Accounting for Consistency and Change in Responses to Influence Attempts: An Examination of Preference for Consistency

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The long-standing question of individual differences' impact in influence research was addressed by examining the possibility that an individual's level of Preference for Consistency (PFC) may account for some of the variability. Consistent with predictions, high and low PFC individuals did not differ in susceptibility to influence attempts when they did not hold an initial position on an issue. However, when an initial position was stated, high PFC individuals altered their position (from initial to final) significantly more than low PFC individuals, indicating that PFC may moderate the effects of influence. Discussion focuses on the salience of commitments made by participants as explanations for the pattern of results, and the implications of PFC for psychological research.

There is historical interest in the effects of influence on the responses of others (Allen, 1965), in part, because of the variability in people's responses to persuasion attempts (Asch, 1955; McGuire, 1968; Wood & Stagner, 1994). People who do not succumb to influence attempts can be seen as remaining independent, recalcitrant, or nonconforming. In cases in which people hold an initial position on an issue and are not affected by influence attempts (e.g., they do not change their position), a consistent pattern of responding is exhibited. If some people are inherently more likely to behave consistently than others, then it is possible that a measure of personal consistency may account for some of the variability present in previous research on influence.

Asch (1955, 1956) examined the effects of social influence in group situations as a way of assessing levels of independence and conformity. Asch's research focused on the influence of a unanimous majority that advocated an incorrect choice on an unambiguous perceptual task. The measure of conformity was the number of times that the subject abandoned his own impression and agreed with the unanimous majority even though it was obviously wrong. On average, subjects agreed with the incorrect majority about 36 percent of the time. However, nearly 25 percent of the participants did not conform on any of the trials, while approximately 5 percent conformed on every trial.

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Deutsch and Gerard (1955) expanded on the work of Asch by differentiating between two types of influence that can operate in social situations: normative and informational. Normative influence occurs when people change their behavior to gain acceptance or conform to the positive expectations or norms of others. This type of influence is based on concern about the group and one's position in it. Informational influence, on the other hand, occurs when people change to be more accurate or correct. This type of influence involves information pertaining to evidence about reality (e.g., Festinger, 1950).

Both normative and informational influence can be considered to be involved in many conformity studies. When subjects abandon their initial position in favor of the position advocated by a majority, they act inconsistently with their beliefs. This same phenomenon, an inconsistency between one's attitude and behavior, became the focal point of several theories of cognitive consistency such as Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, Heider's (1958) balance theory, and Rosenberg's (1960) evaluative-cognitive consistency theory. The type of consistency that was considered in these theories, however, was not a global evaluation of consistency, but rather an attitudinal, domain-specific consistency. These theories of cognitive consistency did not directly address the nonyielding or independent pattern of responding that was a major aspect of early influence studies (e.g., Asch, 1955, 1956). More specifically, these influence studies explored the conditions that led to independence or lack of independence (conformity) in the face of group pressure. This independent pattern of responding can be interpreted as a consistent pattern of responding in the sense that individuals' final responses did not change from their initial positions. It is this type of consistency (lack of change from an initial position or commitment) that has rarely been considered in influence research.

It is obvious that there is a relationship between conformity and consistency. Specifically, when conformity occurs, consistency (with an initial position or perception) does not. Likewise, when individuals remain consistent, they do not conform. These two issues are in essence opposite sides of the same coin. The question that arises is whether some individuals may be less susceptible to influence based on their desire to behave or appear consistent. Those people who have a tendency to be more committed to their initial position (and thus remain consistent) should be less easily influenced than those who are intrinsically less committed to their original position.

