The effect of commitment to future interaction on reactions to norm violations[1]

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Social norms are important, in part, because they prevent harmful or anarchic social intercourse, enable persons to agree on a common definition of the social situation (see Goffman, 1959), and lower the cost of social exchange (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). It follows, then, that those who *violate* social norms will be negatively evaluated (e g, S. Kiesler, 1966) But one's covert evaluation and overt treatment of an inappropriate other depend on a number of situational variables, including the expectation of future interaction with the other.

There is already considerable evidence that strong anticipation of future interaction with others profoundly affects social attitudes and behavior (e g., Kiesler, Zanna, & De Salvo, 1966) C. Kiesler (in press) has argued that commitment to future interaction makes certain responses to others more difficult, and, therefore, less probable. Certain alternative reactions to a person who acts inappropriately should also be more difficult when one is committed to future interaction with him Intuitively, when one must interact with another over time it should be more difficult to discount or "forget" the violation because the present violation may have predictive importance. Therefore, covert negative feelings toward a norm violator should be greater when

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one is committed to future interaction with him than when the interaction is transitory

Commitment may have a psychologically similar effect when the other's behavior is especially appropriate When future interaction is anticipated, appropriate social behavior should be more salient and hence viewed more positively than when future interaction is not anticipated Thus, in the realm of covert reactions to another's behavior, we predict that with future interaction anticipated, one should like the person more who acts appropriately and like the person less who acts inappropriately than when no future interaction is anticipated. This hypothesis was tested in Experiment I

In everyday life individuals can be observed to react overtly to norm violations as well Such overt reactions can be made *privately* to the norm violator or *publicly* (so that, for example, an offended third person is witness to them) First, consider private, overt reactions to the norm violator We thought that a person in the presence of a norm violation has two main options. he can engage in "face-saving," whereby he ignores the inappropriate act, changes the subject, treats it as a joke, etc (see Goffman, 1955), or he can attempt to make the norm violator change his behavior[3] We theorized that committed and uncommitted individuals would differentially emphasize these types of behavior

For the uncommitted person, the inappropriate behavior has no future implications and is therefore relatively unimportant This person should not bother to attempt to change the other's behavior and should place relative emphasis on face-saving behavior The person who *is* committed to future interaction with the norm violator is in a quite different position. If he ignores the inappropriate behavior, then he risks similar unpleasantness in the future Thus, we predict that if the committed person has a chance to deal privately with the norm violator, he will attempt to change the other's behavior by asking him to act more appropriately, or at least by letting him know about his negative

3. The distinction between the two alternatives is not always clear, however Goffman (1955) suggests several maneuvers by which one indirectly attempts to correct the other while at the same time letting him save his own face For example, one can overtly misinterpret the act

feelings. Experiment II explored this possibility. It was predicted that overt reactions made privately to a norm violator, involving attempts to change his behavior, would be more likely when subjects were committed to future interaction with him than when they were not

Sometimes, however, one does not have the opportunity to express his feelings privately to a norm violator This becomes a problem especially when there is a third person present who is the target of the inappropriate behavior What will people do in this situation? Again, we assume that when one is *not* committed to future interaction with the norm violator, the inappropriate act itself is less important and one is less concerned about its future implications Indeed, one might want most to make the immediate situation more comfortable for the offended third person Thus, we might expect the uncommitted person to deal overtly and publicly with the norm violation, trying to undo the damage by contradicting or trying to change the norm violator.

The person who is committed to future interaction with the norm violator, however, is in a more conflictful situation While he may wish to change the norm violator, doing this publicly may merely embarrass the norm violator and endanger future interactions with him To this person, it may be more important to keep peace with the norm violator than to comfort the offended third person Thus, we predict that when overt reactions to a norm violator must be made publicly, the committed person will be *less* likely to overtly attempt to change his behavior than will the uncommitted person. This hypothesis was tested in Experiment III.

