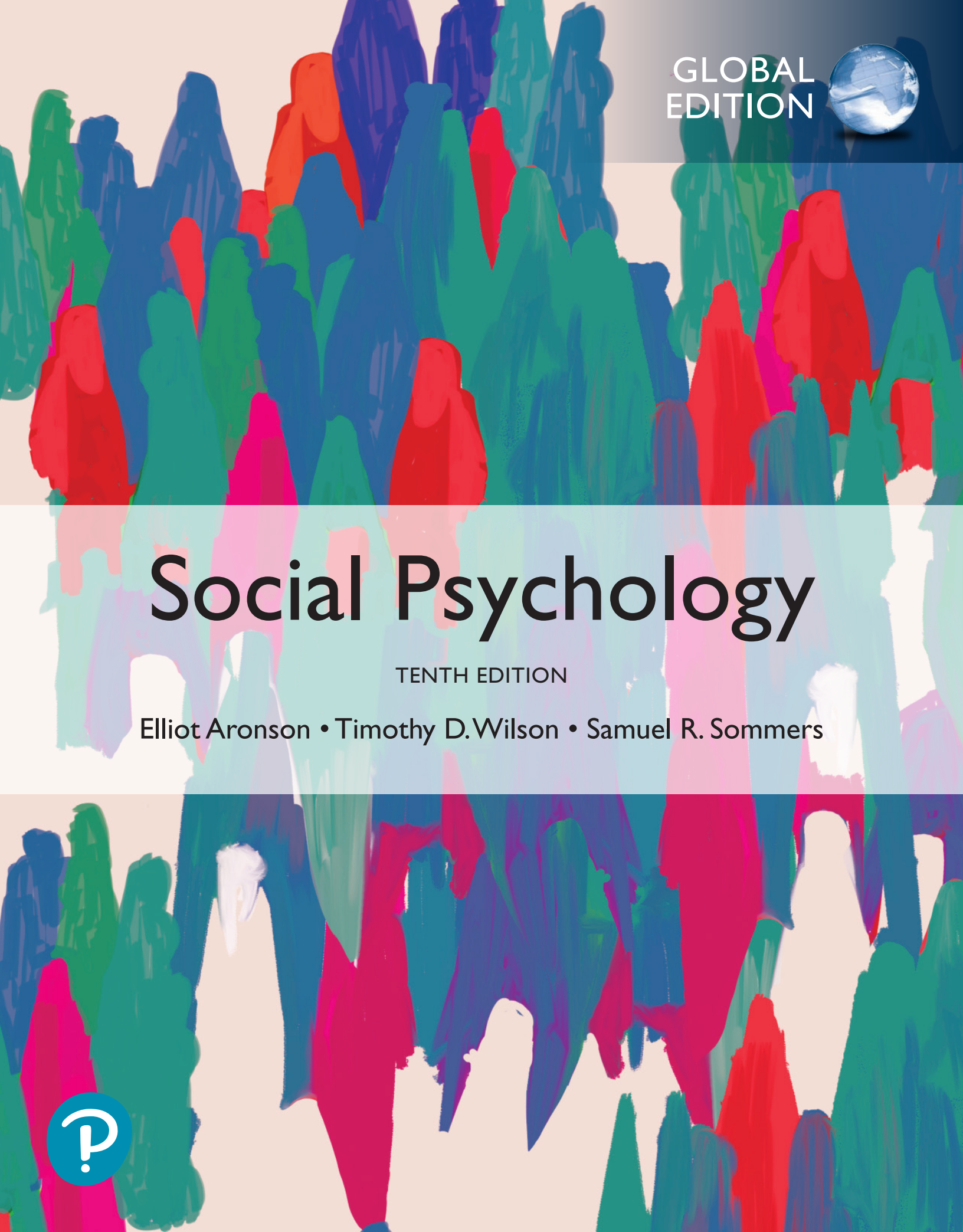

Social Psychology

TENTH EDITION

Elliot Aronson • Timothy D. Wilson • Samuel R. Sommers

Social Psychology

Tenth Edition

Global Edition

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eating disorders. In an effort to disrupt this pattern, a team of researchers assigned high school and college women with body-image concerns to either dissonance or control conditions. Women in the dissonance condition had to compose their own arguments against the "thin is beautiful" image they had bought into, by writing an essay describing the emotional and physical costs of pursuing an unrealistic ideal body and by acting out that argument to discourage other women from pursuing the thin ideal. Participants in the dissonance condition showed significant increases in their satisfaction with their bodies, as well as a decrease in chronic dieting, and were happier and less anxious than women in the control conditions. Moreover, their risk of developing bulimia was greatly reduced (Green et al., 2017; McMillan, Stice, & Rohde, 2011; Stice et al., 2006). This intervention has been replicated with 12- and 13-year-old English girls (Halliwell & Diedrichs, 2014) as well as with Latina, African American, and Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Island women (Rodriguez et al., 2008; Stice et al., 2008).

THE BEN FRANKLIN EFFECT: JUSTIFYING ACTS OF KINDNESS What happens when you do a favor for someone? In particular, what happens when you are subtly induced to do a favor for a person you don't much like? This is an example of counterattitudinal behavior, because you are acting in a way (helping someone) that is contrary to your beliefs (you don't like the person you are helping). As a result, will you like the person more—or less? Dissonance theory predicts that you will like the person more after doing the favor. Can you say why?

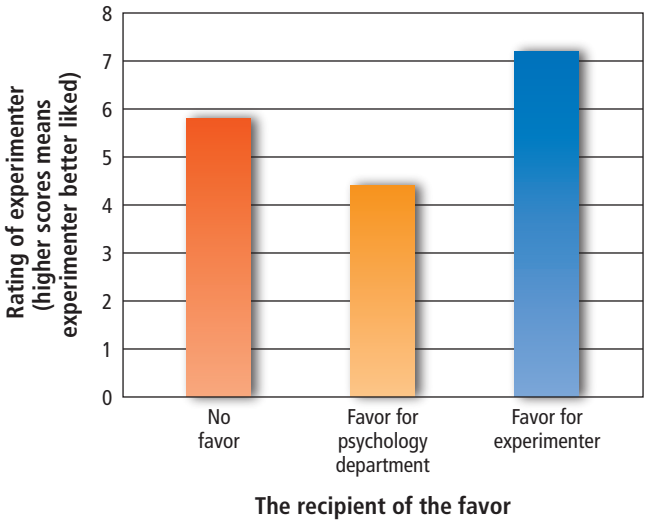
This phenomenon has been a part of folk wisdom for a long time. Benjamin Franklin confessed to having used it as a political strategy. While serving in the Pennsylvania state legislature, Franklin was disturbed by the political opposition and animosity of a fellow legislator. So he set out to win him over. He didn't do it by "paying any servile respect to