One reason why attitudes have been the focus of research since the earliest days of social psychology is that they are useful in understanding and predicting behavior. It is not surprising, then, that the relationship between attitudes and behavior is typically thought about in a particular direction. Sarah likes the music of Britney Spears, so she buys Britney's latest CD. John dislikes math, so he avoids it by watching Seinfeld reruns instead of doing his calculus homework. It is easy to bring to mind instances in which people's attitudes lead to behaviors consistent with those attitudes. There is no doubt that attitudes often spur actions, but in this chapter we discuss how the relationship sometimes works in the opposite direction. That is, the actions people take sometimes help form or change their attitudes.

Consider, for example, the life of the notorious criminal Clyde Barrow, half of the infamous crime duo known as Bonnie and Clyde (Figure 4.1). During the days of the Great Depression, Bonnie and Clyde caught people's fancy as a team of bank robbers whose daring exploits and violent shootouts stymied police. Newspapers of the era were quick to print Bonnie and Clyde's latest exploits, songs and poems were written about them, and their lives formed the basis of a major motion picture during the late 1960s. How did Clyde, a relatively normal child growing up in a large poor family in Dallas, Texas, become one of the most notorious criminals in 20th-century America? Any single answer will, of course, be too simple. Nonetheless, certain events in his life speak to the powerful effect of behaviors in molding attitudes, even attitudes toward law enforcement and crime.

By all accounts, Clyde was a mischievous but not atypical youth. He skipped school occasionally, but there was little in his behavior to suggest that he would eventually become a bank robber.
robber and violent murderer. There was nothing that would lead anyone to expect that he would die on a quiet Louisiana road in a shootout with six policemen.

Despite his peaceful childhood, Clyde’s life began to change in 1926. By then, Clyde had met his first love, a schoolgirl named Anne. After their first lovers’ quarrel, Anne fled to her aunt’s farm in the small town of San Augustine. Clyde rented a car to make the 170-mile trip to reconcile with Anne. To Clyde’s great pleasure, Anne quickly forgot their differences and the couple stayed on in the country for another 2 days.

From Clyde’s vantage point, all was right with the world. The car rental company, however, began to worry when Clyde did not show up to return its automobile. They called the police, who eventually tracked down Clyde in San Augustine. When they arrived, Clyde realized that he had been responsible for stealing the car. He ran out of the farmhouse and across a set of fields. The police drew their pistols and fired several shots. Clyde made it to the woods and hid until the police left. When he returned to the farm, he realized that he was in a hopeless situation. Everyone saw him as a criminal, including Anne, who would now leave him for good.

So began the adult life of a criminal who, by the time of his death, would be responsible for countless robberies and murders. Although it had not been his intent, his failure to return the rental car was criminal behavior. His running from the police and instigating the bullet-dodging chase further compounded his criminality. How could a person whose upbringing had taught him respect for the law make sense of his new criminal behavior? Clyde quickly convinced himself that crime was not so bad. He began stealing cars whenever necessary. Soon he graduated to robbing drugstores and finally to robbing banks and committing murder. Each step of the way, Clyde justified his actions by changing his attitudes.

Sometimes behaviors direct attitudes. Clyde Barrow behaved like a criminal. He had done things that were not consistent with the way law-abiding people behave. The contrary, his behavior at the San Augustine farm on that warm July evening in 1926 was consistent with the behavior of an antisocial lawbreaker. His private attitudes changed. Escaping police was a good thing—a fun thing to do. Soon his attitudes toward robbery and murder followed. Five decades of research shows that actions do indeed direct attitudes. Fortunately, most people do not engage in criminal behavior, but they do often behave in ways that are inconsistent with some of their attitudes. Under the right circumstances, most people change their attitudes to justify their behavior.

EXPLAINING THE CHANGE: THE THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Why do people change their attitudes when their behaviors and attitudes do not coincide? Festinger’s (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance proposed a forceful explanation, now backed by decades of empirical research (for a thorough review, see Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). The theory of cognitive dissonance states that whenever a person holds conflicting thoughts (i.e., thoughts) that are inconsistent with one another, the person experiences an uncomfortable state of tension. That tension, being psychologically aversive, needs to be reduced. Think of Clyde Barrow again. He held at least two cognitions that were discrepant: “I believe that the law should be obeyed” and “I stole a car and I ran from the police.” Extrapolating from Festinger’s (1957) theory, this should have led Clyde to experience dissonance, that is, an unpleasant tension state. People do not like to live with unpleasant feelings. Instead, people are motivated to reduce the unpleasant tension state by reducing the inconsistency, as Festinger argued.

