

# The Legitimization of Paltry Contributions as a Compliance-Gaining Technique: A Meta-Analysis Testing Three Explanations

Communication Research  
1–21

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DOI: 10.1177/0093650215602308

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## Abstract

The legitimization of paltry contributions (LPC) has been shown to be an effective compliance-gaining technique across a variety of empirical investigations. However, the theoretical explanations regarding the effectiveness of the tactic and the effects of LPC messages on donation amounts warrant further consideration. A meta-analytic review of LPC research was conducted to examine these issues. Consistent with a prior meta-analysis, LPC messages increased compliance rates ( $r = .22$ ,  $k = 34$ ,  $n = 3,181$ ) relative to control conditions. Three moderators were also tested. The results indicated that impression management concerns and perceptions of requestor need explained the effects of LPC messages on compliance rates. A second analysis ( $r = -.23$ ,  $k = 11$ ,  $n = 1,531$ ) offered evidence that LPC messages led to smaller mean donation amounts. A third analysis showed that LPC messages produced similar donation totals relative to control messages.

## Keywords

meta-analysis, paltry contributions, even a penny, legitimizing paltry favors, compliance-gaining

Scholars have long been interested in compliance-gaining tactics as a way of encouraging desired behaviors (e.g., Marwell & Schmitt, 1967). To date, researchers have investigated a host of these techniques ranging from messages such as *door-in-the-face*

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(Cialdini et al., 1975), *foot-in-the-door* (Freedman & Fraser, 1966), and *that's not all* (Burger, 1986) to strategies including *image induction* (Bolkan & Andersen, 2009), *pregiving* (Boster, Rodriguez, Cruz, & Marshall, 1995), and *altercasting* (Turner et al., 2010). Although research on these strategies has typically focused on the degree to which they increase rates of compliance, scholars have consistently highlighted the need to understand how these messages bring about such effects (e.g., Banas & Turner, 2011; Dillard, 1991; O'Keefe & Figgé, 1997).

The legitimization of paltry contributions (LPC; Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976), for example, has been demonstrated to be a robust technique for promoting compliance. Developed by Cialdini and Schroeder (1976), LPC is founded on the notion that compliance rates might be increased by legitimizing, rather than asking for, very small contributions. Essentially, these requests ask for donations that would be "acceptable but not necessarily desirable" (Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976, p. 599). This technique for increasing compliance has proved effective: a meta-analysis of LPC research shows that, across 11 research reports and 19 effect sizes, LPC messages produced greater compliance rates when compared with control messages (Andrews, Carpenter, Shaw, & Boster, 2008). However, questions remain about how this message strategy brings about compliance and whether or not it leads to smaller donations.

The present study reports a meta-analytic review of LPC research and tests three possible explanations for the effects of this compliance-gaining strategy. Specifically, issues related to impression management concerns, requestor need, and the reduction of barriers are discussed and formally evaluated as moderators of the effects of LPC messages on compliance rates. A secondary goal of this project involves investigating whether or not LPC leads to diminished donation amounts. Although LPC may increase compliance rates, there has been a long-standing concern that the technique may encourage smaller donations (e.g., Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976; Fraser, Hite, & Sauer, 1988; Shearman & Yoo, 2007). A better understanding of both issues could offer insights about the central mechanisms at work in compliance-gaining tactics employed in soliciting contributions for charitable causes and the benefits/risks of using LPC messages in fundraising efforts.

## Literature Review

In their original investigation of the LPC technique, Cialdini and Schroeder (1976) conducted two experiments during a door-to-door charity drive. Their goal was to test a strategy for requesting small donations without producing what might be considered low-level payoffs. In practice, this meant adding the statement, "even a penny will help," after asking participants to donate to charity. Cialdini and Schroeder reasoned that legitimizing small donations was a way to overcome cost as an obstacle to giving and found that doing so did, in fact, increase rates of compliance without affecting the size of charitable contributions. Since their original investigation, researchers have supported the basic conclusion that legitimizing paltry requests for charitable donations leads to increased compliance rates compared with control groups (e.g., Dolinski, Grzyb, Olejnik, Prusakowski, & Urban, 2005; Fraser et al., 1988; Weyant, 1984)

without necessarily decreasing the size of the contribution (Dolinski et al., 2005; Reeves, Macolini, & Martin, 1987). This effect appears to hold across a variety of contexts including monetary donations (e.g., Fraser et al., 1988); the distribution of flyers (Dolinski et al., 2005); and the donation of time (Takada & Levine, 2007), food (Jacob, Charles-Sire, & Gueguen, 2012), blood (Gueguen, 2013b), and toys (Gueguen, Martin, & Meineri, 2013).

Andrews et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of LPC research and showed that the tactic was successful in increasing compliance in studies spanning the years 1976–2007. The authors reported a weighted mean effect of  $r = .11$ . In addition to identifying the mean effect, Andrews et al. investigated more than a dozen potential moderating variables in an attempt to explain the mechanism at work in LPC messages. These moderators included the presentation mode, the sex of the requester, the sex of the subject, the age of the subject, the phrasing of the request, the type of request, the length of the message, the requesting organization, the number of confederates, the year of publication, the country of origin, if confederates were blind to the procedures or not, face-to-face versus mail-in requests, and pledges versus on-the-spot donations. Despite the plethora of variables examined, the researchers only uncovered one significant moderator in the form of mail-in versus face-to-face requests. Face-to-face solicitations were found to be more successful than mail-in solicitations—however, the authors cautioned that only a single study was included in the group for mail-in responses. Although Andrews and colleagues' (2008) meta-analysis offers compelling evidence to suggest that LPC messages can increase compliance rates, the reason(s) this strategy produces compliance warrants additional attention. Three possible explanations drawn from LPC research are considered in the following paragraphs.

