NINTH EDITION

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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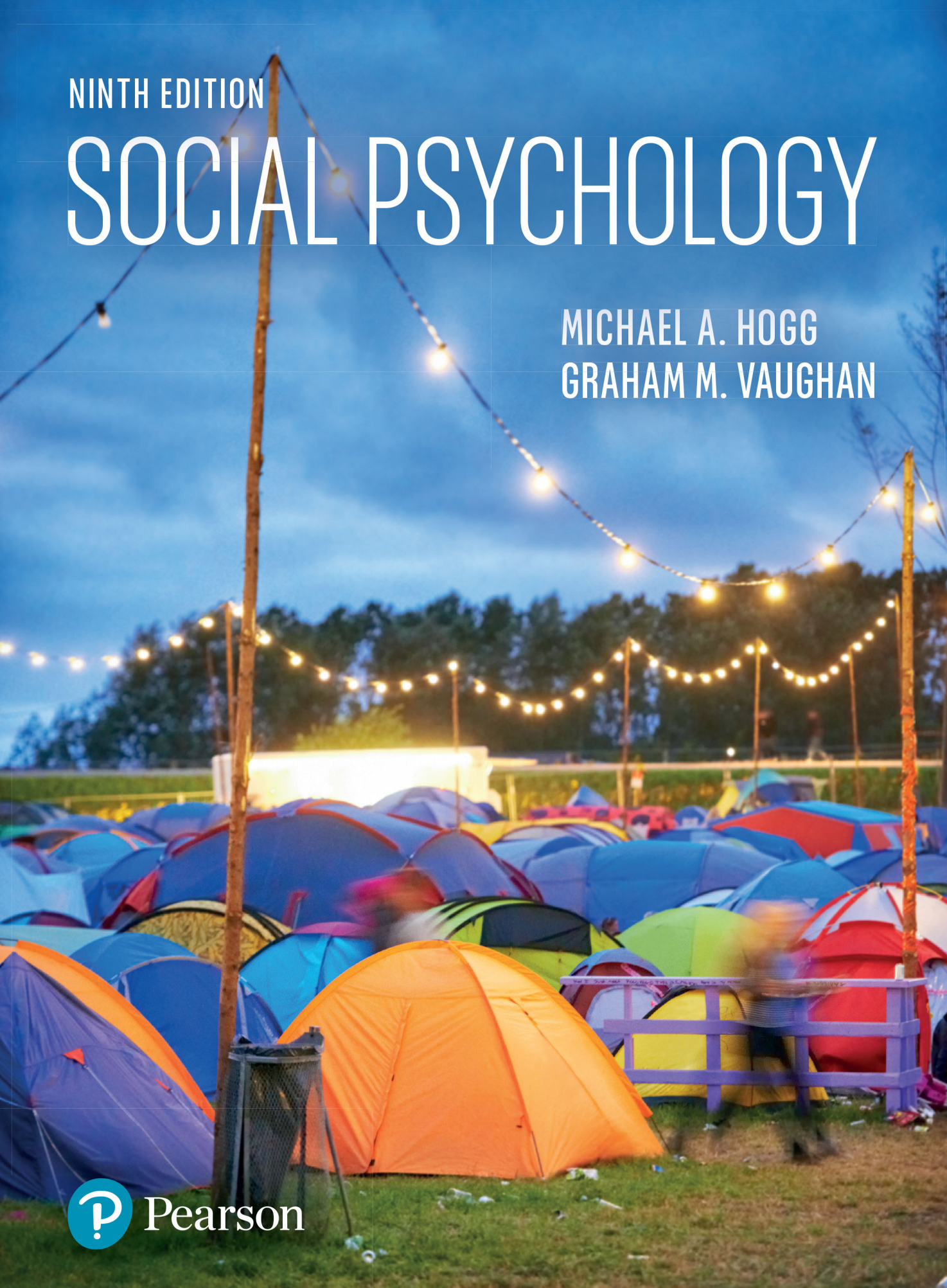

Pearson

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- lack support from fellow ingroup members;
- have said or done something contrary to their customary beliefs or practice;
- rationalise hypocritical behaviour (Stone & Fernandez, 2008; Stone, Wiegand, Cooper, & Aronson, 1997).

