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GIVING AND RECEIVING COMPLIMENTS-WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS?

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Compliments are a part of everyday communication in American culture. While many use compliments in order to gain compliance or to show interest in further developing a relationship, underlying intentions may be different than what is perceived by the receiver. The researchers of this study investigated the difference in the motivations of compliments both given and received based on different categories. Using a survey of students at a faith-based university in the Midwest, researchers were able to gather insight into the intentions of giving compliments as well as the perception of received compliments.

INTRODUCTION

Compliments play a role in the how we view ourselves as well as provide us with perceptions of intentions of others in conversation. There are notable differences in compliment topics and also the intentions behind them. Some examples of compliment topics include: physical appearance, materialistic items, and personality traits. Existing studies have suggested that women often use compliments to build or strengthen affiliations and to help increase one's self-esteem (Jones & Buckingham, 2005). Similar existing studies have found that women typically base compliments on appearance, while men deliver materialistic based compliments (Doohan & Manusov, 2004).

The perceptions of people's intentions of giving compliments provides ample justification for curiosity and opportunity for research (Grant & Fabrigar, 2010). Compliments are used frequently in conversations in an attempt to have or maintain a social relationship with another person, but sometimes people will use a strategy called 'compliment manipulation' to gain compliance with a person (Grant & Fabrigar, 2010). People use this technique to make it more likely for a person to comply with their wishes, or to get something out of them.

The researchers of this current study focused on the motivations behind giving compliments as well as the perceived intention of received compliments. The findings of the study had the potential to greatly increase understanding of communication patterns, which when used in conjunction with existing studies, could provide valuable insight. This study focused on perceptions of intention in compliments. This study is designed to answer the questions: 1) What is the intention when giving a compliment to another person based on materialistic possessions, physical or personality traits?; and 2) What is the perception of the intention when receiving a compliment based on materialistic possessions, physical or personality traits? The researchers hypothesized that compliments based on physical traits would be perceived with flirtatious intentions based on data analyzed from previous studies, while also hypothesizing that the overall intention of giving compliments was to ‘be nice/genuine’.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Very few studies have focused on the intention of compliments and the perceptions of the compliments by the receiver. Existing research has been found to focus on compliments as maintenance in romantic relationships as well as a form of cultural societal compliance (Doohan & Manusov, 2004). A large amount of research has focused on women in relation to compliments; they focus on the impact compliments have on women’s self-esteem and body image (Calogero, Herbozo, & Thompson, 2009). Some research studies also discovered common topics for compliments, but the areas on intentions and perception have minimal research. In a study by Wogan & Parisi (2006), research discovers three common subtopics of compliment: skill, appearance, and materialism. In addition to those subtopics, flirtation and attraction are also major factors (Doohan & Manusov, 2004) to look at in regard to compliment behaviors

providing justification for the researchers current hypothesis that giving compliments based on physical traits would be strongly motivated by an intention to be flirtatious.

Romantic Relationships

Compliments are recognized as a culturally common form of communication within people of all different relationships. Compliments are given and received by strangers, complimentary exchanges are made between friends, and they are also a factor in close, romantic relationships. According to Doohan & Manusov (2004), “In romantic relationships, it is not imperative that outsiders recognize compliments. Instead, compliments need to be recognized by the romantic partner (i.e., members of the same relational culture), and indeed they may be idiosyncratic to the relationship” (p. 214-217). The form of compliments varies depending on the relationship. Romantic relationships typically consist of a personal language that may not be recognized or identified by people outside of that relationship and compliments tend to follow that pattern. Although there isn’t a need for others to be aware of the compliment in a romantic relationship, there is importance in the presence of the compliments in relational satisfaction. “Compliments may be more expected than with strangers, the presence or absence of compliments from a romantic partner will likely influence an individual's perception of the quality of his or her romantic relationship” (Doohan & Manusov, 2004).

Current studies support the idea that giving compliments is an important factor in establishing a romantic relationship. When subjects were asked how they would initiate an interaction that would hopefully lead to romance, pickup lines, compliments and supportive behaviors (helping with homework, etc.) were noted as common methods in establishing a relationship (Doohan & Manusov, 2004). This strategy involves giving praise or public

acknowledgment towards potential relational partners. The compliments could be about physical attributions, material goods or skills. Compliments are used to initiate romantic relationships and maintain mutually satisfactory relationships.

Compliance

According to Fabrigar (2010), “Of the many compliance strategies that have been discussed in the literature, perhaps no strategy seems more intuitively compelling than the use of compliments” (pg. 226). People like to be complimented; therefore, one of the main ways to gain compliance from a person is through compliments. “Flattery is the infantry of negotiation,” (Fabrigar, 2010, pg. 226). Psychologists recognize the utility of compliments as a compliance tactic and have monitored the effects of social psychological consequences and also the factors that lead people to compliment others. A study conducted on a group of waiters and waitresses, and the amount of tips they received based on the compliments given to customers found that servers received higher tips when they complimented clients on their dinner selections or materialistic compliments and physical appearance (Fabrigar, 2010).

“The great majority of compliance researchers have assumed that compliments are likely to facilitate compliance because they exert a powerful effect on interpersonal evaluations,” (Fabrigar, 2010, pg. 227). People have reported higher positive feelings to someone when they receive a compliment or a positive evaluation, in comparison to receiving a criticism. Sometimes people recognize that there is an ulterior motive behind the compliment, and greater likings could play a big part in the person who tries to gain that favor. The goals of the study that was conducted on this topic by Ruhi (2007) was to test the pervasive assumption in the literature that liking is a critical mechanism underlying the effects of compliments on compliance.

Investigating the effectiveness of compliments as a compliance strategy, Ruhi (2007) found that liking, as a potential mechanism, had no significant bearing. However, Ruhi's data suggest that people comply more once they have been complimented. This discovery was the first evidence that compliments are effective means of increasing compliance when asked directly. However, there are many other factors that also affect participants to receive compliments and gain other's compliance.

"The individual characteristics of the confederates (e.g., attractiveness, similarity to the participant) as well as the nature of the face-to-face conversation may lead to larger amounts of compliance" (Fabrigar, 2010). If someone finds another person attractive or they feel more comfortable with the person, they may be more willing to comply based on these factors instead of the compliments they receive from them. The liking mechanism remains a potential mediator for compliment manipulation, but could also be completely insignificant on the success of the compliment in gaining further compliance (Fabrigar, 2010).

There are alternatives to the compliment manipulations and other factors that could potentially decide on whether or not a person will comply. Receiving a compliment may produce feelings of "indebtedness toward the flatterer" (Fabrigar, 2010, pg. 232), but this is because when a person compliments someone, the target may feel as though they need to reciprocate regardless of whether or not the compliment produce any feelings of liking. Another alternative could be that sometimes compliments provide feedback to people and it may alter their perspective of their self-image. This alteration may produce feelings that would promote compliance to the direct request. "Perhaps enhance extremity and/or accessibility of self-perceptions of friendliness may have in turn made people more inclined to agree to a request in order to maintain

consistency between their self-concepts and behaviors” (Fabrigar, 2010, pg. 232). The last alternative is that compliments could perhaps provide a motivation to maintain the relationship between the receiver and the requestor. If they were to comply with the requestor, there could be the potential for additional interactions with the requestor. Compliments ultimately are an effective compliance tactic.

Self Esteem, Body Image, and Body Dissatisfaction for Women

American society is heavily involved in creating polarized values in appearance and skills for women and men (Wogan & Parisi, 2006). Women’s expectations of appearance-based compliments and men’s expectations of skills-based compliments are connected to the social norms in society (Wogan & Parisi, 2006). Both genders perpetuate different categories of expectations for the opposite sex based on learned behaviors from social norms. These expectations may help explain the findings of current studies indicating the impact that appearance-based compliments have on women and self-acceptance of their body image.

Haas, Pawlow, Pettibone, and Segrist (2012) stated that the effects of “media exposure to female images [that] are thin and airbrushed is also associated with depression and lower self-esteem in women” (p. 405). The ideology of beauty is a value, which some societies focus heavily on and is evident in various forms of media. “[P]eople are exposed to many sources of social comparison through mass media such as images in magazines and on television” (Jones & Buckingham, 2005, p. 1165). Exposure to this type of image ideology in media correlates with depression and low self-esteem in women. “Therefore, the high-risk women who [are] exposed to average-sized model images [are] less likely to endorse thinness/restricting expectancies than those participants who are exposed to thin model[s]” (Haas et al, 2012, p. 406). Visual exposure

to these stimulus prime women and develop their schemas for which they interpret communication, reinforcing the researcher's hypothesis that compliments given based on physical attributions would be regarded as having a flirtatious intention but could also create women to perceive these compliments as being mean and identify them as being 'sarcastic'.

