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IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT CONCERNS GOVERNING REACTIONS TO A FAULTY DECISION

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As a part of a study ostensibly concerned with conceptual ability, 120 male and 92 female undergraduates were asked to perform a boring task that consisted of generating random numbers for 20 minutes. The experimenter presented herself as being either attractive or unattractive, and made either favorable or unfavorable comments in describing the task. Following performance of the task, subjects rated it on either signed or unsigned questionnaires. Prior findings were replicated since a direct relationship was obtained between subjects' task evaluations and experimenter's opinion only when the experimenter was attractive; when she behaved unattractively, her opinion had no effect. The anonymity of questionnaire responses did not interact with the other two independent variables, thus providing no support for a two-factor interpretation which predicted dissonance effects under private assessment and impression management only under public assessment. When viewed in combination with previous findings, the results of this experiment indicate that interpersonal, rather than intrapsychic aspects of counterattitudinal behavior should be considered.

The results of numerous empirical investigations of attitude change following counterattitudinal behavior have been remarkably inconsistent (cf. Collins, Ashmore, Hornbeck, & Whitney, 1970; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Janis & Gilmore, 1965). While ad hoc modifications and reinterpretations of dissonance theory have restored some order to these findings (e.g., Aronson, 1969; Bramel, 1968; Greenwald, 1975), it can be argued that formulations which focus on interpersonal rather than intrapsychical processes provide a more parsimonious alternative framework of explanation. Analyses of the social aspects of counterattitudinal behavior paradigms (Alexander & Knight, 1971; Kaufman, 1971; Rosenberg, 1965; Schlenker, 1973; Schlenker & Schlenker, 1975; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971) propose that the individual in an experimental situation just as in any social interaction, desires to appear normal, logical, and consistent. Subjects achieve this goal by making certain their self-descriptions, actions, and appearances provide an observer with information that will enable a favorable impression to be formed. By thus managing their impressions, individuals increase their control

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over the situation, prevent any unpleasant breaks in the smooth flow of social interaction, and increase social approval (Goffman, 1955; 1959).

Impression management theory (Tedeschi et al., 1971) predicts that different patterns of attitude change will be evidenced depending on a number of situational factors, such as the attractiveness and power of the experimenter, the ambiguity of the situation, the availability of information that can disconfirm the image presented, and the degree of responsibility attributable to the subject. Subjects who have behaved in a manner inconsistent with their personal beliefs should alter their reported attitudes in an attempt to manage a consistent image only when the behavior appears to be under their own control. Thus, subjects should be more likely to report attitudes that are consistent with their behavior when external justification for performance of the behavior is minimal. In addition, as the power and attractiveness of the experimenter increases, so should subjects' concern with the impressions they are creating (Jones & Gerard, 1967). Subjects may feel that a more favorable impression may be engendered by conforming to the opinions of the experimenter, and when the experimenter is attractive, this tendency may become even more pronounced.

The well-known dissonance findings (Smith, 1961; Zimbardo, Weisenberg, Firestone, & Levy, 1965) that more attitude change occurs following counterattitudinal behavior (e.g., eating grasshoppers) when the behavior was induced by an unattractive rather than attractive experimenter might appear on the surface to disconfirm impression management predictions. Presumably, greater dissonance was aroused in subjects who had less justification for engaging in the unpleasant behavior, doing so for the unattractive rather than attractive experimenter. Schlenker (1975), however, proposed that if subjects felt that the experimenter's attitude toward the task was negative, then the more attractive the experimenter, the more the subjects would agree with the experimenter by rating the task unfavorably. Such conformity would result in an inverse relationship between the experimenter's attractiveness and the subjects' evaluations of the task. The assumption that subjects may have believed that the experimenter disliked the task is reasonable, given that the studies were described as investigations of "survival foods" that people would not eat unless in dire need.