him," Franklin wrote, but rather by inducing his opponent to do him a favor—namely, lending him a rare book he was eager to read. Franklin returned the book promptly with a warm thank-you letter. "When we next met in the House," Franklin said, "he spoke to me (which he had never done before), and with great civility; and he ever after manifested a readiness to serve me on all occasions, so that we became great friends and our friendship continued to his death. This is another instance of the truth of an old maxim I had learned, which says, 'He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another than he whom you yourself have obliged'" (Franklin, 1868/1900).

Benjamin Franklin was clearly pleased with the success of his blatantly manipulative strategy. But as scientists, we should not be convinced by his anecdote. We have no way to know whether Franklin's success was due to this particular gambit or to his all-around charm. That is why it is important to design and conduct an experiment that controls for such things as charm. Such an experiment was finally done—240 years later (Jecker & Landy, 1969). Students participated in an intellectual contest that enabled them to win a substantial sum of money. Afterward, the experimenter approached one-third of them, explaining that he was using his own funds for the experiment and was running short, which meant he might be forced to close down the experiment prematurely. He asked, "As a special favor to me, would you mind returning the money you won?" The same request was made to a different group of subjects, not by the experimenter but by the departmental secretary, who asked them if they would return the money as a special favor to the (impersonal) psychology department's research fund, which was running low. The remaining participants were not asked to return their winnings at all. Finally, all of the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that included an opportunity to rate the experimenter. Participants who had been cajoled into doing a special favor for him found him the most attractive; they convinced themselves that he was a wonderful, deserving fellow. The others thought he was a pretty nice guy but not anywhere near as wonderful as did the people who had been asked to do him a favor. (See Figure 6.3.)