In general, people can reduce their inconsistency by changing one of their cognitions, adding a cognition, or reducing the importance of their cognitions. If Clyde chose to reduce his dissonance by adding a cognition, he could have remembered all the times that he obeyed the law and thought, “I’m actually a law-abiding citizen.” Or, he could have turned himself into the police or made a donation to the policemen’s benevolent society. Alternatively, Clyde...
Table 4.1 Possible Pros and Cons Involved in Choosing Between a Spring Break Vacation to the Beach and a Ski Vacation to the Rockies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Pros</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful blue waters</td>
<td>Possibility of sunburn</td>
<td>Last chance for the season</td>
<td>Possibility of frostbite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm weather</td>
<td>Sharks in water</td>
<td>Wonderful ski chalet</td>
<td>Expensive ski equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny skies</td>
<td>Five-hour plane ride away</td>
<td>One-hour drive away</td>
<td>Majority of friends going</td>
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</tbody>
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In Festinger and Carlsmith's (1959) study and many similar studies, a person is induced to comply with a request that is contrary to his or her attitude. These studies are now known as induced compliance studies, and they have many parallels in everyday life. For example, lawyers may have to argue for clients or for some legal positions that are contrary to their own beliefs, and politicians may have to take some positions that are contrary to their own beliefs. In these situations, according to cognitive dissonance theory, these lawyers and politicians will experience dissonance, which they may reduce by changing their attitudes to bring them more in line with the content of their statements. We may be appropriately cynical of people who distort their attitudes to persuade juries or win votes. Nonetheless, most of us have some experience with inconsistency. A person may claim to support an issue because he or she wants to impress a colleague whom the person knows will want him or her to support that position. Someone may tell his romantic partner how much he enjoyed going to the ballet when, in fact, he could barely keep his eyes open. Meanwhile, his partner may engage in similar inconsistency by claiming to have loved Sunday's 6-hour NASCAR race. Having said it, however, there is a tendency—driven by the need to reduce dissonance—to believe it.

MAKING CHOICES

Cognitive dissonance theory also makes clear predictions about the consequences of choices that people make. Every time people choose between two or more alternative courses of action, they experience some dissonance. The dissonance is caused by the negative elements of the course of action chosen and the positive elements of the course of action that was not chosen. Suppose that you were trying to decide where to take your vacation for spring break. Perhaps you have narrowed your choices to a trip to the beach or a “last chance for the season” ski vacation to the Rockies. A list of the pros and cons of each alternative might look like those in Table 4.1. Notice that there are fewer negative elements and more positive elements to the beach trip. Looking at this list, you activate your favorite online travel site and make the commitment to head to the beach. Psychologically, however, all is not so simple. What will you do with all of the cognitions that were inconsistent with the trip to the beach? There are negative items about the beach trip that you will have to live with, and there were...
Brehm (1956) constructed a laboratory situation in which participants were allowed to choose which of two attractive consumer items they wished to take home as a gift. Brehm predicted that participants’ ratings of the two items after their decisions would show a “spreading of the idiosyn
cratic” (p. 123). That is, in each case, the chosen gift would be seen as more desirable than it had initially been rated and the forgone gift would be rated less positively than it had initially been rated. Brehm reasoned that participants would reduce their cognitive dissonance by changing their attitudes to make them more consistent with the choice. They would try to think of more positive things about the chosen gift and more negative things about the unchosen alternative. The results supported Brehm’s reasoning. Making a choice between the two gifts led to dissonance, which in turn led to changes in attitudes about those gifts as the most efficient way in which to reduce the dissonance. After the decision, the difference in attitudes between the two items was significantly greater than it had been before the choice was made.

People make choices all of the time in everyday life. The more there is to like about the options they do not choose and the more there is not to like about the options they do choose, the more unwanted consequences people will be, responsible for causing. Thus, after a person makes a choice, the person tends to think that choice is better and the rejected options are worse than he or she thought before. This may explain why people sometimes seem very close-minded about the things they have bought or chosen. After you choose the beach vacation, you might think that the beach is the very best location for a vacation compared with any other location in the world.