To investigate this explanation, Schlenker had subjects agree to participate in a discussion group that subsequently turned out to be quite boring. The experimenter behaved in either an attractive or unattractive manner, and interjected a personal comment about the group that was either favorable or unfavorable. The results supported impression management predictions since the greatest liking for the group occurred when the experimenter was attractive and had voiced a favorable opinion about the group, and the least liking occurred when the experimenter was attractive and had interjected a negative comment. This impression management, conformity effect produced a dissonance-like, inverse relationship between the experimenter's attractiveness and liking for the group in the negative opinion condition, but a positive relationship between these variables in the favorable opinion condition. Thus, the dissonance effect was replicated but shown to be part of a larger impression management pattern.

As Greenwald (1975) noted, however, the flexibility of dissonance theory enables the reinterpretation of seemingly disconfirming empirical findings by adjustment of the theoretical framework. One such explanation of the

Schlenker results proposes that both dissonance and impression management processes may have been operating to produce the observed patterns of attitude change. While dissonance was induced since subjects realized the group they had volunteered to join was boring, and attitude change occurred to reduce the dissonance, subjects may have been hesitant to voice these opinions to the experimenter. Subjects participated in the study one at a time, signed the questionnaire measures, and responses on that questionnaire would obviously be seen by the experimenter. Because failure to conform to the experimenter's opinion may have been socially difficult in the situation, subjects may have simply agreed with the attractive experimenter's opinion rather than admitting they held an opposite attitude. Thus, public impression management concerns merely overwhelmed dissonance reduction.

The present experiment was conducted to provide a conceptual replication of the findings of Schlenker (1975) and to investigate the possibility that impression management predictions are supported under public attitude assessment procedures while dissonance predictions are supported under private attitude assessment procedures. Performance of a boring task was employed as the counterattitudinal action, the experimenter behaved in either an attractive or unattractive manner and voiced either a favorable or unfavorable opinion about the task. In addition, subjects' ratings of the task, the experimenter, and themselves were assessed either publicly (signed questionnaires) or privately (unsigned questionnaires) to determine if the social constraints of the experimental situation prevent subjects from disagreeing with the experimenter's opinion.

Following Crawford (1972) it was decided to factor analyze the subject ratings of the task, experimenter and themselves. It was expected that a factor of overall evaluation of the task would emerge. According to dissonance theory, main effects of the experimenter's attractiveness and interjected opinion should occur on the overall evaluation of the task. Subjects should like the task more when the experimenter (1) is unattractive rather than attractive, and (2) interjects a negative rather than positive opinion of the task (see Schlenker, 1975). When the experimenter is unattractive or negative toward the task, subjects are provided with less external justification for agreeing to perform the task, and hence should experience more dissonance.

According to impression management theory, a two-way interaction of the of the experimenter's attractiveness and opinion should occur on the task evaluation factor, thus replicating Schlenker (1975). Subjects should rate the task more favorably when the experimenter is attractive and voices a positive opinion than when the experimenter is attractive and voices a negative opinion, with the unattractive experimenter conditions falling intermediate. If the anonymous-public manipulation has any effect at all, it should merely be to make the above interaction more pronounced under public than anonymous conditions; the basic form of the interaction, though, should be the same in both cases. This follows from the fact that although opinion conformity is typically greater under public than anonymous conditions, conformity still occurs to some degree even under anonymous conditions (cf. Jones & Gerard, 1967).

Finally, a two-factor explanation, incorporating both dissonance and impression management, predicts a three-way interaction between the experimenter's attractiveness, interjected opinion, and degree of response anonymity. This interaction should reveal that Schlenker's findings of opinion

conformity for an attractive experimenter are replicated only under public questionnaire conditions, where the possibility of social disapproval for failing to conform prevents the reporting of dissonance-produced attitude change. However, under private questionnaire conditions the possibility of social disapproval is reduced, and dissonance reduction should be manifested. Specifically, under private questionnaire conditions, two simple main effects should occur, with more liking for the task under (1) unattractive rather than attractive experimenter conditions, and (2) negative rather than positive opinion conditions.

Method

Subjects

One hundred twenty male and ninety-two female introductory psychology students participated to partially fulfill a course requirement. Subjects were run in four to eight person groups by a female experimenter, and were requested not to participate with friends. Each group was randomly assigned to a single cell of the 2 (attractive vs. unattractive experimenter) by 2 (favorable opinion vs. unfavorable opinion) by 2 (public vs. private) factorial design.

