



## Burdens of non-conformity: Motor execution reveals cognitive conflict during deliberate rule violations



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### ABSTRACT

Rule compliance is pivotal for the regulation of social behavior. Still, humans deliberately violate rules at times – be it for personal reasons or for a higher good. Whereas previous research has studied the pre-conditions and consequences of rule violations, essentially nothing is known about the cognitive processes right at the moment a rule violation takes place. Here we show that merely labeling an action as rule violation induces substantial conflict between rule violation and compliance, as revealed by participants' bias towards rule-complying motor actions. Moreover, conflict that comes with violating a rule was much stronger than conflict that comes with following an alternative rule, even if both decisions result in the same observable behavior. These observations open a new theoretical perspective on rule violation behavior, shifting the focus toward the cognitive processes operating during the very act of rule violation.

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### 1. Introduction

“I ain't gonna pay no attention to your rules” sings hard-rock legend AC/DC. Violation of social rules is not confined to hard rock musicians, however. It is a common human phenomenon with sometimes positive consequences, as with moral courage, and sometimes negative consequences as with scientific misconduct (Stroebe, Postmes, & Spears, 2012). Whereas behavioral research has delineated situational and organizational determinants of violation behavior (Phipps et al., 2008; Reason, 1990; Yap, Wazlawek, Lucas, Cuddy, & Carney, 2013), very little is known about the consequences of rule violation right at the moment it takes place. The present experiments are a first step in this direction by showing that even simple motor actions differ depending on whether they aim at following or breaking rules.

Because rules generally trigger compliance (Asch, 1956; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Ruff, Ugazio, & Fehr, 2013; van de Waal, Borgeaud, & Whiten, 2013; Whiten, Horner, & de Waal, 2005) and obedience to authority (Milgram, 1963, 1974), we hypothesized that rule violation inflicts conflict on the rule breaker who is torn between doing what is normally acknowledged and intentionally doing the opposite. Further

support for this hypothesis comes from studies on how rules are represented in the human cognitive system and how their representation shapes an agent's behavior (for an overview, see Bunge & Wallis, 2007). Studies on rule representation often employed controlled stimulus–response (S–R) paradigms to assess how S–R mapping rules are learned and how they are implemented in task sets. A striking result of this line of research is that merely instructing an arbitrary S–R mapping rule will yield automatic response activation upon encountering the associated stimulus (Cohen-Kdoshay & Meiran, 2009; Hommel, 2000; Kunde, Kiesel, & Hoffmann, 2003, 2005; Reisenauer & Dreisbach, 2013; Wenke, Gaschler, & Nattkemper, 2007). Merely instructing a rule thus seems sufficient to automatically retrieve rule-based behavior whenever the agent is in a situation that is relevant to the rule at hand.

While automatic retrieval of rule-based behavior facilitates actions that aim at following the rule, such retrieval obviously hinders any actions that explicitly aim at violating the rule. In this latter case, the agent not only needs to deliberately access the intended action but might also be faced with cognitive conflict (Botvinick, Braver, Barch, Carter, & Cohen, 2001), resulting from the parallel activation of rule-based action plans alongside the intended action (Pfister, 2013).

To reveal such cognitive conflict, we designed a mouse-tracking paradigm in which participants moved a cursor toward a left or right target position according to an S–R mapping rule. Crucially,

