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# *Principles and Techniques of Social Influence*

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*Blandishing persuasion steals the mind even of the wise.*

—HOMER

For well over half a century, social psychologists have been investigating the process of social influence, wherein one person's attitudes, cognitions, or behaviors are changed through the doings of another. Because other authors within this volume have concerned themselves with social influences on attitudes and cognitions, my focus will be on the realm of behavior change and on the factors that cause one individual to comply with another's request for action of some sort. In the process, we will consider a set of six psychological principles that appear to influence behavioral compliance decisions most power-

fully. Briefly, these principles involve pressures to comply because of tendencies to (1) return a gift, favor, or service; (2) be consistent with prior commitments; (3) follow the lead of similar others; (4) accommodate the requests of those we know and like; (5) conform to the directives of legitimate authority; and (6) seize opportunities that are scarce or dwindling in availability.

## SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON COMPLIANCE

### *Focusing on Powerful Effects*

Within academic social psychology, research into the behavioral compliance process has emphasized two questions: "Which principles and techniques reliably affect compliance?" and "How do these principles and techniques work to affect compliance as they do?" The first of these questions is concerned, of course, with the identification of real effects, while the second is concerned with their theoretical/conceptual mediation. Almost without exception, the vehicle that has been employed to answer these two questions has been the controlled experiment. And this is understandable, as controlled experimentation provides an excellent context for addressing such issues as whether an effect is real (i.e., reliable) and which theoretical/conceptual account best explains its occurrence.

However, a somewhat different approach is called for when one's concern with the compliance process is more than purely academic, as is the case for most of us who find ourselves either interested investigators or interested observers of the interpersonal influence interactions of daily life. We want to know more than whether a particular influence exists and what causes it. We want to know, as well, how powerful it is in the course of naturally occurring behavior, so that we can better decide whether the effect is especially worthy of our attention and study. In referring to the power of an effect on naturally occurring compliance, I mean its ability to change compliance decisions meaningfully over a wide range of everyday situations and circumstances.

Regrettably, when the question of primary interest includes a determination of the power of possible influences on natural compliance behavior, the controlled experiment becomes less suited to the job. The high levels of experimental rigor and precision that allow us to know that an effect is genuine and theoretically interpretable simultaneously decreases our ability to assess the potency of that effect. That is, because the best-designed experiments (1) eliminate or control away all sources of influence except the one under study and (2) possess highly sensitive measurement techniques, they may register whisper-like effects that may be so small as to never make a difference when other (extraneous) factors are allowed to vary naturally, as they typically do in the social environment. What's more, such ecologically trivial effects can be replicated repeatedly in the antiseptic environment of the controlled experiment, giving the mistaken impression of power, when, in reality, all that has been demonstrated is the reliability of the effects.

Thus, rigorous experimentation should not be used as the primary device

for deciding which compliance-related influences are powerful enough to be submitted to rigorous experimentation for further study. Some other starting point should be found to identify the most potent influences on the compliance process. Otherwise, valuable time could well be spent seeking to investigate and to apply effects that are merely epiphenomena of the controlled experimental setting.

### *The Development of Powerful Compliance Inducers*

A crucial question thus becomes, "How does one determine which are the most powerful compliance principles and tactics?" One answer involves the systematic observation of the behaviors of commercial compliance professionals.

Who are the commercial compliance professionals, and why should their actions be especially informative as to the identification of powerful influences on everyday compliance decisions? They can be defined as those individuals whose business or financial well-being is dependent on their ability to induce compliance (e.g., salespeople, fund-raisers, advertisers, political lobbyists, cult recruiters, negotiators, con artists). With this definition in place, one can begin to recognize why the regular and widespread practices of these professionals would be noteworthy indicators of the powerful influences on the compliance process: Because the livelihoods of commercial compliance professionals depend on the effectiveness of their procedures, those professionals who use procedures that work well to elicit compliance responses will survive and flourish. Further, they will pass these successful procedures on to succeeding generations (trainees). However, those practitioners who use unsuccessful compliance procedures either will drop them or will quickly go out of business; in either case, the procedures themselves will not be passed on to newer generations.

The upshot of this process is that, over time and over the range of naturally occurring compliance contexts, the strongest and most adaptable procedures for generating compliance will rise, persist, and accumulate. Further, these procedures will point a careful observer toward the major principles that people use to decide when to comply. Several years ago, I resolved to become such an observer. What emerged from this period of systematic observation was a list of six principles on which compliance professionals appeared to base most of their psychological influence attempts: reciprocity, consistency, social validation, friendship/liking, authority, and scarcity. A full account of the origins, workings, and prevalence of these six principles is available elsewhere (Cialdini, 1993). However, the remainder of this chapter offers a summary description of the principles and of the social scientific theory and evidence regarding how each principle functions to motivate compliance.

## THE PRINCIPLES

### *Reciprocation*

*Pay every debt as if God wrote the bill.*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

One of the most powerful norms in all human cultures is that for reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), which obligates individuals to return the form of behavior that they have received from another. Not only does the norm apply to all cultures, but it applies to all behavior within those cultures. For instance, we report liking those who report liking us (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965; Condon & Crano, 1988); we cooperate with cooperators and compete against competitors (Braver, 1975; Rosenbaum, 1980); we self-disclose to those who have self-disclosed to us (Cunningham, Strassberg, & Haan, 1986); we yield to the persuasive appeals of those who have previously yielded to one of our persuasive appeals (Cialdini, Green, & Rusch, 1992); we try to harm those who have tried to harm us (Dengerink, Schnedler, & Covey, 1978); and in negotiations, we make concessions to those who have offered concessions to us (Axelrod, 1984).

