

## VICARIOUS COGNITIVE DISSONANCE:

### Changing Attitudes by Experiencing Another's Pain

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Can people experience dissonance and undergo attitude change due to the actions of others? New research in the domain of cognitive dissonance suggests that the answer is yes. It has long been established that when people behave in ways that are at variance with their attitudes, they experience the unpleasant affective state of dissonance and change their attitudes as a consequence. We now know that dissonance can also occur vicariously. Observers who witness others acting in a counterattitudinal manner may, under appropriate conditions, experience dissonance and be motivated to change their own attitudes.

Vicarious dissonance is a novel approach at the nexus of two well-established theories in social psychology: social identity theory and cognitive dissonance theory. I propose that people experience dissonance vicariously when they observe a member of their social group behave in ways that are inconsistent with that group member's attitude. Like personal cognitive dissonance, vicarious dissonance is experienced as an uncomfortable feeling of negative affect; it occurs when people have choices about their behavior and is heightened when behavior leads to aversive consequences. However, vicarious dissonance does not require the individual to behave inconsistently but only requires that he or she *observe* a fellow group member behaving at variance with his or

her attitude. It is the ability to be motivated by the actions of a fellow group member that makes vicarious dissonance not only a fascinating phenomenon in its own right, but also makes it highly useful in creating attitude and behavior change on a broad scale. Simply put, the counterattitudinal behavior of one member of a group has the potential to activate motivation on the part of other group members to undertake changes of their own attitudes and behaviors. In the right set of circumstances, this can have highly beneficial effects on pro-social actions and attitudes.

#### From Personal to Vicarious Dissonance

The tenets of cognitive dissonance theory are well established in the literature. Dissonance refers to a state of discomfort that results from holding incompatible cognitions, such as smoking while aware of its adverse impact on one's health. The aversive experience of dissonance motivates efforts to reduce it (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Stone & Cooper, 2001). In a typical research study (e.g., Linder, Cooper & Jones, 1967), participants are induced to write a statement in support of a position with which they disagree. As a result, they change their attitudes in the direction of the statement they just wrote, thereby reconciling their beliefs with their behavior and minimizing the aversiveness of the outcome. Similarly, beginning with Brehm's (1956) classic study on consumer choices, research has shown that the postdecisional consequences of making choices results in opinion change supporting the choice. Dissonance has also been shown to affect the justification of effort that has been expended in the pursuit of a goal (Aronson & Mills, 1959), which in turn has been shown to facilitate the ability of obese people to lose weight (Axsom & Cooper, 1985), of phobic participants to overcome their

fears (Cooper, 1980) and of speech anxious individuals to learn to speak more comfortably (Axsom, 1987).

No good theory remains static. Dissonance has evolved from a theory solely about cognitions in the head to a theory that is intimately involved with notions of self. One of Festinger's original and innovative insights was to conceive of the social world as a series of cognitive representations in the mind of the actor. This permitted perceptions of personal behaviors, attitudes and emotions to co-exist with perceptions of the physical and social world in determining the consonance or dissonance of a set of relationships. Aronson (1968) was perhaps the first scholar to suggest that when it comes to arousing dissonance, not all cognitions inside the head are created equal. He suggested that the special cognition of *self* must be part of the equation if dissonance is to be aroused. Similarly, Steele's (1983; 1987) theory of self-affirmation and Tesser's (1988) theory of self-evaluation maintenance placed dissonance reduction strictly in the service of protecting and enhancing the self. Stone & Cooper's (2001) 'self-standards' model of dissonance, building on Cooper & Fazio's (1984) earlier 'New Look' approach, strengthened the theoretical bond between dissonance and self still further by specifying that the self is multidimensional and that the cognitive accessibility of different aspects of the self determines how and whether a particular behavior leads to the state of cognitive dissonance

**The social self:** The self is a multi-faceted concept and recent theorizing has made clear that the self is both personal and social (Leary & Tangney, 2003). It is about one's own personal characteristics and simultaneously about one's interconnectedness with others and with social groups (e.g., Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Because we

believe the self is relevant to the dissonance process, then we must broaden our understanding of dissonance to include the important aspects of self conception based on our membership in social groups. Until we proposed the theory of vicarious dissonance, theory and research about dissonance in social groups have been relatively scant (see Cooper and Stone, 2000, for a review).