### *Impression Management*

Several scholars argue that impression management (or self-presentation) concerns are important components of social interaction in general (Baumeister, 1982; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Goffman, 1967) and social influence in specific (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). As they pertain to the context of this study, impression management concerns may be important in persuasive situations because interpersonal transgressions (such as not helping people in need) may result in a failure to convince others that a person is behaving as one's ideal self (Baumeister, 1982) and are linked to negative affect such as embarrassment, guilt, and shame (e.g., Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). Because anticipated negative affect has been shown to be an important predictor of behavioral outcomes (e.g., Bagozzi, Baumgartner, & Pieters, 1998; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001), persuasive tactics that can induce targets to anticipate potential violations of their positive interpersonal images may be effective at garnering compliance. In fact, researchers argue that negative affect may lead to desired outcomes in persuasive situations if targets believe they can avoid these unpleasant feelings by complying with requests (Nabi, 2002; O'Keefe, 2002a, 2002b).

The mechanisms described here might be at work in LPC scenarios. According to Cialdini and Schroeder (1976), LPC messages might lead to increased compliance compared with control groups because failing to help when small requests are solicited may “make it difficult for an individual to avoid giving the impression of being an especially unhelpful person” (p. 599). Although few researchers have directly tested the impression management explanation for the effects of LPC messages, some studies have addressed relevant issues that offer insights about this explanation. For instance, Reeves et al. (1987) found that compliance with donation requests was greater in person than in mail-in conditions. According to the authors, their findings suggest that compliance may be the result of situational pressures present in face-to-face solicitations that increase image-maintenance concerns. Takada and Levine (2007) also argued that impression management demands may be at the heart of LPC’s effectiveness. In support of this position, the authors noted that people high in perspective taking were more susceptible to LPC effects than people scoring low in perspective taking. According to Takada and Levine, this may be the case because “individuals high in perspective taking may be more sensitive to the impression management demands and find it more difficult to say no” (p. 183) to the added psychological pressure coming from requests that have been made to appear especially small.

Contrary to the conclusions reported above, the results of several studies might lead some scholars to argue that impression management is of little importance in LPC scenarios. For instance, researchers may come to the conclusion that self-presentation is not important to LPC manipulations because indirect solicitations (i.e., donation boxes left in stores) have been shown to be just as effective as face-to-face interactions (Gueguen, 2013a). The same is true for solicitations where time was allowed to elapse between LPC requests and desired behaviors (Gueguen, 2013b; Gueguen et al., 2013; Jacob et al., 2012).

Meta-analysis is a technique for aggregating the results from a body of research and can be used to reconcile inconsistent findings (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2009; Hunter, Schmidt, & Jackson, 1982). Therefore, given the conflicting arguments and findings in previous LPC research, meta-analysis offers a valuable approach for examining the role of impression management concerns. In the body of LPC research, it is reasonable to expect the level of threat to a participant’s impression management concerns (due to non-compliance) may vary across studies; the group benefitting from the request (e.g., children’s hospital vs. community group) and request situation (e.g., at one’s front door vs. public space) may present more or less of a threat to one’s positive self-presentation. As such, impression management concerns stemming from rejecting a request can be tested as a moderator of compliance rates among existing LPC studies. If impression management concerns explain the effects of LPC messages, then compliance rates should increase in experiments where the threat to one’s positive self-presentation is greater. In studies where participants experience a greater threat to their impression management concerns when rejecting a request, LPC messages should be more effective in producing compliance relative to a control condition. The following hypothesis was proposed to test this idea.

**Hypothesis 1:** Impression management concerns moderate the effect of LPC messages on compliance rates. As the threat to a target's impression management concerns stemming from non-compliance increases, LPC messages produce greater compliance rates.

### *Requestor Need*

In Cialdini and Schroeder's (1976) seminal study, the authors argued that LPC messages might function by making targets feel that, because they are willing to accept an exceptionally small donation, the requestor must be desperate for assistance. A primary reason that people might be more likely to donate in high need situations may be tied to a person's internal standards and sense of moral obligation or social responsibility. As Warburton and Terry (2000) noted, personal decisions regarding the performance of a behavior may be rooted in the morality of doing the right thing regardless of the social consequences. In other words, instead of threatening a person's image as presented to others, LPC may work because it creates the potential for failure as it relates to a person's sense of self. Although saying "no" to someone who is relatively well off may not threaten a target's personal image of social responsibility, saying "no" to someone who is in desperate need of help might lead to decreased self-esteem or increased self-criticism. This pattern of relationships has been observed to work in other compliance-gaining tactics. For example, Feeley, Anker, and Aloe (2012) argued that the effectiveness of door-in-the-face messages may be the result of individuals' desire to avoid unpleasant states that arise due to the failure to live up to one's own personal norm of helping others in need.