A widely shared feeling of future obligation made an enormous difference in human social evolution. For the first time in evolutionary history, one individual could give any of a variety of resources—help, gifts, tools, goods—with-  
out actually giving them away. Sophisticated and coordinated systems of gift giving, defense, and trade became possible, bringing immense benefit to the societies that possessed them (Leakey & Lewin, 1978). With such clearly adaptive consequences for the culture, it is not surprising that the norm for reciprocity is so deeply implanted in us by the process of socialization.

A reciprocity rule for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should be more willing to comply with a request from someone who has previously provided a favor or concession.* Under this general rule, people will feel obligated to provide gifts, favors, services, and aid to those who have given them such things first (DePaulo, Brittingham, & Kaiser, 1983; Eisenberger, Cotterell, & Marvel, 1987; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968), sometimes even returning larger favors than those they have received (Regan, 1971). A number of sales and fund-raising tactics use this factor to advantage. The compliance professional initially gives something to the target person, thereby causing the target to be more likely to give something in return. Often, this “something in return” is the target person’s compliance with a substantial request.

The unsolicited gift, accompanied by a request for a donation, is a commonly used technique that employs the norm for reciprocity. One example experienced by many people is the Hare Krishna solicitor who gives the unwary passerby a book or a flower and then asks for a donation. Other organizations send free gifts through the mail; legitimate and less-than-legitimate missionary and disabled veterans organizations often employ this highly effective device. These groups count on the fact that most people will not go to the trouble of returning the gift and will feel uncomfortable about keeping it without reciprocating in some way. For instance, the Disabled American Veterans organization reports that its simple mail appeal for donations produces a response rate of about 18 percent. But when the mailing also includes an unsolicited gift (gummed, individualized address labels), the success rate nearly doubles to 35 percent (Smolowe, 1990).

The socialized sense of discomfort that attends an unpaid debt does not only explain why people will often agree to perform a return favor that is larger

than the one they received. It also explains why people frequently refrain from asking for a needed favor if they will not be in a position to repay it (DePaulo, Nadler, & Fisher, 1983; Greenberg & Shapiro, 1971; Riley & Eckenrode, 1986). The saddle of unmet social debt weighs heavily, and we will go to considerable lengths to remove or avoid it.

The features of the rule for reciprocity account nicely for the twin outcomes of a study by Rand Corporation researchers Berry and Kanouse (1987). They found that, by paying physicians first, it was possible to increase the likelihood that the doctors would complete and return a long questionnaire they received in the mail. If a check for \$20 accompanied the questionnaire, 78 percent of the physicians filled out the survey and sent it back as requested. But if they learned that the \$20 check was to be sent to them after they complied, only 66 percent did so. By giving the check the character of a noncontingent gift rather than of a reward for compliance, the researchers enhanced their success substantially.

The second reciprocity-related finding concerned only the physicians who got the check up front. As indicated, most complied with the questionnaire request, but some did not. Although virtually all (95 percent) of the doctors who had complied cashed their checks, only 26 percent of those who did not comply did so. If they were not in a position to reciprocate the \$20 gift, they were not of a mind to accept it, making the “accompanying gift” technique a highly cost effective one for the researchers.

### Reciprocal Concessions

A variation of the norm for reciprocity of favors is that for reciprocity of concessions. A reciprocal concessions procedure (or *door-in-the-face technique*) for inducing compliance has been documented repeatedly (e.g., Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler, & Darby, 1975; Harari, Mohr, & Hosey, 1980; Reeves, Baker, Boyd, & Cialdini, 1991). A requester uses this procedure by beginning with an extreme request that is nearly always rejected and then retreating to a more moderate favor—the one the requester had in mind from the outset. In doing so, the requester hopes that the retreat from extreme to moderate request will spur the target person to make a reciprocal concession—by moving from initial rejection of the larger favor to acceptance of the smaller one. This reciprocal concessions strategy has been successfully used in fund-raising contexts where, after refusing a larger request for donations, people become substantially more likely than before to give the average contribution (e.g., Reingen, 1978). Cialdini and Ascani (1976) also used this technique in soliciting blood donors. They first requested a person’s involvement in a long-term donor program. When that request was refused, the solicitor made a smaller request for a one-time donation. This pattern of a large request (that is refused) followed by a smaller request significantly increased compliance with the smaller request, as compared to a control condition of people who were asked only to perform the smaller one-time favor (50 percent vs. 32 percent compliance rate).

Of special interest to university students is evidence that the door-in-the-face technique can greatly increase a professor’s willingness to spend time

helping a student (Harari, Mohr, & Hosey, 1980). In that study, only 59 percent of faculty members were willing to spend "15 to 20 minutes" to meet with a student on an issue of interest to the student—when that was the only request the student made. However, significantly more faculty members (78 percent) were willing to agree to that same request if they had first refused the student's request to spend "2 hours a week for the rest of the semester" meeting with the student.