EXPERIMENT I

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 161 males from an introductory psychology course at Yale University Of these, 12 were dropped from the analysis for suspicion (on the basis of special probing during the debriefing) and five for failure to complete the questionnaire. This left 144 subjects in the final analysis

Experimenters

Nine groups of upperclass psychology majors at Yale University conducted the experiment. Each group consisted of one experimenter, two confederates, and two hidden observers. Each group ran all conditions in the experiment in random order To minimize bias, experimenter groups were not informed of the hypotheses and did not score the data.

Procedure

The 2 × 2 factorial design involved manipulating commitment to another whose behavior was either appropriate or inappropriate One to three subjects (plus the two confederates) were present at each experimental session. The experiment was presented as a study of productivity by individuals and groups. A fictitious second session of dyads was arranged where subjects anticipated future interaction by "random" assignment with one of the two confederates, either the "casual" confederate or the "mode" who behaved as an ordinary subject.

During the experimental session, which subjects spent solving problems individually, the casual confederate behaved irreverently (e g, yawning, scratching, chewing gum loudly) and failed to follow directions (e g, writing in his test booklet) Appropriateness of his behavior was manipulated by varying the seriousness of the experimental situation In the casual (Appropriate) condition, the experimenter was unshaven and wore a sweatshirt, levis, and sneakers He introduced the experiment as "just a part of my bursary job" In the serious (Inappropriate) condition the experimenter was clean-shaven, wore a jacket and tie, and formally announced that the experiment was his senior honors project At the end of the session, the subjects completed a postquestionnaire and were informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

Results

Effectiveness of the Manipulations

The success of the Casual-Serious manipulation was evaluated by analyzing answers to two 17-point scale items on the postquestionnaire. In answer to the question, "How important do you think this experiment is?," those in the Serious condition thought it was more important than did those in the Casual condition ($F = 31\,88$, $df = 1/8$, $p < 01$) The second question, "How serious or casual do you think this situation is?," showed a trend in the same direction but not as strong ($F = 2.97$, $df = 1/8$, $p < .10$).

The commitment manipulation was highly successful. All subjects correctly remembered the person with whom they had been assigned to work in the second session. Observer reports indicated no overt reactions to the casual confederate. However, none were expected since they would have interrupted the task.

Attraction to the Casual Confederate

Attraction to each group member was measured on five seven-point scales (intelligent-unintelligent, likeable-obnoxious, friendly-unfriendly, dependable-undependable, and polite-impolite). Scores on each scale were added so that possible attraction for a member ran from 5 to 35.

Our dependent variable was the extent to which subjects liked the casual confederate minus their liking for the mode.[4] The means for this measure are presented in Table 1. Minus scores indicate that the casual confederate was liked less than the mode.

Table 1 Mean attraction to the casual confederate minus mean attraction to the modal confederate as a function of commitment and atmosphere of the experiment (Experiment I)

Atmosphere of the experiment	Commitment to future interaction with casual confederate	
	No Commitment	Commitment
Casual (casual confederate's behavior appropriate)	−5 69 (*N* = 36)	−2 46 (*N* = 35)
Serious (casual confederate's behavior inappropriate)	−9 03 (*N* = 33)	−9 63 (*N* = 40)

Note —The less negative the score, the higher the relative attraction to the casual confederate

A 2 × 2 × 9 (Seriousness × Commitment × Experimenter groups) mixed-model analysis of variance (see McNemar, 1962) was performed on the data from Table 1 The results supported our hypothesis that private reactions to another's behavior depend both on appropriateness of the behavior and on anticipation of future interaction The interaction between appropriateness and

4 This analysis was done to reduce intersubject variability A separate analysis of the evaluations of the mode yielded no differences

commitment was very significant ($F = 33.36$, $df = 1/8$, $p < .001$) In the Appropriate condition, the casual confederate was liked more when the subject anticipated future interaction with him than when the subject did not ($F = 8.58$, $df = 1/8$, $p < .05$) In the Inappropriate condition, the difference is in the opposite direction, but does not approach significance ($F < 1.0$)