Despite the potential for requestor need to trigger threats to one's personal moral obligations, similar to threats to individuals' impression management concerns, non-compliance is likely to be experienced as negative affect in the form of self-conscious moral emotions. This is because moral transgressions that occur at the individual or the relational level are both likely to lead to negative affective states such as shame and guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 1996). Thus, perceptions of high requestor need may trigger feelings of moral responsibility that, if violated, potentially induce negative affect. That said, people might be more likely to donate in LPC scenarios when requestor need is perceived to be high because they may wish to fulfill their moral obligations and, in doing so, avoid negative emotional states.

If perceptions of requestor need explain the effects of LPC requests, then LPC messages should be more effective in studies where need appears greater. On the contrary, when the need of the requestor is perceived to be low, LPC should not confer an advantage over a control message. The following hypothesis was proposed to test this idea.

**Hypothesis 2:** Perceptions of a requestor's need will moderate the effect of LPC messages on compliance rates. As the perceived need of the requestor increases, LPC messages produce greater compliance rates.

## Barrier Removal

Instead of working via impression management concerns or moral obligation, a third possible explanation for the effects of LPC messages can be traced to the seminal work on this technique. Specifically, the influence of LPC messages might stem from Cialdini and Schroeder's (1976) assertion that the technique functions through its ability to remove barriers associated with the costs of compliance. Several scholars believe this may be the case (Andrews et al., 2008; Gueguen, 2013a, 2013b; Jacob et al., 2012; Reingen, 1978; Weyant & Smith, 1987). For example, Andrews et al. (2008) highlight the idea that the technique may work because "subjects feel comfortable donating what they can afford rather than what they think the charity might expect" (p. 66). Weyant and Smith (1987) support this conclusion and argue that "people who might otherwise fail to donate will contribute provided that the modest sum they are willing to give seems appropriate" (p. 399).

The implications of barriers have received attention more generally in compliance-gaining research. Specifically, Ifert and Roloff (1998) noted that of critical importance to social influence is that requesters "must identify and overcome obstacles that prevent a target from complying" (p. 131). They argue that if obstacles to compliance are removed, it should be easier for the targets to honor solicitors' appeals. Ifert and Roloff's (1994, 1998) research shows that there are several obstacles that might preclude compliance in help-seeking contexts. In the context of LPC scenarios, five barriers are likely to be particularly relevant; these include a person's lack of resources, lack of time, perceptions of inconvenience, lack of incentive, and lack of desire to give.

In the case of donations to charity, as is most often what is asked for in LPC experiments, it is conceivable that individuals might be likely to resist requests based on the belief/excuse that they do not have the resources to give. This reason for non-compliance relates directly to Ifert and Roloff's (1998) notion of inadequate resources. In this case, requests are denied because people do not believe they have any resources to give or because they do not believe that the resources they have are adequate to justify giving (e.g., "I can't give/donate as much as you would like"). Still, a lack of funds is only one excuse that may stop targets from complying with requests. As noted above, there are several other obstacles that might affect LPC compliance attempts. For example, people who are asked to donate money may report that they do not have the time to comply or that they find the request to be inconvenient (e.g., if the request is made while a person is walking to a specific destination). Moreover, based on the type of request made, it could be that targets perceive no incentive to comply or simply do not feel like giving.

As with the two previous explanations, meta-analysis offers a valuable means to examine the role of barrier removal in explaining the function of LPC messages. Within the existing body of LPC research, it seems reasonable to expect some variation in the nature of barriers present among the specific contexts of LPC experiments. If LPC produces compliance by reducing barriers, then the effects of LPC requests relative to control conditions should become greater as particular barriers present in an experiment are more salient. On the other hand, when particular barriers in a compliance situation

are not salient, LPC should not present much of an advantage relative to a direct request. The following hypothesis was proposed to test the notion.

**Hypothesis 3:** Barriers to compliance (i.e., a lack of resources, a lack of time, inconvenience, a lack of incentive, and a lack of desire) moderate the effect of LPC messages on compliance rates. As each of the five barriers increases, LPC messages produce greater compliance rates.

### *LPC and Donation Size*

In addition to investigating why LPC messages work, a secondary goal of this project was to examine how well it works with regard to donation amounts. Although Andrews et al.'s (2008) meta-analysis showed that LPC messages produced higher compliance rates than control messages, a critical concern raised by Cialdini and Schroeder (1976) has yet to be fully addressed. Specifically, in legitimizing small contributions, LPC requests might reduce the amount that people donate. This is because by making it acceptable to donate a small amount (e.g., "even a penny"), LPC messages might influence people to give less money than they would without such a request.

The results from studies that have examined the effects of LPC on donation size are mixed. Whereas the findings from some research reports show that legitimizing paltry contributions decreases donation amounts (e.g., Reeves et al., 1987; Shearman & Yoo, 2007), others show that the tactic does not affect charitable contributions (e.g., Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976; Weyant, 1984; Weyant & Smith, 1987) or even increases them (e.g., Dolinska & Dolinski, 2014; Dolinski et al., 2005). In order to investigate this issue, the following research question was posed.

**Research Question 1:** Do LPC messages produce smaller sized donations than control messages?

## **Method**

### *Literature Search*

To find studies examining the LPC technique, a literature search was conducted to identify published and unpublished manuscripts. First, several academic databases were examined including Academic Search Complete, Communication and Mass Media Complete, All Academic, ERIC, ProQuest, PsycARTICLES, and PsycINFO. In addition to these databases, Google Scholar was reviewed. Separate searches were conducted using each of the following search phrases: "legitimization of paltry favors," "even a penny will help," "even a dollar will help," and "legitimizing paltry contributions." Second, the reference section from each manuscript included in the sample was inspected to identify additional studies. The search process resulted in a total of 26 manuscripts for consideration.

