

HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

The Color of Compliance: Red Effects Compliance with Donation Requests

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Previous research has found that the color red is related to attraction in females and status in males. In the social influence literature there is evidence of attractiveness and status increasing compliance with requests. To date, no research has examined the associations between the color red and compliance. In our study, we connect these literatures by testing the link between the color red and compliance with donation requests. We hypothesized that people would donate more money in response to requests that were on red (vs. white) backgrounds. Purdue students in the Psychology 120 course ($n = 46$) participated in an online study utilizing a within-subjects design. Participants were exposed to four donation appeals by bogus campus organizations that were paired with an ostensible requestor. We manipulated the gender (male vs. female) of requestor and background (red vs. white) of the photo. Participants were given a total of \$700 and instructed to distribute the money to the organizations as they saw fit. Money donated was an indicator of compliance to each appeal. Our results

indicated a significant interaction between background color and requester gender. Specifically, in front of a red background, men received significantly higher donations than women. However, women received significantly fewer donations overall in front of a red background than a white background. Further analysis revealed that female participants donated more to male requestors on the red background whereas male participants donated more to female requestors on a white background. We also found evidence that attractiveness predicted donations to female requestors but not male requestors. Our results suggest that, whereas red may increase compliance for men, it may actually hurt women. Future research will further explore the mediating roles of status and attraction.

Research advisor Bill Graziano writes, "The topic with which Hannah worked is important. Often small, seemingly insignificant aspects of the environment influence human behavior outside awareness. Even prosocial behaviors like donating to charity can be affected by small situation differences. Hannah developed her creative idea and executed it in collaboration with Matt Kassner, a graduate student working in my lab."