

---

---

## The Effectiveness of Honesty and Deceit as Influence Tactics

FRANK J. MONTEVERDE  
RICHARD PASCHKE  
JAMES T. TEDESCHI\*

State University of New York at Albany

---

---

*Subjects possessed a unilateral power advantage over a simulated opponent in a Prisoner's Dilemma game. In response to the subjects' threats demanding a cooperative response, the simulated target verbally announced behavioral intentions and his subsequent responses were manipulated in a 2 by 2 factorial design: (1) Honest-Compliant, (2) Honest-Defiant, (3) Dishonest-Compliant, and (4) Dishonest-Defiant. It was found that subjects sent more threats to a compliant than a defiant target. When the target was Honest-Compliant, he converted the subjects into mutual cooperators; but when he was Dishonest-Compliant, subjects exploited him. While behavioral defiance generally inhibited subjects from sending threats, when the defiant target used deceit in the form of announcing intentions to comply, he induced subjects to make themselves vulnerable to exploitation.*

Conciliatory gestures in the face of threats from an adversary are typically viewed as signs of weakness which are apt to encourage a threatener to intensify his demands. Halle stated that "defenselessness in others invites the assertion of one's own relative power, arousing the instinct of the bully in man and beast, and in nations (1967:139)." In a partial test of this hypothesis, Tedeschi *et al.* (1970) provided subjects with the capability to threaten and punish a simulated target in the context of a Prisoner's Dilemma game (PDG). When the simulated target openly announced his intent to comply and followed through with actual compliance, he converted subjects

---

\*Reprint requests should be sent to Dr. James T. Tedeschi, Psychology Department, State University of New York at Albany, 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12222. The authors take this opportunity to thank Laura Greenblatt, Ron Ludman, Ken Meyer, Mike Madjoras, Barry Nelson, and Cindy Youngs for their assistance in collecting the data.

into cooperative partners. The honest prior announcement of the intent to resist threats discouraged the subjects from sending threats. Failure to announce compliance verbally led subjects to exploit the behaviorally compliant target. These results were interpreted as supporting Osgood's (1962) proposal that a unilateral conciliatory strategy meant to reduce tensions in conflict situations must be preannounced.

Bonoma *et al.* (1974) have shown that even dishonest announcements of cooperative intent may be effective in luring an adversary into making self-defeating cooperative responses. Subjects were given intermittent opportunities to send unilateral promises of intent to cooperate in a mixed motive game. A simulated player responded to subjects' promises with either an identical promise of next trial cooperation or a statement refusing to reveal his strategy intentions. It was found that subjects sent more promises to an adversary who was behaviorally cooperative than to one who was behaviorally competitive. However, the subjects kept their promises more often when the target's verbal reply was a reciprocal promise than when it was evasive. Contrary to Osgood's GRIT proposal and contrary to reinforcement theory, subjects were just as cooperative and honest in their use of promises whether the target was honest or dishonest, as long as the target's stated intention was that he would be cooperative.

The basic question addressed by the present study was whether the consistent dishonest announcement of the intent to comply to a source's threats would be effective in converting a threatener into a cooperative partner or whether such tactics would only anger the source and hence cause him to become more coercive and exploitative. The subjects were given a unilateral power advantage in a PDG and had the capability of sending intermittent threats demanding cooperation from a simulated target. The simulated target was constrained by the rules of play to verbally answer the threatener before making his behavioral choice in the game. If the simulated target did not comply to the subjects' demand for cooperation, the latter could punish the target by deducting a side-payoff from him. In a 2 by 2 factorial design the simulated target either verbally replied that he would be compliant or defiant and then either behaviorally complied to the threatener's demand or defied it. It was hypothesized that: (1) subjects would send more threats to a behaviorally compliant than to a behaviorally defiant target, and (2) subjects would be more benevolent in the use of their threats when the target was verbally compliant than when he was verbally defiant.



## METHOD

*Subjects*

Forty males fulfilled an introductory psychology course requirement by participation in a study described to them as one of joint decision making. The subjects believed they were participating in the experiment with a stranger of the same sex, though in fact they interacted with a simulated player in the PDG. Subjects were randomized over the four cells of the experiment as they appeared in the laboratory.

