

On Eating Fried Grasshoppers

Zimbardo's major *purpose* was to test the idea that compliance with a disliked source leads to greater attitude change than compliance with a liked source. According to dissonance theory, receivers have little external justification for complying with a disliked communicator. In such a case, subjects will feel dissonance and try to reduce it through attitude change. In the case of a liked communicator, there is less reason for attitude change, since there is less dissonance.

Zimbardo's *method* involved attitudes toward a highly disliked food: fried grasshoppers. Army reservists were given a message indicating the need for a mobile army, the need to eat unusual survival foods, and the need to study reactions to these foods. In one condition the communicator was friendly; in the other he was unfriendly. Zimbardo wanted to determine whether subjects who agreed to eat grasshoppers would experience greater attitude change in the "unfriendly" condition than in the "friendly" condition.

The *procedures* were as follows. Subjects came to a large lecture hall and filled out a nine-point scale indicating attitudes to a range of foods including grasshoppers. After this, control subjects completed a post-attitudinal scale either immediately or after a suitable interval. The rest of the subjects received the experimental manipulation either in groups of 10 or singly. The communicator delivered his persuasive message and then played his friendly/unfriendly role. He did this by treating an assistant (who mistakenly brought in eels instead of grasshoppers) either in a pleasant or unpleasant manner. After this manipulation, a plate of grasshoppers was placed before each of the subjects, who were told to try at least one. In an incentive condition, they were offered 50 cents to do so. In a no-incentive condition, they were simply asked to eat. Afterward, a "civilian liaison" asked them to fill out a post-test on attitudes toward a number of foods, willingness to endorse eating grasshoppers, and evaluations of the communicator, his assistant, and the experimental conditions.

Results were as follows. Approximately 50 percent of the subjects in each experimental condition ate at least one grasshopper. This indicates that treatments did not affect public conformity. The treatments did, however, affect private acceptance. Whether attitude change was measured by the proportion of subjects who changed their attitudes in the desired direction or by mean ratings of attitude toward grasshoppers, more change occurred as a result of the negative than of the positive communicator. This difference was more apparent when no monetary incentive was offered. As Zimbardo concludes, "the results support a dissonance theory explanation of communicator characteristics as a source of justification in forced compliance situations."

Source: Philip Zimbardo and others, "Communicator Effectiveness in Producing Public Conformity and Private Attitude Change," *Journal of Personality*, 33 (1965), 233-55.