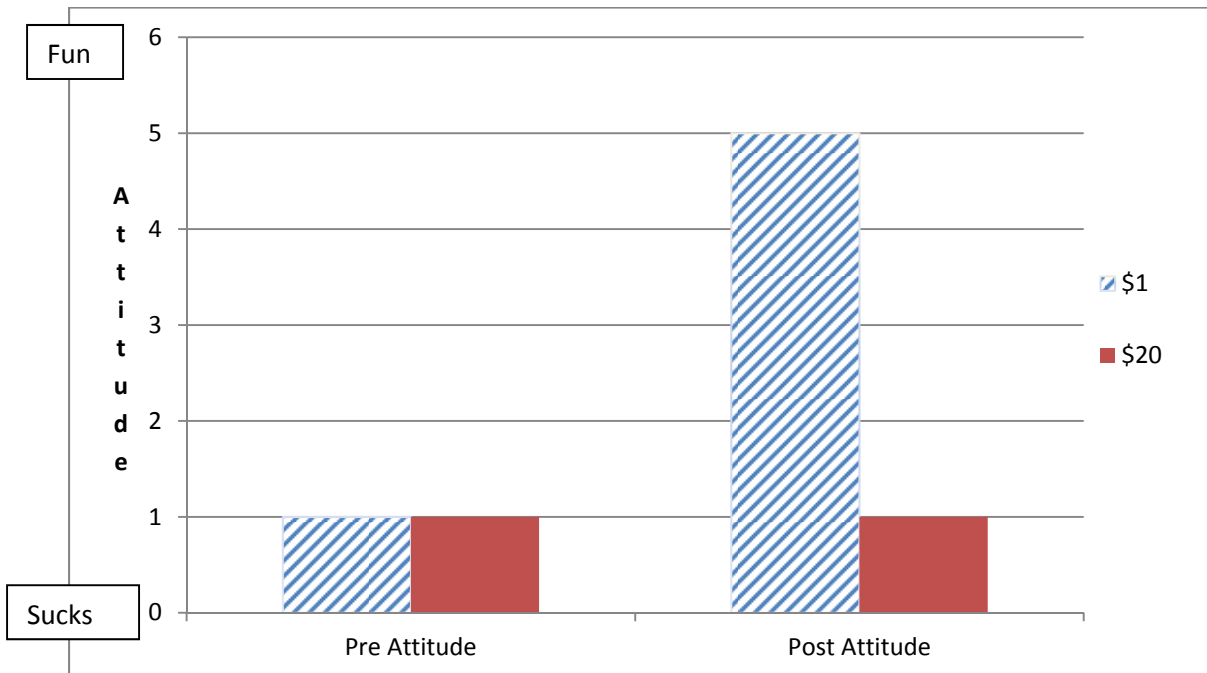


Ch 12 nb Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

In an original experiment all participants were required to do what all would agree was a boring task and then to tell another subject (who was actually a confederate of the experimenter) that the task was exciting. Half of the subjects were paid \$1 to do this and half were paid \$20 (quite a bit of money in the 1950s). Following this, all subjects were asked to rate how much they liked the boring task. This latter measure served as the experimental criterion/the dependent measure.

According to behaviorist/reinforcement theory, those who were paid \$20 should like the task more because they would associate the payment with the task. Cognitive dissonance theory, on the other hand, would predict that those who were paid \$1 would feel the most dissonance since their behavior and attitudes were discrepant and that created dissonance. They had to carry out a boring task (attitude was “this task was boring) and lie to an experimenter (but behavior was “I said this task was fun. I lied), all for only 1\$. This would create dissonance between their belief or attitude that the task was boring and their behavior “but I said it was fun”. Therefore, dissonance theory would predict that those in the \$1 group would be more motivated to resolve their dissonance. They couldn’t change their behavior because they had already done it. But they could change their attitude and come to believe it was more fun than it really was. And so when after-the-fact asked about how they felt about the task (asked about their attitude), those paid \$1 most changed their attitude and said “the task was fun”. Why didn’t the \$20 group also change their attitude? Because they could think “hey I lied for \$20. Hell yeh, I’d do that again too. But those in the \$1 group didn’t have enough of a reason for lying (insufficient justification) and so changed their attitude/belief.



