

A Disrupt-Then-Reframe Technique of Social Influence

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Several theories of change imply that disrupting a person's understanding of an event will facilitate a new representation of that event. The authors created a new influence technique involving a small disruption (stating the price of a package of note cards in pennies rather than dollars) and a direct reframing (saying, "It's a bargain"). Four studies showed that a disrupt-then-reframe (DTR) technique was influential in getting household residents to purchase cards supporting a local charity. Studies 2 and 3 showed that the new technique required both the disruption and the new reframing in that sequence. Study 4 showed the effect when sellers learned 1 sales script and were blind to other scripts. These studies establish the DTR technique and demonstrate the subtlety of some social influence.

The psychology of social influence has identified a series of seemingly small variations in a request that can produce great differences in compliance. These have acquired clever nicknames such as foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, and lowballing (Cialdini, 1993). In this research, we establish a new influence procedure, which we call the disrupt-then-reframe (DTR) technique. The DTR technique rests on the assumption that many everyday persuasive attempts create an approach-avoidance conflict in the target. The target wants to help, wants to own, or wants to enjoy the offered product or service, but at the same time is resistant to the expense, to the effort, or to the commitment required to do so. Many influence techniques attempt to bolster the approach tendency, that is, to provide additional reasons or additional incentives for compliance. The DTR technique works instead with both the approach and the avoidance forces by disrupting the resistance so that the target can be made susceptible to a persuasive framing of the offer.

In four studies, we sold note cards door-to-door for a worthy charity. We presumed that most residents would like to help the charity and would find some use for the note cards but that they would also feel resistant to door-to-door solicitations, spending money, or even complying with someone else's agenda. In this research we introduced a subtle disruption to the sales request. We stated the price in pennies: "The price of these note cards is 300 pennies." The disruption was followed immediately by a reframing that provided additional reasons for purchasing the cards. The reframing we used was as simple and direct as we could make it: "It's a bargain."

Two theories in psychology implied that a disruption followed by a reframing might be an effective way to produce compliance. These two theories come from disparate domains of psychology and draw attention to different aspects of the DTR technique.

Ericksonian Confusion Techniques

Erickson (1964; Erickson, Rossi, & Rossi, 1976; Haley, 1973; Sherman, 1988; Zeig, 1982), a founder of modern clinical hypnosis, was a master of indirect suggestion and subtle hypnotic induction. His contribution to the DTR technique was to show the subtlety of the disruption process. Erickson's understanding was that people came to him desiring to be hypnotized, but they were also resistant to it. The hypnotherapist's task, he thought, was to circumvent the resistance and engage the underlying desire. Among his many techniques for dealing with resistance (Erickson et al., 1976; Haley, 1973) was what he called the confusion technique (Erickson, 1964). Gilligan (1987) described a number of Ericksonian confusion techniques, including non sequiturs, syntactical violations, inhibition of motoric expression, interruption of cues correlated with counterarguing (such as glancing up and to the left), and even interruption of a handshake. The confusion techniques, Erickson believed, engaged and occupied the conscious mind, diverting it from maintaining the resistance to the hypnotic suggestion. He observed that confusion was likely to increase compliance with whatever suggestion immediately followed.

Action Identification Theory

In modern social psychology, action identification theory is a complementary theory of change (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987) that focuses on the role of disruption in establishing a new framing of the situation. Action identification starts with the insight that what people think they are doing is a cognitive construction easily shaped by motive, experience, context, and situation. For any particular act, many constructions are possible. According to Vallacher and Wegner (1987), these constructions may be ordered hierarchically, from low-level characterizations that attend to details and parts of the action to high-level labels that capture the purpose, goals, or implications of the action.

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An action label is a quasi-stationary equilibrium in the traditional Lewinian sense (Lewin, 1951). The selected label is an equilibrium in an approach-avoidance conflict between the desire for higher level characterizations and the desire to avoid disrupting the ongoing action. Desires for efficacy and mastery push for higher and higher levels of representation. However, higher level characterizations make the particulars of the activity more remote. The performance demands of the task are best met by attending to the details of the activity. The selected action label is at equilibrium when it is as broad as it can be while at the same time allowing the activity to be efficiently performed.