Societal attention focused on women's physical appearance "directs women's attention toward how their bodies look to others and encourages them to view themselves as objects ... [A]ny comment based on the visual evaluation of the body (not only negative or sexualized comments) could be linked to taking a third-person (objectifying) versus first-person (subjective) perspective about the self, leading to negative body evaluations" (Calogero et al., 2005, p. 121). Calogero, et al. (2005) reinforces the idea that compliments can increase women's body dissatisfaction by highlighting results showing that both negative physical compliments and positive acceptance of appearance based compliments can contribute equally to self-esteem and body image issues. While these findings seem contradictory, the correlation illustrates the high level of negative effects comments pertaining to physical appearance can have on women, regardless of positive or negative connotation.

Culture and Gender

Previous studies are lacking in gender differences in accepting compliments and intentions behind delivering and receiving compliments, only focusing on the differences in compliment topics seemingly given more by each gender. One study (Wogan & Parisi, 2006) keep focused on gender differences, didn't explore how compliments are being accepted and the intent of the compliments by both parties. Instead, the study concludes that women compliment men more on their skills rather than appearance and men mainly compliment women on their

physical appearance. Other frequent topics about compliments are specifically about the effects on women's self-esteem or of a distinct culture's norm in regard to compliment giving and receiving. One study (Calogero, et al., 2009) conducted an exploration on the effects of compliments to women's self-worth and self-image. The study highlights that the more negative criticism or the positive compliments given about their appearance will increase awareness to a woman's body and also their negative self image. The research affirms the necessity for understanding how women perceive compliments as well as an opportunity for further research to be done to understand the actual intentions of the giver.

CONCLUSION

While there are countless current studies on compliments and women's self-esteem and body image, the role of compliments in gaining compliance and the use of compliments in the maintenance of romantic relationships, there is minimal research currently on the actual intentions and perceptions of intentions in compliment communication. Due to the lack of data, this study will focus on motivation. This study is designed to answer the questions: 1) What is the intention when giving a compliment to another person based on materialistic possessions, physical or personality traits?; and 2) What is the perception of the intention when receiving a compliment based on materialistic possessions, physical or personality traits?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Giving and receiving compliments is a common part of American culture. We give compliments to each other on a daily basis, but the intentions of those compliments aren't always as they appear on the surface. This study focuses on revealing a difference in the intention of compliments given based on different categories as well as the perception of the intention of

compliments received based on these categories: materialistic possessions, physical characteristics and personality traits. The hypothesis that when giving a compliment based on physical traits, the main motivation is ‘to be flirtatious’, provided researchers with the first of two research questions:

RQ1: What is the intention/motivation when giving a compliment to another person based on materialistic possessions, physical or personality traits?

The researchers minimal findings of data on compliment intentions provided interest in exploration of the subject in hopes of providing further insight into this aspect of compliment communication. Ruhi’s study in 2007 supported the notion that people are often more compliant after being complimented. Research by Fabrigar in 2010 supported this idea providing some indication that a motivation for giving compliments would be to get something from another person or to be flirtatious in hopes of compliance. While these studies prove useful in gathering insight into possible motives for giving compliments, a 2001 study done by Mursy & Wilson revealed that compliment giving and receiving differs culturally and typically Western compliment communication is done as a cultural norm of politeness. The researchers hypothesized that the main perception of received compliments would be to “be nice/genuine” with the exception of the physical category which is hypothesized to be perceived as to “be flirtatious”. This hypothesis framed the researchers second question:

RQ2: What is the perception of the intention/motivation when receiving a compliment based on materialistic possessions, physical or personality traits?

Current research fails to focus on intention of compliment giving as well as the perception of compliments received. This study surveyed college students to identify a data sample of this aspect of communication.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A survey was sent out to 2,106 students at a private faith based university located in the Midwest. 443 students participated in the survey at a response rate of 21%. 70.71% of the respondents were female, 29.29% were male. 170 of the respondents were between the ages of 18-20, with 154 being 21-29 years of age. 57 survey participants were 30-39 years old, 38 were 40-49, 17 were 50-59, 2 were 60 or older and 1 reported being 17 years old or younger. 135 survey participants were juniors (30.68%) and 135 were seniors in college (30.68%). 84 of the respondents were freshmen (19.09%) and 74 were sophomores (16.82%).

Procedures

The researchers conducted the survey through the website Survey Monkey. The survey was given a unique web address for students to access the questions. The survey was emailed out to students on October 6, 2014 and closed on November 17, 2014. The survey was self-administered and did not include an incentive for completion. Within the email was a short description of the purpose of the study and the approximate length of time the survey would take. Below the paragraph was the hyperlink that lead to the 33 question survey.

The researchers tested to see if there was a significant difference in both the intention of giving compliments as well as the perception of the intention in compliments received in three different categories. Those categories included giving compliments on physical traits (body

figure, hair style, scent, smile and eyes), personality traits (how nice they are, their great ideas, sense of humor, how outgoing they are), and materialistic possessions (purse/backpack, jewelry, outfit, fashion, shoes). The researchers gave five possible motivations for participants to choose from. These included to be nice/genuine, be sarcastic, make them happy, be flirtatious or to start a conversation. The survey allowed for multiple answers to be chosen within each category as well as an 'Other' option (see Figure 2, Question 4 (2.4)).

RESULTS

At the .05 level of significance of the chi-square test with association, the researchers found within all 3 categories in receiving and giving compliments there to be a significant difference. The data indicated that the majority of the students often give compliments with the intention of 'be nice/genuine' and the data also suggested that students perceived the compliment giver's intention the same. Due to the significant differences found amongst the subcategories, the researchers were unable to classify all the subcategories with their corresponding main categories. Therefore, the data suggested that the students' intentions and perceptions of giving and receiving compliments in each subcategories within the main category are not the same.

The entire undergraduate student body at the University was emailed the link to the 33 question survey. The questions provided the students hypothetical situations regarding both giving a receiving compliments. To test the first hypothesis, researchers analyzed the results of the answers to the questions regarding *giving* compliments. Using a chi-square contingency, the researchers were able to determine a significant difference between responses within each compliment category ($P=0.00001$). Within the physical category, the data suggested that the majority of responses indicated the main motivation behind giving a compliment was to be

nice/genuine (75.69% average) (see Figure 3). Within the personality category, the data suggested that the majority of responses indicated the main motivation behind giving a compliment was to be nice/genuine (83.33% average) (see Figure 4). Within the materialistic category, the data suggested that the majority of responses indicated the main motivation behind giving a compliment was to be nice/genuine (81.38% average) (see Figure 5).

To test the second hypothesis, researchers tabulated the results of the responses given to the questions regarding *receiving* compliments. The findings remained consistent throughout the responses given with regard to receiving compliments as well. The data revealed that the majority of responses indicated the main perception of the intention of a compliment based on physical was to be nice/genuine (65.47% average) (see Figure 6). The data revealed that the majority of responses indicated the main perception of the intention of a compliment based on materialistic possessions was to be nice/genuine (73.92% average) (see Figure 8). The data revealed that the majority of responses indicated the main perception of the intention of a compliment based on personality was to be nice/genuine (70.57% average) (see Figure 7).

DISCUSSION

Symbolic Interactionism Physical: Giving

The Symbolic Interactionism Theory (SIT) suggests that a creation of a person's self and socialization in society is created by communication and the meanings we attribute to those interactions (Mead, 1934). The data indicated that the main intention behind delivering compliments to others was to be nice/genuine. The lack of context in the hypothetical situations given to the survey participants created a barrier in the analysis of the results due to the

interpretation of the questions by each person. Assuming that the interactions are between strangers, analysis of the secondary motivators indicate that within the physical category, the next highest intention was ‘to make them happy’ with the question about giving people a compliment on their scent which indicated the second highest motivator was ‘to be flirtatious’ (30.89 %).

The researchers hypothesized that the motivation of ‘to be flirtatious’ would have been highest in the physical compliment category. The data suggests that while the main motivator in this category was ‘to be nice/genuine’, the motivation ‘to be flirtatious’ was a higher motivator in this category than in any other. The SIT argues that humans act on their definition of a situation (Hewitt, 2006). This could be a reason why people choose to compliment in certain categories. The definitions people assign to a situation could influence the comfort level they have in that situation.

The second highest motivator in the question regarding giving compliments based on body figure was ‘to make them happy’, could be explained by the concept of the ‘looking glass self’ as described by George Herbert Mead. This aspect of the Symbolic Interactionism Theory suggests that our self image is constructed by taking on the role of another in order to see how we look to others (Mead, 1934). The data indicates that to be ‘nice/genuine’ was the highest motivator behind delivering physical compliments, which contradicts the researchers hypothesis that compliments of this nature would be strongly motivated by an intention to be flirtatious. Taking the role of other could be a reason why in all three categories, the primary intention was the same. Human’s desire to be seen as ‘nice’ could outweigh other motivators and the delivery

of compliments could be a platform with low risks in order to help create a self-image and also construct reality based on the reaction of the recipient.