Related to the door-in-the-face technique but somewhat different from it is the *that's-not-all technique* investigated by Burger (1986) and frequently used by sales operators. An important procedural difference between the two techniques is that, in the that's-not-all tactic, the target person does not turn down the first offer before a better second offer is provided. After making the first offer but before the target can respond, the requester betters the deal with an additional item or a price reduction. Burger (1986) found this approach to be useful in selling more goods during a campus bake sale. One reason that this technique works appears to be the target person's desire to reciprocate for the better deal.

### **Social Validation**

*If you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs, you probably haven't grasped the situation.*

—JEAN KERR

People frequently use the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of others, particularly similar others, as a standard of comparison against which to evaluate the correctness of their own beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Thus, it is common for individuals to decide on appropriate behaviors for themselves in a given situation by searching for information as to how similar others have behaved or are behaving there (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Latané & Darley, 1970; Schachter & Singer, 1962). This simple principle of behavior accounts for an amazingly varied array of human responses. For instance, research has shown that New Yorkers use it in deciding whether to return a lost wallet (Hornstein, Fisch, & Holmes, 1968), that children with a fear of dogs use it in deciding whether to risk approaching a dog (Bandura & Menlove, 1968), that amusement park visitors use it to decide whether to litter in a public place (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990), that audience members use it in deciding whether a joke is funny (Cupchik & Leventhal, 1974), that pedestrians use it in deciding whether to stop and stare at an empty spot in the sky (Milgram, Bickman, & Berkowitz, 1969), and, on the alarming side, that troubled individuals use it in deciding whether to commit suicide (Phillips & Carstensen, 1988).

Much of this evidence can be understood in terms of Festinger's (1954) *social comparison theory*, which states that (1) people have a constant drive to evaluate themselves (i.e., the appropriateness of their abilities, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors); (2) if available, people will prefer to use objective cues to make these evaluations; (3) if objective evidence is not available, people will rely on social comparison evidence instead; and (4) when seeking social comparison evi-

dence for these self-evaluations, people will look to similar others as the preferred basis for comparison. So, if, while sitting in a seminar, you find yourself feeling the room getting uncomfortably warm, social comparison theory would make some predictions about how you would likely behave. First, you ought to feel a need to assess the appropriateness of your feeling, which should manifest itself as a search for validating information. If, by chance, there is a thermometer on the wall immediately behind your chair, your first inclination would be to glance over to it to get objective verification of your perception. But should no thermometer be present, you would have to resort to social information; so, you might nudge a classmate (a similar other) and whisper something to the effect of "Does it feel warm in here to you?" Only then, and only if the evidence confirmed your perception, would you likely feel justified in taking congruous action (e.g., asking that the thermostat be adjusted or a window be opened).

When the goal is to evaluate the correctness of an opinion or action, research has generally supported Festinger's theory. For example, social comparison is most likely to occur in situations that are objectively unclear (Tesser, Campbell, & Mickler, 1983) and is most likely to be directed at similar others (Goethals & Darley, 1977; Miller, 1984).<sup>1</sup> Thus, when people are unsure, they are most likely to look to and accept the beliefs and behaviors of similar others as valid indicators of what they should believe and do themselves.

The *social validation rule* for compliance can be stated as follows: *One should be more willing to comply with a request for behavior if it is consistent with what similar others are thinking or doing.* Our tendency to assume that an action is more correct if others are doing it is exploited in a variety of settings. Bartenders often "salt" their tip jars with a few dollar bills at the beginning of the evening to simulate tips left by prior customers and, thereby, to give the impression that tipping with folded money is proper barroom behavior. Church ushers sometimes prime collection baskets for the same reason and with the same positive effect on proceeds. Evangelical preachers are known to seed their audiences with "ringers," who are rehearsed to come forward at a specified time to give witness and donations. For example, an Arizona State University research team that infiltrated the Billy Graham organization reported on such advance preparations prior to one of his Crusade visits. "By the time Graham arrives in town and makes his altar call, an army of 6,000 await with instructions on when to come forth at varying intervals to create the impression of spontaneous mass outpouring" (Altheide & Johnson, 1977). Advertisers love to inform us when a product is the "fastest growing" or "largest selling" because they don't have to convince us directly that the product is good; they need only say that many others think so, which seems proof enough. The producers of charity telethons devote inordinate amounts of time to the incessant listing of viewers who have already pledged contributions. The message being communicated to the hold-outs is clear: "Look at all the people who have decided to give; it *must* be the correct thing to do."

One tactic that compliance professionals use to engage the principle of social validation has been put to scientific test. Called the *list technique*, it involves asking for a request only after the target person has been shown a list of similar others who have already complied. Reingen (1982) conducted several experi-

ments in which college students or home owners were asked to donate money or blood to a charitable cause. Those individuals who were initially shown a list of similar others who had already complied were significantly more likely to comply themselves. What's more, the longer the list, the greater was the effect.

### **Consistency**

*It is easier to resist at the beginning than at the end.*

—LEONARDO DA VINCI

Social psychologists have long understood the strength of the consistency principle to direct human action. Prominent early theorists like Leon Festinger (1957), Fritz Heider (1958), and Theodore Newcomb (1953) have viewed the desire for consistency as a prime motivator of our behavior. More recently, other theorists (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Tedeschi, 1981) have recognized that the desire to appear consistent exerts considerable influence over our behavior as well. If we grant that the power of consistency is formidable in directing human action, an important practical question immediately arises: How is that force engaged? Social psychologists think they know the answer—commitment. If I can get you to make a commitment (that is, to take a stand, to go on record), I will have set the stage for your consistency with that earlier commitment. Once a stand is taken, there is a natural tendency to behave in ways that are stubbornly consistent with the stand (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Greenwald, Carnot, Beach, & Young, 1987; Howard, 1990; Sherman, 1980).

