

# Ingratiation

Authored by  
**mohammad looti**

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Ingratiation, a term coined by social psychologist Edward E. Jones, is a social psychological technique in which an individual attempts to become more attractive or likeable to their target. This outcome can be achieved by using several methods such as other-enhancement, opinion conformity, and self presentation/self-promotion. Other enhancement is a method in which the ingratiation compliments the target individual. Opinion conformity occurs when the ingratiation adopts and validates the attitudes and beliefs of the target individual. Self-presentation/self-promotion is a technique in which the ingratiation emphasizes their own attributes in order to be seen positively in the eyes of the target individual. Recently, researchers have added onto this list of ingratiation methods, and now recognize self-deprecation, instrumental dependency, name dropping and situation-specific behaviors as forms of ingratiation as well.

## **Major theoretical approaches**

### **Edward E. Jones: the father of ingratiation**

Ingratiation, as a topic in social psychology, was first defined and analyzed by social psychologist Edward E. Jones. In addition to his pioneering studies on ingratiation, Jones also helped develop some of the fundamental theories of social psychology such as the Fundamental Attribution Error and the Actor-Observer Bias.

Jones' first extensive studies of ingratiation were published in his book *Ingratiation: A Social Psychological Analysis*. In citing his reasons for studying ingratiation, Jones reasoned that ingratiation was an important phenomenon to study because it elucidated some of the central mysteries of social interaction and was also the stepping stone towards understanding other common social phenomena such as group cohesiveness.

### **Historical definition and classes**

Based on the social theory of groups proposed by John Thibaut and Harold Kelley in 1959, Jones defined ingratiation as "a class of strategic behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of one's personal qualities". From this, Jones divided ingratiation into three major classes: other enhancement, conformity and self-presentation.

Other enhancement is said to "involve communication of directly enhancing, evaluative statements" and is most correlated to the practice of flattery. Most often, other enhancement is achieved when the ingratiation exaggerates the positive qualities of the target while leaving out the negative qualities. According to Jones, this form of ingratiation is effective based on the Gestaltian axiom that it is hard for a person to dislike someone that thinks highly of them. In addition to this, other enhancement seems to be most effective when compliments are directed at the target's sources of self-doubt. To shield the obviousness of the flattery, the ingratiation may first talk

negatively about qualities the target knows are weaknesses and then compliment him/her on a weak quality the target is unsure of.

Conformity is based on the tenant that people like those whose values and beliefs are similar to their own. According to Jones, ingratiation in the form of conformity can "range from simple agreement with expressed opinions to the most complex forms of behavior imitation and identification." Similar to other enhancement, conformity is thought to be most effective when there is a change of opinion. When the ingratiator switches from a divergent opinion to an agreeing one, the target assumes the ingratiator values his/her opinion enough to change, in turn strengthening the positive feelings the target has for the ingratiator. With this, the target person is likely to be most appreciative of agreement when he wants to believe that something is true but is not sure that it is. Jones argues, therefore, that it is best to start by disagreeing in trivial issue and agreeing on issues that the target person needs affirmation.

Self-presentation is the "explicit presentation or description of one's own attributes to increase the likelihood of being judged attractively". The ingratiator is one who models himself along the lines of the target person's suggested ideals. Self-presentation is said to be most effective by exaggerating strengths and minimizing weaknesses. This tactic, however, seems to be dependent of the normal self-image of the ingratiator. For example, those who are of high esteem are considered with more favor if they are modest and those who are not are seen as more favorable when they exaggerate their strengths. One can also present weakness in order to impress the target. By revealing weaknesses, one implies a sense of respect and trust of the target. Interview responses such as "I am the kind of person who...", "You can count on me to..." are examples of self-presentation techniques.

### **Modern types**

Since Jones' work of the 1960s, researchers have added four more types of ingratiation. The first of these four types has been labeled as self-deprecation, which serves the opposite purpose of self-presentation. Instead of the ingratiator making themselves seem more attractive in the eyes of the target individual, the goal of self-deprecation is to decrease the perceived attractiveness of the ingratiator. By doing so, the ingratiator hopes to receive pity from their target. Instrumental dependency similarly aims to make oneself appear inferior to the target individual, and it achieves this by making the target individual think that the ingratiator is entirely dependent on them. Name dropping is an ingratiation tactic that is commonly used, and it occurs when the ingratiator uses the name of, or makes reference to, a well-known and well-respected third party. Lastly, situation-specific behaviors involve the ingratiator finding out personal information about the target individual, and then using this information to gain their approval.

## Goals

In regards to the goals of the ingratiation, Jones also defines three separate types of ingratiation:

Acquisitive ingratiation occurs if the target person controls scarce or valuable resources that the ingratiation hopes to acquire at a minimum personal cost.

Protective Ingratiation is used in order to cultivate favor with the target in order to proactively prevent or blunt a potential attack.