Action identification theory attends to both stasis and change. On the one hand it describes the factors that determine which level of the hierarchy will apply to a particular action, and on the other hand it describes the factors that determine when one representation will be replaced by another. It is this second process that we think applies to the DTR effect.

It is unlikely that one high-level action label will be replaced by an alternative high-level label, unless the quasi-stationary equilibrium of the first label is disrupted. The disruption causes the person to move to lower level representations to recapture efficient control of the action. The attention to the details of action allows mastery to be regained. The reclaimed control over the action then allows the person to adopt a higher level portrayal of the action. It is at this stage that a new, high-level representation of the action may be substituted for the previous one. Vallacher and Wegner (1985) established these reframings through biased questionnaires, where the questions were all loaded in the direction of the reframing or through declarative assertions (e.g., "coffee drinkers seek/avoid stimulation").

The processes of action identification change that Vallacher and Wegner describe are subtle, swift, and outside of focal attention. For instance, in one study, students were instructed to eat Cheetos either with their hands or with a pair of chopsticks (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985). In another, students drank coffee either from a normal cup or from a cup made very awkward by a pound of lead in its base (Wegner, Vallacher, Macomber, Wood, & Arps, 1984). The students who performed the actions as they normally would were unresponsive to imbedded influence techniques and, if anything, showed more resistance to the influence attempt. However, students whose normal behavior had been disrupted by the awkward apparatus proved quite susceptible to the social influence. The disruption made them susceptible to the reframing suggested in the influence attempt, and they adopted the reframed action identification.

Requirements for the DTR Technique

Ericksonian confusion techniques (Erickson, 1964) and Vallacher and Wegner's (1985, 1987) action identification theory clarified the requirements for the DTR effect. For both theories, the disruptions that the authors used were unexpected elements in the normal script for the interaction. They were anomalous but not enough to change the focus of the interaction. The disruptions were seemingly part of the script, albeit an odd part. The research participants in Vallacher and Wegner's disruption conditions were still trying to eat Cheetos or drink coffee. Erickson's hypnotic subjects were still trying to make sense out of the induction even when Erickson seemingly got his phrases backward. We assumed

that if the participants had been forced to change the focus of action away from eating Cheetos or drinking coffee to focus instead on manipulating these chopsticks or hefting that cup, then they would not have been as susceptible to the influence attempt. So, it appears that the disruption needs to be subtle, disrupting to the script of the interaction but not disrupting targets away from the script.

The reframings used by Erickson and by Vallacher and Wegner were as brazen as the disruptions were subtle. Erickson (1964) followed a confusing phrase with the assertion "You are falling deeper into trance." Vallacher and Wegner (1985) followed their disrupting activity with reframing assertions such as "college education impairs one's sex life" or "coffee drinkers seek stimulation." It appears that when the disruption works, the reframing can be blatantly direct.

Study 1

We thought that there was a family of DTR change procedures consistent with Erickson (1964) and Vallacher and Wegner (1985) that would work in more everyday situations. Our first study created a new social influence technique that offered a subtle disruption to a sales script (stating the price in pennies rather than in dollars) and followed it with an explicit new characterization ("It's a bargain"). This first study tested whether that this new DTR technique was effective in producing compliance.

Method

Overview and Participants

In early December, two female experimenters went door-to-door in different neighborhoods selling Christmas cards, the profits from which supported the local center for developmentally delayed children and adults. The eight cards were different Christmas pictures drawn by clients of the center, grouped with envelopes in an attractive packet. Houses sampled were single-family detached and duplex dwellings in a metropolitan area with a population of 125,000 people. Each salesperson sampled 30 households equally divided among the three conditions. A household participated in this experiment when a resident answered the doorbell and listened long enough to hear the entire sales script. The salesperson introduced herself, presented the Christmas cards, and said,

I would like to show you some cards made by clients of the Richardson Center. Are you familiar with the Richardson Center? Then you know that it is a nonprofit organization that has great programs for developmentally disabled children and adults. These cards are made by clients at the center and come eight to a package. Would you like to know the price?

