

Leon Festinger. A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1957.

I am not certain as to just how much use the review of this text will be for you, i.e., in terms of just what implications it may have for your own ideas. However, the ideas that Festinger has espoused in this text have caught hold in the field of psychology, social psychology in particular, and there have been many studies on dissonance over the past several years. I find myself somewhat reluctant to say this, but much of what Festinger has to say is carefully thought-out "common sense" translated into psychological terms. The last chapter in this book (Chapter 11) presents a recapitulation of Festinger's views and I find that I have marked so much of it that I will simply Xerox the entire chapter and attach it to the end of what I do ~~write~~ excerpt from the first ten chapters of the book.

An introduction to the theory of dissonance: "It has frequently been implied, and sometimes even pointed out, that the individual strives toward consistency within himself. His opinions and attitudes, for example, tend to exist in clusters that are internally consistent. Certainly one may find exceptions. A person may think Negroes are just as good as whites but would not want any living in his neighborhood; or someone may think little children should be quiet and unobtrusive and yet may be quite proud when his child aggressively captures the attention of his adult guests. When such inconsistencies are found to exist, they may be quite dramatic, but they capture our interest primarily because they stand out in sharp contrast against a background of consistency. It is still overwhelmingly true that related opinions or attitudes are consistent with one another. ~~There~~ Study after study reports such consistency among one person's political attitudes, social attitudes, and many others. There is the same kind of consistency between what a person knows or believes and what he does. A person who believes a college education is a good thing will very likely encourage his children to go to college; a child who knows he will be severely punished for some misdemeanor will not commit it or at least will try not to be caught doing it....Again what captures our attention are the exceptions to otherwise consistent behavior. A person may know that smoking is bad for him and yet continue to smoke..." (1-2).

"Granting that consistency is the usual thing, perhaps overwhelmingly so, what about these exceptions which come to mind so readily? Only rarely, if ever, are they accepted psychologically as inconsistencies by the person involved. Usually more or less successful attempts are made to rationalize them...But persons are not always successful in explaining away or in rationalizing inconsistencies to themselves. For one reason or another, attempts to achieve consistency may fail. The inconsistency then simply continues to exist. Under such circumstances--that is, in the presence of an inconsistency--there is psychological discomfort. The basic hypotheses, the ramifications and implications of which will be explored in the remainder of this book, can now be stated. First I will replace the word 'inconsistency' with a term which has less of a logical connotation, namely, dissonance. I will likewise replace the word 'consistency' with a more neutral term, namely, consonance." (2-3).

"The basic hypotheses...are as follows: 1. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance. 2. When the dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance" (3).

"...I am proposing that dissonance, that is, the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right. By the term cognition, here and in the remainder of the book, I mean any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior. Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction. It is a very different motivation from what psychologists are used to dealing with, but, as we shall see, nonetheless powerful" (3).

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"Why and how does dissonance ever arise? How does it happen that persons sometimes find themselves doing things that do not fit with what they know, or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold? An answer to this may be found in discussing two of the more common situations in which dissonance may occur. 1. New events may happen or new information may become known to a person, creating at least a momentary dissonance with existing knowledge, opinion, or cognition concerning behavior. Since a person does not have complete ~~control~~ and perfect control over the information that reaches him and other events that can happen in his environment, such dissonances may easily arise....2. Even in the absence of new, unforeseen events or information, the existence of dissonance is undoubtedly an everyday condition. Very few things are all black or all white; very few situations are clear-cut enough so that opinions or behaviors are not to some extent a mixture of contradictions. Thus, a midwestern farmer who is a Republican may be opposed to his party's position on farm price supports...Where an opinion must be formed or a decision taken, some dissonance is almost unavoidably created between the cognition of the action taken and those opinions or knowledges which tend to point to a different action. There is, then, a fairly wide variety of situations in which dissonance is nearly unavoidable. But it remains for us to examine the circumstances under which dissonance, once arisen, persists. That is, under what conditions is dissonance not simply a momentary affair? If the hypotheses stated above are correct, then as soon as dissonance occurs there will be pressures to try to reduce it" (4-5).

"...there are some areas of cognition where the existence of major dissonance is customary. This may occur when two or more established beliefs or values, all relevant to the area of cognition in question, are inconsistent. That is, no opinion can be held, and no behavior engaged in, that will not be dissonant with at least one of these established beliefs" (6-7).

"The important point to ~~remember~~ remember is that there is pressure to produce consonant relations among cognitions and to avoid and reduce dissonance. Many other writers have recognized this....The task which we are attempting in this book is to formulate the theory of dissonance in a precise yet generally applicable form, to draw out its implications to a variety of contexts, and to present data relevant to the theory" (9).

"The terms 'dissonance' and 'consonance' refer to relations which exist between pairs of 'elements.'...These elements refer to what has been called cognition, that is, the things a person knows about himself, about his behavior, and about his surroundings. These elements, then, are 'knowledges,' if I may coin the plural form of the word. Some of these elements represent knowledge about oneself: what one does, what one feels, what one wants or desires, what one is, and the like. Other elements of knowledge concern the world in which one lives: what is where, what leads to what, what things are satisfying or painful or inconsequential or important, etc. It is clear that the term 'knowledge' has been used to include things to which the word does not ordinarily refer--for example, opinions. A person does not hold an opinion unless he thinks it is correct, and so, psychologically, it is not different from a 'knowledge.' The same is true of beliefs, values or attitudes, which function as 'knowledges' for our purposes...for all the definitions here, these are all 'elements of cognition,' and relations of consonance and dissonance can hold between pairs of these elements" (9-10).

"Another important question concerning these elements is, how are they formed and what determines their content? At this point we want to ~~now~~ emphasize the single most important determinant of the content of these elements, namely, reality. These elements of cognition are responsive to reality. By and large they mirror, or map, reality. This reality may be physical or social or psychological, but in any case the cognition more or less maps it....In other words, elements of cognition correspond for the most part with what the person actually does or feels or with what actually exists in the environment," ~~XXXXXX~~ (10-11).

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"But let us here object and say that persons frequently have cognitive elements which deviate markedly from reality, at least as we see it. Consequently, the major point to be made is that the reality which impinges on a person will exert pressures in the direction of bringing the appropriate cognitive elements into correspondence with that reality. This does not mean that the existing cognitive elements will always correspond. Indeed, one of the important consequences of the theory of dissonance is that it will help us understand some circumstances where the cognitive elements do not correspond with reality. But it does mean that if the cognitive elements do not correspond with a certain reality which impinges, certain pressures must exist. We should therefore be able to observe some manifestations of these pressures. This hypothesized relation between the cognitive elements and reality is important in enabling measurement of dissonance, and we will refer to it again in considering data. It is now possible to proceed to a discussion of the relations which may exist between pairs of elements. There are three such relations, namely, irrelevance, dissonance, and consonance." (11).

Irrelevant relations: "Two elements may simply have nothing to do with one another. That is, under such circumstances where one cognitive element implies nothing at all concerning some other element, these two elements are irrelevant to one another. For example, let us imagine a person who knows that it sometimes takes as long as two weeks for a letter to go from New York to Paris by regular boat mail and who also knows that a dry, hot July is good for the corn crop in Iowa. These two elements of cognition have nothing to do with one another; they exist in an irrelevant relation to each other. There is not, of course, much to say about such irrelevant relations except to point to their existence. Of primary concern will be those pairs of elements between which relations of consonance or dissonance can exist. In many instances, however, it becomes quite a problem to decide a priori whether or not two elements are irrelevant. It is often impossible to decide this without reference to other cognitions of the person involved. Sometimes situations will exist where, because of the behavior of the person involved, previously irrelevant elements become relevant to one another. This could even be the case in the example of irrelevant cognitive elements which we gave above. If a person living in Paris was speculating on the corn crop in the United States, he would want information concerning weather predictions for Iowa but would not depend upon boat mail for getting his information" (11-12).

Relevant Relations: Dissonance and Consonance:

^ "Let us consider two elements which exist in a person's cognition and which are relevant to one another. The definition of dissonance will disregard the existence of all the other cognitive elements that are relevant to either or both of the two under consideration and simply deal with these two alone. These two elements are in a dissonant relation if, considering these two alone, the obverse of one element would follow from the other. To state it a bit more formally, x and y are dissonant if not-x follows from y. Thus, for example, if a person knew there were only friends in his vicinity and also felt afraid, there would be a dissonant relation between these two cognitive elements" (13).

"...the relation between the two elements is dissonant if, disregarding the others, the one does not, or would not be expected to, follow from the other...If, considering a pair of elements, either one does follow from the other, then the relation between them is consonant. If neither the existing element nor its obverse follows from the other element of the pair, then the relation between them is irrelevant. The conceptual definitions of dissonance and consonance present ~~present~~ some serious measurement difficulties. If the theory of dissonance is to have relevance for empirical data, one must be able to identify dissonances and consonances unequivocally. But it is clearly hopeless to attempt to obtain a complete listing of cognitive elements, and even were such a listing available, in some cases it would be difficult or impossible to say, a priori, which of the three relationships holds. In many cases, however, the a priori determination of dissonance is clear and easy. (Remember also that two cognitive elements may be dissonant for a person living in one culture and

not for a person living in another, or for a person with one set of experiences and not for a person with another" (15).