It had been difficult to test such a hypothesis due to the unavailability of a reliable measure of an individual's intrinsic motivation to behave consistently. However, a scale for measuring a person's "preference for consistency" (PFC) has recently been reported (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995). This scale measures "the tendency to base one's responses to incoming stimuli on the implications of existing (prior entry) variables, such as previous expectancies, commitments and choices" (Cialdini et al., p. 318). Cialdini and his colleagues were able to demonstrate the validity of this scale in a series of studies that examined the susceptibility of participants to a set of standard consistency-based effects (Bator, Guadagno, & Cialdini, 1996; Cialdini et al.). These studies reveal that the type of consistency being measured is a consistency with a prior commitment or position. In general, individuals who score high on the PFC

scale (high PFC) feel a greater sense of commitment to an initial position than those who score low on the scale (low PFC) and, therefore, should be less likely to succumb to influence attempts that oppose their initial position. For example, using the foot-in-the-door technique, high PFC individuals were shown to be more likely than low PFC individuals to agree to a larger subsequent request after agreeing to an initial smaller request (Bator et al., 1996).

Based on the above discussion, our first hypothesis states that high PFC individuals should be less easily influenced than low PFC individuals when an initial position on an issue is held. When presented with an influence attempt, high PFC people should be more consistent with their initial responses while low PFC people should be more willing to change their responses based on the influence attempt. Our second hypothesis states that in situations where no initial position is held, both high and low PFC individuals should show similar effects of influence attempts. When no initial position is held by an individual, it is not possible to base successive responses on an initial position. Therefore, no differences between high and low PFC people are predicted when no initial position is held.

Because the same type of influence does not operate in all situations (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kaplan & Miller, 1987), we examined the effects of both normative and informational influence to maximize generalizability of the findings. Our speculation was that normative and informational influence would not differ with respect to the amount of influence produced or interact with levels of PFC (either high or low).

To test the hypotheses, individuals responded to a series of questions that measured their position on a number of issues. In one condition, individuals answered the series of questions twice: once to establish an initial position and once after having been exposed to influence attempts. Through this procedure, it was possible to test the first hypothesis by examining the amount of movement away from the initial position toward the position advocated by the influence. In a second condition, individuals answered a series of questions after receiving influence attempts pertaining to each question. This procedure allowed us to test the second hypothesis that states that in situations where no initial position is held, both high and low PFC individuals should be equally susceptible to influence attempts.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred twelve undergraduate students at North Dakota State University volunteered to participate in this experiment to earn extra credit in their lower-level psychology courses. Sixteen participants were excluded from the analysis due to an incomplete prescreening questionnaire (administered earlier in the semester from which PFC scores were obtained) or a failure to follow instructions. Therefore, 96 students (46 males and 50 females) completed all aspects of this experiment.

Design

The design of the study was a 2 (initial-position or no-initial-position condition) X 2 (ordering of conditions) X 2 (informational influence present or absent) X 2 (normative influence present or absent) X 2 (high or low PFC) mixed design. The between subjects variables included the ordering of conditions (having the initial-position condition first or second) and level of PFC. We did not anticipate that the ordering of conditions would have an effect, however it was necessary to analyze it to establish this contention. Participants were presented with two sets of issues. In one condition, they established an initial position on each issue (initial-position condition), in the other they did not (no-initial-position condition). Although all participants received both conditions, half received the initial-position condition first, and the other half received the no-initial-position condition first. Therefore, the no-initial or initial position variable was a within subjects variable counterbalanced for order. This counterbalancing created the order of conditions variable. The additional within subjects variables included the informational influence and the normative influence manipulations. The four levels of the influence manipulations were counterbalanced for presentation order and issue topic with a Greco-Latin square.

Measures

PFC scale. The PFC scale has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of personal preference for consistency (Cialdini et al., 1995). This scale measures the tendency for an individual to base his or her responses to incoming stimuli on the implications of existing variables, such as previous commitments or choices. The scale has been validated in several experiments in which scores on the PFC scale were shown to successfully predict individuals who would and would not be susceptible to a set of standard consistency-based effects (Bator et al., 1996; Cialdini et al., 1995). In addition, discriminative validity tests reveal that the PFC scale significantly correlates with only a small number of other personality measures such as extroversion (r = -.22), openness (r = -.38), self-consciousness (r = .25), rigidity (r = .48), and personal need for structure (r = .47; see Cialdini et al., 1995). This scale has been shown not to correlate with measures of agreeableness, self-esteem, social desirability, or self-monitoring, among others.