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they obeyed the mapping rule in some trials but they violated it on occasion. To isolate the effects of labeling a certain behavior as rule violation from further processes that might accompany rule violation behavior, we ensured that the task did not involve any sanctions or otherwise negative consequences. We opted for analyzing movement trajectories of the mouse cursor to assess the impact of the task rule, because such trajectories offer a unique measure of bias towards specific response options (e.g., Freeman & Ambady, 2009, 2011; McKinstry, Dale, & Spivey, 2008; Pfister, Janczyk, Wirth, Dignath, & Kunde, 2014; Song & Nakayama, 2009). Among others, giving deceptive responses to simple yes/no questions was shown to yield a bias toward the honest response option (Duran, Dale, & McNamara, 2010), and, likewise, trajectories were biased toward tempting response alternatives when probing for self-control conflicts (Dignath, Pfister, Eder, Kiesel, & Kunde, 2014). Furthermore, mouse trajectories have been found to be sensitive to internal representations such as anticipated action consequences (Pfister et al., 2014; Wirth, Pfister, Janczyk, & Kunde, 2015). Spatial characteristics of the performed mouse movements thus appear as a prime measure to assess a possible impact of rule representations during the act of rule violation, and we hypothesized the corresponding trajectories to be attracted toward the rule-based response option. Two experiments provided compelling evidence for a profound impact, both, when participants were able to decide whether to violate or not (Experiment 1), and when violations were prompted externally (Experiment 2).

## 2. Experiment 1: Choosing to violate

We compared two groups of participants: a violation group and a reversed rule group. Participants of the *violation group* were instructed with one specific S–R mapping rule but were asked to indicate whether or not they wanted to follow the rule before each trial. Participants in the *reversed rule group*, by contrast, received slightly changed instructions: They were presented with two tasks with oppositional mapping rules and they indicated whether they would perform the original task or the task with opposite mapping. Thus, one and the same motor action was labeled as rule violation for the participants of the violation group whereas it was labeled as an equally acceptable behavioral option for the participants of the reversed rule group (see Fig. 1 for a schematic of the experimental design).

To evaluate cognitive conflict during rule violation as compared to using the reversed mapping rule, we analyzed the trajectory of the participants' mouse movements. For these movements, we computed the maximum absolute distance (MAD) between the actual trajectory and a straight line from start- to endpoint of the movement, and the corresponding area under the curve (AUC). Positive values of both, MAD and AUC, indicate that a movement is torn to the competing response alternative, indicating a persisting influence of the original mapping rule during violations (violation group) or the opposite mapping rule for reversed rule responses (reversed rule group).

### 2.1. Methods

#### 2.1.1. Participants, apparatus, and stimuli

We recruited 20 participants for the violation group (mean age = 20.5 years, 14 female, 2 left-handed) and another 20 participants for the reversed rule group (mean age = 21.4 years, 17 female, 2 left-handed). Handedness was determined by self-report and participants operated a standard computer mouse with their right hand and placed their left hand on the arrow keys of the keyboard.

Stimuli appeared on a 17" computer monitor at a viewing distance of about 60 cm. Target stimuli were two astrological symbols

(Aries vs. Gemini, displayed in 60 pt. MS Gothic font), mapped to a left and a right response, respectively. The S–R mapping was counterbalanced across participants. That is: For one half of the participants, the Aries symbol prompted a movement to the left target area whereas the Gemini symbol prompted a movement to right target area; for the other half of the participants, the Gemini symbol prompted a movement to the left target area whereas the Aries symbol prompted a movement to right target area.

#### 2.1.2. Framing and instructions

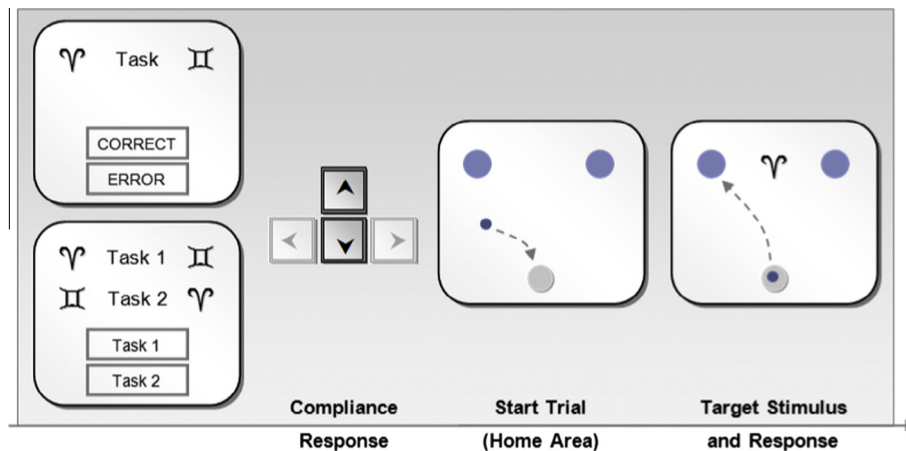
At the beginning of the session, participants were introduced to the concept of home and target areas and were given time to acquaint themselves with the setup by moving the cursor between the home area and the target areas. When they felt confident to continue, the experimenter pressed the space bar, which made the two possible target stimuli appear simultaneously on the screen. The experimenter then told the participant that the following task would revolve around a rule that mapped the two target stimuli to a left or right response. Participants could terminate this display by moving their cursor to one of the target areas which cleared the screen, followed by the task rule which was displayed in large (40 pt.) font.

