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The Effects of Altercasting and Counterattitudinal Behavior on Compliance: A Lost Letter Technique Investigation

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A field experiment was conducted to test the effectiveness of altercasting (Weinstein & Dutschberger, 1963) as a compliance-gaining technique. The central hypothesis predicts that positive altercasting messages should produce greater compliance than direct requests. Following Milgram's (1969) lost letter technique, 2,400 ostensibly "lost" letters were placed on car windshields throughout a metropolitan area along with a business card containing a handwritten altercasting or direct request message to mail the letter. The frequency of letters returned was used as a primary measure of compliance. The results do not demonstrate the effectiveness of altercasting as a compliance-gaining technique; on the contrary, they indicate that negative altercasting significantly reduces compliance.

Keywords: Altercasting; Compliance; Milgram

Scholars of influence have long been interested in the processes predicting when individuals comply with a request to perform a particular behavior. Compliance gaining is distinguished from other forms of social influence in that the product of a

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compliance-gaining attempt is public acceptance of a message or overt behavior change and not necessarily internal attitude change (Festinger, 1953; Kelman, 1961). One such technique for gaining compliance is altercasting (Weinstein & Dutschberger, 1963), which involves projecting an individual (the target) into a particular role that is consistent with one's goals (e.g., "A good colleague would…"). The target faces pressure to comply with the request to behave in a manner that is consistent with the role into which she or he has been cast.

Miller, Boster, Roloff, and Seibold's (1977) research indicated that in certain conditions people are likely to use altercasting messages; however, there is a dearth of research examining the effects of altercasting messages on behavior change. Altercasting messages are important to study, not only because they are prevalent in our society (Miller et al., 1977; Weinstein & Dutschberger, 1963), but also because altercasting messages rely on the social psychological construct of social roles. Casting others in various social roles provides a powerful theoretical mechanism for understanding behavior (Pratkanis, 2000); however, little is currently known about using altercasting messages to gain compliance. In this study, Milgram's (Milgram, 1969; Milgram, Mann, & Harter, 1965) lost letter technique was used to test the role of positive and negative altercasting with a pro- and counterattitudinal behavior. In the following section, we review previous research and theorizing regarding altercasting to develop hypotheses.

Altercasting and Compliance Gaining

Altercasting has been established as a potentially effective strategy for inducing compliance. Weinstein and Deutschberger (1963) described altercasting as "projecting an identity, to be assumed by other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent with one's own goals" (p. 454). The target is placed into a social role (e.g., "Be a helpful person and…") and is expected to behave accordingly. Marwell and Schmitt (1967) explained that altercasting messages can be framed positively or negatively. Positive altercasting projects the target into a potentially affirming role, such as making it clear that "a person with 'good' qualities would comply" (p. 357). Negative altercasting, in contrast, projects targets into a potentially undesirable role; in this instance, receivers must perform the behavior to avoid acting in a manner that is consistent with the negative role. A negative altercasting messages may take the following form: "only a person with bad qualities would not comply" (Marwell & Schmitt, p. 358).

Although scholars have examined the altercasting message strategy (Malone, 1995) and have determined that people are likely to use it in certain conditions (Miller et al., 1977), few studies have tested the effectiveness of the altercasting message strategy on gaining compliance. One study by Johnson (1992), however, examined the effect of a negative altercasting request on perceptions of the communicator. Johnson had participants view a videotaped interaction of a supervisor using either a liking or a negative altercasting message to gain a subordinate's compliance. In the negative altercasting condition, the boss told his employee that "…only a bad person would

refuse to do what I am asking you to do'' (p. 62). Participants responded more nega-
tively to the negative altercasting message than the liking message, rating the boss as
less competent. Problematically, Johnson did not measure compliance as a dependent
variable; so, it remains questionable whether perceived incompetence would have
manifest as low compliance. It can be assumed from Johnson's work that negative
altercasting messages are less effective than positive tactics, but it is unclear if negative
altercasting is more or less effective than a direct request for gaining compliance.