Figure 6.3 The Justification of Kindness

If we have done someone a personal favor (blue bar), we are likely to feel more positively toward that person than if we don't do the favor (orange bar) or do the favor because of an impersonal request (yellow bar).

(Based on data in Jecker & Landy, 1969)



The Ben Franklin effect starts early. In a study of 4-year-olds, some children were told to give away some of their playful stickers to a doggie puppet "who is sad today"; others had a choice of how much to share with Doggie. The children who were allowed to choose to be generous to the sad doggie later shared more with a new puppet named Ellie, compared with children who had been instructed to share (Chernyak & Kushnir, 2013). Once children saw themselves as generous kids, they continued to behave generously.

We can see how helping others might change our self-concept and our attitudes. But what if you harmed another person; what then might happen to your feelings?

DEHUMANIZING THE ENEMY: JUSTIFYING CRUELTY A sad, though universal, phenomenon is that all cultures are inclined to dehumanize their enemies by calling them cruel names and regarding them as "vermin," "animals," "brutes," and other nonhuman creatures. During World War II, Americans referred to the German people as "krauts" and portrayed them as brutes; they called the Japanese people "Japs" and portrayed them as sneaky and diabolical; during the Vietnam War, American soldiers referred to the Vietnamese as "gooks"; after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began, some Americans began referring to the enemy as "ragheads" because of the turbans or other headdresses that many Arabs and Muslims wear. The use of such language is a way of reducing dissonance: "I am a good person, but we are fighting and killing these other people; therefore, they must deserve whatever they get, because they aren't fully human like us."

The other side, of course, is doing the same thing: for example, the Nazis portrayed the Jews as rats; during the Cold War, the Soviets called the Americans greedy capitalist pigs; after 9/11, anti-American demonstrators called Americans "rabid dogs." Of course, many people have always held negative and prejudiced attitudes toward certain groups, and calling them names might make it easier for them to treat them ruthlessly.

Without realizing it, Ben Franklin may have been the first dissonance theorist.

How can we be certain that self-justification can *follow* acts of cruelty rather than only cause them? To test this possibility, the social psychologist must temporarily step back from the helter-skelter of the real world and enter the more controlled setting of the experimental laboratory.

In one of the first demonstrations of the way that the need to reduce dissonance can change attitudes toward an innocent victim, experimenters asked students, one at a time, to watch a young man (a confederate) being interviewed, and then describe their general opinions of him. Next, the students were instructed to provide the confederate with an analysis of his shortcomings as a human being (Davis & Jones, 1960). After telling him things they knew were certain to hurt him—that they thought he was shallow, untrustworthy, and boring—they convinced themselves that he deserved to be insulted this way, as a way of reducing their dissonance over insulting him.

It may seem a big jump from the laboratory to the battlefield, but dissonance links them. Imagine these two scenes: (1) A soldier kills an enemy combatant in the heat of battle; (2) a soldier kills an innocent civilian who happened to be in the wrong

Try It!

The Internal Consequences of Doing Good

Anthony takes the subway to school. During peak hours, he often sees elderly people struggling to find a seat. However, Anthony does not feel any compassion for them and has never given up his seat, believing that since they have both paid the same train fare, he should be just as entitled to the seat as anyone else. Suppose that one day Anthony does decide to give up his seat for an elderly person. Based on what you know about cognitive dissonance, how would Anthony's prosocial action affect his attitude toward helping the elderly?

place at the wrong time. Which soldier will experience more dissonance? We predict that it would be the latter. Why? When engaged in combat with an enemy soldier, it is a "you or me" situation; if the soldier had not killed the enemy, the enemy might have killed him. So even though wounding or killing another person is rarely taken lightly, it is not nearly so heavy a burden, and the dissonance not nearly as great, as it would be if the victim were an unarmed civilian, a child, or an old person. Indeed, one of the major causes of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is their inability to reduce dissonance over killing children, bystanders, and other innocent civilians—a result of the difficulty of fighting a war against counterinsurgents rather than a formal army (Klug et al., 2011).