Measure of position. Participants responded to a series of issues, each containing four questions. These issues assessed opinions and were conceptually similar to stimuli used in previous research (e.g., Latané & Bourgeois, 1996; Latané & L'Herrou, 1996). For example, one issue asked, "How sure are you that you are for or against surface mining?" Participants answered these questions on a 10-point scale ranging from extremely sure (convinced, certain, or likely) about one option at one end of the scale to extremely sure (convinced, certain, or likely) about the other option at the opposite end. A pilot study was used to divide and equate issues between conditions.

Normative and informational influences were introduced on some issues by specific statements. For example, informational influence was presented as "Surface mining

operations are one of the main sources of environmental degradation in the world today" and "It is possible to attain these ores through other methods less expensively and with less damage to the environment." These statements are informational influence because they provide some information pertaining to evidence about reality. Normative influence was provided with a statement such as "A large majority of NDSU students in a recent survey stated that they were against surface mining." This statement can be considered normative influence because it pertains to the norm and indicates the response preferred by the majority. At the bottom of each issue, students were asked to write their reasons for selecting each preference. This was done to encourage participants to take the task seriously and also to enhance the salience of taking a position.

Procedure

Students, in groups of three to thirty, were seated in a classroom and told that they would be reading and answering a series of questions as well as forming small groups to discuss their responses to some of the issues. The anticipation of discussing their responses with others should have increased the amount of normative influence felt by the students (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).

The students were randomly assigned to receive either the no-initial-position condition first or the initial-position condition first. In the no-initial-position condition, participants were given a packet containing four issues and asked to respond to each. Three of these issues were paired with some form of influence (either normative, informational, or both) designed to move the response in a certain direction. When all participants had completed the packet, the materials were collected.

In the initial-position condition, students were initially given a packet containing four issues similar to those used in the no-initial-position condition, except that they did not contain any influence attempts. This packet allowed individuals to establish an initial position on each issue. Upon completion of these issues, the packet was collected. A second packet was then distributed which contained the same four issues, with the exception that three of them were paired with some form of influence (either normative, informational, or both). Upon completion of these issues, the packets were collected.

At this point, the primary aspects of the study had been completed. The participants were told that the discussion portion of the study was not absolutely necessary and could be skipped. All participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation. Finally, each participant's PFC score was obtained from screening questionnaires completed earlier in the semester.

RESULTS

Previous researchers have differentiated between high and low PFC individuals in several ways. For example, Cialdini et al. (1995) explored the utility of both a median split of PFC scores and also a grouping in which only the top 25 percent and bottom 25 percent of scores were considered. Council, Grant, Smith, and Matz (1997) considered both a median split and a split in which high, medium, and low PFC individuals were

differentiated. Consequently, there has been no uniform way of classifying people based on PFC scores. What is clear is that low PFC individuals tend to respond differently than high and medium PFC individuals. An inspection of the distribution of PFC scores in the present study revealed a slight negative skew. In this case, a median split would tend to dilute the effect of low PFC individuals because moderates would be included in this grouping. We also considered the possibility of creating groups by a midpoint split on the PFC scale (e.g., above or below 5 on the 9-point scale). This procedure was not suitable because a large majority of respondents ended up in the high PFC group and did not appropriately represent the distribution. Consequently, we chose to use a mean split of PFC scores because this did not dilute the low PFC grouping and only slightly over-weighted the high PFC grouping.

This mean-split on PFC scores created groups of individuals scoring high (n = 54; M = 6.57) or low (n = 42; M = 4.87) on the PFC scale. The means for the high and low PFC groups were on opposite sides of the scale's midpoint and were significantly different from each other, $F(1, 94) = 162.73$, $p < .001$. The overall mean (5.82), median (6.03), and mode (6.50) of the distribution of PFC scores obtained in our study were slightly higher than those obtained by Cialdini et al. (1995; M = 5.43, Mdn = 5.50, and mode = 5.44). This indicates that, on average, participants in this study may have placed slightly more emphasis on behaving or appearing consistently than did those in previous studies. The pattern of PFC scores obtained in this study is consistent with other research (e.g., Council et al., 1997) in which PFC scores were, on average, slightly higher than those reported by Cialdini et al.

