

The Effects of Censorship on Attitude Change: The Influence of Censor and Communication Characteristics¹

STEPHEN WORCHEL², SUSAN ARNOLD AND MICHAEL BAKER

University of North Carolina

The effects of censor characteristics and audiences' initial agreement with a censored communication on attitude change and desire to hear a communication were investigated. Subjects were informed that a communication taking a position with which they had originally agreed or disagreed had been censored. The censor was either an attractive or unattractive agent and his expertise on the topic of the speech was either high or low. The results indicated that in all cases except one, censorship led to an increased desire to hear the communication and attitude change toward the position of the communication. In the one exceptional case, when an attractive expert censor forbade a communication with which the audience disagreed, the subjects decreased their desire to hear the speech and did not change their attitudes on the topic of the communication. The results were interpreted as indicating that censorship arouses both reactance and balancing attempts but that balancing will be observed only in limited situations.

The concept of censorship has been the topic of much conversation but of little research. The general concern over censorship has been whether it is legally or morally right or wrong and under what conditions it should be permissible. Although there has been some research as to what effects certain censorable materials such as erotic or aggressive movies have on audiences (see Goranson, 1970; *Medical World News*, 1970), there has been little study of the effects of the act of censorship itself.

In one of the few studies on the effects of censorship, Ashmore, Ramchandra, and Jones (1971) demonstrated that censorship motivated the

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²Requests for reprints should be sent to Stephen Worchel, Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia 22901.

potential audience to change their attitudes toward the position that was to have been advocated by the censored communication. Subjects in the censor condition of this study were told that they were to have heard a speech taking position X. However, these subjects were informed that they would not be able to hear the communication because the dean had censored it. A control group was run in which subjects merely were asked to indicate their opinion toward position X. A measure of subjects' attitudes toward position X revealed that subjects in the censor conditions changed their attitudes to be more in agreement with position X and that this occurred whether or not the subject had initially been in agreement with that position. Ashmore et al. (1971) argued that the effects of censorship were due to reactance (Brehm, 1966) aroused by the censor. They reasoned that censorship threatened the subjects' freedom to hold position X and that the change toward that position represented subjects' attempts to restore their behavioral freedom.

Worchel and Arnold (1973) argued that the Ashmore et al. (1971) results could have been explained by cognitive balance theory (Heider, 1958) if subjects viewed the censor as unattractive. By censoring the communication, the censor implied his position on the issue; and balancing would result if subjects moved their opinion away from that of the censor. Worchel and Arnold (1973) conducted a study to test reactance and balance interpretations of the effects of censorship. They, too, led subjects to believe that they were to hear a communication taking position X. Subjects in the censor conditions were then told that the speech had been censored by a group that had either been rated positively or negatively. Balance theory would suggest that attitude change toward position X should occur only when the censor was unattractive, whereas reactance theory would predict change toward that position regardless of the censor's attractiveness because both censors threaten the subjects' freedom to hear the speech. The results supported reactance theory: subjects expressed increased desire to hear the communication and evidenced significant attitude change toward the position to be taken by the speech under both positive and negative censor conditions.

Though these results suggested that censorship arouses reactance, Worchel and Arnold (1973) also found some evidence that balancing may occur. In one set of conditions in their study, the experimenter stated that he had decided to override the censor and play the communication. Thus, subjects were told that the communication had been censored but that they were to hear it regardless. This overriding of the censor should have restored behavioral freedom and eliminated any reactance aroused by the censor. However, subjects should still have been aware of the position held by the censor on the issue. A measure of subjects' attitudes in these conditions revealed cognitive balancing; subjects in the negative censor condition showed a stronger desire to hear the communication and showed attitudes more in

agreement with position X than did a control group who had heard nothing of the censorship. However, subjects in the positive censor condition evidenced a decreased desire to listen to the speech and reported attitudes significantly more in disagreement with position X than did a control group.

