

# She wore a red/white flower in her hair: The effect of hair ornamentation on compliance with a survey request

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It has previously been reported that an interviewer's dress style influences compliance with a face-to-face survey request. However, dress style has been examined in global terms, with the interviewer wearing conventional clothes vs. smart clothes. In this study, we tested the effect of the presence or absence of a single cue of dress style. An experiment was carried out where four female student confederates wearing a flower (white or red) or no flowers in their hair, asked people in the street for their participation in a survey. Results show that hair ornamentation compared to no hair ornamentation was associated with greater compliance with the request. No difference between the two flower color conditions was found.

*Keywords:* survey, interviewer, physical appearance, flower, hair ornamentation

## Introduction

Studies have shown that interviewers' physical characteristics are associated with variation in participants' response rate. Dommeyer and Ruggiero (1996) reported that using a head shot of a physically attractive female researcher in a mail survey cover letter was associated with an increase in response rate. Guéguen, Jacob, and LeGohérel (2003) observed in a Web mail survey that a picture of a physically attractive interviewer induced a higher level of response than that of a less attractive interviewer.

Further studies have shown that an interviewer apparel appearance was associated with variation in the response rate. Guéguen (2002) found, in a street survey setting, that interviewers wearing formal attire got more passers-by to accept the survey request than interviewers wearing casual clothes. In the same way, Walker, Harriman, and Costello (1980) observed in a street survey that passers-by were significantly more likely to comply with the survey request addressed by a well-dressed interviewer, and Nelissen and Meijers (2011) reported that passersby were more likely to respond to a short street survey when the interviewer wore the logo of a luxury brand-labeled shirt.

Sometimes, a small dimension of physical appearance can influence compliance with a survey request. Green and Giles (1973) reported that the single presence of a tie worn by a male market researcher who asked passersby for their address to include them in a survey increased the number of participants who accepted to participate.

Although hair style and hair color are common, striking, and obvious features of appearance, the impact of women's hair, particularly hair ornamentation, has received little attention so far. Stillman and Hensley (1980) reported intriguing findings from an experiment where waitresses either wore a flower in their hair, or not, while serving their customers. It was observed that patrons of both genders left higher tips in the flower condition. However, tipping is an implicit helping behavior used by customers to reward a service. The effect of hair ornamentation on the direct solicitation of help has never been studied.

In particular, no study has examined the role of hair ornamentation on people's compliance to a survey request. However, studying this aspect of physical appearance seems to be important for practitioners, given that it would be worth finding out whether hair ornamentation is

associated with a difference in receptivity to the request for a survey. Should this be the case, one could increase the response rate by encouraging interviewers to pay attention to their hair appearance. Thus, the first objective of our experiment was to extend the research between hair ornamentation and helping and to test the effect of hair flower on verbal solicitation of a confederate.

Given the previous results, we hypothesized that ornamentation would be associated with greater compliance to a request addressed by the confederate. The second objective was to test the effect of the hair ornamentation color. Elliot and Niesta (2008) reported that when the color of the surrounding of a photo that presented a woman was red, men (but not women) viewed the target as more attractive and sexually desirable. Niesta-Kayser, Elliot and Feltman (2010) who viewed an ostensible conversation partner in a red *versus* a green shirt chose to ask her more intimate question (experiment 1) or sit closer to a woman with a red shirt than with a blue one (experiment 2). Guéguen (2012) observed that women hitchhikers wearing a high top red solicited a higher response in the number of male drivers who stopped to offer a ride.

In the present experiment we compared the effect of a red flower compared with a white flower. We hypothesized that red flower compared with a white flower would be associated with greater compliance with the request addressed by the interviewer.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants were 360 male passers-by (their “visible” age from 20 to 50) chosen at random from the people walking alone in pedestrian areas of a town (between 70-80,000 inhabitants) situated on the south coast of Brittany in France.