JUSTIFYING EFFORT

Now let us consider a different type of dilemma to which cognitive dissonance has been applied. What are the consequences of people working hard—perhaps even suffering to achieve a goal? Dissonance theory would predict that the more people have suffered to attain things, the more they will come to like those things better (Figure 4.2). Imagine that you are trying to be admitted to a club, sorority, or fraternity. You are confronted with an elaborate pledge period replete with a number of difficult or embarrassing activities. The behavior, which is effortful, is inconsistent with peoples general attitudes toward doing things that are unpleasant. Moreover, suppose that the club had some genuinely unattractive features (e.g., the other members are dull, the food is bad, the parties are mediocre). How can you deal with the dissonance among the suffering involved in pledging, the attitude that one does not like the other members are dull, the food is bad, the parties are mediocre)?

Aronson and Mills (1959) tested this proposition by designing an experiment in which female participants had to read aloud either sexually explicit words or sexually nonexplicit words to gain admission to a discussion group that was discussing sexual topics. After their “initiation,” the participants listened to a boring discussion among group members about the secondary sexual characteristics of lower vertebrates. Participants who had read aloud the more embarrassing, sexually explicit material experienced dissonance. To reduce the tension, they rated the boring discussion as more enjoyable and rated the participants as more attractive than did participants who had read the nonexplicit (nonembarrassing) material.

There are other situations where expending effort may lead to cognitive dissonance and persuasion (Figure 4.3). For example, if people endure a strenuous interview process to get a job, they may reduce their dissonance by liking the job more. In a therapeutic weight loss program, people whose regimen was markedly unpleasant have been shown to be more successful in reaching their weight loss goals (e.g., Cooper & Axsom, 1982). In one study, Cooper and Axsom (1983) recruited participants who were obese by insurance company standards and who expressed a desire to lose weight. Most participants had experienced unsuccessful results in other weight loss programs. In Cooper and Axsom’s study, some participants were randomly assigned to a high-effort condition in which they were asked to perform some difficult and tedious cognitive tasks such as memorizing long strings of numbers, doing a difficult visual discrimination task, and reading nursery rhymes backward. Other participants were asked to complete a similar but much less effortful version of the tasks. After 6 months, the results showed that participants in the high-effort regimen lost an average of nearly 7 pounds, whereas participants in the low-effort group and those in a “no treatment” control group failed to lose any weight at all. Using a conceptually similar approach to help college students overcome their fear of public speaking, Axsom (1989) found that students who engaged in a highly effortful procedure became more relaxed and made fewer errors than did students who engaged in a low-effort version of the procedure.
For 25 years, our Peace Corps members have endured and tough working conditions for virtually no pay.

9 out of 10 would do it again.

Figure 4.3: "Effort Justification" Explanation for the Dedication of These Peace Corps Members

SOURCE: Courtesy of the Peace Corps and the Advertising Council, Inc.

Retailers also make use of the dissonance produced by effort justification, and this may occur more often than we might think. If retailers make their products difficult to get or make their product prices very high, people who do get the products may develop more positive attitudes toward the products than would be the case if they had not put so much effort (or money!) into getting them. Consumers have caused riots in attempting to get holiday toys that were extremely difficult to obtain. The Cabbage Patch dolls of the 1980s and the Tickle Me Elmo dolls of 2000 are vivid illustrations. The more people had to work, travel, and pay to find these toys, the more attractive the toys seemed to become.

THE EXPERIENCE OF DISSONANCE

Festinger (1957) suggested that dissonance was an uncomfortable state of tension akin to the drive of hunger or thirst. It is unpleasant and bothersome, motivating a person to take action to reduce it. How do we know that the assumption is true. The original work on cognitive dissonance simply treated it as though it were true. That is, how else could a person account for the change in attitudes following inconsistent behavior unless the presence of inconsistency was indeed unpleasant, arousing, and uncomfortable? Ultimately, however, the assumption was drawn into question (Bern, 1972), and the quest for hard evidence regarding the internal experience of dissonance began.