This prediction, about which soldier will feel the greater dissonance, was supported by the results of an experiment in which volunteers had to administer a supposedly painful electric shock to a fellow student (Berscheid, Boye, & Walster, 1968). As one might expect, these students disparaged their victim as a result of having administered the shock—they felt compelled to justify their actions. But half of the students were told that there would be a reversal: the other student would be given the opportunity to retaliate against them at a later time. Those who were led to believe that their victim would be able to retaliate later did not insult the victim. Because the victim was going to be able to even the score, there was little dissonance, and therefore the harm-doers had no need to belittle their victim to convince themselves that he or she deserved it. The results of these laboratory experiments suggest that, during a war, military personnel are more likely to demean civilian victims (because these individuals can't retaliate) than military victims.

Think of the chilling implications of this research: namely, that people who perform acts of cruelty do not come out unscathed. Success at dehumanizing the victim virtually guarantees a continuation or even an escalation of the cruelty: It sets up an endless chain of violence, followed by self-justification (in the form of dehumanizing and blaming the victim), followed by still more violence and dehumanization (Sturman, 2012). In this manner, unbelievable acts of human cruelty can escalate, such as the Nazi "Final Solution" that led to the murder of six million European Jews. But all tyrants and oppressors reduce dissonance by justifying their cruelty. This is how they sleep at night.

Riccardo Orizio (2003) interviewed seven dictators, and every one of them claimed that everything they did—torturing or murdering their opponents, blocking free elections, starving their citizens, looting their nation's wealth,

Unfortunately, dehumanizing outgroups, religious groups, and minorities continues to this day.

After he cheats, this student will try to convince himself that everybody would cheat if they had the chance.

launching genocidal wars—was done for the good of their country. The alternative, they said, was chaos, anarchy, and bloodshed. Far from seeing themselves as despots, they saw themselves as self-sacrificing patriots. Sound familiar? Consider President Bashar al-Assad's account of the civil war in Syria, which, since 2011, has cost the lives of more than 400,000 people, including thousands of children. President Assad is widely believed to have perpetrated deadly chemical attacks on his own citizens. His rationale? In a 2013 speech Assad stated that, "Defending the homeland is a duty that isn't up for discussion and is a legal, constitutional and religious duty and is the only choice" (Bashar al-Assad's Opera House Speech, 2013).

JUSTIFYING OUR OWN IMMORAL ACTS Another kind of counterattitudinal behavior occurs when we decide to act contrary to our moral beliefs. Take the issue of cheating on an exam. Suppose you are a college sophomore taking the final exam in organic chemistry. Ever since you can remember, you have wanted to be a surgeon, and you think that your admission to medical school will depend heavily on how well you do in this course. A key question involves some material you know fairly well, but because so much is riding on this exam, you feel acute anxiety and draw a blank. You happen to be sitting next to one of the best students in the class, and when you glance at her paper you see that she is just completing her answer to the crucial question. You avert your eyes. Your conscience tells you it's wrong to cheat, and yet, if you don't cheat, you are certain to get a poor grade. And if you get a poor grade, you are convinced you won't get into medical school.

Regardless of whether or not you decide to cheat, the threat to your self-esteem arouses dissonance. If you cheat, your belief or cognition "I am a decent, moral person" is dissonant with your cognition "I have just committed an immoral act." If you decide to resist temptation, your cognition "I want to become a surgeon" is dissonant with your cognition "I could have nailed a good grade and admission to medical school, but I chose not to. Wow, was I stupid!"

Suppose that after a difficult struggle, you decide to cheat. According to dissonance theory, it is likely that you would try to justify the action by finding a way to minimize its negative aspects. In this case, an efficient path to reducing dissonance would involve changing your attitude about cheating. You would adopt a more lenient attitude toward cheating, convincing yourself that it is a victimless crime that doesn't hurt anybody, that everybody does it, and that, therefore it's not really so bad.