However, further evidence relevant to the latter comparison is provided by subjects who expressed a preference for working with someone other than the person to whom they were assigned Of those in the Commitment conditions (assignment to the casual confederate), 58 per cent in the Inappropriate condition and 40 per cent in the Appropriate condition wished to switch While not significantly different ($CR = 1.58$, $p = .11$), the trend is in the expected direction If we compare the Commitment-Inappropriate condition against the other three conditions, the difference is more reliable ($CR = 2.44$, $p < .05$)

In sum, the results tend to support our contention that commitment to future interaction changes one's covert feelings about another's behavior, such that appropriate acts are viewed more positively and inappropriate acts more negatively

EXPERIMENT II

In discussing overt reactions to norm violations, we hypothesized that if private communication is possible, one will be more likely to attempt to change the violator's behavior when one is committed to future interaction with him than when one is not committed To test this hypothesis, we used an experimental design similar to that of Experiment I—i e, commitment to future interaction and appropriateness of another's behavior were varied orthogonally

Method

Subjects

Forty-six freshmen and sophomore males at Yale University were paid $1.50 to participate Of these, eight were discarded from the analysis (seven revealed suspicion during the debriefing probe, and one subject could not return for future sessions) leaving a sample of 38 subjects. Subjects participated in pairs, when only one subject appeared for the experiment, a confederate took the other's place

Procedure

When the subjects arrived, a female experimenter explained that the investigators were interested in how each person's initial impressions of the other and opinions about other groups and individuals influenced the acquaintanceship process Subjects were told that to eliminate the effects of visual cues, tone of voice, and related variables, their communications to each other would take the form of completed questionnaires They were also told that they would fill out some questionnaires twice, so that a copy could be given to the "supervisor" of the study Then, committed subjects were led to believe that they would see their partners at least three more times and would have to interact closely with them Uncommitted subjects were told they would return for three more sessions, but with a different partner

The presence or absence of a norm violation was manipulated, as in the first experiment, by varying the situation slightly The experimenter took each subject to a private cubicle, and in the context of a casual conversation, mentioned to half of the subjects that she had previously been a secretary She also explained that she would read their directions over a microphone (actually, instructions were tape-recorded) Subjects were instructed to complete each of five questionnaires in order

On the first questionnaire were noticeable misspellings (e g, "favoralbe") and typographical errors These mistakes, plus a required rating of "clerical workers," were designed to put the subsequent remarks of the partner in context After subjects began working, they heard their partner (actually a taped confederate) coughing a few times and mumbling The "partner" then said, "Gee, nice bunch of mistakes on this damn thing Phew! un *fav*oralbe? *un*favoralbe unfavor*albe* Goddamn these secretaries have *got* to be the least talented people in the whole world" These comments, we assumed, would be perceived as a faux pas, and hence as highly inappropriate, only when the experimenter had mentioned that she had been a secretary

After subjects completed Questionnaire #1, they completed two pairs of questionnaires measuring "first impressions" of the partner and attitudes toward occupations (including secretaries) Copies were to be sent to the partner and to the supervisor Those sent to the partner would be seen only by him and could include "additional comments" Our major dependent variable was the extent to which subjects, in sending completed questionnaires to their partners, would take the opportunity to write in negative comments about the anti-secretary comments The questionnaires, therefore, were used primarily as a pretext for allowing the subjects to communicate privately with their partners

When the experimenter picked up the completed questionnaires, she asked subjects to fill out one "final form" Subjects then completed a few items checking on impressions of the experimenter and possible suspicion

Following this, subjects were brought together and completely debriefed All subjects were paid and sworn to secrecy before they left.