### *Inclusion Criteria*

To be included in the analysis for compliance rates, studies had to consist of experiments that (a) involved appeals using control conditions and conditions that legitimized paltry contributions, (b) involved spoken requests for compliance, (c) involved spoken LPC, (d) involved in-person solicitation, and (e) reported enough data to compute compliance rates and variance associated with these rates. LPC messages were operationally defined as messages that included an explicit sentence making it clear that a very small contribution would be acceptable (i.e., “even a penny will help”). Two manuscripts were excluded because one was a conference paper that was subsequently published (published as Shearman & Yoo, 2007) and the other reported data that were present in another article (data were utilized from Reingen, 1978). A total of 13 research reports with 34 effect sizes met the criteria and were included in the analysis examining the effects of LPC messages on compliance rates. Descriptive information about the studies in the sample is available in Table 1.

To be included in the analysis of donation amounts, studies must have met the preceding criteria and also included a measure of mean monetary donation per compliant individual. A total of seven research reports with 11 effect sizes were included in the analysis. Table 2 includes descriptive information about the studies examining donation amounts. It should be noted that no corrections were made to the effect estimates reflecting the impact of LPC messages on compliance rates and donation amounts.

### *Assessing Moderator Variables*

Because participants' perceptions of impression management issues, requestor need, and barriers to compliance were not typically measured in the original studies, additional data were collected to assess these variables. A convenience sample of participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) was paid a small sum of money to read and evaluate a single scenario used in previous LPC research. MTurk is a Web application where requesters post tasks (e.g., completing a questionnaire) that can be completed by workers for compensation (for an introduction, see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). MTurk has been demonstrated to be a valuable resource for sampling participants for social scientific research (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). The mean ratings for each control scenario were used as moderator variables in tests of the study hypotheses. Participants ( $N = 1,036$ ) were 618 men and 418 women with ages ranging from 18 to 72 ( $M = 30.9$ ).

Participants were randomly assigned to read a single scenario associated with 1 of the 33 control conditions from the LPC studies in the sample (one study involved an exact replication of another study and therefore was not duplicated). Participants were asked to evaluate the control condition for each study because it offered a baseline for evaluating the degree to which each of the moderating variables was present in the compliance-gaining situation; perceptions of the moderating variables in the control conditions are not biased by the LPC messages. The scenarios were generated for this project by re-creating the circumstances of the original solicitations. All scenarios

**Table 1.** Studies Used to Calculate Compliance Rates (N = 3,181).

Study	Treat "Yes"		Control "Yes"		r	I	N	BI	B2	B3	B4	B5
	Treat N	Control N	Treat N	Control N								
Cialdini and Schroeder, 1976 (Study 1)	21	42	12	42	.24	4.44	4.66	4.94	2.83	4.30	3.09	4.08
Cialdini and Schroeder, 1976 (Study 2)	18	31	10	31	.28	3.71	4.94	4.63	3.11	3.81	3.33	4.30
Dibble et al., 2011 (1st person)	7	27	14	40	-.12	2.89	4.27	3.63	4.98	5.47	4.98	6.03
Dibble et al., 2011 (3rd person)	12	41	13	34	-.11	3.11	3.77	4.05	5.15	5.17	4.35	5.02
Dolinska and Dolinski, 2014 (Study 1; LPC + Fear then relief)	22	48	11	48	.28	4.04	4.06	4.82	3.48	4.58	4.47	5.15
Dolinska and Dolinski, 2014 (Study 1; LPC)	12	48	5	48	.28	5.29	4.94	3.97	3.29	4.48	3.74	4.52
Dolinska and Dolinski, 2014 (Study 2; LPC + Fear then relief)	25	60	12	60	.28	3.91	4.42	4.05	2.81	3.68	3.50	4.15
Dolinska and Dolinski, 2014 (Study 2; LPC)	14	60	4	60	.37	4.23	4.35	3.60	2.97	3.98	3.45	4.34
Dolinski, Grzyb, Olejnik, Prusakowski, and Urban, 2005 (Study 1; Dialogue)	25	30	20	30	.24	5.14	5.06	4.77	2.67	4.27	3.09	4.05
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 1; Monologue)	16	30	10	30	.22	4.11	4.20	4.65	3.72	4.40	4.43	4.68
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 2; Dialogue issue)	19	30	15	30	.15	3.54	4.19	4.47	3.05	4.06	4.31	4.25
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 2; Dialogue mood)	16	30	11	30	.18	4.06	4.64	4.36	2.67	3.92	3.68	4.12
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 2; Monologue issue)	10	30	7	30	.14	3.91	3.84	3.52	2.95	4.61	4.14	4.64
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 2; Monologue mood)	5	30	5	30	.00	4.11	4.18	4.82	3.79	4.56	4.17	4.73
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 3; Dialogue issue)	18	30	14	30	.15	3.50	3.78	3.41	5.22	5.16	4.70	5.30
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 3; Dialogue weather)	16	30	12	30	.15	3.28	3.97	3.61	5.32	5.27	4.97	5.58
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 3; Monologue issue)	10	30	6	30	.19	3.28	3.81	3.90	5.00	5.37	4.87	5.66
Dolinski et al., 2005 (Study 3; Monologue weather)	8	30	5	30	.16	3.48	3.69	3.86	5.16	5.50	5.25	5.64
Fraser and Hite, 1989 (LPC + Matching)	30	80	5	80	.52	4.55	4.81	4.82	2.76	4.05	3.23	4.06
Fraser and Hite, 1989 (LPC)	24	80	19	80	.09	3.78	4.43	4.87	3.35	4.57	3.35	4.03
Fraser, Hite, and Sauer, 1988 (LPC + Anchor US\$20)	29	160	18	160	.15	3.65	4.52	4.58	2.79	4.31	4.15	4.90
Fraser et al., 1988 (LPC)	54	160	24	160	.28	4.82	5.22	4.48	2.53	3.80	3.16	3.66
Reeves and Saucer, 1993 (Study 1)	10	15	6	15	.29	4.19	4.59	4.58	3.36	4.02	3.70	4.39

