

PREFERENCE FOR PREDICTABILITY OR UNPREDICTABILITY AS A MEDIATOR OF REACTIONS TO NORM VIOLATIONS¹

SARA B. KIESLER²

University of Kansas

If norms function to insure predictable interaction, people who violate norms may be disliked because they appear to be unpredictable. Norm violators would lose esteem to the extent that persons interacting with them prefer predictability in the situation. On the other hand, if situational demands induce participants to prefer unpredictability, norm violators should be liked more than those who act appropriately. This hypothesis was tested in two experiments. The subjects' preferences for predictability or unpredictability and the appropriateness of a stimulus person's behavior were independently manipulated. A significant interaction supporting the hypothesis was obtained in both studies; under conditions designed to arouse the need for unpredictability in others, inappropriate stimulus persons were liked better than appropriate stimulus persons.

Ordinarily, one who violates norms can expect disapproval from others. Negative reactions occur when a person is impolite (Kiesler, Kiesler, & Pallak, 1967), disagrees (Schachter, 1951), illegitimately assumes power (Raven & French, 1958), or steps out of role (Kiesler, 1966).

In considering the functions of norms, theorists have made several assumptions: (a) Persons have a need for predictability in social interaction; (b) norms function to increase the predictability of behavior; and (c) norm violators are perceived as unpredictable. Thus, disliking may result from a norm violator's unpredictability. Goffman (1959), for example, proposed that inappropriate behavior implies rejection of our definition of the situation, destroying a needed sense of predictability. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) stated that norm violations increase the irregularity and therefore the potential costs of interaction. Similarly, Gergen (1969) contended that people maximize their payoffs best in an ordered, stable world.

As yet, there are no studies which have directly evaluated the role of predictability in

mediating reactions to norm violations. Some situations probably demand from participants relatively high predictability and others, very little. If one can assume that a norm violator is perceived as unpredictable, in situations where predictability in others is preferred, attraction to a norm violator should be less than when there is no particular preference for predictability. For example, when one is committed to future interaction with another person, his predictability ought to be more important than when one is not committed, since knowing how he will act in the future facilitates one's own planning. Kiesler et al. (1967) found that subjects liked a norm violator less when they anticipated future interaction with him than when they did not expect to see him again.

If there are situational effects on preferences for predictability, some situations might produce a preference for *unpredictability* and thus inappropriate behavior. Suppose the unpredictable person is perceived as being novel or complex or creative. He should be liked to the extent that these traits are valued in the situation. If, for example, a group is trying to solve a problem, novel behavior might lead to the correct answer. One would expect that the greater a person's potential for solving the problem, the more liking there would be of inappropriate task behavior. Hollander (1961) found that subjects who read about inappropriate but innovative task behavior by a group member accorded him a more positive

¹ This research was supported by National Science Foundation Grant GS-1611 to the author.

² The author is indebted to Shelly Taylor (now at Yale University) for her assistance in preparing and performing Experiment I; Experiment II was ably conducted by Janet Stradley.

Requests for reprints should be sent to the author, Department of Psychology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66044.

evaluation the greater his status and competence. Consistent with the present analysis, the opposite was obtained for inappropriate social behavior.

There are also situations in which persons must make inferences about the individual idiosyncracies of another. Jones, Davis, and Gergen (1961) argued that accurate information about another (his "true self") is best gained when he steps out of role. Hence, in situations where the need for accurate information is very high, one would expect unpredictability in the form of role violations to be both valuable and liked. Jones et al.'s experiment demonstrated that out-of-role behavior was perceived as more informative, interesting, and candid than in-role behavior.

These considerations led to the following hypothesis: When predictability of others is preferred in a situation, inappropriate behavior by them results in less attraction than appropriate behavior; whereas when unpredictability is preferred, inappropriate behavior results in greater attraction than appropriate behavior. This hypothesis was tested in two experiments which employed situational variations designed to manipulate the preference for predictability or unpredictability and the presence or absence of inappropriate behavior in another.

EXPERIMENT I

Method

The subjects were asked to be confederates in a Sherif-type (autokinetic) social influence experiment. Their subject was actually a confederate (henceforth called a stimulus person). Also, the subjects expected to work later with the stimulus person on a task requiring consensus (predictability preference condition) or on a task requiring them to make up creative stories (unpredictability preference condition). This operation assumed that when subjects must cooperate and come to an agreement with another, they should value predictability in him. On the other hand, subjects who must devise unique stories should prefer unpredictability in the other.