Then, depending on a random schedule, residents were assigned to one of three differently worded offers.¹

¹ This experiment included a fourth condition in which we attempted to replicate the that's-not-all technique developed by Burger (1986). The salesperson said, "The price was \$5, but we are selling them now for \$3." Seventy percent of the households hearing this offer purchased the Christmas cards. This was a significantly greater percentage than the 35% who purchased the cards after hearing only that the price was \$3, $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 4.91, p < .05$. This finding replicates Burger's (1986) results showing the effectiveness of a that's-not-all price reduction.

Table 1
Percentage of Targets Who Complied in Each Condition

Condition	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Disrupt-then-reframe ("They're 300 pennies . . . that's \$3. It's a bargain.")	65	70	65
Price only ("They're \$3.")	35	25	30
Reframe only ("They're \$3. It's a bargain.")	35	30	—
Disruption only ("They're 300 pennies . . . That's \$3.")	—	35	—
Reframe-then-disrupt ("It's a bargain . . . They're 300 pennies. That's \$3.")	—	—	25

Note. In each condition, $n = 20$. Dashes signify conditions not tested in each study.

Conditions

DTR. In this condition, the salesperson provided a disruption to the action plus a new label for it. Specifically, she stated, "This package of cards sells for 300 pennies." After a 2-s pause, she said, "That's \$3. It's a bargain." We believed that the "300 pennies" description occurring first provided the disruption to the ongoing script. We followed this after several seconds with the price stated in dollars so that all conditions would have the price stated in the same way at least somewhere in the offer. We presumed that saying, "300 pennies . . . That's \$3," would be a subtle disruption to the script. We also presumed that the reverse order, "\$3 . . . That's 300 pennies," would not disrupt the show-product/tell-price script, because the usual price designation would come first but would merely draw attention to the salesperson.²

Price only. In this control condition, the salesperson stated that the price of the package was \$3.

Reframe only. A second control condition was added in which the salesperson stated that the price of the package was \$3, then, after a 2-s pause, added, "It's a bargain."

Compliance

The salesperson waited for a response from the resident. A purchase of any number of packages was recorded as complying with the request. When the respondent decided not to purchase the cards, the salesperson thanked him or her for listening and left. All money collected was turned in to the Richardson Center.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the proportions of respondents who decided to purchase cards in Study 1. The two salespeople had nearly identical sales in each condition, so their results are combined in Table 1.

The first question addressed was whether the DTR condition produced more compliance than the price-only condition. When respondents were given a mild disruption ("The cards are 300 pennies") and then a reframing ("It's a bargain"), they complied with the request at a much higher level (65%) than did the respondents in the price-only condition (35%), $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 4.49, p < .05$.

The second question addressed was whether compliance would be increased by the reframing alone. Both the price-only condition and the reframe-only condition had exactly the same level of compliance (35%), indicating that the statement "It's a bargain" had no effect by itself. Together, the results of this study show that a mild disruption coupled with a new emergent label for the event increased compliance.

The results reveal subtle but powerful processes. The difference between the experimenter's behavior in the reframe-only condition

("These cards sell for \$3 . . . It's a bargain") and the DTR condition ("These cards sell for 300 pennies . . . that's \$3. It's a bargain") seems on the surface to be quite minor but is quite distinguishable, as demonstrated by the framework of action identification (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985) and Ericksonian change (Erickson, 1964) theories. This subtle difference in the request had a great impact on behavior, almost doubling the rate of compliance.

Study 2

Study 1 demonstrated that the DTR technique can increase sales. Action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985) and Ericksonian change theory (Erickson, 1964) imply that both components, the disruption and the reframing, are required for this effect to occur. Without a disruption to the action sequence, the old label is maintained and the new characterization is not accepted. A disruption by itself provides no reframing and thus does not change the understanding of the action. A person will recapture the previous high-level representation.

