

Effects of Public and Private Deviancy on Compliance with a Request

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A confederate requester asked subjects to write letters for an educational campaign after they had completed a battery of tests and received either deviant or nondeviant feedback. Half of the subjects were led to believe that the requester had knowledge of their test performance; the remaining half believed that the confederate did not know their test scores. Within these conditions, some subjects believed that complying with the request would involve future meetings with the requester while others were not led to anticipate any future interaction. As expected, deviants complied more than nondeviants replicating Freedman and Doob's (1968) results; however, neither the secret/known nor the future interaction variations produced effects. Contrary to the prediction that deviants are compliant because they wish to avoid mistreatment, secret deviants complied slightly more than known deviants. Compliance was discussed as instrumental in improving self-image.

Although a number of social scientists have studied deviancy in a variety of field settings (e.g., Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1969; Matza, 1969; Dinitz, Dynes, & Clark, 1969), it is only recently that experimental social psychologists have created deviancy defined as "differentness" (Freedman and Doob, 1968) or "uniqueness" (Fromkin, 1970) in the laboratory. In a series of experiments designed to study the effects of "being different," Freedman and Doob (1968) manipulated deviance by means of a false feedback technique. Their subjects completed a battery of general personality tests after which they received fictitious scores that placed them in one or the other extreme tails of a normal distribution (deviant conditions) or close to the mean (nondeviant conditions).

This paper is based on an Ohio State University senior honors thesis by the first author under the direction of the second author. Thanks to Larry Babich, Robert Gelbard, Richard Meyer, Michael O'Callaghan, and Lon Peterson for serving as confederates. We are grateful to Anthony N. Doob for helpful suggestions and for providing experimental materials. Reprint requests should be sent to: Alan E. Gross, Department of Psychology, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63121.

This fictitious feedback effectively created the illusion that a subject was either similar to most other people or vastly different from most other people on some unspecified dimension.

One of the findings which emerged from this research program was that deviants are more likely than nondeviants to comply with a request made in a face-to-face setting. In one experiment (p. 135 ff.) a confederate asked subjects to write letters for "an organization that is trying to save the Redwoods." Subjects who had received deviant feedback were willing to write more letters than nondeviants, especially when the request was made by a nondeviant. Freedman and Doob (1968, p. 142) offered an ingratiation explanation for the increased compliance in deviant conditions. They speculated that deviant subjects agreed to do a favor for the requesting confederate in order to avoid the rejection and mistreatment often accorded deviants.

Although it is possible that deviant subjects indeed complied to assuage or ingratiate the normal confederate, it is not *necessary* to invoke this kind of social-instrumental explanation for the results. As Freedman and Doob note (pp. 23 and 137) subjects who received deviant feedback probably found the experience of differentness somewhat unpleasant. Although doing a favor for someone cannot really counterbalance the negative feedback, the expected social reinforcement (perhaps a friendly "thanks") could help to restore or bolster the subject's image of himself as a good person. As Freedman and Doob put it, "he may be deviant but he is really OK anyway." But, whether or not public awareness of deviancy and the attendant possibility of mistreatment is necessary to increase compliance is not tested within the Freedman and Doob design because all of their deviant subjects believed that the requester was aware of their test scores.

In the present study the public or known deviant treatment was replicated, and additional "secret" conditions in which only the subject himself was informed about his test scores were included. If the ingratiation interpretation is correct then increased compliance should occur only, or at least more often, in conditions where the subject believes that his deviant scores are known to the requester. If improving one's self-image is also an important determinant of compliance deviant subjects should be more likely than normal controls to accede to requests even when their deviancy is secret or private.

Furthermore, a secret deviant should have less fear of rejection or mistreatment if he were not expecting to interact with the confederate requester in the future than if he were anticipating continued interaction with the requester; thus, according to the ingratiation explanation, secret deviants who do not expect to interact with the requester should comply less often. On the other hand, if a secret deviant wishes to conceal his

deviant status he should comply less often when he expects compliance to lead to future contacts. If he becomes involved in a project with the requester he may fear that he will eventually be asked to reveal his test scores. Freedman and Doob (1968, p. 57) have demonstrated that secret deviant subjects do express a preference to work alone, evidently in an attempt to conceal their deviant status from nondeviants. To test these conflicting predictions about the effects of expected future interaction, two variations of the letter-writing request were used in the present study; one which required compliant subjects to see the requester again and the other in which no future meetings were expected.

To summarize, it was expected that the Freedman and Doob finding that deviants are more compliant than nondeviants in face-to-face situations would be replicated, and moreover that known deviants would comply more than secret deviants. In addition the study was designed to assess the effects of expected future interaction on compliance.

METHOD

Overview. A confederate requester asked subjects to write letters for an educational campaign after they had completed a battery of tests and received either deviant or non-deviant feedback. Half of the subjects were led to believe that the requester had knowledge of their test performance; the remaining half believed that the confederate did not know their test scores. Within these conditions, some subjects believed that complying with the request would involve future meetings with the requester while others were not led to anticipate any future interaction. Thus test feedback (deviant or nondeviant), requester's knowledge of the feedback (known or secret), and whether or not future interaction was anticipated were varied in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design.