The appropriateness of the stimulus person's behavior was varied by having him fulfill or not fulfill role expectations. He was presented as either high status or low status, and he either conformed or remained independent during the influence trials. Since high-status persons are probably expected to be more independent than those of low status, we assumed that the high-status independent and the low-status conformer would be perceived as acting appropriately, whereas the high-status conformer and

the low-status independent would be perceived as violating role expectations. It was hypothesized that in the predictability preference condition appropriate behavior would produce greater attraction than inappropriate behavior, whereas in the unpredictability preference condition appropriate behavior would produce less attraction than inappropriate behavior.

Subjects

High school students, paid \$1 each, participated in groups of two or three males and two females ($N = 229$). The subjects were told by a female experimenter that they would take part in two studies, one involving a sixth (or fifth) person who had been scheduled to come later, and another in which all six would work together. The subjects were told that in the first study they would actually be working for the experimenter to see if the sixth person would conform to group pressure and that he would be unaware of the purpose of the study.

Procedure

The experimenter then explained the nature of the social influence situation.

When the sixth guy comes in, we'll all go into the next room, which is completely dark. After I read the fake directions, you'll all see a small dot of light which will seem to move. Most people say that the light moves . . . actually it's only your eyes that are moving. After we get in there, I'll ask this guy how far he sees the light move. What you're going to do is try to change his mind. After he gives his answer, I'll ask all of you how far you think the light moved. If he says the light moved below 5 inches (such as 2 or 3 inches), then all five of you will say that the light moved more than 5 inches (like 7 or 8 inches). But if he says that the light moved more than 5 inches, you all say that the light moved less than 5 inches.

The experimenter explained that after a few trials they would answer before the sixth person did in order to measure how much their answers were influencing his; the group then practiced in the darkened room.

The experimenter told each group that information about each "subject" was available. Four versions of a fictitious biographical sketch, presumably describing the sixth person, were randomly distributed in each group (the experimenter was blind to which version each subject received). To create the first part of the appropriateness manipulation, the stimulus person's status was varied. He was either high status—Jim Campbell, aged 17, an honors student who received a full scholarship to Yale, won the New York State Science Fair Award in 1967, and was editor of the high school newspaper—or low status—Jim Campbell, aged 15, who failed two courses, was a member of the color guard, and worked for his father in the summer.

An instruction sheet was used to manipulate the preference for predictability or unpredictability. The second study was presented as one in which the stimulus person would no longer be deceived. In the

predictability preference condition, the second study was designed to "find out how groups reach decisions. We are going to give you two topics. . . . At the end of each six-minute period you must give me a consensus on the issue . . . a group opinion that no one disagrees with. . . ." In the unpredictability preference condition, the second study was designed to "find out what kinds of stories people will tell. . . . We are going to ask you to make up a creative, composite story. The first person will start the story . . . the second person will pick up the story from that point and so on. . . ."

After the stimulus person arrived, "directions" were read to the group, and the influence attempt began. One of two stimulus persons, aged 16, either yielded on all trials or did not conform at all. Stimulus persons were unaware of the other manipulations. Afterwards, the stimulus person was sent to another room, and the subjects were requested to complete a questionnaire. Seven-point scaled items were designed to assess attraction to the stimulus person and the effectiveness of the manipulations. The experiment was then terminated. Subjects were debriefed when the entire study was completed.

Results

Since the distributions were positively skewed, all postquestionnaire scores were first subjected to a log transformation. Four-way analyses of variance were performed on the data (Status $\times$ Conformity $\times$ Predictability Preference $\times$ Stimulus Person). One stimulus person was less positively evaluated, and his performance elicited greater differences among conditions, but the results were in the same direction for both.

Effectiveness of the Manipulations

Two items following the attraction items were designed to test the effectiveness of the appropriateness manipulation ("How tactful is this person?"; "How appropriate do you think his behavior usually is?"). However, there was greater approval of high status ($F_s = 11.0$ and 3.8 , respectively), and significant three-way interactions were obtained paralleling the attraction data. Therefore, a control group of 10 subjects was run until the time the stimulus person was to enter. The subjects were asked how they expected him to react to social influence and to rate whether conformity or independence would be appropriate. When the stimulus person was high status, 4 of 5 expected independence, and all 5 rated independence as more appropriate. When the stimulus person was low status, 4

of 5 expected conformity and said it would be more appropriate.

