

Effects of Initial Request Size and Timing of a Second Request on Compliance: The Foot in the Door and the Door in the Face

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A field experiment tested four separate procedures for influencing compliance to the second of two requests. Two factors—size of initial request and timing of the second request—were included in a 2×2 factorial design. Subjects were induced either to comply with a small initial request or to refuse a large initial request. They then received a moderate request either immediately (no delay) or 7-10 days later (delay). Compliance to the second request was the dependent measure. The results in the two delay conditions and the small-request—no-delay condition supported a self-perception position in that the induction of one kind of behavior (compliance or noncompliance) carried over to affect subsequent behavior similarly. The large-request—no-delay condition supported a bargaining explanation, as initial refusal to comply led to an increase in subsequent compliance. Possible processes that could account for these results are discussed.

There has been a recent upsurge of interest in the effects of initial requests on subsequent compliance. The impetus for the research in this area comes from a study by Freedman and Fraser (1966), which reports a "foot-in-the-door" technique for increasing compliance. Freedman and Fraser found that the probability of obtaining compliance to a request having a low a priori probability of agreement could be substantially increased by first requesting and obtaining compliance with a behavior having a high probability of agreement. The effect showed surprising generality. Compliance to the second request increased even when the first request concerned an unrelated topic and was made by a different person. These results have been strongly replicated by Pliner, Hart, Kohl, and Saari (1974).

Freedman and Fraser (1966) suggested that the initial agreement causes:

a change in the person's feelings about getting involved or about taking action. Once he has agreed to a request, his attitude may change. He may become, in his own eyes, the kind of person

who does this sort of thing, who agrees to requests made by strangers, who takes action on things he believes in, who cooperates with good causes. (p. 201)

This change in self-perception makes it more likely that the person will comply with a second request.

The Freedman and Fraser explanation is quite similar to one that would be derived from attribution theory (Kelley, 1973) or self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). These theories propose that one's self-attributions are often determined from observations of his own behavior and the situational context in which the behavior occurs. A self-attribution results when a response is emitted in the absence of sufficient external causal factors. Self-attributions must be incorporated into one's self-perception. Compliance, in the absence of external pressure, should lead to the assignment of dispositional attributes to the self that are consistent with this compliance. The self-perception then acts to mediate behavior in subsequent situations.

One implication of the self-perception explanation is that if subsequent compliance is increased by inducing initial agreement, then it should be decreased by inducing non-compliance to the first request. That is, a person who refuses to comply with an initial

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request may perceive himself as a noncomplier or someone who does not always perform socially desirable acts. A test of this proposal is contained in a study by Snyder and Cunningham (1975). Using a procedure similar to Freedman and Fraser's, subjects were asked to comply first either with a large request, having a low probability of eliciting compliance, or with a small request having a high probability of eliciting compliance. In line with the Freedman and Fraser study and self-perception theory in general, subjects who received the small initial request were more likely to agree to a moderate second request than were control subjects who received only the moderate request. Furthermore, subjects who received the large initial request were less likely to comply with the subsequent moderate request than were control subjects. A subtle induction of one kind of behavior makes it more likely that a similar and consistent type of response will occur in a second situation.

The research thus far has involved the induction of a response by controlling the situation in which an initial request is made and then creating a somewhat similar situation in the future. The findings indicate that the response in the second situation is quite likely to be similar to the one induced initially: Compliance produces compliance and noncompliance produces noncompliance. Obviously, the size of the initial request is an important factor in this paradigm. What about the timing of the second request? Is it important for there to be a delay between the two requests in order to observe the effects obtained thus far?

In contrast to the results of Snyder and Cunningham (1975) and the self-perception explanation of the subsequent rate of compliance after an initial request, Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, & Wheeler (1975) found that a refusal to comply with an initially large request led to an *increased* rate of compliance to a second more moderate request. One major difference between the two experiments was the timing of the second request. In the Snyder and Cunningham study, the second request followed the initial one by several days. On the other hand, subjects in the Cialdini et al. experiments were

asked to respond to the second request immediately after their noncompliance with the large initial request. Thus, it would seem that the timing of the second request is an important variable to be considered, and the results of Cialdini et al. suggest that a process other than self-perception operates in the large-initial-request-no-delay condition.