Prior research connected dissonance reduction with social groups by conceiving of the group as a way that people can reduce their dissonance. Zanna and Sande (1987) varied whether participants were acting on their own or in groups of three when they behaved inconsistently with their attitudes. They found that dissonance was experienced in groups, although some individuals diffused responsibility in-group settings and experienced very little dissonance as a result. Cooper and Mackie (1983) found that being a member of a social group made it virtually impossible for group members to reduce their dissonance by changing their attitudes on an issue that was definitional to their group membership. Rather, they channeled their dissonance reduction through attitude change on related issues.

In the theory of vicarious dissonance, we went more to the heart of the meaning of group membership. We considered the effect of one group member's counterattitudinal advocacy on the attitudes and behaviors of other members of one's group. Social identity theory was the vehicle that helped us link the dissonant behavior of one group member with the attitudes of other members of the group. Because of the impact of social identity on members of social groups, we reasoned that dissonance aroused in one group member could cause other group members to experience dissonance vicariously and result in attitude change by the other members of the social group.

**Social Identity**. The theory of social identity offers a wide ranging perspective on the relationship between collective self-conception and both group and intergroup processes (for contemporary statements see Hogg, 2005a, 2006). It incorporates Tajfel and Turner's (1979) original emphasis on intergroup relations, social comparison and self-esteem motivation, as well as Turner and colleagues' later analysis of self-categorization and prototype-based depersonalization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). During the past twenty years, social identity theory has had a significant impact in areas that include stereotyping (Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994), social Influence (Turner, 1991), group solidarity (Hogg, 1993), social cognition (Abrams & Hogg, 1999), depersonalization (Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995), leadership (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003) and extremism (Hogg, 2007).

According to social identity theory, people cognitively represent groups in terms of prototypes – that is, fuzzy sets of attributes that simultaneously capture in-group similarities and intergroup differences. These attributes include beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, feelings, intentions and behaviors – in short any and all dimensions that can be used to segment the social world into discrete categories that are distinctive and high in entitativity (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). Prototypes describe, evaluate and prescribe group attributes.

The process of social categorization perceptually depersonalizes other people. It transforms perceptions of other people from unique individuals into embodiments of the relevant in-group or out-group prototype. Categorization-based depersonalization underpins stereotyping and valenced perceptions of other people.

Social categorization of self operates in exactly the same way. It depersonalizes self-conception and transforms one's own perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, feeling and behaviors to conform to the in-group prototype. Self-categorization transforms individuals into group members, individual and interpersonal self-concept into collective self-concept, personal identity into social identity and individual behavior into group and intergroup behavior. Self-categorization generates such well-defined and heavily researched phenomena as in-group bias, intergroup discrimination, ethnocentrism, in-group cohesion and solidarity, in-group loyalty and attraction and in-group normative attitudes, feelings and behaviors.

Depersonalization involves assimilation of self and others to relevant prototypes. Thus, within a contextually salient group, self-categorization replaces self-other differences with in-group prototypical similarity or interchangeability. The self-other distinction is blurred into a single, collective self: Self and other are *fused* into a single entity. This fusion gives rise to *intersubjectivity*, where one experiences the other as oneself. Working from different theoretical orientations, Wright, Aron and Tropp (2002) have also argued that self-categorization extends the self-concept to include others in the self, and research by Mackie and associates (Mackie, Maitner & Smith, 2007) shows that self-categorization may facilitate a process whereby in-group members experience the emotions of fellow group members.