The first flurry of research findings was directed toward finding out whether dissonance is arousing. Pallak and Pittman (1972) showed that when people experience dissonance, they have trouble in learning complex material—precisely the same trouble that occurs when people are aroused by other emotions. Cooper, Zanna, and Taves (1978) showed that if people write counterattitudinal essays but have their arousal taken away by a sedative, they do not show attitude change. However, if their arousal is augmented by an amphetamine, people show more attitude change. Moreover, Zanna and Cooper (1974) showed that if people mistakenly think that their arousal is due to an external stimulus rather than to their counterattitudinal essays, they do not show attitude change. Apparently, mistakenly attributing their arousal to another source makes attitude change unnecessary. Finally, Croyle and Cooper (1983) and Losch and Cacioppo (1990) were able to measure skin conductance changes when people experienced dissonance, concluding that, as Festinger (1957) had speculated, dissonance is indeed a state of arousal.

Arousal is one part of the formula, but is it also unpleasant? Elliot and Devine (1994) set out to answer that question. They created a scale on which participants could report how they felt at various times during an experiment where they were asked to write counterattitudinal essays. Of particular interest was a set of items, called the discomfort index, that assessed how uncomfortable, uneasy, and bothered they felt. Elliot and Devine found that when people were asked how they felt offering writing essays, they indicated significantly higher discomfort than they did before writing the essays.

Elliot and Devine (1994) also looked at the relationship of discomfort and attitude change. From their first finding, the investigators knew that dissonance was experienced as discomfort. They then asked whether people who changed their attitudes after writing their essays would still report discomfort. This is an intriguing question given that if Festinger’s original proposition is correct, attitude change occurs as a way of relieving the discomfort. Once respondents’ attitudes changed and the inconsistency was resolved, participants should no longer have experienced any discomfort. And that is exactly what Elliot and Devine found.
Taking all of these results together, we can conclude that when people act in inconsistent ways that activate cognitive dissonance, they feel uncomfortable and experience the emotion of discomfort. Reducing dissonance, through attitude change or presumably any means available to self-affirm. If they can marshal other evidence of their competence and changing attitudes to justify that outcome. Does this mean that cognitive inconsistency is unnecessary to the arousal of dissonance or that inconsistency alone (i.e., without aversive consequences) does not produce dissonance? More recent research suggests that drawing such conclusions may overstate the role of aversive consequences in dissonance (Hannon-Jones, 2000; Harmon-Jones, Brehm, Greenberg, Simon, & Nelson, 1996; Johnson. Kelly, & Le Blanc, 1195).

Inconsistency or Aversive Consequences?

Festinger (1957) originally argued that the only requirement for cognitive dissonance is inconsistency between cognitions. In his original view, dissonance could be aroused merely by two discordant thoughts, for example, the beliefs “I believe in the U.S. Constitution” and “I do not believe in free speech.” However, you may have noticed something more than just inconsistency in the situations we have described. In the induced compliance situation, for example, you may have noticed that the key action pet-thrilled by participants (lying to another person) not only is inconsistent with their attitudes but also leads to an aversive consequence—an outcome that the participants wish had not occurred. In the case of the Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) study, participants actions caused the negative outcome of another person coming to believe a false statement. Not only was Clyde Barrow’s crime spree inconsistent with his original law-abiding attitudes, but his behaviors also brought about aversive consequences for many people besides himself. Analyzing the behavior—attitude relationship from this perspective led researchers to consider whether inconsistency or the production of aversive consequences was responsible for arousing dissonance in people (Cooper & Fazio, 1984).

For example, Cooper and Worchel (1970) repeated the Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) induced compliance study but added a new twist to the study design. Cooper and Worchel (1970) reasoned that telling another person that a boring task was interesting would be perceived by participants as producing an aversive consequence only if the person to whom they were telling the lie appeared to believe them. So, they had an accomplice serve as the person to whom participants lied about the task. In some cases the accomplice told participants that he was convinced the task would be interesting, and in other cases the accomplice told participants he was not convinced. The results showed that dissonance was aroused only in the conditions where the accomplice appeared to be convinced. That is, only when participants thought they had produced the bad outcome of convincing the accomplice was there any change in participants’ attitudes toward the task.

The notion that producing aversive consequences, and not just inconsistency, is key to dissonance arousal has been supported by other findings (for a review, see Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Scher and Cooper (1989) asked college students to write essays that were either consistent or inconsistent with their attitudes toward a disliked policy. Some students were then led to believe that their essays (whether consistent or inconsistent with their attitudes) would have an unwanted effect, leading to the adoption of the policy. When students were told that their essays would have this unwanted effect, dissonance was aroused regardless of the positions they took in their essays. In other words, the unwanted outcome was more important than the inconsistency of the essay-writing behavior in producing subjective dissonance and changing attitudes to justify that outcome.

