

## *Social Psychology* *Case Study 2 (9/8/11)*

- ▶ This case study assignment requires you to apply information from chapter 4 (lecture and text). Read the case and answer the five questions in detail. Follow the instruction in the lecture outlines booklet (pages 174-175) and at [www.lhup.edu/sboland](http://www.lhup.edu/sboland)
- ▶ Avoid plagiarism. Avoid quoting directly from the textbook -- write using your own words. Information taken from the text or lecture, even if rewritten in your own words, must be cited to the textbook author (Myers, p. 104) or lecture (Lecture, p. 19 or date). See the full instructions for more information about citing the text, or review the class exercise on plagiarism. The only sources you need to use are the text and lecture. Do not use other sources, including from the internet.
- ▶ If you have any questions regarding this assignment, please ask. I am happy to go over rough drafts. Set up an appointment with me and allow at least 20 minutes. You may want to revise your paper after our conference, so have your rough draft ready well before the due date.
- ▶ After the paper is graded, you will have an opportunity to rewrite one or two of your answers.
- ▶ Each answer is worth up to 6 points (30 points total) and will be judged on these criteria:
  - **Explanation of Concepts:** Clear, complete, organized and accurate explanation of concept or theory (in own words).
  - **Application:** Use of concepts, clearly described connection between application and theory.
  - **Use of Source:** Paraphrasing, citation of source, few or no quotes, proper use of quotation marks etc. Penalties for plagiarism will increase with subsequent case studies.
  - **Writing Mechanics:** Grammar, spelling, sentence and paragraph structure, flow of ideas, etc.

### **Case Study 2 (30 points): A Drive to Attitude Change**

On a Saturday afternoon, George and his wife Sara are running errands. While George is waiting for Sara outside a fabric store, George agrees to answer some survey questions about using energy saving products. On the survey George says that he thinks that everyone has a responsibility to conserve energy in any way he or she can. He believes that natural resources are limited, so conservation is important. George tells Sara about the survey as they head to their last stop of the day, a car dealership.

George and Sara are shopping for a new car for their family of four. They have two sons, Tim and Justin. Sara agrees that George should make the final decision. He will be the primary driver because he has a 10 mile commute to work every day. He's narrowed his choice to two vehicles. He likes the rugged looks of the GMC Yukon. This SUV has a list price of \$38,395 and gets 15 miles per gallon (mpg) in the city, and 21 mpg on the highway. George also looks at the family friendly Cadillac CTS Wagon. It lists for \$39,195 and gets 23 mpg in the city, 29 mpg on the highway.

George decides to buy the GMC Yukon. One evening, two months later, he tells Sara how much he enjoys driving the SUV to work every day. Sara replies, "I'm glad you like the new car, but I was surprised you bought the Yukon. I thought you'd choose the wagon because the gas mileage is better. You told me your answers on that energy survey were in favor of conservation. If you're such an environmentalist, what led you to choose the SUV?"

George shifts uncomfortably in his seat as he tries to think of an answer. After a few moments, he responds, "Well when we were at the dealership, I remembered a report on the Fox channel about new oil reserves in Alaska. I figured America won't be running out of oil any time soon, so the gas mileage wasn't a concern."

George was also thinking that he didn't want the guys at work to see him drive a station wagon – a soccer mom car. He wanted to drive a masculine vehicle. Of course, George did not say this out loud to Sara.

Instead, George changes the subject. "I'm going to volunteer to coach Tim's soccer team again this year. Do you think I'd also have time to help out with Justin's scout troop? I'd like to do more with Justin than just help him with his homework in the evenings."

When his wife points out an inconsistency between George's car purchase and his answers on a survey, George seems to change his attitude about the need for conservation. In the textbook and in lecture, four theories are discussed that attempt to explain why our behavior affects our attitudes (text pages 140-146, lecture pages 60-66). You will use the four theories to discuss the case.

1. According to Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, George might experience dissonance when his wife brings up his choice of car.
  - a. What is dissonance and what causes it (that is, when and why does it occur)?
  - b. Explain why George might experience cognitive dissonance in this situation. (Be sure to clearly identify the attitude and behavior that are inconsistent.)
  - c. Why would dissonance lead George to change his attitude?
2. In addition to attitude change, four other ways to reduce dissonance are discussed in lecture (60-61).
  - a. List the four additional methods for reducing dissonance.
  - b. Choose **TWO** of these methods and describe what they are in more detail and how they might reduce dissonance.
  - c. Give specific, detailed examples of how George could use the **two** techniques to reduce his dissonance. That is, think of ways that George can justify or rationalize his car purchase. (You cannot use the examples that I give in the lecture notes. Your examples should clearly fit the two techniques you choose.)
3. Self-perception theory (Bem) would explain George's attitude change differently.
  - a. According to self-perception theory, when does behavior lead to an attitude? Explain the process people go through.
  - b. How would self-perception theory account for George's new attitude?
  - c. In your opinion, which theory (cognitive dissonance or self-perception) does a better job of explaining George's shift in attitude? Defend your answer using evidence from the case.
4.
  - a. According to self-affirmation theory (Steele) when and why does an inconsistent behavior cause the arousal of dissonance?
  - b. Could this theory explain why George felt dissonance? Explain your answer using information from the case.
  - c. According to self-affirmation theory how can people reduce dissonance? Is there evidence from the case that George is using such a strategy?
5.
  - a. How would impression management theory (Leary) explain George's attitude change?
  - b. What evidence in the case suggests that George has self-presentation (impression management) concerns?

Notice that the names of theories are not capitalized unless they start a sentence.