Preliminary analyses. To determine if an order of conditions effect existed (e.g., having initial-position condition first or second), ANOVAs were conducted on participants' mean responses. As expected, there was no order effect for either the no-initial position condition or the initial-position condition (both $ps > .30$) on mean responses or change scores. As such, this variable will not be considered further in the analyses. Reliability analyses were conducted on the four questions for each issue. All four questions on each issue were highly correlated and showed high internal consistency (all Cronbach's aas > .91).

Hypothesis 1. To test the hypothesis that high PFC individuals would be less easily influenced than low PFC individuals when they hold an initial position, the data from the initial-position condition were analyzed. The amount of change from initial position to final position was calculated by subtracting a participant's final position from his or her initial position on each question. Therefore, a participant's change score could range from -9 (a complete change in the direction opposite the influence attempts) to 9 (a complete change in the direction of the influence attempts) on each question. A response was calculated for each participant by averaging these four change scores for each issue.

The first step in analyzing these data was to examine the Greco-Latin square design. This analysis considered the main effects of issue, type of influence present, order, and starting position. Results indicated a significant main effect of influence type only, $F(3, 368) = 38.12$, $p < .001$ (all other $ps > .10$). Because there was not a significant main effect of issue, order, or starting position, these variables were collapsed. A residual

effect was also calculated as a check on the appropriateness of the procedure. The residual effect was not significant ($F < 1$), indicating that interactions are not likely and that it is appropriate to conduct the Greco-Latin square analysis (see Winer, 1962).

A PFC (high or low) X normative influence (present or absent) X informational influence (present or absent) mixed design ANOVA was conducted, revealing a significant main effect for PFC (see Tables 1 and 2). However, contrary to predictions, high PFC participants evidenced greater change than did low PFC participants. Additionally, a significant main effect of informational influence was exhibited. Participants exhibited greater amounts of change when informational influence was present. The main effect of normative influence was not significant. No interactions reached the level of significance.

Hypothesis 2. To examine the hypothesis that high and low PFC individuals would respond similarly to influence attempts when no initial position was held, the data from the no-initial-position condition were analyzed. Mean responses for each issue were calculated by averaging the responses to the four questions on each issue.

Similar to the analysis of the initial-position condition, the Greco-Latin square design was examined first. The analysis of the Greco-Latin square design considered the main effects of issue, influence type present, order, and starting position. A significant main effect of influence type only was revealed, $F(3, 368) = 18.22$, $p < .001$ (all other $ps > .05$). Because there was not a significant main effect of issue, order, or starting position, these variables were collapsed. The residual effect calculated as a check on the appropriateness of the Greco-Latin square procedure was not significant ($F < 1$).

A PFC (high or low) X normative influence (present or absent) X informational influence (present or absent) mixed design ANOVA was conducted. Significant main effects were uncovered for normative and informational influence (see Tables 3 and 4).

TABLE 1

ANOVA Source Table for Initial-Position Condition

Source	*df*	*MS*	*F*
	Between subjects		
PFC	1	9.01	4.16*
Error (PFC)	94	(2.16)	
	Within subjects		
Normative influence	1	.36	.20
Informational influence	1	215.21	86.79**
PFC X normative influence	1	1.00	.55
PFC X informational influence	1	.37	.15
Normative X informational	1	2.78	1.96
PFC X normative X informational	1	2.41	1.70
Error (normative influence)	94	(1.81)	
Error (informational influence)	94	(2.48)	
Error (influence interactions)	94	(1.42)	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

