



New perspectives on the praise literature: towards a conceptual model of compliment

Jessica S. Morton¹ · Moira Mikolajczak¹ · Olivier Luminet^{1,2}

Accepted: 29 September 2020

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2020

Abstract

Compliments are verbal acts that take place on daily basis between at least two individuals (the complimenter and the complementee). The frequency and effects of compliments contrast with the scarcity of research devoted to this issue. So far, compliments have mainly been studied through the lens of educational psychology, with the aim of examining their effects on students' learning and performance. These studies concluded that compliments are relatively ineffective educational tools. For their part, the linguists were interested in the wording of compliments and the cross-cultural issues. Our literature review aims to enlarge the focus of research in this domain by considering the compliment from other perspectives, such as social psychology, personality, emotions, social cognition and communication. This article aims to provide a theoretical framework that (1) integrates the disparate elements of the literature on compliments, (2) accounts for the antecedents and consequences of the compliment, as well as the moderating effect of contextual and personal variables (in the complimenter and the complementee), (3) explains why compliments do not always have the desired effect and why well-intended compliments can have negative consequences on the receiver, and (4) stimulates future research by identifying gaps in the literature and suggesting a number of hypotheses.

Keywords Compliment · Praise · Model, social interaction · Personality · Positive psychology

Introduction

Everybody receives and makes compliments, these little comments that highlight the qualities of the receiver. Some compliments are normative in nature and occur on life's major occasions, such as the birth of a child or the acquisition of a new house. Normative compliments are the equivalent of congratulations. While compliments received on these occasions serve to reassure about life choices, they also constitute implicit evaluations of the ability to act in accordance with the standards of the in-group. Other compliments are more spontaneous, without any normative obligation. This is the case when a person spontaneously decides to compliment friends on the beautiful outfit they are wearing. Whether the

compliment is normative or spontaneous, it constitutes a powerful way to express the extent to which the individual values another person. The compliment also offers the opportunity to increase the closeness of a relationship, reactivate shared values and/or reinforce desired behaviors. Compliments are by essence a social act and therefore fall within the scope of social psychology.

Among the different antecedents and consequences of the compliment (see below), emotions play a central role. Observing the achievement of something praiseworthy by others can induce emotions such as admiration, pride, jealousy or envy. The intensity and nature of the emotion felt can encourage or discourage complimenting the target. In the same way, the complementee (the person who receives the compliment) could be pleasantly surprised to receive an unexpected compliment or could feel irritated by an inflated compliment. Whether the individual takes on the role of complimenter or complementee, the compliment always involves emotions of varying nature, intensity and duration. As such, compliments fall also within the scope of emotion psychology.

There are individual differences in how people give and receive compliments. Some people find it very easy to

✉ Jessica S. Morton
jessica.morton@uclouvain.be

¹ Faculté des Sciences Psychologiques et de l'Éducation, UCLouvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

² National Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS), Brussels, Belgium

compliment people and/or accept compliments, while others do not. Personality factors, in the mind of both the complimenter and complementee, influence the process of giving and receiving a compliment and, therefore, compliments should also be studied from the perspective of personality psychology.

Until now, the study of compliments has been mostly confined to the fields of psychopedagogy and education. In these contexts, the aim has mostly been limited to examining the effects of compliments on motivation (for a review, see Henderlong and Lepper 2002), self-esteem (e.g., Brummelman et al. 2014a; Brummelman et al. 2014b) or school choices (e.g., Dweck 2007). Another central objective of this previous literature has been to determine the best type of compliment with respect to the desired effects on the complementee (e.g., perseverance in effort, restoration of self-esteem). However, these studies do not really consider the personality of the complimenter as an important element in the compliment process. In manipulating the wording or purpose of the compliment, researchers took on the role of the complimenter (the person who pays the compliment) and did not take into account (1) the personality of the complimenter as a key element, (2) the possibility that the effect of a compliment could depend on who is the complimenter in relation to the complementee, and (3) the possibility that the effect of a compliment could also depend on the complementee.

The act of complimenting is not limited to the elementary expression of a positive message and the observation of the complementee's reaction, as suggested in the linguistics and education literature. To fully appreciate their complexity and effects, compliments should be studied as social interactions in which both interlocutors influence the process (Wall et al. 1989). This bi-directional view of compliment has also been suggested by Marigold et al. (2007, 2010) in the context of romantic relationships and by Swenson et al. (2016) in the parent-child relationship. As we want to extend the study of compliment to other fields of psychology, new research questions emerge. What are the motivations for complimenting the deserving other? What are the personal characteristics of the interlocutors that facilitate or undermine compliment behavior? What are the interpersonal issues related to compliment? To answer these questions, the variables involved must be identified and their relationship must be understood. To achieve this, we need to include a broader range of variables that are not found in the praise literature, which is what we endeavor to achieve with the conceptual model proposed in this paper. The model takes into account the whole course of the compliment and provides researchers with a useful tool to help them (a) formulate clear research questions and hypotheses, (b) test the proposed relationships, and (c) organize the previous and current findings, which are still very heterogeneous to date. The introduction of each variable into the model

is supported either by empirical evidence or, when not available, by concepts studied in contexts outside of the compliment literature (e.g., interpersonal communication literature as J. Fiske 2010; or persuasive communication theory from McGuire 1985). In addition, relevant hypotheses will be discussed all along the model.

Definitional Issues

We propose to define compliment as an act of verbal evaluation (oral or written) by which an individual attributes to another person merit in reference to an inter- or intra-individual standard. The person observing the merit becomes the complimenter as soon as they express their compliment and the other person becomes the complementee as soon as they receive it.

The concept of merit is central in this definition of compliments. It encompasses different types of actions (e.g., behavior, cognition, physical appearance) for which the complementee is assessed by the complimenter as having reached a standard that is of a high level. The merit assessment implies a recategorization (even temporary) of the complementee (for a full explication see S. T. Fiske and Taylor 2013). In other words, when an individual is complimented, they would be (temporarily) moved from the 'average' category to be classified as 'deserving'. To carry out this assessment, the observer uses a reference standard. Corpus et al. (2006) compared the *social comparison praise* (the complementee reached higher standards than the group) with the *mastery praise* (the complementee reached higher standards than what he usually does). Since compliments are studied as social interactions, a third norm that should be considered is the *complimenter comparison praise* (the complementee reached higher standards than the complimenter).

We assume that the choice of standard is subjective. This choice will be influenced by both (a) personal characteristics such as the observer's predispositions to the ascending or descending direction of social comparisons (e.g., Buunk and Gibbons 2007) or their own values (e.g., Hitlin and Piliavin 2004) and (b) by contextual characteristics that facilitate the initiation of automatic processes such as the priming effect, the salient aspect of merit or the direct perception of merit (for a full explanation, see S. T. Fiske and Taylor 2013). This subjectivity in the choice of the standard makes it possible to take into account individual differences in assessing the same merit.

