

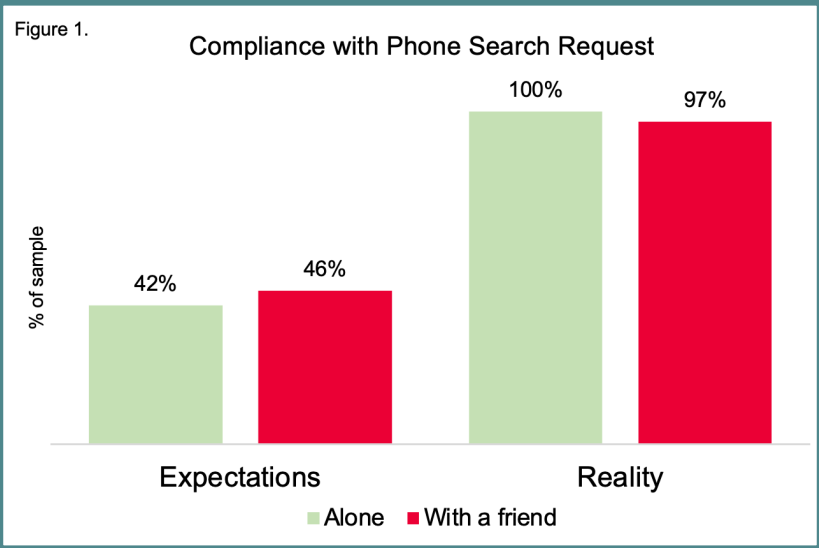


Consent in the company of others: How social influences change intrusive requests

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If you were asked to unlock and hand your phone to a stranger, would you comply?

Would your answer change if you were with a friend?



Against expectations, participants comply with a phone search request when alone or with a close friend, despite feeling more comfortable saying no

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BACKGROUND

- Consent requests are made across contexts (e.g., legal, medical, interpersonal)
- In a lab setting, we are more likely to grant consent for a phone search request than we anticipate¹
- The presence of a close other has been shown to affect decision-making², but it is unknown how the social context changes compliance with a consent search

OBJECTIVE

We are ultrasocial beings who often make consent decisions in the presence of close others. The aim of this study is to determine how the presence of a close friend changes both *expectations* and *experiences* of a consent request.

STUDY ONE (expectations; online survey)

- *N* = 89 undergraduates
- **Procedure:** Participants (Ps) watched a video of an experimenter entering the room and asking them to unlock and hand over their phone. They reported how they would respond when alone versus seated with a friend.
- **Measures:** Compliance (whether they imagined that they would hand over their phone), self-reported emotions

STUDY TWO (reality; in-lab experiment)

- *N* = 127 undergraduate friend pairs
- **Procedure:** Friend pairs were randomly assigned to be in separate rooms (alone condition) or remain together (friend condition). An experimenter entered the room and asked Ps (only one P in friend condition) to unlock and hand over their phone.
- **Measures:** Compliance (whether they handed over their phone), self-reported emotions

Study 1 Online; imagining response to a consent request



Study 2 In-lab; experiencing a consent request

RESULTS from STUDY ONE (expectations; online)

- Minority reported they *would* comply with the request when alone (42%) or with a friend (46%) (Fig 1, *p* = .127)
- When imagining the presence of a friend, respondents felt it would be easier & less awkward to say no compared to when alone (Table 1, *p* = .006, *d* = .31, *p* < .001, *d* = .39)

RESULTS from STUDY TWO (reality; in-lab)

- No difference was found in actual compliance rates between the alone and friend condition (Fig 1, *p* = .192)
- Those in the friend condition judged the request to be easier to say no to (Table 1, *p* = .012, *d* = .32)
- Those in the alone condition felt it would be more awkward to say no (Table 1, *p* = .003, *d* = .27)

DISCUSSION

- Though people tend to anticipate that they wouldn't comply with a phone search request, the majority of our in-lab participants did, whether seated with a close friend or alone
- Despite the presence of a friend making participants feel more "able" to say no and less awkward doing so, their behavior was not changed
- Results suggest social influences may change the experience of a consent request, but not behavioral responses

Self-Reported Emotions Following the Request

Table 1
Condition (seated alone or with a close friend) predicting emotions following consent request

Item	Expectations (Online)		Cohen's <i>d</i>	Reality (In-Lab)		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Alone	Friend		Alone	Friend	
Easy to say no	3.95(1.70)	4.43(1.55)	.31	2.33(1.22)	2.81(1.65)	.32
Awkward saying no	4.93(1.66)	4.43(1.55)	.39	5.85(1.22)	5.43(1.69)	.27
Pressured to say yes	4.55(1.69)	4.26(1.62)	.22	5.36(1.46)	5.25(1.52)	.07
Free to say no	4.52(1.74)	4.70(1.52)	.12	2.87(1.67)	2.87(1.61)	.00
Comfort during request	2.98(1.56)	3.23(1.72)	.17	4.04(1.84)	3.75(1.92)	.15
Confidence with decision	5.21(1.30)	5.33(1.33)	.11	5.27(1.41)	5.10(1.63)	.11

Note: bolded effect sizes denote significant differences (*p* < .05)

REFERENCES

1. Sommers & Bohns (2019). *The Yale Law Journal*; 2. Rini et al., (2011). *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*.