Replicating the Pique Technique of Compliance-Gaining

Thomas Hugh Feeley, Sarah Dietrich, & Jennifer Musone

University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

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Abstract

The pique technique predicts requests for giving are more likely met with compliance when an unorthodox request amount is used in replace of a traditional request amount. Three studies were conducted to replicate the pique technique in two request contexts. The results indicated compliance rates and average giving failed to significantly differ based upon request condition. Specifically, requests of $3.17 to support a prosocial cause did not meet with higher compliance when compared to requests for $3.00. The disrupt-only, pique-then-reframe, and disrupt-then-reframe strategies were also tested and compared to baseline requests. The absence of empirical support for the pique technique was discussed and an argument is made for the value of replication studies in compliance-gaining.

Replicating and Extending the Pique Technique of Compliance-Gaining

People typically donate to prosocial causes because they are asked to do so. The 'ask' can come from a familiar source or from a stranger who may call, mail, email, or approach one face-to-face. The request to donate from a stranger is typically met with an absence of response or a gentle declination to help. The reluctance to help individuals or causes can be due to a variety of reasons including a lack of trust in the requester or feelings of discomfort of being put on the spot. The typical response to a request to give is likely automated or scripted due to the number of occasions one has been likely asked to help from individuals representing organizations or causes.

The *pique technique* of compliance-gaining, introduced by Santos, Leve, and Pratkanis (1994), uses an atypical asking amount, such as 47 cents rather than 50 cents, in an effort to halt the refusal script and then increase mindfulness on the part of message receivers. For example, in the first experiment by Santos et al. (1994), passersby on a wharf were approached by confederate panhandlers and asked to spare either 17 or 37 cents (pique conditions) or any change or a quarter (control conditions). It was predicted that the pique technique, "should disrupt the counterarguing and induce positive thoughts about compliance" (Santos et al., 1994, p. 763).

Other persuasive strategies seek to disrupt refusal scripts, such as the *disrupt-then-reframe technique* (Davis & Knowles, 1999), or rely on unconventional request amounts (e.g., use of sharp numbers, 47% vs. 50%) to increase credibility of evidence claims (Schindler & Yalch, 2006). ~~The pique technique however is specific to face-to-face compliance-gaining scenarios and its primary feature is the unorthodox amount requested.~~ Pique ostensibly operates on the confusion principle (Kardes, 2002) and is predicted to disrupt the refusal script and

provoke mindfulness toward the request message. As Fennis, Das, & Pruyn (2004, p. 282) argue, this type of disruption is postulated "to be rather blunt to evoke a shift from mindless refusal to mindful attention."

The goal of the present study is to replicate and extend the pique request strategy in a donation scenario where strangers are asked to donate to a prosocial cause (as opposed to directly helping the requester). While there is little reason to believe the technique would operate differently when asking to help a prosocial cause as opposed to assisting a panhandler it is important to test the boundary conditions of the technique as well as providing a direct replication of the technique in the field. Other compliance-gaining strategies vary the request in an effort to increase donations to prosocial causes such as the *door-in-the-face* (Cialdini et al., 1975) and *legitimization of paltry favors* (Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976) techniques. Before discussing elements of the current set of experiments, it is necessary to review the research literature in relation to the strength of the pique technique in increasing compliance and giving amounts.

The initial experiment (Study 1) by Santos et al. (1994) indicated that the pique technique produced an increase in compliance from 23% to 37% across two request conditions and this represents an effect size of $r = .15$ when converting ANOVA results (Lipsey & Wilson, 2000). The average giving amount per individual approached however did not differ by experimental condition. Thus, pique worked to increase the number of people who complied but did not serve to increase the total amount that was given once compliance was obtained.

In a follow-up study conducted by Burger, Hornisher, Martin, Newman, and Pringle (2007), the effect was supported in two experiments. In study 1, students approached individuals and either asked for spare change or for 37 cents. Additionally, two scripts were prepared in the

event participants in the pique condition asked the requester for a reason why a gift was needed. Compliance in the control group (19%) was significantly lower than compliance in the pique group (42%), r = .23. Study 2 replicated the first study with one exception: two control groups were used and requesters asked for either 25 or 50 cents. Results indicated compliance increased from 17% to 42% when collapsing across control and pique conditions, r = .28.

An interesting pattern of results emerged in the Burger et al. (2007) replication studies: the pique findings were qualified by the reason manipulation. That is, when teasing out results by participants' who inquired about the atypical asking amount, the results for pique were explained; the sub-sample of pique participants who asked why the help was needed were more likely to comply and donated more money compared to control participants and pique participants who did not inquire. Thus it may be the conversation shifted participants from a refusal heuristic into an acquaintance heuristic.