The results of the Worchel and Arnold (1973) study suggested that when freedom is threatened by censorship and not subsequently restored, reactance effects will overshadow balance attempts because subjects will act to restore their own freedom. One question that is raised by these findings is whether the effects of reactance are so great as to always overshadow any balancing that may occur following censorship. If so, the censor's efforts are always doomed to failure; his act of censorship will have the unfortunate effect (from his point of view) of increasing people's desire to hear the censored communication and causing them to change their attitudes toward the position taken by the forbidden speech.

Because of the paucity of research on censorship, such a conclusion would be hasty. The Worchel and Arnold (1973) study used only one issue—an issue about which subjects were initially neutral. Second, only the attractiveness of the censor was varied. The simple attractiveness of the censor might not be the most important dimension along which balancing occurs following censorship. A dimension that should be as important as attractiveness, if not more important, is the expertise of the censor on the particular issue of concern. Numerous studies (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kelman & Hovland, 1953) indicated that the expertise of the communicator plays a central role in determining attitude change. Presumably, expertise is a valued characteristic, and balance results when people follow an expert's advice.

The present study was undertaken to further investigate the effects that censorship has on people's desire to hear the censored communication and the effects of censorship on their attitudes. Two communications taking different positions were used: one position with which subjects initially agreed and one with which they initially disagreed. The perceived expertise of the censor on the issue was varied as well as his attractiveness. The expectations were that if reactance is indeed the mediating process underlying reactions to censorship, subjects would increase their desire to hear the communication and change their attitude toward the position taken by the censored speech regardless of the position of the communication, the attractiveness of the censor, and the expertise of the censor. If, however, balance theory explains people's reaction to censorship, subjects should be expected to increase their desire to hear the communication and change their attitudes in the direction of that communication when an unattractive or nonexpert censor threatened their freedom. The greatest change toward the communication should occur for an unattractive nonexpert censor. Decreased desire to hear the communication and attitude change away from the speech should be found with an attractive or

expert censor, and the greatest change should occur with an attractive expert censor.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 194 male and female introductory psychology students from the University of North Carolina who volunteered for an experiment entitled "Communication Processes" as part of a course requirement. *Ss* were run in groups of three, four, or five. The data from seven subjects were deleted because these subjects expressed suspicions concerning the experimental manipulations.

Procedure

The basic design of the study comprised a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial with two external controls. Attractiveness of censor, expertise of censor, and topic of speech were the factors. Two experimenters were utilized to create the fourth factor.

When subjects arrived at the experimental room they were told by the experimenter that the study for which they had signed up would investigate how speaker variables affect the ability of a communicator to "get his message across." The experimenter told subjects that they were to hear a tape taking either the position that "police should never be allowed on university campuses" or that "mixed dorms are beneficial to university life." These positions constituted the topic of communication variable. Pretesting had shown that subjects generally disagreed with the position on police but agreed with the mixed dorms position. Subjects were further told that after hearing the tape they were to rate the speaker and message content on a number of dimensions.

Following this brief introduction, the experimenter informed the subjects that he would not be able to carry out that study and subjects would not be allowed to hear the communication because permission to play the communication had not been given. Subjects were, however, informed that they would receive their experimental credit for coming to the study.

The experimenter explained:

As you know, all studies run at the University of North Carolina are subject to review by a review board and by any other group which wishes to do so. Because the topic of the speech we were using was "police should never be allowed on university campuses," a number of groups elected to review our study.

Groups assigned to the positive censor condition were then told:

Right before we were to run the study, we learned that the YM-YWCA group on campus had strongly opposed our use of the speech and asked that we not be allowed to use it in our study.

Pretesting had shown that subjects rated the YM-YWCA positively.

Groups of subjects assigned to the negative censor condition were informed that the John Birch Society had reviewed and censored the playing of the communication about mixed dorms on campus. The John Birch Society was rated as unattractive in pretesting.

After informing subjects what group censored the communication, the expertise manipulation was varied. Subjects in the expert condition were told that:

the YM-YWCA (John Birch Society) has just completed a two-year study on the role of police on university campuses (mixed dorms on university campuses). They have not finished analyzing their results but decided to censor this speech until the results were complete.