Symbolic Interactionism Physical: Receiving

The data for receiving compliments within the physical category shows that the most frequent motivation was to “be nice/genuine”, and to “be flirtatious” was the second most frequent response. The responses for the to “be nice/genuine” (eyes 57.72%), (body figure 62.50%), (hair 77.13%), (scent 65.11%), (smile 69.91%), motivation were lower than giving physical compliment category. The researchers found that the to “be flirtatious” motivation was not far behind the main motivation. When receiving compliments, it is common that people tend to look at the intention of the person complimenting them more thoroughly and dissect the compliment, which could be why to “be flirtatious” was not far behind to “be nice/genuine”. The Symbolic Interactionism Theory refers to a composite mental image that people put together, which is known as a person’s generalized other (Hewitt, 2006). A generalized other of a person is based on his/herself based on societal expectations and responses. This relates to the research because when a person receives a compliment they have to figure out what the motivation is in order to evaluate the type of behavior that should be used after the initial meeting. People will take the position of the generalized other and assign that meaning to the people and their actions (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2007). When receiving compliments, dissecting the compliment and trying to figure out the motivation will help assign meaning to that situation and meaning to the person that is doing the complimenting.

Something that the researchers found interesting was the comments reported in the “Other” category when receiving physical compliments. They found in the “Other” category that

respondents had written in their own answers to the survey questions that had a direct correlation to the research that they had done. Some of the responses in the section were “This has never happened to me, so I’m not sure”, and “It makes me feel confident”. And one of the more interesting responses was, “They want something from me.” In previous research, there has been similar results. The response, “They want something from me” correlates to previous research done on people trying to gain compliance through compliments. Gaining compliance from a person is one of the main motivations when complimenting another person (Fabrigar, 2010). There was a study conducted on a group of waiters and waitresses, and the amount of tips they received when they complimented customers on their physical appearances. The amount of tips was significantly higher when the employees complimented on the customers physical appearances (Fabrigar, 2010). The researchers were fascinated to see that a hidden motivation such as gain compliance was something that showed up in the “Other” category within receiving physical compliments in the survey.

Symbolic Interactionism Materialistic: Giving

Regarding compliments pertaining to materialistic items, the data indicates that the most frequent response to the reason of intent for giving a compliment was to ‘be nice/genuine’. The data indicated that the average response rate of selecting to ‘be nice/genuine’ as a motivator in regards to giving materialistic compliments was 81.37%. The researchers also identified the second most frequent response to the intent for giving a compliment based on materialistic items was to ‘make them happy’ with only one exception, which was giving a compliment about a person’s purse/backpack. When participants were asked about giving a compliment regarding a person’s purse/backpack 30% of the respondents indicated it was to start a conversation rather

than 26.18% of the respondents which indicated it was to ‘make them happy’. Within the data the researchers identified the overall average percentage of selecting the response ‘make them happy’ as a motivator regarding giving materialistic compliments was 34.066%. The researchers provided questions regarding five different materialistic items: Purse/backpack, jewelry, outfit, fashion style, and shoes.

The researchers looked at materialistic items as objectifiable items. Items/objects that could be identified due to their physical characteristics, in other words things one could touch or feel (this differed from perceptions of personality compliments which could not be categorized/characterized physically). The main goal of the researchers in this study was to gain meaning of the difference in intentions of giving and receiving compliments based on personality, physical characteristics, and materialistic items. According to current research, objects don’t have meaning on their own, objects get their meanings from the social actors (Askan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbukan, 2009). The question then arose how did the participants assign meaning to the different materialistic items they gave compliments on? Assigning meaning to objects (materialistic items) is a key aspect of the Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Symbolic Interaction is a process that creates reciprocal meaning and values by aid of symbols in the mind (Askan et al., 2009). Mead suggested that people behave based on what they believe and not what is objectively true (Mead, 1934). When looking at giving compliments to a person, previous research indicated that from a societal view, relevant to the society of where the research was conducted, most compliments have shown to have had positive stereotypes surrounding them. People tend to compliment another person in order be nice and make them happy (Czopp, 2008). The researchers suggested that due to the societal belief that giving

compliments is a way of being nice and making them happy, this may have contributed to the response rate of to 'be nice/genuine' as the number one motive of intention. The researchers indicated that the participants did not know the context of the relationship to whom they were giving the materialistic compliment. The lack of knowledge of the context of the relationship may have been a factor when participants tried to create meaning of the different objects. The researchers suggested the reason why participants selected to 'be nice/genuine' as the most frequent motivation was due to ambiguity of the relationship. Previous research has shown communication of compliments in romantic heterosexual relationships versus compliments given by strangers and acquaintances. This previous research also showed participants' perception of their own and their partners' compliment behavior are positively related to relational satisfaction (Doohan & Manusov, 2004). This research suggested that in romantic relationships it is not imperative that outsiders recognize compliments, but instead compliments need to be recognized by the romantic partner (Doohan & Manusov, 2004).

The researchers assumed that due to being in a romantic relationship with a person there is a perceived sense that the partners within the relationship have known each other for a significant period of time. A person that has prior knowledge of the person they gave a compliment to may have had an easier time assigning meaning to the compliment given and its intention, therefore possibly responding differently in this context. The researchers conclude that people may give compliments based on materialistic possessions to those who they do not have established relationships with because compliments based on materialistic items may be seen with less cost than those of a more personal nature.

Symbolic Interactionism Materialistic: Receiving

Regarding received materialistic compliments and the perception of intent of the sender, the data indicated that the most frequent response was to ‘be nice/genuine.’ The response rate of was 73.92% of the time when receiving materialistic compliments. Existing research suggested that when receiving materialistic compliments, societal pressures and compliment stereotypes conditioned the way people perceived the intentions (Czopp, 2008). In an earlier research study that examined the roles of compliment topics by analyzing compliment responses between American and Japanese college students, Americans overwhelmingly accepted compliments and almost never rejected them (Katsuta, 2012).

The researchers suggested that due to the common American perception that compliment intentions are of positive nature, this may have been a factor in the selection of to ‘be nice/genuine’ as the main response regardless of the nature of the compliment category. The researchers suggested that the cultural ideology of the society played a significant role in the process of participants creating meaning of compliments and their intents. The researchers indicated that the Symbolic Interactionism Theory’s main concept was assigning meaning to objects through symbol’s in one’s mind. The researchers suggested that these symbols were acquired from outside societal sources and cultural norms. Perhaps American society has placed a ‘genuine’ value on materialistic items, defining them as a branch of ones own identity. This could explain why most survey participants accepted the intention of ‘to be nice/genuine’ as the main motivator behind receiving a compliment based on their materialistic possessions. Societal expectations are believed to be an important factor when creating meaning about perceived intentions when receiving materialistic compliments.

Symbolic Interactionism Personality: Giving

Each of the 4 personality traits (nice, outgoing, good ideas, sense of humor) showed a significant difference ($P=0.00001$) within each motivator. The researchers concluded that this could be due to Mead's Symbolic Interactionism theory of meaning, language, and thoughts shaping an individual's self-concept (Hewitt, 2006). The data showed that 'be nice/genuine' was also the most selected motivator in all of the sub-categories within the personality category. The theory supports the findings that respondents selected 'be nice/genuine' as their top motivator of giving compliments for possible reasons of strengthening or maintaining their self-concept. Participants may view themselves as nice and genuine, therefore reporting a motivation to give a personality-based compliment with the same intention in order to reinforce their positive self-concept. With the 'be nice/genuine' intention response ranging between a high 70 percentile and high 80 percentile, the data supported participants' desire to reciprocate their self-concept through positive intentions (see Figure 4).

The second highest reported motivator within the personality category was 'make them happy'. With the highest percentage of 40.18% in the question: "When I compliment someone on their sense of humor, I am trying to:", and rating in the high 30th percentile in two of the other questions, this motivator also merged well into Mead's explanation of self-concept. Most of the participants demonstrated that their intentions are to be nice and genuine and this connected properly with the motivator of 'making them happy', because kindness tends to come from people's intention of making others happy. However, the sub-category of 'outgoing' had the lowest response (26.05%) in this motivator. Instead, outgoing was a higher response (28.78%) in the motivator of 'start a conversation'. This difference could indicate that participants assigned a different meaning to the sub-category of 'outgoing'. The data suggested

that participants viewed ‘outgoing’ as a way of connecting to others, instead of making them feel happy. It illustrates the different meanings behind each intention or motivation the participants ascribe to the personality compliment sub-category.