The Current Study

The current study will examine several important elements in relation to the pique technique. It is important to note at the outset the pique technique is reserved to describe atypical requests made of individuals that typically meet with mindless refusal. The current experiments retain these essential characteristics and also examined three additional considerations to test the robustness of the procedure. First, individuals will be asked to give to the requester on behalf of a prosocial cause instead of giving to help the panhandler herself. Second, the requested donation amount is higher and asks individuals to donate $3.00 (or $3.17 in the pique condition) whereas earlier studies (e.g., [Burger et al., 2007] asked for 37 or 50 cents). This increase in amount may serve to strengthen the refusal script.

Third, the pique technique will be directly compared to the *disrupt-then-reframe* (DTR) *technique* introduced by Davis and Knowles (1999). DTR first disrupts the refusal script then reframes the asking amount. For example, a solicitor who elects to use the DTR technique might ask, “Would you mind donating 300 pennies, that’s 3 dollars? It’s a bargain!” The first study detailed next sought to directly compare the pique technique with the more conventional request technique. It is expected the pique requests as group will garner higher compliance than control or conventional requests as past studies have indicated. The purpose of this direct comparison and explication is to test the contention by Fennis, Das, and Pruyn (2004) the two procedures are distinct and operate under different cognitive pathways.

Study 1

Procedures

Four female confederates (“requesters”) approached individuals walking on the waterfront on a summer day who appeared over the age of 18 years and not otherwise occupied (e.g., speaking on phone, wearing headphones). The requesters worked in pairs and one made the request while the other recorded study details (e.g., sex, compliance, amount of money donated). The study details were designed to replicate those reported by Santos et al. (1994). Requesters made either a baseline or pique request of individuals: the baseline request asked, “Can you spare $3.00 for Hunter’s Hope Foundation?” and the pique request asked, “Can you spare $3.17 for Hunter’s Hope Foundation?” Hunter’s Hope is an organization that raises awareness and research funds for Krabbe Disease. Participants were randomly assigned to the two experimental conditions. All study procedures were approved by the Human Subjects’ Institutional Review Board at the authors’ university. Student requestors for all studies were trained by the second author and instructed to stay closely to the script as possible. As part of the training, the student

requestors were observed by the author for several trials. For statistical tests, Chi-square analyses were used to test for significant differences based on marginal values. All outcomes were translated to Pearson *r* for ease of interpretation of effect sizes.

Results

Fifty-four individual requests were recorded with 28 baseline and 26 pique requests. Compliance and donation amounts did not differ by requester or sex of request pair; thus data were collapsed across these factors. Compliance for baseline and pique request groups did not differ significantly and was 21.4% and 15.4% respectively for the two groups, $r = -.08$. Amount of donation per request did not differ significantly by group and baseline requests averaged \$1.32 ($SD = 3.91$) and pique averaged \$0.62 ($SD = 1.52$). The rate of compliance is reported in Table 1. Thus, support was not found for the pique technique.

It was recorded if a target individual responded to the requester with a question or comment. Thirteen (24%) individuals responded to the requester and among this subsample, 54% complied with the donation request. Only 7% (3 of 41) of those who failed to respond or simply said “no” complied with donation requests. The number of responses did not vary by request condition.

These data failed to support the pique technique and it appears compliance is related to responding to the requester in some manner. However, the pique request did not provoke a response any more than the baseline request. A second study was undertaken to replicate these findings and test the disruption aspect of the DTR technique directly to baseline and pique requests. The disruption in the DTR asks individuals for a donation using a non-traditional form of asking (e.g., asking for 100 pennies rather than 1 dollar). It is predicted there should be a slight increase in compliance when using the disruption-only technique, a more subtle form of

persuasion (Fennis et al., 2004). It is unclear if disruption-only will outperform pique in terms of gains in compliance and this empirical question is tested in the second field experiment.

Study 2

Procedures

The study procedures for the second experiment were nearly identical to those in study 2 with two exceptions. First, two charities were used to rule out the cause as a confounding factor in the first study's results. Capital Area Therapeutic Riding Association (CATRA), a volunteer-based organization that provides horse-facilitated therapy to mentally and physically disabled riders was used as a charity in addition to Hunter's Hope. Second, a third experimental requester condition was added called "disruption only" and asked individuals, "Can you spare 300 pennies for (charity)? That's 3 dollars." The other two request conditions (baseline, pique) were identical to study 1. The same downtown waterfront park was used for the request context and three requesters were used to approach passersby. It was observed that most individuals walk in pairs or in small groups and a decision was made to approach individuals alone or in groups and code for this factor. Each participant or group was sequentially assigned to experimental condition in an effort to create equal sample size and estimate random assignment.