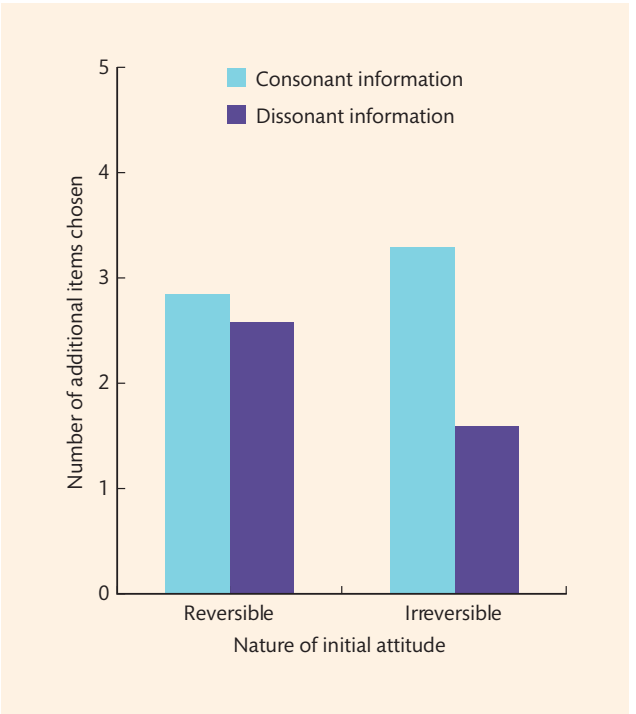
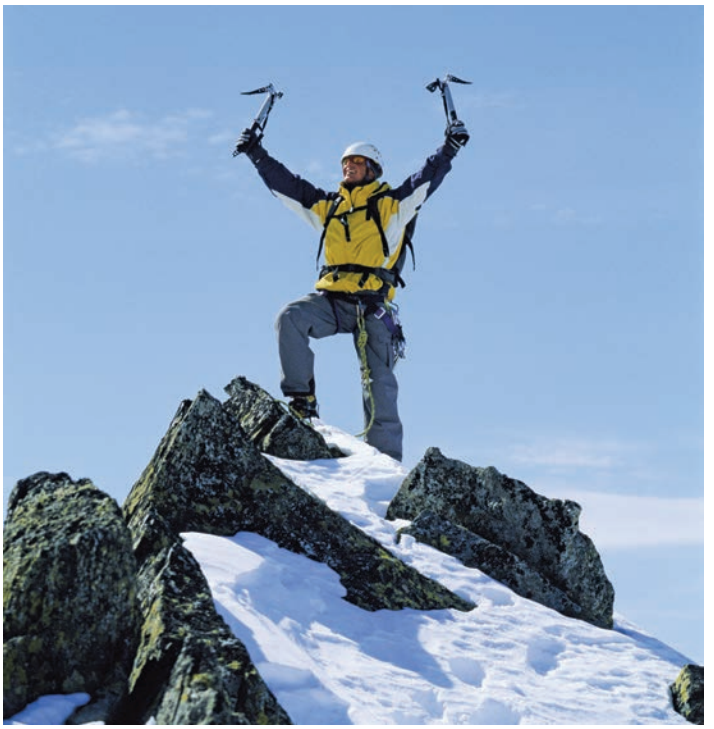


Figure 6.8 Selection of consonant and dissonant information as a function of attitude irreversibility

Source: Based on data from Frey and Rosch (1984).



Effort justification
Was the monstrous effort to reach the summit of Kala Patthar worth it? This trekker's celebration provides the answer. Everest may have to wait.

A particularly appealing feature of dissonance theory is that it can generate non-obvious predictions about how people make choices when faced with conflicting attitudes and behaviours (Insko, 1967). Dissonance research adopts one of three different research paradigms (Worchel, Cooper, & Goethals, 1988): effort justification, induced compliance and free choice. Let us see how these differ.

Effort justification

Effort justification
A special case of cognitive dissonance: inconsistency is experienced when a person makes a considerable effort to achieve a modest goal.

Now here is a surprise: the moment you choose between alternatives, you invite a state of dissonance. Suppose you need some takeaway food tonight. You make the momentous decision to get Indian food rather than Chinese food. You keep mulling over the alternatives, even after making your choice. Tonight's the night for a curry – you can taste it in your mouth already! The curry will be evaluated more favourably, or perhaps Chinese food becomes less attractive, or maybe both – and tomorrow is another day. The way the **effort justification** paradigm works is shown in Figure 6.9.