Suppose, by contrast, after a difficult struggle, you decide not to cheat. How would you reduce your dissonance? Again, you could change your attitude about the morality of the act, but this time in the opposite direction. That is, to justify giving up a good grade, you convince yourself that cheating is a heinous sin, that it's one of the lowest things a person can do, and that cheaters should be rooted out and severely punished. What has happened is not merely a rationalization of your own behavior, but a change in your system of values. Thus, two people acting in two different ways could have started out with almost identical attitudes toward cheating. One came within an inch of cheating but decided to resist, while the other came within an inch of resisting but decided to cheat. After they

Watch "DISSONANCE AND SELF-CONCEPT" – CHEATING AND DISSONANCE

had made their decisions, however, their attitudes toward cheating would diverge sharply as a consequence of their actions.

Avoiding Temptations

How do we get people to avoid doing tempting things they're really not supposed to do? All societies run, in part, on punishment or the threat of punishment. You know, while cruising down the highway at 80 miles an hour, that if a cop spots you, you will pay a substantial fine, and if you get caught often, you will lose your license. So we learn to obey the speed limit when patrol cars are in the vicinity. By the same token, schoolchildren know that if they cheat on an exam and get caught, they could be humiliated by the teacher and punished. So they learn not to cheat while the teacher is in the room, watching them. But does harsh punishment teach adults to want to obey the speed limit? Does it teach children to value honest behavior? We don't think so. All it teaches is to try to avoid getting caught.

Parents can intervene to stop one sibling from tormenting another right at the moment of the incident, but what might they do to make it less likely to happen in the future?

Let's look at bullying. Imagine that you are the parent of a 6-year-old boy who often beats up his 4-year-old brother. You've tried to reason with your older son, to no avail. In an attempt to make him a nicer person (and to preserve the health and welfare of his little brother), you begin to punish him for his aggressiveness. As a parent, you can use a range of punishments, from the mild (a stern look) to the severe (forcing the child to stand in the corner for 2 hours, depriving him of privileges for a month). The more severe the threat, the higher the likelihood the youngster will cease and desist—while you are watching him. But he may hit his brother again as soon as you are out of sight. Just as most drivers learn to watch for the highway patrol while speeding, your 6-year-old still enjoys bullying his little brother; he has merely learned not to do it while you are around to punish him. What can you do?

If you used a severe threat, would your child experience much dissonance over the fact that he wasn't bullying his brother? Probably not, because he has *external justification* for not doing it. He implicitly asks himself, "How come I'm not beating up my little brother?" Under severe threat, he has a convincing answer in the form of sufficient external justification: "I'm not beating him up because, if I do, my parents are going to punish me." But what if you dialed back the threat so that it was pretty mild? As long as he still obeys you, your 6-year-old is more likely to experience dissonance. When he asks himself, "How come I'm not beating up my little brother?" he doesn't have a convincing answer, because the threat is so mild that it does not provide a superabundance of justification. This is called **insufficient punishment**. The child is refraining from doing something he wants to do, and although he does have some justification for not doing it, that doesn't seem strong enough to explain his compliance. In this situation, he experiences dissonance; therefore, the child must find another way to justify the fact that he is not hitting his kid brother. The less severe you make the threat, the less external justification there is; the less external justification, the higher the need for internal justification. The child can reduce his dissonance by convincing himself that he doesn't want to beat up his brother. In time, he can go further in his quest for internal justification and decide that beating up little kids is not fun.

Insufficient Punishment

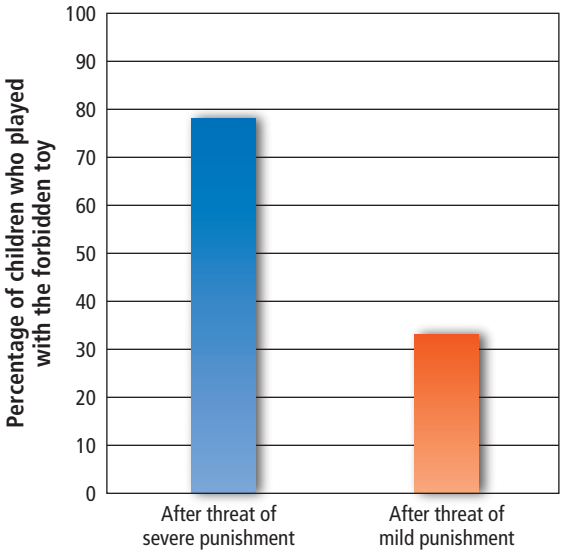
The dissonance aroused when individuals lack sufficient external justification for having resisted a desired activity or object, usually resulting in individuals devaluing the forbidden activity or object