The magnitude of dissonance: "All dissonant relations, of course, are not of equal magnitude. It is necessary to distinguish degrees of dissonance and to specify what determines how strong a given dissonant relation is....One obvious determinant of the magnitude of dissonance lies in the characteristics of the elements between which the relation of dissonance holds. If two elements are dissonant with one another, the magnitude of the dissonance will be a function of the importance of the elements....It is probably safe to assume that it is rare for no dissonance ~~to~~ at all to exist within any cluster of cognitive elements. For almost any action a person might take, for almost any feeling he might have, there will most likely be at least one cognitive element dissonant with this 'behavioral' element....In short, there are generally so many other cognitive elements relevant to any given element that some dissonance is the usual state of affairs" (16-17). "Assuming momentarily, for the sake of definition, that all the elements relevant to the one in question are equally important, the total amount of dissonance between this element and the remainder of the person's cognition will depend on the proportion of relevant elements that are dissonant with the one in question. Thus, if the overwhelming majority of relevant elements are consonant with, say, a behavioral element, then the dissonance with this behavioral element is slight. If in relation to the number of elements consonant with the behavioral element the number of dissonant elements is large, the total dissonance will be of appreciable magnitude. Of course, the magnitude of the total dissonance will also depend on the importance or value of those relevant elements which exist in consonant or dissonant relations with the one being considered" (16-17). Summary of points made in this section: "If two cognitive elements are relevant, the relation between them is either dissonant or consonant. 2. The magnitude of the dissonance (or consonance) increases as the importance or value of the elements increases. 3. The total amount of dissonance that exists between two clusters of cognitive elements is a function of the weighted proportion of all relevant relations between the two clusters that are dissonant. The term 'weighted proportion' is used because each relevant relation would be weighted according to the importance κ of the elements involved in that relation" (18).

The reduction of dissonance: "The presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. The strength of the pressures to reduce the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance. In other words, dissonance acts in the same way as a state of drive or need κ or tension. The presence of dissonance leads to action to reduce it just as, for example, the presence of hunger leads to action to reduce the hunger. Also, similar to the action of a drive, the greater the dissonance, the greater will be the intensity of the action ~~to~~ reduce the dissonance and the greater the avoidance of situations that would increase the dissonance....In general, if dissonance exists between two elements, this dissonance can be eliminated by changing one of those elements. The important thing is how these changes may be brought about" (18).

Changing a behavioral cognitive element: "When the dissonance under consideration is between an element corresponding to some knowledge concerning environment (environmental element) and a behavioral element, the dissonance can, of course, be eliminated by changing the behavioral cognitive element in such a way that it is consonant with the environmental element. The simplest and easiest way in which this may be accomplished is to change the action or feeling which the behavioral element represents....There are many persons who do stop smoking if and when they discover it is bad for their health. It may not always be possible, however, to eliminate dissonance or even to reduce it materially by changing one's action or feeling. The difficulty of changing the behavior may be too great, or the change, while eliminating some dissonances, may create a whole host of new ones" (19).

Changing an environmental cognitive element: "Just as it is possible to change a behavioral cognitive element by changing the behavior which this element mirrors, it is sometimes possible to change an environmental cognitive element by changing the situation to which that element corresponds. This, of course, is much more difficult than changing one's behavior, for one must have a sufficient degree of control over one's environment--a relatively rare occurrence. Changing the environment itself in order to reduce dissonance is more feasible when the social environment is in question than when the physical environment is involved" (19-20).

Adding new cognitive elements: "It is clear that in order to eliminate a dissonance completely, some cognitive element must be changed. It is also clear that this is not always possible. But even if it is impossible to eliminate a dissonance, ~~by adding new cognitive elements~~ it is possible to reduce the total magnitude of the dissonance by adding new cognitive elements. Thus, for example, if dissonance existed between some cognitive elements concerning the effects of smoking and cognition concerning the behavior of continuing to smoke, the total dissonance could be reduced by adding new cognitive elements that are consonant with the fact of smoking. In the presence of such dissonance, then, a person might be expected to actively seek new information that would reduce the total dissonance and, at the same time, to avoid new information that might increase the existing dissonance. Thus, to pursue the example, the person might seek out and avidly read any material critical of the research which purported to show that smoking was bad for one's health. At the same time he would avoid reading material that praised this research" (21-22).

"...it is worth while to emphasize again that the presence of pressures to reduce dissonance, or even activity directed toward such reduction, does not guarantee that the dissonance will be reduced. A person may not be able to find the social support needed to change a ~~given~~ cognitive element, or he may not be able to find new elements which reduce the total dissonance. In fact, it is quite conceivable that in the process of trying to reduce dissonance, it might even be increased. This will depend upon what the person encounters while attempting to reduce the dissonance. The important point to be made so far is that in the presence of a dissonance, one will be able to observe the attempts to reduce it. If attempts to reduce dissonance fail, one should be able to observe symptoms of psychological discomfort, provided the dissonance is appreciable enough so that the discomfort is clearly and overtly ~~manifested~~" (23-24).

Resistance to reduction of dissonance: "If dissonance is to be reduced or eliminated by changing one or more cognitive elements, it is necessary to consider how resistant these cognitive elements are to change. Whether or not any of them change, and if so, which ones, will certainly be determined in part by the magnitude of resistance to change which they possess. It is, of course, clear that if the various cognitive elements involved had no resistance to change whatsoever, there would never be any lasting dissonances. Momentary dissonance might occur, but if the cognitive elements involved had no resistance to change, the dissonance would immediately be eliminated... The first and foremost source of resistance to change for any cognitive element is the responsiveness of such elements to reality. If one sees that the grass is green, it is very difficult ~~not~~ to think it is not so. If a person walking down the street, it is difficult for his cognition ~~to~~ not to contain an element corresponding to this. Given this strong and sometimes overwhelming responsiveness to reality, the problem of changing a behavioral cognitive element becomes the problem of changing the behavior which is being mapped by the element. Consequently, the resistance to change of the cognitive element is identical with the resistance to change of the behavior reflected by that element, assuming that the person maintains contact with reality. Certainly much behavior has little or no resistance to change...What...are the circumstances that make it difficult for the person to change his actions? 1. The change may be painful or involve loss....2. The present behavior may be otherwise satisfying.... 3. Making the change may simply not be possible. It would be a mistake to imagine that a person could consummate any change in his behavior if he wanted to badly enough. It may not be possible to change for a variety of reasons. Some behavior, especially emotional reactions, may not be under the voluntary control of the person" (24-26).

Resistance to change of environmental cognitive elements: "Here again, as with ~~the~~ behavioral cognitive elements, the major source of resistance to change lies in the responsiveness of these elements to reality. The result of this, as far as behavioral elements go, is to tie the resistance to change of the cognitive element to the resistance to change of the reality, namely, the behavior itself. The situation is somewhat different with regard to environmental elements. When there is a clear and unequivocal reality corresponding to some cognitive element, the possibilities of change are almost nil. If one desired, for example, to change one's cognition about the location of some building which one saw every day, ~~this~~ would indeed be difficult to accomplish. In many instances, however, the reality corresponding to the cognitive element is by no means so clear and unambiguous. When the reality is basically a social one, that is, when it is established by agreement with other people, the resistance to change would be determined by the difficulty of finding persons to support the new cognition. There is another source of resistance to change of both behavioral and environmental cognitive elements... This source of resistance to change lies in the fact that an element is in relationship with a number of other elements. To the extent that the element is consonant with a large number of other elements and to the extent that changing it would replace these consonances by dissonances, the element will be resistant to change... In considering any dissonance and the resistance to change of the elements involved, the important factor in the attempt to eliminate the dissonance by changing an element is the total amount of resistance to change; the source of the resistance is immaterial" (26-28).

Limits of the magnitude of dissonance: "The maximum dissonance that can possibly exist between any two elements is equal to the total resistance to change of the less resistant element. The magnitude of dissonance cannot exceed this amount because, at this point of maximum possible dissonance, the less resistant element would change, thus eliminating the dissonance. This does not mean that the magnitude of dissonance will frequently even approach this maximum possible value" (28).

Avoidance of dissonance: "The avoidance of an increase in dissonance comes about, of course, as a result of the existence of dissonance. This avoidance is especially important where, in the process of attempting to reduce dissonance, support is sought for a new cognitive element to replace an existing one or where new cognitive elements are to be added... the seeking of support and the seeking of new information ~~may~~ must be done in a highly selective manner... The operation of a fear of dissonance may also lead to a reluctance to commit oneself behaviorally. There is a large class of actions that, once taken, are difficult to change. Hence, it is possible for dissonances to arise and to mount in intensity. A fear of dissonance would lead to a reluctance to take action--a reluctance to commit oneself. Where decision and action cannot be indefinitely delayed, the taking of action may be accompanied by a cognitive negation of the action. Thus, for example, a person who buys a new car and is very afraid of dissonance may, immediately following the purchase, announce his conviction that he did the wrong thing. Such strong fear of dissonance is probably relatively rare, but ~~it~~ it does occur. Personality differences with respect to fear of dissonance and the effectiveness with which one is able to reduce dissonance are undoubtedly important in determining whether or not such avoidance of dissonance is likely to happen. The operational problem would be to independently identify situations and persons where ~~this~~ this kind of a priori self-protective behavior occurs" (30-31).

Summary: "The core of the theory of dissonance which we have stated is rather simple. It holds that: 1. There may exist dissonant or 'nonfitting' relations among cognitive elements. 2. The existence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce the dissonance. 3. Manifestations of the operation of these pressures include behavior changes, changes of cognition, and circumspect exposure to new information and new opinions. Although the core of the theory is simple, it has rather wide implications and applications to a variety of situations which on the surface look very different" (31).