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Study	Treat		Control		r	I	N	BI	B2	B3	B4	B5
	"Yes"	Treat N	"Yes"	Control N								
Reeves and Saucer, 1993 (Study 2)	20	30	11	32	.35	4.19	4.59	4.58	3.36	4.02	3.70	4.39
Reeves, Macolini, and Martin, 1987 (Even a penny)	17	30	9	30	.29	3.80	4.47	4.58	3.23	4.80	4.34	4.72
Reingen, 1978 (Study 1; LPC)	15	32	6	32	.35	3.89	4.83	4.52	3.08	3.97	3.62	4.10
Reingen, 1978 (Study 1; LPC + DITF)	14	32	11	32	.11	4.23	4.26	4.19	3.13	4.19	3.85	4.37
Reingen, 1978 (Study 1; LPC + FITD)	16	32	11	32	.18	4.28	5.18	4.42	3.02	3.74	3.65	4.09
Reingen, 1978 (Study 2)	11	28	3	28	.42	3.90	4.5	4.63	3.23	4.22	3.87	4.40
Shearman and Yoo, 2007 (Study 2)	11	31	3	39	.46	4.79	4.78	4.77	3.70	4.39	3.52	4.13
Shearman and Yoo, 2007 (Study 2; LPC + Social proof)	27	41	10	34	.39	3.88	4.43	4.83	3.48	4.40	3.72	4.47
Takada and Levine, 2007	6	26	4	29	.17	3.63	4.18	3.64	4.89	4.65	4.18	5.00
Weyant, 1984	30	53	23	59	.19	4.13	4.79	4.90	3.28	4.41	3.81	4.45
Weyant and Smith, 1987 (Study 1)	37	95	34	94	.03	4.31	4.66	5.00	3.56	4.00	3.63	4.14

Note. Independent control groups were used for all studies (e.g., the effect for Reingen, 1978, Study 1 LPC + DITF was calculated by comparing the LPC + DITF group with a control group exposed only to a DITF manipulation). I = impression; N = need; B = barriers; 1 = no resources; 2 = no time; 3 = inconvenient; 4 = no incentive; 5 = did not feel like complying. FITD = foot-in-the-door; DITF = door-in-the-face.

**Table 2.** Studies Used to Calculate Mean Donations.

Study	<i>r</i>	SE
Cialdini and Schroeder, 1976 (Study 1)	-.09	.17
Cialdini and Schroeder, 1976 (Study 2)	.03	.20
Fraser and Hite, 1989 (LPC + Matching)	-.23	.15
Fraser and Hite, 1989 (LPC)	-.07	.15
Fraser, Hite, and Sauer, 1988 (LPC + Anchor US\$20)	-.42	.11
Fraser et al., 1988 (LPC)	-.12	.11
Reeves and Saucer, 1993 (Study 1)	-.04	.25
Reeves, Macolini, and Martin, 1987	-.40	.16
Reingen, 1978 (Study 1 combined)	-.13	.11
Shearman and Yoo, 2007 (Study 2; LPC)	-.57	.16
Shearman and Yoo, 2007 (Study 2; LPC + Social proof)	-.49	.12

were described addressing the same issues including the location of the request (e.g., at home, walking near a college campus, walking in a public square), the age of the requester, the exact wording of the request as supplied in the initial studies, and any details associated with the solicitation (e.g., the presence of identification badges, informational brochures, etc.). Care was taken to ensure that the age differential between requestors and targets, as well as the original study settings, was accurately translated for a sample of participants drawn from MTurk. For example, an original experiment conducted on a college campus using college students as requestors and targets was presented to participants in this project as involving a situation where “someone your same age” approaches you “in a public square” and presents the request. Participants evaluated the scenarios as if they were the target of the request. After reading one scenario, participants rated their perceptions of the moderator variables. The total number of participants evaluating each scenario ranged from 29 to 32.

The questionnaire contained a series of measures designed to evaluate impression management concerns with non-compliance, perceptions of requestor need, and barriers to compliance. Items related to impression management concerns were created for this study and included three statements asking participants to report the degree to which they thought that saying “no” to the request would make them look *cheap*, *stingy*, or *uncaring*; response options ranged from (1) *not at all* to (10) *very much*. The three items were combined to form a measure of **self-image concerns** ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .93$ ). **Requestor need** was evaluated with a single-item measure in which participants were asked to report the extent to which they believed the organization soliciting donations was in need of assistance. Responses could range from (1) *not at all in need* to (10) *extremely in need* ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ).