Despite the paucity of studies testing the effectiveness of altercasting, the theoretical
underpinnings of this strategy have been considered. Weinstein and Deutschberger
(1963), drawing from Goffman's (1959, 1969) dramaturgical perspective of interac-
tion, offered social roles as one explanation of the effects of altercasting. They
described roles as ''purposeful and normative . . . defined as a repertoire of lines of
action'' (p. 455). Implicit in roles are expectations about behavior. Indeed, competent
performance of a role requires that one behave in a manner consistent with normative
understanding of the role. Goffman (1959) explained,

> When an actor takes on an established social role, usually [s]he finds that a
> particular front has already been established for it. Whether this acquisition of
> the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given tasks or by a
> desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that [s]he must
> do both. (p. 27)

Once accepted by individuals, roles exert a variety of social pressures on them to
make certain that the roles are carried out (Pratkanis, 2000). People must act in
accordance with the roles to maintain a positive image and sustain the interaction.
Accordingly, altercasting may function by capitalizing on our reliance on general
social roles as a means to gain compliance.

Through casting an individual into a particular role, altercasting brings social
pressures accompanying the role to bear on the individual to encourage him or
her to behave accordingly and comply with the request. Positive altercasting projects
the target into an affirming role, creating a situation where, through complying and
performing an advocated behavior, the target is rewarded with the positive attributes
associated with one who performs such an act. Compliant individuals signing a
petition or donating money have their face enhanced by being seen as people who
are ''good'' or perform ''good'' acts. Negative altercasting, in contrast, projects targets
into unattractive roles if they do not comply with the message. By complying with the
request, targets may only circumvent the label or role of people who were ''bad'' or
perform ''bad'' acts. Additionally, Johnson's (1992) study demonstrated that negative
altercasting messages diminish the perceptions of the source, a problem not produced
by positive tactics. Thus, the following predictions are offered:

> H1: Positive altercasting messages produce greater levels of compliance than
> direct request messages.
> H2: Positive altercasting messages produce greater levels of compliance than
> negative altercasting messages.
> RQ1: Will negative altercasting messages produce greater levels of compliance
> than direct request messages?

Johnson's (1992) research, as well as prior theorizing about altercasting, ignored a critical moderating variable: The target's attitude toward the behavior requested. It is likely that the relative effectiveness of positive and negative altercasting messages is dependent upon whether the request is pro- or counterattitudinal. Regardless of the types of messages utilized, compliance is dependent upon prior attitudes (Milgram, Mann, & Harter, 1965). Milgram et al. found that when lost letters were addressed to the Communist Party, for example, return rates were 25 percent; however, when the lost letters were addressed to "medial research associates" the percent returned was 72 percent. However, there are no known studies that have examined the interaction between the request type, specifically positive and negative altercasting, and prior attitude toward the request. If positive altercasting messages will be more effective at gaining compliance than either a direct request or a negative altercasting message, then this effect should be exaggerated when the behavior requested is proattitudinal. A positive altercasting message should be reinforced by an individual's positive attitude toward a behavior. Because the target deems the behavior as valuable or has an affinity for it, the chance to adopt the positive attributes of one who complies may seem more attractive and, thus, compliance may be increased. It is less clear what the effects will be when the behavior requested is counterattitudinal. It could be that when individuals have a negative attitude about the behavior requested, negative altercasting messages lead to compliance because the attitude that a particular group is "bad" may reinforce the threat of the target being a "bad" person by not complying. In other words, by not complying, the targets must assume the same negative characteristics as they ascribe to the counterattitudinal group; the targets must be similar to the disliked group.

H3: When the behavior requested is proattitudinal, positive altercasting messages will produce more compliance than negative altercasting messages.

RQ2: When the behavior requested is counterattitudinal, what is the relationship between message type and compliance?

Method

Study Overview

A field-experiment was conducted to test the previous hypotheses. Milgram's (Milgram, 1969; Milgram et al., 1965) lost letter technique was used to examine behavioral responses to the altercasting and counterattitudinal behavior manipulations. The lost letter technique has become an extensively used indirect measure of attitudes about a wide range of issues, including: interracial marriage (Bridges, Keeton, & Clark, 2002), gay and lesbian issues (Bridges, Anzalone, & Ryan, 2002; Bridges, Williamson, Thompson, & Windsor, 2001; Levinson, Pesina, & Rienzi, 1993) and abortion (Kunz & Fernquist, 1989); however, this investigation is the first known study to pair messages with the lost letter technique to investigate compliance-gaining.

Experimenters placed 2,400 ostensibly lost letters, which addressed to pro- and counterattitudinal groups, under vehicle windshield wipers in public areas of a large southwestern city. A business card was placed on top of the letters containing a

handwritten compliance-gaining message indicating that the letter was lost and directing the target to mail it if it was not theirs.