*Procedure*

A complete description of the game equipment can be found in Tedeschi *et al.* (1971). Subjects read dittoed instructions about the rules of play. When the experimenter observed through a one-way mirror that the subject was no longer attending to either the instructions or the apparatus, he re-entered the experimental cubicle and reviewed the procedure by paraphrasing the written instructions. Questions were answered by referring to the appropriate part of the instructions or the relevant features of the apparatus. Conflict related words such as "game," "opponent," "cooperation," "competition," "win," "threat," and "punishment" were not used during the instructions. An individualistic instructional set emphasized that the subject's goal was to obtain as many points as he could during the course of the experiment.

The instructions explained the rudiments of Prisoner's Dilemma play and reviewed the contingencies between strategy choices and outcomes. Subjects were told that intermittently during the course of the interaction the white communication light would illuminate for a period of 10 seconds during which time they could choose to send their one available message to the "other person." The message posted on the outgoing side of the subject's panel read, "If you do not make Choice 1 on the next trial, I will take 10 points from your counter." Subjects were informed that the "other person" could not initiate sending messages, but if the subject sent a message to him, the "other person" was constrained to reply with one of his three available messages. The three messages posted on the incoming side of the subject's panel were: (M1) "I intend to make Choice 1 on the next trial"; (M2) "I intend to make Choice 2 on the next trial"; and (M3) "I do not wish to disclose my intentions."

An iteration of the PDG followed the message option period. If an exchange of messages occurred and the simulated target made Choice

2 (defied the threat), then a red light illuminated for a period of ten seconds, indicating to the subject that he could push the penalty button and subtract ten points from the simulated target's cumulative counter. Following this penalty period, regular PDG play resumed.

The behaviors of the simulated target were strictly controlled and variations constituted the independent variable manipulations. In the *Honest-Compliant* condition the simulated target always replied to the subjects' threats with M1 and always made the cooperative choice (Choice 1) on the subsequent trial of the PDG. In the *Dishonest-Compliant* condition the simulated target always replied to the subjects' threats with M2 and always made the cooperative strategy selection in compliance to the subjects' verbal demands. In the *Honest-Defiant* condition the simulated target always responded to threats with a M2 reply and the defiant strategy selection (Choice 2). In the *Dishonest-Defiant* condition the simulated target used the reply message indicating that he would make Choice 1 and then always made the defiant response. In all conditions the simulated target alternated cooperative and competitive strategy selections in an *abba* order on those message-option trials on which a subject chose not to send a message. Finally, on all nonmessage-related PDG trials, the simulated target followed a preplanned but unpatterned 50% cooperative and 50% competitive strategy that was the same for all subjects. Subjects were provided with 20 message options over the course of the 100 PDG trials. These message options were distributed rather regularly over trials, with two occurring within each block of ten PDG trials.

Following game play, subjects were removed to small individual testing cubicles and were asked to provide their impressions of the "other person" on a shortened form of the Semantic Differential (Osgood *et al.*, 1957). The Semantic Differential contained 12 polar adjectives which were scored from +3 to -3. The evaluative dimension was represented by the adjectives good-bad, kind-cruel, honest-dishonest, and beneficial-harmful. The potency dimension was represented by the adjectives hard-soft, strong-weak, severe-lenient, and rash-cautious. The adjectives representing the activity dimension were active-passive, progressive-regressive, changeable-stable, and excitable-calm. A score was obtained for each dimension by simply summing the ratings of the four appropriate adjectives.

Following completion of the Semantic Differential, questions by subjects were answered as long as they did not relate to the hypotheses and deceptions of the study. Full debriefing was carried out in class after the data had been analyzed. At that time, the



purposes, design, hypotheses, results, deceptions, and interpretation of the study were fully discussed with the subjects, as were ethical standards of laboratory research.