The measure of perceived **barriers to compliance** was created for this study based on the work of Ifert and Roloff (1994, 1998) and represented five potential reasons for resisting compliance. Each reason was measured using two items with response options ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Participants were told to report

the extent to which each of the reasons would stop them from complying with the specific request. The first reason included a **lack of resources** and was measured with the statements “I just don’t have the resources” and “I don’t have the ability to give” ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ , standardized coefficient  $\alpha = .84$ ). The second reason referred to a **lack of time** and was measured with the statements “I don’t have time to do it” and “I am too busy to do that” ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ , standardized coefficient  $\alpha = .91$ ). The third reason represented an **inconvenience** and was measured with the statements “This is an inconvenience” and “This is bothersome” ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ , standardized coefficient  $\alpha = .85$ ). The fourth reason referred to a **lack of incentives** and was measured with statements “I don’t see why I should do that” and “I don’t have any reason to do that” ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ , standardized coefficient  $\alpha = .84$ ). The fifth reason included a **lack of desire** and was measured with the statements “I just don’t feel like doing that” and “I don’t want to do that” ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ , standardized coefficient  $\alpha = .88$ ).

## Results

### *Testing Potential Moderators of the Effect of LPC Messages on Compliance Rates*

The effect sizes for each study were calculated using the computer program Comprehensive Meta-Analysis (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2006; Version 2.2). Compliance rates were examined using the effect size  $r$ , which is commensurate with a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, because it is a metric that is fairly intuitive to a broad audience. A random-effects model meta-analysis was conducted to determine the weighted mean effect of LPC messages on compliance rates (Borenstein et al., 2009). This analysis included 13 research reports with 34 effect sizes and a total of 3,181 participants. The results of the random-effects model meta-analysis revealed a weighted mean effect of LPC messages on compliance rates of  $r = .22$  ( $p < .01$ ) with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .17 to .26.

A series of random-effects meta-regression models were employed to test the study hypotheses. Meta-regression is a technique for examining a continuous moderator variable (for a review, see Borenstein et al., 2009) where the values of a potential moderator variable are used to predict the relative size of an effect estimate among studies in a given sample. As is common in meta-analysis, weights for each study are included in the analyses. In this project, each moderator variable was tested in a separate model, and only one moderator variable was included per model. All tests involved all 34 studies identified in Table 1. The outcome variable for all models consisted of the effect estimates representing differences in compliance rates between the LPC and control message condition. A significant beta coefficient offers evidence that the predictor variable moderates the effects of LPC messages on compliance rates. More specifically, a significant beta coefficient indicates that the size of the estimates for the effects of LPC messages on compliance increases/decreases linearly as the value of the moderator increases/decreases. In the following paragraph, the  $R^2$  values represent the proportion of variance between studies explained by the moderator.

In support of Hypothesis 1, results demonstrated that impression management concerns significantly moderated the effect of LPC messages on compliance. The unstandardized beta coefficient representing the relationship between impression management concerns and the effect estimates for the impact of LPC on compliance was significant, intercept =  $-.34$ ,  $b = .14$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $z = 3.09$ ,  $p < .01$ , ( $Q_{model} = 9.53$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $R^2 = .91$ ). As non-compliance presented a greater potential threat to a target's positive self-presentation, the effectiveness of LPC messages relative to control messages increased. The results also supported Hypothesis 2. Participants' perceptions of requestor need moderated the effect of LPC messages on compliance. The unstandardized beta coefficient representing the relationship between requestor need and the effect estimate for the impact of LPC on compliance was significant, intercept =  $-.41$ ,  $b = .14$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $z = 2.37$ ,  $p < .05$ , ( $Q_{model} = 5.60$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $R^2 = .53$ ). The effects of LPC messages on compliance were greater as the perceived need of the requestor increased. Related to Hypothesis 3, the perceived lack of time, intercept =  $.51$ ,  $b = -.08$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $z = -2.93$ ,  $p < .01$ , ( $Q_{model} = 8.57$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $R^2 = .83$ ); inconvenience, intercept =  $.77$ ,  $b = -.13$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $z = -2.61$ ,  $p < .01$ , ( $Q_{model} = 6.82$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $R^2 = .65$ ); the lack of incentive, intercept =  $.65$ ,  $b = -.11$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $z = -2.59$ ,  $p < .01$ , ( $Q_{model} = 6.69$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $R^2 = .64$ ); and the lack of desire to give, intercept =  $.68$ ,  $b = -.10$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $z = -2.33$ ,  $p < .05$ , ( $Q_{model} = 5.42$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $R^2 = .49$ ), all moderated the effect of LPC on compliance rates. These findings, however, were in the opposite direction of what was predicted. LPC messages produced smaller compliance rates relative to the control conditions as each of these barriers became larger. A perceived lack of resources did not moderate the effect of LPC messages on compliance rates, intercept =  $-.10$ ,  $b = .07$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $z = 1.28$ ,  $p = .20$ , ( $Q_{model} = 1.63$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $R^2 = .01$ ).