Pilot Study

Prior to conducting the field experiment, two pilot studies were conducted to assess the face validity of the compliance-gaining messages and identify a pro- and counter-attitudinal group to serve as the intended receiver of the lost letter. One hundred and forty undergraduate students completed a short questionnaire. Participants were asked to read a series of positive and negative altercasting messages and direct requests and respond to whether the messages conformed to the definition of positive or negative altercasting or direct requests. This test led to the requests used in this study (see description below). Respondents rated the positive altercasting message ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .71$) as having more qualities of a positive altercasting message (i.e., telling respondents that a good person would mail the letter) than the negative altercasting message (i.e., telling respondents that a bad person would not mail the letter) ($M = 2.59$, $SD = .74$), $t(139) = 8.23$, $p < .01$.

The second pilot test was conducted to choose the pro- and counterattitudinal groups. Participants were asked to rate a variety of groups on a scale of 1 (counterattitudinal) to 5 (proattitudinal) in terms of their attitudes toward them. The Children's Hospital ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .39$) and the Communist Party ($M = 1.53$, $SD = .79$) emerged as the organizations that elicited the most polarizing attitudes. Participants had significantly more favorable attitudes about the Children's Hospital than the Communist Party, $t(139) = 41.41$, $p < .01$. Thus, these two organizations were used as the pro- and counterattitudinal groups to whom participants would be asked to send a letter.

Participants

Participants in the field consisted of 2,400 individuals who parked their vehicle on a public street in Austin, Texas. Austin is a large metropolitan area in central Texas populated by 656,562 people at the time of the study. According to the 2000 census data the Austin population included: 65.36% Caucasians, 30.55% Hispanics, 10.05% Black/African Americans, and 4.72% Asians. Breaking Austin down by household type yields 53% family households, and 46.7% nonfamily households. The mean income per household was $58,754, and the median was $42,689.

Design

A 2 (proattitudinal behavior, counterattitudinal behavior) × 3 (negative altercasting message, positive altercasting message, direct request) between-participants factorial design was employed. In discussing the application of the lost letter technique, Milgram (1992) explained that uncontrolled variance in letter return rates must be accounted for by using a large number of letters in each condition (at least 100 letters per condition). Four hundred letters were "lost" in each of the six experimental conditions for a total of 2,400 letters distributed. Prior to distributing

the letters, a table of random numbers was use to arrange the letters in a random order and, thus, ensure the random assignment of participants to the experimental conditions.

Procedure

Researchers placed "lost" letters along with a business card with the compliance-gaining message written on it under the windshield wipers of vehicles parked on public streets in Austin, Texas. The city and its suburbs were divided roughly into five equal geographic areas among the researchers. Several procedures were implemented to keep the distribution of the 2,400 letters uniform. Letters were dropped: on weekdays; during daylight hours; out of visual sight of any other letter; not on rainy days; and only on those vehicles parked on a public street—no letters were placed on cars parked in private driveways, parking lots, or shopping malls. The drop rate was approximately 15 letters per hour.

Upon arriving at their vehicles, participants would find a stamped envelope (the lost letter) and business card under their windshield wipers. Envelopes were addressed to either the pro- (Children's Hospital) or counterattitudinal (Communist Party) social group and had a first-class stamp on them. Proattitudinal behaviors were operationalized as returning the lost letter to the proattitudinal group and counterattitudinal behaviors were operationalized as returning the letter to the counterattitudinal group. The compliance-gaining message was handwritten on the back of the business card. The positive altercasting message stated: "I found this next to your car. A good person would mail it (that is, if it's not yours)." The negative altercasting message said: "I found this next to your car. Only a bad person wouldn't mail it (that is, if it's not yours)." The direct request message stated: "I found this next to your car. Mail it (that is, if it's not yours)." The status of the individual who presumably left the business card was also manipulated to mitigate the possibility of fixed-message effects; business cards were from a medical doctor or mover (also based on results of an unreported pilot test).[1] The wording of the compliance-gaining requests was chosen for three reasons. First, and most importantly, the wording is consistent with the original Marwell and Schmitt (1967) messages. Second, the negative altercasting message, the message that could potentially be perceived as rude, is consistent with the wording used in Johnson's (1992) study, and the positive altercasting message was designed to be the same length and form. Third, the pilot test indicted it was consistent with the definition of altercasting. Also, it should be noted that care was taken to ensure that the business card was placed on top of the letter, with the compliance-gaining message facing participants; presumably, participants first saw the compliance-gaining message and then the attitude manipulation.