Cialdini et al. (1975) argued that this particular interpersonal situation, an interaction in which a series of requests are made contemporaneously, is conceptually similar to a bargaining interaction. In bargaining studies, researchers have found that a concession by one party is usually met by a concession from the other party (Benton, Kelley, & Liebling, 1972; Komorita & Brenner, 1968). Thus, if one person concedes from his original position to a position more favorable to the other, the other person should also be willing to make some concession from his previous position. Gouldner (1960) has termed this obligation to match another's concession the norm of reciprocity.

In the Cialdini et al. (1975) compliance situation, the large initial request by the experimenter may be thought of as representing his opening offer. The subject's refusal establishes his initial position. When the experimenter then immediately makes a smaller request, this constitutes a concession on his part. Since the only concession available to the subject is a change to a compliant response, the probability of compliance is increased. In three separate studies, Cialdini et al. found the predicted increase in compliance using this rejection-then-moderation technique.

A second difference between the Cialdini et al. study and the Snyder and Cunningham (1975) study is that Snyder and Cunningham used two experimenters to make the two requests, whereas Cialdini et al. used only one person. This may be an important variation, since Cialdini et al. have shown in one of their studies (Experiment 2) that compliance to the moderate request does not increase unless the same person makes both requests. Cialdini et al. have claimed that when two requesters are used, the situation is no longer comparable to a bargaining interaction.

In relation to the previous studies reviewed, the Cialdini et al. studies are unique in that the subjects' responses to the second request are opposite in nature to the responses induced via the initial request. In every other case, the induction of compliance produced heightened compliance, and the induction of noncompliance resulted in decreased compliance. Now initial noncompliance increases compliance.

A second study that involves two requests without a delay between them was reported by Harris (1972). Harris found that subjects who were asked a trivial initial request showed greater compliance to a second larger request made immediately thereafter. She suggested that the initial agreement increases subsequent compliance because it increases the salience of a social responsibility norm. Since the Harris study is the only one that has tested the particular procedure whereby a small request is followed by a larger one during the same interaction, the generality of the phenomenon remains to be demonstrated. Actually, a reactance (Brehm, 1966) explanation might predict a decrease in compliance using this procedure. The contemporaneous escalation of the requests may be perceived by the subject as a threat to his behavioral freedom and may cause him to refuse the second request as a means of asserting his behavioral freedom and to avoid feeling that he is being taken advantage of.

In review, previous research in the area has suggested that two variables may adequately account for the results of initial requests upon subsequent compliance. First, the size of the initial request is an important consideration. Whether the first request induces compliance or noncompliance may affect the response to the subsequent request. The second variable, timing of the second request, apparently interacts with initial request size to affect the eventual compliance rate.

EXPERIMENT I

The present study includes the four possible conditions in a 2×2 (Initial Request \times Delay) factorial design. A fifth group of subjects, the control group, receives only the second request.

The hypotheses to be tested are as follows:

1. When a small request is made initially, compliance to the second request should increase (relative to the control group) regardless of the timing of the second request. Such a prediction can be made on the basis of previous foot-in-the-door research with delay (Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Pliner et al., 1974) and without delay (Harris, 1972).

2. When a large request (virtually certain to induce noncompliance) is made initially, a more moderate request made immediately thereafter should produce heightened compliance (relative to the control group); however, a delayed moderate request should produce decreased compliance. Thus different processes should be involved in the no-delay and delay conditions. With no delay, the situation is likely to be construed as a bargaining situation where one party is seeking accommodation to the requests of the other. However, using delays of up to 10 days between requests would minimize the possibility that the second exchange would be viewed as a continuation of the initial encounter. In such a case, self-attribution processes ought to predominate, and initial refusal of a request should cause a decrease in compliance to a subsequent request.

METHOD

Overview

A male experimenter, identifying himself as a member of a local group promoting traffic safety, contacted residents of the community by telephone. Initially, a subject was asked to comply with one of two requests, either small or large. Subsequently, the experimenter made a second request of an intermediate nature, either during the same conversation or 7-10 days later. A fifth group, the control cell, received only the intermediate request. Thus a 2×2 factorial design was employed, with the size of the initial request and the timing of the intermediate request serving as independent variables. The dependent variable was the amount of compliance to the intermediate request.