### *Examining the Effects of LPC Messages on Mean Donation Size*

A second meta-analysis was conducted using a random-effects model to evaluate the effects of LPC messages on the mean size of donations offered per compliant individual. Data for this meta-analysis were extracted directly from the original research reports. Donation amounts were examined using the effect size  $r$ . The analysis included seven research reports with 11 effect sizes and a total of 1,531 participants; 428 individuals gave donations. The observed effect estimate shows that LPC messages produced smaller mean contributions compared with control groups, the difference was statistically significant. The effect estimate was  $r = -.23$  ( $p < .01$ ) with a 95% confidence interval ranging from  $-.34$  to  $-.12$ .

Next, we conducted a second set of analyses to determine if the total amount of money generated in LPC conditions was significantly different from control conditions. Whereas the previous analysis focused on the amount donated by the average person who complied, this analysis considered the amount given along with the total number of people who complied. It is plausible that, although LPC messages result in smaller donation amounts, the increased compliance rates stemming from these messages may produce a larger total amount of money contributed in a study. To conduct this analysis, we calculated total donation amounts for both experimental and control

groups from 10 research reports representing 18 comparisons (U.S. samples only) and a total of 2,054 participants. Care was taken to ensure donation totals were adjusted to reflect an equal number of participants in the LPC and control conditions for each study. Because our observations of these data were at the study level (e.g., total amount contributed in the LPC and control conditions), it was not possible to use traditional meta-analytic techniques to test for differences. Instead, we examined differences using a paired  $t$  test with the experimental and control condition donation totals from a given study each representing one data point. The difference between the donation totals for experimental ( $M = 49.07$ ,  $SD = 49.68$ ) and control conditions ( $M = 46.04$ ,  $SD = 57.01$ ) was not statistically significant,  $t(17) = .41$ ,  $p = .69$  (two-tailed).

## Discussion

This study was conducted to explore three explanations about how LPC messages bring about compliance and to examine the effects of LPC messages on donation amounts. In line with the other summary study available (i.e., Andrews et al., 2008), the current project shows that, on the whole, the LPC technique significantly increased compliance rates over control conditions. Perhaps more important, the results of this project offer evidence consistent with the notion that impression management concerns and requestor need explain the effects of LPC messages on compliance. The results also indicate that this technique may serve to decrease the size of donations and produce a similar total donation amount compared with control messages. These findings and their broader implications for compliance-gaining research are considered in the following paragraphs.

### *Explaining the LPC Technique: Tests of Three Moderators*

The results related to Hypotheses 1 and 2 offer evidence that impression management concerns and requestor need moderate the effectiveness of LPC messages with respect to compliance rates. Specifically, the results showed that LPC worked better in situations where saying no to a request to help a charitable organization represented a greater threat to a target's impression management concerns. LPC messages also produced greater compliance rates relative to control conditions as perceptions of requestor need increased. By refusing to donate to charities in these instances, we argued that individuals risked violating a personal moral obligation to provide assistance to people in need. Taken together, these findings indicate that as it lowers the stakes of complying, LPC raises the possibility that people will be seen in a negative light, or will perceive themselves in a negative light, if they resist compliance—especially in charitable contexts. This finding is in line with Baumeister's (1982) observation that “the desire to be one's ideal self gives rise to motivations affecting both the private self and the public self” (p. 3).

Choosing not to help people in need may result in perceptions of a personal moral failure (Feeley et al., 2012) or a failure with regard to promoting a desired impression with other individuals (Baumeister, 1982). Both cases reflect a failure of the self in

relation to others and may give rise to self-conscious negative affect such as shame and guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Considering the above, results from the current investigation are consistent with the notion that individuals exposed to LPC messages may comply with requests as a way of avoiding feeling badly about themselves. Thus, it may be negative emotions—or, at least, the potential for experiencing them—stemming from the failure to live up to one's ideal self (either publicly or privately) that lead to compliance in the case of solicitations that legitimize paltry contributions. These results are corroborated by findings that perceptions of social responsibility are linked to individuals' emotional well-being (Keyes, 1998) and that anticipated emotions have a significant influence over volitional behavior (Bagozzi et al., 1998; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001).

While the social or intrapersonal pressure stemming from being unhelpful may lead to enhanced compliance among some people, the added pressure may not be beneficial in all cases. For example, Takada and Levine (2007) noted that while LPC messages were successful when communicated to individuals who scored high on measures of perspective taking, the opposite was true for people who scored low. As Takada and Levine argued, LPC messages might fail for people low in perspective taking because they may be more likely to resent the pressure added to requests where the prospect of a negative impression is made salient. Similarly, inducing impression management or social responsibility concerns may backfire for individuals who interpret LPC requests to be manipulative (e.g., Coulter & Pinto, 1995) or who perceive the solicitations to be a threat to their personal freedom (Rains, 2013).

The results of this meta-analysis are important because they help rule out the role of barriers in relation to the effects of LPC messages. Although several of the barriers examined in this project moderated the effects of LPC on compliance rates, the associations were in the opposite direction of what we expected. If LPC messages function by removing barriers to compliance, we would expect that this tactic would become more effective as barriers to compliance became greater. Yet, four of the five barriers served to reduce the effectiveness of the LPC tactic. As these barriers to compliance became greater, LPC messages became less effective in promoting compliance relative to control conditions. This set of findings points to the conclusion that LPC does not necessarily work by reducing barriers; instead, it works better when barriers are low. This result is consistent with research on other compliance-gaining tactics. For example, Gueguen et al. (2011) reported that although touching targets when making requests can influence compliance rates when coupled with requests that ask for minimal aid, this effect dissipates when used with substantial requests. Foss and Dempsey (1979) came to a similar conclusion regarding the foot-in-the-door technique.