Results

Twenty-eight requests were made by two female confederates for each of the three experimental conditions ($N = 84$). Twenty-four individuals (7 female, 17 male) were approached alone and 60 individuals were approached as part of a group of 2 or more individuals (46 male groups, 9 female groups, 5 mixed-sexes). It should be noted only one person from each group was asked for compliance. Compliance rates were 25%, 25%, and 21.4% across the baseline, disrupt-only, and pique conditions consecutively. When directly comparing each experimental

condition to the control condition, there was no statistical difference between the disrupt (r = .00) or the pique requests (r = -.04) to control. There were no significant differences when individuals were approached alone or in a group. Also, neither the charity represented nor requester/participant sex influenced compliance or giving amounts.

The total amount donated per request was \$0.79 (*SD* = 1.45), \$0.79 (*SD* = 1.79), and \$0.93 (*SD* = 1.84) for control, disrupt and pique conditions respectively and these means did not differ significantly, F (1, 83) = .07. Tests of significance were conducted on raw data and on log-transformed data due to high skewness and kurtosis (see Fink, 2009) and both tests were not statistically significant.

Among the 84 requests made, 24% of individuals responded with questions or comments and among this subsample, 65% complied compared with the 1.5% of individuals who complied among the individuals who failed to respond. The request condition did not significantly impact the percentage of individuals who inquired to requesters with 7%, 25%, and 18% responding for control, disrupt and pique conditions, χ^2 (2) = 3.26, p = .20. These findings were similar in study 1. In summary, responses to requesters were linked to compliance but request condition did not influence responses (or compliance).

Based upon these findings, a third study was designed with the following research aims in mind. In addition to replicating the pique technique, it was decided to provide a direct comparison of DTR to pique and control conditions. Recall in study 2 the *disrupt only* aspect of the request was replicated without reframing (i.e., “that’s a bargain!”). The DTR technique rests on the assumption that persuasion occurs due to disrupting receivers’ resistance and then framing the deal. A fourth condition will also be examined – *pique-then-reframe* (PTR) where the disruption is in the form of atypical request (e.g., \$3.17) amount rather than reframing the

request amount (e.g., 317 pennies) as a means of disruption. The third study seeks to examine if PTR or DTR works better than controls or the traditional pique request. It should be reiterated the third study is another opportunity to observe the pique technique in a new request context as the technique did not yield higher compliance in the first two trials. It was expected the pique, PTR, and DR conditions would outperform control requests. Also, a direct comparison among the three sequential techniques was permissible to identify if one strategy is superior in terms of compliance-gaining.

Study 3

Procedure

Individuals attending eight different events at the University's Arts Center were approached outside of the venue after the show and asked to donate to Hunter's Hope Charity. Individuals who were walking alone and appeared over the age of 18 years were approached over a 2 month period. The same procedures for approaching and recording each request were replicated from the first two studies. Four trained requesters (3 female, 1 male) made requests of individuals and the request type was determined sequentially by experimental condition. For the baseline (pique) conditions, patrons were asked, "Can you spare $3.00 ($3.17 pique) to donate to Hunter's Hope Charity?" The DTR (PTR) reframe requests asked, "Can you spare 300 (317) pennies, that's $3.00 ($3.17). It's not too much to donate." A second observer recorded requester profile, sex of target, type of request, amount donated, and if the target responded.

Results

One hundred sixty-nine individuals were approached across the 4 experimental conditions (sample sizes are reported in Table 1). One hundred four (N = 104; 62%) requests were made by female confederates and 95 females and 74 males were approached. Sex of sender,

sex of participant, and all combinations of sex of sender-receiver failed to explain significant variation in compliance rates. Across conditions, 21% of individuals complied and donated and the average amount donated per person approached was $0.83 (*SD* = 1.89) and some gave as much as $10.00. The amount of overall giving per request failed to differ by experimental condition, F (3, 168) = 0.64. Among those who complied and donated, 69.4% responded to requesters with a question or comment while only 10.5% of those who declined to donate commented. The percentage of responses to requests did not vary by request condition. These findings corroborate findings from the first two studies.

The test of differences in compliance by experimental condition was not statistically significant, χ^2 (1) = 2.75, p = .10. The highest percentage of compliance (see Table 1) was in the disrupt-then-reframe condition (31.4%) and lowest in the baseline and pique-then-reframe conditions at 16.3%. Thus, support was not found for any of the three compliance-gaining techniques when compared to baseline compliance even when direct tests were computed.

Discussion

Three field studies were undertaken to test the pique technique of compliance-gaining against baseline and against two other disruption techniques. The findings across three expositions failed to support the claim that pique requests work better than using a typical request amount. Confederate requesters approached passersby on the waterfront (Studies 1, 2) or patrons attending a show at an Arts Center at a research university (Study 3). Neither the context nor the sex of requesters and participants influenced compliance or average donation amounts.