Procedure

The subjects were 88 residents of Bloomington, Indiana, chosen at random from the telephone directory. Three were not included in the final analysis, as they could not be contacted for the second request within the predetermined period.

All contacts were made by a male experimenter on weekdays from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. When a

second contact was required, an attempt was made one week later. Any subjects who could not be recontacted within 10 days of the initial contact were excluded. This was done to keep the interval between contacts as homogeneous as possible.

All subjects received the following introduction during the first contact: "Hello, Mr. (Ms.) _____, my name is _____. I am a member of the Citizen's Committee for Traffic Safety. Our organization is primarily interested in collecting information about traffic patterns in the city, isolating major problem areas, and seeing that the appropriate improvements are made. To do this, we have to have some community support."

This was followed by one of the two requests. The small request was delivered as follows: "Since we are just getting started, we are trying to collect some background information. Would you mind answering a few short questions for us?" If the subject agreed, the experimenter asked the following three questions: (a) "Do you own a car?"; (b) "How many members in your household drive or have a driver's license?"; and (c) "Do you usually wear seat belts when you drive?" The subject was then thanked, and the contact ended.

In the large-request condition subjects were asked: "We would like to know if you would be willing to assist us in collecting some information. This would involve your spending about 2 hours at the intersection of Third street and the Bypass and keeping a record of the traffic flow in each direction, that is, counting the number of cars passing in each direction. Would you be willing to do this?"

If compliance was obtained, the experimenter said he would call back at another time to set up a schedule if the subject's help was needed.

The intermediate request was made either immediately after the subject's response to the first request (no delay) or 7-10 days later during a second phone contact (delay): "Right now we are also interested in promoting traffic safety, and we would like to come into contact with as many people as possible. We would like to send you 15 of our pamphlets dealing with traffic safety and ask that you pass them out to people in your neighborhood. Would you be willing to do that?"

When the intermediate request was made 7-10 days later, the following brief introduction preceded the request: "Hello, Mr. (Ms.) _____. This is _____ of the Citizens Committee for Traffic Safety calling again. As you probably remember, our organization is concerned with looking at traffic problems in the area."

Subjects who agreed to the intermediate request were told that the pamphlets would be sent out if the Committee needed their help.

Finally, the control condition consisted of the first introductory paragraph followed by the intermediate request.

In terms of the experimenter's phenomenology, he was naturally aware of the experimental conditions of the control group and the two no-delay conditions. However, for the two delay conditions, while

TABLE 1
PROPORTIONS OF SUBJECTS AGREEING TO THE INITIAL REQUEST

Size of initial request	Timing of the second request	
	No delay	Delay
Small	23/23	20/20
Large	3/21	2/21

he knew that the subject had been previously contacted, he was blind as to whether that initial contact had involved a large or small request. Since the effects of initial contact on compliance for the delayed requests differed as a function of whether the initial request was large or small and since the experimenter was blind to the size of that initial request, any difference in compliance rates between large-request-delay and small-request-delay conditions cannot be attributed to experimenter bias.

RESULTS

Compliance with the Initial Request

The proportions of subjects who agreed to comply with the initial requests in each of the four conditions are shown in Table 1. A chi-square analysis comparing those subjects who received the small initial request with those receiving the large request was highly significant, $\chi^2(1) = 66.96$, $p < .001$. All of the subjects who received the small initial request agreed to perform it. Of those receiving the large initial request, however, only 12% agreed. Clearly, the initial request size manipulation was successful.

Compliance with the Moderate Request

The main dependent variable was the number of people in each condition who agreed to the moderate request. Table 2 contains these proportions. Since a Request Size \times Timing interaction was predicted, the procedure described by Langer and Abelson

TABLE 2
PROPORTIONS OF SUBJECTS AGREEING TO THE SECOND REQUEST

Size of initial request	Timing of the second request	
	No delay	Delay
Small	18/23	14/20
Large	19/21	6/21

Note. The control group proportion was 13 agreements and 13 refusals.

(1972) to test for an interaction with the data in the form of proportions was used, with arc sine transformations of the proportions. Results showed that the interaction effect was highly significant ($z = 2.79$, $p < .003$, two-tailed).