A consistency rule for compliance can be worded as follows: *After committing oneself to a position, one should be more willing to comply with requests for behaviors that are consistent with that position.* Any of a variety of strategies may be used to generate the crucial instigating commitment.

One such strategy is the *foot-in-the-door technique* (Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Schwartzwald, Bizman, & Raz, 1983). A solicitor using this procedure will first ask for a small favor that is virtually certain to be granted. The initial compliance is then followed by a request for a larger, related favor. It has been found repeatedly that people who have agreed to the initial small favor are more willing to do the larger one (see Beaman et al., 1983, for a review), seemingly to be consistent with the implication of the initial action. For instance, home owners who had agreed to accept and wear a small lapel pin promoting a local charity were, as a consequence, more likely to contribute money to that charity when canvassed during a subsequent donation drive (Pliner, Hart, Kohl, & Saari, 1974).

Freedman and Fraser (1966) have argued that the foot-in-the-door technique is successful because performance of the initially requested action causes individuals to see themselves as possessing certain traits. For example, in the Pliner and colleagues (1974) study, after taking and wearing the charity pin, subjects would be expected to see themselves as favorable toward charitable causes, especially this particular one. Later, when asked to perform the larger, related favor of contributing to that charity, subjects would be more willing to do so to be consistent with the "charitable" trait they had assigned to them-

selves. Recent support for this interpretation comes from a study showing that children are not influenced by the foot-in-the-door technique until they are old enough to understand the idea of a stable personality trait (around 6 to 7 years). Once children are old enough to understand the meaning of a stable trait, the foot-in-the-door tactic becomes effective, especially among those children who prefer consistency in behavior (Eisenberg, Cialdini, McCreathe, & Shell, 1987).

Other, more unsavory techniques induce a commitment to an item and then remove the inducements that generated the commitment. Remarkably, the commitment frequently remains. For example, the *bait and switch procedure* is used by some retailers who may advertise certain merchandise (e.g., a room of furniture) at a special low price. When the customer arrives to take advantage of the special, he or she finds the merchandise to be of low quality or sold out. However, because customers have by now made an active commitment to getting new furniture at that particular store, they are more willing to agree to examine and, consequently, to buy alternative merchandise there (Joule, Gouilloux, & Weber, 1989).

A similar strategy is employed by car dealers in the *low-ball technique*, which proceeds by obtaining a commitment to an action and then increasing the costs of performing the action (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, & Miller, 1978). The automobile salesperson who "throws the low ball" induces the customer to decide to buy a particular model car by offering a low price on the car or an inflated one on the customer's trade-in. After the decision has been made (and, at times, after the commitment is enhanced by allowing the customer to arrange financing, take the car home overnight, etc.), something happens to remove the reason the customer decided to buy. Perhaps a price calculation error is found, or the used car assessor disallows the inflated trade-in figure. By this time, though, many customers have experienced an internal commitment to that specific automobile and proceed with the purchase. Experimental research has documented the effectiveness of this tactic in settings beyond automobile sales (e.g., Brownstein & Katzev, 1985; Joule, 1987). Additional research indicates that the tactic is effective primarily when used by a single requester (Burger & Petty, 1981) and when the initial commitment is freely made (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, Miller, 1978).

One thing that these procedures (and others like them) have in common is the establishment of an earlier commitment that is consistent with a later action desired by the compliance professional. The need for consistency then takes over to compel performance of the desired behavior. However, not all types of these earlier commitments are equally effective. There is research evidence suggesting the types of commitments that lead to consistent future responding. The present context does not allow sufficient space for a thorough discussion of that evidence. Nonetheless, I would argue that a fair summary of the research literature is that a commitment is likely to be maximally effective in producing consistent future behavior to the extent that it is active (Bem, 1967), effortful (Aronson & Mills, 1959), public (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), and viewed as internally motivated (i.e., uncoerced, Freedman, 1965).

Another approach to employing the commitment/consistency principle also has popularity among commercial compliance professionals. Rather than

inducing a new commitment to their product or service, many practitioners point out existing commitments within potential customers that are consistent with the product or service being offered. In this way, desirable existing commitments are made more visible to the customer, and the strain for consistency is allowed to direct behavior accordingly. For example, insurance agents are frequently taught to stress to new home owners that the purchase of an expensive house reflects an enormous personal commitment to one's home and the well-being of one's family. Consequently, they argue it would only be consistent with such a commitment to home and family to purchase home and life insurance in amounts that befit the size of this commitment. Research of various kinds indicates that this sort of sensitization to commitments and to consequent inconsistencies can be effective in producing belief, attitude, and behavior change. Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube (1984) demonstrated long-term behavioral effects from a television program that focused viewers on their personal commitments to certain deep-seated values (e.g., freedom, equality), on the one hand, and their current beliefs and behaviors, on the other. Not only did uninterrupted viewers of this single program evidence enhanced commitment to these values, but they were significantly more likely to donate money to support causes consistent with the values 2 to 3 months after the program had aired.