Chap. 2 The Consequences of Decisions: Theory

"Although psychologists have paid a great deal of attention to the decision-making process, there has only been occasional recognition of the problems that ensue when a decision has been made. One of the major consequences of having made a decision is the existence of dissonance" (32).

"How strong the dissonance is [after making a decision] will depend...upon the general determinants which we have stated in the previous chapter. The task here is to spell out the specific nature of these determinants as they exist in postdecision situations. The importance of the decision will affect the magnitude of the dissonance that exists after the decision has been made. Other things being equal, the more important the decision, the stronger will be the dissonance....Another major determinant of the magnitude of post-decision dissonance is the relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternative. This, of course, follows directly from our analysis of the postdecision situation and the reasons that dissonance exists at all. The dissonance exists because, following the decision, the person continues to have in his cognition elements that, if considered alone, would lead to an action other than the one he has taken or is engaged in. These elements reflect the desirable characteristics of the unchosen alternatives and the undesirable characteristics of the chosen alternatives. Consequently, the greater the relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternatives α to the chosen alternative, the greater will be the proportion of relevant elements that are dissonant with the cognition corresponding to the action" (37-38).

"It is best, before going on, to also discuss the distinction between conflict and dissonance, because they are dynamically different in their effects. The person is in a conflict situation before making the decision. After having made the decision he is no longer in conflict; he has made his choice; he has, so to speak, resolved the conflict. He is no longer being pushed in two or more directions simultaneously. He is now committed to the chosen course of action. It is only here that dissonance exists, and the pressure to reduce this dissonance is not pushing the person in two directions simultaneously" (39).

Ways in which postdecision dissonance can be reduced. Three main ways. "(a) changing or revoking the decision, (b) changing the attractiveness α of the alternatives involved in the choice, and (c) establishing cognitive overlap among the alternatives involved in the choice." ~~THE~~ (42-43).

Changing or revoking the decision: "It should be emphasized that this analysis concerns itself with the state of affairs that exists immediately after the decision has been made and before further experience accumulates concerning the results and consequences of the action which has been taken. It must be recognized that at this point the existing dissonance cannot be overwhelming. Indeed, assuming that the individual chose the most favorable alternative, the weighted sum of the dissonances (each dissonant relation somehow weighed for its importance) would not exceed the weighted sum of the consonances. Consequently, reversing the decision, assuming that this is possible for the moment, is not an adequate way of reducing dissonance since it would simply reverse which cognitive elements were dissonant or consonant with the cognition about the action....It is probably correct, though, that the dissonance would have to become nearly overwhelming, that is, more than half of the cognitive elements would have to be dissonant with the cognition about the action taken, before reversal of the action would be a feasible means of coping with dissonance....It is possible, however, to reduce or even eliminate the dissonance by revoking the decision psychologically. This would consist of admitting to having made the wrong choice or insisting that really no choice had been made for which the person had any responsibility....These are probably not the usual types of solutions to the existence of dissonance. In essence they put the person back in conflict, that is, in the choice-making situation, although the choice need not, or perhaps cannot, be remade; or else it puts the person in a situation where he does not accept responsibility for what he does" (43-44).

Changing cognition about the alternatives: "This is the most direct and probably most usual manner of reducing postdecision dissonance. Since the dissonance exists in the first place because there were cognitive elements corresponding to favorable characteristics of the unchosen alternative and also cognitive elements corresponding to unfavorable characteristics of the chosen alternative, it can be materially reduced by eliminating some of these elements or by adding new ones that are consonant with the knowledge of the action taken. The net effect of this would be to increase the proportion of relevant cognitive elements that are consonant with the action taken and hence to lessen the total dissonance that exists. Whether or not a person is successful in reducing dissonance in this manner will depend in part on his mental agility and in part on the availability of support of one kind or another for the changes he wishes to make in his cognition. He may now be able to magnify the importance of the good points associated with the chosen alternative and to think of new advantages that he hadn't thought of before. He may be able to discover new information that favors the decision he took or to get others to agree with his action" (44-45).

Establishing cognitive overlap: "As may be recalled..., the more the cognitive elements corresponding to the different alternatives involved in a decision are alike, the less is the resulting dissonance. Postdecision dissonance can consequently be reduced by establishing or inventing cognitive overlap. This type of reduction of dissonance is also stressed by Adams...In discussing a boy who has made a decision between playing ball and going to the circus, for example, he states: '...our boy restructures the situation (and hence the sentiments involved) and experienced an insight such that the conflicting consummatory values are seen as alternative instruments or means to a single one....Thus our boy may perceive for the first time that ball game and circus are both means to recreation in general...' In other words, one way of establishing cognitive overlap is to take elements corresponding to each of the alternatives and to put them in a context where they lead to the same end result. If this is accomplished, some cognitive elements are identical in this larger context, and dissonance is reduced. It is also possible to establish cognitive overlap in a more direct fashion...In other words, cognitive overlap may be established by discovering or creating elements corresponding to the chosen alternative that are identical with favorable elements that already exist for the corresponding unchosen alternative. Detailed discussion of the possible reduction of dissonance by lowering the importance of the whole matter has been omitted, but it must be remembered that it can and does occur. Our hunch is that it is not a major manifestation of the pressure to reduce postdecision dissonance." (45-47).

Summary: "Dissonance has been shown to be an inevitable consequence of a decision. The magnitude of the postdecision dissonance has been hypothesized to depend upon the following factors: 1. The importance of the decision. 2. The relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternative to the chosen one. 3. The degree of overlap of cognitive elements corresponding to the alternatives. Once dissonance exists following a decision, the pressure to reduce it will manifest itself in attempts to increase the relative attractiveness of the chosen alternative, to decrease the relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternative, to establish cognitive overlap, or possibly to revoke the decision psychologically." (47).

Chapter 3 is on The Consequences of Decisions: Data. Some studies are presented which are based on hypotheses derived from what was stated in Chapter 2. The summary of this chapter follows: "This chapter has reviewed a number of studies which in one way or another deal with events that occur after a decision has been made. The data show: 1. Following a decision there is active seeking out of information which produces cognition consonant with the action taken. 2. Following a decision there is an increase in the confidence in the decision or an increase in the discrepancy in attractiveness between the alternatives involved in the choice, or both. Each reflects successful reduction of ~~postdecision~~ dissonance. 3. The successful reduction of postdecision dissonance is further shown in the difficulty of reversing a decision once it is made and in the implication which changed cognition has for future relevant



action. 4. The effects listed above vary directly with the magnitude of dissonance created by the decision" (83).

Chapter 4. The effects of forced compliance: theory. "There are circumstances on which persons will behave in a manner counter to their convictions or will publicly make statements which they do not really believe. As will be shown later, such a state of affairs is accompanied by dissonance and by various manifestations of pressure to reduce the dissonance....it is necessary to discuss the circumstances in which this type of discrepancy between public behavior and private belief occurs. Only if the conditions that produce such a situation are clearly understood is it possible to analyze when and why dissonance occurs....The present discussion will concern itself mainly with overt or public compliance without accompanying change of private opinion" (84-85).

"Public compliance without an accompanying change in private opinion or belief will occur when the following conditions exist: 1. The compliance is brought about mainly through the exertion of a threat of punishment for noncompliance, the individual against whom the threat is directed being sufficiently restrained from leaving the situation....If the threatened punishment is stronger than whatever resistance he has to showing compliance, he will overtly change his behavior statements....however, his private opinion will not be affected....2. The compliance is brought about mainly through the offer of a special reward for complying....if the reward is sufficiently attractive to overcome the existing resistance, the individual may comply overtly in order to obtain the promised reward...if compliance is obtained in this manner on an overt or public level, the private opinion will remain essentially unchanged for the moment and hence will be at variance with the public behavior or expression. The empirical question...arises as to how one can identify and distinguish public compliance without private change from instances where private opinion is also altered. Clearly, this must be done by somehow identifying the discrepancy between overt behavior or statement and private opinion. There are two general ways in which this may be done. 1. The first is by removing the source of influence or pressure. Assume that a person exhibits a certain changed behavior in the presence of others who have exerted pressure on him to behave in that manner. One may then attempt to observe the behavior of this person when he is not in the presence of those people. If private change has occurred, the behavior should persist under these circumstances. If the change has been only on the level of public compliance, the behavior should revert to what it had been previously....2. The second way to identify the discrepancy between overt behavior and private opinion is by direct measurement of private opinion.... If the anonymous and public statements differ ~~otherwise~~ (when private opinion is guaranteed anonymity), there is evidence that public compliance without accompanying private change of opinion has occurred" (85-87). "suffice it to say that threat of punishment or offer of special reward does produce some degree of forced compliance, and consequently, we can use these a priori conditions to infer the existence of such compliance" (89).

Dissonance resulting from forced compliance: "From the point of view of the purpose here, the most obvious aspect of a situation in which compliance has been forced by either the offer of reward or the threat of punishment is that once compliance is exhibited, there is a non-correspondence between the overt behavior and the private opinion. On the one hand, there are cognitive elements corresponding to the opinion or belief in question, and on the other hand, there are cognitive elements corresponding to the overt behavior or statement. These two sets of elements are clearly dissonant with one another." (89).