Does this mean that cognitive inconsistency is unnecessary to the arousal of dissonance or that inconsistency alone (i.e., without aversive consequences) does not produce dissonance? More recent research suggests that drawing such conclusions may overstate the role of aversive consequences in dissonance (Hannon-Jones, 2000; Harmon-Jones, Brehm, Greenberg, Simon, & Nelson, 1996; Johnson. Kelly, & Le Blanc, 1195). In order to answer this question, they had some participants drink an unpleasant beverage (Kool-Aid mixed with vinegar) and then perform a behavior inconsistent with their attitudes by writing a sentence stating that they liked the beverage. The prospect of aversive consequences was essentially removed from this situation by telling participants that the sentence-writing task was completely anonymous and then having them throw the piece of paper on which the sentence was written into a trash can—indicating that it could not be used for something had (e.g., misleading another person, adopting an incorrect policy). The results showed that even in a situation where aversive consequences were not present, inconsistency led to the arousal of cognitive dissonance. Clearly, however, taking into account the role of aversive consequences represents a key advance that has taken place in the understanding of what arouses cognitive dissonance since Festinger (1957) originally formulated his theory. Broadly speaking, the production of aversive consequences plays its important role in most, if not all, instances of cognitive dissonance arousal.
Liu (1981, 1983) found that if participants in a typical dissonance situation are given the chance to remind themselves that they are good people by, for example, thinking about some of their good values, they do not change their attitudes even when these values have nothing to do with the attitudes involved in arousing the dissonance. In some respects, self-affirmation theory is similar to self-consistency theory in that it focuses on people’s need to see themselves as moral and competent. However, the two approaches make very different predictions about the role of self-esteem in attitude change. As we pointed out, self-consistency theory takes the view that attitude-inconsistent statements will create the highest magnitude of dissonance in people whose self-esteem is highest. Taking the opposite position, self-affirmation theory views people as being constantly worried about correcting their self-images after threat. People with high self-esteem can use their positive self-images as a buffer against threat. People with low self-esteem have no such buffer and are more motivated to find a way in which to show that they are indeed moral and competent. In the self-affirmation view, it is people with an already low sense of self who will be most motivated to change their attitudes following inconsistent behavior.

**Toward a Resolution: The Self-Standards Model**

Understanding the precise mechanism that is responsible for arousing cognitive dissonance has been an exciting but elusive research issue. Stone and Cooper (2001) developed a model of dissonance arousal that accounts for the often contradictory findings generated by the self-consistency and self-affirmation viewpoints and provides a fuller understanding of what lies at the heart of dissonance arousal. "File self standards model takes as its starting point people’s tendency to evaluate their own behavior. People act and then decide whether their actions were good or bad, worthy or unworthy, competent or incompetent, and so on. They cannot do this in a vacuum; rather, they need a standard of comparison by which to assess the meaning of their behavior. Otherwise, the evaluation has no meaning.

People have a choice of measuring sticks, or standards, to use in evaluating their behavior. A participant who lied to the accomplice in Festinger and Carlsmith’s (1959) study can invoke a very personal standard of measurement. This person will consider how he or she normally stands on issues involving competence and morality. A person of high self-esteem may think, "I lied. I am a very competent and moral person. Lying is inconsistent with that morality." Such reasoning will lead to dissonance. A person in the same situation, invoking a personal standard but feeling less worthy (low self-esteem) may reason, "I lied. But that is what a person who is not very competent or moral usually does." Thus, this person will experience little dissonance.

On the other hand, a participant in Festinger and Carlsmith’s (1959) study may invoke a nonnative standard of judgment. This person may reason, "I lied and convinced a fellow student to believe something that is not true. It doesn’t matter what I think about myself. Everyone knows that duping a fellow student is a bad thing to do. I have brought about an unwanted aversive event." For this person, the evaluation of his or her counterattitudinal behavior against a normative standard creates dissonance. Self-esteem is not involved. Thus, for Stone and Cooper’s (2001) model, self-esteem may or may not be an aspect of dissonance, depending largely on what standard of judgment is invoked.