An examination of Table 2 reveals that the effect is due to the differential effect of timing when the initial request is large. Following initial noncompliance, a moderate request made immediately is agreed to at a high rate (90% compliance), but a moderate request made after a delay is usually refused (29% compliance).

To assess the magnitudes of these effects, it was necessary to compare the compliance rates in the experimental groups with the rate in the control group. The first comparison involved the three groups (small request-no delay, small request-delay, and large request-no delay) in which an increase in compliance was predicted. There were no significant differences among these groups, $\chi^2(2) = 2.715$, $p < .20$. The data from these three cells were therefore combined and compared to the control. This test yielded a highly significant difference ($z = 2.83$, $p < .003$, one-tailed).¹ Thus, none of the groups in which an increase was predicted differed from each other, and the proportion of agreements in these cells was significantly higher than the control proportion.

Finally, the one cell in which a decrease was predicted was compared to the control group. The test confirmed that the compliance rate in the large-request-delay cell was lower than that in the control group ($z = 1.49$, $p < .068$, one-tailed).

EXPERIMENT 2

Although the first experiment showed rather solid support for the predictions, one possible problem must be taken into account. While the experimenter was blind as to the size of the initial request made of all delay subjects (and thus any results in the delay conditions are free from experimenter bias), he was obviously aware of the subjects' condition in the no-delay conditions. In addition, the ex-

perimenter was not completely ignorant of the various possibilities for the results. While he had no prediction for any specific pattern of results, the pattern that emerged was consistent with one set of expectations. The script was held to quite rigidly, and the experimenter was well trained in keeping his responses and demeanor constant, rendering experimenter bias less likely; yet, it seemed appropriate to replicate the no-delay conditions with an experimenter totally blind as to the experimental hypotheses and area of research.²

This study constituted a replication of the no-delay and control conditions of Experiment 1. The only difference was the use of a new experimenter, one completely naive as to any of the experimental hypotheses and to the area of research. Subjects were 60 residents of Bloomington, Indiana, chosen at random from the telephone directory. Two subjects could not be included in the analysis because they hung up before even listening to the initial request.

RESULTS

In the small-initial-request condition, all 18 subjects agreed to the request. The large initial request produced compliance in only two of 20 subjects. An analysis of these data yields a highly significant effect, $\chi^2(1) = 32.72$, $p < .001$. The manipulation of initial behavior was again quite successful.

The compliance rates to the moderate request are shown in Table 3. As in the initial experiment, the first analysis compared the two experimental groups, since both were predicted to produce increases. No significant difference was found, $\chi^2(1) = .037$, $p < .20$. The data from these two groups were then combined and compared to the control group. This analysis yielded a highly significant difference ($z = 2.17$, $p < .015$, one-tailed). As in Experiment 1, when there was no delay between the two requests, there was an increase in compliance regardless of the size of the initial request, and again, the increases were not significantly different.

¹ This statistical treatment is the same as that suggested by Snyder and Cunningham (1975).

² This use of naive experimenters in no-delay compliance studies has typically been used in previous studies (Cialdini et al., 1975; Harris, 1972).

TABLE 3
PROPORTION OF SUBJECTS AGREEING TO THE MODERATE
REQUEST IN EXPERIMENT 2

Response	Initial request size		
	Small	Large	Control
Agree	13	15	9
Refuse	5	5	11

DISCUSSION

The pattern of results that has been obtained is fully consistent with the predictions derived from earlier studies in compliance. By using a design that included both of the apparently relevant factors (size of initial request and timing between requests), it was possible to determine how these factors interacted while equating other extraneous factors. The decision as to an appropriate strategy for influencing compliance via a sequence of requests involves choosing an initial request with an appropriate probability of acceptance and determining the optimal time at which to make the critical request.

If a small favor is requested initially, the timing of the second or critical request is of little importance. In either instance, whether the critical request is made immediately or after a considerable delay, the effect of compliance to the small initial request is to raise the level of compliance. No specific predictions were made concerning the relative superiority of one or the other procedure for increasing compliance. Previous research had found increases in compliance both when the initial request was small and the requests were made together (Harris, 1972) and when they were separated in time (Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Pliner et al., 1974; Snyder & Cunningham, 1975). The present results would seem to indicate that there is actually very little difference in the compliance rates obtained in the small-request-no-delay condition and the small-request-delay condition.