The magnitude of dissonance resulting from forced compliance: "...the magnitude of the reward or punishment, that is, the attractiveness and desirability of the offered reward of the unpleasantness and undesirability of the threatened punishment, is an important determinant of the magnitude of dissonance which exists once compliance is exhibited. Too great a reward or punishment will result ~~only~~ only in only little dissonance. Consider,

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for example, a situation where a man came up to you and said he would give you a million dollars if you publicly stated that you like reading comic books. Let us assume, for the sake of the example, that you believe him and that you do not like reading comic books. Very likely you would publicly announce your preference for comic books, pocket the million dollars, and be quite content. There is some slight dissonance to be sure. You said you liked comic books and you really do not. But there are some very important elements that are consonant with having uttered this public statement, namely, the knowledge of the money now in your pocket. Relative to this, the dissonance is negligible. Essentially the same situation would ensue if a person threatened to shoot you unless you publicly declared you liked comic books. As the promised reward, or threatened punishment, becomes smaller in importance, the dissonance resulting from compliance increases. The maximum possible dissonance would be created if the reward, or punishment, was just barely enough to elicit the desired overt behavior or expression. But also of interest to us here is the situation that results if the reward offered, or the punishment threatened, is too small and, hence, the compliant behavior is not elicited. Under such circumstances the individual continues to show overt behavior which is in line with his private beliefs, but, nevertheless, dissonance will be present. The elements corresponding to his opinions and beliefs will be consonant with the cognitive elements corresponding to his overt behavior, but the latter will be dissonant with the knowledge of the reward he had not obtained or the punishment he will suffer. Here, of course, the dissonance will be greatest if the reward or punishment just barely fails to elicit the compliant behavior. From this point on, the weaker the reward or punishment, the less will be the dissonance. One should also state for the sake of completeness that the more important the opinions or behavior involved, the greater will be the magnitude of dissonance accompanying forced compliance" (91-92).

Manifestations of pressure to reduce 'forced compliance' dissonance: "Recalling the basic hypothesis that the presence of dissonance gives rise to ~~reducing the~~ pressure to reduce that dissonance, we may now examine the ways in which the dissonance that follows upon forced compliance may be reduced. Apart from changing the importance of the beliefs and behaviors involved, there are two ways in which the dissonance may be reduced, namely, by decreasing the number of ~~consonant relations~~ dissonant relations or by increasing the number of consonant relations....When the magnitude of the threatened punishment or promised reward has been sufficient to elicit the compliant overt behavior, dissonance is present only as long as the person involved continues to maintain his initial private opinions or beliefs. If following the forced compliance he can succeed in changing his private opinion also, the dissonance may disappear entirely....Since a situation where reward or punishment is offered to obtain forced compliance may frequently be accompanied by other types of influence, argument, and persuasion, this type of resolution of the dissonance should not be an uncommon one. The act of forced compliance should now predispose the person to be more amenable to exertions of influence which will change his private opinion and hence eliminate the dissonance which exists. Thus one would expect that sometimes forced compliance would be followed by change of private opinion. One would expect that since the pressure to reduce dissonance depends upon the magnitude of the dissonance that exists, a change of private opinion would follow public compliance more frequently when the punishment or reward is relatively weak than when it is too strong. Thus, if one wanted to obtain private change in addition to mere public compliance, the best way to do this would be to offer just enough reward or punishment to elicit the overt compliance. If the reward or threat were too strong, only little dissonance would be created and one would not expect private change to follow as often. When the threat of punishment or offer of reward is not strong enough to elicit the overt compliant behavior, opinion change in the opposite direction would serve to reduce the dissonance somewhat: if the person changed his private opinion so that he was now even more certain of his initial stand on the matter and saw even more arguments in favor of it, the number of consonant relations would increase and hence the total dissonance would decrease. Thus, it would seem that with respect to obtaining change of private opinion, the offer of reward or punishment which is not

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sufficient to elicit the overt behavior may be worse than nothing in that it serves to impel the person to increase his original conviction. The other cognitive elements which may be changed to reduce the dissonance are, of course, those corresponding to the reward or to the punishment. If forced compliance has been elicited, the number of consonant relations may be increased by magnifying the importance of the reward obtained or of the punishment avoided" (94-96).

Summary: "Some data have been presented to document the assertion that public compliance without accompanying change in private opinion occurs when a reward is offered for compliance or when some punishment is threatened for failure to comply. Dissonance inevitably follows such a situation. If public (i.e., forced) compliance is elicited, then the private opinions are dissonant with the cognitive elements corresponding to the overt behavior. If the promised reward or threatened punishment fails to elicit the public compliance, then the knowledge concerning the reward or punishment is dissonant with the cognitive elements corresponding to the overt behavior. The dissonance thus established, the magnitude of which will be a function of the importance of the opinions involved and of the magnitude of the punishment or reward, may be reduced in either of two ways: 1. Subsequent change of private opinion to make it consonant with the overt behavior. 2. Magnification of the reward or punishment to increase the consonance with the overt compliant behavior" (96-97).

Ch. 5. The effects of forced compliance: data. Some studies are presented based on hypotheses derived from Ch. 4. "These studies lend support to the idea that attitude or opinion change is facilitated if a person finds himself in a situation where, by showing compliant behavior, he is engaged in actions which are dissonant with his private opinions. The changes in private opinion which ensue are the end result of a process of attempting to reduce or eliminate this dissonance" (112).

Summary: "Data from five studies have been presented, all of which are relevant to the theoretical analysis presented in Chapter Four, namely, that dissonance follows from situations which elicit forced compliance and that this dissonance may be reduced by change of private opinion. The data show that: 1. Following public compliance there is frequently a change of private opinion over and above what the variables in the situation, not including dissonance, would account for. 2. Taking the magnitude of such opinion change as reflecting the magnitude of the pressure to reduce dissonance, the data fit the hypothesized relations with importance of the issue and with amount of reward used to elicit the compliant behavior" (122).

Ch. 6. Voluntary and involuntary exposure to information: theory. "The discussion in this chapter will center about the reasons that, and the conditions under which, persons will actively seek out information. The concern here will be primarily with spelling out the implications which the theory of dissonance has for this type of behavior. There are, however, many other antecedent conditions, apart from the existence of dissonance which will produce active seeking out of new information" (123). "Active curiosity and the sheer pleasure of acquiring information for its own sake cannot be ignored in any discussion of voluntary seeking out of new information. This chapter, however, will not discuss these factors further beyond acknowledging their existence and their importance" (124).

The possibility of relevant future action: "It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that persons will seek out information which is relevant to action they must take....If there is no behavior or action in which a person engages or possibly may engage that is relevant to a particular area of information, there will be no motivation from this source to acquire cognition concerning this particular area of information" (124). "If the area of information is relevant to some impending or possible future behavior for the person, one would then expect to observe considerable motivation to acquire cognitive elements in this area as well as active seeking out of such information. One would further expect that for such a person, this seeking out of information would be rather impartial. He would not select one kind of information to listen to and



avoid other kinds. Rather, he would be motivated toward acquiring cognition about all aspects and all alternatives" (125).

"In general, one may say that the preaction or predecision situation will be characterized by extended and nonselective seeking of relevant information. Of course, it is rather rare that there is a pure preaction situation. Most instances will involve mixtures....There is one further point to be made about information seeking on a preaction situation....Along with the nonselectivity of what information he exposes himself to, there will be a lack of resistance to accepting and cognizing any relevant information which comes his way. Thus, prior to the taking of action, many cognitive elements will have been established which may later be dissonant with the cognition corresponding to the action which does ensue" (126).

The presence of dissonance: "The presence or the absence of dissonance in some particular content area will have important effects on the degree of information seeking and on the selectivity of such information seeking....1. Relative absence of dissonance. If little or no dissonance exists, there would be no motivation (considering this source of motivation alone) to seek out new and additional information. Of course, there would also be little or no motivation to avoid any particular source of information....2. The presence of moderate amounts of dissonance. The existence of appreciable dissonance and the consequent pressure to reduce it will lead to the seeking out of information which will introduce consonances and to the avoidance of information which will increase the already existing dissonance....3. The presence of extremely large amounts of dissonance. Let us recall that there is a limit to the magnitude of dissonance which can exist in a system. If two cognitive elements exist in a dissonant relationship, the maximum magnitude this dissonance can have is equal to the resistance to change of the less resistant element of the pair. Similarly, if dissonance exists between one cluster of elements and another cluster, this dissonance cannot exceed in magnitude the resistance to change of the least resistant parts of the clusters. If the dissonance becomes greater than the resistance to change, then the least resistant elements of cognition will be changed, thus reducing the dissonance. What may one say concerning the seeking out of new information on the part of a person whose dissonance is near to the limit that can exist? Under such circumstances a person may actively seek out, and expose himself to, dissonance-increasing information. If he can increase the dissonance to the point where it is greater than the resistance to change of one or another cluster of cognitions, he will then change the cognitive elements involved, thus markedly reducing or perhaps even wholly eliminating the dissonance which now is so great" (126-129).

Involuntary and forced contact with information: "Let us consider what the reaction of a person would be if he is forced to read or listen to information or a persuasive communication which, in the ordinary course of events, would produce elements of cognition dissonant with existing cognition. Once these dissonances are introduced one would, of course, expect the same attempts to reduce dissonance which have already been ~~discussed~~ discussed in previous chapters. One might also expect, however, that at the initial moment of impact of the new dissonant cognition, effective processes could be initiated which would prevent the dissonant elements from ever being firmly established cognitively. One might expect to observe such things as attempts to escape or avoid further exposure, erroneous interpretation or perception of the material, or any other technique or maneuver which will help to abolish the newly introduced dissonance and to prevent the further introduction of dissonance" (134).