During this initial framing, participants in the violation group were informed that the study investigated the impact of rules on behavior and that they were to work according to a single task rule. The experimenter took care to stress the word "rule" and to avoid alternative terms to describe the task such as "stimulus classification" or "categorization". After memorizing the mapping rule, participants were informed that they could choose before every trial whether they wanted to follow the rule or whether they wanted to violate the rule and intentionally commit an error. The experimenter also asked the participants to decide spontaneously between rule following and rule violation without using any specific strategy. To conclude the instructions, a summary screen showed four bullet points that described the experimental procedure, again emphasizing that participants would indicate to either follow the rule or violate it and commit an error by intention.

The instructions of the reversed rule group differed from those of the violation group by framing the study as investigating task performance when working on two different tasks. The instruction screen therefore presented both mappings simultaneously with the labels "Task 1" and "Task 2". Also in contrast to the violation group, participants of the reversed rule group were asked to choose whether to perform Task 1 or Task 2 at the beginning of each trial and to choose spontaneously between these two options. All other aspects of the task were as described for the violation group.

#### 2.1.3. Procedure

Participants completed a training block and 8 experimental blocks of 50 trials each, 25 trials with Aries and 25 trials with Gemini as target stimulus (see Fig. 1 for a schematic of the trial procedure). At the beginning of each trial, participants indicated their current intention ("compliance response"). For the violation group, the corresponding display featured the correct task mapping in the upper half of the screen. The lower half of the screen showed two boxes containing the German words "Korrekt" (Eng. correct) and "Fehler" (Eng. error), to indicate both options that were available to the participant to choose from. We chose the label "error" instead of "violation" to further stress that this behavior was not in accordance with the still active rule and to avoid misunderstandings in terms of applying the reversed rule. The locations of the correct option and the error option were counterbalanced across participants but constant across trials for each individual. Participants responded whether they would comply to the mapping rule by pressing either the up-key or the down-key on the computer keyboard with their left hand.



**Fig. 1.** Trial procedure of Experiment 1. Departing from the bottom center, participants moved from a home area in the bottom center of the screen to a target area to upper left or right, while the correct response was signaled by a target symbol that appeared in the upper center of the screen. Before each movement, however, participants indicated whether they would follow the instructed mapping rule or whether they intended to violate the rule and commit an error by intention (violation group; upper left screen). Performance of this group was contrasted to another group of participants who received slightly different instructions (reversed rule group; lower left screen) and were asked to choose between two tasks with opposite mapping rules. Superficially similar actions were thus labeled either as rule violations for the violation group or as responses using another rule for the reversed rule group.

For the reversed rule group, the upper half of the screen showed both possible mapping rules and the boxes in the lower half of the screen contained the labels “Task 1” and “Task 2”. As in the violation group, participants in the reversed rule group pressed the up- or down-key of the keyboard to indicate which of the two tasks they would like to perform in the upcoming trial. Thus, choosing Task 2 was identical to choosing to violate the mapping rule (i.e., committing an error by intention) except for the different framing of the response.