The timing of the second request, relative to the initial request is, however, a crucial consideration when the initial request is large and has a very low probability of gaining compliance. This sequence of requests can be used to either increase or decrease the subse-

quent rates of compliance. If both requests are made during the same interaction, an increase in compliance to the second request results. On the other hand, the institution of a delay between the requests, such that they are made during separate contacts, leads to a decrease in compliance. The magnitude of the difference between the compliance rates in large-request-no-delay and large-request-delay cells testifies to the importance of arranging the requests in an appropriate temporal relationship.

The results in the present study provide a replication and integration of a number of findings that previously had been obtained in isolated studies by other researchers. In speculating about the possible processes that are causal in these techniques, it would seem useful to consider the interpretations proposed by previous researchers.

The small-request-delay and large-request-delay conditions are best considered together, since they can be interpreted easily within a single theoretical framework: self-perception. The results of these two cells provide strong support for such a theoretical explanation. The subject is placed in a free-choice situation and confronted with a request that is so trivial or so extreme that compliance or noncompliance is nearly automatic. When in the second situation, the subject is again confronted with a request from a stranger for help with another similar cause, the behavior that was initially induced is likely to be repeated. Compliance yields an increased probability of compliance, and noncompliance produces greater noncompliance. The inferred cognitive process is the integration of a self-attributed behavior into a general self-perception that the subject maintains concerning the appropriate responses to particular situational cues. The self-attribution occurs because the initial response is induced in a free-choice situation, so that no external pressures can be perceived as causal. The self-attribution affects self-perception in such a way that a similar response is perceived as appropriate in a subsequent situation containing similar external cues. Thus, either an increase or a decrease in compliance can be predicted depending upon the initially induced behavior.

Lepper (1973) has shown within the context of the forbidden-toy paradigm that a subtle indication of compliance in one situation has a predictable effect on behavior in another situation. When the subject is given insufficient external justification for his behavior, that behavior appears to influence his subsequent behavior in related situations. This same principle is exploited in the typical foot-in-the-door compliance situations.

A self-perception analysis may also account for the results of our small-request-no-delay condition. Subjects who agreed to an initial small request were more likely than controls to comply with a second larger request when it followed immediately after the first. However, Harris (1972) has presented a second possible explanation: the salience of a social responsibility norm. Compliance to the initial trivial request makes one more aware of the social acceptability of altruistic behaviors. When the second request is made, the subject is still in this heightened state of awareness, so he or she is more likely to comply. Such a norm-salience explanation can easily account for the findings in the small-request-no-delay cell. It may even account for the findings in the small-request-delay cell (although not in such a straightforward manner), since it might be argued that social responsibility norms are made salient again at the time of the second contact. However, the norm-salience explanation can probably be dismissed in that helping norms are equally salient in both delay conditions. Both involve an appeal for a worthy cause, a situation designed to make helping norms salient. Yet the conditions differ greatly in terms of the degree of compliance obtained. The fact that a condition with salient helping norms (large-request-delay) showed a decrease in level of compliance renders the norm-salience explanation implausible.

Continuing with a discussion of the small-request-no-delay condition, it was previously noted that a reactance explanation may provide a theoretical basis for expecting a decrease in compliance for this case. If a subject perceives that the smaller request is being used to induce him to agree to larger and larger requests, he may respond negatively to the larger requests as an assertion of his

behavioral freedom. Reactance theory predicts that when an individual perceives an attempt to restrict his behavioral freedom, he responds in the direction opposite to the perceived pressure in order to demonstrate his freedom of choice. Although the request sequence in the small-request-no-delay condition does represent an escalation of requests, and could therefore arouse reactance, Berkowitz (1973) has distinguished between requests that should and those that should not arouse reactance. He has suggested that the perceived obligation to help another may overcome any aroused reactance if helpfulness in the situation is clearly established as socially desirable. This is especially likely to occur if the requests are not based on any personal wishes or needs of the requester. It may be that if the requests are of a personal nature such that the requester will be the recipient of gains, reactance will be aroused and there will be a decrease in compliance with no-delay escalated requests.

In the present study, the social desirability of the requests was emphasized. The alleged purpose of the fictitious citizen's group, to improve traffic safety, was stressed as one that would benefit all residents of the community. Further, the requests were independent of any personal needs or the self-caused deficiencies of the requester. These two factors should, therefore, minimize any reactance that might be aroused by the escalation in the size of the requests.