Finally, it is also important to note that our definition of the compliment is quite different to the definition of feedback. Hattie and Timperley (2007) conceptualized feedback as any information provided by an *evaluator* to a *performer* about certain aspects of the assessed performance in order to clarify misunderstood ideas, suggest different strategies for

improvement, or send incentives to maintain the performer's effort. Unlike compliments, feedback is mainly institutionalized (i.e., at school, in companies) or explicitly requested by the performer. Feedback sometimes includes compliments, and compliments can sometimes be interpreted as feedback. However, these concepts do not overlap with one another.

Conceptual Model of the Compliment

Overview

Our review of the literature on praise and compliments leads us to propose the conceptual model of compliments presented in Fig. 1. This model organizes the existing literature in a coherent way, and allows researchers to easily pinpoint gaps in the literature and future directions for research. The goal of this first section is to provide an overview of the model and facilitate its understanding through a concrete example. In the following sections, we will go deeper into each part of the model, review the existing literature and make more specific hypotheses to guide future research.

Common sense would dictate that the starting point of the compliment process should be the other person's merit. However, the person who wishes to pay a compliment will always find a way to do so, even if the complementee is not deserving. Nevertheless, the complimenter must find something to compliment. That's why we start the compliment process with the **Evaluation of merit** by an external person with reference to a set of intra- or interpersonal norms. Let us take the example of your first presentation at an international conference. Your colleagues have seen you working hard on the presentation. They know how important this moment is for your self-esteem and the future of your research career. By attending your talk, your colleagues are likely to experience emotional states ranging from appreciation or admiration to jealousy. Depending on the nature and intensity of their

emotion, they may feel the need to compliment you after your performance. As a direct competitor, Andrew is jealous of your performance, which will lessen his desire to compliment you. On the contrary, your colleague Susan admired your talk and her intention to compliment you is consequently very high.

In some cases, the **Intention to compliment** may precede and therefore influence the evaluation of merit (Fig. 1). In this case, the complimenter seeks to produce certain effects on the other person through their compliment. Your supervisor James knows how disappointed you are with the results of your last study. He sees your talk as an opportunity to reassure you about your qualities as a researcher. His intention to compliment you may already be present before you give your talk.

These two cases suggest that the relationship between the evaluation of the merit and the intention to compliment can be bidirectional. They also emphasize the need to distinguish between two categories of compliments: *meritorious compliments*, stemming directly from the observation of merit, and *instrumental compliments*, aimed at producing certain effects on the complementee or obtaining certain benefits for the complimenter. In practice, these two categories are rarely mutually exclusive. Often, the complimenter pursues several motives. Compliments can therefore be both meritorious and instrumental. James may be really impressed with your performance and at the same time motivated by the need to reassure you about your skills.

According to Heckhausen and Beckmann (1990), intentions are plans about how to act when certain pre-determined cues or conditions occur. As soon as intention is formed, implementation of the action may follow. When the intention to compliment turns into **an actual Compliment**, different parameters can be considered. First, the *object* of the compliment may differ from one complimenter to another (Herbert 1990). Your colleague Andrew could congratulate you on the clarity of your presentation, while Susan could focus on the apparent calm you displayed. Then, the *form* (e.g., generic "You are

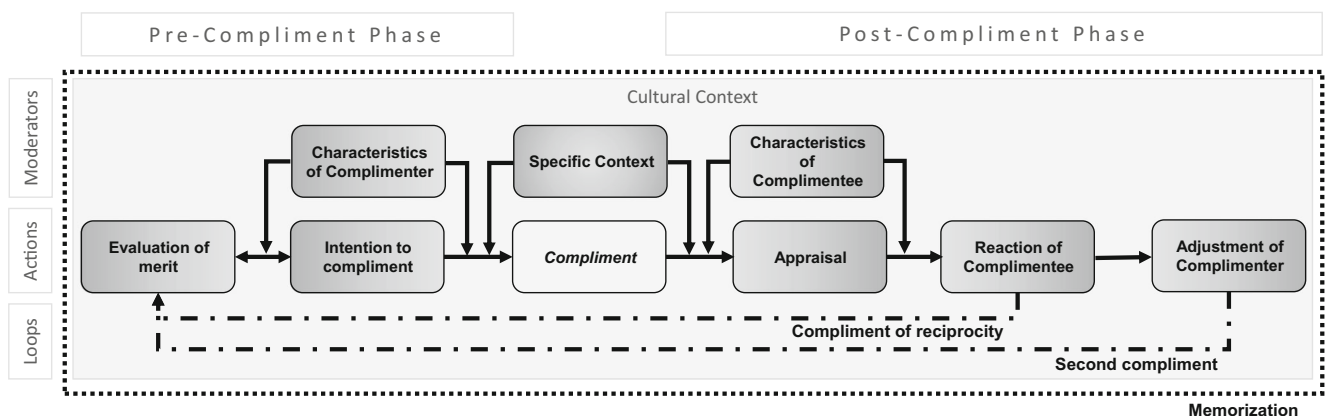


Fig. 1 Conceptual model of compliment - - - Second compliment and/or compliment of reciprocity are likely but not systematic. . . . Memorization of some or all the elements of the interaction.

good” vs. nongeneric “You did very well during your talk”, Cimpian et al. 2007), the choice of personal pronoun (e.g., “I think you look” vs. “You look” vs. “Good look”, Holmes 1988) or the length of the compliment (e.g., short vs. long, Herbert 1990) are syntactic variables allowing the same message to be expressed differently. Andrew could tell you “*It was very informative*”, while James could say: “*I found your presentation very interesting. I learned a lot, it stimulated my reflection.*” Andrew’s short, impersonal compliment can be explained by his jealousy, while the intention to boost your morale leads James to formulate a more personal and elaborated compliment. Finally, the *intensity* of the compliment can also vary. Andrew can congratulate you with low intensity by simply telling you “*Good talk*”, while Susan can be much more expressive: “*That was wonderful!!!*”

We hypothesize that personal **characteristics of the Complimenter** acts as a moderator of the relationship between the Evaluation of merit and the Intention to compliment (see Fig. 1). In our example, Andrew’s competitive attitude explains why he produces an instrumental compliment, while Susan’s altruistic personality explains her desire to compliment your merit. Andrew’s intention is different in nature from Susan’s. Other individual and personality characteristics of the Complimenter may also moderate the second relationship of the pre-compliment phase between the Intention to compliment and the Compliment. If Susan is an introverted person, she might hesitate to formulate a compliment whereas if she is more extroverted, her compliment will be more exuberant. Gender differences also play a role. Holmes (1988) and Herbert (1990) showed that to modulate their compliments, women introduce precise syntax, while men often modify the intonation of their voice.