Participants gave the compliance response at leisure – correct vs. violation or Task 1 vs. Task 2, respectively. Then, the screen was blanked and three areas appeared: The home area in the bottom center and the two target areas to the upper left and upper right of the screen. From this point onward, the mouse cursor was displayed as a small circle (0.5 cm in diameter) and the program waited for the participants to move inside the home area. Each area measured 1.6 cm in diameter and the inter-center-distance between home area and each target area was 14 cm, whereas the two target areas were separated by an inter-center distance of 15.2 cm.

The target stimulus appeared in the upper center of the screen after the cursor had spent a dwell time of 500 ms in the home area. In response to this target stimulus, participants had to move toward one of the target areas as quickly as possible (according to the target stimulus and their preceding compliance response).<sup>1</sup> From this point onward, we sampled the *x*- and *y*-coordinates of the mouse cursor at 100 Hz. Initiation time (IT) was defined as the time from onset of the target stimulus until the cursor had left the home area. Movement time (MT) was recorded once the cursor hit one of the target areas; this ended the trial and the cursor shrank and disappeared from the screen. The screen was cleared 500 ms later and the next trial began after an additional 1000 ms. We did not display any error

feedback when actual errors were committed but participants were encouraged to respond more quickly when they did not start their movement within 500 ms after target onset.

#### 2.1.4. Hypotheses

For the violation group, we predicted a stronger trajectory deflection toward the opposite target (i.e., higher values for MAD and AUC) for rule violations as compared to rule-based responses. Moreover, we predicted the impact of rule compliance to be stronger in the violation group than in the reversed rule group, as should be indicated by an interaction of rule compliance and instruction group.

#### 2.1.5. Data treatment

Trajectory data was preprocessed using custom MATLAB scripts (The MathWorks, Inc.) to determine MAD and AUC for each trial. Movements to the left were mirrored at the vertical midline, and we determined the straight line from the movement’s start point to its final point as reference. We then stripped off all dwell time data that was recorded until the cursor had left the target area (i.e., until IT), and time-normalized the remaining data to 100 points by linear interpolation. MAD was then computed as the (signed) maximum Euclidean distance from these points to the reference line (in px), with positive values indicating deviation in direction of the opposite target. Similarly, AUC was computed as the signed area between the interpolated points and reference line (in px<sup>2</sup>).

To complement the two spatial variables, we further analyzed temporal characteristics of each response in terms of the time from stimulus onset to movement initiation (initiation time; IT), and the duration of the movement (movement time; MT). For the present experimental design, effects observed on these measures should be interpreted with caution, however, because they might also indicate additional processes such as differences in response caution or distraction of attention between conditions. We therefore focused the following analyses on the more informative spatial measures of MAD and AUC.

## 2.2. Results

### 2.2.1. Trajectory analyses

For the following analyses, we omitted trials in which participants failed to act according to their compliance response (4.8%), and the immediately following trials. Furthermore, trials were

<sup>1</sup> Analyses of movement trajectories such as the present analyses of computer mouse movements have often been interpreted against the theoretical background of a “dynamical account of cognition” (e.g., Spivey & Dale, 2004). Even though we use a dependent variable that is applied by studies on action dynamics, our design was not built with such a dynamical account in mind. Rather, we use trajectory analyses to investigate spatial attraction of a movement to one or another response option in order to assess a possible influence of rule representations on rule violation behavior. Whether such an empirical attraction effect is due to processes operating “online” during movement execution or whether it is due to processes that operated already during action planning is therefore not of main concern here.

discarded as outliers if any measure (IT, MT, MAD, or AUC) deviated more than 2.5 standard deviations from the respective cell mean (6.2%). We then conducted separate split-plot analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with rule compliance (correct vs. violation/reversed) as within-subjects factor and instruction group (violation vs. reversed) as between-subjects factor for each measure (see Fig. 2 and Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

The critical measures for the present question, MAD and AUC, yielded converging results. For MADs, a significant main effect of rule compliance indicated stronger deviations to the alternative target for both, violations and responses applying the reversed mapping rule, as indicated by a main effect of rule compliance,  $F(1,38) = 40.37, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .52$ . Crucially, this effect was more pronounced for the violation group than for the reversed rule group, as indicated by a significant interaction of rule compliance and instruction group,  $F(1,38) = 11.41, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .23$ .<sup>2</sup> Overall, MADs did not differ between the two groups as the main effect of instruction group was not significant,  $F(1,38) = 2.67, p = .110, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . For AUCs, a similar main effect of rule compliance,  $F(1,38) = 31.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .45$ , was moderated by a significant interaction,  $F(1,38) = 11.67, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .23$ , again driven by a stronger effect for the violation group than for the reversed rule group. Overall AUCs did not differ between groups,  $F(1,38) = 1.79, p = .190, \eta_p^2 = .04$ .