The pattern of results when compared to previously published studies on the pique technique require speculation as to why the current experiments fail to replicate the pique technique's predicted effect. There are at least two answers to this question to contemplate. One

argument is there is a *true effect* for pique and there may have been too few observations to detect the effect or there were elements of the experimental procedure that disqualify these studies as valid replications. On the latter point, the sample sizes ranged from 26 to 42 requests for pique conditions and the sample size range was 145 to 204 in previous studies (Burger et al., 2007; Santos et al., 1994). The size of the samples in this study and those previously published are underpowered when you consider the small effect sizes and the traditional inputs to conduct power analysis a prior (see Murphy & Myors, 2004). In defense of the current sample sizes, many studies in compliance-gaining (e.g., Davis & Knowles, 1999) use as few as 20 individuals per experimental group in replication studies and when collapsed across three studies, there is a sample size of 195 individuals across pique and control conditions in the current monograph.

On this second point, there were essentially the same request conditions as the original studies and baseline compliance rates in the current study were nearly identical (roughly 20%) to those in the previous studies by Burger et al. (2007) and Santos et al. (1994). The higher asking amount in the current studies may have nullified pique results with $3.17 asked of individuals in the pique condition, compared to $0.37 in Santos et al. (1994). It could be receivers processed the request more carefully when compared to more paltry requests (across experimental conditions) or it could very well be the pique request was simply not blunt enough to halt receivers' refusal script.

An important consideration in compliance-gaining research is the level of attention garnered by participants in request contexts. Our own anecdotal evidence suggests many individuals pay little attention to the requester and the request amount. It might be said individuals were immune to disruption efforts that are featured in many compliance-gaining strategies (Davis & Knowles, 1999; Kardes, 2002; Santos et al., 1994). Individuals who

responded or commented to the request to donate were significantly more likely to donate when compared to those who did not comment or ask a question. However, the request condition failed to influence response rates.

Related to this last finding, it may be the case pique operates only in situations where the requester first has the attention of message receivers who acknowledged and considered the request amount. The Burger et al. (2007) studies indicated the pique technique worked *only* when message receivers asked about the request amount. What is unclear is the order of operations in their findings; that is, did the question simply follow after one has already committed to comply or does compliance follow from getting the attention of respondents. Also unclear is whether individuals in the control condition posed questions of requesters in the Burger et al. (2007) studies.

Still out of focus from the current study and the two previous studies is the exact cognitive mechanism that accounts for the pique technique when it does work successfully. If the current thinking is accurate, the strategy disrupts refusal scripts or at least temporarily suspends the script. The current findings indicated the receiver must also acknowledge and process the request amount before the refusal script is disrupted. Stated differently, the requester must first gain the attention of the receiver first then ask for a donation.

A potential limitation in the current study is how the disrupt-then-reframe strategy was operationalized. We used Davis and Knowles' (1999) conceptualization of disruption to include, "Would you donate 317 cents, that's $3.17" when it might be argued the "that's $3.17" might actually serve to reframe the unorthodox request for 317 cents. Interesting to note, Davis and Knowles tested independent request conditions, "disrupt only" and "reframe only" and the "$3.17" (i.e., asking amount) is present in both conditions. The added reframing portion may

have diluted the disrupt-only condition in study 2 and nullified its advantage over control requests. Davis and Knowles found a 10% increase in compliance for the disrupt only condition (35%) over price only requests (25%).

The value of replication in science cannot be overstated. Only through repeated trials can we have confidence in the strength of a given relationship. The current set of studies were undertaken to observe the pique technique and future research would go far to replicate the technique to better account for the heterogeneity of effects across the three studies.

One consideration is the use of the pique concept in different persuasive contexts. To date, it is studied as a face-to-face compliance gaining context and pique could work in other contexts seeking to gain attention of the target audience and to disrupt refusal scripts. Using an unorthodox request for compliance may pique audience attention and induce compliance. For example, our own campus has signs throughout campus claiming it is a “smoke free campus” and directly in front of these signs one can see smokers who summarily dismiss these signs. Might a different sign reduce the number of individuals who smoke on campus? Research would go far to extend the pique technique, if in fact, it is established as a valid persuasive technique.

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Table 1

Compliance Rates by Request Condition

	Study		
Condition	1	2	3
Baseline	21.4 (28)	25.0 (28)	16.3 (43)
Pique	15.4 (26)	21.4 (28)	21.4 (42)
Disrupt only	--	25.0 (28)	--
Disrupt-then-reframe	--	--	31.4 (41)
Pique-then-reframe	--	--	16.3 (43)

Note. Cell entries represent percentage compliance and sample sizes reported in parentheses.