Procedure

Each group session was conducted with subjects seated in individual cubicles which prevented visual contact with other subjects during the course of the experiment. Throughout each session, the experimenter presented herself as characteristically attractive or unattractive. The *unattractive experimenter* maintained little eye contact, refrained from smiling, and acted rude and inconsiderate. For example, at the start of the session, the experimenter made some derogatory remarks about an undergraduate assistant who brought her the wrong forms, noting that "undergraduate assistants are really poor." (The derogation of an experimental assistant was the means used by Zimbardo et al., 1965, to manipulate their experimenter's attractiveness.) The *attractive experimenter* maintained a high degree of eye contact, smiled frequently, and behaved in a congenial and considerate manner.

The experimenter explained that the project was part of a series of initial studies being conducted to examine complex verbal and pictorial thought processes. The research was attempting to determine if conceptual ability could be revealed by the ways people group and code numbers when asked to write digits in a random pattern. However, subjects were informed that the "initial research has been only moderately successful and there is some question as to whether or not it will contribute anything." The denigration of the importance of the project was included to insure a low to moderate justification for participation in the study, thereby increasing dissonance (Crawford, 1972; Freedman, 1963). The task was then explained in detail. Essentially, subjects had to place a number from 0 to 9 inclusive into each blank space in a 10 by 18 matrix that appeared on each sheet of paper of their test booklet; each booklet consisted of about 50 such pages. Crawford (1972) used an identical task on which subjects worked for the same amount of time as in the present study and found effects of "dissonance arousal." Freedman (1963) used both a highly similar task of having subjects place a "+" or "-" in each square of a grid and the identical number-generating task

used here in four experiments in which subjects worked for even less time (12 minutes) than in the present study and also found dissonance effects. Thus, the basic task and time period employed in the present study have been standardly used in dissonance studies and have consistently produced dissonance-like results. Subjects find the task to be exceedingly repetitious, monotonous, and boring.²

Before subjects were asked if they agreed to participate in the study, the experimenter interjected her own favorable or unfavorable opinion of the task, ostensibly to give subjects further information about the experiment. The statement was carefully worded to ensure that subjects realized the statement was one of personal opinion, and did not reflect the appraisal of all previous subjects in the experiment or the rest of the experimental team. This was achieved by stating:

A few of the people working on this project feel that the task itself is rather tedious, boring, and unenjoyable, while others feel that even though it is repetitious in some ways, it is quite interesting and enjoyable on the whole. Personally, I think it's a rather boring (interesting) task. I even have a bet going with some of the people involved with this study that most of the subjects will perceive the task this way. But like I said, there are some who believe that the task is pretty interesting (boring).

Opinion conformity occurs when people (1) are aware of the opinions of others, and (2) believe that the others care whether or not they agree (cf. Mills & Aronson, 1965). The experimenter's statement about the bet was added to insure that the latter condition was realized and thus provide a fair test of impression management predictions. The addition of the statement would not modify any of the predictions made from the three theoretical perspectives.

Following the statement of opinion, all subjects agreed to sign informed consent slips indicating that they freely chose to complete the task. It might be argued that running subjects in groups would reduce their feelings of freely deciding to perform the task and hence reduce dissonance. However, several considerations indicate that dissonance should have been aroused by the procedure. First, prior studies have run subjects in groups and obtained dissonance effects (Crawford, 1972; Freedman, 1963). Second, subjects were

²To insure that the task was perceived negatively, 9 subjects simply performed the task with minimal introduction and then rated it for interestingness and enjoyableness. These subjects found it to be boring and unenjoyable ($M_s = 2.9$ and 3.7 , respectively, on 9-point scales where a 1 indicated "boring" or "unenjoyable" and 9 indicated "interesting" or "enjoyable"). Additionally, the experimental conditions' ratings of the task for enjoyableness and interestingness were quite low overall ($M_s = 3.7$ and 4.6 , respectively, on 13-point scales where a 1 indicated "not at all" enjoyable or interesting and a 13 indicated "extremely" enjoyable or interesting). The scale labels in the experimental conditions were identical to those used by Freedman (1963). For comparison purposes, it is worth noting that the mean ratings of enjoyableness in Freedman's experiment II, which found strong dissonance effects as a consequence of justification, were 5.8 in the high-justification/low-dissonance condition and 7.4 in the low justification/high-dissonance condition (when converted to a 13-point scale base); subjects in his other experiments responded comparably. Thus, subjects in the present study reacted even more negatively to the task than did Freedman's. These converging lines of data strongly indicate that dissonance should have been aroused by agreeing to perform the task.