The second study focused more directly on the necessity of both the disruption and the reframing. A salesperson sold a packet of note cards door-to-door for \$3. The statement of the price sometimes involved a disruption ("The price is 300 pennies"), sometimes included a reframe label ("It's a bargain"), and sometimes included both. The DTR change theories imply that the reframing would be accepted only when accompanied by the disruption.

Method

Overview and Participants

On nice days in February and March, a female salesperson (Barbara Price Davis) went door-to-door selling packages of eight note cards. The cards were printed with attractive pictures drawn by clients of the Richardson Center, the same center as in Study 1. The houses sampled were single-family detached and duplex dwellings in different parts of the same metropolitan area as in Study 1. Eighty residents were offered the opportunity to purchase these cards; 20 residents were randomly assigned to each of four conditions. When a resident answered the door, the salesperson introduced herself as a representative from the Richardson Center, showed the packet of cards, and explained that the money collected from the sales

² We subsequently tested this presumption by telling 20 households, "This packet of cards sells for \$3, that's 300 pennies . . . It's a bargain." This order produced limited sales (25% of the households purchased the cards), many puzzled looks, and a generally awkward interaction, much more so than in the DTR condition.

would benefit the center's programs. Then, in a randomly assigned order, the salesperson told the resident the price of the package of cards in one of four ways. The exact wording of this price manipulated the disruption and new characterization. Residents who refused before hearing the price were not counted.

Conditions

Price only. In the control condition, which was the standard sale procedure, the salesperson showed the cards and then said, "For a package of eight note cards, the price is \$3."

Disruption only. In the disruption-only condition, the salesperson provided a subtle disruption to the usual offer-response action sequence. She said, "For a package of eight note cards, the price is 300 pennies." Then, after a 2-s pause, the salesperson added, "That's \$3."

Reframe only. In this condition, the salesperson gave the standard price but included with it the information that the package was a bargain. Specifically, the salesperson said, "For a package of eight note cards, the price is \$3." Then, after a 2-s pause, the salesperson added, "It's a bargain."

DTR. This condition combined the disruption with the new characterization. The salesperson said, "For a package of eight note cards, the price is 300 pennies." After a 2-s pause, she added, "That's \$3. It's a bargain."

Compliance

As in the first study, the salesperson then waited for the resident to respond. A purchase of any number of packages was recorded as complying with the request.

Results and Discussion

The compliance rates for Study 2 are also shown in Table 1. These results clearly support the DTR change theories. When both the disruption and the new characterization (reframing) were given, the proportion of households purchasing note cards was twice as high as in any other condition, also shown in Table 1. The four conditions showed significantly different responses, $\chi^2(3, N = 80) = 10.42, p = .015$. The DTR condition (70%) was significantly higher than the next highest condition (disruption-only condition, 35%), $\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 4.91, p = .026$, and, therefore, higher than each of the other conditions. These other three conditions did not differ significantly from each other, $\chi^2(2, N = 60) = 0.48, p = .78$.

The disruption ("The price is 300 pennies") drew no comments, but the salesperson experienced some funny looks in the disruption-only condition. However, the disruption, even in the disruption-only condition, did not become the focus of attention for the respondents for anything more than a moment. The respondents' major task was to consider the offer and decide whether to buy the cards. Their consideration of the offer was unsettled but not diverted. Respondents easily moved beyond the disruption and made a quick decision whether to purchase.

When the disruption was accompanied by a reframing ("It's a bargain"), 70% of the decisions were to purchase the cards. However, when the disruption occurred by itself, only 35% of the decisions were to purchase, almost the same proportion as in the price-only condition (25%) or the reframe-only condition (30%). This pattern clearly shows that both components, the disruption and the reframing, are necessary for this influence technique to be effective. The disruption by itself presumably was resolved by returning to the previous frame ("Do I want these cards?") and thus

was no more effective than just telling the respondents the price in the regular way. The reframe-only technique provided respondents with the reframing ("It's a bargain"), but this reframing clearly was not accepted in the absence of a disruption.

This study isolated the two components of the DTR technique and showed that both the disruption and the reframing were required for the offer to be influential.