Summary: "The endeavor of in this chapter has been to examine two major questions: 1. How does the presence of dissonance and its magnitude affect the seeking out of the avoidance of new information? 2. How do persons react when involuntarily confronted with information or propaganda which they would normally have avoided? From the previously stated general theory of dissonance and pressures to reduce dissonance, together with the fact that dissonance may be reduced by adding consonant cognitive elements, the implications concerning voluntary exposure to new information may be easily drawn. Dissonance-reducing cognition is sought; dissonant-increasing



cognition is avoided. If a person is involuntarily exposed to information that will increase dissonance, then in addition to the usual procedures whereby he may reduce this dissonance, there are also set up quick defensive processes which prevent the new cognition from ever becoming firmly established" (136-137).

Ch. 7. Voluntary and involuntary exposure to information: data. Here we again have studies, this time based on hypotheses derived from the views put forth in Ch. 6. Summary: "This chapter has dealt with data concerning one aspect of the process of dissonance reduction, namely, obtaining new cognition which will be consonant with existing cognition and avoiding new cognition which will be dissonant with existing cognition. It has been shown that much of the data concerning selectivity in exposure to propaganda, information, and mass media can be interpreted along the lines of attempted dissonance reduction. Unfortunately, most such data are causally equivocal and cannot be regarded as providing strong corroboration for the theory of dissonance. The data concerning reactions of people when involuntarily exposed to new information are, fortunately, more adequate. When dissonance exists, persons will be able to evade the impact of dissonance-increasing information, even when forcibly exposed to it, by various means such as misperception, denying its validity, and the like. If persons do not expect a source of information to produce dissonant cognition and, hence, are not alert to avoid the dissonance, the information will have more impact" (176).

Ch. 8. The role of social support: theory. "The social group is at once a major source of cognitive dissonance for the individual and a major vehicle for eliminating and reducing the dissonance which may exist in him. On the one hand, information and opinions which are communicated to him by others may introduce new elements which are dissonant with already existing cognition. On the other hand, one of the most effective ways of eliminating dissonance is to discard one set of cognitive elements in favor of another, something which can sometimes only be accomplished if one can find others who agree with the cognitions one wishes to retain and maintain. Processes of social communication and social influence are, hence, inextricably interwoven with processes of creation and reduction of dissonance" (177).

The reduction of dissonance stemming from social disagreement: "According to the theory, when there is dissonance there will be corresponding pressures to reduce the dissonance, the magnitude of these pressures depending upon the magnitude of the dissonance. Here again, the ways in which dissonance reduction may be accomplished are similar to those that have already been discussed in other contexts. Three methods for reducing dissonance stemming from social disagreement readily suggest themselves" (181) "1. The dissonance may be reduced, or perhaps even eliminated completely, by changing one's own opinion so that it corresponds more closely with one's knowledge of what others believe. Changing one's own opinion will effectively reduce dissonance only, of course, if there are not many persons who already agree with one's original opinion (who would then be disagreeing after the opinion change)...2. Another way of reducing the dissonance would be to influence those persons who disagree to change their opinion so that it more closely corresponds to one's own...3. Another way of reducing dissonance between one's own opinion and the knowledge that someone else holds a different opinion is to make the other person, in some manner, not comparable to oneself. Such an allegation can take a number of forms. One can attribute different characteristics, experiences, or motives to the other person or one can even reject him and derogate him" (182).

"Since in the presence of dissonance there is pressure to reduce dissonance (and to avoid further increase of dissonance) and since disagreement and agreement from others can increase or reduce existing dissonance, there are some things one can say about the circumstances under which attempted influence will or will not be successful. In general, influence exerted on a person to change his opinion so that dissonance is reduced will be more successful in changing that opinion than influence which would produce an increase of dissonance. In short, if a person already has an appreciable

number of cognitive elements which are dissonant with an opinion that he holds, it will be easier to influence him to change his opinion in a ~~xxx~~ direction which will make it consonant with those other cognitive elements than to change his opinion in the other direction. Consider a person who smokes heavily and believes that smoking is rather harmful to his health. It will be easier for other people to persuade him that smoking is not at all harmful and that the data which purport to show that it is harmful are inadequate, than it will be to persuade him that smoking is not only $\frac{1}{2}$ 'rather harmful' but is positively lethal. From the foregoing discussion we see that in the presence of dissonance, a person frequently will attempt to obtain social support for the opinions he wishes to maintain. If social support is obtained, the dissonance will be materially reduced and perhaps even eliminated. If, however, such agreement from others is not forthcoming, then the dissonance may persist or even be increased. When such social support is sought in an attempt to reduce dissonance, the success of the attempt is equivalent to the success of a social influence process" (190-191).

Chapters 9 and 10 present data relevant to the role which social communication and influence processes have in creating and reducing dissonance.

Ch. 9. The role of social support: data on influence process. "Clearly, if it is correct to say that holding one opinion is dissonant with the knowledge that someone else, generally like oneself, holds a contrary opinion, then much of the data on influence in face-to-face groups and effect of mass media can be interpreted in line with the theory. The fact that people tend to associate with others who agree with them, the fact that people read newspapers which already support their existing views, etc., can all be seen as instances of dissonance reduction or as avoiding increase of dissonance. But such instances are not very compelling with respect to the theory of dissonance" (203).

In the data from the studies he presents, Festinger finds "...some interesting implications here for the problem of the impact of the mass media on the opinions and attitudes of persons. The direct impact on a person of a persuasive communication via the mass media is probably seldom strong enough to cause a complete about-face on an opinion which he holds. More often the direct impact is to create some doubts in the mind of the person. To the extent that this person talks about the matter to selected others following his exposure to the mass media, it is quite likely that his doubts will be erased. The mass media may be expected to be most effective under circumstances where there is something to prevent the ready reduction of the dissonance which is created by the exposure to these media. Thus, for example, one would expect the mass media to be more effective with respect to content about which people do not talk readily than with respect to content which is frequently the subject of discussion. Similarly, one would expect the mass media to be more effective with persons who are relatively isolated socially than with those who have many social contacts" (231-232).

Ch. 10. The role of social support: data on mass phenomena. "Mass phenomena are frequently so striking and dramatic in quality that one tends to think of them as exclusively so. There is also a tendency to seek explanations of these striking phenomena which match them in dramatic quality; that is, one looks for something unusual to explain the unusual result. It may be, however, that there is nothing more unusual about these phenomena than the relative rarity of the specific combination of ordinary circumstances that brings about their occurrence...the concern here is with finding and analyzing instances where, for one set of reasons or another, a number of people who are in contact with one another all suffer from the same cognitive dissonance. Under such circumstances, the striking and dramatic aspects of mass phenomena exist not because something exceptional or unique is brought into the situation, but only because social support is particularly easy to find in the pursuit of dissonance reduction. Theoretically, it should make little difference whether the dissonance is truly widespread, resulting in a mass phenomenon involving very large numbers of people, or whether the dissonance is shared by a relatively



small number of people--provided that in the latter case, social support is still easy to come by" (233-234). "If a person has a strong reaction of fear which persists, the cognition corresponding to this reaction would be dissonant with the cognition that 'there is nothing to be afraid of.' If such a dissonance exists for a person, the pressure to reduce the dissonance will frequently be manifested by an attempt to acquire some cognitive elements which are consonant with the fear reaction. This would, of course, be especially true if the fear reaction could not be turned off at will" (235). "There are natural events which, if they occur, produce fear reactions in people--for example, various types of disasters. There are also some kinds of events which produce similar fear reactions even though they are not accompanied by visible disaster--for example, earthquakes. Even people who live in earthquake areas like California and are quite sophisticated about such things are frightened by the tremors of an earthquake. But most often, following an earthquake there is no visible damage or destruction which would produce cognition which is consonant with this fear reaction. It is, of course, pure speculation, but one may imagine that the mass media, by publicizing the instances of damage which do occur, and by comparing the magnitude of the given earthquake to the worst earthquakes of the past, thus reminding people of the danger involved, may be performing an important function of reducing dissonance" (236).

Maintaining invalid beliefs: "It is quite difficult for people who are ordinarily responsive to reality to maintain beliefs which are clearly invalid. By the term 'invalid' I do not mean here a belief which is possibly wrong, but rather one which has been, and continues to be, directly and unequivocally disconfirmed by good evidence such as actual events which impinge on the persons who hold the belief....But there are circumstances in which this does not happen--that is, even in the face of clearly disconfirming evidence, the belief is not discarded....one would expect this to happen under the following circumstances: the belief is difficult to change, and there are a sufficient number of persons with the identical dissonance so that social support is easily obtainable" (243-244).