An early classic study of effort justification had female students volunteer to take part in a group discussion about sex (Aronson & Mills, 1959). They were told that before they could join a group, they must first pass a screening test for their capacity to speak frankly. Those who agreed were assigned to one of two conditions. In the severe condition, they were given a list of obscene words and explicit sexual descriptions to read aloud; in the mild condition, they were to read words that included some such as 'petting' and 'prostitution'. After being initiated, they listened over headphones to a group discussion with a view to joining in during the following week. What they heard was tame – far short of embarrassing. The discussion was in fact a recording where the participants had been primed to mumble incoherently and be plain boring. As well as the severe and mild initiation conditions, there was a control condition where the participants did not undergo the screening experience.

The hypothesis was that the severe condition would cause some distress to the participants. Yet they *had* volunteered to participate, and the act of volunteering for embarrassment should cause dissonance. The outcome would be increased liking for the chosen option (to participate in the discussion group), because the choice had entailed suffering. To make this sequence consonant, participants would need to rate the group discussion as more interesting than it really was. The hypothesis was confirmed. Those who went through the severe initiation thought that both the group discussion and the other group members were far more interesting than did those in the mild or control conditions (see Figure 6.10).

Later studies have shown that effort justification is a useful device to induce behavioural changes relating to phobias and alcohol abuse. For example, Cooper and Axsom (1982) studied women participants who felt they needed help to lose weight and were willing to try a 'new experimental procedure'. They were to come to a laboratory, where their weight was measured and the procedure was explained to them.

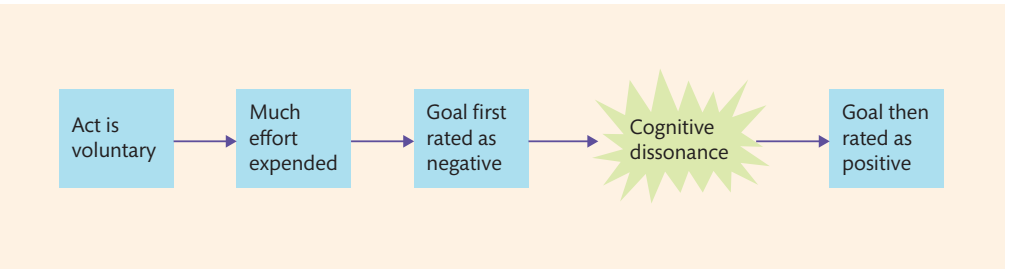


Figure 6.9 The general model of the effort justification paradigm

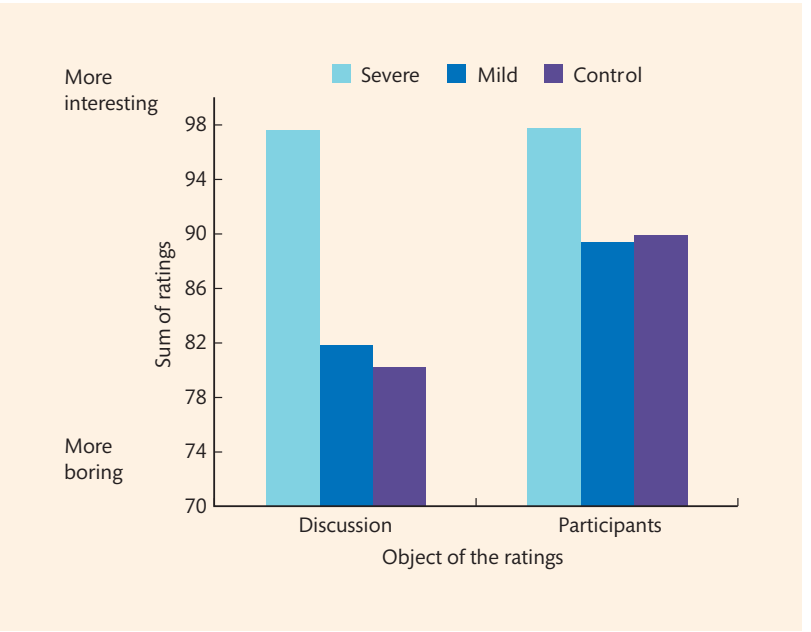


Figure 6.10 Interest in a group discussion as a function of the severity of the initiation procedure

Some degree of 'suffering' makes a voluntary activity seem more attractive.

Source: Based on data from Aronson and Mills (1959).