The fusing of the self with one's group and with prototypical group members requires that identification with the group be strong. The more strongly a person feels about her or his membership in the group, the more central the group is to a person's self-definition and self-concept. Fusing of self and other is heightened when the group's

prototype is clear and focused and when the observed in-group member is highly prototypical of the group. Research has shown that people in groups are perceptually attuned to subtle differences among group members in how prototypical they are (e.g., Haslam, Oakes, McGarty, Turner, & Onorato, 1995) - there is a clearly perceived prototypically gradient that engenders both rejection of marginally prototypical members who threaten group integrity and strong endorsement of highly prototypical members (Hogg, 2005b). Thus, the process of fusion of self and other members of one's group will be affected by the degree of perceived prototypicality of a specific other member, and moderated by perceived self-prototypicality.

Another aspect of social identity theory that is relevant to the theory of vicarious cognitive dissonance is its perspective on attitude change. The social influence process associated with social identity is referent informational influence (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner & Oakes, 1989). When people identify with a group, they learn the group's normative attitudes primarily from the behaviors of highly prototypical in-group member. It is therefore not surprising that we tend to assimilate our attitudes to group standards (Turner, 1991) or that our attitudes polarize toward positions expressed by group members (Mackie, 1986; Mackie & Cooper, 1984). In short, the behavior and attitudes of in-group members have their greatest impact on those who are highly identified with the group and it is they who are more likely to be influenced by group norms (Terry & Hogg, 1996). As we shall see shortly, a clear derivation of this fact is that people who are highly identified with their group are the ones who are most likely to experience vicarious cognitive dissonance, especially based on the behavior of prototypical group members.

Attitude change as a function of group membership has primarily been viewed as coldly cognitive. The intriguing possibility suggested by the theory of vicarious dissonance, is that self-categorization based attitude change may occur by a more affectively-toned dissonance process. It is an idea especially consistent with Hogg's uncertainty-identity theory – a motivational extension of social identity theory that argues that people are motivated to identify with groups, particularly high entitativity groups (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), in order to reduce feelings of uncertainty about themselves and things that relate to or reflect on self (Hogg, 2000, 2007). Vicarious dissonance presumably involves vicarious uncertainty pivoting on conflict between self-relevant behaviors and beliefs.

The important idea drawn from social identity theory is that where common group membership is psychologically salient, social categorization of self and in-group others generates prototype-based depersonalization. Self and others are “fused” because they are viewed in terms of a common in-group prototype – others' attitudes, feelings, experiences and behaviors can become one's own, particularly when the other is a highly prototypical member of a group with which we identify strongly. There emerges an empathic bond, an intersubjectivity, which enables one to experience the other as oneself. Not only may this protect against harming the other (cf. Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000) – after all, the other *is* the self—but it may also allow one to vicariously experience others' thoughts and feelings, and to take the role of another in constructing a sense of who one is (see Mead, 1934).

### **Vicarious Dissonance Exists:**

#### **The beginning of the research program**

Our initial foray to find empirical confirmation of vicarious dissonance was a study conducted at Princeton University (Norton, et al. 2003, Study 1). The general idea was to have participants observe another student agreeing to write an essay that took a position that they, the observer, thought was counter-attitudinal. The question we asked was whether the participants would experience cognitive dissonance and change their own attitudes, solely because of the behavior of the fellow student. From our theoretical analysis of social identity and dissonance processes we expected that the mere observation of counter-attitudinal behavior would lead to attitude change in our participants, provided that the participants and the essay writer were members of the same social group and provided that the participants identified with and felt positive about being a member of their group.