Mass proselyting: "Let us turn...to examining data where there is evidence concerning the social process which arises when social support is easily obtainable. Again, we will look for situations where a belief that is very difficult to discard is held, and where cognition dissonant with this belief is introduced by the unequivocal evidence of one's own senses. Specifically, if the belief is very difficult to discard, and if the cognition dissonant with the belief is also very difficult to discard, obtaining social support will be one of the major means of reducing the magnitude of the dissonance. Under such circumstances, the introduction of an identical dissonance into the cognitions of many people will lead to two observable manifestations of the pressure to reduce the dissonance by obtaining social support. First, there will be an increase in giving and obtaining support among those suffering the identical dissonance. Second, there will be an increase in the attempts to persuade new people that the belief is, after all, valid. In principle, the phenomenon discussed here is no different from what one observes in a person who buys a new car, has some experiences with it which are not altogether to his liking, and proceeds to try to convince his friends that the make of car he just purchased is the most wonderful thing on the market. The only difference is that where there are a number of people having the same cognitive dissonance, the phenomenon may be much more spectacular even to the point where it is possible to withstand evidence which would otherwise be overwhelming. This results in an apparent paradox, namely, that after being exposed to evidence of one's own senses which unequivocally demonstrates a belief system to be wrong, people proceed to proselyte more vigorously for the belief system....Typically, those movements which are relevant to our purposes here have the following characteristics: 1. A belief or set of beliefs is held with conviction by a number of people. 2. The belief, at least in part, has sufficient implication for the affairs of the daily world so that the believers take action in accordance with the belief. 3. The action is sufficiently important, and sufficiently difficult to undo, that the believers are, in a very real sense,



committed to the belief. 4. At least some part of the belief is sufficiently specific and concerned with the real world so that unequivocal disproof or disconfirmation is possible. 5. This possible disconfirmation actually occurs, usually in the form of the nonoccurrence of a predicted event within the time limits set for its occurrence. 6. The dissonance thus introduced between the belief and the information concerning the nonoccurrence of the predicted event exists in the cognitions of all the believers, and hence, social support in attempting to reduce the dissonance is easily obtainable" (246-248).

Chapter 11, the ~~concluding~~ concluding chapter, is titled "Recapitulation and further suggestions." Since the entire chapter is relevant here in that it summarizes the ~~theory~~ theory of cognitive dissonance, I am attaching a xerox copy of the chapter in its entirety.



Recapitulation and Further Suggestions

The various definitions, assumptions, and hypotheses which constitute the theory of cognitive dissonance have been stated in the five theoretical chapters of the book. In an effort to provide a brief summary of the theory, I will restate some of these definitions, assumptions, and hypotheses in as organized a manner as seems feasible.

The basic background of the theory consists of the notion that the human organism tries to establish internal harmony, consistency, or congruity among his opinions, attitudes, knowledge, and values. That is, there is a drive toward consonance among cognitions. In order to deal with this notion in a somewhat more precise manner, I have imagined cognition to be decomposable into elements or, at least, clusters of elements. The following theoretical statements have been made about the relations among these cognitive elements:

1. Pairs of elements can exist in irrelevant, consonant, or dissonant relations.
2. Two cognitive elements are in an irrelevant relation if they have nothing to do with one another.
3. Two cognitive elements are in a dissonant relation if,

considering these two alone, the obverse of one element follows from the other.

4. Two cognitive elements are in a consonant relation if, considering these two alone, one element follows from the other.

Starting from these definitions, a number of situations have been denoted as implying the existence of cognitive dissonance.

1. Dissonance almost always exists after a decision has been made between two or more alternatives. The cognitive elements corresponding to positive characteristics of the rejected alternatives, and those corresponding to negative characteristics of the chosen alternative, are *dissonant* with the knowledge of the action that has been taken. Those cognitive elements corresponding to positive characteristics of the chosen alternative and negative characteristics of the rejected alternative are *consonant* with the cognitive elements corresponding to the action which has been taken.

2. Dissonance almost always exists after an attempt has been made, by offering rewards or threatening punishment, to elicit overt behavior that is at variance with private opinion. If the overt behavior is successfully elicited, the person's private opinion is dissonant with his knowledge concerning his behavior; his knowledge of the reward obtained or of the punishment avoided is consonant with his knowledge concerning his behavior. If the overt behavior is not successfully elicited, then his private opinion is consonant with his knowledge of what he has done, but the knowledge of the reward not obtained or of the punishment to be suffered is dissonant with his knowledge of what he has done.

3. Forced or accidental exposure to new information may create cognitive elements that are dissonant with existing cognition.

4. The open expression of disagreement in a group leads

to the existence of cognitive dissonance in the members. The knowledge that some other person, generally like oneself, holds one opinion is dissonant with holding a contrary opinion.

5. Identical dissonance in a large number of people may be created when an event occurs which is so compelling as to produce a uniform reaction in everyone. For example, an event may occur which unequivocally invalidates some widely held belief.

Thus far, dissonance and consonance have been defined as "all or none" relations—that is, if two elements are relevant to one another, the relation between them is either dissonant or consonant. Two hypotheses have been advanced concerning the magnitude of dissonance or consonance.

1. The magnitude of the dissonance or consonance which exists between two cognitive elements will be a direct function of the importance of these two elements.

2. The total magnitude of dissonance which exists between two clusters of cognitive elements is a function of the weighted proportion of all the relevant relations between the two clusters which are dissonant, each dissonant or consonant relation being weighted according to the importance of the elements involved in that relation.

Starting with these hypotheses about the magnitude of dissonance, a number of operational implications seem clear.

1. The magnitude of postdecision dissonance is an increasing function of the general importance of the decision and of the relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternatives.

2. The magnitude of postdecision dissonance *decreases* as the number of cognitive elements corresponding identically to characteristics of chosen and unchosen alternatives *increases*.

3. The magnitude of the dissonance resulting from an at-

tempt to elicit forced compliance is greatest if the promised reward or threatened punishment is either *just sufficient* to elicit the overt behavior or is *just barely not sufficient* to elicit it.

4. If forced compliance is elicited, the magnitude of the dissonance *decreases* as the magnitude of the reward or punishment *increases*.

5. If forced compliance fails to be elicited, the magnitude of the dissonance *increases* as the magnitude of the reward or punishment *increases*.

6. The magnitude of the dissonance introduced by the expression of disagreement by others *decreases* as the number of existing cognitive elements consonant with the opinion *increases*. These latter elements may correspond either to objective, nonsocial items of information or to the knowledge that some other people hold the same opinion.

7. The magnitude of the dissonance introduced by disagreement from others *increases* with *increase* in the importance of the opinion to the person, in the relevance of the opinion to those voicing disagreement, and in the attractiveness of those voicing disagreement.

8. The greater the difference between the opinion of the person and the opinion of the one voicing disagreement, and, hence, the greater the number of elements which are dissonant between the cognitive clusters corresponding to the two opinions, the greater will be the magnitude of dissonance.

One now comes to the point of stating the central hypotheses of the theory, namely:

1. The presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce that dissonance.

2. The strength of the pressure to reduce dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the existing dissonance.

These hypotheses lead, naturally, to a consideration of the ways in which dissonance may be reduced. There are three major ways in which this may be done.

1. By changing one or more of the elements involved in dissonant relations.
2. By adding new cognitive elements that are consonant with already existing cognition.
3. By decreasing the importance of the elements involved in the dissonant relations.

Applying these considerations to actual situations leads to the following:

1. Postdecision dissonance may be reduced by increasing the attractiveness of the chosen alternative, decreasing the attractiveness of the unchosen alternatives, or both.
2. Postdecision dissonance may be reduced by perceiving some characteristics of the chosen and unchosen alternatives as identical.
3. Postdecision dissonance may be reduced by decreasing the importance of various aspects of the decision.
4. If forced compliance has been elicited, the dissonance may be reduced by changing private opinion to bring it into line with the overt behavior or by magnifying the amount of reward or punishment involved.
5. If forced compliance fails to be elicited, dissonance may be reduced by intensifying the original private opinion or by minimizing the reward or punishment involved.
6. The presence of dissonance leads to seeking new information which will provide cognition consonant with existing cognitive elements and to avoiding those sources of new information which would be likely to increase the existing dissonance.
7. When some of the cognitive elements involved in a dissonance are cognitions about one's own behavior, the dissonance

can be reduced by changing the behavior, thus directly changing the cognitive elements.

8. Forced or accidental exposure to new information which tends to increase dissonance will frequently result in misinterpretation and misperception of the new information by the person thus exposed in an effort to avoid a dissonance increase.

9. Dissonance introduced by disagreement expressed by other persons may be reduced by changing one's own opinion, by influencing the others to change their opinion, and by rejecting those who disagree.

10. The existence of dissonance will lead to seeking out others who already agree with a cognition that one wants to establish or maintain and will also lead to the initiation of communication and influence processes in an effort to obtain more social support.

11. Influence exerted on a person will be more effective in producing opinion change to the extent that the indicated change of opinion reduces dissonance for that person.

12. In situations where many persons who associate with one another all suffer from the identical dissonance, dissonance reduction by obtaining social support is very easy to accomplish.

To conclude this brief summary of the theory, there are a few things to be stated concerning the effectiveness of efforts directed toward dissonance reduction.

1. The effectiveness of efforts to reduce dissonance will depend upon the resistance to change of the cognitive elements involved in the dissonance and on the availability of information which will provide, or of other persons who will supply, new cognitive elements which will be consonant with existing cognition.

2. The major sources of resistance to change for a cogni-

tive element are the responsiveness of such cognitive elements to "reality" and the extent to which an element exists in consonant relations with many other elements.

3. The maximum dissonance which can exist between two elements is equal to the resistance to change of the less resistant of the two elements. If the dissonance exceeds this magnitude, the less resistant cognitive element will be changed, thus reducing the dissonance.