Results

Effects of the Manipulations

Analysis of the question, "During how many more sessions will you be working with the other person?," indicated that subjects in the Commitment conditions perceived that they would be working in more future sessions with their partners than did those in the No Commitment conditions ($F = 22\ 19$, $df = 1/34$, $p < 001$) Thus, we may conclude that the commitment manipulation was successful

We made no direct attempt to measure perceived appropriateness of the partner's behavior since such questions would have incurred suspicion However, ratings of "secretaries" on the attitudinal questionnaires indirectly indicated that those in the Faux Pas conditions noticed the experimenter's remark about having been a secretary That is, those in the Faux Pas conditions rated secretaries more favorably than did those in the No Faux Pas condition ($F = 4\ 46$, $df = 1/34$, $p < 05$ for ratings to supervisor, $F = 6\ 57$, $df = 1/34$, $p < 05$ for ratings to partner) This result will be discussed more fully below

Attempts to Change the Partner

In accord with our previous discussion, it was predicted that attempts to change the partner when he violated a norm would occur most frequently when the subject was committed to future interaction with him. A total of 16 subjects used the questionnaires to the partner to write comments Of those, eight referred directly to the anti-secretary remarks.[5] Our measure of attempts

5 All eight comments were negative in tone, according to two independent judges Only three, however, were agreed by both judges to be "clear, nonsense attempts to change the partner" These three all appeared in the Commitment–Faux Pas Condition The remaining eight comments were mostly concerned with the format of the questionnaire and were equally distributed among conditions

Table 2. Percentage of subjects in each condition who commented on their partner's anti-secretary remarks (Experiment II).

Partner's behavior	Commitment to future interaction	
	No commitment (pct)	Commitment (pct)
No Faux Pas (low inappropriateness)	10 (N=10)	0 (N=10)
Faux Pas (high inappropriateness)	20 (N=10)	62 5 (N=8)

to change the other consisted of the proportion of subjects in each condition who referred to the anti-secretary remarks The data are presented in Table 2

A three-dimensional χ^2 analysis was performed on the data presented in Table 2 (see Sutcliffe, 1957). The total χ^2 of 11 39 is significant beyond the .025 level ($df = 4$). The triple interaction (Faux Pas × Commitment × presence or absence of comment) is significant beyond the 05 level ($df = 1$), indicating that the frequency of comments referring to the anti-secretary remarks was dependent upon both the Commitment and Faux Pas variables Exact tests were also carried out, comparing the Commitment–Faux Pas condition with each of the other three. Probabilities thus produced range from 08 to less than 001 (one-tailed test) It seems quite clear that attempts to change the offending other's behavior were concentrated in the Commitment–Faux Pas condition as predicted

No evidence of face-saving of the partner was obtained from the data. However, it is possible to interpret the ratings of secretaries mentioned above as an attempt by those in the Faux Pas condition to save the *experimenter's* face That is, since those in the Faux Pas condition rated secretaries more favorably than did those in the No Faux Pas condition, it is possible that the former subjects were trying to counteract the negative impression given by the partner.

EXPERIMENT III

Experiment II was designed to test the hypothesis that given the opportunity for *private* communication with the norm vio-

lator, committed persons, more than uncommitted persons, would attempt to change the other's behavior. However, when communication with the norm violator must be made *publicly,* the reverse should occur uncommitted persons, more than committed persons, would overtly attempt to change the norm violator Experiment III was designed to test this hypothesis

In this experiment, as in Experiment II, subjects were either committed to future interaction with a partner (in this case, a confederate) or not, and a faux pas or no faux pas concerning the experimenter was made However, the interaction first took place in a face-to-face setting with the experimenter present and then, later, with the experimenter absent In addition, there was a further variation subjects in the Faux Pas condition either knew the experimenter was going to leave, or had no expectation that she would leave

Thus, the design was a 2 × 3 factorial, with two levels of commitment cross-indexed with three situational variations In one variation, no faux pas occurred In both other conditions a faux pas occurred in the presence of the offended third person—the experimenter In one, however, subjects expected the experimenter to leave We predicted that those in the Faux Pas condition would attempt to change their partner, but that uncommitted subjects would make these attempts publicly, whereas committed subjects would wait until the experimenter left before they attempted to change their partner We included the expectation conditions to assess whether subjects who knew the experimenter would leave would then wait before mentioning the faux pas