seated in individual cubicles and hence did not know whether the others were agreeing or not agreeing, making the decision an individual one. Third, subjects indicated that they had a high degree of choice when asked about their decision freedom on the post-experimental questionnaire ($M = 9.3$ on a 13 point scale where 1 indicated "none" and 13 indicated "a great deal"). Additionally, a major reason for choosing to run subjects in groups is that it should heighten feelings of anonymity and give dissonance predictions and the two-factor predictions a fair test. If subjects were run individually, it could mitigate against feelings of anonymity irrespective of the type of questionnaire assessment.

The situation thus contained a proliferation of elements that should arouse maximum dissonance for some of the participants. The project was described as of low to moderate value, subjects freely made a decision to participate in a task that had foreseeable negative consequences (cf. Carlsmith & Freedman, 1968), and some did so for an unattractive experimenter who made an unfavorable comment about the enjoyableness of the task.

Test booklets were then distributed to the subjects, who were given twenty minutes to fill the squares with digits. When the testing session was completed, the booklets were collected and the experimenter stated that the experiment was essentially completed. However, she then requested that all subjects fill out a series of questionnaires which were designed to give the research team additional background information about the conceptual ability task. As the questionnaires were distributed, subjects in the *public* conditions were asked to place their names on the forms for identification purposes. Subjects in the private conditions were specifically told to be certain to omit their names since the forms were to be completely anonymous.

Dependent Measures

The questionnaire forms distributed after completion of the conceptual ability task asked subjects to rate the task, themselves, and the experimenter on 46 thirteen-point scales containing appropriate verbal indices. Task rating items assessed such aspects as how interesting and enjoyable the task was, how important and educational it was, how fatiguing and difficult it was, and how much effort was required. Subjects rated themselves and the experimenter on bipolar adjective scales. After completion of the questionnaires, all subjects were completely debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results³

Aside from three questionnaire items that specifically served as manipulation checks, factor analysis was performed on the 43 dependent variables to reduce the data to a coherent and meaningful set of factors that describe how the subjects viewed the situation.⁴ Principal component factor analysis with

³Individual subjects rather than experimental sessions were chosen as the unit of analysis since subjects did not interact during the sessions and three or more groups served in each cell of the design, thus minimizing intragroup history threats to internal validity.

⁴As an alternative approach to the data analyses, the original variables were divided into theoretically predetermined subsets and the variables in each subset were then submitted to a multivariate analysis of variance procedure (Wilkes Lambda criterion).

orthogonal varimax rotation was performed using the pooled-within-cell correlations, which were computed by subtracting the appropriate cell mean from each subject's original score. Six factors emerged from the analysis that had eigenvalues over 1.0 and that accounted for 54.9 percent of the variance. The first factor included subjects' *experimenter evaluations* on adjectives such as competent, friendly, likeable, intelligent, and warm. The second two factors concerned aspects of the task and corresponded to the two dimensions discussed and found by Crawford (1972). A *task evaluation* factor dealt with the overall appraisal of the task (e.g., interesting, enjoyable, educational, valuable) and a *task difficulty* factor included such items as how effortful, fatiguing, and tiring the task was. Finally, three self factors emerged – these reflected subjects' ratings of their own *esteem* (e.g., mature, truthful, non-conformist, perceptive), *social attractiveness* (e.g., friendly, liked, competent), and *intelligence* (e.g., intelligent, respected). Standardized factor scores were computed for each subject on each of the factors, and these were then subjected to a 2 (attractive vs. unattractive experimenter) by 2 (favorable vs. unfavorable comment) by 2 (public vs. private questionnaire) by 2 (male vs. female) analysis of variance. Because the number of subjects in each cell was unequal, analyses were calculated using a least squares regression procedure that eliminated any equal or lower order confounded effects in a stepwise manner (Appelbaum & Cramer, 1974).