This brief summary can hardly hope to give an adequate picture of the theory, but perhaps it can help the reader to see more clearly the nature of the theory and where it goes. I will not attempt to provide any summary of the empirical evidence which has been presented.

In the course of thinking about the theory, conducting studies designed to test its implications, and searching the literature for data, numerous ideas have suggested themselves which seem promising but about which there is no evidence. The degree of confirmation of the theory of dissonance in those areas where data have been obtained seems sufficient to encourage me to spell out here those implications from, and ideas about, the theory of dissonance for which no evidence is available. The remainder of this chapter consists, then, of an assortment of suggestions which vary all the way from derivations from the theory to hunches about variables which affect the processes of dissonance reduction.

Some Notions Concerning Personality Differences

There are, certainly, individual differences among people in the degree to which, and in the manner that, they react to the existence of dissonance. For some people dissonance is an extremely painful and intolerable thing, while there

are others who seem to be able to tolerate a large amount of dissonance. This variation in "tolerance for dissonance" would seem to be measurable in at least a rough way. Persons with low tolerance for dissonance should show more discomfort in the presence of dissonance and should manifest greater efforts to reduce dissonance than persons who have high tolerance. Because of this variation in efforts to reduce dissonance, it would be plausible to expect that persons with low tolerance would actually have considerably less existing dissonance at any time than comparable persons who have a rather high tolerance for dissonance. One would expect a person with low tolerance for dissonance to see issues more in terms of "black and white" than would a person with high tolerance for dissonance who might be expected to be able to maintain "grays" in his cognition. Thus, for example, let us imagine a person who is a Democrat. If he has a high tolerance for dissonance, it might be possible for him to continue being a Democrat and yet also believe that there were certain issues on which the Democrats are wrong. In essence, he would be maintaining two sets of cognitions which are dissonant with one another since, considering only the fact that he thinks the Democrats are wrong on some issues, and ignoring all other relevant cognition for the moment, the obverse of "being a Democrat" would follow.

A person with a low tolerance for dissonance would, perhaps, be unable to maintain such dissonances and would struggle to eliminate them. Thus, one would expect that if a person with low tolerance for dissonance were a Democrat, he would show tendencies to accept everything the Democrats stood for. For such a person, then, clusters of relevant cognitive elements would be mainly consonant. His opinions on issues might be characterized as extreme or as

cast in terms of black and white. It would seem that a measure of "tolerance for dissonance" based upon these considerations would be possible.

At this point many readers will feel like suggesting that perhaps such a test already exists, having recognized a certain similarity between our discussion immediately above and some descriptions of "authoritarian personalities" and some descriptions of people with high "intolerance for ambiguity." My own suspicion would be that existing tests such as the F scale do measure, to some extent, the degree to which people hold extreme opinions, that is, opinions where dissonance has been effectively eliminated. Such tests also measure so many other things, however, that they would not be very satisfactory for this purpose. Tests which simply measure "intolerance of ambiguity" may be closer to the purpose which concerns us here. These are empirical questions. The validation procedure for any test which is to be used as a measure of tolerance for dissonance is clear, however. It should relate to the degree to which subjects show evidence of pressure to reduce dissonance in an experimental situation where dissonance has been introduced under controlled conditions.

Once such a measure of tolerance for dissonance is available, there are a number of interesting conjectures which it would be possible to test empirically. Let us consider persons at one extreme end of the range of tolerance for dissonance, that is, persons for whom dissonance is especially painful. One might expect that in such extreme instances a person would act so as to avoid the occurrence of dissonance. Having learned, during the course of his existence, how unpleasant dissonance is, he may very likely avoid those situations which he has learned lead to dissonance. Thus, for example, he would undoubtedly have experienced the unpleasantness that exists following a decision since there is

almost always dissonance. If such a person, for whom dissonance is extremely painful, attempts to avoid the occurrence of dissonance, one would expect to observe that he tries to avoid making decisions or even becomes incapable of making decisions. At this extreme, of course, it becomes possibly a pathological affair. Let us examine further what one would expect of a person who, through fear of dissonance and its unpleasantness, actually prefers to stay in conflict and shows an inability to make decisions.

If such a person is, indeed, reacting in anticipation of dissonance which is for him highly unpleasant, then it is clear that he must have frequently suffered such dissonance in order to learn this anticipatory avoidance reaction. One would, consequently, also expect that he would have developed some mechanisms for reducing dissonance which, while perhaps not very effective (or else why the avoidance of dissonance), would nevertheless be serviceable in the long run. The existence of these mechanisms, together with the strong pressure to reduce dissonance when it existed, would make it highly likely that he would have managed to eliminate any dissonance which may have existed in long-established cognitive clusters. One would expect such a person to have very positive and one-sided opinions about many issues and not to be able, very effectively, to see "both sides of a question." If this is correct, one would then find the almost paradoxical situation where a person who is very "decided" concerning opinions, issues, and values also shows an inability to make decisions.

One would also expect that such a person would react very vigorously to the introduction of dissonance into his cognition. This must follow if, indeed, the inability to make decisions is a reaction to fear of dissonance. There is at least one kind of situation where a person cannot avoid dissonance unless he makes an absolute recluse out of himself.

That is, occasionally people discuss things, have disagreements, and voice their disagreements. Since the knowledge that someone like oneself holds one opinion is dissonant with holding a contrary opinion, a person for whom dissonance is extremely unpleasant would be expected to react very vigorously to the expression of disagreement from others. He might argue vigorously, be dogmatic, be stubborn, and the like. This syndrome of inability to make decisions, of being very "decided" and "one-sided" about issues, and of reacting vigorously in the face of disagreement from others, is one which would be consistent with an interpretation that the person has such low tolerance for dissonance that he has learned to react in anticipation of it.

We have been discussing an extreme instance, of course. There are other, milder ways of reacting in anticipation of dissonance in order to avoid it. There are persons who, in avoiding postdecision dissonance, make decisions without making them. This can be done sometimes by assuming a passive role with respect to the environment so that, at least in some instances, decisions get made because the ground, so to speak, has moved under one's feet. Thus the decision is made but the person is not responsible for it. Avoiding postdecision dissonance can also be accomplished to some extent by psychologically revoking the decision as soon as it is made. Thus, for example, if immediately after having made a decision, irrevocable though it may be in actuality, the person is convinced that it was absolutely the wrong thing to do, he is again preparing himself for the impact of possible dissonance and avoiding this impact. Such avoidance of dissonance should exist only for persons who have very low tolerance for dissonance coupled with relatively inefficient mechanisms for reducing dissonance once it occurs.

This brings us, of course, to the problem of the variability

from person to person in the effectiveness of the techniques they use for reducing dissonance and in the preference for one technique or mechanism over another. But I have little to say on this point beyond the acknowledgment that such differences among people certainly exist. Undoubtedly, some people typically attempt to reduce dissonance by focusing on the elements of cognition which are involved in the dissonant relations and attempting to alter or to discard some of them. Other people habitually deal with dissonance by focusing mainly on the cognitive elements involved in consonant relations and attempting to add new elements which are also consonant with others. The extent to which selective forgetting of cognitive elements involved in dissonant relations is an effective means of dissonance reduction has also been insufficiently explored. Other means of reducing dissonance, which are theoretically possible but about which we have little evidence, are, for example, reducing the importance of the whole area of cognitive content in which dissonance exists, compartmentalizing different cognitive clusters so that they, in effect, have nothing to do with one another. I mention these merely to indicate some of the problems involved and the possible scope of inquiry rather than because I have any ideas about how to deal with these aspects of personality in relation to dissonance.

Some Effects of Changes in Status and Role

The problem of drawing implications of a general nature from the theory of cognitive dissonance is, of course, one of independently identifying situations or circumstances which produce dissonance habitually. On a very general level it seems plausible that if a person is subjected to a sudden change in his way of life, some cognitive dissonance will result. Many of the actions he will engage in because of his

altered circumstances will very likely be dissonant with some of the opinions or values which he acquired previously. If specific situations could be identified where this would be true, one would be able to predict certain specific ideological changes or opinion changes subsequent to the change in the person's way of life. Such change of opinion would, of course, be one way to reduce the dissonance between existing opinions and knowledge of the actions now engaged in. I will discuss some such situations which can be specifically identified to illustrate the kind of implication to be drawn from a consideration of dissonance and the pressure to reduce it.

It sometimes happens that a person's "role" or "position" in some organization, or in society, changes. Thus, a graduate student passes his examinations, receives his Ph.D., and accepts a position teaching in some college. Suddenly his position in life and the things he must do are considerably changed. He is no longer a student but someone who teaches others; instead of being the recipient of grades, he gives grades to others, and the like. Many of the things he does will introduce dissonance into his cognition. As a student he may, for example, have held certain derogatory opinions about teachers who came to class unprepared and delivered poor lectures. He now may find himself doing this occasionally. As a student he may have acquired certain opinions about the grading system and its value. Now, as a teacher, he may frequently find that he has to give grades without sufficient basis for making differentiations. And many other similar instances may arise. Such dissonance may be reduced by changing his old opinions. While he is associating with other teachers, it is probably not too difficult for him to acquire a set of opinions which are consonant with the things he does. In other words, he accepts the opinions and the values of the position into which he has moved.