## RESULTS

### *Communication and Enforcement of Threats*

In confirmation of the first hypothesis, the behavioral compliance or defiance of the simulated target produced a main effect on the frequency with which subjects sent threats ( $F = 22.181$ ,  $df = 1/36$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Subjects sent more threats to a behaviorally compliant ( $\bar{X} = 17.6$ ) than to a behaviorally defiant ( $\bar{X} = 11.95$ ) target. The verbal replies of the target had no effect either by themselves or in interaction with the targets' behaviors on how frequently subjects sent threats to him ( $p$ 's  $> .10$ ). Subjects established high credibility for their threats in both target defiance conditions ( $F = 2.74$ ,  $df = 1/18$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

### *Cooperation on Threat-relevant Trials*

In confirmation of the second hypothesis, the degree of benevolence displayed by subjects in the use of threats was significantly affected by the type of reply message sent by the simulated target ( $F = 7.445$ ,  $df = 1/36$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The subjects cooperated more on threat-relevant trials when the simulated target said he would be compliant ( $\bar{X} = .614$ ) than when he said he would be defiant ( $\bar{X} = .344$ ). The actual compliant or defiant behavior of the simulated target had no effect on the subjects' cooperative responding on threat-relevant trials either by itself or in interaction with the target's verbal replies ( $p$ 's  $> .10$ ).

### *Cooperation on Non-message Trials*

There were no significant main or interaction effects on the proportion of cooperative strategy selections by subjects on PD trials not preceded by message exchanges (all  $p$ 's  $> .05$ ).<sup>1</sup>

### *Impressions of the Other Person*

A separate analysis of the honest-dishonest ratings of the simulated target was carried out as a manipulation check. Of course,

---

<sup>1</sup>The main effect of behavioral response on the subject's cooperation on non-message trials approached statistical significance ( $p < .07$ ). Subjects in the compliant conditions were more cooperative on nonmessage trials ( $\bar{X} = .463$ ) than were subjects in the defiant conditions ( $\bar{X} = .380$ ).

TABLE 1

*Group Comparisons on Honest and Evaluative Ratings\**  
(Duncan Range Test)

	Honest Compliant	Honest Defiant	Dishonest Compliant	Dishonest Defiant
Honest-Dishonest	2.20 <sub>a</sub>	2.11 <sub>a</sub>	-.10 <sub>b</sub>	-2.00 <sub>c</sub>
Evaluative	4.30 <sub>d</sub>	2.44 <sub>d</sub>	1.10	-2.90 <sub>e</sub>

\*Means with a common subscript were not significantly different ( $p > .05$ ).

both of the independent variables were implicated in the truthfulness or deceitfulness of the simulated target's communications. Although there were main effects of both the target's verbal replies ( $F = 4.123$ ,  $df = 1/35$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and actual responses to threats ( $F = 6.707$ ,  $df = 1/35$ ,  $p < .02$ ), the interpretation of this variable rests upon the expected significant interaction ( $F = 58.971$ ,  $df = 1/35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A summary of the differences between means is presented in Table 1 and indicates that the simulated target was rated as quite honest in both the Honest-Compliant and Honest-Defiant conditions and as quite dishonest in the Dishonest-Defiant condition. Though perceived as somewhat dishonest in the Dishonest-Compliant condition, the simulated target was rated as significantly less dishonest than he was in the Dishonest-Defiant condition and significantly less honest than he was in either the Honest-Compliant or Honest-Defiant conditions.

The only other significant results obtained from the Semantic Differential ratings were on the Evaluative dimension. A main effect of the simulated target's behavioral response to threats ( $F = 7.477$ ,  $df = 1/35$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and an interaction of both experimental factors ( $F = 14.724$ ,  $df = 1/35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were found on the positive-negative evaluations of the simulated target. In the compliant conditions the simulated target was rated as evaluatively positive ( $\bar{X} = +2.70$ ) while in the defiant conditions he was rated as evaluatively negative ( $\bar{X} = -.456$ ). The Duncan Range tests summarized in Table 1 show that the most negative ratings occurred when the simulated target was both dishonest and behaviorally defiant to the subject's threats.

## DISCUSSION

Whenever the simulated target complied with a threat transmitted to him by subjects, the latter were assured of winning points in the PDG. Behavioral defiance by the simulated target ensured that the



subjects would lose points no matter what strategy selection they made. As both common sense and reinforcement theory might predict, subjects sent more threats to a compliant than to a defiant target. The readiness of subjects to use their threats benevolently was indicated by their responsiveness to the simulated target's verbal statements of intentions, independent of the behavioral choice he subsequently made. When the simulated target said he would make the cooperative choice in reply to a threat issued by subjects, the latter more often cooperated on the threat-relevant trials than was the case when the simulated target stated his intention to be defiant in reply to the subjects' demands for a cooperative response. The subjects' reliance on the simulated target's verbal statements of intention even when subjects were clearly betrayed by subsequent responses (i.e., punished for such displays of trust) is similar to a finding reported by Bonoma *et al.* (1974) in a study of noncontingent promises.