Another postquestionnaire item asked, "How predictable do you think this person is?" in order to determine whether the stimulus person was perceived as more predictable if he acted appropriately than if he did not. As expected, the Status $\times$ Conformity interaction was significant ($F = 4.7$, $df = 1/213$, $p < .05$). High-status independents and low-status conformers were perceived as more predictable than high-status conformers and low-status independents. There were no other significant effects except a theoretically trivial effect of conformity.

Questions designed to measure the preference manipulation indirectly (how important it is that he be dependable, interesting) did not produce significant differences. However, a direct question was presented to a second control group of 13. These subjects expected to encounter two stimulus persons, each of whom would work on a different task with the group in the future, and were asked, "Would you prefer this person to be a predictable sort of person, or an unpredictable person? What about the second person?" When the opinion consensus task was expected, 10 of the 13

TABLE 1
MEAN ATTRACTION IN EXPERIMENT I TOWARD A
STIMULUS PERSON AS A FUNCTION OF THE
APPROPRIATENESS OF HIS BEHAVIOR
AND THE SUBJECT'S PREFERENCE
FOR HIS BEING PREDICTABLE
OR UNPREDICTABLE

Status of stimulus person and his reaction to social influence	Preference condition	
	Predictability	Unpredictability
High status Independent (appropriate)	1.427	1.416
"	29	29
Conform (inappropriate)	1.401	1.422
"	28	29
Low status Independent (inappropriate)	1.380	1.437
"	29	29
Conform (appropriate)	1.398	1.354
"	27	29

Note. Means were computed from transformed scores; the higher the mean, the greater the attraction.

said they preferred him to be predictable. When the creative story task was expected, 12 of 13 said they preferred him to be unpredictable. These data suggest that the manipulations were effective.

Attraction to the Stimulus Person

Scores on six items were combined to obtain one measure of attraction: (a) How much did you like the sixth person? (b) Would you like to know him better? (c) How well would you get along with this person? (d) How goodnatured is this person? (e) What kind of sense of humor does this person have? (f) Would you like to work with this person in the future? The data are presented in Table 1. The means were arrayed as predicted, and the Status $\times$ Conformity $\times$ Predictability Preference interaction was significant ($F = 5.86$, $df = 1/213$, $p < .05$). The interaction primarily stemmed from differences within the unpredictability preference condition. In the predictability preference condition, as expected, the two appropriate condition means (high-status independent and low-status conformer) were greater than the inappropriate condition means (high-status conformer, low-status independent), but the difference did not reach significance ($t = 1.17$).⁸ In the unpredictability preference condition, however, the predicted reversed effects (high-status conformer and low-status independent $>$ high-status independent and low-status conformer) were significant ($t = 2.28$, $df = 213$, $p < .05$).

Since the hypothesized effects were much stronger for unpredictability preference than for predictability preference conditions, another experiment testing the same hypothesis was performed to find out if this tendency was a reliable one. Experiment II employed different manipulations and subjects and added a no-preference comparison group. For this condition, appropriate and inappropriate behaviors should have no differential effects on attraction.

EXPERIMENT II

Method

The subjects in this study listened to a tape-recorded conversation. Appropriateness of the stim-

⁸ Two-tailed t tests were performed in Experiments I and II.

ulus person's behavior was varied by manipulating the social role of a second person. That is, the subjects heard a college student complain extensively about her personal problems in the presence of a dormitory counselor (appropriate condition) or a faculty member (inappropriate condition). There were three conditions to vary preferences for predictability. In the no-preference condition, the subjects were to evaluate the structure of the conversation. In the predictability preference condition, the subjects expected to evaluate the stimulus person's personality and judge the kind of person she was. In the unpredictability preference condition, the subject had to describe the stimulus person's traits accurately without imposing value judgments (as in Jones et al., 1961). The latter two conditions were designed to parallel Jones and Thibaut's (1958) situation-matching and causal-genetic sets.

Subjects and Procedure

The subjects were 126 female Connecticut College undergraduates, paid \$1 each. A female experimenter told each subject that a group of researchers had recorded conversations in formal and informal situations. She also said, "we needed permission to use the microphones, so some were aware of them, but others were not. Of course, we got their permission to use the tapes later." The experimenter then asked the subjects to help judge and score some tapes.