A more manipulative tactic than merely focusing people on their existing values is to put them in a situation where to refuse a specific request would be inconsistent with a value that people wish to be known as possessing (Greenwald, Carnot, Beach, & Young, 1987; Sherman, 1980). One such tactic is the *legitimization-of-paltry-favors* (or even-a-penny-would-help) technique (Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976). Most people prefer to behave in ways that are consistent with a view of themselves as helpful, charitable individuals. Consequently, a fund-raiser who makes a request that legitimizes a paltry amount of aid ("Could you give a contribution, even a penny would help") makes it difficult for a target to refuse to give at all; to do so risks appearing to be a very unhelpful person. Notice that this procedure does not specifically request a trivial sum; that would probably lead to a profusion of pennies and a small total take. Instead, the request simply makes a minuscule form of aid acceptable, thereby reducing the target's ability to give nothing and still remain consistent with the desirable image of a helpful individual. After all, how could a person remain committed to a helpful image after refusing to contribute when "even a penny would help"?

Experimental research done to validate the effectiveness of the technique has shown it to be successful in increasing the percentage of charity contributors (Brockner, Guzzi, Kane, Levine, & Shaplen, 1984; Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976; Reeves, Macolini, & Martin, 1987; Reingen, 1978; Weyant, 1984). What's more, in each of these studies the even-a-penny procedure proved profitable because subjects didn't actually give a penny but provided the donation amount typically given to charities. Thus, the legitimization-of-paltry-favors approach appears to work by getting more people to agree to give (so as to be consistent with a helpful image); but the decision of how much to give is left unaffected by the mention of a paltry amount. The consequence is increased proceeds.

A last commitment-based tactic deserves mention—one that we might call the "How are you feeling?" technique. Have you noticed that callers asking you to contribute to some cause or another these days seem to begin things by inquiring as to your current health and well-being? "Hello, Mr./Ms. Targetperson?" they say. "How are you feeling this evening?" Or, "How are you doing today?" The caller's intent with this sort of introduction is not merely to seem friendly and caring. It is to get you to respond—as you normally do to such polite, superficial inquiries—with a polite, superficial comment of your own: "Just fine" or "Real good" or "I'm doing great, thanks." Once you have publicly stated that all is well, it becomes much easier for the solicitor to corner you into aiding those for whom all is not well: "I'm glad to hear that, because I'm calling to ask if you'd be willing to make a donation to help out the unfortunate victims of . . ."

The theory behind this tactic is that people who have just asserted that they are doing/feeling fine—even as a routine part of a sociable exchange—will consequently find it awkward to appear stingy in the context of their own admittedly favored circumstances. If all this sounds a bit far-fetched, consider the findings of consumer researcher Daniel Howard (1990), who put the theory to the test. Dallas, Texas, residents were called on the phone and asked if they would agree to allow a representative of the Hunger Relief Committee to come to their homes to sell them cookies, the proceeds from which would be used to supply meals for the needy. When tried alone, that request (labeled the standard solicitation approach) produced only 18 percent agreement. However, if the caller initially asked "How are you feeling this evening?" and waited for a reply before proceeding with the standard approach, several noteworthy things happened. First, of the 120 individuals called, most (108) gave the customary favorable replay ("Good," "Fine," "Real well," etc.). Second, 32 percent of the people who got the how-are-you-feeling-tonight question agreed to receive the cookie seller at their homes, nearly twice the success rate of the standard solicitation approach. Third, true to the consistency principle, almost everyone who agreed to such a visit did in fact make a cookie purchase when contacted at home (89 percent).

### *Friendship/Liking*

*The main work of a trial attorney is to make the jury like his client.*

—CLARENCE DARROW

A fact of social interaction that each of us can attest to is that people are more favorably inclined toward the needs of those they know and like. Consequently, a *friendship/liking rule* for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should be more willing to comply with the requests of friends or other liked individuals.* Could there be any doubt that this is the case after examining the remarkable success of the Tupperware Corporation and their "home party" demonstration concept (Frenzen & Davis, 1990)? The demonstration party for Tupperware products is hosted by an individual, usually a woman, who invites to her home an array of friends, neighbors, and relatives, all of whom know that their hostess receives

a percentage of the profits from every piece sold by the Tupperware representative, who is also there. In this way, the Tupperware Corporation arranges for its customers to buy from and for a friend rather than from an unknown salesperson. So favorable has been the effect on proceeds (\$2.5 million in sales per day!) that the Tupperware Corporation has wholly abandoned its early retail outlets, and a Tupperware party begins somewhere every 2.7 seconds.

Most influence agents, however, attempt to engage the friendship/liking principle in a different way: Before making a request, they get their targets to like *them*. But how do they do it? It turns out that the tactics that practitioners use to generate liking cluster around certain factors that also have been shown by controlled research to increase liking.

### Physical Attractiveness

Although it is generally acknowledged that good-looking people have an advantage in social interaction, research findings indicate that we may have sorely underestimated the size and reach of that advantage. There appears to be a positive reaction to good physical appearance that generalizes to such favorable trait perceptions as a talent, kindness, honesty, and intelligence (See Eagly et al., 1991, for a review). As a consequence, attractive individuals are more persuasive in terms of both changing attitudes (Chaiken, 1979) and getting what they request (Benson, Karabanic, & Lerner, 1976). For instance, a study of the 1974 Canadian Federal elections found that attractive candidates received more than two and a half times the votes of unattractive ones (Efran & Patterson, 1976). Equally impressive results seem to pertain to the judicial system (see reviews by Castellow, Wuensch, & Moore, 1990; and Downs & Lyons, 1991). In a Pennsylvania study, researchers rated the physical attractiveness of 74 separate male defendants at the start of their criminal trials. When, much later, the researchers checked the results of these cases via court records, they found that the better-looking men received significantly lighter sentences. In fact, the attractive defendants were twice as likely to avoid incarceration as the unattractive defendants (Stewart, 1980). When viewed in the light of such powerful effects, it is not surprising that extremely attractive models are employed to promote products and services, that sales trainers frequently include appearance and grooming tips in their presentations, or that, commonly, con men are handsome and con women pretty.