Significance ingratiation occurs when the ingratiation merely seeks the respect and approval of the target and is not seeking an explicit reward.

## Major empirical findings

### In business

Seiter conducted a study that looked into the effect of ingratiation tactics on tipping behavior in the restaurant business. The study was done at two restaurants in Northern Utah, and the participant pool was 94 dining parties of 2 people each, equaling 188 participants in total. In order to ensure that the person paying the bill was complimented, the experimenters were told to compliment both members of the party without making their compliments seem insincere. The data was collected by two female communication students, both the age of 22, who worked part-time as waitresses.

The results of the experiment supported the initial hypothesis that customers receiving compliments on their choice of dish would tip larger amounts than customers who received no compliment after ordering. A one-way ANOVA test was performed, and this test found significant differences in tipping behavior between the two conditions. Customers who received compliments left larger tips ( $M = 18.94$ ) than those who were not the recipients of ingratiation tactics ( $M = 16.41$ ).

### In conversation and interviews

Godfrey conducted a study that looked into the difference between self-promoters and ingratiation. The study subjects consisted of 50 pairs of unacquainted, same sex students from Princeton University (25 male pairs, 25 female pairs). The pairs of students participated in two sessions of videotaped, 20-minute conversations, spaced one week apart.

The first session was an unstructured conversation where the two subjects just talked about arbitrary topics. After the first conversation, one subject was randomly assigned to be the presenter. The presenter was asked to fill out a two-question survey that rated the likability and the competency of the other subject on a scale from 1 to 10. The second subject was assigned the role of the target, and was instructed to fill out a much longer survey about the other subject, which

included the likability and competency scale, 41 trait attributes, and 7 emotions. In the second session, the presenters were asked to participate as an ingratiation or a self-promoter. They were both given specific directions: ingratiation were told to try and make the target like them, while the self-promoters were instructed to make the targets view them as extremely competent.

The results show that the presenters only partly achieved their goal. Partners of ingratiation rated them as somewhat more likable after the second conversation than after the first conversation ( $M_s = 7.35$  vs.  $6.55$ ) but no more competent ( $M_s = 5.80$  vs.  $5.85$ ), whereas partners of self-promoters rated them as no more competent after the second conversation than after the first conversation ( $M_s = 5.25$  vs.  $5.05$ ) but somewhat less likable ( $M_s = 5.15$  vs.  $5.85$ ). Ingratiation gained in likability without sacrificing perceived competence, whereas self-promoters sacrificed likability with no gain in competency.

## Applications

Ingratiation can be applied to many real world situations. As mentioned previously, research has delved into the areas of tipping in the restaurant business and conversations. More research shows how ingratiation is applicable in the online dating community and job interviews.

In a study of social rejection in the online dating community, researchers tested whether ingratiation or hostility would be the first reaction of the rejected individual and whether men or women would be most likely to ingratiate in different situations. The study showed that cases in which the woman had felt "close" to a potential dating partner from the mutual sharing of information and was rejected, she was more likely than men to engage in ingratiation. Furthermore, men were shown to be more likely to be willing to pay for a date (as prompted by the researchers, not for the date itself) with a woman who had previously harshly rejected him over a woman who had mildly rejected him. Both cases show that while men and women have different social and emotional investments, they are equally likely to ingratiate in a situation which is self-defining to them.

In another study in the context of an interview, research showed that a combination of ingratiation and self-promotion tactics was more effective than using either one by itself or neither when trying to get hired by a potential employer. The most positive reviews and recommendations came from interviewers whose interviewees had used such a combination, and they were also most likely to be given a job offer. However, when compared by themselves, self-promotion was more effective in producing such an outcome than ingratiation; this may be due to how the nature of an interview requires the individual being considered for the job to talk about their positive qualities and what they would add to the company.

## Controversy

There is some disagreement in the literature as to whether self-presentation is a type of ingratiation or another tactic in itself. But there is no concrete evidence or reasoning supporting the idea that the self-presentation is not a form of ingratiation. Therefore, the major consensus is that the two are mutually exclusive.

## **Conclusion**

Studies have shown that ingratiation, defined as the attempt of an individual to become more likeable to their target, is a highly effective form of impression management, and one that occurs frequently in social interactions. As a result, it has become a useful tactic in many real-world situations when one is looking to improve their appearance towards another. Examples of situations in which ingratiation is often used include businesses, court-rooms, dating, and other areas in which a person looks to improve their image towards a target individual.

In a world in which social standing is an important aspect of personal identity, ingratiation as a form of impression management has become a tactic that is used increasingly often. While it still remains a relatively under-researched topic in social psychology, its importance in day-to-day life is becoming further recognized by researchers, as demonstrated by the recent addition of four new subcategories. These four subcategories, along with the three primary types of ingratiation coined by forefather of the subject Edward E. Jones, have established a solid base for a topic that is likely to see further expansion in the future.