

## COMPLIANCE EMPLOYING A TWO-FEET-IN-THE-DOOR PROCEDURE\*<sup>1</sup>

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### SUMMARY

The typical foot-in-the-door experimental procedure increases compliance for a hard critical request by preceding it with an easy request. The current study investigated whether interposing an intermediate request between the initial and final request would increase compliance above the level obtained in the typical foot-in-the-door procedure. The level of the intermediate request was easy, moderate, or hard. The Ss, 120 persons randomly selected from the telephone directory, were called and asked to help a new radio station. The results showed that while all three-request procedures produced increased compliance when compared to the two-request foot-in-the-door procedure, a significant increase occurred only when the intermediate request was of a moderate level.

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### A. INTRODUCTION

The "foot-in-the-door," a procedure for inducing increased compliance to a request, was first experimentally verified by Freedman and Fraser (5). They demonstrated that American housewives after complying with a small request were more likely to agree to a large request than control Ss for whom the small request was omitted. Although two series of studies have reported that the "foot-in-the-door" technique was ineffective for increasing compliance when the critical task was that of donating blood (3, 4), a number of studies using a variety of other critical tasks have corroborated the success of the "foot-in-the-door" for obtaining enhanced compliance (1, 6, 9, 10, 11).

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<sup>1</sup> Requests for reprints should be sent to the first author at the address shown at the end of this article.

The explanation that has been offered to account for the success of the foot-in-the-door phenomenon makes use of the self-perception and attribution theories of Bem (2) and Kelley (7). Individuals who have initially complied with a small request perceive themselves as being helpful to strangers. Having made this self-attribution, they continue to be helpful when asked to perform an additional harder task.

Seligman *et al.* (10), using the foot-in-the-door procedure, found that increasing the difficulty level of the initial task led to increased compliance, providing that the initial task was kept at a level where most *Ss* would agree to do it. When the initial task was too easy, the "foot" procedure did not produce additional compliance.

To date the research examining the foot-in-the-door has made use of a two-request procedure: i.e., an easy (E) first request followed by a hard (H) critical test request (E-H). An alternate procedure which might induce an even greater dispositional inference of being helpful and a higher level of compliance is to employ more than one request prior to the critical task. If the perception of being helpful occurs after agreeing to one request, should not this perception be reinforced and strengthened after agreement with two requests? The current research examined compliance to a critical H task when a two-foot-in-the-door procedure was employed. The first request was maintained at an E level and the critical third task always remained at an H level. Three conditions were designed containing either an E level, an M level, or an H level task for the second request. In addition, three control conditions were devised.

The six conditions were H, E-H, E-E-H, E-M-H, E-H-H, and M-H. The E-H condition, the usual procedure employed in the foot-in-the-door experiments, and the H condition served as controls. The E-E-H condition, by providing an additional opportunity to be helpful, might lend the *S* to enhance his helpfulness self-perception and result in increased compliance. The E-M-H condition can be seen as making use of two successive foot-in-the-door procedures. The initial first task might induce greater compliance for the second M level task and the second M level task could induce greater compliance for the H level critical task. This feature might be likened to the behavioral technique of successive approximation, used here, of course, to induce greater compliance. In the E-H-H condition, the *S* who complied on the second task should be consistent and comply again on the critical third task. Some of the *Ss* who refused the second task might be wavering between refusing and accepting; given an additional opportunity,

some of them might now agree to the critical task. Increased compliance obtained for this condition would provide evidence that would be contradictory to the self-consistency expectation.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether a particular three-task foot-in-the-door procedure, as described above, would produce greater compliance than the typical two-task procedure.

## B. METHOD

### 1. *Subjects*

Ss were 120 Kansas City residents whose telephone numbers were randomly selected from the Kansas City telephone directory. They were called by a male *E* on weekdays between 12:00 and 4:00 p.m. and randomly assigned to six conditions, which were executed in a random order. When Ss had been exposed to one rotation of the six conditions, the conditions were again randomly ordered. This procedure was continued until each condition contained 20 Ss.

### 2. *Establishing Difficulty Levels of Tasks*

Before the phoning began, to obtain requests for an E, M, and H level, a nine-item questionnaire was administered to 40 students. Each item described a request dealing with a radio station survey and the students were asked to rate these requests on a seven-point scale, indicating the amount of effort that would be required to complete the task.

On the basis of the data collected, five tasks were chosen. The first E request was, "We are conducting a survey concerning radio programming. Would you please tell me the two radio stations that you listen to most often?" (*M* of difficulty rating = 1.3, range = .40.) The second E request was, "We are conducting a survey concerning music listening preferences. Would you please tell me two musical selections that you enjoy hearing?" (*M* of difficulty rating = 1.5, range = .40.) The M level request was, "We are doing a survey concerning radio programming. Would you please listen to one-half hour of our radio program and answer certain questions about it? The questionnaire will be mailed to you with the return postage paid by our station." (*M* of difficulty rating = 3.0, range = .35.) The first H level request was, "We are doing a survey concerning the type of music played on phonographs at home. Would you please keep track of all the records you listen to for the next six weeks? We will send you a song sheet to record

this information. After the six-week period, you may mail this sheet back to us with the return postage paid by our station." ( $M$  of difficulty rating = 4.8, range = .20.) The critical H level request was, "We are attempting to do a survey concerning radio programming, but we need volunteers. Would you be willing to call 50 names, picked at random from the telephone directory and ask them a few questions? You may do this phoning any time during the next two weeks. The list of names and questions will be mailed to you with the return postage paid by our station." ( $M$  of difficulty rating = 4.6, range = .10.) Thus the fact that the student sample, used to evaluate the difficulty of the requests, was different from the  $S$ s in the study is probably not important since, it may be assumed, most Americans are likely to react similarly to such requests.