In a high-effort condition, the women participated in a variety of time-consuming and effortful tasks, including reading tongue-twisters aloud for a session lasting 40 minutes. These tasks required psychological effort rather than physical exercise. When the effort was low, the tasks were shorter and easier. In a control condition, the volunteers did not participate in any tasks at all but were simply weighed and asked to report again on a later date. The high-effort and low-effort groups came to the laboratory for five sessions over a period of three weeks, at which point they were weighed again. The results are shown in Figure 6.11.

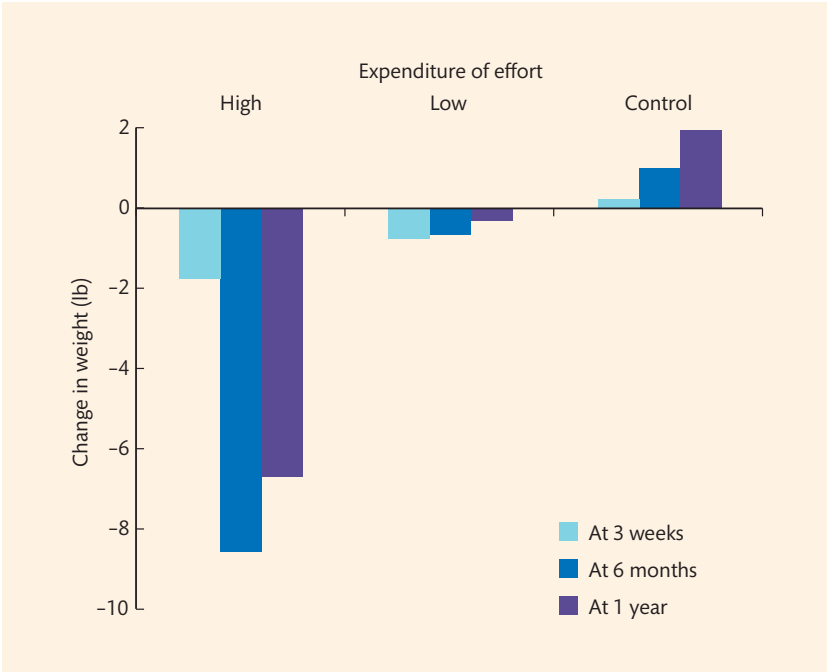


Figure 6.11 Change in weight among overweight women after expending psychological effort

You may think that physical effort should reduce weight. This study suggests that mental effort is an important ingredient in a programme's effectiveness.

Source: Based on data from Cooper and Axsom (1982).

Cooper and Axsom were encouraged to find that the weight loss in the high-effort group was not just an artefact of the interest shown in the women during the time of the three-week study. The participants were contacted again after six months and after one year and agreed to be weighed again. The weight loss was much more marked after time had elapsed. After six months, a remarkable 94 per cent of the high-effort group had lost some weight, while only 39 per cent of the low-effort group had managed to do so.

Induced compliance

Induced compliance
A special case of cognitive dissonance: inconsistency is experienced when a person is persuaded to behave in a way that is contrary to an attitude.

Sometimes people are induced to act in a way that is inconsistent with their attitudes. An important feature of the **induced compliance** paradigm is that the inducement should not be so strong that people feel they have been forced against their will. Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) carried out an often-cited experiment in which students who had volunteered to participate in a psychology experiment were asked to perform an extremely boring task for an hour, believing that they were contributing to research on 'measures of performance'.

Imagine that you are the volunteer and that in front of you is a board on which there are several rows of square pegs, each peg sitting in a square hole. You are asked to turn each peg a quarter of a turn to the left and then a quarter of a turn back to the right. When you have finished turning all the pegs, you are told to start all over again, repeating the sequence over and over for 20 minutes. (This was not designed to be fun!) When the 20 minutes are up, the experimenter tells you that you have finished the first part, and you can now start on the second part, this time taking spools of thread off another peg board and placing them all back on again, and again, and again. Finally, the mind-numbing jobs are over.

At this point, the experimenter lets you in on a secret: you were a control participant, but you can now be of 'real' help. It seems that a confederate of the experimenter has failed to show up. Could you fill in? Would you mind telling the next person that the task would be very interesting. The experimenter explains that this was to study the effects of preconceptions on people's work on a task. Later, the experimenter offers a monetary incentive if you would be willing to be on call to help again at some time in the future. Luckily, you are never called.