Method

Subjects

Seventy-four males at Michigan State University volunteered to take part in a study of occupational research and were paid $1 50 All were included in the analysis

Procedure

The commitment and faux pas manipulations were identical to Experiment II The main methodological differences between Experiments II and III were that, in the present case, the interaction was face-to-face, and one-third of the subjects expected the experi-

menter to leave for a few minutes later in the experimental hour, and, indeed, in all cases, she did leave for five minutes These differences led to several procedural changes, which are outlined below.

First, all instructions were delivered to the subjects prior to the confederate's arrival, so that he would be blind to experimental conditions The experimenter said, "when I spoke to him on the phone last night [all subjects had been contacted by phone], he said he would have to be a few minutes late While I spoke to him, I was able to give him the instructions To save time, I'll give you the same instructions I gave him, and then when he arrives, we can start right in" The study was presented as concerned with the "role of various occupations in society and how different people are fitted for jobs in industry" Then the commitment and secretary manipulations were given in a manner identical to Experiment II.

The experimenter then mentioned that the people who were typing her materials were a little behind. In one condition (Expectation), she said she would have to go upstairs after the first part of the hour to get some more forms In the other condition (No-expectation) she merely said, "but fortunately I don't need anything at the moment"

At this point, the confederate entered and the experimenter asked him, "Do you have any questions about the instructions I gave you over the phone last night?" When the confederate answered negatively, the task was begun The subject and confederate alternated giving their impressions of "representative occupations," typed on a sheet of paper In this context, the confederate delivered a negative evaluation of clerical workers He stated, "clerical workers—I guess that's like secretaries The one who typed this page is probably one of the better ones Secretaries have just got to be the *least* talented group in the whole world"

All sessions were recorded and the subject's immediate response to confederate's comment was one of the two primary dependent variables in this study The subject could demur, agree, or go on to his next category (physicians)

After the subject finished, the experimenter said, "I think now would be a good time for me to go and get those papers which the people upstairs have hopefully finished. I should be back in, oh, no more than five minutes" Then she left the room The subject's comments after the experimenter left represent the second primary dependent variable After five minutes, the experimenter returned and concluded the experiment

Results

Tables 3 and 4 present the basic data from this study. Of the 74 subjects, 22 mentioned the anti-secretary remarks before

Table 3 Number of subjects in each condition who disagreed with the confederate in the experimenter's presence (Experiment III).

Situational variation	Commitment to future interaction	
	No commitment	Commitment
No Faux Pas (control)	3 (N=11)	2 (N=10)
Faux Pas—No expectation of experimenter leaving	7 (N=13)	1 (N=13)
Faux Pas—Expectation of experimenter leaving	2 (N=13)	2 (N=14)

Table 4 Number of subjects in each condition who had not disagreed before but who disagreed with the confederate after the experimenter left (Experiment III).

Situational variation	Commitment to future interaction	
	No commitment	Commitment
No Faux Pas (control)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Faux Pas—No expectation of experimenter leaving	1 (8)	5 (6)
Faux Pas—Expectation of experimenter leaving	3 (5)	3 (5)

Note.—Total number disagreeing shown in parentheses.

the experimenter left the room. Table 3 presents the number of subjects in each condition who *disagreed* with the confederate's statement about secretaries or told him not to make such statements, before the experimenter left the room. Twenty-four subjects mentioned the faux pas after the experimenter left Table 4 contains the number of subjects in each condition who *disagreed* with the confederate after the experimenter left the room. From the totals in Table 4, it may be seen that all experimental subjects who disagreed with the confederate before the experimenter left the room also brought up the topic after she left the room.