Chapter 12 nb

Detecting and Resisting Persuasion Tactics

From telemarketers and salespeople to TV and Internet advertisements, we live in an era of unprecedented persuasive attempts. Would-be persuaders often come armed with techniques that may get us to say “Yes” when we want to say “No.” By learning to identify these techniques, you will be in a better position to resist them (Cialdini, 1988).

The Norm of Reciprocity

The powerful **norm of reciprocity** – “Do unto others as they do unto you” – includes the expectation that when others treat us well, we should respond in kind. Thus to get you to comply with a request, I can do something nice for you now – such as an unsolicited favor – in the hopes that you will feel pressure to reciprocate later (Cialdini, 1988). Free food samples offered at the supermarket are another example. People may buy a product they don’t want because the salesperson did something “nice” for them.

Our self-imposed pressure to “repay our debt” can dissipate over time (Burger et al., 1997). Thus persuaders often perform an unsolicited favor and then quickly ask us to reciprocate. The Hare Krishna Society (a religious sect) cleverly used “flower power” to manipulate the norm of reciprocity and raise millions of dollars in donations.

Door-in-the-Face Technique

As you walk across campus, a representative of a “County Youth Program” asks if you would donate two hours a week, for at least two years, to serve as a counselor to juvenile delinquents. You politely refuse. Then he presents a smaller request: Would you help chaperone a group of delinquents on one trip to the zoo? In an actual experiment with college students, 51 percent agreed to the second, smaller request (Cialdini et al., 1975). In contrast, among control group students presented only with the smaller (zoo) request, merely 17 percent agreed. Similarly, people are more likely to donate \$2 to a charity after they have first declined a \$25 request, than if they are directly asked for \$2. (Wang et al., 1989).

These examples illustrate the **door-in-the-face technique**: A persuader makes a large request, expecting you to reject it (you “slam the door” in the persuader’s face), and then presents a smaller request. To be effective, the same persuader must make both requests, suggesting that the *norm of reciprocity* is involved. Because the persuader “compromised” by making a smaller request, this pressures us to reciprocate and accept it (Cialdini, 1988). Refusing the first request also may produce guilt, so to reduce it and to feel socially responsible we comply with the second request (O’Keefe & Figge, 1997; Tusing & Dillard, 2000).

Foot-in-the-Door Technique

The door-in-the-face technique involves shifting from a larger to a smaller request. In contrast, the foot-in-the-door technique does the opposite: The persuader gets you to comply with a small request first (getting the “foot-in-the-door”), and later presents a larger request (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). When residents of suburban Toronto were directly asked to donate money to the Cancer Society, 46 percent did so (Pliner et al., 1974). But when other residents were merely asked to wear a “Cancer Drive” pin (small request) and then a day later were asked for money (larger request), the donation rate almost doubled.

This technique typically works regardless of whether the two requests are made by the same person or by different people (Chartrand et al., 1999). However, although hypotheses abound, we are not sure why it is effective.

Resisting Social Influence

By recognizing when influence techniques are being used to manipulate our behavior, we are in a better position to resist them. Consider the norm of reciprocity. Robert Cialdini (1988), an expert on influence techniques, suggests that the key is not to resist the initial gift or favor. Instead, accept the unsolicited “favor,” but if the person then asks you for a favor in return, recognize this as a manipulative technique. As Cialdini notes, “The rule says that favors are to be met with favors; it does not require that tricks be met with favors.”

If you agree to a small request, and later the person asks for a larger favor, recognize that the foot-in-the-door technique is a “trick” being used to manipulate you. Similarly, if a telemarketer or door-to-door solicitor first asks you to agree to a very large request, and then after you decline immediately asks for a smaller commitment, respond by thinking or even saying, “I see; the door-in-the-face technique.” Of course, you can still choose to comply if you believe it is the right thing to do. The goal is not to automatically reject every social influence attempt, but to avoid feeling coerced into behaving in ways that you do not wish to.