Subjects in the nonexpert condition were told nothing of the expertise of the censor. Pretesting had revealed that neither the YM-YWCA nor the John Birch Society were seen as experts on either of the issues.

Next, the dependent measures were taken. The experimenter asked subjects if they would complete some questionnaires that would help in the planning of future studies. Subjects were given a questionnaire which included imbedded questions as to how strong was their desire to hear the tape, how expert they saw the YM-YWCA (or John Birch Society), how good a reason they believed the censor had for censoring the communication, and how much they thought hearing the communication would affect their attitudes.

The subjects were then thanked for coming to the experiment and told the experiment was over. The experimenter, however, asked subjects if they would mind participating in another short study since they did not have to be in the one in which they had come. The experimenter told subjects that another experimenter was collecting some opinions for an attitude survey and had asked if he could use subjects from the present study. After subjects consented, the experimenter left the room and shortly returned with the second experimenter.

The second experimenter explained to subjects that he was taking an opinion survey for the department. He gave subjects a questionnaire on which they were to indicate their attitude on a number of issues including the police on campus and mixed dorm topics. The subjects were also given a second questionnaire labeled "Student Activities Questionnaire" on which they

indicated their attraction for a number of organizations including the YM-YWCA and the John Birch Society. This questionnaire was supposedly to obtain an indication of students' future plans and present desires about having new groups on campus. The rationale behind having a second experimenter collect the attitude measure and ratings of groups was to reduce any possible demand characteristics that may have been created by the first experimenter's taking these measures. The second experimenter was blind as to the condition under which the subjects had been run. After subjects completed these two questionnaires, they were thoroughly debriefed as to the purpose of the study.

Two control no censor conditions were run.³ Subjects in these conditions were given instructions similar to those given initially to subjects in the censor conditions. However, they were told nothing of the censorship and they expected to hear the communication (police on campus or mixed dorms). The experimenter asked these subjects to complete some questionnaires for "purposes of experimental control" before they heard the tape. These subjects responded to the same questions asked subjects in the censor conditions with the exception that they did not answer questions as to why the communication was censored, if the censor had good reasons for his act, and how expert the YM-YWCA or John Birch Society were on the issue.

RESULTS

Since subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions by groups, the group of subjects constituted the unit of analysis. Six groups participated in each experimental condition (each experimenter ran three groups per cell). Multivariate analyses revealed no significant effects for the experimenter factor, and therefore effects and means for the dependent variables are reported, collapsing over experimenter.

Manipulation Check

To measure the success of the experimental manipulation of expertness, subjects were asked to rate the expertness of the censor on a 21-point scale (1 = very expert, 21 = not expert). An analysis of variance on these ratings revealed a significant main effect for expertness in the expected direction with

³A third control group was run to insure that the disagreement with the police condition and agreement with the mixed dorm position were still present while the experiment was being run. These subjects merely came to the experimental room and were asked to complete an opinion questionnaire and the Student Activities Questionnaire. Results from this condition revealed that subjects did disagree with the police issue and agree with the mixed dorm issue and that they rated the YM-YWCA as attractive and the John Birch Society as negative.

subjects in the expert conditions attributing a higher level of expertise to the censor than subjects in the no expert conditions ($F = 71.64, df = 1,40, p < .001$; marginal means of 10.42 and 14.74, respectively). A significant censor main effect on perceived expertness was also obtained ($F = 8.67; df = 1,40; p < .005$). This effect was due to the tendency for the YMCA ($\bar{X} = 11.83$) to be seen as more expert than the John Birch Society ($\bar{X} = 13.33$). There was, however, no significant interaction between these variables ($F < 1$).