Moreover, normal, rule-based responses were initiated more quickly than rule violations and responses that used the reversed mapping rule, as indicated by a significant main effect of rule compliance in the IT analysis,  $F(1,38) = 27.18, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .42$ .<sup>3</sup> These effects did not differ between the groups and the overall IT level was also comparable across groups ( $ps > .236, \eta_p^2 < .04$ ). A similar main effect of rule compliance emerged for MTs,  $F(1,38) = 27.68, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .42$ . This analysis, however, also yielded an interaction of rule compliance and instruction group,  $F(1,38) = 4.10, p = .050, \eta_p^2 = .10$ , with a stronger impact of rule compliance for the violation group than for the reversed rule group. The violation group further showed generally longer MTs than the reversed rule group,  $F(1,38) = 12.17, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$ .

### 2.2.2. Choice frequencies

The different labeling of the responses also affected choice frequencies: Participants in the violation group chose to violate in 39.5% of the trials whereas participants in the reversed rule group chose to use the reversed mapping rule in 47.6% of the trials. The mean proportion of violations differed from chance for the violation group,  $t(19) = 3.52, p = .002$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.79$ , but not for the reversed rule group  $t(19) = 1.38, p = .183, d = 0.31$ . A direct comparison of both groups also indicated that the effect on choice frequencies was larger for the violation group than for the reversed rule group,  $t(38) = 2.35, p = .026, d = 0.23$  (corrected for unequal variances).

Furthermore, for the violation group, the frequency of violation choices was correlated with the effect of rule violations on the trajectory data. More precisely, participants with stronger effects for MAD and AUC were less likely to choose a rule violation (MAD:  $r = -0.41, p = .070$ ; AUC:  $r = -0.45, p = .047$ ). The same was true for MTs,  $r = -0.47, p = .039$ , but not for ITs,  $r = -0.09, p = .708$ . For the reversed rule group, none of the correlations approached

significance,  $|r| < 0.26, ps > .285$ . Because the different frequencies of rule violations and reversed responses might also partly account for the reported findings, we conducted a second experiment with fixed frequencies of violations and reversed responses. In a nutshell, Experiment 2 fully replicated the trajectory data, thus ruling out this possible confound.

## 3. Experiment 2: Instructed violations

Not all violations are driven by endogenous decisions. Rather, taxonomies of rule violation behavior include “necessary violations” (Reason, 1990, 1995), i.e., rule violations that an agent has to commit for external reasons. Experiment 2 addressed such necessary violations by exchanging the freely chosen compliance response with a cue instructing the participants of the violation group whether to conform to the S–R rule (in 75% of the trials) or whether to violate it (in 25% of the trials). This set-up also allows constraining the cause of the effects observed in Experiment 1 by deciding whether these effects were mainly driven by the free decision to commit a rule violation or rather driven by the labeling of the response as rule violation.

We again contrasted performance in the violation group to performance in a reversed rule group. Participants in the reversed rule group were presented with a cue that specified which mapping rule to use (Task 1 vs. Task 2, with Task 2 featuring the reversed mapping of Task 1). This procedure allowed us to assess whether the impact of rule violations would replicate even in the absence of free choices while at the same time controlling for differences in choice frequencies between both groups.