### 3. Procedure

Six conditions were devised which consisted of asking the  $S$ s to help with one, two, or three tasks as follows: H, E-H, E-E-H, E-M-H, E-H-H, and M-H.

After reaching an  $S$  over the telephone, the  $E$  replied, "Hello, my name is Chris Walters. I am calling in behalf of KCST, a new radio station in the area." According to the condition, the appropriate request(s) was (were) made. When more than one request was to be asked, these additional requests were preceded with the phrase, "Would you be willing to help in this way?" In order to save time and preserve realism, if the  $S$  complied with an E level request, the  $S$  was allowed to answer the question. When the question was an M or H level request and the  $S$ s agreed to comply, they also responded to the critical H request; then they were told that a list of names of people willing to help was being compiled and, if their name was chosen, they would be called later.

### 4. Dependent Measure

The critical H level task appeared in every condition and the type of response given to this task provided the data for the dependent variable measure. The type of response was rated on the following six-point scale: 0 = immediately hung up the telephone or an extreme negative response; 1 = polite refusal without an excuse; 2 = refusal with an excuse; 3 = offer to answer the question some other time; 4 = compliance with reluctance; and 5 = unconditional compliance.

A second person, who was unaware of the nature of the experiment,

independently scored the replies of 45 Ss, listening on an extension line. Highly reliable results were obtained,  $r(43) = .96$ ,  $p < .001$ .

On several pretrials, it was observed for the conditions that required two or three requests that some Ss would hang up before all requests could be asked. Since the scores were retained only if the S responded to all the requests, and since it seemed likely that those Ss who hung up before all requests could be asked were more negative and probably would have refused further requests, this procedure would permit a differential biasing factor to operate, depending on the number of requests required for a given experimental condition. To control for this, even though a given condition required less than three requests to obtain a measure for the critical H task, three requests were always made. If an S hung up before the third request could be made, his or her response was not counted. For the H condition, the added request was the E and M level tasks; for the E-H condition, the added request was the M level task; and for the M-H condition, the added request was the E level task. These levels for the added tasks were chosen to balance the difficulty levels of the three tasks.

### C. RESULTS

The dependent variable measure was the type of response Ss gave to the critical H request. An analysis of variance test was carried out for the six mean compliance scores and the results were significant,  $F(5, 114) = 3.65$ ,  $p < .01$ .

The two-request foot-in-the-door condition, E-H ( $M = 2.65$ ), produced significantly more compliance than the H control condition ( $M = 1.90$ ),  $t(114) = 2.14$ ,  $p < .05$ .<sup>2</sup> Thus, the tendency for the typical foot-in-the-door procedure to increase compliance was verified.

Although the mean compliance scores for the M-H ( $M = 2.90$ ), E-E-H ( $M = 3.00$ ), and the E-H-H ( $M = 2.75$ ) conditions were all greater than the mean compliance score for the E-H condition, none of the differences between these means yielded statistically reliable results ( $p > .30$  for all comparisons).

However, the E-M-H ( $M = 3.30$ ) condition produced almost significantly greater compliance than the E-H condition  $t(114) = 1.86$ ,  $p < .06$ .

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<sup>2</sup> The probabilities for the  $t$  tests are based on two-tailed tests.

## D. DISCUSSION

While all three-task foot-in-the-door procedures produced increased compliance when compared to the typical two-task foot-in-the-door, the present study demonstrated that marginally significantly increased compliance was obtained only when the intermediate task was of an M level. The E-H condition increased compliance by 39 percent when compared to the H condition, and the E-M-H condition further increased compliance when compared to the E-H condition by 25 percent.

The results also show that having a second request of an E level following a first E level task did not lead to added compliance for the critical task; an additional E level intervening task did not appear to enhance the helpfulness self-perception. It may be that having several intervening E level tasks would be required before this helpful dispositional evaluation is made, but, of course, this has not been demonstrated here.

Some evidence was obtained that the intervening M level task led to a gradual increase in the self-perception of being a helpful person. By comparing the degree of compliance for the first task in the M-H condition with the degree of compliance for the second task in the E-M-H condition, it was possible to examine whether a gradual change was occurring. The results show that the mean compliance score for the M level task in the three-task procedure was greater than the M level task in the two-task procedure, but not significantly higher.

It may be assumed that an individual making repeated requests would at some point be refused. However, the results obtained here found that following an E-level task with two H-level tasks did not produce a significant change in compliance for the second of the H-level tasks.

The question could be asked whether it was necessary to have an E-level task precede the M-H condition or if the M-level task preceding the critical H task was sufficient by itself to increase compliance. The results indicate that only for the E-M-H condition was compliance almost significantly increased over the E-H condition. Compliance in the M-H condition was not significantly greater than in the E-H condition.

Milgram (8) in his "obedience" study employed a procedure which can be likened to a repeated E-M-H condition. In the "obedience" study, an S was asked to help the E by appropriately shocking the learner. Initially the task was easy, administering a 15-volt shock. The S was next requested to move to the subsequent shock level, a short 15-volt step above the previous one, and this procedure continued. The completion of each task (administering

shock) served as a "foot" for the next successive task. Thus, it may be that Milgram was not merely examining the extent of obedient behavior in the Ss, but, by the use of his experimental manipulation, was actually causing the Ss to become more obedient. The repeated series of trials may have induced the Ss to form a self-concept that they were the kind of individuals who helped an *E* collect psychological data even if it meant shocking an innocent victim. To test the obedience level that the Ss possessed at the start of the study, Milgram would have had to devise a procedure which required the Ss to immediately shock the learner at the highest voltage level. The results of the current study suggest that Milgram may have unknowingly illustrated how effective the repeated use of the "foot" procedure is for creating extreme levels of compliance.

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