Desire To Hear the Tape

The mean ratings of desire to hear the tape and summary of the analysis of variance are presented in Table 1. Reactance theory predicts that subjects in the experimental conditions should have experienced reactance as a result of the censorship of the tape and increased their desire to hear the tape. In light of this theory, it was expected that experimental subjects would show a greater desire to hear the speech than subjects in the control conditions, who had not been exposed to censorship. To test this prediction, special contrasts

TABLE 1
MEANS AND ANALYSES FOR THE DESIRE TO HEAR VARIABLE

Group	Police		Dorms	
Control	10.58 ^a		10.46	
	Expert	No expert	Expert	No expert
Attractive censor	13.86	4.82	5.86	4.88
Unattractive censor	4.81	5.43	5.84	5.01
Source	df		MS	F
Expertness (A)	1		77.65	26.78*
Issue (B)	1		39.55	13.64*
Censor (C)	1		51.32	17.69*
A × B	1		33.32	11.49*
A × C	1		73.04	25.19*
B × C	1		55.66	19.19*
A × B × C	1		67.09	23.14*
Error	40		2.93	

^aHow much do you desire to hear the tape? (1 = very much, 21 = very little).
* $p < .001$.

between the police experimental and the police control groups, and between the dorm experimental and the dorm control conditions were computed. These contrasts supported reactance theory: subjects in the police and dorm experimental conditions showed a greater desire to hear the tape than did subjects in the respective control groups (police experimental vs. police control: $F = 18.63$, $df = 1,40$, $p < .001$; dorm experimental vs. dorm control: $F = 42.11$, $df = 1,40$, $p < .001$).

A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analysis of variance on the experimental conditions was performed to determine if the desire to hear was effected by censor characteristics or agreement with the speech. Reactance theory would expect no differences due to these variables. However, balance theory would predict differences due to the evaluation of the censor. Specifically, subjects should have shown less desire to hear the speech when it had been censored by a positively evaluated censor than when the censor was an unattractive agent. Further, tendencies for balancing also should have been differentially aroused by the perceived expertise of the censor so that expert censors may have initiated less desire to hear the speech than censors who were not perceived to be expert.

As can be seen from the results of this analysis reported in Table 1, all main effects and interactions were significant at the $p < .001$ level. An examination of the mean ratings in Table 1, however, reveals that the main effects and double interactions of the independent variables are qualified by the significant Expertness \times Issue \times Censor interaction. This triple interaction occurred because only subjects in the condition where a liked and expert agent censored a position with which they initially disagreed actually decreased their desire to hear the speech (police attractive, censor expert vs. police control: $F = 11.14$; $df = 1,40$; $p < .001$). Censorship in all seven other conditions led to an increased desire to hear the communication ($F = 81.78$; $df = 1,40$; $p < .001$). There was no significant difference between the means of these seven other conditions (largest vs. smallest mean: $F = 1.12$; $df = 1,40$; $p = NS$). Balance theory is supported by the finding of decreased desire to hear in the police expert, attractive censor condition. However, the finding that subjects increased their desire to hear the communication in each of the other conditions, including the dorms expert, attractive censor cell, does not support balance theory and suggests that highly specific conditions are necessary to arouse balancing processes once censorship has occurred. When these conditions were not met, reactance effects occurred.

Attitude Toward Censored Position

Subjects in all conditions were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements "police should never be allowed on university campuses" and

TABLE 2
MEANS AND ANALYSES FOR ATTITUDE RATINGS

Group	Police		Dorms	
Control	16.44 ^a		7.21 ^b	
	Expert	No expert	Expert	No expert
Attractive censor	17.52	12.42	5.00	4.86
Unattractive censor	10.95	11.50	5.42	4.99
Source	<i>df</i>		<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Expertness (A)	1		19.67	7.18**
Issue (B)	1		773.68	282.24**
Censor (C)	1		36.07	13.16**
A × B	1		11.87	4.33*
A × C	1		21.56	7.86**
B × C	1		48.30	17.62**
A × B × C	1		26.45	9.65**
Error	40		2.74	

^a“Police should never be allowed on university campuses.” (1 = agree, 21 = disagree).

^b“Mixed dorm living is beneficial to campus life.” (1 = agree, 21 = disagree).