Which standard of judgment will people use? This is more straightforward than it might seem. The answer depends on which standard is accessible—or active in one’s mind—at the moment when the evaluation is made. In situations where societal standards are active in one’s mind, the arousal of dissonance is based on nonnative concerns. In situations where personal standards are active in one’s mind, the arousal of dissonance is based on evaluations particular to the self. Stone and Cooper (2001) speculated that peoples default (or typical) standard is the normative one. Personal ideographic standards are more unusual and occur when some aspect of the situation increases people’s awareness of their unique and individual characteristics.

**Do We All Experience Dissonance? Some Evidence on the Role of Individual Differences in the Arousal of Dissonance**

When we describe a phenomenon such as cognitive dissonance, we often use language that implies a universal proposition that all people respond to cognitive inconsistency with unpleasant tension and that all people who are confronted with inconsistency are motivated to reduce their dissonance regardless of their individual personalities or cultural heritage. Let us examine both of these propositions.

What types of people would be more likely to be bothered and upset by cognitive inconsistency? There are broad individual differences among people in the degree to which they normally feel that they control their own behaviors and fates. Some people generally feel that their outcomes in life are determined more by luck, fate, or chance than by their own individual decisions. People with this orientation are said to have an external locus of control (Rotten, 1966), whereas people who believe that they are responsible for their own outcomes in life are said to have an internal locus of control.

One of the most robust findings in cognitive dissonance research is that people experience dissonance when they are responsible for the inconsistent cognitions. Someone who chooses a vacation at the beach is responsible for that choice. A politician who argues against his or her own true beliefs is similarly responsible for that behavior. In most research studies, people who choose to act inconsistently with their beliefs experience dissonance; people who are forced to behave inconsistently by the experimenter’s instructions do not. Putting this all together, it is reasonable that people who normally think that they are responsible for their own outcomes (internalizers) will experience more dissonance when they behave inconsistently than will people who normally think that their outcomes are controlled by others (externalizers). This prediction has been borne out in several studies (e.g., Cooper, 1969; Cooper & Scalise, 1974). Other ways of looking at individual differences among people have also revealed a relationship with the experience of cognitive dissonance. Zanna and colleagues (Olson & Zanna, 1982; Zanna & Azziza, 1976) have shown that people whose overall orientation toward life is to deal with aversive events by pretending that they did not exist (called repressors) are much less likely to experience dissonance than are people whose orientation stings them super-vigilant to deal with any mailers of concern (called fibrilizers).

More recently, Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom (1999) surveyed the work on individual differences in the arousal of dissonance. They took the interesting position that the preference for consistency should be examined not by correlating it with measures of existing personality variables (e.g., locus of control, repression/sensitization) but rather by creating a new measure that was specifically directed at individual differences in the desire to maintain consistency. The Preference for Consistency (PFC) scale was created and then tested on a large number of students. The scale was designed to measure people’s desire for consistency in three broad domains: the desire for internal consistency, the desire to appear consistent to others, and the desire that other people be consistent.
Cialdini and colleagues (1995) showed that high scores on the PFC do indeed relate to the magnitude of cognitive dissonance. In one of their studies, students were asked to write essays on a topic with which they disagreed raising tuition at their university. Dissonance theory predicts that people who agree to write such essays will experience the unpleasant arousal state and will alter their private opinions in the direction of their behavior. Cialdini and colleagues found that the dissonance predictions were supported, but only for those people who were high on PFC. Participants who were low on PFC did not show the typical attitude change effect. This provides intriguing support for the notion that the propensity to experience dissonance is a phenomenon that is distributed across people such that some people are more keenly affected by it than are others. PFC appears to be a way of assessing the individual differences and distinguishing those who are more susceptible to the effects of dissonance from those who are less bothered by the inconsistency among their cognitions.