The method we used for the study serves as a paradigm for much of the research we consider in this chapter, so we will present it in some detail. We created a fictitious cover story that participants found intriguing and involving. For our research purposes, the cover story created a rationale for a student to witness a fellow student agree to write a counter-attitudinal message and to learn whether or not the student was a member of the participant's social group. At Princeton University, all entering undergraduate students are assigned at random to one of five residential colleges. Each student lives and eats in one of the colleges and each college has its own social and academic activities. The student's residential college served as the crux of the in-group vs. out-group manipulation because each participant believed that he or she was witnessing an interaction with a student who happened to be a fellow resident of his or her residential college (in-group

member) or happened to be a resident of a different residential college (out-group member).

The students arrived for a study of “linguistic subcultures” in groups of two, although each reported to a separate room, separated by two-way mirrors. We told the students that we were interested in how people in different residential colleges come to speak in slightly different ways, learning to use slightly different inflections or terms in their spoken behavior. For example, we know that people who live in the mid-west develop a slightly different pattern of speech than people who live in South Carolina or Massachusetts. The experimenter explained that the purpose of the students’ participation in the current study was to see if these speech patterns occur in microcosms – i.e., small groups with a larger context. We told the students that, in this study, we wanted to see if the speech patterns of students in the different residential colleges at Princeton University were different from one another and whether we could measure them.

We explained that one of the two students, selected at random, was going to deliver a speech on a given topic and the other student was going to listen carefully, and then respond to several questions about the speaker’s speech patterns. Each participant was told that he or she was the one who had been randomly picked to rate the speech, while the student in the other room was assigned to give the speech. The procedure allowed us to make the student’s residential college group salient and manipulate systematically whether the speaker’s residential college group was the same (in-group) or different (out-group) from the participant’s. The experimenter found a pretext to turn the lights on briefly, which allowed the participants to see that there truly was another student in the other room. The illumination was kept low so that the students’ identities

could not be accurately discerned. What students did not realize was that each of them had been assigned the role of listener. All information about what the alleged other student said or did was manipulated by instruction or audiotape.

The experimenter left the room, ostensibly to instruct the other participant about the speech he or she was to make. During the intervening period, participants filled out various measures, including measures of how much they liked and felt identified with their residential college on a scale developed by Hogg and his associates (e.g., Hogg & Hains, 1996; Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998). In a few minutes, the experimenter returned with a tape recording that included the completed speech and the experimenter's alleged conversation with the other student. On the tape, the experimenter explained that he was fortunate to be able to combine two studies into one. The Dean's office had asked for a study trying to assess student opinion about the possibility of raising tuition fees by a more than typical amount. Using a cover story developed by Linder, Cooper & Jones (1967), the experimenter asked the student to write a strong and forceful speech advocating a spike in tuition fees. He explained that this would be the speech that the other subject (i.e., the real participant) would rate for its linguistic features and that it would then be sent on to the Dean's office. The experimenter also asked the alleged other student how he or she felt about raising tuition and the student responded, "Well...I'd be against it."

The participants thus had a credible, albeit fabricated, story that allowed them to overhear an in-group or an out-group member make a counterattitudinal speech on a controversial topic. The tape recorder was stopped while the writer supposedly organized his or her thoughts, and then re-started for the participant to hear the alleged speech. The

speech was a relatively brief exposition on how higher tuition rates could allow the university to hire more faculty, purchase more books for the library, and so forth. Before rating the speech for its linguistic properties, participants were asked about their own attitudes toward tuition increases at the university. This served as the dependent measure of our study.

The results of the study showed clearly that observing a fellow group member behave in a counterattitudinal fashion caused the participant to change his or her attitude in the direction of the group member's counterattitudinal advocacy. As predicted by vicarious dissonance, this effect *only* occurred when the participant strongly identified with his or her group. In the absence of a strong affinity with one's group, observing an in-group or an out-group member did not affect participants' attitudes.