### 3.1. Method

Experiment 2 was similar to Experiment 1 with the only exception that the compliance response was substituted for a screen that instructed the participants whether to violate a rule or not (violation group;  $n = 20$ , mean age = 26.1 years, 16 females, 1 left-handed) or whether to perform Task 1 or Task 2 (reversed rule group;  $n = 20$ , mean age = 27.4 years, 14 females, 3 left-handed, 1 ambidextrous). Participants pressed the spacebar to terminate the compliance instruction and continue with the trial proper. They completed 9 blocks, each consisting of 36 trials with correct responses and 12 trials with violations for the violation group and 36 trials with Task 1 and 12 trials with Task 2 for the reversed rule group.

### 3.2. Results

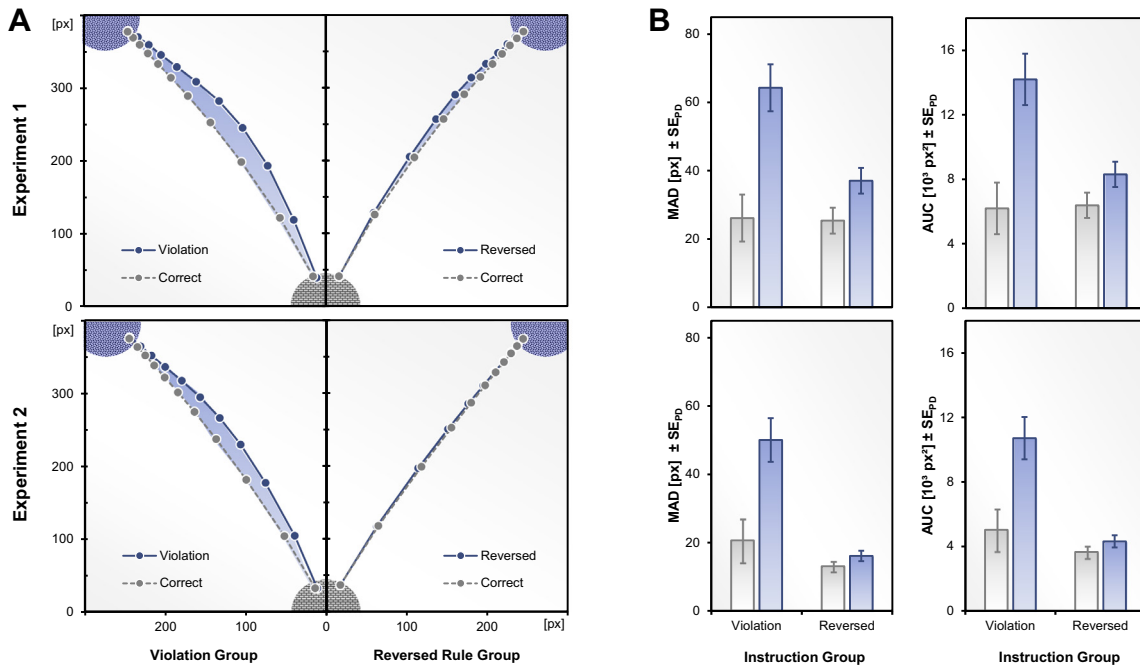
Prior to analysis, we omitted all trials in which participants failed to act according to the compliance instructions (3.7%), and trials following such errors; 6.3% of the remaining trials were discarded as outliers due to the same criterion as for Experiment 1.

The trajectory analysis did indeed replicate the main findings of Experiment 1 (Fig. 2). For MADs, a significant main effect of rule compliance again indicated stronger deviations to the alternative target for both, violations and responses applying the reversed mapping rule,  $F(1,38) = 24.39, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .39$ , and this effect was again more pronounced for the violation group than for the reversed rule group,  $F(1,38) = 16.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$ .<sup>4</sup> Overall MADs differed between the two groups,  $F(1,38) = 7.44, p = .010, \eta_p^2 = .16$ . For AUCs, a similar main effect of rule compliance,  $F(1,38) = 21.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$ , was moderated by a significant

<sup>2</sup> The interaction of rule compliance and instruction group remained significant when restricting the analysis to the second half of the experiment. This was true for both, MADs,  $F(1,38) = 5.09, p = .030, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , and AUCs,  $F(1,38) = 5.00, p = .031, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , indicating that the impact of rule violations was not eliminated by increasing experience with the task. Further, the results concerning the interaction were also robust to different criteria for outlier correction and replicated even when not correcting for outliers at all.