TABLE 2

Mean Change Per Question in the Initial-Position Condition

		Normative Influence					
		Absent		*Present*		*Mean Total*	
	Absent						
	Total Sample	0.09	(0.77)	0.35	(1.20)	0.22	(0.99)
	High PFC	0.08	(0.87)	0.57	(0.99)	0.37	(0.93)
Informational	Low PFC	0.10	(0.63)	0.07	(1.40)	0.09	(1.02)
Influence	*Present*						
	Total Sample	1.79	(1.65)	1.68	(1.78)	1.74	(1.72)
	High PFC	1.98	(1.56)	1.81	(1.89)	1.90	(1.73)
	Low PFC	1.55	(1.74)	1.50	(1.63)	1.53	(1.69)
	Mean Totals						
	Total Sample	0.94	(1.21)	1.02	(1.49)	0.99	(1.35)
	High PFC	1.03	(1.22)	1.19	(1.44)	1.11	(1.33)
	Low PFC	0.83	(1.19)	0.79	(1.52)	0.80	(1.36)

Standard deviations appear in parentheses next to mean values (n = 96 per cell).

For both normative and informational influence, responses were closer to the position advocated by the influence attempts when the influence was present. There was not a significant effect of PFC. This is consistent with hypothesis 2 because no significant differences existed between high (M = 5.05) and low PFC individuals (M = 5.01) on responses when no initial position was held. No interactions reached a level of significance.

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to address the question: Why do some people tend to remain independent in the face of influence? Our hypothesis was that a portion of the variability attributed to individual differences in previous studies of influence could be accounted for by an individual's intrinsic motivation to be consistent, as assessed by his or her preference for consistency. We found preference for consistency to be a significant predictor of an individual's likelihood to alter his or her response when an initial position was held, but not when no initial position was held.

Although the finding that high PFC individuals were significantly more likely to change their response than low PFC individuals was opposite of the prediction, PFC did moderate the effect. To explain these findings, it is important to consider which commitment was made most salient to the participants. That is, with which commitment were participants being consistent? We expected that the participants' initial responses on an issue would be the most salient commitment. However, this probably did not occur because high PFC individuals were less consistent than low PFC individuals on the task. A number of potential explanations for this unexpected pattern of results can be considered.

High PFC participants may have been more willing to change their response because

TABLE 3

ANOVA Source Table for No-Initial-Position Condition

Source	*df*	*MS*	*F*
	Between subjects		
PFC	1	.16	.04
Error (PFC)	94	(3.61)	
	Within subjects		
Normative influence	1	12.03	8.22*
Informational influence	1	104.70	47.47**
PFC X normative influence	1	1.48	1.01
PFC X informational influence	1	3.18	1.44
Normative X informational	1	5.02	2.35
PFC X normative X informational	1	.25	.12
Error (normative influence)	94	(1.46)	
Error (informational influence)	94	(2.21)	
Error (influence interactions)	94	(2.14)	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

TABLE 4

Mean Responses in the No-Initial-Position Condition

		Normative Influence					
		Absent		*Present*		*Mean Total*	
Informational Influence	*Absent*	5.85	(1.34)	5.28	(1.48)	5.57	(1.41)
	Present	4.54	(1.70)	4.44	(1.58)	4.49	(1.64)
	Mean Total	5.20	(1.52)	4.86	(1.53)	5.03	(1.52)

Smaller mean values indicate responses closer to the position advocated by the influence.

Standard deviation values appear in parentheses next to mean values ($n = 96$ per cell).

they were more committed to participating in the research than were low PFC participants. Indeed, previous research has shown that high PFC individuals maintain a stronger commitment to participating in research than low PFC individuals as evidenced by significantly more high PFC students showing up for studies they had signed up for than low PFC students (Council et al., 1997). Bator et al. (1996) demonstrated a similar commitment to research participation by considering individuals' PFC and employing the foot-in-the-door technique. High and low PFC participants initially spent a few minutes helping an experimenter complete a worksheet. After completing the worksheet, participants were asked if they would agree to receive a set of worksheets in the mail, complete them, and return the set to the experimenter. Fourteen percent of the low PFC participants returned the worksheets compared to 36 percent of the high PFC participants. This demonstrates that high PFC people may be more committed to the research in which they are participating than low PFC people.