#### **FOLLOWING THE RULES:**

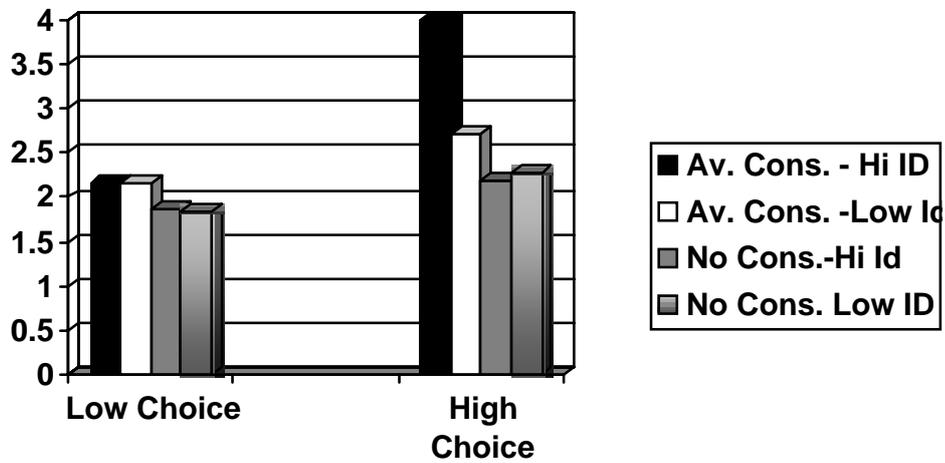
### **VICARIOUS DISSONANCE AND THE NEW LOOK MODEL OF DISSONANCE**

If vicarious dissonance exists, is it experienced similarly and does it follow the same rules as personal dissonance? . The goal of our next study (Norton et al., 2003, Study 3) was to manipulate in a single experiment the variables that are known to affect personal cognitive dissonance and assess their impact on vicarious dissonance. From the decades of research on personal dissonance, we know that dissonance only occurs when a person is responsible (i.e., makes an act of free choice) to act in a counterattitudinal fashion (Cooper, 1971; Davis & Jones, 1960; Linder et al., 1967) and when the act has potential unwanted consequences (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Cooper & Worchel, 1970; Scher & Cooper, 1989; Stone & Cooper, 2001.) There are some models of

cognitive dissonance theory that take issue with whether an unwanted consequence is a necessary condition for dissonance to occur (Beauvois & Joule, 1999; Harmon-Jones, Brehm, Greenberg, Simon & Nelson, 1996) but all agree that producing an unwanted event is, at the very least, an important cognition for the arousal of dissonance. To the extent that the changes of attitudes we found in the first two studies were based on a vicarious version of cognitive dissonance arousal, then the effect should similarly depend on the existence of choice and the potential occurrence of an unwanted consequence.

We used our familiar procedure, although this time at the University of Queensland in Australia. The attitude issue was the imposition of up-front fees (payment of tuition up-front rather than through a loan to be repaid later on), which was a very unpopular position at the time for students at universities throughout Australia. Not surprisingly, we requested the speechwriter in this experiment to make a strong and forceful statement supporting the collection of up-front fees. We manipulated the two crucial independent variables: choice of the speaker to make the counterattitudinal speech and whether or not the speech had the potential to lead to an aversive consequence. The participants' level of in-group identification was measured with the scale used in our previous study.

Fig 1. Attitude change as a function of choice, consequence and group identification.



The results are depicted in Figure 1. For ease of presentation, we grouped the identification variable by a median split, although regression analysis confirms the results of the factorial analysis of variance. Participants changed their attitudes in the direction of the position advocated in the essay. In addition to main effects for choice, consequences and identification, there was the predicted second order interaction: Attitudes changed in the direction of the discrepant position when the speaker had high choice, when the speech had a potential negative consequence, and when the participants felt strongly identified with their fellow students at the University of Queensland. The first two of those variables are the ones that typically enable personal dissonance to occur (high choice and high consequences). Thus, dissonance in the observer occurred in conditions in which dissonance would have been experienced by the speaker – but only when the observers were highly identified with and attracted to their in-group.