Likewise, the **Context** influences the object and formulation of compliments. Your performance takes place in a professional setting. For this reason, James will not compliment you on your carefully chosen dress, even if he noticed it. Cultural norms regulate contextual behavior (for a full explanation see Berry et al. 2011). Therefore, compliments—as social interactions—are also affected by these norms. Another contextual determinant influencing the implementation of the Compliment would be the presence of an audience. James could be silent in front of Andrew not to amplify his jealousy. Conversely, James might compliment you in front of Susan to remind her of his professional expectations in a vicarious way (Bandura 1969). Similarly, context can influence the appraisal of the compliment and indirectly the reaction of the complementee. One could still imagine Susan responding before you to Andrew that he is not playing fair with his insincere compliment. Susan’s intervention will likely hinder your reaction.

Once the Compliment is issued, the complementee appraises the received message. The central **Appraisal** is related to merit. When your colleagues congratulate you, you

compare their views with your own opinion of your performance (Kille et al. 2017). Other appraisals will be related to (1) expertise of the complimenter in the merit’s field, (2) perceived intention of the complimenter through (2a) perceived sincerity (e.g., Kanouse et al. 1981; Skarlicki et al. 2004) and (2b) perceived spontaneity, or (3) relevance of the compliment in the context (e.g., presence/absence of an audience, current status and/or nature of the relationship). In addition, the Appraisal can result from an either in-depth or superficial analysis of the received compliment. In accordance with the principle of sufficiency (Chaiken 1980), the type of appraisal encompasses a balance between (1) the effort devoted to information processing and (2) the satisfaction of particular motivations such as establishing a correct judgment in which the individual can have confidence. Thus, the complementee will process the compliment until they reach a sufficient level of confidence about the Compliment or the Complimenter. From this viewpoint, it is likely that, compared to Susan, doubts about Andrew’s intentions will prompt you to analyze more systematically the different dimensions of his compliment (*Why is he complimenting me? Is his evaluation of my performance relevant? Do I want to be complimented by him when our relationship is so difficult?*).

The outcomes of this Appraisal stage will manifest into observable **Reactions of the complementee**. These reactions will be of different kinds: emotional (e.g., valence and intensity), psychological (e.g., self-esteem, motivation), behavioral, (e.g., persistence/abandonment of the effort, search for new experiences), and relational (e.g., desire to distance oneself/approach the complimenter).

By introducing Appraisals, we add a new important parameter in the model. So far, the literature on praise has examined various objects of Compliments (e.g., intelligent vs. effort, Dweck 2006; Kamins and Dweck 1999) and studied the effects obtained on the complementee. However, we suggest that the observed Reaction of the complementee is the result of Appraisal processes (in a subjective way) rather than of the Compliment itself (in an objective way). It is not mainly the message that will induce a particular effect, but on the contrary, the effect is induced by what the complementee perceives, understands and retains from this Compliment. Introducing Appraisals as a mediating variable between the Compliment and the Complementee’s Reaction allows certain reactions to be explained, for example, why Complementees with low self-esteem (who may appear as being those who need compliments the most) tend in fact to reject compliments (e.g., Kille et al. 2017). They often are unable to integrate positive information because they perceive themselves as being undeserving. Although James may express a sincere and well-deserved compliment, if you have low self-esteem, you might not accept it. Indeed, the **characteristics of the complementee** play a moderating role in the compliment-appraisal-reaction relationship.

As we have already pointed out several times, current research on compliments has not yet gone beyond the Reaction of the complimentee. One exception is Marigold et al. (2007) who discussed how systematic rejection of the compliment could harm romantic relationships. By considering the compliment as a social interaction, there is a need to integrate the interpersonal process after the Complimentee's Reaction. Regardless of whether the compliment is motivated by observing merit or obtaining benefits, the complimenter expects (more or less consciously) the complimentee will react in some way. As a conscientious supervisor, James seeks to restore your motivation. As a colleague, Andrew seeks to maintain a cordial relationship, and Susan seeks to express spontaneously how much she values you. The complimenter will thus compare the expected effect of their compliment to those actually produced in the complimentee. The overlap between the complimentee's response and the complimenter's expectations triggers the **adjustment of the complimenter** in an emotional, cognitive, behavioral and/or relational manner. With a big overlap, the complimenter might feel positive affect and seek more intimacy with the complimentee than they would with a small overlap. This reaction should increase the positive affect felt by the two interlocutors and improve the quality, intimacy, and longevity of their relationship. Susan's compliment will strengthen your relationship if you react positively, as expected. If you reject Andrew's compliment, you will probably both feel embarrassment. Faced with an unexpected response from the complimentee, the complimenter might reassess the merit of the complimentee. Depending on whether the complimenter maintains or changes their opinion of merit, it will always be possible for him to restart a **second compliment** phase. To avoid embarrassment, Andrew could repeat his compliment with more sincerity (first compliment: *Good talk!*; second compliment: *I really think that your presentation was very interesting*). To further benefit from the positive effects of her compliment, Susan may continue to compliment you (*Amazing! You looked so calm! I was really impressed, you know!*).

Although the complimenter is at the origin of the process, we believe that the complimentee will, in most cases, be motivated by the pursuit of a good relationship with the complimenter. According to Gouldner (1960) and more recently to Falk and Fischbacher (2006), the norm of reciprocity is a social obligation that invites the individual to return "favours/gifts" to others. In so doing, the receiver of the favor also avoids being in debt. The **Compliment of reciprocity** (this type of compliment response corresponds to the return by Herbert 1990) comes in response to a received compliment and is motivated by the need for equality in relationships (after accepting James' compliment, you might thank him for serving as a role model for a great researcher) or the need to pay off a debt (complimenting Andrew would mean you no longer feel indebted to him for his compliment).

Some compliments will be memorized by one or both interlocutors while other compliments will simply be forgotten. Chances are that you will not memorize Susan's superficial compliments, whereas you might try to motivate yourself again by voluntarily remembering James's compliment. As for Andrew's compliment, it may prompt you to compliment him next time you evaluate him as deserving. **Memorization** will both adapt compliment behavior for future interactions and capitalize on positive events.

In this section, we briefly defined, explained and illustrated the variables included in the conceptual model of compliments. In the following section, we will argue the interest of studying each of the elements involved in the compliment process. Through in-depth discussions of different fields of psychology research, we will provide hypotheses in order to guide and stimulate future research. Although the model can also be applied to normative compliments (congratulations), we will focus on spontaneous compliments (praise) for the rest of this paper.

Pre-Compliment Phase: Antecedents

Until now, the literature on praise has not considered the pre-compliment phase in depth; no researcher has really looked at how or why people compliment others. Therefore, we can only suggest, on the basis of the wider literature, various hypotheses that deserve to be examined in future work. In the conceptual model of the compliment (see fig. 1), four variables are considered as antecedents of the compliment: The Evaluation of the Merit, the Intention to Compliment, the personal characteristics of the Complimenter, and Contextual factors.