In the present study, high PFC individuals' elevated level of commitment may have

led them to become more compliant to "make the study work." It is possible that these people were more willing to change their responses because of the obvious influence attempts present in the methodology and their desire to make the study a success. In other words, it may be that the act of signing up to participate in a study leads high PFC participants to be more committed to showing up and also to making the study work. If this interpretation is correct, the presence of low PFC individuals in experiments may increase error variance and decrease the likelihood of uncovering an effect (see Cialdini et al., 1995).

Another explanation for why high PFC participants were more willing to change their responses in the face of influence is that the commitment motivating their responses was a commitment toward believing strong evidence in general (R. B. Cialdini, personal communication, May 19, 1997). High PFC participants may have changed their position because they were committed to an orientation that they regard highly factual evidence about reality (e.g., the informational influence statements). High PFC people may have a greater desire than low PFC people to search for, and be consistent with, the truth about reality. It is possible that, for high PFC participants, the commitment created by the establishment of an initial position was not the most salient commitment. Rather, the commitment motivating responses was an orientation toward believing evidence-based arguments. Therefore, the responses of high PFC participants were more subject to change based on the new influence attempts than were low PFC participant's responses.

Although plausible, the explanations of the "compliant," or "evidence-oriented" participant are somewhat inconsistent with the results of this study. If high PFC participants were more committed to making the study a success, appearing cooperative or being more responsive to evidence about reality, they should have been more likely than low PFC participants to be persuaded by the influence attempts in both the initial-position and no-initial-position conditions. However, they were not. No differences were reported between PFC groups in the no-initial-position condition, suggesting important limitations to these post-hoc explanations.

What is clear in this study is that making an initial response changed how high and low PFC individuals responded to the influence. High PFC participants were more willing to change than low PFC participants after having first been given the opportunity to state a response. By initially stating a response, participants were able to become aware of the issues and likely realized that they had little knowledge regarding the topics. This lack of knowledge was presumably discrepant with how they perceived themselves. It is likely that most of these college students viewed themselves as knowledgeable people and that encountering issues for which they had little knowledge was inconsistent with their view of themselves. Therefore, a related explanation for why high PFC people were more willing to change their responses is that they were being consistent with a view of themselves as knowledgeable people. The salience of this value was probably bolstered by the instructions in which participants were told that the study would be examining individual's "degree of cultural knowledge" and that "cultural knowledge may be related to intelligence."

The PFC scale measures the "the tendency to base one's responses to incoming stimuli

on the implications of existing (prior entry) variables" (Cialdini et al., 1995, p. 318). In this case, the implication of the incoming stimuli (the initial presentation of the issues) was that participants became aware that they were not very knowledgeable about the topics covered by the issues (e.g., surface mining). Therefore, it is possible that to be consistent with their conception of themselves as knowledgeable people, high PFC participants responded more favorably to the information provided. By responding in accordance with the influence, participants may have garnered a sense of having responded correctly or more knowledgeably.

This explanation based on a knowledgeable self-conception is consistent with the results for the no-initial-position condition. Because students were presented with the issues and influence statements at the same time, they may not have become as aware of their lack of knowledge. Consequently, high and low PFC participants responded in the same fashion, producing the finding of no differences on mean responses when no initial position was held.

This "knowledgeable self-conception" interpretation of the results is consistent with the theories of some cognitive consistency researchers who contend that a desire to maintain a positive self-image can lead to attitudinal, and potentially behavioral, adjustments (Aronson, 1968, 1969). That is, when people experience an event that threatens their self-concept they are motivated to protect or revitalize their self-image, often by altering their attitudes or behaviors. In our study, the issues (of which participants likely had little knowledge) may have threatened the participants' images of themselves as knowledgeable people. To reduce this threat to their self-concept participants may have shifted their responses in the direction of the influence (i.e., toward the correct answer).