Study 3

So far we have shown that the DTR technique is effective and that both the disruption and the reframing are necessary for the DTR technique to work. Both change theories reviewed in the beginning of this article imply that the order of these two components is crucial. The change process should work only when the disruption precedes the reframing. If the reframing was to precede the disruption, it should fall on unprepared ground and be ineffective, just as the reframe-only condition was in Study 2. Study 3 investigated the order of the two critical components of the DTR technique.

Method

Overview and Participants

A female salesperson (Barbara Price Davis) sold the same note cards as in Study 2 door-to-door. Sixty single-family households living in detached and duplex housing were offered the opportunity to purchase these cards, as in the previous studies. The exact wording of the offer varied, with 20 households in each of three conditions. Data for the first price-only and DTR conditions were obtained in late May. Data for the reframe-then-disrupt condition were obtained in early June from houses in the same neighborhood.

Condition

Price only. The offer in this control condition stated the price in dollars: "The package of eight note cards is \$3."

DTR. This condition placed the disruption first, followed immediately by the reframing. The salesperson said, "The package of eight note cards is 300 pennies." Then, after a 2-s pause, she added, "That's \$3. It's a bargain."

Reframe-then-disrupt. This condition reversed the order of the two components. The salesperson said, "The package of eight note cards is a bargain." After a 2-s pause, she said, "It's 300 pennies. That's \$3."

Compliance

As in the earlier studies, the salesperson waited for the resident to respond. A purchase of any number of packages was recorded as complying with the request.

Results and Discussion

The three conditions were differentially effective in selling the note cards, $\chi^2(2, N = 60) = 7.92, p < .02$. As shown in Table 1, the DTR condition produced significantly greater sales (65%) than the price-only condition (30%), $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 4.91, p < .05$, a fact that replicated the findings in the previous two studies, showing the effectiveness of the DTR technique. More important, the DTR condition produced significantly greater sales than the reframe-then-disrupt condition (25%), $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 6.46, p < .02$.

These results tell two tales. First, they demonstrate for the third time that the DTR technique is an effective procedure that dramatically increases sales over simply stating the price. Second, they demonstrate that the order of the two components of the DTR technique is crucial to its effectiveness. The reframing must follow the disruption, not precede it. This order is exactly what Vallacher and Wegner's (1985) and Erickson's (1964) change theories would predict and indeed require. The disruption prepares the field in which the reframing takes root. Without the disruption readying the way, the reframing is fruitless.

Study 4

The first three studies have used a within-salesperson design to test the DTR technique against various comparison offers. This choice required that each salesperson enact all of the conditions in a study. The salespeople for the first three studies were not blind to the hypotheses. Social influence is very subtle, and respondents may be influenced by experimenter anticipations and desires (Rosenthal, 1994, 1995). To assure that the effects reported so far were not a chimera created by experimenter expectation, we conducted a fourth study that used independent salespeople who learned and enacted only one script, without knowledge of the other scripts in the study.

Moving to a between-salesperson design introduced two changes: one social, one statistical. The social change was that salespeople were no longer aware of the other conditions in the study. They were recruited for a study of sales effectiveness, but each person was given only one sales script to learn. The statistical change was that the design now included salesperson differences in both the treatment and the error term, whereas the previous studies had subtracted these differences from both terms. To minimize this statistical difference, we decided to use a matched, random design, where salespeople were matched on the basis of their persuasiveness using a neutral script and then randomly assigned to conditions. We expected that matched salespeople would be more effective using the DTR script than using the reframe-only script.

Method

Experimenter Selection

We recruited potential salespeople from undergraduate psychology classes. Eight people volunteered to be door-to-door salespeople, but none had prior direct-marketing experience. The 8 people were tested, trained, and supervised individually so that they did not know the other salespeople or other conditions in the experiment.

We first tested each person's sales style so that we could match them for persuasiveness. Each volunteer learned, practiced, and was videotaped in the laboratory delivering a neutral sales script:

Hello, my name is ____ and I am representing the University of Arkansas Psychology Department. Are you familiar with the University of Arkansas? Then you know that the students receive a great education there. I'd like to show you some cookies made by students at the University of Arkansas. The cookies come eight to a package. Would you like to know the price? The price for a package of cookies is \$1.50. How many would you like?