Likewise, ‘sense of humor’ and ‘outgoing’ shared the same and the highest response in the motivators of ‘be flirtatious’ (15.88%) and ‘be sarcastic’(7.35%) (see Figure 4). These similarities in the data implied that the two personality sub-categories shared a meaning of motivation. When giving a personality compliment based on people’s sense of humor or how outgoing they are, data indicated that the results showed equal percentages in the motivations of ‘flirtatious’ and ‘sarcastic’. This finding was not seen anywhere else in the researchers’ data. Therefore, it suggested that participants may have seen both sub-categories as equal to one another and may have perceived both sub-categories to have an overlapped meaning. The researchers were surprised by this data since the motivations of being flirtatious and being sarcastic seem to be contradictory, but perhaps the interpretation of the survey participants differed than those of the researchers.

Another theory that helps explain the results of the research is the Social Exchange Theory, which was developed by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor, and is defined as, “Relationship behavior and status regulated by both parties’ evaluations of perceived rewards and costs with each other” (Griffin, 2012, p.117). This theory says that people try to predict the outcome of an interaction before it takes place, and compliments and the motivation behind them can decide that outcome. The social exchange theory indicates that most of people’s behaviors can be explained based on a profit-motivated standpoint. The researchers found in their study that most people responded that to ‘be nice/genuine’ was the main motivation behind giving

compliments. The social exchange theory is based on a reward and cost system that would also explain why certain motivations were chosen. Most people make choices and behave in a manner that will benefit them the most. Through the motivation of being nice/genuine, a person would be initiating a relationship that they want to continue. When the response was to be sarcastic, the relationship may not deem beneficial to them. Regardless of the type of compliment given or received, the main motivation found in the data was to ‘be nice/genuine’ supporting the Social Exchange Theories concept of perceived rewards versus costs in communication behavior. Compliments could be used as an initial interaction with minimal risk, which could provide both parties with insight into the other based on how they accept or deliver the compliment. The provided information could then assist the people in forming predictions and expectations about further behavior.

Symbolic Interactionism Personality: Receiving

The data in receiving personality compliments displayed significant differences within all sub-categories and motivations ($P=0.00001$). As shown in (Figures 4 and 8), giving a personality compliment and receiving a personality compliment both had ‘be nice/genuine’ as their top motivation. As mentioned earlier in the “Symbolic Interactionism Personality: Giving” section, the data indicated that the highest motivation was ‘to be nice/genuine’ (ideas 88.22%), (nice 86%), (outgoing 76.43%), (ideas 88.22%). Contrary to those findings, the researchers noticed that the percentages in the receiving category were not as high and more dispersed (nice 81.99%), (outgoing 58.58 %), (humor 68.66%), (ideas 73.04%). The lowest response was 58.58% of ‘be nice/genuine’ in the questions regarding compliments given on ‘outgoing’ personalities (see figure 4). The difference in the data implied that participants could be

questioning the compliment giver's intentions more when compliments are based on personality traits than in other categories. Although participants reported intentions of 'be nice/genuine' when giving personality compliments, their perceptions of the intentions of others when receiving similar compliments were different.

Katsuta (2012) conducted a study of compliment topics in compliment response and in his discovery, he found that compliment [sub-categories] in regards to personality traits and achievements were relatively more accepted in the English group than the Japanese group. His findings supported a unique discovery in the motivation of 'be sarcastic' when receiving personality compliments. Participants were more likely to question other's intention as 'sarcastic', because they might be reluctant to accept the compliment. This suggested that the participants tended to interpret the compliment giver's motivation with a less genuine intention, possibly with negative connotation. The data illustrated this difference when comparing the motivation of 'be sarcastic' within both giving and receiving personality categories (see Figures 4 and 8).

Discrepancy was also shown in the motivation of 'be flirtatious'. Sense of humor was the sub-category of personality with the highest response (17.44%), leading in front of the question regarding how 'nice' they are, which had the second highest response of 11.8%. The data suggested that participants potentially perceived both sub-categories as a playful interaction with the compliment giver. This emphasized Mead's SI theory in regards to participants assigning a meaning to the compliment giver's motivation as 'flirtatious' in both sub-categories (Mead, 1934). Although, when comparing the percentages of giving a compliment to receiving a compliment in both sub-categories (sense of humor and how nice they are), the giving

sub-categories did not have results higher than 8% (see Figures 4 & 8). There is considerable increase of 6-10% in the motivation of 'be flirtatious' in the receiving category. This discovery was vital, because it not only indicated a difference between giving and receiving personality compliments, but the finding suggested that participants' motivations and the participants' perception of the compliment giver's motivation do not have a correlation.

Limitations

Self-reporting is one limitation encountered by the researchers. The ability for multiple responses as well as the option of having an 'other' category with an option to write-in answers provided additional limitations to the study. Interviews or a focus group would provide more qualitative data and could provide further insight through observation and organic discussion since the interpretations of the study questions by the participants posed limitations to the current study. The context of the questions was also a limitation that the researchers encountered. These questions should have been within the context of an initial meeting because it would broaden the spectrum of theories the researchers could connect with the research. The researchers also wanted to be able to study the dual motivations. The researchers were able to study the main motivations, but due to the platform that they used for their survey, they were unable to study and compare overlaps between motivations.

Suggestions for Future Research

Suggestions for future research would include a longitudinal study, a broader participant pool, the use of triangulation methods, and studies to further identify cultural and gender differences in intentions of compliments given and received. Deeper analysis of the multiple

responses as well as the comments given in the ‘other’ category could provide further insight into motivations and perceptions. Determining whether or not the communication is between strangers meeting for the first time, or between people in an established relationship would allow researchers to further identify the motives that drive compliment delivery and their role in developing and maintaining relationships. A longitudinal study could be done to identify changes in compliment communication over the course of a relationship. For more diverse sampling, similar studies at other universities should be done. Researchers are encouraged to use triangulation methods for future studies. In future research, more clearly described situations and relationship of communicating partners should be given in order to gather more accurate data with a more controlled context of the interactions.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1:

Survey Questions

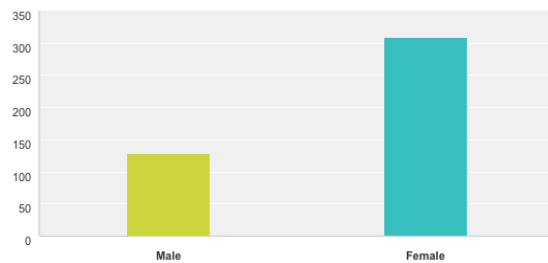
1. Are you male or female?
2. What is your age?
3. What year are you in school?
4. When I give a compliment to another person about their eyes, I'm trying to:
5. When I'm giving a compliment to another person based on how nice they are, I'm trying to:
6. When I get complimented on my great ideas, I think that person is trying to:
7. When I receive a compliment based on what I'm wearing that day, I think the compliment giver is trying to:
8. When I give a compliment to a person about their smile, I am trying to:
9. When I compliment someone on how outgoing they are, I am trying to:
10. When I give a compliment to a person about their shoes, I'm trying to:
11. When I receive a compliment about my eyes, I think the other person is trying to:
12. When I give someone a compliment based on their body figure, I'm trying to:
13. When I get a compliment on how outgoing I am, I think the person is trying to:
14. When I receive a compliment about my purse/backpack, I think the other person is trying to:
15. When someone compliments me on my sense of humor, I think they are trying to :
16. When I give someone a compliment on their hair style, I am trying to:
17. When I give a compliment to a person about their purse/backpack, I am trying to:
18. When someone gives me a compliment about how smart I am, they are probably trying to:
19. When I receive a compliment about my jewelry, I think the other person is trying to:
20. When I;m giving a compliment to another person based on what they're wearing that day, I'm trying to:
21. When I compliment someone on their sense of humor, I am trying to:
22. When someone compliments me about my hairstyle, I think they are trying to:
23. When I get a compliment about my smile, I think the other person is trying to:
24. When I receive a compliment about my shoes, I think the other person is trying to:
25. When I compliment someone on their sense of humor, I am trying to:
26. When I receive a compliment about my perfume/cologne, I think the other person is trying to:
27. When I give a compliment to a person about their jewelry, I am trying to:
28. When I give a compliment to a person about their perfume/cologne, I am trying to:

29. When I receive a compliment based on what I'm wearing that day, I think the compliment giver is trying to:
30. When I receive a compliment about my body figure, I think the other person is trying to:
31. When I give someone a compliment about their great ideas, I am trying to:
32. When I give a compliment to a person about their fashion style, I'm trying to:
33. When I receive a compliment about outfit, I think the other person is trying to:

Figure 2:

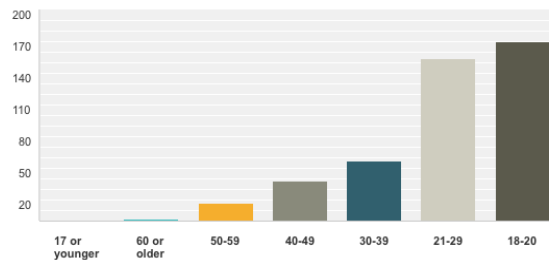
Question 1 (2.1)

Are you male or female?



