

EXPERIMENT DEBRIEFING

The Psychology of Compliments

January 23, 2020

Xuan Zhao and Nicholas Epley

Thank you for participating in today’s study on the psychology of compliments!

Over the past two years, we have recruited nearly 1,000 people in the Garfield Park Conservatory—pairs of friends, family members, or romantic couples—to write compliments to one another. In each pair, one person was asked to write a number of compliments to their partner. Before revealing their compliments, we asked the compliment-givers to predict how the recipients would feel.

We found that compliment-givers systematically underestimated the positive impact their compliments would have!

Your compliment can brighten a person’s day—even more than you might expect. Yet people often notice others’ admirable qualities or actions without expressing their appreciation.

When a genuine compliment comes to mind, why don’t people express it? Across seven experiments, we have found that reluctance to express genuine compliments may stem from underestimating how good the compliment will make the recipient feel.

So, how do you plan to use this knowledge in your everyday life?

PLEASE NOTE

To maintain the integrity of the study, it is very important that you **do not discuss the study** or the debriefing information above with anyone else until you leave the Garfield Park Conservatory. Other people may participate after you, and our study depends on them not knowing the content ahead of time.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study when it is completed, please feel free to contact Xuan Zhao at xuan.zhao@chicagobooth.edu.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as participant in this research, you may contact the University of Chicago Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board at (773) 834-7835 or sbs-irb@uchicago.edu.



XUAN ZHAO

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, The University of Chicago Booth School of Business



NICHOLAS EPLEY

John Templeton Keller Professor of Behavioral Science; Faculty Director, Center for Decision Research, The University of Chicago Booth School of Business

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for Decision Research is a community of behavioral scientists who examine how intuition, reasoning, and social interaction produce beliefs, judgments, and choices. As part of the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, the CDR is home to faculty whose accolades include the Nobel Prize and MacArthur Fellowship. The Center conducts world-class research, mentors scholars and practitioners, and serves as a hub for the discipline—advancing scientific discovery as well as public awareness of behavioral science’s positive impact at both the individual and societal level.

LEARN MORE

To read more about our work, participate in experiments, and join the conversation, visit us online:

 ChicagoBooth.edu/CDR

 twitter.com/CDR_Booth

 facebook.com/boothcdr