The subjects were given a booklet which included one page of instructions, a rating sheet for evaluating conversation structure, and a set of scales for rating the "unaware participant" in the conversation. In the no-preference condition, the instructions indicated that "conversation can be described according to . . . number of people, conversational tone . . . etc." The instructions asked the subjects to listen carefully so they could describe the taped conversation accurately. To justify the attraction measure, the instructions also stated, "Since we are not certain that our conversation typology is complete, you will also be asked to describe the unaware person in the group . . . This may give clues to information not included in the conversation typology."

The predictability and unpredictability preference instructions were exactly alike except for the addition of two sentences in the latter condition. The instructions read,

we hope to be able to learn more about people through their everyday conversation. We believe that by observing a person in a social situation, one can say a great deal about an individual's personality and generally determine what kind of person he is. . . . Please listen carefully so that you can make your description of the unaware person as accurate as possible.

In the unpredictability preference condition, there was an addition: "Please do not impose your own value judgments on the unaware person. We only want accurate information on the traits he or she possesses, regardless of whether or not they are positive or negative."

The experimenter then distributed a xeroxed sheet

TABLE 2

MEAN ATTRACTION IN EXPERIMENT II TOWARD A
STIMULUS PERSON AS A FUNCTION OF THE
APPROPRIATENESS OF HER BEHAVIOR
AND THE SUBJECT'S PREFERENCE
FOR HER BEING PREDICTABLE
OR UNPREDICTABLE

Stimulus person's behavior	Preference condition		
	None	Predicta- bility	Unpredicta- bility
Appropriate (counselor other)	.33	.30	.17
Inappropriate (faculty other)	.28	.24	.25

Note. Means are based on transformed scores which originally were the percentage of positive statements checked; $n = 21$ per condition.

of paper (presumably one of many) which described the unaware person in the conversation to be heard as a college student and the aware participant as either a dormitory counselor or a faculty member. The tape recording was then played. A door opened, and the student began speaking about her inability to study because her boyfriend had not called her. She went on for approximately 5 minutes about this problem using what was designed to be a complaining and whining tone. The other person was designed to be sympathetic but not extremely interested. She asked some questions about the problem and the student's feelings and made a few suggestions. (According to pretesting and manipulation checks, attitudes toward the advisor did not differ when the roles were changed.)

After the tape was played, the subjects completed the postquestionnaire. Included were conversation description scales, an interpersonal checklist to measure attraction to the stimulus person, and items to check the effectiveness of the manipulations. The subjects were then debriefed and dismissed.

Results

Effectiveness of the Manipulations

The subjects were asked to indicate on a linear scale (scored 1-100) the extent to which the unaware person had acted appropriately. As expected, when the other conversant was a faculty member, the stimulus person was perceived as behaving less appropriately than when the other was a dormitory counselor⁴ ($F = 8.12$, $df = 1/116$, $p < .01$). The subjects were also asked how important it was to them to be able to predict the stimulus person's behavior. Those in the predictability preference condition rated predictability of most importance; those in the unpredictability

preference condition rated it of least importance; no-preference means were midway between these ($F = 2.41$, $df = 2/116$, $p < .10$). On the adjective checklist there was a strong tendency for subjects to check more items in the inappropriate condition ($F = 9.96$, $df = 1/120$, $p < .001$). While not bearing on the present study, this result supports Jones's et al. (1961) finding that inappropriate behavior is perceived as more informative than is appropriate behavior.

Attraction to the Stimulus Person

The checklist used to measure attraction to the stimulus person consisted of 118 adjectives and phrases taken from the love-hostility items in the Interpersonal Check List (LaForge, 1963). Pretesting established which items were unambiguously positive (40), which were negative (42), and which were neutral or ambiguous. The latter were used as filler. Attraction toward the stimulus person was scored as the percentage of positive adjectives checked. As in Experiment I, the attraction scores were positively skewed and were subjected to a log transformation. The mean transformed scores are presented in Table 2. The means were arrayed as expected, and the predicted Appropriateness $\times$ Predictability Preference interaction was obtained ($F = 3.29$, $df = 2/120$, $p < .05$).

