Evaluating Compliance Messages
Toughness as a moderator for Door-In-The-Face Theory
Kayla Hardesty (Honors BA, 2013) & Thomas Feeley (Advisor)
Department of Communication, College of Arts and Sciences

Background
• The Door-In-The-Face Theory (DITF), a compliance gaining technique, works through a requester making an initial large request (which is assumed will be denied), followed by a smaller seemingly more reasonable target request after the initial rejection (Cialdini, 1975).
• Feeley et al. (2012) proposed that difficulty or “toughness” of the target request as measured by baseline compliance, may be a moderator for when DITF is successful.

Procedures
• We decided to test if toughness could be shown to be a moderator for DITF.
• Using two compliance scenarios from previous DITF research varying on toughness (low & high) we created an online survey to test reactions to these request scenarios.
• 255 participants took our survey which consisted of closed ended and open ended questions that assessed their willingness to comply with a given scenario.
• Participant’s open responses to the scenarios were coded, collapsed and used for our analysis.

Findings
• Data from open ended responses supported toughness as a moderator for when DITF is successful in gaining compliance.
• Participants exposed to the high toughness scenario in the DITF condition were more willing to comply with the request compared to those in a low toughness scenario.
• When the scenario was easier to comply with (low toughness) participants in the control condition were more willing to comply than in DITF condition. This phenomenon is called a “boomerang effect”, meaning that attempts to use DITF in easy request scenarios actually backfires, supporting previous research (Feeley et al., 2012).

Implications
• Use of DITF in compliance contexts that ordinarily yield high compliance or “low toughness” scenarios is not recommended.
• DITF increases verbal compliance in an online setting in addition to a traditional face-to-face setting.
• A comprehensive theory as to why DITF works has yet to be explicated in the literature.
• Future research should identify why DITF works better in more difficult request contexts.

References

Acknowledgement
Darrin J. Griffin, Doctoral Student - assisted with data collection and analyses