that male same-sex pairs are less likely than female same-sex pairs to touch partner. Why do men usually avoid touching other men? There are many indications that the touch between men in many situations may be perceived as having a homosexual character. Even in countries where homophobic attitudes are not very strong (USA), participants viewing photographs of same sex and opposite sex dyads regarded male same-sex as particularly abnormal and sexually motivated (Derlega, Lewis, Harrison, Winstead, and Costanza, 1989). Martin (2012) in his research conducted in marketing domain found, in turn, that when British consumers are accidentally touched by male stranger when examining products, report more negative brand evaluations, negative product beliefs, less willingness to pay, and spend less time in-store than both control participants and participants touched by female stranger.

In line with this reasoning, it has been shown that especially men with negative attitudes toward homosexuals are less comfortable with same-sex touching and engage in less same sex touching (Roese et al. 1992). It can not be surprised with this perspective that, although in numerous studies men were more likely to fulfill requests made by a man stranger when he touched their arm or forearm slightly while asking, the reverse was true in Poland - the country with very high homophobia. The result obtained in the previous studies (Dolinski, 2010) was replicated in the two experiments presented in this article. At the same time, however, we did not find confirmation for the thesis that this pattern of results is due to the fact, that homophobic confederates subtly, although unconsciously, communicate their own homophobic discomfort when touching the

male participants, which, in turn, causes participants' lack of willingness to fulfill the request. So, the most likely explanation for this, that touched man does not want to satisfy requests addressed to him by another man remains his own homophobia.

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