### Similarity

We like people who are similar to us (Byrne, 1971; Carli, Ganley, & Pierce-Otay, 1991). This fact seems to hold true whether the similarity occurs in the area of opinions, personality traits, background, or lifestyle. Consequently, those who wish to be liked in order to increase our compliance can accomplish that purpose by appearing similar to us in any of a wide variety of ways. For that reason, it would be wise to be careful around salespeople who just *seem* to be just like us. Many sales training programs now urge trainees to "mirror and match" the customer's body posture, mood, and verbal style, as similarities along each of these dimensions have been shown to lead to positive results (LaFrance, 1985; Locke & Horowitz, 1990; Woodside & Davenport, 1974).

Similarity in dress provides still another example. Several studies have demonstrated that we are more likely to help those who dress like us. In one study, done in the early 1970s when young people tended to dress either in "hippie" or "straight" fashion, experimenters donned hippie or straight attire and asked college students on campus for a dime to make a phone call. When the experimenter was dressed in the same way as the student, the request was granted in over two-thirds of the instances; but when the student and requester were dissimilarly dressed, a dime was provided less than half of the time (Emsweller, Deaux, & Willits, 1971). Another experiment shows how automatic our positive response to similar others can be. Marchers in a political demonstration were found not only to be more likely to sign the petition of a similarly dressed requester but to do so without bothering to read it first (Suedfeld, Bochner, & Matas, 1971).

### Compliments

Praise and other forms of positive estimation also stimulate liking (e.g., Byrne & Rhamey, 1965). The actor Maclain Stevenson once described how his wife tricked him into marriage: "She said she liked me." Although designed for a laugh, the remark is as much instructive as humorous. The simple information that someone fancies us can be a bewitchingly effective device for producing return liking and willing compliance. Although there are limits to our gullibility—especially when we can be sure that the flatterer's intent is manipulative (Jones & Wortman, 1973)—we tend as a rule to believe praise and to like those who provide it. Evidence for the power of praise on liking comes from a study (Drachman, deCarufel, & Insko, 1978) in which men received personal comments from someone who needed a favor from them. Some of the men got only positive comments, some only negative comments, and some got a mixture of good and bad. There were three interesting findings. First, the evaluator who offered only praise was liked the best. Second, this was so even though the men fully realized that the flatterer stood to gain from their liking of him. Finally, unlike the other types of comments, pure praise did not have to be accurate to work. Compliments produced just as much liking for the flatterer when they were untrue as when they were true.

It is for such reasons that direct salespeople are educated in the art of praise. A potential customer's home, clothes, car, taste, etc., are all frequent targets for compliments.

### Cooperation

Cooperation is another factor that has been shown to enhance positive feelings and behavior (e.g., Aronson, Bridgeman, & Geffner, 1978; Bettencourt, Brewer, Croak, & Miller, 1992; Cook, 1990). Those who cooperate toward the achievement of a common goal are more favorable and helpful to each other as a consequence. That is why compliance professionals often strive to be perceived as cooperating partners with a target person (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991). Automobile sales managers frequently set themselves as "villains" so that the salesperson can "do battle" in the customer's behalf. The cooperative, pulling together kind of relationship that is consequently produced between the sales-

person and customer naturally leads to a desirable form of liking that promotes sales.

### Scarcity

*The way to love anything is to realize that it might be lost.*

—GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

Opportunities seem more valuable to us when they are less available (Lynn, 1991). Interestingly, this is often true even when the opportunity holds little attraction for us on its own merits. Take, as evidence, the experience of Florida State University students who, like most undergraduates, rated themselves dissatisfied with the quality of their cafeteria's food. Nine days later, they had changed their minds, rating that food significantly better than they had before. It is instructive that no actual improvement in food service had occurred between the two ratings. Instead, earlier on the day of the second rating students had learned that, because of a fire, they could not eat at the cafeteria for two weeks (West, 1975).

There appear to be two major sources of the power of scarcity. First, because we know that the things that are difficult to possess are typically better than those that are easy to possess, we can often use an item's availability to help us quickly and correctly decide on its quality (Lynn, 1992). Thus, one reason for the potency of scarcity is that, by assessing it, we can get a shortcut indication of an item's value.

In addition, there is a unique, secondary source of power within scarcity: As the things we can have become less available, we lose freedoms; and we hate to lose the freedoms we already have. This desire to preserve our established prerogatives is the centerpiece of *psychological reactance theory* (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981) developed to explain the human response to diminishing personal control. According to the theory, whenever they are limited or threatened, the need to retain our freedoms makes us want them (as well as the goods and services associated with them) significantly more than previously. So, when increasing scarcity—or anything else—interferes with our prior access to some item, we will *react against* the interference by wanting and trying to possess the item more than before.