The eight videotapes were placed in a haphazard order and shown to 53 undergraduate students. The students first viewed the videotapes without

audio and used nonverbal cues to rate each salesperson's persuasiveness on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *not persuasive* to 7 = *very persuasive*. Similar ratings were made for friendliness, nervousness, comfortableness, eagerness, and likability. Students also rated the overall presentation of the salesperson on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *very bad* to 7 = *very good*. Following these nonverbal ratings, students saw the videotapes again, this time with audio, and repeated the ratings on all seven scales for the salesperson's verbal performance. Nervousness scores were reversed for analyses.

Correlations across the students and the salespeople ($N = 424$) showed that the 14 verbal and nonverbal ratings were highly correlated (average $r = .823$). A maximum likelihood factor analysis of these correlations yielded a single factor that explained 82% of the variance in ratings. All 14 scales loaded at .768 or higher on this one factor. The average correlation within nonverbal ratings ($r = .817$) and within verbal ratings ($r = .845$) was similar to the average correlation between verbal and nonverbal ratings ($r = .815$).

Because the 14 ratings of each salesperson were largely redundant, they were averaged to create a single performance score. These scores ranged from a low of 2.88 to a high of 6.66. Based on this wide range of performance judgments, we decided to use only those 4 salespeople who scored above the midpoint of the 7-point rating scale (i.e., 4.00). The 2 highest scoring people, with overall performance scores of 6.66 and 6.64, were matched and randomly assigned to conditions, as were the next highest scoring pair, with scores of 5.41 and 5.23. Because the two people in the first pair were both women and in the second pair were both men, this random assignment resulted in 1 male and 1 female salesperson assigned to each condition. However, this also meant that the quality of the salesperson covaried with the sex of the salesperson.

Training and Conditions

The 4 salespeople were individually trained to use one of two scripts to sell note cards door-to-door. The note cards were the same eight-note-card sets as used in Studies 2 and 3. All of the salespeople learned the same script to describe the cards and the charity, the Richardson Center. However, the price was stated differently, depending on the assigned condition.

DTR. In this condition, the salesperson said, "For a package of eight note cards, the price is 300 pennies." Then, after a 2-s pause, the salesperson added, "That's \$3. It's a bargain."

Reframe only. In this condition, the salesperson said, "For a package of eight note cards, the price is \$3." Then, after a 2-s pause, the salesperson added, "It's a bargain."

Training and videotapes. Salespeople were scheduled for individual appointments in the psychology laboratory. There, they were given one of the experimental scripts to learn and practice. When the salesperson felt comfortable and skilled delivering the sales script, he or she faced the video camera and the recitation was videotaped. These videotapes, in a haphazard order, were later shown to 40 undergraduate students. As with the selection ratings, the students first saw the videotapes without audio and made ratings of the salespersons' nonverbal performance, then viewed them again with the audio and rated the salespersons' performance. The students rated each person's friendliness, nervousness, persuasiveness, comfortableness, eagerness, likability, and overall presentation using the 7-point scales described in *Experimenter Selection*. Nervousness scores were reversed for analyses. These 14 ratings were averaged into a single performance score.

Participants

We had selected 10 three-block districts from the same metropolitan area used in the previous studies. These districts were similar to each other in social-economic character. They also had not been used in the previous studies. We randomly selected one of these districts for each salesperson.

The salesperson went to the beginning of the first block and attempted

to sell the cards door-to-door, using the script he or she had learned and practiced. Salespeople were instructed to count as a participant any person who appeared to be over the age of 18 years and who listened long enough to hear the price. If a target person refused the sale before hearing the price of the note cards, he or she was not counted as a participant in the study. Salespeople were instructed to continue until they had obtained 10 participants.

Compliance

As in the earlier studies, the salesperson waited for the resident to respond. A purchase of any number of packages was recorded as complying with the request.