In the Festinger and Carlsmith study, participants in one condition were paid the princely sum of $1 for agreeing to cooperate in this way, while others in a second condition were paid $20 for agreeing to help. The experimental design also included a control group of participants who were not asked to tell anyone how interesting the truly boring experience had been, and they were paid no incentive. On a later occasion, all were asked to rate how interesting or otherwise this task had been. According to the induced compliance paradigm, dissonance follows from the fact that you have agreed to say things about what you have experienced when you know that the opposite is true. You have been induced to behave in a *counter-attitudinal* way.

The variation in incentive adds an interesting twist. Participants who received $20 could explain their lie to themselves with the thought, 'I did it for the $20. It must have been a lousy task, indeed' – $20 was a tidy sum in the mid-1950s. In other words, there would probably be no dissonance in this condition. On the other hand, those who told the lie and had been paid only $1 were confronted with a dilemma: 'I have done a really boring task, then told someone else that it is interesting, and finally even agreed to come back and do this again – for a measly $1!' Herein lies the dissonance. One way of reducing the continuing arousal is

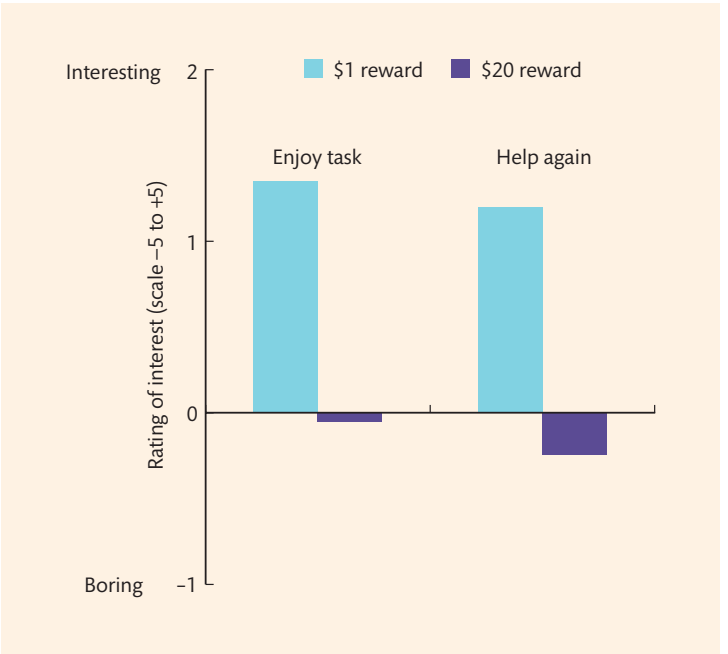


Figure 6.12 The effect of incentives on evaluating a boring task in an induced-compliance context

One of social psychology's counter-intuitive findings: commitment to return to repeat a boring task is maximised, as is dissonance, by offering a minimal reward.

Source: Based on data from Festinger and Carlsmith (1959).

to convince yourself that the experiment was 'really quite interesting' after all. The results of this now-classic study are shown in Figure 6.12.

The interest ratings of the two reward groups confirmed the main predictions. The $1 group rated the task as 'fairly interesting', whereas the $20 group found it 'slightly boring' (while control participants found it even more so!). The $1 participants were also more willing to take part in similar experiments in the future. The main thrust of this experiment, which is to use a smaller reward to bring about a larger attitude change, has been replicated several times. To modify an old saying: 'If you are going to lead a donkey on, use a carrot, but make it a small one if you want the donkey to enjoy the trip.'

Talking of carrots brings us to consider eating fried grasshoppers. An intriguing experiment carried out in a military setting by Zimbardo and his colleagues (Zimbardo, Weisenberg, Firestone, & Levy, 1965) tackled this culinary question. The participants were asked to comply with the aversive request to eat grasshoppers by an authority figure whose interpersonal style was either positive (warm) or negative (cold). According to the induced compliance variant of cognitive dissonance, **post-decisional conflict** (and consequent attitude change) should be greater when the communicator is negative – how else could one justify voluntarily behaving in a counter-attitudinal way? Read what happened in this study in Box 6.7; then check the results in Figure 6.13.

Post-decisional conflict
The dissonance associated with behaving in a counter-attitudinal way. Dissonance can be reduced by bringing the attitude into line with the behaviour.