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

“Mixed dorm living is beneficial to campus life” using 21-point scales (1 = agree, 21 = disagree). To test for main effects and interactions of the independent variables on attitudes toward the experimental communication, it was necessary to construct a dependent variable that consisted of the responses to the police issue for subjects in the police conditions and attitudes toward mixed dorm living for subjects in the dorm conditions. The mean ratings and summary of analysis of variance for this relevant issue variable are presented in Table 2.

The predictions made by balance and reactance theories for the desire-to-hear variable are also applicable to subjects’ attitudes concerning the issue of the communication. Specifically, reactance theory predicts that subjects in the experimental conditions would show greater agreement with the position of the speech than subjects in the control conditions. Also, no differences in attitude due to the perceived expertise or evaluation of the

ensor were hypothesized by reactance theory. Balance theory, on the other hand, does predict that such differences would occur. Subjects in the attractive censor conditions should have shown less agreement with the position taken in the censored communication than subjects in the unattractive censor condition. Further, subjects should have agreed less with the position of the speech when it was censored by an expert than when censorship came from a nonexpert source.

Subjects' attitudes toward the topic of the communication closely paralleled their desire to hear the tape. Reactance theory predictions received support in that subjects in the experimental conditions generally showed greater agreement with the position of the communication than did control subjects (police experimental vs. police control: $F = 53.81$, $df = 1,40$, $p < .001$; dorm experimental vs. dorm control: $F = 8.07$, $df = 1,40$, $p < .007$). Also, as was found with the desire-to-hear variable, analysis of the $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design (excluding control groups) revealed a significant Issue \times Censor \times Expertness interaction on relevant attitude that qualified all lower order effects. The nature of this interaction was such that a significant Expertness \times Censor interaction occurred when subjects initially disagreed with the position of the speech (police conditions: $F = 22.35$; $df = 1,40$; $p < .001$) whereas this interaction failed to reach significance within the dorm conditions ($F < 1$). In fact there was no significant difference between the means in the dorm condition ($F < 1$) nor was there a significant difference between either of the two expert conditions and the expert-unattractive censor condition in the police condition ($CF = 2.36$; $df = 1,40$; $p = NS$). Subjects in the police attractive, censor expert conditions agreed less with the position of the speech than subjects in the police attractive, censor no expert condition ($F = 28.58$; $df = 1,40$; $p < .001$). In fact, although nonsignificantly so, the mean attitude ratings of subjects in the police attractive, censor expert condition were less in agreement with this speech than attitude ratings of control subjects ($F = 1.19$; $df = 1,40$; $p = NS$).

Evaluation of the Censor

Subjects rated their liking for the YMCA and John Birch Society using 10-point scales (1 = like, 10 = dislike). These assessments were obtained to allow an examination of the possible effects of censorship on the evaluation of the censor. Analysis of variance on the ratings for the John Birch Society revealed no significant effects for the independent variables. Regardless of whether censorship occurred, subjects showed little liking for the John Birch Society ($\bar{X} = 7.54$). However, analysis of variance did reveal a significant censor main effect on ratings of the YMCA ($F = 9.74$; $df = 1,40$; $p < .003$). When the YMCA censored the communication, subjects generally liked the

YMCA less ($\bar{X} = 4.21$) than did subjects in the control conditions ($\bar{X} = 3.27$; $F = 8.39$; $df = 1,40$; $p < .006$). There was, however, no significant difference between the police attractive, censor expert condition and the control group on rating of the YMCA ($F < 1$), whereas in each of the remaining three attractive censor conditions the YMCA was liked significantly less than in the control condition ($F = 13.447$; $df = 1,40$; $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The results were generally straightforward and as would be predicted by reactance theory with the exception of one condition (police attractive, censor expert). In all but the one condition, the act of censorship led to an increased desire to hear the communication and an attitude change toward the position to be advocated by the communication. This occurred whether the censor was positive or negative, whether he was seen as an expert on the issue or not, and whether the subject initially agreed or disagreed with the position of the communication. These findings support contentions by Ashmore et al. (1971) and Worchel and Arnold (1973) that censorship can arouse reactance in the audience. These feelings result from the elimination of freedom to hear the communication and the threat to the subject's freedom to hold the position advocated by the speech.