Evaluation of a Merit

To compliment someone, the future complimenter must attribute merit to them. Therefore, the starting point of the compliment should be the observation that the target reaches a high(er) standard in comparison with intra- or interpersonal norms. We propose three possible points of comparison to establish the merit of others: (1) the group (performance above average), (2) the complimentee (better than usual) or (3) the complimenter (better than me). Applying the theory of the self-evaluation maintenance (Beach and Tesser 2000), the Intention to compliment is triggered only if the chosen comparison does not threaten the complimenter's ego too much. This is why three variables need to be taken into account to determine the Evaluation of the merit: (i) point of comparison, (ii) level of threat to the observer's self, and (iii) emotion felt when observing the object of the merit. The observer who uses themselves as a standard should more easily suffer from the comparison and therefore feel a negative self-focused emotion, such as jealousy. Conversely, the observer who uses

the complimentee as a standard should not suffer from the comparison and therefore feel positive other-focused emotion such as admiration. According to Algoe and Haidt (2009), admiration is an other-praising emotion elicited by individuals who excel in any culturally-valued skill. Admiration in turn induces a tendency to compliment the target (Onu et al. 2016). A better identification of possible patterns *comparison-threat-emotion* when assessing merit would foster a better understanding of emotional and (pro-)social issues that are at the root of the compliment process.

Intention to Compliment

Introducing the *Intention to compliment* provides the possibility to take into account the potential hesitations of the observer to pay the compliment, and the fact that the evaluation of a merit does not always translate into a compliment. According to Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991), the intention to engage in behavior depends on (1) attitudes towards that behavior (e. g., *The observer thinks the act of compliment is flattering / instructive / generous*), (2) perceived norms towards that behavior (e. g., *The observer feels obliged / not allowed to compliment*), and (3) perceived control over this behavior (e. g., *The observer feels (un)able to pay the compliment*). The results of these three components of intention clearly depend on the observer's beliefs. Combined with personality theories, Ajzen's theory could be a fertile framework to predict people's complimenting behavior.

Bidirectional Relationship between Evaluation of Merit and Intention to Compliment

From a dichotomous perspective, when the Evaluation of merit triggers the process, the compliment is purely *meritorious*. If the trigger is the Intention to compliment, the compliment is purely *instrumental*. However, the observer of the merit may be motivated by a more complex combination. Regardless of the relationship between Evaluation of merit and Intention to compliment, one of these two motives could take precedence. Thus, a compliment will either be more meritorious than instrumental or vice versa.

Compliments with a Higher Meritorious Potential According to Smith's model of social comparison-based emotions (2000), admiration is an emotion centered on the other with a particular focus on the positive consequences that the other can enjoy. The more positive emotions the complimenter feels when observing the merit of the other, the more meritorious the compliment will be.

Compliments with a Higher Instrumental Potential According to praise literature in pedagogy, the individual may use the compliment with the intention of producing certain effects like

increase the internal motivation (e.g., Cimpian et al. 2007). In this case, the Intention precedes the Evaluation. The more the complimenter targets the induction of behavioral and relational effects, the more instrumental the compliment is.

Characteristics of the Complimenter as Moderators

Not all observers will compliment the deserving person in the same way or for the same reasons. We suggest a list of potential traits that could act as moderators. First, the moderation can occur in the relationship between the Evaluation of the merit and the Intention to compliment. The potential role of emotional reactivity, pro-social tendencies, narcissism or hierarchy of the observer's values could be potential moderators.

Emotional Reactivity Based on the theory of social sharing of emotions (Rimé et al. 1991), a minimum threshold of emotional intensity is necessary to trigger the Intention to compliment. However, the emotional response depends on the individual's degree of emotional responsiveness. These inter-individual differences should partially explain why not all individuals respond with the same intensity when observing the merit of others.

Pro-Social Tendencies According to Caprara et al. (2012), people with pro-social tendencies are inclined to be agreeable with others and have a high capacity for empathy. Consequently, this personality trait is likely to be relevant. The more pro-social the observer is, the more comfortable they should be in their complimenter role, the easier it will be for them to compliment and the more meritorious their compliments will be.

Narcissism Konrath et al. (2014) describe narcissism as a personality trait characterized by excessive self-love combined with low empathy. Narcissistic individuals also often experience shame or envy, two negative self-focused emotions (Smith 2000). People with a high level of narcissism should be less willing to feel other-focused positive emotions and should be less inclined to assume the role of complimenter.

Hierarchy of Personal Values In the same situation, the object of the compliment may vary from one complimenter to another. For example, if two people see a father drop off his newborn in a beautiful car, some people will compliment the father on his child, others on his car. To explain this variation, and in agreement with Mullen and Goethals (1990), the observer should value the object of the merit. Through their compliment, the complimenter seeks to transmit their own values. Hence, the choice of the object of the compliment is based on the complimenter's hierarchy of values.

Extraversion One dimension of the Big-Five model of personality (R. McCrae 2009; R. R. McCrae and Costa Jr. 1997, 2004), extraversion is characterized by three main components: sociability, assertiveness (dominance) and ability to feel intense positive emotions. The total level of the complimenter's extraversion could also have a moderating impact on how spontaneous the compliment is expressed: the higher the complimenter scores on extraversion, the more spontaneous their compliments would be.

Through this initial but non-exhaustive list of moderators, we hope to (1) encourage research projects that will study the impact of personality on the pre-compliment phase and (2) encourage researchers to consider other relevant personality traits.

Contextual Characteristics as Moderators

Similar to any other behavior, the complimenter is required to adjust their compliment to the context in which it is expressed. A whole section of the literature on praise has focused on intercultural differences in the act of complimenting. In the following section, we consider general elements as well as situation-specific elements.

The Cultural Norms of the Complimenter A number of researchers have already addressed the cross-cultural issue relating to compliments (e.g., Behnam and Aminzadeh 2011; Boroujeni et al. 2016; Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Yu 2005). These studies suggest that the rules for implementing a compliment are subject to intercultural variations. According to Golato (2002), the culture of the complimenter prevails over that of the complimentee. This situation significantly increases the probability of misunderstandings in the complimentee's reaction. Thanks to Golato's study, we can understand that the complimenter has every interest in bending to the culture of their interlocutor if they wish their compliment to be well received. The violation of conventions highlights the fact that not all compliments are permitted in all contexts, regardless of whether the two interlocutors share the same culture or not. These cultural norms influence the *whole course of the compliment* (see Fig. 1) by dictating what is or is not a merit, when to compliment or not someone, and how to react after receiving a compliment.

Situation-Specific Elements Some elements of the context facilitate or hinder the expression of the compliment: (a) the quality of relationship between the interlocutors in terms of its hierarchical or egalitarian nature (e.g., boss vs. spouse), the current state of their relationship (e.g., after an argument) and their habitual compliment behavior (rare vs. frequent compliment); (b) whether or not the person to be complimented has

really achieved something, and (c) the presence or not of an audience.