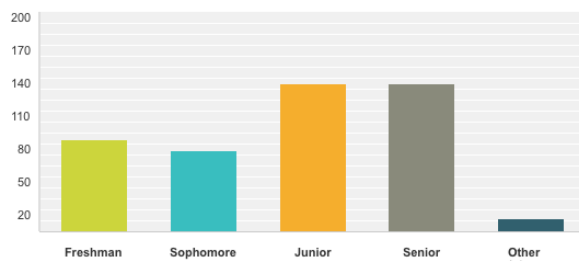
Question 2 (2.2)

What is your age?



Question 3 (2.3)

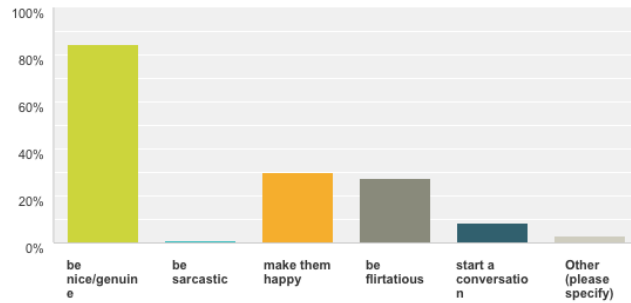
What year are you in school?



Question 4 (2.4)

When I give a compliment to another person about their eyes, I'm trying to:

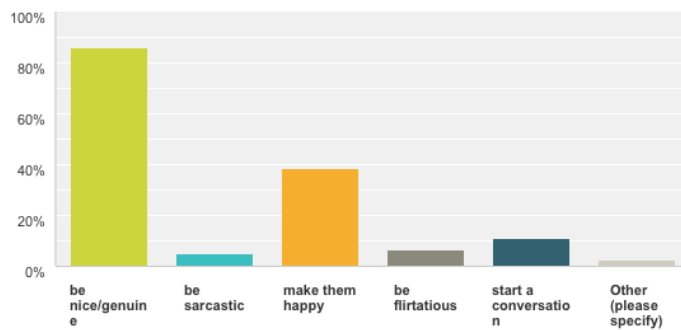
Answered: 407 Skipped: 36



Question 5 (2.5)

When I'm giving a compliment to another person based on how nice they are, I'm trying to:

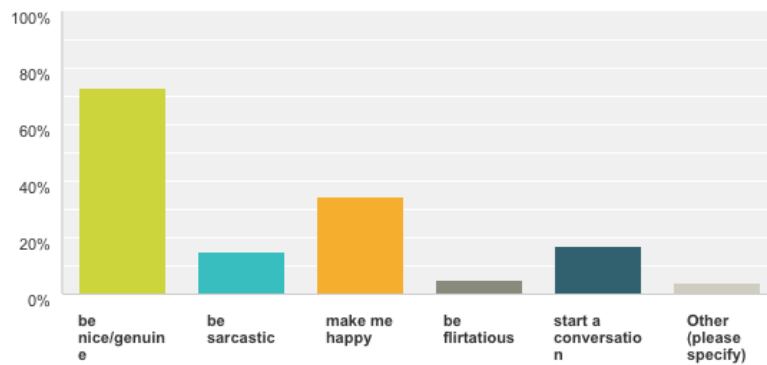
Answered: 408 Skipped: 35



Question 6 (2.6)

When I get complimented on my great ideas, I think that person is trying to:

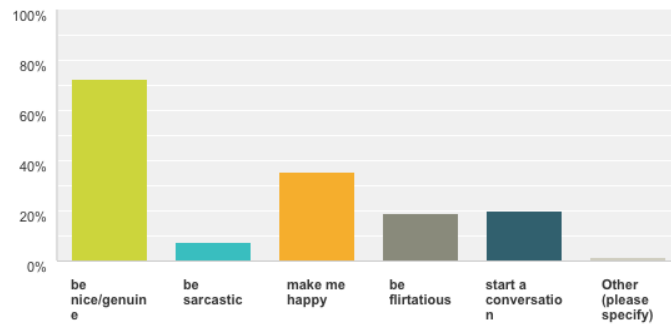
Answered: 408 Skipped: 35



Question 7 (2.7)

When I receive a compliment based on what I'm wearing that day, I think the compliment giver is trying to:

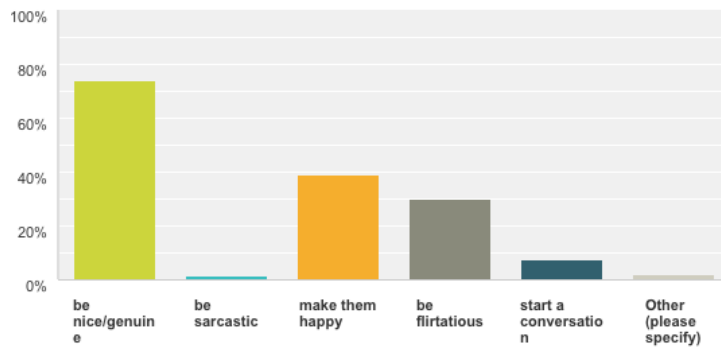
Answered: 406 Skipped: 37



Question 8 (2.8)

When I give a compliment to a person about their smile, I am trying to:

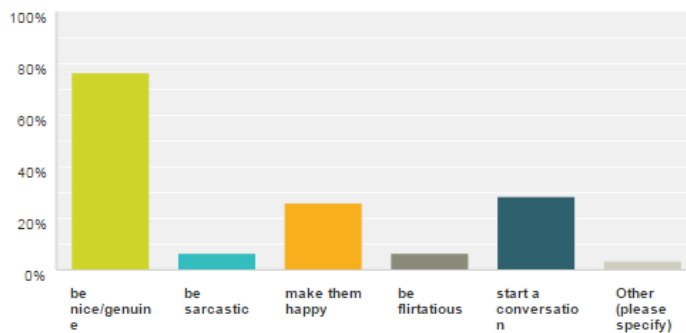
Answered: 404 Skipped: 39



Question 9 (2.9)

When I compliment someone on how outgoing they are, I am trying to:

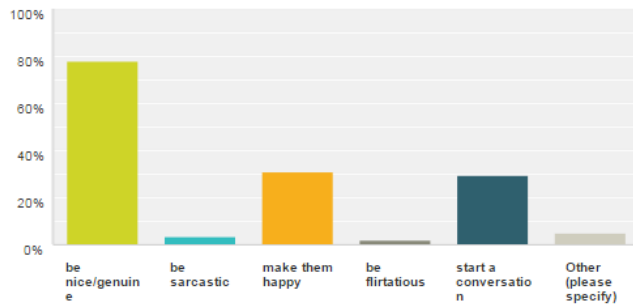
Answered: 404 Skipped: 39



Question 10 (2.10)

When I give a compliment to a person about their shoes, I'm trying to:

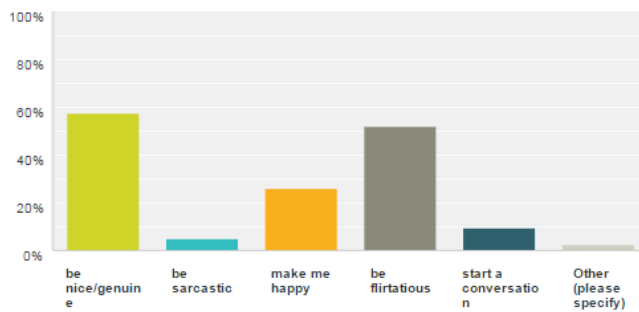
Answered: 406 Skipped: 37



Question 11 (2.11)

When I receive a compliment about my eyes, I think the other person is trying to:

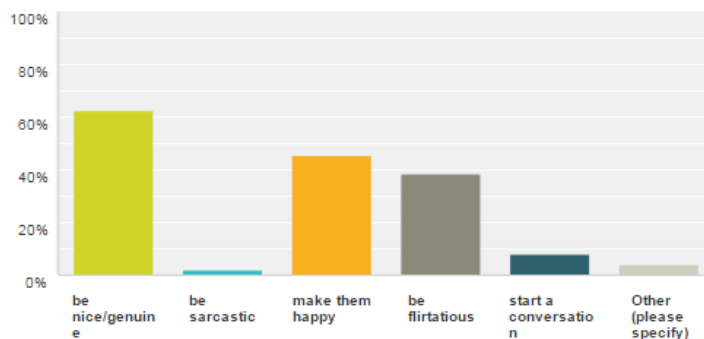
Answered: 369 Skipped: 74



Question 12 (2.12)