Subjects. Ninety-one male Ohio State University undergraduates participating to fulfill an introductory psychology course requirement were randomly assigned to the eight cells of the design. Since no differences among nondeviant conditions were predicted, twice as many subjects were assigned to deviant as nondeviant conditions. Seven subjects who were suspicious of the deviancy manipulation were eliminated from the data analysis, yielding cell *ns* of 14 and 7, respectively, in deviant and nondeviant treatments.

Procedure. Upon arrival at the laboratory, each subject was paired with a confederate and led to one of three small experimental rooms which contained two chairs, a table equipped with an opaque divider, a speaker which broadcast taped instructions, and a signal switch connected to a light in a control room. Although either one, two, or three subject-confederate pairs were actually tested during a session depending on the availability of subjects and/or confederates, subjects were always led to believe that all three rooms were occupied, i.e., that six subjects were being tested simultaneously.

When each pair was seated at the table, the experimenter explained, "We're doing some routine standardization of personality tests today . . . we're a little cramped . . . so I'll have to put two of you in each room. I'm going to be playing some tape-recorded instructions to all of you simultaneously." If less than three subjects were present, the experimenter announced that the tape would be delayed until "the others arrive."

Taped instructions informed the subjects that they would take five personality tests and that they would receive feedback "about how your answers on the test compare with the answers most other people give (because) we thought we might as well let you get some-

thing interesting out of it too." Subjects were instructed to record their responses on answer sheets which would be scored "down the hall" and returned. "You'll receive feedback from the first test right after you finish the second test . . . and so on. I'll have the feedback from the (fifth) last test and also the summary ready a few minutes after you finish . . . after the fifth test (I'll) ask you some routine questions. . . ." The tape informed subjects that they would place an assigned code symbol on each answer sheet so that meaningful individual feedback could be given while maintaining confidentiality.

When the tape concluded the experimenter distributed the first test, assigned symbols, which for subjects was always an asterisk, demonstrated the feedback procedure using a sample sheet, and told each pair to turn on their signal switches when they had completed each test. This procedure and the five tests were identical in all critical aspects to the Freedman and Doob (1968) procedure. The five tests were: a version of the TAT, 12 items drawn from the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, a Rorschach-type test, the Marlowe-Crown Social Desirability Scale Standard Form, and a self-description scale.

Secret-known manipulation. Identifying symbols were drawn on 3×5 in. cards. In secret conditions, the experimenter merely handed the cards to the subject and confederate without allowing either to see the other's card. In known conditions, the cards were tacked to the wall adjacent to each side of the table, high enough so that they could easily be seen over the top of the opaque divider. After the fourth test, in order to reemphasize the secret-known variation, the experimenter pointed at the symbols, either on the wall or on each side of table, and reminded, "Don't forget to put your symbols on your answer sheets."

Deviance manipulation. Feedback sheets were prepared as described by Freedman and Doob (1968, pp. 20-23). Each sheet contained six symbols "corresponding to the symbols on your cards . . . the machine will give us a raw score that corresponds to the table at the top of the page which . . . summarizes results for a thousand college students who have taken the tests. . . ." Sheets handed to deviant subjects consistently indicated that their scores were markedly different from the "thousand college students" and from the five other persons who had supposedly just completed the tests. Subjects assigned to non-deviant treatments received scores consistently at or near the middle of the distribution. In order to avoid the possible implausibility or unpleasantness of always being typical or average (Fromkin, 1970) nondeviant feedback scores were varied within 1 SD of the mean. Feedback sheets in both conditions indicated to the subject that the confederate's test scores were nondeviant.

Request. The experimenter entered each room approximately 5 min after completion of the fifth test, distributed the last two feedback sheets and explained that he would return in a few minutes for the postsession interview. As soon as the experimenter exited, the confederate got up from his seat and after engaging the subject's attention, made the request:

Excuse me, but I got roped into this committee and I'm trying to talk to everyone I run into. You see, it's the Committee for Undergraduate Education and they're writing letters to people. . . . They want them to come to a bunch of seminars . . . to improve undergrad education. Anyway, they like to send handwritten letters 'cause they get the best response. So they ask volunteers to go into the office in the Union and copy letters from a form letter we have. We furnish the stationery and stamps and all that.

At this point in future interaction conditions, the confederate continued, "I'm almost always at the office so I'd be there to supervise. . . .", but in no future interaction conditions, the confederate said "I'm never at the office myself, it's usually a guy named Phil Johnson who's there to supervise. . . ." In both variations, the request concluded with

"It only takes two or three minutes to write one of the letters. Anyway, I was wondering if you'd be willing to go into our office and do that, write some of these letters?" If the subject replied affirmatively the confederate said, "Gee, that's great. . . . We usually ask people to do somewhere between five and fifty. If you tell me how many you can do, I'll just give you the cards and you can take them with you. How many do you think you could do?" If the subject refused to comply, the confederate made an alternate request, "You don't think you could do that, huh? Well, some people don't like to go into the office. If I gave you the letter and stamps and stationery and addresses, could you do some at home in your spare time? I (Phil Johnson) would be happy to pick them up where you live when you're through. You could just give me a call when you're through (I could give you his number)." If this second request succeeded the confederate asked the subject, ". . . How many do you think you could do?" The requesting confederate was blind to the deviancy feedback, but of course he was aware of the secrecy and future interaction manipulation.