Inducing people to act in opposition to their attitudes is not easy and often requires a subtle approach. Counter-attitudinal actions with foreseeable negative consequences, such as being quoted in the media saying that smoking is not harmful, requires an intricate inducement; whereas actions with less serious or negative consequences, such as voting anonymously that smoking is harmless, may be less difficult to bring about. However, once people have been induced to act counter-attitudinally, the theory predicts that dissonance will be strong and that they will seek to justify their action (Riess, Kalle, & Tedeschi, 1981).

Box 6.7 Research classic
To know grasshoppers is to love them

Attitude change following induced compliance

Consider the second 'What do *you* think?' question at the beginning of the chapter. This scenario, involving young military cadets, was researched in a reality setting by Phil Zimbardo and his colleagues (Zimbardo, Ebbesen, & Maslach, 1977). They had an officer in command suggest to the cadets that they might eat a few fried grasshoppers, and mild social pressure was put on them to comply. A questionnaire about food habits administered earlier had revealed that all the cadets thought there were limits to what they should be expected to eat, and that a meal of fried grasshoppers was one such limit. However, the officer gave them a talk about modern soldiers in combat conditions being mobile and, among other things, being ready literally to eat off the land. After his talk, the cadets were each given a plate with five fried grasshoppers and invited to try them out.

A critical feature of the experiment was how the request was made. For half the cadets the officer was cheerful, informal and permissive. For the other half, he was cool, official and stiff. There was also a control group who gave two sets of food ratings but were never induced, nor given the chance to eat grasshoppers. The social pressure on the experimental participants had to be subtle enough for them to feel they had freely chosen whether to eat the grasshoppers or not. An order to eat would not arouse dissonance, because a cadet could then justify his compliance by saying 'He made me do it'. Furthermore, the cadets who listened to the positive officer might justify complying by thinking 'I did it as a favour for this nice guy'. However, those who might eat the grasshoppers for the negative officer could not justify their behaviour in this way. The resulting experience should be dissonance, and the easy way of reducing this would be to change their feelings about grasshoppers as a source of food.

As it turned out, about 50 per cent of the cadets ate some grasshoppers. Those who complied ate, on average, two of the five hoppers sitting on their plate. The results in Figure 6.13 show the percentage of participants who changed their ratings of liking or disliking grasshoppers as food. Note that in both the negative and positive officer conditions, eaters were more favourable and non-eaters less favourable, suggesting that a degree of self-justification was required to account for an act that was voluntary but aversive. However, the most interesting result concerned the negative officer condition. This is the case in which dissonance should be maximal and, in line with the theory, it was here that the biggest change towards liking the little beasties was recorded.

Source: Based on Zimbardo, Ebbesen and Maslach (1977); Zimbardo, Weisenberg, Firestone and Levy (1965).

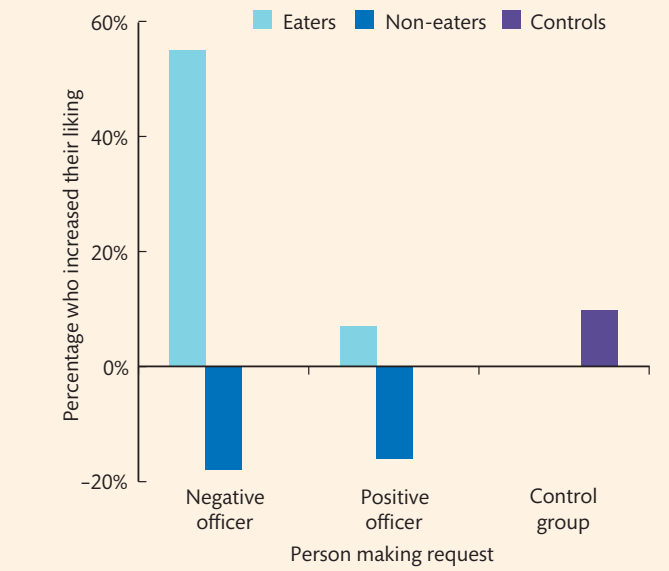


Figure 6.13 Military cadets' liking for fried grasshoppers as food, as a function of the interpersonal style of an officer

As with Figure 6.12, here is another counter-intuitive outcome: complying with an unpleasant request can seem more attractive when the person making the request is less attractive (see also Box 6.7).

Source: Based on data from Zimbardo, Weisenberg, Firestone and Levy (1965).