### **Procedure**

The experiment was conducted during a 2 day period after a local shopkeeper asked the university’s business department and its undergraduate students to conduct a survey about the perception and the evaluation of a recently opened chocolate bar (first one in town).

Four 19 year old female undergraduate business students served as confederates in this study. To prevent multiple solicitations of the same pedestrian, the study was conducted in different areas of the town at the same time. Each confederate wore (or not) a single red or white natural flower in her hair. All confederates were instructed to change their hair ornamentation after testing 15 passers-by. The confederates were instructed to act “as usual” and in a similar way in each condition. They were not aware of the hypotheses and the purpose of the flowers.

The confederate stationed herself in the middle of the street and looked for a viable candidate walking towards her. If a women, a child, an adolescent, an older person, or a group of people passed, the confederate waited until a person corresponding to the profile (men of roughly 20 to 50 years of age walking alone) walked by. The confederate then approached the participant and asked him to participate in a short survey concerning a recently opened bar (the chocolate bar). The confederate then noted whether the participant agreed or not. If the participant agreed then the survey was administered.

## Results and discussion

The number of participants who complied with a confederate's survey request was the dependent variable in this study.

**Table 1 Participant compliance with the survey request in each experimental condition.**

No flower	Red Flower	White flower
40.3% (49/120)	56.7% (68/120)	55.0% (66/120)

A 3 x 2 Chi-square test revealed an overall significant difference ( $\chi^2 (2, N = 320) = 7.27, p = .026, \phi = .14$ ). Pairwise comparisons revealed that the control condition was significantly different than the red flower condition ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 240) = 6.02, p = .014, \phi = .16$ ) and the white flower condition ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 240) = 4.83, p = .028, \phi = .14$ ). The difference between the red flower condition and the white flower condition was not significant ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 240) = 0.07, p = .795, \phi = .02$ ).

The present findings show that hair ornamentation had an influence on compliance with a survey request posed to men. Participants complied more often when the confederate wore a flower in her hair. These results are congruent with those found by Stillman and Hensley (1980) who reported that waitresses got larger tips when they wore a flower in their hair as opposed to no hair ornamentation.

The moderate effect size of the ornamentation effect found in our study appeared near the same ( $r = .15$ ) than the effect-size reported in Stillman and Hensley's study ( $r = .16$ ). Our results extend the effect of said ornamentation to an explicit request by an interviewer. Indeed, the effect of ornamentation was previously found only in restaurant tipping which appears to be an implicit helping behavior delivered to reward an employee for a service.

Further research is now needed to explain these results. Perhaps ornamentation increases women's perceived/physical attractiveness which in turn increases helping. Previous research found that increased attractiveness is associated with more help (Guéguen & Jacob, 2011; Lynn & Simons, 2000) and that increasing attractiveness of a female interviewer increases the number of participants who accept to respond to a survey (Dommeyer & Ruggiero, 1996; Guéguen, Jacob, & LeGohérel, 2003).

Hair ornamentation could also have increased the perceived status of the interviewer. Several studies consistently reported that increasing the perceived status of an interviewer with the help of his clothing appearance increased compliance with a survey request (Green & Giles, 1973; Guéguen, 2002; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Walker, Harriman, & Costello, 1980).

Positive mood elicited by the presence of the flower could also explain the results of this study. It was reported that exposition to flowers elicits a positive mood and more positive

social behavior, such as initiating conversation more frequently or standing closer to someone (Haviland-Jones, Rosario, Wilson, & McGuire, 2005).

However, we found no effect of the flower color. Previous research reported that red color enhanced women's attractiveness and sexiness (Elliot & Niesta, 2008; Guéguen, 2012; Niesta-Kayser, Elliot & Feltman, 2010). In our study we manipulated hair ornamentation color only. Perhaps a red flower was not sufficient to influence the participant's behavior. Indeed, in most of the previous studies examining the effect of the red color, women wore at least a red T-shirt or a red skirt.

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