Compliment

Object of the Compliment

As we pointed out in the introduction, compliments can be normative (congratulations on a marriage) or more spontaneous (praise). In this second case, the object of the compliment can vary greatly. Herbert (1990) identified four categories of objects: (1) physical appearance, (2) possessions, (3) achievements, and (4) effort provided by the complimentee. In the literature, the authors contrast process "*You tried hard*" with person praise "*You are smart*" (e.g., Pomerantz and Kempner 2013) or praise for intelligence "*You have the capacity*" (e.g., Mueller and Dweck 1998). Other authors, like Zentall and Morris (2010), focus on the generic aspect (*Good talk!*) versus the specific aspect (*Your talk demonstrates your excellent scientific qualities!*). All these studies are part of semantic (i.e., the linguistic rules of formulating a compliment) or pedagogical (i.e., the best compliment to motivate students) approaches. In contrast, the conceptual model takes a psychosocial approach (i.e., the interpersonal issues of the compliment). Through its object, the compliment constitutes a tool to transmit one's own values to others (e.g., if I complement someone on his academic performance, this means that I somehow value scholastic achievement).

Expression of the Compliment

When an observer decides to compliment a deserving person, the compliment can be expressed in different ways by using a range of linguistic variables that modulate the effects of the compliment. According to Herbert (1990), these variables include (1) choice of personal pronoun, (2) message length, and (3) rhetorical technique (e.g., hyperbole, metaphor). In addition to these variables, Brummelman et al. (2014a) show that adding an adjective (e.g., perfect) or adverb (e.g., incredibly) to a compliment inflates its perceived positive evaluation. Furthermore, we suggest adding voice intonation to modulate the perceived spontaneity of the compliment.

Post-Compliment Phase: Consequences

As noted in the overview, the context in which the compliment is paid will also influence the complimentee's reaction. To include the audience's implication from the persuasion model (for a full explanation, see S. T. Fiske and Taylor 2013), we added the specific context variable as a moderator to the *Compliment - Appraisal* relationship. This external disrupter is particularly relevant when the compliment is studied as an educational tool. Since the presence of the audience is

systematic in the school context, it appears to be a key factor to be taken into consideration.

Appraisal of the Compliment by the Complimentee

The inclusion of this variable is based on the concept of cognitive mediation proposed by the Elaboration Likelihood model of persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Cognitive elaboration corresponds to the appraisal of the arguments and the value to be given to the message. During this step, the complimentee develops an attitude towards the compliment received. The quality and type of cognitive elaboration will depend on individual factors (motivations to adopt a certain attitude and cognitive abilities) and situational factors. The four dimensions of Appraisal to consider are: (1) self-evaluation of the merit, (2) the complimenter's intentions and (3) personal characteristics, and/or (4) the context in which the compliment is formulated.

Self-Evaluation of Merit Kille et al. (2017) suggest that the complimentee assesses themselves in order to determine whether they meet the expectations formulated by the complimenter. In order to evaluate their own merit, the complimentee will also need a point of comparison. Indeed, the complimentee may consider that they have done better than usual (intra-subject comparison) but not at all compared to a peer or to the complimenter (inter-subject comparison). Similar to what we have proposed for the complimenter, the following variables should be considered: (i) self-assessment of merit, (ii) potential threat to self-esteem, and (iii) emotions experienced when receiving the compliment.

Intention to Complement Appraisal of the complimenter's intention—most likely based on the levels of perceived spontaneity and perceived sincerity of the complimenter—has the dual purpose of determining (1) whether the complimentee is being manipulated and (2) whether they become indebted to the complimenter. For example, compliments that are too general or expressed in an inflated manner may be perceived as insincere (e.g., Kanouse et al. 1981). The literature on persuasion (e.g., McGuire 1985) offers an interesting theoretical contribution to the study of this sub-dimension of the Appraisal.

Degree of Perceived Expertise and Personality of the Complimenter Since the compliment underlines merit, it is logical that the complimentee evaluates the legitimacy of the complimenter. For example, Hovland and Weiss (1951) and more recently Pornpitakpan (2004) studied the importance of the credibility of the sender in the receiver's acceptance of the message. The same is likely to happen with compliments. The more legitimate the complimenter is perceived, the more likely the complimentee will accept the compliment.

Context As in the pre-compliment phase, this dimension of Appraisal must include general cultural elements and elements specific to the context in which the compliment is expressed. Golato (2002) has pointed out that failure to respect the cultural values of the complimentee hinders the functionality of the compliment.

Each of these four dimensions of Appraisal has the capacity to hinder the compliment's process. A single case of incongruence can result in the rejection of the compliment by the complimentee. A cumulative effect of incongruences would considerably increase this risk of rejection. In other words, this variable strongly determines the degree of the compliment's functionality.

Reaction of the Complimentee

In the proposed model, observable changes (emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational) from the complimentee are no longer understood as the direct effects of the compliment. The complimentee reacts to the compliment based on their Appraisal. Herbert and Straight (1989) have listed 12 types of compliment responses ranging from *token appreciation* (a verbal or nonverbal acceptance of the compliment) to *request interpretation* (the complimentee, consciously or not, interprets the compliment as a request rather than a simple compliment). Between these two extreme reactions, the authors include the *scale down* response (complimentee disagrees with the compliment, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated), where the complimentee's reaction involves expressing their Appraisal to the complimenter.

Emotional Reaction The valence of the emotion experienced by the complimentee is based on the cognitive appraisal described above. Consistent with Kille et al. (2017), the complimentee feels negative affects when they consider they are not deserving. Similarly, the nature of the complimentee's emotion depends on the complimenter's perceived intention. A compliment perceived as acknowledgement should induce pride and gratitude while a compliment perceived as judgment should induce irritation. However, it is possible that both positive and negative affects are experienced. For examples, the expression of pride would be inhibited based on the relevance of the area of achievement (van Osch et al. 2019). Armenta et al. (2017) note that gratitude—a positive affect—is often associated with feelings of indebtedness towards others, which involves discomfort. Van Brusselt (2013) have observed that compliments perceived as incongruent (i.e., when the intensity of the compliment does not match the merit, for e.g., people perceive their performance as exceptional and think that they would have deserved a more intense compliment, or people perceive their performance as mundane and think that they would have deserved a less intense compliment) induce more

negative affects (e.g., irritation, anger and sadness) and less positive affects (e.g., pride, satisfaction and joy). If common sense conveys the idea that compliments always please, the reality is more complex.

Cognitive Reactions The cognitive reactions are typically the thoughts that follow the appraisal. The Cimpian's study (Cimpian et al. 2007) on ability praise in young children has shown that subtle social cues have the power to shape thinking (by changing children's conception of their abilities) and behavior (by influencing their achievement motivation). These findings indicate the presence of a cognitive reaction in the complimentee's mind after analyzing the compliment received.