One naturally occurring example of the consequences of increased scarcity can be seen in the outcome of a decision by county officials in Miami to ban the use and possession of phosphate detergents. Spurred by the tendency to want what they could no longer have, the majority of Miami consumers came to see phosphate cleaners as better products than before. Compared to Tampa residents, who were not affected by the Miami ordinance, the citizens of Miami rated phosphate detergents as gentler, more effective in cold water, better whiteners and fresheners, more powerful on stains, etc. After passage of the law, they had even come to believe that phosphate detergents poured easier than did the Tampa consumer (Mazis, 1975).

This sort of response is typical of individuals who have lost an established

freedom and is crucial to an understanding of how psychological reactance and scarcity work on us. When our freedom to have something is limited, the item becomes less available, and we experience an increased desire for it. However, we rarely recognize that psychological reactance has caused us to want the item more; all we know is that we *want* it. Still, we need to make sense of our desire for the item, so we begin to assign it positive qualities to justify the desire. After all, it is natural to suppose that, if one feels drawn to something, it is because of the merit of the thing. In the case of the Miami antiphosphate law—and in other instances of newly restricted availability—that is a faulty supposition. Phosphate detergents clean, whiten, and pour no better after they are banned than before. We just assume they do because we find that we desire them more.

Other research has suggested that in addition to commodities, limited access to information makes the information more desirable—and more influential (Brock, 1968; Brock & Bannon, 1992). One test of Brock's thinking found good support in a business setting. Wholesale beef buyers who were told of an impending imported beef shortage purchased significantly more beef when they were informed that the shortage information came from certain "exclusive" contacts that the importer had (Knishinsky, 1982). Apparently, the fact that the scarcity news was itself scarce made it more valued and persuasive. Additional evidence—from the literature on censorship—suggests that restricting information can empower that information in unintended ways. Individuals typically respond to censorship by wanting to receive the banned information to a greater extent and by becoming more favorable to it than before the ban (e.g., Worchel & Arnold, 1973; Worchel, 1992). Especially interesting is the finding that people will come to believe in banned information more even though they haven't received it (Worchel, Arnold, & Baker, 1975).

A scarcity rule for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should try to secure those opportunities that are scarce or dwindling.* With scarcity operating powerfully on the worth assigned to things, it should not be surprising that compliance professionals have a variety of techniques designed to convert this power to compliance. Probably the most frequently used such technique is the "limited number" tactic in which the customer is informed that membership opportunities, products, or services exist in a limited supply that cannot be guaranteed to last for long.

Related to the limited number tactic is the "deadline" technique in which an official time limit is placed on the customer's opportunity to get what is being offered. Newspaper ads abound with admonitions to the customer regarding the folly of delay: "Last three days." "Limited time offer." "One week only sale." The purest form of a decision deadline—right now—occurs in a variant of the deadline technique in which customers are told that, unless they make an immediate purchase decision, they will have to buy the item at a higher price, or they will not be able to purchase it at all. I found this tactic used in numerous compliance settings. A large child photography company urges parents to buy as many poses and copies as they can afford because "stocking limitations force us to burn the unsold pictures of your children within 24 hours." A prospective health club member or automobile buyer might learn

that the deal offered by the salesperson is good for that one time; should the customer leave the premises, the deal is off. One home vacuum cleaner sales company instructed me as a trainee to claim to prospects that "I have so many other people to see that I have the time to visit a family only once. It's company policy that even if you decide later that you want this machine, I can't come back and sell it to you." For anyone who thought about it carefully, this was nonsense; the company and its representatives are in the business of making sales, and any customer who called for another visit would be accommodated gladly. The real purpose of the can't-come-back-again claim was to evoke the possibility of loss that is inherent in the scarcity rule for compliance.

The idea of potential loss plays a large role in human decision making. In fact, people seem to be more motivated by the thought of losing something than by the thought of gaining something of equal value (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). For instance, home owners told about how much money they could lose from inadequate insulation are more likely to insulate their homes than those told about how much money they could save (Gonzales, Aronson, & Costanzo, 1988). Similar results have been obtained by health researchers (Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987; Meyerowitz, Wilson, & Chaiken, 1991): Pamphlets urging young women to check for breast cancer through self-examinations are significantly more successful if they state their case in terms of what stands to be lost (e.g., "You can lose several potential health benefits by failing to spend only 5 minutes each month doing breast self-examination") rather than gained (e.g., "You can gain several potential health benefits by spending only 5 minutes each month doing breast self-examination").

### **Authority**

*Follow an expert.*

—VIRGIL

Legitimately constituted authorities are extremely influential persons (e.g., Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963; Blass, 1991; Milgram, 1974). Whether they have acquired their positions through knowledge, talent, or fortune, their positions bespeak of superior information and power. For each of us this has always been the case. Early on, these people (e.g., parents, teachers) knew more than us, and we found that taking their advice proved beneficial—partly because of their greater wisdom and partly because they controlled our rewards and punishments. As adults, the authority figures have changed to employers, judges, police officers, and the like, but the benefits associated with doing as they say have not. For most people, then, conforming to the dictates of authority figures produces genuine practical advantages. Consequently, it makes great sense to comply with the wishes of properly constituted authorities. It makes so much sense, in fact, that people often do so when it makes no sense at all.