However, the results obtained in the police attractive, censor expert cell, which were responsible for the number of statistically significant interactions, suggest that reactance is not the only process activated by censorship. The results in this cell were the opposite of those predicted by reactance theory, because subjects significantly decreased their desire to hear the communication following censorship and showed a tendency to change their attitude away from the position of the communication and towards that supposedly held by the censor. These results are in line with predictions derivable from balance theory as the audience held a high opinion of the censor and a low one of the position advocated by the speech. The attitude change here was in the direction of balance as subjects aligned themselves with an attractive expert censor who had taken a stand against a rather unpopular issue. It should be noted that the effects observed in the police attractive, censor expert cell are also consistent with reinforcement theory contentions (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). That is, subjects in this condition may have anticipated favorable outcomes from agreement with the censor, e.g., agreeing with a positively evaluated individual who presumably had good arguments to support his position.

Taken together, these findings offer additional support to the Worchel and Arnold (1973) suggestion that both reactance and balance processes are initiated by censorship. Whereas Worchel and Arnold demonstrated that

balancing would emerge after freedom to hear the communication had been restored and reactance was supposedly diminished, the present results indicate that it is not necessary to restore behavioral and attitudinal freedom before balancing effects will be witnessed. Theoretically, reactance should have occurred in the police attractive, censor expert condition; but the fact that the censor was so positive and that subjects already disagreed with the speech's position seemed to be enough to allow balancing to override or to counter reactance.

Moreover, reactance occurred regardless of the reasons subjects imputed for the censorship. Subjects in the police attractive, censor expert condition saw the YM-YWCA as having no better reason for censoring the communication than did subjects in the other attractive-censor condition; yet their responses were almost opposite. This result suggests that reactions to censorship are not based on any rational thought process of carefully considering the reasons for the censor's actions. Subjects simply react to the fact that their freedom has been threatened or eliminated, regardless of the reason. From a practical point, this finding would suggest that a censor's efforts to win his audiences' approval by offering them reasons for the censorship and attempting to justify his actions would not affect their response to the censorship.

As found in the Worchel and Arnold (1973) study, there was a general decrease in attractiveness for the positive censor after subjects were told of his action. This decrease occurred in every experimental condition except the police attractive, censor expert condition. There was, however, no decrease in the attractiveness of the negative censor. This result may have occurred because the negative censor was already rated low or because although censorship was unexpected from the positive censor, it was expected from a negative agent. Thus, the hostility generated by censorship may be simply a function of violated expectancies (Berkowitz, 1962). Hostility toward a threatener of behavioral freedom has been shown to follow the arousal of reactance (Worchel, 1971; Worchel & Anderoli, 1974), and these results are in line with predictions that censorship arouses reactance. That this effect was not found in the police attractive, censor expert condition offers further evidence that either reactance was not aroused or that it was overridden. It should be noted that while the YM-YWCA did decrease in popularity, it was still rated significantly more attractive than the John Birch Society.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the results of the present study. First, this study, along with the two previous ones of censorship, indicates that the simple act of censoring a communication can have strong effects on the potential audience's desire to hear the forbidden communication and on their attitudes toward the position advocated by the communication. Second, this study demonstrates that a communication an audience neither hears nor expects to hear can affect their attitudes. The bulk

of research in attitude change has focused on how communications one hears or expects to hear affect his attitude. The implication from this research is that hearing or expecting to hear a communication is not necessary for attitude change to occur. This present study demonstrates that under certain conditions expecting not to hear a communication can have a marked effect on attitudes. Third, this study offers rather strong evidence that reactance arousal is the mediating process of attitude change following censorship. It also shows that balancing does occur even though the conditions under which this process will become evident are limited. Finally, this study offers some practical advice for a potential censor. That is, censorship may backfire and have an effect on the audience opposite from what is desired unless the censor is viewed as attractive and as an expert in the area of concern and unless the potential audience already disagrees with the position advocated by the speech.

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