Behavioral Reactions Dweck's research (Dweck 2007) shows different children's behavioral responses depending on whether they receive praise for their effort versus praise for their intelligence. These observations can be understood through the Appraisal variable of the conceptual model (see Fig. 1). According to Dweck, praising effort encourages the child to develop a malleable vision of intelligence while praising intelligence induces a fixed vision of intelligence. With a malleable vision of intelligence, the child views a pedagogical challenge as an opportunity to learn. The pleasure of developing new skills translates into a positive behavioral response in learning tasks. In this case, praise for effort is seen as an encouragement to move forward. By contrast, when the child has a fixed vision of intelligence, the pedagogical challenge is perceived as an obligation to demonstrate one's abilities. The child feels anxious because they do not yet know how to proceed. In this context, it is more likely that the child would give up when confronted with challenging situations. Praising intelligence is more likely to be perceived as flattery and thus is more likely to be rejected. Most, if not all reactions to compliments can probably be classified on an approach versus avoidance dimension or, at least, on a "give up" versus "perseverate" dimension.

Relational Reactions Marigold et al. (2007) showed that people with low self-esteem tend to systematically reject their romantic partner's compliments in a defensive behavior. The positive image sent by the complimenter does not correspond to the negative image they have of themselves. This perceived lack of congruence leads them to doubt their partner's intentions. Convinced they are not understood or do not want to be manipulated, these complimentees distance themselves from their partner. This research supports the notion that Appraisal mediates the relationship between the expression of Compliment and the Reaction of the complimentee.

The literature on the effects of compliments has demonstrated that they do not systematically induce positive effects on the complimentee and can even induce opposite effects

(e.g., abandonment of the task, Dweck 2007; cheating behavior, Zhao et al. 2017). In the conceptual model proposed here, the complimentee's self-esteem no longer appears as a consequence of the compliment but as an important moderator between the Compliment and the Appraisal performed by the complimentee.

Characteristics of the Complimentee as Moderators

The personality of the Complimentee certainly plays a moderating role between the Compliment and the Reaction of the complimentee. In order to provide research perspectives, we will explore some characteristics that should influence the relationship between Compliment and Appraisal (e.g., self-esteem, cognitive tendency to make internal or external attributions) and the relationship between the Appraisal and the Reaction of the complimentee (e.g., narcissism, predisposition to feel gratitude).

Self-Esteem Level Self-esteem plays an important role in compliment appraisal. Studies by Brummelman et al. (2014a), Kille et al. (2017) and Marigold et al. (2007) have all shown that, compared to people with high self-esteem, those with low self-esteem have difficulty integrating a compliment into their self-theories.

Types of Attribution As mentioned above, complimentees assess their merit according to a standard. The ability of complimentees to claim their own merit thus affect the point of comparison they choose. According to attribution theory (Graham 1991; Kelley and Michela 1980), people look for the causes of their achievements. Consistent with this literature (e.g., Meyer 1992; Meyer et al. 1979, 1986), an external attribution of merit (*the others helped me*) is more closely coupled with an inter-subject comparison (*they do it better than I do*) and would lead the complimentee to consider themselves as incompetent (*I would never have done it alone*). Conversely, an internal attribution of merit (*I worked hard*) is more likely to be associated with an intra-subject comparison (*I wanted to get it this time*) and would lead the complimentee to consider themselves as competent (*I'm able to do it*). Thus, the type of attribution should moderate the relationship between the compliment and the appraisal.

High Level of Narcissism As previously mentioned, Konrath et al. (2014) describe narcissism as a personality trait characterized by excessive self-love combined with low empathy. Highly narcissistic individuals are more likely to welcome an incongruous compliment and to unfairly take on the role of complimentee. Given its potential capacity to interfere with the pre-compliment phase (leading to fewer compliments, see Characteristics of the complimenter) and to erroneously improve the post-compliment phase (resulting in more

acceptance of incongruous compliments), this personality trait deserves extensive study in future research.

Predisposition to Feel Gratitude According to Emmons and McCullough (2004) gratitude is the emotional result of a two-step cognitive process: recognizing that (a) one has accomplished a positive achievement, and (b) the cause of the positive outcome is from a source external to the individual. A greater predisposition towards feeling gratitude induces a worldview oriented towards perception and appreciation of the positive in life (e.g., Sirois and Wood 2017; Wood et al. 2008a) and the development of social support (Wood et al. 2008b). Feeling and expressing gratitude reinforces pro-social behavior and reciprocity between people, but also induces a corollary sense of debt towards the complimenter (Armenta et al. 2017). The thankful complimentee can escape the embarrassment of receiving the compliment by offering a compliment of reciprocity to the complimenter. In this way, the complimentee could make it known that they recognize their own merit (*it is true that I played well*) and at the same time, by elevating the complimenter to the rank of a deserving person (*but you defended yourself well too!*), pays off the debt of receiving a compliment.

This list of personal characteristics is by no means exhaustive. The researcher who is interested in the impact of the complimentee's personality on the compliment's process will find other interesting hypotheses to explore. But these illustrate the relevance of considering some personality traits to the study of compliments.

Adjustment of the Complimenter

As we explained in the overview, we suggest that the complimenter systematically evaluates the reaction of the complimentee to their compliment. In other words, as soon as the complimentee has indicated whether they agree or disagree with the compliment (agreement vs. nonagreement), the complimenter validates or reassesses their own evaluation of merit.

If the Complimentee Agrees with the Compliment If the complimentee has a positive reaction, the complimenter can validate their evaluation of merit (see fig. 1). If the complimenter wishes to benefit more from the positive effects that the compliment has produced on the relationship between the two interlocutors, or if they wish to ensure that the compliment is well received, the complimenter may decide to send a *confirmatory compliment*. This second compliment sent by the complimenter repeats the first compliment in order to reproduce the obtained effects.

If the Complimentee Disagrees with the Compliment If the complimentee expresses a negative reaction to the

compliment, the complimenter may feel the need to review their evaluation of merit. In this case, the complimenter can either maintain or modify the evaluation of merit. If they maintain their initial opinion of merit, the complimenter may be tempted to return a *second intensified compliment* in order to change the Evaluation of merit on the part of the complimentee. If the complimenter changes their opinion about the merit, they may be tempted to send a *second amended compliment* to let the complimentee know that they had revised their evaluation of merit.

Another possible reaction would be to stop at the first compliment without expressing the second one. In all cases, as suggested above, one of the functions of the compliment is to develop harmonious relationships. In agreement with Wall et al. (1989), we consider that the compliment process extends beyond the reaction of the complimentee and opens up to a circular interpersonal dynamic in which each interlocutor can improve their position. A second stage should complete the post-compliment phase. When the compliment succeeds, the two interlocutors will actively achieve harmony through cognitive (reaching a consensus about the merit) and emotional synchronization (sharing positive emotions). According to Gable et al. (2004), the effects of synchronization should increase (1) positive affect, (2) well-being and (3) the quality of the relationship in terms of intimacy and longevity. Following these observations, the value conveyed by compliment should be reinforced in the hierarchies of values of the two interlocutors if the synchronization occurs. If the compliment fails, the complimenter and the complimentee will experience difficulties in reaching synchronization. We should observe (1) the presence of negative affect, (2) a decrease in positive affect, and (3) an alteration in the quality of the relationship.