Following the procedure used by Milgram et al. (1965), the name Pat Karnak was used above the return address of the original sender. Included inside each envelope was an identical single sheet of paper with a message based on Milgram et al.'s original lost letter. The message contained 90 words and informed the recipient "Walter" that the plans for a speaker had changed and that Pat (the

sender) would be back in time for a previously planned meeting. On the back of each letter a numerical code was included by the researchers that allowed tabulation of return rates per experimental condition and length of time between drop date and return date.

One potential concern about the method is its ecological validity. Specifically, why would someone take the time to write a note on a business card instead of simply mailing the letter? Admittedly, pairing a handwritten note on the back of a business card with Milgram's (1969) lost letter technique is an unusual method for testing compliance-gaining messages. However, the premise of the method is that the note-writer found a letter by someone's vehicle and has assumed it belongs to the vehicle's driver. The note explicitly encourages the person to mail it "if it's not yours." The scenario was pilot-tested and participants indicated that the scenario seemed plausible. Thus, it was concluded that pairing notes with the lost letter technique was an appropriate method for testing compliance-gaining messages in a field experiment.[2]

Dependent Measures

Letter return comprised the primary dependent variable. Returned letters were coded 1 and unreturned letters were coded 0 ($M = .48$, $SD = .50$). We also used the time from when the letter was dropped until it was returned as a secondary dependent measure. Time was computed by counting the number of days between when the letter was dropped and the letter was postmarked by the post office ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 2.76$). Letters received on the same day in which they were "lost" were coded as 1. Unreturned letters were treated as missing data in this analysis.

Results

The data were first cleaned following the recommendations established by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). The dependent measures were inspected for the presence of out-of-range values and outliers. As noted by Tabachnick and Fidell, extreme outliers can artificially inflate mean scores and need to be corrected. Hence, outliers identified for the measure of letter return time (range 1 to 37 days) were reassigned a value of 11 days, which is one unit greater than the upper-bound limit of the 95% confidence interval for the measure. This procedure corrected for outliers while preserving data. Additionally, an analysis was conducted to determine whether or not there were any differences in the dependent variables stemming from the five geographic areas in which the letters were dropped. Although there were no differences in the number of letters returned, $\chi^2(4, N = 2400) = 5.19$, $p = .27$, the difference in letter return time between the geographic areas was significant, $F(4, 1142) = 8.59$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Accordingly, geographic area was used as a control variable when assessing the influence of altercasting on letter return time.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that positive altercasting messages will produce great-er levels of compliance than direct request messages as well as negative altercasting

Table 1 Number of Letters Returned and Letter Return Rate as a Function of Compliance-Gaining Message and Pro-and Counterattitudinal Behavior

	Positive altercasting		Negative altercasting		Direct request	
	Pro	Counter	Pro	Counter	Pro	Counter
Return frequency	282	131	229	101	281	133
Percent returned	70.50%	32.75%	57.25%	25.25%	70.25%	33.25%
Percent returned by message type	51.63%		41.25%		51.75%	
Return time in days						
M	3.74	3.18	3.38	3.77	3.65	3.34
SD	2.90	2.52	2.56	2.86	2.92	2.57

Note. 'Pro' and 'Counter' refer to proattitudinal and counterattitudinal groups to which behavior advocated in the compliance-gaining message. Return time was assessed in days; smaller values indicate that letters were returned faster. Four hundred letters were distributed in each condition.

messages. Additionally, Research Question 1 asked if negative altercasting messages produce greater levels of compliance than direct request messages.

A logistic regression model was tested to assess the influence of message type on letter returns. Two dummy-coded variables were created for the three compliance-gaining message conditions. The direct request message served as the reference condition. The dummy-coded variables positive altercasting (with positive altercasting coded as 1, and negative altercasting and direct request coded 0) and negative altercasting (with negative altercasting coded as 1, and positive altercasting and direct request coded 0) were entered into the first step of the model as criterion variables. Letter returns served as the dependent variable. The results showed that those receiving a positive altercasting message were no more likely to return the letter than those receiving a direct request, $OR = .95$, $p = .58$, 95% $CI = .78–1.15$. Positive altercasting messages did, however, lead to more compliance than negative altercasting messages (see Table 1). With regard to Research Question 1, those who received a negative altercasting request were less likely to return the letter than those receiving a direct request or positive altercasting, $OR = .66$, $p < .01$, 95% $CI = .54–.80$. This is consistent with Johnson's (1992) study showing that negative altercasting can have detrimental consequences.