To find out if this is what happens, Elliot Aronson and J. Merrill Carlsmith (1963) devised an experiment with preschoolers. They couldn't very well have young children hitting each other for the sake of science, so they decided to perform their experiment with a more benign goal: attempting to change the children's desire to play with some appealing toys. The experimenter first asked each child to rate the attractiveness of several toys. He then pointed to a toy that the child considered

Figure 6.4 The Forbidden Toy Experiment

Children who had received a threat of mild punishment were far less likely to play with a forbidden toy (orange bar) than children who had received a threat of severe punishment (blue bar). Those given a mild threat had to provide their own justification by devaluing the attractiveness of the toy ("I didn't want to play with it anyhow"). The resulting dissonance reduction lasted for weeks.

(Based on data in Freedman, 1965)



among the most attractive and told the child that he or she was not allowed to play with it. Half of the children were threatened with mild punishment if they disobeyed; the other half were threatened with severe punishment. The experimenter left the room for a few minutes, giving the children the time and opportunity to play with the other toys and to resist the temptation to play with the forbidden toy. None of the children played with the forbidden toy.

Next, the experimenter returned and asked each child to rate how much he or she liked each of the toys. Initially, everyone had wanted to play with the forbidden toy, but during the temptation period, when they had the chance, not one child played with it. Obviously, the children were experiencing dissonance. How did they respond to this uncomfortable feeling? The children who had received a severe threat had ample justification for their restraint. They knew why they hadn't played with the toy, and therefore they had no reason to change their attitude about it. These children continued to rate the forbidden toy as highly desirable; indeed, some even found it more desirable than they had before the threat.

But what about the others? Without much external justification for avoiding the toy—they had little to fear if they played with it—the children in the mild threat condition needed an *internal* justification to reduce their dissonance. Before long, they persuaded themselves that the reason they hadn't played with the toy was that they didn't like it. They rated the forbidden toy as less attractive than they had when the experiment began. That is, they reduced their dissonance over not playing with a fun toy by convincing themselves that the toy wasn't all that great to begin with.

Moreover, the effects of dissonance reduction in young children can be lasting. In a replication of the forbidden-toy experiment, the overwhelming majority of the children who had been mildly threatened for playing with a terrific toy decided, on their own, not to play with it, even when given the chance several *weeks* later; the majority of the children who had been severely threatened played with the forbidden toy as soon as they could (Freedman, 1965). (See Figure 6.4.)

To summarize, a sizable reward or a severe punishment provides strong external justification for an action. They encourage compliance but prevent real attitude change. So if you want a person (your child, for example) to do something or not to do something only once, the best strategy would be to promise a large reward or threaten a severe punishment. But if you want a person to become committed to an attitude or to a behavior, the *smaller* the reward or punishment that will lead to momentary compliance, the *greater* will be the eventual change in attitude and therefore the more permanent the effect (See Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Internal Versus External Justification for Counterattitudinal Behavior and Avoiding Temptations

Magnitude of Reward or Threats	Counterattitudinal Behavior (People Rewarded for Doing Something They Don't Want to Do)	Avoiding Temptations (People Threatened Punishment for Doing Something They *Want* to Do)
Small (Internal Justification)	Dissonance Resulting in Long-Term Internal Change "Now I really like it"	Dissonance Resulting in Long-Term Internal Change "I really don't like it after all!"
Large (External Justification)	No Dissonance ("I did it for the money, I still really don't like it")	No Dissonance ("I avoided it because of the severe threat; I still really want to do it")