When I give someone a compliment based on their body figure, I'm trying to:

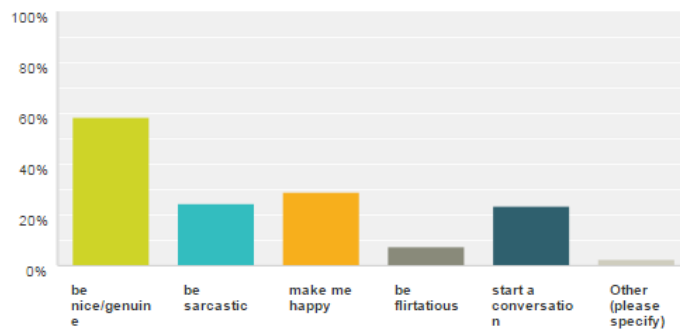
Answered: 368 Skipped: 75



Question 13 (2.13)

When I get a compliment on how outgoing I am, I think the person is trying to:

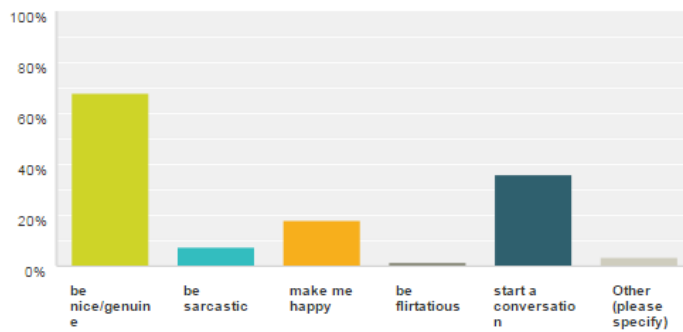
Answered: 367 Skipped: 76



Question 14 (2.14)

When I receive a compliment about my purse/backpack, I think the other person is trying to:

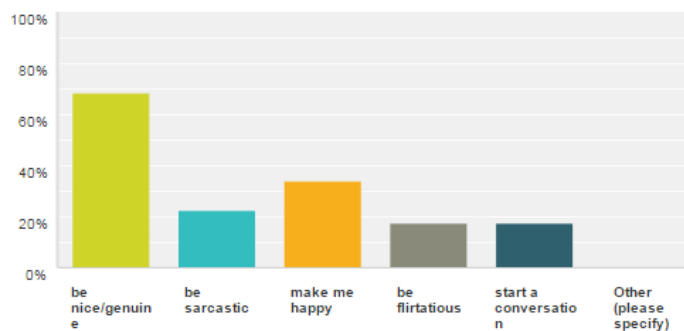
Answered: 368 Skipped: 75



Question 15 (2.15)

When someone compliments me on my sense of humor, I think they are trying to:

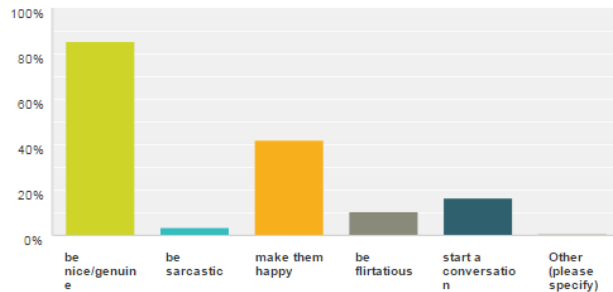
Answered: 367 Skipped: 76



Question 16 (2.16)

When I give someone a compliment on their hair style, I am trying to:

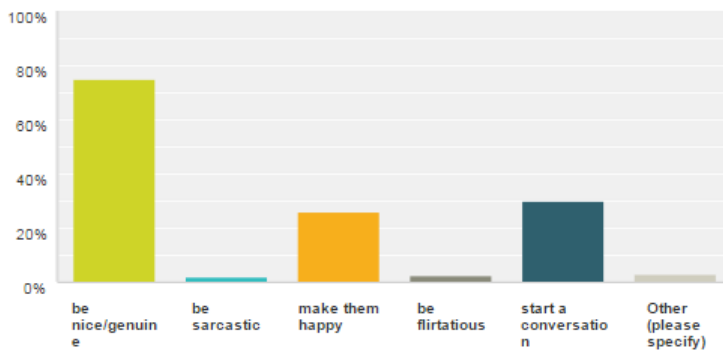
Answered: 367 Skipped: 76



Question 17 (2.17)

When I give a compliment to a person about their purse/backpack, I am trying to:

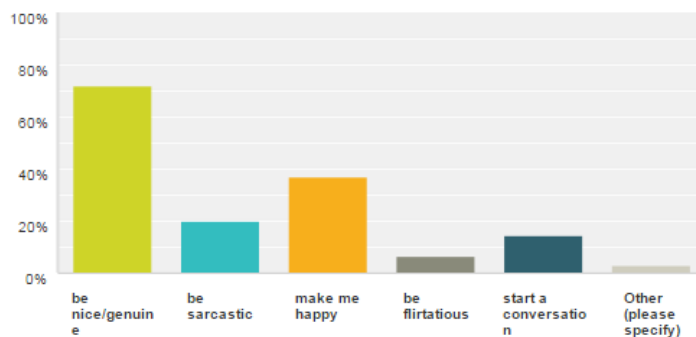
Answered: 341 Skipped: 102



Question 18 (2.18)

When someone gives me a compliment about how smart I am, they are probably trying to:

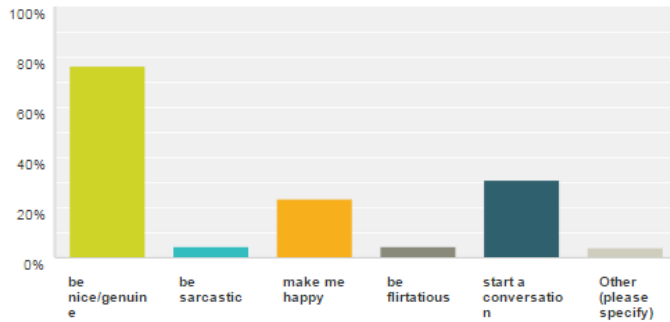
Answered: 342 Skipped: 101



Question 19 (2.19)

When I receive a compliment about my jewelry, I think the other person is trying to:

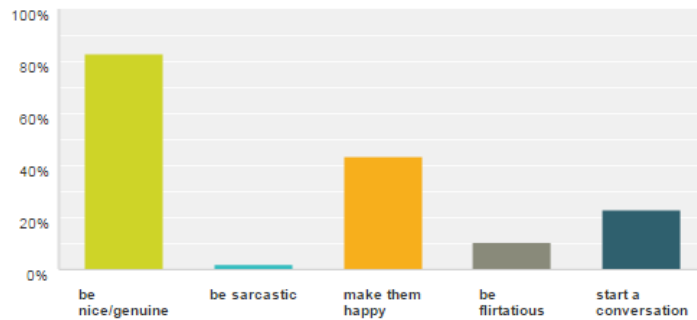
Answered: 338 Skipped: 105



Question 20 (2.20)

When I'm giving a compliment to another person based on what they're wearing that day, I'm trying to:

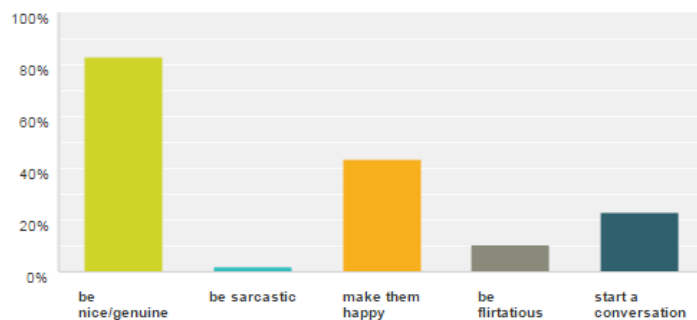
Answered: 339 Skipped: 104



Question 21 (2.21)

When I'm giving a compliment to another person based on what they're wearing that day, I'm trying to:

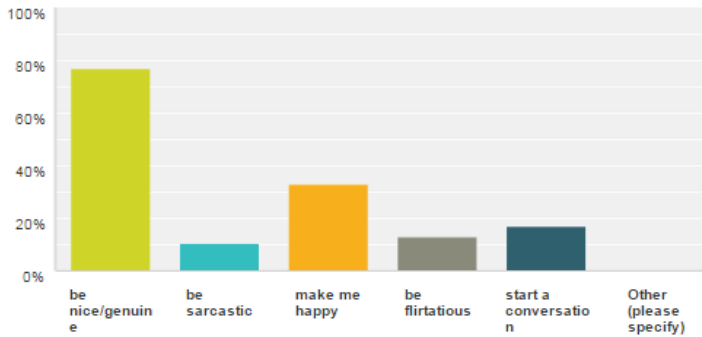
Answered: 339 Skipped: 104



Question 22 (2.22)

When someone compliments me about my hair style, I think they are trying to:

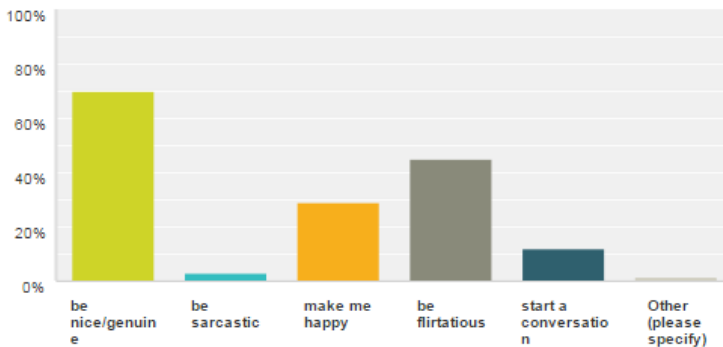
Answered: 341 Skipped: 102



Question 23 (2.23)

When I get a compliment about my smile, I think the other person is trying to:

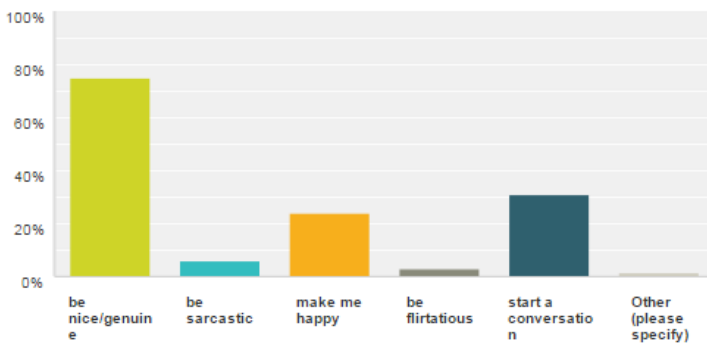
Answered: 319 Skipped: 124



Question 24 (2.24)

When I receive a compliment about my shoes, I think the other person is trying to:

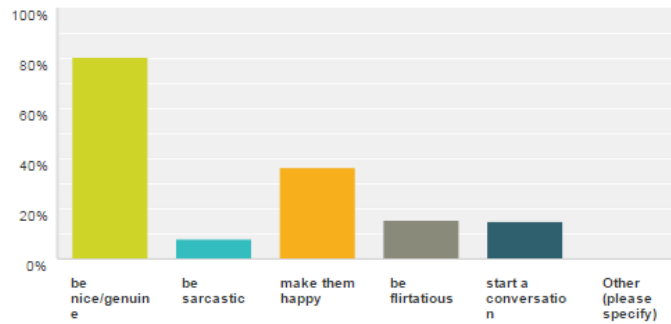
Answered: 321 Skipped: 122



Questions 25 (2.25)

When I compliment someone on their sense of humor, I am trying to:

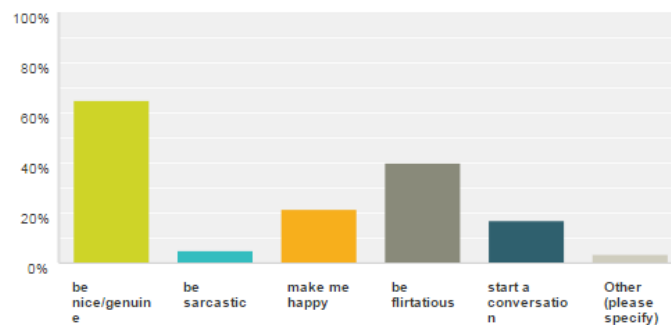
Answered: 322 Skipped: 121



Question 26 (2.26)

When I receive a compliment about my perfume/cologne, I think the other person is trying to:

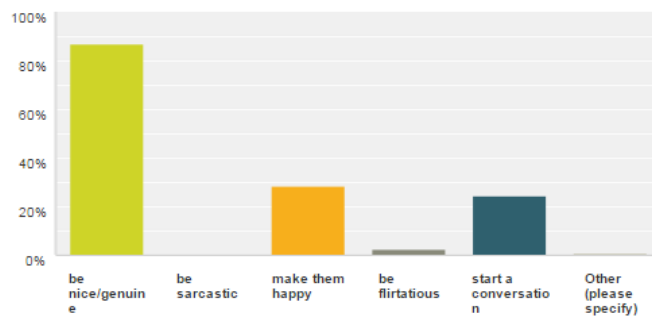
Answered: 321 Skipped: 122



Question 27 (2.27)

When I give a compliment to a person about their jewelry, I am trying to:

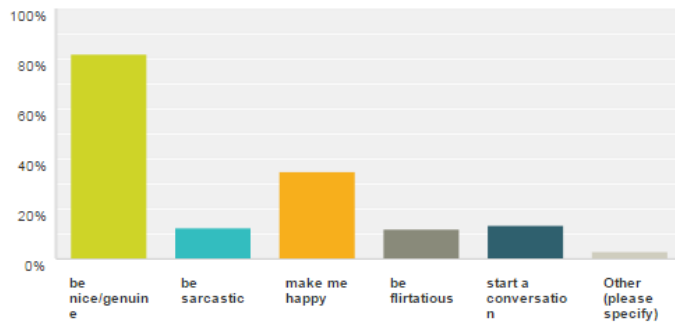
Answered: 320 Skipped: 123



Question 28 (2.28)

When I'm given a compliment based on how nice I am, I think the other person is trying to:

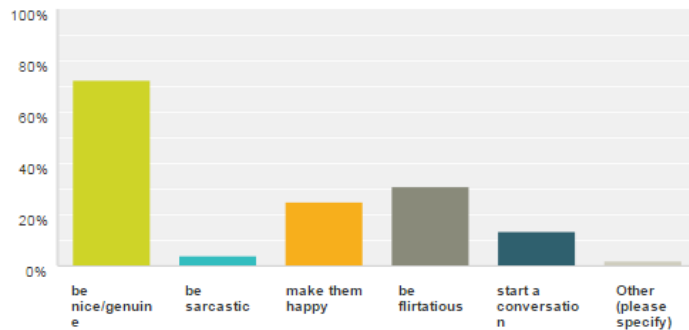
Answered: 322 Skipped: 121



Question 29 (2.29)

When I give a compliment to a person about their perfume/cologne, I am trying to:

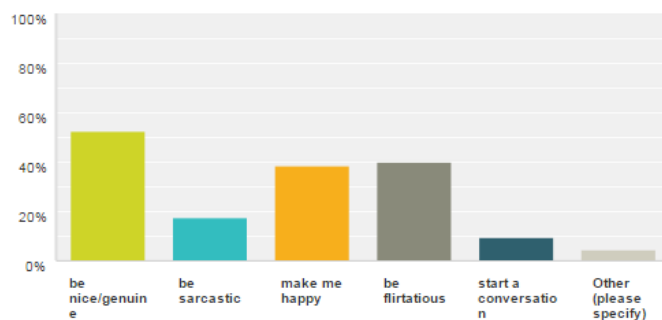
Answered: 315 Skipped: 128



Question 30 (2.30)

When I receive a compliment about my body figure, I think the other person is trying to:

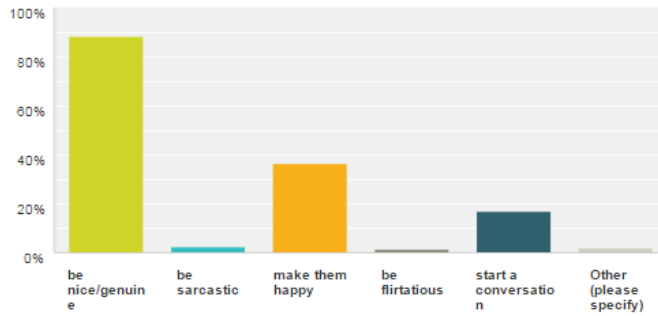
Answered: 316 Skipped: 127



Question 31 (2.31)

When I give someone a compliment about their great ideas, I am trying to:

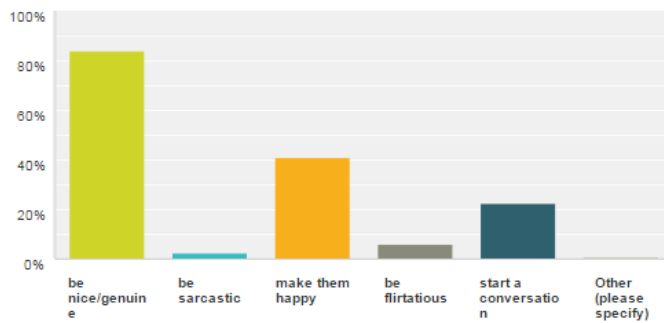
Answered: 315 Skipped: 128



Question 32 (2.32)

When I give a compliment to a person about their fashion style, I'm trying to:

Answered: 316 Skipped: 127



Question 33 (2.33)

When I receive a compliment about my outfit, I think the other person is trying to:

Answered: 316 Skipped: 127

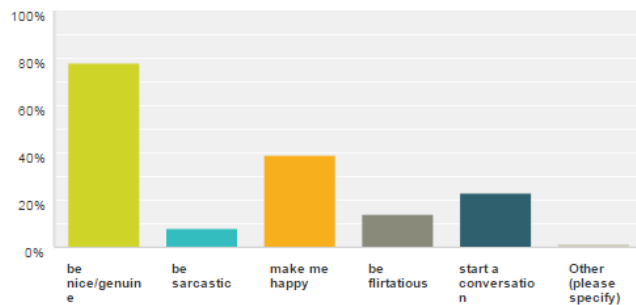


Figure 3:
 (Giving)

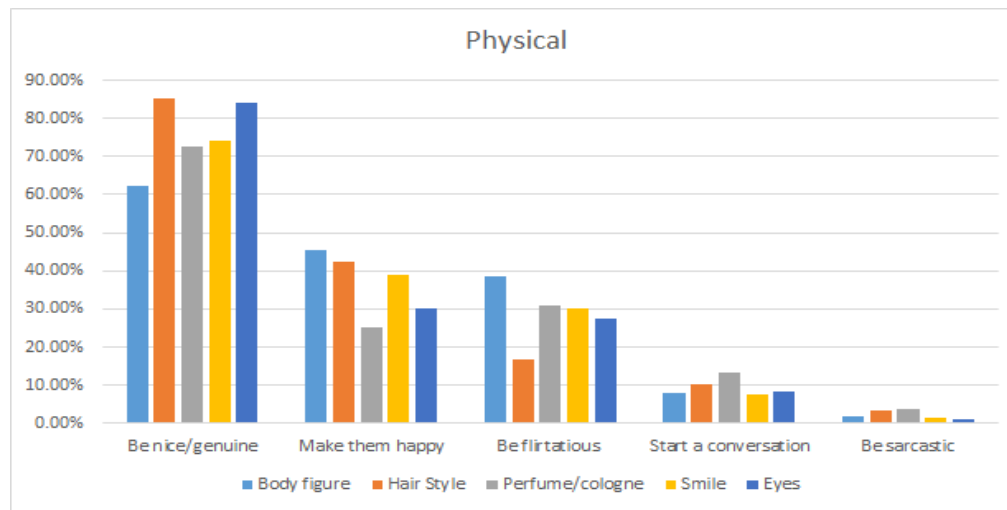


Figure 4:
 (Giving)

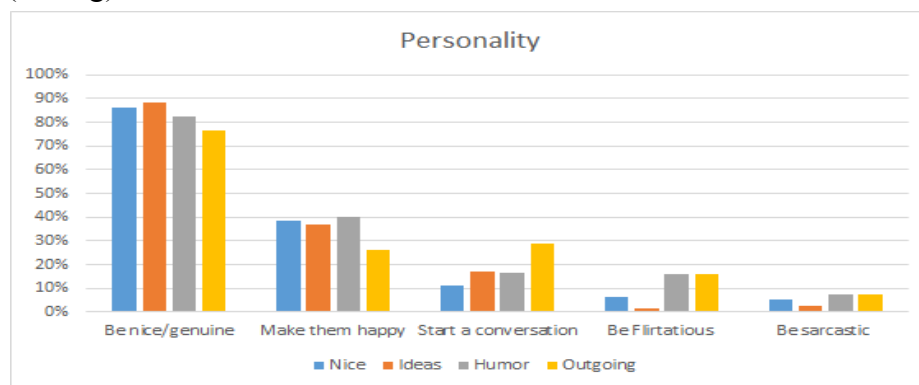


Figure 5:
 (Giving)

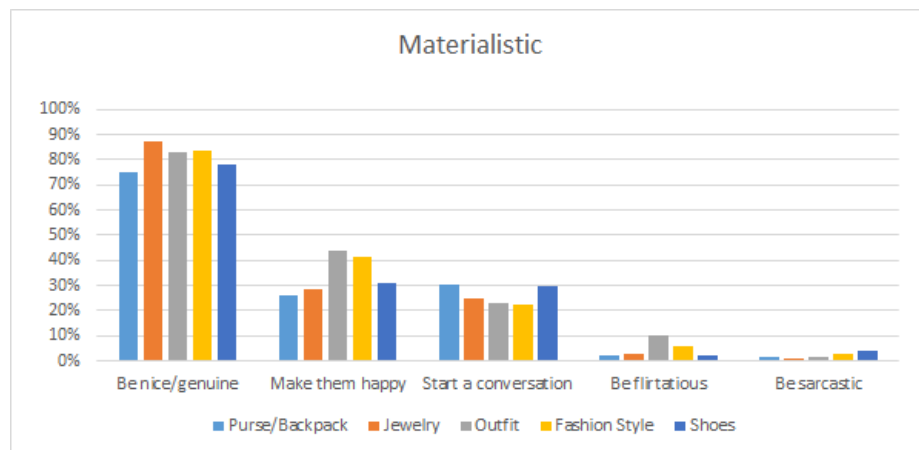


Figure 6:
 (Receiving)

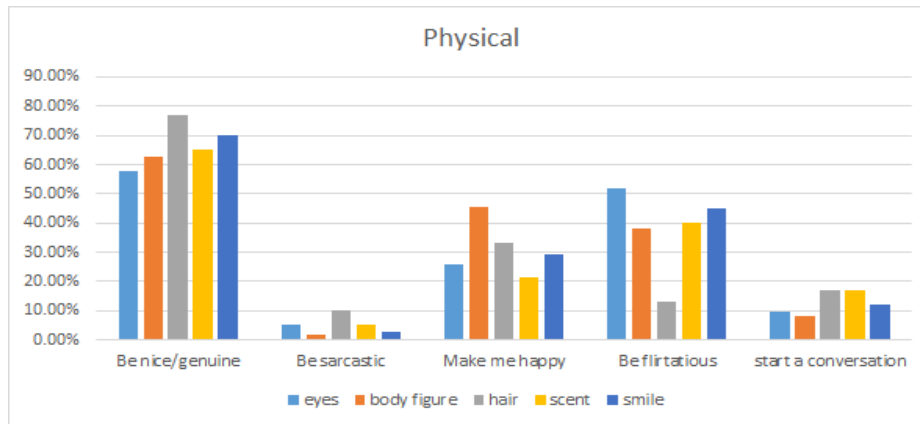


Figure 7:
 (Receiving)

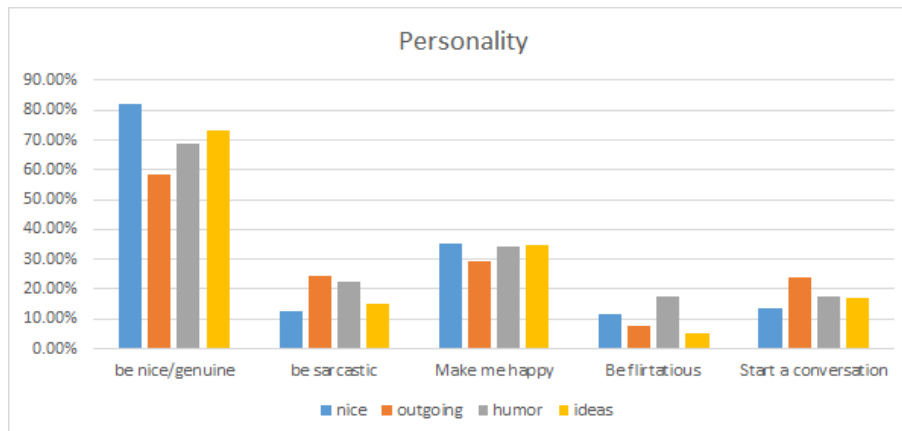


Figure 8:
 (Receiving)