An ANCOVA was also conducted to assess the influence of message type on letter return time. The geographic area in which a letter was dropped was included as a control variable; four dummy-coded variables were created to represent the five geographic areas in which the letters were dropped. The main effect for message type was not statistically significant, $F(2, 1140) = 0.03$, $p = .97$, $\eta^2 < .01$. Controlling for the geographic location in which the letters were dropped, there was no difference in the time it took to return the letters depending on type of compliance-gaining message used.

Hypothesis 3 posited that when a behavior requested is proattitudinal, positive altercasting messages will produce more compliance than negative altercasting

messages. Additionally, Research Question 2 asked if the behavior requested is counterattitudinal, what is the relationship between message type and compliance?

Hierarchical logistic regression was again used to test the influence of attitudes and message type on letter returns. A dummy coded variable was constructed with positive altercasting coded as 1 and negative altercasting coded as 0. This dummy coded variable and the variable assessing attitudes (with proattitudinal behavior coded 1 and counterattitudinal behavior coded 0) were entered into the first block of the model. The interaction term representing the Altercasting × Attitude interaction was entered into the second block. The interaction term was not statistically significant, $OR = 1.01$, $p = .66$, 95% $CI = .72–1.68$. With regard to compliance, it is clear that positive altercasting messages and direct requests are more effective than negative altercasting. Also, compliance was greater when the request was proattitudinal.

An ANCOVA was conducted to test the Altercasting × Attitude interaction on the time it took for participants to return the letter. Again, the direct request message condition was excluded from the analysis, and the geographic area in which letters were dropped served as the control variable. The interaction term was statistically significant, $F(1, 725) = 5.17$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .01$. This interaction indicates that when a positive message was paired with a proattitudinal behavior, it took slightly less time for people to mail the letter. When a negative message was paired with a counterattitudinal behavior, however, compliance took slightly longer.

Discussion

It should be noted that the effect sizes in the present study were small, and hence, the results should be interpreted with caution. Overall, the findings of this study did not demonstrate the effectiveness of altercasting compared to a direct request as a compliance-gaining tactic. Nonetheless, there are several outcomes of the study that warrant consideration. In the following paragraphs, the results of the field experiment as well as the use of Milgram's lost letter technique as a method for testing the efficacy of compliance-gaining messages are discussed.

Positive altercasting messages were not more effective than direct requests, as both kinds of requests resulted in the same number of letters returned regardless of whether the behavior was pro- or counterattitudinal. However, both direct requests and positive altercasting messages were more effective than negative altercasting tactics. In fact, negative altercasting led to significantly fewer letter returns than direct requests.

Interestingly, positive altercasting resulted in a 70 percent return rate when the behavior was proattitudinal. Indeed, it was expected that a positive message paired with a positive behavior would lead to high compliance rates; what was not expected was the high rates of compliance associated with the direct request when paired with a proattitudinal behavior. Unfortunately, since there are no studies of altercasting messages on compliance, it is difficult to say what the baseline might have been. Typically, compliance-gaining messages improve upon direct requests or no message

at all; however, the baseline compliance rate for the positive behavior might have been too high to be improved upon. Indeed, Milgram et al. (1965) found a 72 percent return rate with no message and a proattitudinal group (''medial research associates''). Thus, the messages used in this study did not lead to more compliance than dropping a letter without any message at all. However, Milgram et al. found 25 percent compliance with their disliked group, also the Communist Party. The data presented here suggests that positive altercasting messages can improve upon those rates of compliance. It may be that positive altercasting can improve compliance for tasks that people do not want to do. Unfortunately, this study did not include a no message condition, and hence, such a claim should be interpreted with caution. Future researchers may want to investigate this issue.

One of the most interesting findings of the present study is that one of Marwell and Schmidt's (1967) request styles actually reduced compliance. When envelopes addressed to a liked group (i.e., Children's Hospital) were accompanied by negative altercasting messages, compliance dropped to 57 percent. Oddly, when the data from this experiment is compared to Milgram et al.'s (1965) results, it can be seen that the counterattitudinal task paired with negative altercasting messages led to the same rates of compliance that Milgram found for a similar group but with no message at all. It might be that there is a ceiling effect for liked groups (around 70 percent compliance) and a basement effect for disliked groups (around 25 percent). Of course, there are many potential issues with comparing data from this study with Milgram's data from four decades ago; however, doing so illuminates some interesting trends and raises provocative questions.