In his GRIT proposal, Osgood (1962) argued that the way to reduce tension and resolve conflict was for one of the adversaries to honestly and openly announce his intention to be cooperative and rewarding. The results of the present study and that of Bonoma *et al.* indicate that the mere announcement of cooperative intentions even when demonstrably dishonest may be successful in eliciting positive reciprocity. The power of words to cause subjects to engage in self-defeating behaviors even when the adversary was perceived as dishonest suggests that a weak party in conflictful dyadic interactions can effectively use deceit and lies to reap advantage. Dishonest defiance both inhibited the powerful party from sending threats and induced him to make himself vulnerable to the exploitative strategy of the weaker party. Furthermore, neither the practice of deceit nor the defiant behavior of the simulated target affected the costs associated with nonmessage interactions. Although there was an unreliable tendency for subjects to behave more cooperatively on nonmessage trials when the simulated target was behaviorally compliant rather than defiant, the strategies and tactics adopted during the message-relevant trials of the PDG did not significantly exacerbate or ameliorate the degree of conflict between players on the other iterations of the game.

Support for the effectiveness of deceit as an influence tactic has also been reported by Fischer (1969), who found that the disadvantaged player in a bargaining game lied more often than his more powerful opponent and gained better bargaining outcomes as a consequence. In the present study, however, Honest-Compliant targets reaped a greater advantage from their powerful opponent,

since they encouraged him both to send threats and to use them benevolently. Hence, contrary to common sense, open and honest compliance with threats does not cause the threatener to intensify his exploitative demands but rather induces him to seek an accommodation of interests.

In general, honesty was a good policy. If the simulated target was honest and compliant, he converted the threatener into a cooperative partner. If the simulated target was honest and defiant, he deterred the threatener from sending threats. As has been indicated, deceit also could serve the interests of the simulated target when he intended to defy the threatener behaviorally. The most costly policy for the simulated target to adopt in the short run was to indicate that he would not give in to the threatener's demands but then to do so. The latter policy both encouraged the threatener to send many threats and to use them exploitatively.

Subjects' impressions of the simulated target were generally positive except when he was both deceitful and defiant. Apparently, subjects appreciated the target's resolve to defy threats if he was honest in announcing his intentions, since they rated him positively when he did so. Also, subjects had a positive impression of a simulated target who rewarded them by complying to their threats, whether he was honest or dishonest in announcing his intentions. But when the simulated target used deceit to lure the subjects into making cooperative overtures that were exploited, they rated the target negatively. Whether there would be any long-range effects of these impressions on the course of conflict is an interesting research question for the future. It appears clear, however, that it is to the advantage of those who possess little power to use deceit against those of greater power when they do not wish to comply to the latter's demands.

#### REFERENCES

- Bonoma, T. V., J. T. Tedeschi and B. Helm  
1974 "Some effects of target cooperation and reciprocated promises on conflict resolution." *Sociometry* 37:251-261.
- Fischer, C. S.  
1969 "The effects of threats in an incomplete information game." *Sociometry* 32:301-314.
- Halle, L. J.  
1967 *The Cold War as History*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Osgood, C. E.  
1962 *An Alternative to War or Surrender*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Osgood, C. E., G. J. Suci and P. H. Tannenbaum  
1957 *The Measurement of Meaning*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.



- Tedeschi, J. T., T. V. Bonoma and R. C. Brown  
1971 "A paradigm for the study of coercive power." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25:197-224.
- Tedeschi, J. T., T. V. Bonoma and S. Lindskold  
1970 "Threatener's reaction to prior announcement of behavioral compliance or defiance." *Behavioral Science* 15:171-179.

**MANUSCRIPTS FOR THE  
ASA ROSE SOCIOLOGY SERIES**

Manuscripts (100 to 300 typed pages) are solicited for publication in the *ASA Arnold and Caroline Rose Monograph Series*. The Series welcomes a variety of types of sociological work—qualitative or quantitative empirical studies, and theoretical or methodological treatises. An author should submit three copies of a manuscript for consideration to the Series Editor, Professor Ida Harper Simpson, Department of Sociology, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina 27706.

Copyright of Sociometry is the property of American Sociological Association. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.