Results

Videotape Ratings

The 14 scores used to rate the salespeople were averaged into a single performance score. This score was analyzed in a within-rater 2 (condition: DTR vs. reframe only) \times 2 (quality: high-female vs. moderate-male) analysis of variance (ANOVA). The average ratings for the four salespersons are presented in Table 2.

The salesperson quality strongly affected the perceived performances, $F(1, 39) = 221.21, p < .0001$. The 2 high-quality females had much higher performance scores ($M = 5.30$) than the 2 moderate-quality male salespeople ($M = 3.96$). Of course, they had been selected for this difference. More important, the condition had no significant effect on these performance ratings, $F(1, 39) = 1.50, p = .228$. The interaction between condition and quality was also nonsignificant, $F(1, 39) = 0.13, p = .719$. The average performance of the two salespeople in the DTR condition ($M = 4.69$) was similar to the average performance of the two salespeople in the reframe-only condition ($M = 4.56$).

Card Sales

The compliance rates for each salesperson in each condition are shown in Table 3. Both of the salespeople in the reframe-only condition elicited purchases from 50% of the households who heard the request. However, 90% of the households who heard the DTR request decided to purchase the cards.

We used an ANOVA with households as the unit of analysis and their decision to purchase or not as the dependent measure of compliance. The 2 \times 2 design included conditions (DTR or reframe only) and qualities of salesperson (high-female or moderate-male). The salesperson quality did not affect sales sig-

Table 3

Percentage of Targets Who Complied in Each Condition of Study 4

Condition	Sales
Disrupt-then-reframe ("They're 300 pennies . . . that's \$3. It's a bargain.")	
High-quality/female salesperson	80
Moderate-quality/male salesperson	100
Average	90
Reframe only ("They're \$3. It's a bargain.")	
High-quality/female salesperson	50
Moderate-quality/male salesperson	50
Average	50

nificantly, $F(1, 36) = 2.00, p > .1$. However, the sales script condition clearly had a strong effect on compliance, $F(1, 38) = 8.81, p < .01$. Salesperson quality and script condition did not interact, $F(1, 36) = 0.55, p > .5$, indicating that the DTR script worked equally well for the high-quality female salespeople and the moderate-quality male salespeople.

Discussion

Salespeople who used the DTR technique sold 40% more cards on average than did those who used the reframe-only script. This is a dramatic difference, especially because the salespeople using each technique had been matched beforehand on their persuasiveness using a neutral script. The student raters confirmed that the high-quality salespeople presented their scripts in a high-quality performance, whereas the moderate-quality salespeople presented their scripts in a moderate-quality performance. However, the quality of the performance had no effect on sales. The script, which had no effect on the perceived quality of the performance, had a determining effect on compliance with the sales request.

These results were obtained from salespeople who learned and used only one script and were unaware of the other script used in this study. The fact that the DTR effect replicated in a between-salesperson design, where salespeople were blind to hypotheses and unaware of other conditions, greatly diminishes concerns that the DTR phenomenon in the previous studies was a product of experimenter expectations.

General Discussion

Mechanisms

How does the DTR technique work? Erickson (1964) thought that this family of techniques worked when there was a tension between desires for and against taking an action. The disruption interrupted the resistance to the action and diverted attention away from the struggle. This process is reminiscent of the finding that persuasive messages accompanied by a distraction are more effective than messages without distraction (Festinger & Maccoby, 1964). In Erickson's hypnotherapy, the reframing suggestion that followed the disruption engaged and gave permission to the original desire that was being resisted. The cards in these four experiments may have set up a similar tension system: a desire to support the local charity clashing with a desire to avoid door-to-

Table 2

Overall Presentation Ratings of the Salespeople in Study 4

Condition	Rating
Disrupt-then-reframe ("They're 300 pennies . . . that's \$3. It's a bargain.")	
High-quality/female salesperson	5.34
Moderate-quality/male salesperson	4.04
Average	4.69
Reframe only ("They're \$3. It's a bargain.")	
High-quality/female salesperson	5.25
Moderate-quality/male salesperson	3.88
Average	4.56

door sales. The DTR offer could be seen as distracting the resistance to door-to-door sales while the reframing provided extra incentive to support the worthy charity. The disruption by itself did not change the respondents. To be effective, the influence required both the disruption and the reframing, in that order.