Given the surprising findings, it is important to attempt to explain why negative altercasting might be an ineffective tactic. Despite current theorizing, people may dislike others who cast them into a negative role and reject the notion that they must comply to be inconsistent with that negative role. As Johnson's (1992) study revealed, individuals view those who use negative altercasting as incompetent communicators. As a result of this incompetence, the message is unlikely to gain compliance. Additionally, negative altercasting messages may be viewed as rude and inappropriate. If so, it is reasonable to assume that one would throw the letter away, thinking, ''why should I do anything for you?'' In particular, if the letter is to be sent to a disliked group (the Communist Party in this case) compliance should be dramatically reduced. In the conditions where the letter was going to a liked group, however, compliance would have increased simply as a result of support for the Children's Hospital and not as a result of any message tactic.

If the extant theorizing on the effectiveness of negative altercasting is accepted, then another explanation for its ineffectiveness may be the physical absence of a requestor. It might be the case that the physical presence of a requestor is necessary to activate the normative pressure that is implied in positive and negative altercasting messages. Such social pressure may be especially important when using negative altercasting. Without another person present who may, presumably, hold participants accountable by enforcing the social role, participants may become reactant at being scolded (i.e., being called a ''bad person'') for failing to mail a letter.

As Dillard and Shen (2005) proposed, reactance can manifest as both anger and negative cognitions. In other words, people might have engaged in counterarguing upon receiving the negative altercasting message. To reduce dissonant feelings (e.g., ''Am I really bad if I don't mail this? To heck with you, I don't have to do what you say!''), people argue internally in favor of their self-esteem and against doing the behavior requested. This explanation deserves attention and warrants future study.

There was no interaction between altercasting and attitudes toward the behavior requested for letter returns. This interaction was significant, however, for the amount of time taken to return the letter. Contrary to our expectations, participants returned the letters more quickly when the valence of the altercasting message was opposite of the valence of their attitude toward the behavior. Participants receiving a positive altercasting message and a letter directed at the Communist Party, and those receiving a negative altercasting message and a letter directed to the Children's Hospital, returned their letter the fastest. One explanation for this finding is type of contrast effect occurred. The juxtaposition of one's attitude toward the behavior with an oppositely valenced message may have made the interpersonal consequences of complying (or resisting compliance) more salient. The opportunity to ''be a good person,'' for example, may have seemed all the more important when participants were asked to help the Communist Party.

Finally, the use of the lost letter technique as a method for testing compliance-gaining messages deserves further discussion. An important benefit of the lost letter technique is the ability to unobtrusively measure compliance behavior. The lost letter technique lends itself to a primary measure of compliance, the number of letters returned in each condition, as well as secondary measures, including time of return and the number of letters tampered with.[3] Additionally, the lost letter technique allows scholars to conduct research using a diverse sample of participants. A criticism of social scientific research is the reliance on college students as participants. Although using student samples is not inherently problematic, sampling from a more diverse population increases the generalizability of the findings. Finally, as a procedure for gathering behavioral measures of compliance, the lost letter technique has a reasonable amount of ecological validity. Participants' responses were assessed in a natural setting, and there is reason to believe that the lost letters and compliance-gaining messages were taken very seriously by participants in the field experiment.

Conclusion

The study reported here examined altercasting messages and assessed compliance behavior in a naturalistic setting. The results suggest that altercasting is not an effective technique for generating compliance. Nonetheless, scholars are encouraged to continue working to explore the theoretical mechanisms underlying compliance-gaining strategies and developing naturalistic approaches for studying compliance among adult, nonstudent populations.

Notes

[1]   Logistical regression revealed no effects for source on compliance rates.
[2]   As an additional testament of the ecological validity of the study, the FBI visited the home of one of the authors of the study (who foolishly put his/her home address on the envelopes). The FBI agents informed the author that several people who found letters under their windshields were complaining about Communist Party activity in the area and contacted both local and federal authorities to investigate. The author apologized and produced the appropriate IRB forms to demonstrate that the letters were part of an ongoing study. Relevant to ecological validity concerns, the FBI agents admitted that none of the concerned citizens noted suspicions of being part of a research study in their complaints.
[3]   Only 10 letters were tampered with, almost exclusively the letters addressed to the Communist Party, regardless of message type. Such a low number made meaningful statistical analysis impossible. Interestingly, some of the tampered letters were still mailed, but included letters denouncing Communism.

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