There is, in fact, some indication in one study by Cialdini et al. (1975) that reactance may cause a compliance decrement even with contemporaneous decreasing request sizes. In their two-experimenter control condition, the second experimenter reminds the subject of his initial refusal of the larger request prior to suggesting that he might instead be able to comply with a smaller request. This procedure would seem to emphasize the subject's obligation to do something rather than the social desirability of the act. The proportion of subjects who complied with the second experimenter was considerably lower in this condition than in any other reported. The possibility that reactance caused this decrease is real and should probably be examined more closely.

The only condition in which a self-perception explanation seems inappropriate is the large-request-no-delay cell in which non-compliance to the initial request causes a marked increase in compliance to the second request. Since the *only* difference between the large-request-no-delay and large-request-delay conditions in the present study is the temporal relationship between the two requests, this would seem to be the critical difference between the Snyder and Cunningham results and those of Cialdini et al. (rather than the fact that the former study involved two different requesters, while the latter involved one).

There are several possible processes that may account for the increased compliance in the large-request-no-delay cell. First, and most likely in the light of the previous research by Cialdini et al. (1975), is the operation of the bargaining-concession process discussed previously. In addition, self-perception changes assumed to occur in the delay condition probably require some amount of time to have an effect. The cognitive work necessary to alter the self-perception may impose a lower limit on the time between two requests if the initial behavior is to function as an input for making an inference that will affect subsequent behavior.

A second possibility is that the mechanism leading to an increase in compliance in the large-request-no-delay condition is a perceptual contrast effect. By initially asking a very large request, the second request may be perceived as smaller than it would have been if it alone had been presented. If someone asked you for \$5 and then changed his request to a quarter, the quarter would seem more trivial than if it had been asked for initially. Such a contrast effect would be operational only if the second request followed soon enough after the first that the initial request was still salient. When a delay procedure is used, the contrast may not occur because the requests are perceived independently of each other.

Whatever the process involved in the large-request-no-delay situation, it is unique in that the subjects' responses to the two requests are inconsistent. That is to say, in every other cell the response induced to the

initial request, whether compliance or non-compliance, increases the probability of a similar response. In the large-request-no-delay condition, the probability of the opposite response is increased; noncompliance leads to greater compliance.

One final possibility for making sense of the results is an interpretation based on dissonance reduction. In the small-request conditions, subjects resolve their conflict about complying with the requests of others by convincing themselves that the issues involved are important or that they are the kind of people who get socially involved. This leads to an increased probability of compliance with subsequent requests. In the large-request-no-delay condition, the subject refuses to comply with a request for help in a social cause. He probably feels some conflict about this and can easily resolve this conflict by complying with the second request, which is offered immediately. In the absence of this immediate request (large request-delay), a different path of conflict resolution must be taken. During the delay, the subject can reduce dissonance by derogating the requester or the social cause, leading to a reduction in compliance to the delayed request.

There are other questions that can now be asked regarding the behavioral effects of induced compliance. If there is actually a change in self-perception caused by this procedure, then there should be changes in subject's reports on self-evaluation scales. The major problem in the implementation of this test of the explanation is determining how the subject classifies the type of change that has occurred. Bem and Allen (1974) have outlined the extreme difficulty that one may have in developing appropriate tools for making this type of evaluation. A second question involves the long-term effects of induced changes in self-perceptions. Will subjects who have been exposed to this procedure be increasingly susceptible to subsequent requests, or will they eventually reach a ceiling level and show no further increases in their probability of compliance? Theoretically, there would seem to be no limit if a sound procedure were employed in inducing greater and greater compliance.

Finally, there is the question of how far

these effects will generalize to related situations. If a subject is induced to comply with a socially desirable request, then is he more likely to comply with any other requests or only with socially desirable ones? Also, will other types of altruistic behaviors be affected by the self-perception change? If a subject is initially asked to donate a small sum of money to a conservation organization, is he then more likely to help elderly people cross busy intersections? Some of these generalizations may depend heavily on how the subject has categorized his behavior, and the answers may have to await appropriate means to gain access to his cognitive organization in this regard.

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