**New Directions: Dissonance in a Cultural Context**

Whereas Cialdini and colleagues (1995) addressed the question of finding a dimension that can discriminate among people within a culture, we now raise the question of whether people from different cultures experience cognitive dissonance. Do people from all cultures feel uncomfortable if their behavior is discrepant from their attitudes? Heine and Lehman (1997) addressed this question with respect to people from Canada and Japan. They predicted that people from North America would be more susceptible to dissonance and the motivation to reduce it due to the nature of the self that is emphasized more in North American cultures than in Asian cultures. In particular, it seems that in Western countries such as Canada and the United States, people’s perceptions of themselves are based largely on an understanding that people are independent and autonomous and are guided by stable internal attributes such as attitudes. As a result, people in independent cultures are keenly sensitive to the correspondence between their attitudes and behaviors and are highly motivated to reduce perceived discrepancies, for example, when experiencing cognitive dissonance. On the other hand, people from Japan and a number of other Asian countries tend to see the self quite differently. They tend to see people as interdependent—connected with others and to their environments. From this viewpoint, behavior is not seen as necessarily corresponding to a person’s true feelings, and related discrepancies are not generated the amount of cognitive dissonance, or the motivation to reduce it, that is seen in independent cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

To test these ideas, Heine and Lehman (1997) had Canadian and Japanese participants complete a version of Brehm’s (1956) tree-choice dissonance research. As part of a study ostensibly concerning music preferences, participants first rated how much they liked 10 different music CDs. Then they were asked to choose between two CDs that they ranked similarly to take home in return for participating in the study. Finally, they related how much they liked each of the CDs after making their selections. The results supported the culture-based predictions: Canadian participants were much more likely to show a spread of alternatives (i.e., increase how much they reported liking CDs they selected and/or decrease how much they reported liking CDs they did not select) than were Japanese participants. Although these results do not show conclusively that people’s susceptibility to and experience of dissonance depends on culture, they are at least suggestive of that possibility.

Another set of recent experiments showed that people who merely observe another person acting inconsistently with his or her attitudes may experience dissonance. This research suggests a broadening of the relationship between actions and attitudes and also raises some new hypotheses about the role of culture. Norton, Monin, Cooper, and Ho (2003) predicted that people not only experience dissonance when their own actions violate their attitudes but may also experience dissonance vicariously on behalf of someone else. Norton and colleagues reasoned that the vicarious experience of dissonance occurs when people share a common group membership and feel strongly identified with their group. It has long been known that people experience strong bonds with group members and that people’s sense of self is inextricably tied to their group membership (Hogg & Turner, 1991). Norton and colleagues (2003) predicted that if a person observes a member of his or her social group behaving in a way that violates that group member’s attitudes, the observer will experience vicarious dissonance. Feeling the pain and discomfort of the fellow group member, the observer will change his or her own attitude in the direction of the group member’s behavior.

To test this idea, Norton and colleagues (2003) conducted research in which undergraduates ostensibly listened to another undergraduate perform a counterattitudinal behavior in an induced compliance paradigm. Participants listened to an interaction between an experimenter and a speaker (actually a confederate) where the speaker disagreed with an issue (advocating a tuition increase for the upcoming school year) but nonetheless had to stake a speech in favor of that issue. Some of the participants were told that the speaker was a member of the same social group as the participants, and other participants were told the speaker was not a fellow group member. Participants’ attitudes toward the issue were measured both before and after hearing the interaction. The results showed that participants who identified strongly with their group changed their attitudes to be more consistent with a fellow group member’s speech, but only when they believed that the speaker was a fellow group member.

Vicarious dissonance in a group context may open a new window on the role of culture in attitude change. As we have seen, the analysis provided by Heine and Lehman (1997) suggests that dissonance is primarily a phenomenon that occurs in Western cultures that emphasize individualism. However, vicarious dissonance is very much a function of the relationships among people. We experience dissonance on behalf of others precisely because we feel related to them through our common membership in an important group. As Cooper and Hogg (2001) suggested, an intriguing hypothesis is that vicarious dissonance (i.e., dissonance experienced on behalf of others) may be more prevalent in collectivistic societies than in individualistic societies.

**SUMMARY**

We began this excursion into attitudes and actions by looking at the metamorphosis of Clyde Barrow, who moved from ordinary Texas teenager to the top of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s “most wanted” list. Surely, his attitudes toward crime were multiply determined. Nonetheless, we can see the progression from his first unintended criminal act to his wanton disregard for the rules of society and for human life. To a much less dramatic degree, all people are captive to the consequences of their behavior. When people’s actions are inconsistent with their attitudes, when people compare their actions against a meaningful standard and find them wanting, and when the actions bring consequences that are undesirable or aversive, people feel pressure to change their attitudes. Intriguing new research suggests that...
dissonance-based attitude change can also occur when someone else does the acting and that the type of dissonance that brings about change may be moderated not only by group membership but also by culture.

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