Memorization

The last variable of the conceptual model of compliment takes into account the memory of this interaction. Three major research questions can be raised in relation to this variable.

Why do we remember some compliments and not others? It is obvious that the more intense the emotion, the more the compliment will be memorized. Yet a more comprehensive answer to this question should make it possible to identify the interpersonal issues related to compliment, in particular the continuum of judgment versus acknowledgement.

What do we do with these remembered compliments? For Gable and Reis (2010), capitalization occurs when individuals use their memories of past compliments to re-experience their positive effects. Thanks to this potential of capitalization, the compliment could produce long-term effects for both interlocutors.

What do complimenters and complimentees take into account from previous interactions to adapt their compliments' behaviors? Social inferences lead to the use of heuristics

constructed on the individual's preferences and judgements using information already in memory (Weber and Johnson 2006). Some salient compliments have the power to directly modify these heuristics and to indirectly modify future compliment behaviors.

As we have just seen, studying in more detail the Memorization variable would increase understanding of social functions of compliments.

Conclusion

Conceptual models are essential for research. Their clear structure provides research questions and specific hypotheses necessary for the construction of empirical knowledge. In turn, the findings allow to validate or modify parts of the conceptual model. The scientific process is thus a two-way construction. So far, the literature on compliment remains sparse and disparate. In order to allow its further development, a conceptual framework is urgently needed. That is what this paper aimed to achieved.

In the introduction, we argued for the importance of broadening the study of compliment to the fields of social, emotion, personality psychology, social cognition, and communication. This is because we consider compliments as a tool for social relations in everyday life. This psychosocial approach to compliment involves taking into account the two interlocutors: the complimenter and the complementee. In previous studies, the focus has only been on the person being complimented. Therefore, this conceptual framework broadens the study of compliments by (1) introducing the pre-compliment phase that involves also the complimenter and (2) expanding the post-compliment phase to include research on synchronization between the two interlocutors.

Above all, the identification of the variables involved in the compliment process provides a theoretical basis on which researchers can build their experimental design. In doing so, the compliment conceptual model also considers the interlocutors' interpersonal influences and the contextual factors that have previously been neglected in the literature.

Finally, this model emphasizes the different contexts in which compliments can be (dys)functional. We address the fact that compliments do not always achieve their desired effects. Although a complimenter may have good intentions, the compliment can have dysfunctional consequences on the complementee and harm the relationship. By identifying flaws in the process, researchers will be able to better understand how and why certain compliments hit the mark.

By integrating existing literature and by suggesting a number of research questions and hypotheses, we hope to stimulate future research in this area.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest Authors do not have any interest that might be interpreted as influencing the research.

Ethical Approval Statement Not applicable (theoretical paper).

Informed Consent Not applicable (theoretical paper).

References

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T).
- Algoe, S. B., & Haidt, J. (2009). Witnessing excellence in action: The 'other-praising' emotions of elevation, gratitude, and admiration. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(2), 105–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760802650519>.
- Armenta, C. N., Fritz, M. M., & Luybomirsky, S. (2017). Functions of positive emotions: Gratitude as a motivator of self-improvement and positive change. *Emotion Review*, 9(3), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916669596>.
- Bandura, A. (1969). Principles of behavior modification (Holt, Rinehart and Winston). [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807\(197007\)7:3%3C307::AID-PITS2310070322%3E3.0.CO;2-L](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(197007)7:3%3C307::AID-PITS2310070322%3E3.0.CO;2-L).
- Beach, S. R., & Tesser, A. (2000). Self-evaluation maintenance and evolution. In *Handbook of social comparison* (springer, pp. 123–140). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4237-7>.
- Behnam, B., & Aminzadeh, M. (2011). A comparative study of the compliments and compliment responses between English and Persian TV interviews. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 17(1), 65–78.
- Berry, J. W., Poortinga, Y. H., Breugelmans, S. M., Chasiotis, A., & Sam, D. L. (2011). *Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications* (3rd ed). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511974274>.
- Boroujeni, A. J., Domakani, M. R., & Sheykhi, S. (2016). Comparative cross-cultural analysis of compliments in English and Persian series. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 3(2), 177–187.
- Brummelman, E., Thomaes, S., Orobio de Castro, B., Overbeek, G., & Bushman, B. J. (2014a). "That's not just beautiful—That's incredibly beautiful!" the adverse impact of inflated praise on children with low self-esteem. *Psychological Science*, 25(3), 728–735. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613514251>.
- Brummelman, E., Thomaes, S., Overbeek, G., Orobio de Castro, B., van den Hout, M. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2014b). On feeding those hungry for praise: Person praise backfires in children with low self-esteem. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(1), 9–14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031917>.
- Buunk, A. P., & Gibbons, F. X. (2007). Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a field. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 102(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.09.007>.
- Caprara, G. V., Alessandri, G., & Eisenberg, N. (2012). Prosociality: The contribution of traits, values, and self-efficacy beliefs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(6), 1289–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025626>.
- Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 752–766. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.39.5.752>.