Debriefing. After the request was completed the experimenter reentered the room and asked the confederate to leave, allegedly to be interviewed in another room by the experimenter's helper. In most cases, the subject immediately asked what his scores meant, especially in deviant conditions. After probing for suspicion, the experimenter explained the design in some detail emphasizing that the feedback was preassigned and fictitious.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manipulation check. Because the deviancy induction had been used successfully in a number of studies (Freedman & Doob, 1968), only a single item on the fifth test was used as a manipulation check. Subjects were asked to describe themselves on a five-point scale with end points labeled "similar-different." Deviant subjects rated themselves somewhat more different than nondeviants ($F(1,76) = 2.87, p < .09$). At the time subjects responded to this item, they had received only three of six feedback sheets (five tests and a summary); thus it is likely that the deviancy manipulation had not yet reached full impact.

Compliance. Only five subjects, distributed among experimental conditions, complied to the alternate request after refusing the initial request. The number of letters that the subject agreed to write on either request was used as the measure of compliance. Because the distribution was positively skewed—only three subjects agreed to write more than 25 letters and these three all volunteered to write 50—a square root transformation was performed. An ANOVA (Table 1) on these transformed scores yielded only a main effect of deviancy indicating that, as predicted, deviant subjects complied more than nondeviants ($F(1,83) = 4.31, p < .05$) (all others $F_s < 1.10$). The magnitude of the deviant/non-deviant difference is similar to that found by Freedman and Doob (1968). Deviants agreed to write approximately twice as many letters. Only one nondeviant subject agreed to write more than 10 letters, 19 deviants agreed to write more than 10 letters.

Neither the secret/known variation nor whether or not future interaction was expected produced main effects or interactions with deviancy.

TABLE 1
MEAN NUMBER OF LETTERS ACCEPTED^a

Feedback	Requester's knowledge of feedback	
	Secret	Known
Deviant	11.2 (2.7)	9.4 (2.4)
Nondeviant	7.5 (2.0)	3.2 (1.2)

^a Note—Transformed scores indicated in parentheses. n for deviant cells = 28; n for nondeviant cells = 14.

Table 1 shows compliance rates collapsed over the future interaction variable. Contrary to the ingratiation prediction, secret deviants complied insignificantly more than known deviants. And secret deviants complied more than secret nondeviants (Mann-Whitney $U = 150.5$, $n = 28, 14$, $p < .10$) and more than all nondeviants combined ($U = 266.5$, $n = 28, 28$, $p < .02$). Thus the data demonstrate that both secret and known deviants comply more than nondeviants; and there is clearly no indication of increased compliance when the subject believes his deviant scores are known by the requester.

These data do not support the notion that deviants are more likely than normals to do favors as an ingratiation tactic aimed at avoiding rejection or mistreatment. Why, then, did both secret and known deviant subjects agree to write more letters? One possibility, which has been suggested by Carlsmith and Gross (1969), is that agreeing to perform a prosocial act functions to bolster the favor-doer's self image. While the deviancy manipulation in the present study was designed to avoid value imputations of goodness or badness to the "differentness" feedback, postsession interviews indicate that deviant subjects often felt curious, uncertain, or even anxious about their test scores. Availing themselves of an opportunity to perform a good service may have served to reassure deviant subjects that they were "good people" despite their extreme test scores.

An alternative explanation, though not as parsimonious, is that the known deviant complies to avoid mistreatment while the secret deviant complies out of fear that the requester will infer that he is deviant if he refuses. Such an explanation assumes that secret deviants are motivated to conceal their deviant scores. But no differences in compliance were attributed to the future interaction variable which was included in the design to test this concealment hypothesis. Although it is possible that the one sentence future interaction manipulation was too weak to pro-

duce results, it is likely that a subject who is attempting to conceal his deviant identity should be quite sensitive to the possibility of interacting with the requester in the future.

Thus the present data clearly rule out the mistreatment hypothesis because compliance is as high or higher when the subject believes that his deviancy is secret. It appears that deviants, more than normals, may seek to bolster or restore their self-image via obtaining approval and acceptance from others.

These data and conclusions must be interpreted cautiously, however. Laboratory-created deviancy has the advantages and disadvantages of being abstract or content-free. In the real world, deviants are usually labeled (and label themselves) according to a particular kind of differentness; e.g., physical abnormality or sexual orientation, and these labels endure longer than the brief period of a laboratory induction. Future research which utilizes subjects who consider themselves secret or known deviants, while sacrificing the advantages of random assignment to condition, will extend or limit the external validity of these laboratory results.

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(Received August 20, 1974)