As can be seen from Table 3, disagreeing comments in the experimenter's presence were concentrated in the Faux Pas–No

expectation condition. In that condition, significantly more subjects disagreed with the confederate in the No Commitment condition than in the Commitment condition ($z = 2.97$, $p < .01$, tested by differences between proportions, using the arcsin transformation). This supports our prediction In terms of new subjects speaking up after the experimenter left, the situation is reversed. Here, in the No Expectation condition, it is the committed subjects who now disagree ($z = 1.97$, $p < .05$) This result also supports our predictions and replicates the basic data from Experiment II, where subjects also received an unexpected opportunity to disagree with the confederate

The data from subjects who expected the experimenter to leave are quite surprising Both before and after the experimenter left, commitment seemed to make no difference, although after the experimenter left, Faux Pas–Expectation subjects disagreed with the confederate more than the No Faux Pas subjects (smallest $z = 2.44$, $p < .02$) We suspect that this situation was too sophisticated for our young subjects (mostly first-term freshmen) and they could not decide what to do We note that Commitment-Expectation subjects were less likely to laugh and treat the matter as a joke than No Commitment–Expectation subjects ($z = 2.04$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

In the present investigation we proposed three hypotheses, two of which were supported, and a third supported only under certain conditions Experiment I demonstrated that covert reactions to another's behavior tend to be more positive when the other acts appropriately and more negative when he acts inappropriately when persons are committed to future interaction with the actor than when they are not Experiment II demonstrated that overt, negative reactions to a norm violation, when can be made privately, will be greater when persons are committed than when they are not This result was replicated in Experiment III, when subjects had an unexpected opportunity to deal privately with the norm violator Experiment III also supported our prediction that when one must deal publicly with the norm violator, it will be the uncommitted rather than the committed persons who will attempt to change his behavior. We

conclude that these findings bear directly on our basic assumptions first, that commitment to future interaction with another makes the other's behavior more important and salient (because of what that behavior may imply for the future), and second, that commitment makes certain alternative responses to the other more difficult Thus, commitment resulted in stronger covert reactions to another (Experiment I), in private attempts to make the other act more appropriately (Experiment II), and in more circumspect public behavior toward the other (Experiment III)

It is interesting to note that we failed in all three experiments to find any clear, systematic evidence of face-saving behavior Certainly, one alternative response an offended person has is a temporary, overt acceptance of the objectionable other According to Goffman (1955), face-saving tactics range from ignoring the inappropriate act, to changing the subject of conversation, to treating the act as a joke, to graciously withdrawing from the interaction Perhaps one could interpret the behavior of those who did not mention the faux pas as "face-saving," but clearly we have no evidence to distinguish this from simple apathy In Experiment III, in fact, there were some data opposite to what we would expect if face-saving were used For example, we would expect that subjects who did *not* mention the anti-secretary remarks and who wished to save the confederate's face would have quickly gone on to the next topic. Yet their latency was greater than that of those who did comment on the remarks ($t = 2.26$, $df = 52$, $p < .05$) [6] Perhaps more sophisticated subjects and measuring instruments are needed.

One final comment is in order. One might argue that subjects exposed to a faux pas reacted as they did, not because the behavior was inappropriate, but because it was unexpected or because it revealed the partner to be malicious Both alternatives, however, are implausible given the experimental situations First, the partner's remarks were made in all conditions and thus would be equally unexpected Second, the comment of the experimenter's about having been a secretary (Experiments II and III) was only a "chance remark," not made in the presence

6 The latency estimates were made from tape recordings Not all subjects are included because none of the several tape recorders used (all Concord models) would function consistently

of the partner. Not knowing she was a secretary, the partner presumably was not purposely being malicious.

Summary

Three experiments explored some covert and overt reactions to the inappropriate behavior of another as a function of the anticipation of future interaction with the other. Experiment I indicated that with future interaction anticipated, subjects liked the person more who behaved appropriately and liked the person less who behaved inappropriately than when no future interaction was anticipated Experiments II and III indicated that when the other behaved inappropriately toward a third person, the commitment to future interaction increased the frequency of attempts to change the other's behavior, but only when the offended person was not present

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