The one exception to the previous trend, however, warrants consideration. Perceptions of one's resources as a barrier did not moderate the effect of LPC messages on compliance rates. If the perceived costs of donating to a charitable organization served as a barrier to compliance as some researchers had predicted, then we would have expected to see LPC work better in scenarios where the costs associated with compliance were perceived to be high. This was not the case. This finding is informative nonetheless because it suggests that people who were asked to contribute

to charitable organizations in previous LPC studies likely perceived that they did, in fact, have the ability to give. It appears that individuals who denied requests for compliance were simply not sufficiently convinced to part with their resources.

### *LPC and Donation Amount*

Beyond examining why LPC works, a secondary goal of the current project was to explore the ultimate utility of LPC messages. Although LPC messages may increase compliance rates, they might simultaneously serve to reduce the amount that is donated. The results of the current study indicated that LPC messages do tend to decrease the mean donation size among individuals who comply with requests. An interpretation of the size of this effect shows that approximately 69% of those in the LPC groups donated below the mean (50th percentile) of the control group distribution (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). According to some scholars, these results might reflect the notion that the LPC serves as an anchor that influences subsequent donations (Shearman & Yoo, 2007). From a practical perspective, solicitors may be wary of using the tactic when other compliance-gaining techniques may function just as well for increasing the rate of compliance without the threat of diminished donations.

Although our results demonstrate that individuals who donate after hearing LPC requests tend to give less compared with control conditions, some people might claim that the tactic is still beneficial compared with control groups. This is because, even though people exposed to LPC requests might give a lower mean dollar amount in comparison with individuals in control groups, their smaller donations may be offset by the fact that, as a group, they give more often. In the current study, we tested this notion by examining whether the total amount of money collected through the cumulative efforts of previous researchers was different for LPC conditions compared with control conditions. Although the means were in the direction of a benefit for LPC requests, our results indicated that the difference was non-significant. Thus, despite its ability to increase compliance rates, solicitation efforts that legitimize paltry contributions may not be better off for having done so; we found that the smaller amounts donated per person effectively offset the increased donation rates associated with LPC messages.

Still, because LPC is beneficial for increasing rates of compliance, this technique might prove useful for soliciting behaviors that do not vary in magnitude. Stated differently, the LPC technique may be most useful if it is used to solicit compliance in contexts where all-or-nothing behavior is requested. Examples of these contexts may include requests to sign a petition, requests to vote, requests to attend an event (e.g., a fund-raiser), and requests to be vaccinated. For instance, solicitors requesting a signed petition may tell individuals that “even one signature will help.” Alternatively, in the case of vaccinations, people who are interested in gaining compliance for the flu shot, for example, may tell their targets that “even small steps” taken to ensure personal health and the safety of the community will help. However, as our findings indicated, these requests may only prove useful in situations where existing barriers for compliance are low and when a person’s concerns regarding impression management or a sense of social responsibility are threatened.

## Limitations

As with any study, the current project has limitations. First, although all studies were included that could be found, the analyses may suffer from small sample sizes. Specifically, one of the drawbacks of the analysis of mean donation amounts was that there was not enough information provided by several primary studies to ascertain effect sizes. More information would have allowed for the inclusion of additional studies, which may have proved informative.

Another limitation pertains to our use of a single-item measure for perceptions of requester need. We used a single item to manage the overall length of our questionnaire and reduce the demand on participants. A third limitation is that the ratings of the moderator variables used to examine the three explanations for how LPC messages function were collected post hoc. Impression management concerns, perceived requestor need, and barriers to compliance were not evaluated by participants in the original experiments. Asking participants in our sample to provide a measure of these perceptions as a substitute for how the original study participants may have been feeling introduces potential problems including differences in individual giving behavior and ability, and cultural responsiveness to solicitations, for example. However, the approach used in this study has precedence (e.g., Petty, Kasmer, Haugtvedt, & Cacioppo, 1987) and effectively made it possible to conduct a meta-analytic review testing these three explanations for the effects of LPC messages. Moreover, care was taken to ensure that each scenario was presented uniformly to participants in a manner that was faithful to the original experiment from which it was derived. Finally, the relatively large number of individuals evaluating each scenario serves to increase reader confidence about the robustness of the mean ratings used to test the moderators.

## Conclusion

Despite compelling evidence that LPC messages can increase compliance rates, to date, questions remained about how such messages bring about compliance. This project explored three explanations for the effects of LPC messages on compliance rates and examined the effects of LPC messages on donation amounts. The results of our study indicated that the effectiveness of LPC was not dependent on individuals' perceived barriers to giving. Instead, LPC messages were beneficial because they increased targets' impression management concerns and perceptions of requestor need, which provided them with an incentive to comply. Practically speaking, our results also showed that, as a fundraising technique related to donation totals, LPC may not be a superior tactic compared with control conditions. This is because, although people gave more often in conditions where paltry contributions had been legitimized, they donated less—just as they were prompted to do.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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\*Indicates a research report used in the meta-analysis.

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