We also assessed what vicarious dissonance *feels* like. We asked participants to rate their affect on scales devised by Elliot & Devine (1989) that have been used frequently in the dissonance literature. We asked them how bothered, uneasy, and uncomfortable they felt. We found no differences among conditions. However, we also asked the participants about their *vicarious affect*: “How do you think you would feel if you were in the speech writer’s position?” This time, we found some fascinating effects: we obtained the very same second order interaction that we had obtained for attitudes. Participants who were strongly identified with their group and who witnessed the counterattitudinal speech made under conditions of high choice and high unwanted consequences expressed the highest degree of vicarious negative affect. As they placed themselves in their group member’s shoes, they expressed considerable discomfort.

## **VICARIOUS DISSONANCE AND VICARIOUS HYPOCRISY:**

### **Focusing on Behavior and Health**

One of the intriguing methods for inducing the feeling of cognitive dissonance is to have people engage in pro-attitudinal, rather than counterattitudinal, advocacy. Dissonance is induced by reminding people of their past behavior that was inconsistent with their attitudes and inconsistent with their current advocacy. Known as the hypocrisy paradigm (Aronson, Fried and Stone, 1991; Stone Weigard, Cooper & Aronson, 1997), this instance of dissonance is particularly useful at encouraging more attitude-consistent behaviors and for moving attitudes to more extreme pro-attitudinal positions. For example, Stone et al. (1994) asked university participants to make a speech to high school students urging them to use condoms each and every time they had sexual relations.

Some of the participants were asked to think of times that they had had sex without using a condom. Others were not asked to think of their attitude-discrepant behavior. Later, the university participants were given the opportunity to purchase condoms. Those who had made a strong statement advocating the use of condoms and who had had their attention focused on their past behavioral inconsistency were more likely to purchase condoms than if they had not been made mindful of their past behavior. In short, becoming aware of prior behavior that was discrepant from a stated attitude causes dissonance and results in changes of behavior in the direction of the attitude.

Hypocrisy is well suited for arousing dissonance when we want to induce behaviors that people already agree with...but do not often do. For example, encouraging people to use condoms to protect against HIV and AIDS is a position people generally agree with, but with which they do not always comply. Eating a healthy diet for weight loss and for better health is similarly endorsed by most people. Encouraging people to comply consistently is a more difficult proposition. We wanted to turn our attention to an issue of major importance for protection against melanomas and carcinomas – i.e., taking the simple precaution of applying sunscreen when exposed to the sun.

In a series of studies, we examined whether hypocrisy can be experienced vicariously and, if so, whether it could result in the change of behaviors and behavioral intentions to act in ways conducive to improved health. Both studies involved the use of sun block to protect against the risk of skin cancer. One study was conducted at the University of Queensland, located in a sub-tropical Australian state with a high incidence of skin cancer and where students are well aware of the need to protect against the sun.

Participants overheard a fellow student from UQ agree to make a speech advocating the use of sun block every time a person goes outdoors. In the hypocrisy condition the speaker was made mindful of the occasions in which she failed to practice what she advocated. Participants overheard the experimenter ask the speaker if she had ever gone outdoors without using sun block. The experimenter explained that she was interested in understanding the reasons that people sometimes do not use sun block, even though they know it is excellent protection against the risk of skin cancer. Yes, the speaker admitted, in truth she did not use sun block on every occasion and then listed some reasonable excuses for failing to apply it. In the hypocrisy condition, then, the speaker heard a fellow group member advocate a pro-attitudinal position and also heard the group member become mindful of the occasions in which she had not acted in accordance with that belief. In an advocacy-only condition, the speaker agreed to make the speech favoring the use of sunscreen, but was not explicitly made mindful of the occasions in which she had not used it.