To test the hypothesis more exactly, two 2×2 analyses of variance were performed comparing each preference condition with the no-preference condition. The results of these analyses paralleled the results of Experiment I. In the unpredictability preference condition, the inappropriate person was evaluated more highly than the appropriate person, whereas in the no-preference condition the reverse was true ($F = 4.29$, $df = 1/80$, $p < .05$). While the predictability preference means were in the predicted direction, a significant interaction with control means was not obtained ($F = .05$).

DISCUSSION

The experimental data reported here demonstrated that (a) situational constraints can influence individual preferences for predictability or unpredictability in others; (b) one who acts inappropriately is perceived as relatively unpredictable; and (c) whether or not

⁴ df s vary across measures since a few subjects failed to complete every item.

one dislikes this inappropriate, unpredictable other depends on situational variations which affect one's preference that others be predictable or unpredictable. It was hypothesized that when the preference for predictability predominates, inappropriate behavior by another causes one to like him less than when he acts appropriately. There was insignificant but consistent support for the assertion in both experiments. In addition, there are previous studies which support it, especially Kiesler et al. (1967).

The strongest findings, however, demonstrated that there are conditions under which inappropriate behavior leads to greater attraction than appropriate behavior and that these conditions create a preference for unpredictability. Since liking for a norm violator is probably not intuitively expected (few theorists have even mentioned the possibility), the strength of these data were somewhat surprising. One reason for the impact of the unpredictability preference condition may have been that comparable interaction goals are rare in everyday life. Situations where one must accurately describe another or create something novel with him are probably not too common. Given the uniqueness of the situation, the subjects would have paid relatively great attention to the stimulus person, looking for behaviors from which they could make inferences, and the inappropriate act would have stood out. In contrast, the other subjects' goals were likely not very unusual. Though the inappropriate act would be noticed, it would not be an important basis for inference. Thus, the strength (but not the direction) of the unpredictability preference data could have resulted from subjects' heightened attention. If so, any situation arousing needs for unpredictability in others might produce relatively pronounced reactions to their behavior.

One possibility that should be considered is that unpredictability preference-appropriate stimulus persons were disliked because they were uninteresting (or inappropriate stimulus persons were liked because they were interesting). This interpretation assumes that the unpredictability preference manipulation aroused a need to interact with interesting persons. While the interpretation seems reasonable with respect to Experiment I (cre-

ative people are interesting), it does not apply to Experiment II in which unpredictability preference subjects were merely trying to be accurate.

If one considers the data from Experiments I and II as a whole, the present results can be taken as supporting those social exchange theories which assume that one of the functions of social norms is to produce predictable interaction (e.g., Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). One would ordinarily dislike someone who failed to enact a norm and thereby reduced the predictability of interaction. Yet the present data also suggest that theorists should consider the conditions under which unpredictability and norm violations may be functional or preferred. At the present time, we do not know which interaction goals reliably produce a need for unpredictability, nor how often these goals exist in everyday life.

REFERENCES

- GERGEN, K. J. *The psychology of behavior exchange*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969.
- GOFFMAN, E. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959.
- HOLLANDER, E. P. Some effects of perceived status on responses to innovative behavior. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1961, 63, 247-250.
- HOMANS, G. L. *Social behavior: Its elementary forms*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961.
- JONES, E. E., DAVIS, K. E., & GERGEN, K. J. Role playing variations and their informational value for person perception. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1961, 63, 302-310.
- JONES, E. E., & THIBAUT, J. W. Interaction goals as bases of inference in interpersonal perception. In R. Tagiuri & L. Petrullo (Eds.), *Person perception and interpersonal behavior*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958.
- KIESLER, C. A., KIESLER, S. B., & PALLAK, M. S. The effect of commitment to future interaction on reactions to norm violations. *Journal of Personality*, 1967, 35, 585-599.
- KIESLER, S. B. The effect of perceived role requirements on reactions to favor-doing. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 1966, 2, 198-210.
- LAForge, R. Research use of the ICL. Unpublished manuscript, Oregon Research Institute, 1963.
- RAVEN, B. H., & FRENCH, J. R. P. Group support, legitimate power, and social influence. *Journal of Personality*, 1958, 26, 400-409.
- SCHACHTER, S. Deviation, rejection, and communication. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1951, 46, 190-207.
- THIBAUT, J. W., & KELLEY, H. H. *The social psychology of groups*. New York: Wiley, 1959.

(Received February 28, 1972)