Manipulation Checks

The manipulations were highly effective in inducing the desired perceptions. Both an item that asked for subjects' global evaluation of the experimenter, $F(1,196) = 28.48, p < .001$, and the experimenter evaluation factor that emerged from the factor analysis, $F(1, 196) = 29.55, p < .001$, revealed main effects of the attractiveness manipulation. Subjects liked the attractive experimenter and felt neutral to dislike toward the unattractive experimenter. A main effect of anonymity was also found on both items, $ps < .05$, with subjects in the private conditions rating the experimenter more favorably than subjects in the public conditions.

The opinion manipulation check ("How enjoyable do you believe the experimenter felt the task was?") revealed main effects of opinion, $F(1,196) = 90.58, p < .001$, attractiveness, $F(1,196) = 9.61, p < .01$, and anonymity, $F(1,196) = 3.77, p < .05$. Subjects felt the experimenter was more positive in the favorable than unfavorable opinion conditions ($M_s = 6.2$ and 2.7 , respectively), in the attractive than unattractive experimenter conditions

Four subsets were formed: experimenter ratings, subjects' self-ratings, task evaluations, and task difficulty. The two task subsets were formed on the basis of Crawford's (1972) analysis. The multivariate analysis of variance performed on the nine task evaluation items (e.g., interestingness, enjoyableness, valuableness, importance of participation, educational value, likelihood of volunteering for a similar study, interestingness of task to other people) revealed an anonymity main effect, $F(9,188) = 6.32, p < .001$, and an attractiveness main effect qualified by an experimenter's attractiveness by opinion interaction, $F(9, 188) = 3.38, p < .001$. This interaction was also significant ($p < .05$) on five of the nine univariate F -tests and approached significance ($.05 < p < .10$) on three others. These effects are identical to those obtained on the reported analysis of the task evaluation factor that was extracted from the factor analysis. Hence, the results and conclusions reported are not affected by the specific type of analysis performed on the data.

TABLE 1

Effects of Experimenter's Attractiveness and Opinion on
Evaluative Ratings of the Task

Experimenter's Attractiveness	Experimenter's Opinion	
	Favorable Opinion	Unfavorable Opinion
Attractive Experimenter	.822 _a	-.314 _b
Unattractive Experimenter	-.010 _b	-.276 _b

Note. — Mean factor scores without at least one common subscript differ by $p < .05$ by Duncan Range test.

($M_s = 4.6$ and 3.8 , respectively), and in the private than public questionnaire conditions ($M_s = 4.3$ and 2.8 , respectively).

The anonymity manipulation check ("How anonymous do you feel your answers to these questions are?") revealed the desired main effect of the public-private variable, $F(1, 196) = 47.02$, $p < .001$, with subjects feeling more anonymous in the private than public questionnaire condition ($M_s = 9.9$ and 6.4 , respectively).

Task Ratings

Analyses of variance on the four factors for which no specific predictions were advanced (the three self factors and the task difficulty factor) revealed no effects at the multivariate or univariate level. However, the task evaluation factor revealed a main effect of anonymity, $F(1, 196) = 8.63$, $p < .01$, and an experimenter's attractiveness by opinion interaction, $F(1, 196) = 14.82$, $p < .001$. Subjects in the private condition rated the task more favorably than did subjects in the public condition, $M_s = .102$ and $-.117$, respectively. Table 1 presents the means for the interaction. When the experimenter was attractive, the favorability of her opinion was directly related to task evaluations, while when she was unattractive, her opinion had no significant effect on the ratings. This is exactly the same pattern that was obtained by Schlenker (1975). Viewed another way, when the experimenter made a favorable comment about the task, attractiveness was directly related to task ratings — an effect that is opposite that which would be predicted by dissonance theory. However, when the experimenter made an unfavorable comment about the task, a dissonance-like, inverse relationship between the experimenter's attractiveness and task liking was suggested, though the effect was not statistically significant. It is quite likely that an even more pronounced inverse relationship would have been obtained had a floor effect not been observed — subjects' ratings of the task in these conditions tended to be at the bottom of the

scale, allowing no room for further task derogation by subjects in the attractive-experimenter/unfavorable-opinion condition.

