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A Cognitive Dissonance Theory Perspective on Persuasion

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Research and conceptual development on the theory of cognitive dissonance continues in full force more than 40 years after the theory's conception. Part of the reason for the theory's longevity may be that it was stated abstractly; could be applied to a wide array of issues; dealt with the interaction of cognition, motivation, and affect; and generated research that suggested ways of inducing lasting attitude, belief, and behavior change. For example, dissonance research has demonstrated that dissonance processes can reduce prejudice (Leippe & Eisenstadt, 1994), increase water conservation (Dickerson, Thibodeau, Aronson, & Miller, 1992), increase the purchasing of condoms (Stone, Aronson, Crain, Winslow, & Fried, 1994), reduce hunger and thirst (Brehm, 1962), and reduce pain (Zimbardo, Cohen, Weisenberg, Dworkin, & Firestone, 1969). In

addition, dissonance processes can lead to changes in attitudes toward a variety of objects and issues, such as boring tasks (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959), boring reading passages (Harmon-Jones, Brehm, Greenberg, Simon, & Nelson, 1996), delicious chocolate (Harmon-Jones, 2000a), eating grasshoppers (Zimbardo, Weisenberg, Firestone, & Levy, 1965), sour beverages made with vinegar (Harmon-Jones et al., 1996), increasing tuition at one's university (Elliot & Devine, 1994), and mandatory comprehensive final exams (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995).

Currently, researchers are approaching issues related to cognitive dissonance processes with a level of intensity that typically occurs at the birth of a theory. Several generative revisions to the original theory have been

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