The present study differs from traditional attitudinal studies of cognitive consistency in methodology and theory. Attitudinal studies of cognitive consistency often employ a methodology in which attitude change is measured following the performance of an attitude discrepant behavior (e.g., Aronson, 1968, 1969; Festinger, 1957). In the present study, attitudinal (or positional) change was expected to occur based on traditional influence manipulations. In addition, this study addressed the issues of independence, conformity, and individual differences from a different theoretical perspective than had previously been considered. Specifically, we considered susceptibility to influence attempts from a response-consistency, rather than cognitive-consistency, perspective. Although people characterized as low in cognitive consistency are found to be more susceptible to influence attempts (Chaiken & Yates, 1985; Norman, 1975), our findings suggest that low PFC people may be less susceptible to influence attempts. These seemingly contrasting findings are easily explained when we consider the differences in how the two types of consistency are defined and assessed. While cognitive theories consider consistency between attitudes and behavior, PFC considers a more global disposition to behave in a consistent manner, not necessarily related to attitudes but rather to any salient prior entry variable.

In order to examine the effect of PFC on participants' willingness to change their responses, it was necessary that the influence manipulations be effective. Significant effects were revealed for informational influence in both conditions and for normative influence in the no-initial-position condition. Although significant effects were pro-

duced, the method of presenting the influence in this study was different from many other examinations of influence because the manipulations were presented outside a strictly social setting. It is likely that the influence statements would have had an even greater effect if they would have been presented in an actual social setting where others could have seen and responded to an individual's stated positions (e.g., Asch, 1955, 1956; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).

This lack of social interaction is particularly relevant to the normative influence manipulations. By definition, normative influence requires a desire to conform to the norm of the group. In the present study, group pressure could only be anticipated. It is probable that the normative influence, although effective in the no-initial-position condition, lost its effect in the initial-position condition because it was not as strong as the informational influence in nonsocial environments. Therefore, the normative statements were not sufficient to cause participants to change from their initial position (which was likely a mildly salient commitment). Support for this contention comes from the dominance of informational influence (i.e., having a larger effect than normative influence) in both conditions (see mean differences in Tables 2 and 4).

The findings of this study are potentially applicable to many areas of influence and persuasion research because both normative and informational influences were used. The finding that informational influence was effective in both conditions and normative influence was effective in only the no-initial-position condition indicates that two forms of influence may have been at work. Because no social interaction actually took place, it is difficult to say with certainty whether the normative statements used in this study did produce normative pressures. That possibility notwithstanding, this study was able to differentiate between two different forms of influence in a simple, straightforward, nonsocial procedure. This procedure could be potentially applicable in future research endeavors examining the effects of influence.

Future research should consider which commitments or values motivate consistency among individuals. Our post-hoc speculations concerning which commitment is most salient is based solely on what seems to fit with the results. To consider which commitments are motivating responses, investigators should establish conditions in which certain commitments or values can be made more or less salient. Research could also consider testing similar hypotheses, as addressed here, in actual social situations. It is possible that PFC may have a different effect under such conditions. This could be accomplished by replicating influence research (e.g., Asch, 1956; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Latané & Bourgeois, 1996) and adding a measure of PFC. Such examinations would test the PFC scale in new areas and also continue to address the long-standing question of individual differences in influence research.

One phenomenon that remains intriguing, yet disconcerting, is the repeated finding that only high PFC individuals show an effect for study manipulations. Five studies have now shown low PFC participants did not appear affected by the experimental manipulation (the present study, one reported by Bator et al., 1996; three reported by Cialdini et al., 1995). As Cialdini and his colleagues point out, such a pattern of responding is troublesome for psychological research as a whole. It suggests that roughly half of all participants in psychological research may be unaffected by some experimen-

tal manipulations. Future research should examine the extremity of this phenomenon, and also consider the possible ramifications of low PFC participants when interpreting results. If differential responses of people high and low in preference for consistency are born out in future research, these individual differences in preference for consistency could help explain the variability in responding to influence attempts. Preference for consistency could contribute to our understanding of the historical questions regarding why some individuals conform to, or are persuaded by, an influence attempt, while a substantial subset may be unaffected.

NOTES

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