<sup>3</sup> Note that, for the present design, between-condition differences in processing time are unlikely to affect spatial variables such as MAD and AUC because participants started their movement only after target onset.

<sup>4</sup> As in Experiment 1, the interaction of rule compliance and instruction group was also significant when restricting the analysis to the second half of the experiment; MADs:  $F(1,38) = 24.35, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .39$ ; AUCs:  $F(1,38) = 22.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .35$ . The results again replicated when not correcting for outliers at all.



**Fig. 2.** Results of Experiment 1 (upper plots) and Experiment 2 (lower plots). (A) Mean time-normalized movement trajectories for both instruction groups. Dots represent cursor coordinates in 10%-steps of normalized movement time. When violating the mapping rule, trajectories were clearly biased toward the target that was indicated by the mapping rule. This impact was strongly reduced for the reversed rule group. (B) Key results of the spatial measures of maximum absolute distance (MAD) and area under the curve (AUC). Bars are color-coded as in Panel A, and higher values of both measures indicate attraction toward the opposite target area. Error-bars indicate standard errors of paired differences (SE<sub>PD</sub>; Pfister & Janczyk, 2013), allowing to assess statistical significance of the effects within each instruction group. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

**Table 1**

Descriptive statistics for all temporal (IT, MT) and spatial measures (MAD, AUC) of the mouse movements. Standard errors of paired differences (SE<sub>PD</sub>) were computed separately for each instruction group and allow for an assessment of the effect within each group (Pfister & Janczyk, 2013). Correct and reversed responses for the reversed rule group refer to Task 1 and Task 2, respectively.

Experiment	Measure	Instruction group					
		Violation			Reversed		
		Correct	Violation	SE <sub>PD</sub>	Correct	Reversed	SE <sub>PD</sub>
Exp. 1	IT [ms]	374	413	9.15	357	381	7.84
	MT [ms]	416	473	13.86	349	374	6.92
	MAD [px]	26	64	6.88	25	37	3.78
	AUC [px <sup>2</sup> ]	6192	14200	1600.21	6381	8304	781.66
Exp. 2	IT [ms]	350	403	8.15	350	363	3.2
	MT [ms]	343	392	14.91	335	348	5.82
	MAD [px]	21	50	6.39	13	16	1.53
	AUC [px <sup>2</sup> ]	5026	10713	1313.94	3653	4308	377.88

IT = initiation time, MT = movement time, MAD = maximum absolute distance, AUC = area under the curve.

interaction,  $F(1,38) = 13.54, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .26$ , again driven by a stronger effect for the violation group than for the reversed rule group. Overall AUCs differed significantly between groups,  $F(1,38) = 4.87, p = .034, \eta_p^2 = .11$ .

Normal, rule-based responses were also initiated more quickly than violations and responses that used the reversed mapping rule, as indicated by a significant main effect of rule compliance in the IT analysis,  $F(1,38) = 57.84, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .60$ . In contrast to Experiment 1, the IT effects were larger in the violation group as compared to the reversed rule group as qualified by a significant interaction,  $F(1,38) = 21.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$ , whereas the overall IT level was comparable across groups,  $F(1,38) = 1.90, p = .176, \eta_p^2 = .05$ . Finally, a main effect of rule compliance emerged for MTs,  $F(1,38) = 15.27, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$ , as did a significant interaction,  $F(1,38) = 5.22, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , again indicating a stronger effect in the violation group than in the reversed rule group. The

main effect of instruction group did not approach significance for the MT analysis,  $F(1,38) = 1.01, p = .321, \eta_p^2 = .03$ .