- Cimpian, A., Arce, H.-M. C., Markman, E. M., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Subtle linguistic cues affect children's motivation. *Psychological Science*, 18(4), 314–316. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01896.x>.
- Corpus, J. H., Ogle, C. M., & Love-Geiger, K. E. (2006). The effects of social-comparison versus mastery praise on children's intrinsic motivation. *Motivation and Emotion*, 30, 335–345. 10.1.1.469.2099.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success* (RandomHouse). <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2006-08575-000>
- Dweck, C. S. (2007). The perils and promises of praise. *ASCD*, 65(2), 34–39.
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2004). The psychology of gratitude. *Oxford University Press, USA*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195150100.003.0001>.
- Falk, A., & Fischbacher, U. (2006). A theory of reciprocity. *Games and Economic Behavior*, 54(2), 293–315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geb.2005.03.001>.
- Fiske, J. (2010). *Introduction to communication studies* (Routledge).
- Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (2013). *Social cognition. From brains to culture*: Sage.
- Gable, S. L., & Reis, H. T. (2010). Good news! Capitalizing on positive events in an interpersonal context. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 42, pp. 195–257). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(10\)42004-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(10)42004-3).
- Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 228–245. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.2.228>.
- Golato, A. (2002). German compliment responses. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34, 547–571. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(01\)00040-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(01)00040-6).
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25(2), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2092623>.
- Graham, S. (1991). A review of attribution theory in achievement contexts. *Educational Psychology Review*, 3(1), 5–39.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112. 10.3102%2F003465430298487.
- Heckhausen, H., & Beckmann, J. (1990). Intentional action and action slips. *Psychological Review*, 97(1), 36–48. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.97.1.36>.
- Henderlong, J., & Lepper, M. R. (2002). The effects of praise on children's intrinsic motivation: A review and synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(5), 774–795. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.5.774>.
- Herbert, R. K., & Straight, H. S. (1989). Compliment-rejection versus compliment-avoidance: Listener-based versus speaker-based pragmatic strategies. *Language & Communication*, 9(1), 35–47. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0271-5309\(89\)90005-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0271-5309(89)90005-0).
- Herbert, R. K. (1990). Sex-based differences in compliment behavior. *Language in Society*, 19(02), 201–224. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500014378>.
- Hitlin, S., & Piliavin, J. A. (2004). Values: Reviving a dormant concept. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, 359–393. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110640>.
- Holmes, J. (1988). Paying compliments: A sex-preferential politeness strategy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 12(4), 445–465. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(88\)90005-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(88)90005-7).
- Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15(4), 635–650. <https://doi.org/10.1086/266350>.
- Kamins, M. L., & Dweck, C. S. (1999). Person versus process praise and criticism: Implications for contingent self-worth and coping. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(3), 835–847. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.35.3.835>.
- Kanouse, D. E., Gumpert, P., & Canavan-Gumpert, D. (1981). The semantics of praise. *New Directions in Attribution Research*, 3, 97–115.
- Kelley, H. H., & Michela, J. L. (1980). Attribution theory and research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 31(1), 457–501. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.31.020180.002325>.
- Kille, D. R., Eibach, R. P., Wood, J. V., & Holmes, J. G. (2017). Who can't take a compliment? The role of construal level and self-esteem in accepting positive feedback from close others. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 68, 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2016.05.003>.
- Konrath, S., Corneille, O., Bushman, B. J., & Luminet, O. (2014). The relationship between narcissistic Exploitativeness, dispositional empathy, and emotion recognition abilities. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 38(1), 129–143. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-013-0164-y>.
- Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2001). Compliment responses among British and Spanish university students: A contrastive study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33(1), 107–127. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(99\)00127-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00127-7).
- Marigold, D. C., Holmes, J. G., & Ross, M. (2007). More than words: Reframing compliments from romantic partners fosters security in low self-esteem individuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(2), 232–248. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.2.232>.
- Marigold, D. C., Holmes, J. G., & Ross, M. (2010). Fostering relationship resilience: An intervention for low self-esteem individuals. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(4), 624–630. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.02.011>.
- McCrae, R. (2009). The five-factor model of personality traits. In P. Corr & G. Matthews (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Personality Psychology* (Cambridge University press., pp. 148–161).
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa Jr., P. T. (1997). Personality trait structure as a human universal. *American Psychologist*, 52(5), 509–516. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.5.509>.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa Jr., P. T. (2004). A contemplated revision of the NEO five-factor inventory. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 36(3), 587–596. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(03\)00118-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(03)00118-1).
- McGuire, W. J. (1985). Attitudes and attitude change. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Random House, Vol. 2, pp. 233–346).
- Meyer, W.-U. (1992). Paradoxical effects of praise and criticism on perceived ability. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 3(1), 259–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14792779243000087>.
- Meyer, W.-U., Bachmann, M., Biermann, U., Hempelmann, M., Ploger, F.-O., & Spiller, H. (1979). The informational value of evaluative behavior: Influences of praise and blame on perceptions of ability. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71(2), 259–268. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.71.2.259>.
- Meyer, W.-U., Mittag, W., & Engler, U. (1986). Some effects of praise and blame on perceived ability and affect. *Social Cognition*, 4(3), 293–308.
- Mueller, C. M., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.1.33>.
- Mullen, B., & Goethals, G. R. (1990). Social projection, actual consensus and valence. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 29(3), 279–282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1990.tb00907.x>.
- Onu, D., Kessler, T., & Smith, J. R. (2016). Admiration: A conceptual review. *Emotion Review*, 8(3), 218–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073915610438>.
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 19, 123–205. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60214-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60214-2).

- Pomerantz, E. M., & Kempner, S. G. (2013). Mothers' daily person and process praise: Implications for children's theory of intelligence and motivation. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(11), 2040–2046. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031840>.
- Pornpitakpan, C. (2004). The persuasiveness of source credibility: A critical review of five decades' evidence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34(2), 243–281. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2004.tb02547.x>.
- Rime, B., Mesquita, B., Boca, S., & Philippot, P. (1991). Beyond the emotional event: Six studies on the social sharing of emotion. *Cognition & Emotion*, 5(5–6), 435–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699939108411052>.
- Sirois, F. M., & Wood, A. M. (2017). Gratitude uniquely predicts lower depression in chronic illness populations: A longitudinal study of inflammatory bowel disease and arthritis. *Health Psychology*, 36(2), 122–132. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000436>.
- Skarlicki, D. P., Folger, R., & Gee, J. (2004). When social accounts backfire: The exacerbating effects of a polite message or an apology on reactions to an unfair outcome 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34(2), 322–341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2004.tb02550.x>.
- Smith, R. H. (2000). Assimilative and contrastive emotional reactions to upward and downward social comparisons. In *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research* (Suls and Wheeler, pp. 173–200). Kluwer academic/plenum publishers. <https://psychology.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/Smith2000.pdf>
- Swenson, S., Ho, G. W., Budhathoki, C., Belcher, H. M., Tucker, S., Miller, K., & Gross, D. (2016). Parents' use of praise and criticism in a sample of young children seeking mental health services. *Journal Pediatric Health Care*, 30(1), 49–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2015.09.010>.
- Van Brusselt, J. (2013). Les compliments font-ils toujours plaisir? Etude des facteurs modérateurs de l'impact des compliments. Louvain-la-Neuve: UCL.
- van Osch, Y., Zeelenberg, M., Breugelmans, S. M., & Brandt, M. J. (2019). Show or hide pride? Selective inhibition of pride expressions as a function of relevance of achievement domain. *Emotion*, 19(2), 334–347. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000437>.
- Wall, M. D., Amendt, J. H., Kleckner, T., & Bryant, R. D. (1989). Therapeutic compliments: Setting the stage for successful therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 15(2), 159–167. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.1989.tb00795.x>.
- Weber, E. U., & Johnson, E. J. (2006). Constructing preferences from memory. In *The Construction of Preference* (Lichtenstein, S. & Slovic, P., pp. 397–410). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1301075>.
- Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., & Maltby, J. (2008a). Gratitude uniquely predicts satisfaction with life: Incremental validity above the domains and facets of the five factor model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 45(1), 49–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2008.02.019>.
- Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Gillett, R., Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2008b). The role of gratitude in the development of social support, stress, and depression: Two longitudinal studies. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42(4), 854–871. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2007.11.003>.
- Yu, M. C. (2005). Sociolinguistic competence in the complimenting act of native Chinese & American English speakers: A mirror of cultural value. *Language & Speech*, 48(1), 91–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00238309050480010501>.
- Zentall, S. R., & Morris, B. J. (2010). “Good job, you’re so smart”: The effects of inconsistency of praise type on young children’s motivation. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 107(2), 155–163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2010.04.015>.
- Zhao, L., Heyman, G. D., Chen, L., & Lee, K. (2017). Praising young children for being smart promotes cheating. *Psychological Science*, 1(3), 1868–1870. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617721529>.

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.