We then asked the participants about their own behavioral intentions. We asked them to respond to the statement, "I intend to start carrying sun block with me wherever I go" on a scale ranging from 1 (*not very likely*) to 9 (*very likely*). The results showed that women participants who listened to the hypocritical speaker indicated a greater intention to carry sun block compared to those who listened in the advocacy-only condition. As predicted, the interaction between identification and hypocrisy was also significant. Vicarious hypocrisy occurred only for students who were highly identified with their group.

A similar experiment conducted in the United States included an additional factor of having an in-group vs. out-group member make the pro-sun screen speech. Students at the University of Arizona were asked to listen to a speech made by another student that encouraged people to use sun block as a preventative measure for skin cancer. The participants were told that the University of Arizona was collaborating with rival university, Arizona State University, on a project to develop effective public service announcements designed to convince high school students to use sun block as protection against skin cancer. The experimenter explained that public service announcements had already been made by college students during the previous phase of the study, and the purpose of the current session was to offer an assessment of the messages. Participants listened to a tape recording of a female student who made a strong speech advocating the use of sun block every day to protect against the threat of melanomas. Of course, all participants heard precisely the same speech but the cover story allowed us to vary whether the hypocritical speechmaker was allegedly from the person's in-group (Arizona) or from the rival out-group (Arizona State). The speech concluded with the statement, "No matter how busy you think you are with school or work, you can and should always wear sunscreen to reduce your risk of cancer."

In the *target-advocacy* condition, the recording ended after the statement was complete. However, in the *target-hypocrisy* condition, the strong statement at the end of the speech laid the groundwork for demonstrating the target's inability to practice what she had preached. For participants in the target-hypocrisy condition, the tape continued with the researcher explaining that it would be helpful to know more about why college students fail to use sun block every time they spend time in the sun. He indicated that

researchers in the sun block program had made a list of common reasons people use for not applying sun block. The target asked to see the list and then responded, “Yeah, it’s true for me. I can see some of the major reasons why I don’t use sun block regularly right here on the top. I sometimes forget it in my car, or in the house...or I’m in too much of a hurry to stop and put it on before I go out.” In this way, the target, who has already advocated the consistent use of sun block whenever one goes out of doors, publicly admitted to behavior that contradicted the statement. From our previous research, we predicted that the participant would experience vicarious dissonance from overhearing another student confess to the hypocrisy – but only if the fellow student was from the participant’s in-group. The hypocrisy of students from the rival institution, Arizona State University, should not lead to vicarious hypocrisy.

At the conclusion of the research session, participants were asked about their attitudes toward always using sun block and the strength of their intention to use sun block in the future. We concluded with a behavioral measure: All participants were given a coupon that they could redeem for free bottles of sun block. All they needed to do was to send a confirmation of their desire to have the free sample to the e-mail address listed on the coupon. The e-mail address belonged to the researchers and we were able to tally the number of people who actually tried to acquire the sun block. (And we did send them their free bottle of sun block!)

The results of the study were exciting. Female participants’ attitudes at the end of the study became more ardent that sunscreen should always be used -- provided that the target speaker was from the in-group and the participant felt highly identified with that in-group.

Behavior was also dramatically affected. In the condition in which the University of Arizona participant felt highly identified with her university, witnessing the in-group speaker admit to her hypocrisy resulted in 70% of the participants e-mailing their request for their complimentary sunscreen. By contrast, only 54% of the other participants bothered to reclaim their coupons.

### **SUMMARY and CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have considered the evidence that cognitive dissonance can be experienced vicariously. Because we are social animals and take our identity partly from our group memberships, we experience an overlap or fusion with typical members of our groups. This sows the seeds of vicarious dissonance. Our group members' discomfort becomes our discomfort; their dissonance becomes ours. We experience discomfort vicariously and change our attitudes in order to reduce it. Not only does this expand the reach of dissonance processes in understanding shifts in attitudes and behaviors, it also allows us to place dissonance in the service of promoting pro-social, pro-attitudinal healthy behaviors. The research discussed in this chapter represents a beginning of that effort.