Discussion

The data provided a near perfect conceptual replication of the Schlenker (1975) study. When the experimenter was attractive, ratings of the task were directly related to how much subjects felt that the experimenter liked the task; when the experimenter was unattractive, the ratings were intermediate and unaffected by the experimenter's opinion. The only suggestion of an inverse relationship between the experimenter's attractiveness and liking toward the task was a nonsignificant one obtained in the unfavorable comment condition. Given that subjects generally rated the task at or near the low end of the scale, those in the attractive-experimenter/unfavorable-opinion condition were seemingly stopped from rating the task even more negatively by a floor effect. A floor effect would not, though, have stopped subjects from increasing their ratings of the task in the unattractive-experimenter/unfavorable-opinion condition (dissonance predictions would have provided for the most positive ratings of the task in that condition).

The attractiveness by opinion interaction on task evaluations was not qualified by the public-private dimension. Subjects were apparently interested in conforming to the attractive experimenter's opinions irrespective of how anonymous they felt in their questionnaire responses. Thus, no support was provided for a two-factor interpretation of the Schlenker (1975) findings in which dissonance effects would be obtained under traditional, more private measurement conditions and impression management effects would be obtained under public conditions.

The failure to obtain the dissonance-predicted relationship between an influencer's attractiveness and the subjects' attitudes poses problems for dissonance theory. Both the Schlenker (1975) study and the present one contained all of the ingredients heretofore seen as necessary to produce dissonance. Subjects freely chose to engage in behavior that they could foresee might be very boring and worthless, and some of them did so despite the fact that external justification was extremely low (i.e., the influencer was unattractive and further derogated the task in her comments). Yet only an impression management effect emerged from the results. The pattern of results generated in many of the forced compliance paradigms may be due to such social interaction concerns rather than "cognitive dissonance."

Dissonance theory is known for its magical ability to frequently escape from empirical tests unscathed irrespective of the look of the data. For that reason, Schlenker (1975) considered several alternative dissonance explanations of a comparable set of data and found them wanting. For example, one could assume that the high justification provided by the experimenter's favorable comment "washed out" dissonance in those conditions, allowing the direct relationship between attractiveness and task evaluation to emerge. However, such an explanation would require high evaluations of the task in the unattractive-experimenter/unfavorable-opinion condition (where dissonance should have been greatest), an effect that did not occur.

It is possible to apply balance theory predictions (Heider, 1958) to the present situation. According to a balance theory interpretation, subjects (*P*) either like or dislike the experimenter (*O*) who, in turn, either likes or dislikes

the task (*X*). A balanced triad would be achieved if subjects expressed liking for the task when (1) the experimenter was attractive and expressed a favorable opinion of the task, and (2) the experimenter was unattractive and expressed an unfavorable opinion of the task. Conversely, balance would be achieved by disliking the task when (3) the experimenter was attractive and expressed an unfavorable opinion, and (4) the experimenter was unattractive and expressed a favorable opinion. Only predictions 1 and 3 above were supported in both the Schlenker (1975) study and the present one.

Although the observed effects of experimenter attractiveness and opinion are quite consistent with impression management predictions, subjects were not more conforming under public rather than private conditions. Instead, subjects were more favorable in their evaluations of the task and the experimenter when they were under private questionnaire conditions. Perhaps subjects in the public conditions slightly suppressed the favorability of their ratings since glowing praise may have appeared ingratulatory (Jones & Wortman, 1973). Subjects in private conditions, on the other hand, could give the experimenter and task higher ratings without appearing sycophantic.

In sum, the pattern of results in the present study are not easily accounted for by balance theory, traditional dissonance theory, its extensions, or a two-factor theory of attitude change. Instead, an impression management approach which focuses on the social aspects of the experimental situation provides a suitable framework for further experimental inquiry. An explanation based on internal cognitions and psychological consistency seems unnecessary.

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