Action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985; Wegner & Vallacher, 1986) also sees the disruption as upsetting an equilibrium between opposing desires, specifically between the desire to maintain competent behavioral control of the event and the desire to understand the broader meaning of the event. Disruption upsets the balance between these desires, returns attention to the lower level issues of behavioral control, and opens an opportunity for reframing into a different meaning. The card-selling encounter invoked a regular script in which the seller described the cards and disclosed the price, and the buyer decided whether to purchase the cards. The 300-penny offer momentarily disrupted this script, requiring the respondent to attend to the details of the offer rather than the implications or meanings of the encounter. This attention to details of the script allowed the script to be reframed with a different meaning. The reframing could be provided directly, as in the case of our DTR conditions, or perhaps be implied by some feature of the script. For instance, we believe the that's-not-all technique (Burger, 1986) involves a disrupting revision of an offer coupled with an implied reframing (Pollock, Smith, Knowles, & Bruce, 1998).

Boundaries to DTR Techniques

It might be useful at this point to speculate on the limiting conditions for the technique we have presented. We suspect that careful, central-route consideration of an offer may be able to counteract the reframing offered by DTR techniques. When people are motivated and able to give careful consideration to an offer, they engage a more rational decision process. In this more rational process, people might consider the strength of their desire, the quality of the product, the probability that it will satisfy the desire, their ability to pay, and the compatibility of the product with other goals and desires (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Plous, 1993; Schoemaker, 1982). The mild disruptions in the DTR technique might not interfere with a highly motivated and careful consideration of an offer (Pollock et al., 1998).

The Subtlety of Some Social Influence

On the surface, the difference between telling a prospective customer that the price of note cards is \$3, which is a bargain, and telling her that the price is 300 pennies, which is a bargain, appears trivial. Nonetheless, the second form of the offer consistently produced nearly twice the sales of the first. Ross and Nisbett (1991) remind us that large consequences from small differences imply dynamic systems in tension, as proposed by both of the change theories discussed in the introduction. What emerges from these studies is a view of the subtlety of some social influence.

The reframing "it's a bargain" can double sales or be quite ineffective, depending on the subtle manipulation of attentional focus. First, the target's focus on the script of the offer needs to be disrupted enough to make the reframing effective. Without a disruption here, there is no acceptance of the reframing attempt. Disruptions presumably need to be quite subtle, enough to disrupt

the script but not so much that the disruption draws critical attention. It is easy to envision a disruption that would divert attention away from the offer and onto the disruption or its author. In these cases, a reframing attempt would probably lose any effectiveness, because the target's attention is now on the salesperson and the implications of the disruption. This seemed to happen in the reframe-only condition of Study 2. Of course, these studies used only one disruption and one reframing. It is clear that fuller understanding of the DTR technique will require investigation of a range of disruptions and a range of reframings.

Second, the offer and the disruption probably need to be processed by the target via the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Our note card studies were effective presumably because the objects were attractive, the prices relatively trivial, and the disruptions easily overcome. Change any one of these features and the DTR family of influence techniques may lose its effectiveness (Pollock et al., 1998). For instance, Santos, Leve, and Pratkanis (1994) showed that stating an unusual price piqued the target's interest and instituted more mindful consideration of the encounter. Santos et al. found that an unusual request (begging for 78 cents or 73 cents instead of 75 cents) produced greater compliance, presumably because of the greater mindfulness produced by this novel request. However, Santos et al. did not introduce a reframing statement after their unusual request. We suspect that if the unusual request increased mindfulness, it would diminish the effectiveness of any reframing message that was offered.

More generally, these studies reinforce the need to understand the molecular cognitive and motivational processes involved in social influence. Minor variations in the request, the context, and the order of components can produce major differences in the outcome. The DTR techniques demonstrate how subtle some social influence can be.

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