Take, for example, the strange case of the "rectal earache" reported by two professors of pharmacy, Michael Cohen and Neil Davis (1981). A physician ordered eardrops to be administered to the right ear of a patient suffering pain

and infection there. But instead of writing out completely the location "right ear" on the prescription, the doctor abbreviated it so that the instructions read "place in R ear." Upon receiving the prescription, the duty nurse promptly put the required number of eardrops into the patient's anus. Obviously, rectal treatment of an earache made no sense. Yet, neither the patient nor the nurse questioned it.

Of course, the most dramatic research evidence for the power of legitimate authority comes from the famous Milgram experiment in which 65 percent of the subjects were willing to deliver continued, intense, and dangerous levels of electric shock to a kicking, screeching, pleading other subject simply because an authority figure—in this case a scientist—directed them to do so. Although virtually everyone who has ever taken a psychology course has learned about this experiment, Milgram (1974) conducted a series of variations on his basic procedure that are less well known but equally compelling in making the point about the powerful role that authority played in causing subjects to behave so cruelly. For instance, in one variation, Milgram had the scientist and the victim switch scripts so that the scientist told the subject to stop delivering shock to the victim, while the victim insisted bravely that the subject continue for the good of the experiment. The results couldn't have been clearer: Not a single subject gave even one additional shock when it was a nonauthority who demanded it.

An *authority rule* for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should be more willing to follow the suggestions of someone who is a legitimate authority.* Authorities may be seen as falling into two categories: authorities with regard to the specific situation and more general authorities. Compliance practitioners employ techniques that seek to benefit from the power invested in authority figures of both types. In the case of authority relevant to a specific situation, we can note how often advertisers inform their audiences of the level of expertise of product manufacturers (e.g., "Fashionable men's clothiers since 1841"; "Babies are our business, our only business"). At times, the expertise associated with a product has been more symbolic than substantive, for instance, when actors in television commercials wear physicians' white coats to recommend a product. In one famous Sanka commercial, the actor involved, Robert Young, did not need a white coat, as his prior identity as TV doctor Marcus Welby, M.D., provided the medical connection. It is instructive that the mere symbols of a physician's expertise and authority are enough to trip the mechanism that governs authority influence. One of the most prominent of these symbols, the bare title "Dr.", has been shown to be devastatingly effective as a compliance device among trained hospital personnel. In what may be the most frightening study I know, a group of physicians and nurses conducted an experiment that documented the dangerous degree of blind obedience that hospital nurses accorded to an individual whom they had never met, but who claimed in a phone call to be a doctor (Hofling, Brotzman, Dalrymple, Graves, & Pierce, 1966). Ninety-five percent of those nurses were willing to administer an unsafe level of a drug merely because that caller requested it.

In the case of influence that generalizes outside of relevant expertise, the impact of authority (real and symbolic) appears equally impressive. For in-

stance, researchers have found that, when wearing a security guard's uniform, a requester could produce more compliance with requests (e.g., to pick up a paper bag on the street, to stand on the other side of a Bus Stop sign) that were irrelevant to a security guard's domain of authority (Bickman, 1974; Bushman, 1988). Less blatant in its connotation than a uniform, but nonetheless effective, is another kind of attire that has traditionally bespoken of authority status in our culture—the well-tailored business suit. It also can mediate influence. Take as evidence the results of a study by Lefkowitz, Blake, and Mouton (1955), who found that three and a half times as many people were willing to follow a jay-walker into traffic when he wore a suit and tie versus a work shirt and trousers (but see Mullin, Cooper, & Driskell, 1990).

Con artists frequently make use of the influence inherent in authority attire. For example, a gambit called the bank examiner scheme depends heavily on the automatic deference most people assign to authority figures, or those merely dressed as such. Using the two uniforms of authority we have already mentioned, a business suit and guard's outfit, the con begins when a man dressed in a conservative three-piece suit appears at the home of a likely victim and identifies himself as an official of the victim's bank. The victim is told of suspected irregularities in the transactions handled by one particular teller and is asked to help trap the teller by drawing out all of his or her savings at the teller's window. In this way, the examiner can "catch the teller red-handed" in any wrongdoing. After cooperating, the victim is to give the money to a uniformed bank guard waiting outside, who will then return it to the proper account. Often, the appearance of the "bank examiner" and uniformed "guard" are so impressive that the victim never thinks to check on their authenticity and proceeds with the requested action, never to see the money or those two individuals again.

## SUMMARY

At the outset of this chapter it was suggested that an important question for anyone interested in understanding, resisting, or harnessing the process of interpersonal influence is, "Which are the most powerful principles that motivate us to comply with another's request?" It was also suggested that one way to assess such power would be to examine the practices of commercial compliance professionals for their pervasiveness. That is, if compliance practitioners made widespread use of certain principles, this would be evidence for the natural power of these principles to affect everyday compliance. Six psychological principles emerged as the most popular in the repertoires of the compliance pros: reciprocity, social validation, consistency, friendship/liking, scarcity, and authority. Close examination of the principles revealed broad professional usage that could be validated and explained by controlled experimental research. As with most research perspectives, additional work needs to be done before we can have high levels of confidence in the conclusions. However, there is considerable evidence at this juncture to indicate that these six principles en-

gage central features of the human condition in the process of motivating compliance.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>However, when the purpose of social comparison is to make oneself feel better or to motivate oneself to greater accomplishments, people will sometimes compare themselves to others who are not similar but who are below or above them on a relevant dimension (Wood, 1989; Suls & Wills, 1990).

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