Exactly the same kind of analysis may be made for other kinds of sudden change in the job which a person does. A worker in a factory, for example, may be promoted to the job of foreman. Suddenly he finds himself giving orders instead of receiving them, supervising the work of others instead of being supervised, and the like. Again, these new actions will be dissonant, in many instances, with opinions and values which he acquired as a worker and still holds. In the pursuit of dissonance reduction, one would expect this person to quite rapidly accept the opinions and values of other foremen, that is, opinions and values which are consonant with the things he now does. It would also not be surprising to find that such a person starts seeing less of the workers with whom he used to associate since these other workers will not support the changes of opinion which will lead to dissonance reduction. I do not mean to imply that this is a completely sudden change of opinion that occurs or that it is an "all or none" process. Indeed, it may take some time, and some opinions may be very resistant to change so that some dissonance is never eliminated. But the pressure to reduce the dissonance does exist, and a large degree of acceptance of values and opinions appropriate to the new position should be evident.

There are other types of changes, other than changes in "job," that produce the same kinds of dissonance between existing opinions and new actions which a person takes because of the changed situation. Thus, for example, the last decade in the United States has seen a sharp rise in the living standard of many people and the growth of a new "suburbia." If a change over a period of a few years may be called sudden, then these persons changed many aspects of their way of life suddenly. But even if it is to be called a gradual change, the fact remains that the change occurred and produced behavior and actions which, in many instances, were undoubtedly dissonant with existing opinions.

A person who had always lived in the middle of a city, and had acquired certain opinions about how one lives and how one spends one's time, may now find himself with a small lawn that requires attention and mowing. A person who had always paid rent may now find himself paying taxes on the home he purchased and having reactions to taxes which are dissonant with his opinions concerning how high taxes should be. Once more, such dissonance can be reduced through change of opinion, and we would expect such ideological change to occur. It would be reflected to some extent in change of political opinions and to some extent in change of social opinions and values. In short, one would expect to see the acceptance and adoption of the opinions and values of the social class into which these people moved.

The fact that changes in role or in status affect people's opinions and beliefs has, of course, been recognized and commented on by many writers. Emphasis has been placed on two factors—namely, that people who occupy a certain role or position respond to the expectations which others have of that role or position, and that one is influenced by the persons one associates with while occupying a given role. The interpretation I have given in terms of the theory of cognitive dissonance does not discount the effect of factors such as these, but rather casts them in a new light. The influence which others in similar positions exert on persons who move into a new role is undoubtedly important. But if my interpretation is correct, the person who moves into the new role is not, so to speak, a victim of this influence, but rather seeks it out. As we saw in Chapter Nine, in discussing the McGuire study, influence that reduces dissonance is considerably more effective than influence that tends to increase dissonance. Without the availability of others who are willing, and able, to exert influence in the direction which will reduce the dissonance created by the new situation, the

ensuing dissonance reduction in the form of opinion change would not be able to occur so easily.

Such factors as the expectations which others have of the role and the requirements of the role are, undoubtedly, important in producing the dissonance in the first place. For example, a worker who accepts a promotion to the job of foreman in a large factory may intend to behave differently from all foremen he has known in his past. In other words, he initially sees himself as behaving in manners consonant with his current opinions. But the expectations of the workers that he finds himself supervising, and their perception of the role of the foreman, may simply not allow this. He may find himself, willy nilly, acting like a foreman.

Certainly, such a change in role is complicated in the sense that many factors are undoubtedly at work affecting the person's behavior and opinions. In the new role, he also has experiences which he never had before. All I wish to point out, however, is that the phenomenon of acceptance of the values associated with a role by a person who moves into that position can be adequately understood in terms of dissonance reduction.

The Scope of the Theory of Dissonance

In the various chapters of this book, I have presented data from a wide range of contexts which are relevant to the theory of dissonance. The material dealt with has ranged all the way from the situation in which an individual finds himself after having made a decision, a purely psychological problem, to a concern with the level of proselyting in certain types of mass movements, a problem which would probably interest sociologists more than psychologists. And indeed, the theory of dissonance does seem to have wide scope. The existence of dissonance is probably so prevalent,

and various circumstances which can give rise to dissonance probably occur so frequently, that evidence of dissonance and manifestations of the pressure to reduce it are likely to be found in almost any context.

Indeed, there are some obvious ramifications of the theory of dissonance which I have almost totally ignored. For example, any time a dissonance exists between one set of cognitions which correspond to, say, information or opinions, and another set of cognitions which correspond to behavior in which the person is engaging, it is clear that this dissonance can be reduced by changing the behavior. Actually, cognitions that represent knowledge of a person's own actions are, in a sense, the easiest kinds of cognitive elements to change since this can be accomplished by merely changing the behavior involved. This may be contrasted with the great difficulty of changing cognitive elements that correspond to knowledge about the environment that has impinged on the person directly through his senses. Consequently, it is clear that one would expect appropriate modification of behavior to be a frequent reaction to the existence of dissonance.

But precisely because the theory has such wide scope, it is important to attempt to delimit precisely where it is relevant and where it is not. There are many factors affecting people's behavior, attitudes, and opinions about which the theory of dissonance has nothing to say. For example, we have said little or nothing about motivation throughout the course of this book. Dissonance itself can, of course, be considered as a motivating factor, but there are many other motives which affect human beings and we have skirted the question of any relationship between these other motivations and the pressure to reduce dissonance. There are, however, in some circumstances, clear relationships. There are instances where motives define whether a relation

between two cognitive elements is dissonant or consonant. For example, consider the experiment on voluntary seeking of information in a gambling situation which was described in Chapter Seven. There I assumed, plausibly, that cognition experientially acquired by someone who had been losing fairly steadily was dissonant with the cognition that he continued to play on the same side he originally chose. But stating that the relation between these two sets of cognitions was dissonant depends on the assumption that the person is motivated to win. If, by some chance, a subject in this experiment wanted to lose, these two cognitive clusters would exist, for him, in a consonant relationship.

Other motives which may operate also will enter the picture insofar as they make certain cognitive elements resistant to change, thus perhaps hindering the reduction of dissonance. A consideration of such other motivations would also undoubtedly be necessary in order to predict the occurrence of dissonance. But what I want to stress here is that I have not dealt with problems of motivation, and that these problems would, by and large, be distinct from the problems with which the theory of dissonance does deal.

If one starts using the concept of dissonance loosely, however, this distinction is easily lost sight of. For example, does cognitive dissonance exist any time a person is in a frustrating situation, that is, any time progress toward some objective which he is motivated to achieve is blocked? The answer to this is No, but it is worth while detailing the answer since I think it will help clarify the limitations of the scope of the theory of dissonance. If a person is driving a car on a lonely road at night, has a flat tire, and discovers he does not have an automobile jack with him, we would certainly describe him as being in a frustrat-



ing situation. But let us consider his cognition to see if any dissonant relations exist. He knows he has a flat tire, he knows he has no jack, he knows it is night time on a lonely road, he knows that he is supposed to be in such and such a place at such and such a time. But none of these cognitions are dissonant with one another. None of them, considered alone, would lead to the obverse of one of the others.

Such a frustrating situation could also involve cognitive dissonance. If the person in the above situation proceeded to use his wrench to take off all the bolts on the wheel on which the tire was flat, his cognition about that action would be dissonant with knowing he cannot change the tire because he has no jack. He might attempt to reduce such dissonance by convincing himself that even though it is late at night on a lonely road, surely another car will come along and stop to help him. But it is clear that his reactions to this possible dissonance are quite different from his reactions (which he will undoubtedly have) to the frustration.

It would be unfortunate indeed if the concept of dissonance were used so loosely as to have it encompass everything, thus depriving it of meaning entirely. Of course, the possibility of such loose use exists only because of the occasional vagueness in the definition of dissonance and, especially, vagueness in how to denote, a priori, whether or not the relation between two cognitive elements is dissonant or not. The vagueness in the conceptual definition of dissonance—namely, two elements are dissonant if considering them alone, the obverse of one follows from the other—lies in the words “follows from” and in the phrase “considering them alone.” One element may follow from another because of logic, because of cultural mores, because of things one has experienced and learned, and per-

haps in other senses too. Thus, the specification of the phrase “follows from” involves specification of the operations by means of which one can say that for a given person, element A follows from element B. The specification of the meaning of the phrase “considering them alone” also boils down to a specification of the procedures by means of which one determines whether or not dissonance exists. Thus, this degree of vagueness is almost inherent in any theoretical statement which is new in the sense that little empirical work relevant to the theory has as yet been done. Thus, for example, I do not believe there is any vagueness in the a priori determination of dissonance which exists as a result of having made a decision. This has been clarified empirically. Additional empirical work in other contexts will further clarify the procedures for determining the existence of dissonance.

But perhaps the best way of avoiding loose usage of the concept of dissonance is to emphasize its clarity rather than its vagueness. Dissonance is not anything which exists all by itself. It is a characterization of a relationship between cognitive elements. Thus, determining whether or not dissonance exists should take the form of first specifying the cognitive elements, or clusters, which are under consideration and then examining whether, considering either one alone, the obverse of the other follows. If it seems plausible to assert that the relation is dissonant, it is usually also helpful to specify on what grounds—logical, experiential, cultural, or otherwise—the “follows from” holds in that instance. It is also clearly necessary to be able to specify what specific changes in cognition, or what new cognitive elements, would reduce the magnitude of the dissonance thus determined. If treated as precisely and specifically as possible, I believe the theory of cognitive dissonance will prove a useful explanatory and predictive device.