#### 4. Discussion

The reported findings show that rules are not easily broken; and even if they are broken eventually, behavior is still attracted toward compliance. Furthermore, it is not the free decision to violate that drives this effect but rather the mere fact of labeling a behavior as rule violation. Merely defining a rule, however arbitrary and irrelevant it may be, thus seems to prompt a tendency toward following it. Accordingly, rule compliance in humans might be a behavioral default that arises at least partly as a consequence of the cognitive burdens of rule violations, even without any ethical or moral implications.

The continued impact of the rule representation on violation behavior therefore reminds of ironic effects of facilitating behavior that an agent intends to suppress (Wegner, 2009). Yet, ironic thoughts, feelings, and movements are normally only observed under high cognitive load, e.g., when participants are distracted with a secondary task. Furthermore, ironic effects tend to manifest as expressions of unwanted behavior. Here, participants clearly succeeded to act according to their intention. However, even in the absence of any negative consequences, the trajectories of the agent's movements revealed on-going conflict caused by a voluntary and deliberate rule violation.

Despite the mentioned differences between rule violations and ironic effects, the impact of rule violations might still derive from a common source, i.e., to the difficulty of representing negations (Deutsch, Gawronski, & Strack, 2006; Wason, 1959). Even though parts of the effects observed in the present experiment are likely to relate to negation processing (especially those captured in ITs), two observations suggest that the impact of rule violations cannot be reduced to negation processing. For one, instructing participants in a control experiment to use a negated mapping rule yielded smaller effects than a rule violation instruction (Wirth, Pfister, Foerster, Huestegge, & Kunde, 2015). For another, negations have been found to yield a distinct pattern in movement trajectories that becomes evident when analyzing the distributions of trajectory data (Dale & Duran, 2011). More precisely, negations seem to incur rather discrete costs that render the corresponding distributions of MADs and AUCs markedly bimodal. To test for such effects in our data, we computed bimodality coefficients for the overall distributions of MADs and AUCs across both experiments (following the logic of Dale & Duran, 2011). These post hoc analyses indeed suggested unimodal rather than bimodal distributions,  $BC_{MAD} = .502$ ,  $BC_{AUC} = .375$  (with  $BC < .555$  being indicative of unimodality; cf. Pfister, Schwarz, Janczyk, Dale, & Freeman, 2013). The present data therefore remind more of the behavioral signature of deceptive responding (Duran et al., 2010) rather than negation processing per se.<sup>5</sup> Even though procedural differences between the current setup and previous studies on deceptive responding do not allow for definite conclusions at present, exploring the relation of rule violations to deceptive responding thus seems to be a promising field for future inquiry.

Another mechanism that might drive the behavioral effects of rule violations in addition to negation processing relates to affective processing, e.g., due to latent expectations of punishments even if those punishments would clearly not occur in the present settings. Recent findings indeed suggest that affective evaluations of own actions arise rather automatically (Aarts, De Houwer, & Pourtois, 2012). Such findings might be taken to suggest that rule violations could automatically activate a range of negative cognitions, and possibly even representations related to an authority which is able to apply sanctions or punishments. This question clearly awaits empirical investigation.

The reported findings also open up several related questions about the processing of rule violation behavior. One of these questions relates to learning-dependent changes of the observed effects. First studies from our lab (Jusyte et al., submitted for publication) suggest that extensive experience with rule violation may indeed eliminate the reported traces in movement trajectories, as indicated by absent trajectory effects for a sample of convicted criminals. Further questions relate to the impact of actual sanctions and punishments that we deliberately excluded in this setting (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Klucharev, Hytönen, Rijpkema, Smidts, & Fernández, 2009), as well as influences of rule violation behavior on the rule representation itself. Finally, open questions

relate to the impact of rules and norms in the context of social interactions. In these situations, previous research has shown a remarkable sensitivity to implicit norms such as obeying to social requests (Sartori, Becchio, Bulgheroni, & Castiello, 2009), suggesting that rule violations might leave an even more pronounced fingerprint on the agent's behavior in such settings. In any case, the reported findings call for a new perspective on rule violation behavior – a perspective that focuses on the agent violating a rule and the processes involved in actually performing the behavior.

## Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2015.11.009>.

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