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Cognitive consistency theories have been traditionally conceived of at the intrapersonal level: consonance/dissonance, balance/imbalance, congruity/incongruity, and so on, are discussed and studied as they relate to an individually derived sense of meaning and truth. Despite the significant contribution of consistency theories in emphasizing individuals' truth motivation, consistent and inconsistent cognitions are not born in a vacuum. They are socially constructed. We argue that these cognitions are meaningful and relevant to the extent that they are interpersonally acquired; that is, in so far as they stem from creating shared realities with others. In this article, we propose an interpersonal account of cognitive consistency and review the literature suggesting that shared reality plays a critical role in consistency processes. Specifically, we argue that not all consistent and inconsistent cognitions are equally influential: Those rooted in shared reality have the greatest motivational power.

Cognitive Consistency and Interpersonal Truth Motivation

It is widely recognized that one of the major contributions of cognitive consistency theories was to fundamentally shift the psychological portrayal of humans from need-satisfying, hedonic-seeking animals to problem-solving, meaning-making beings. Humans were no longer depicted as mindless beings controlled by reinforcers in their environments but rather as cognitive beings seeking coherence—trying to construct a world that makes sense (see, e.g., Festinger, 1957). This precedence of truth-seeking over hedonics profoundly altered the landscape of social psychology in the 1950s, contributing to the cognitive revolution.

A founding tenet of the original theorizing on cognitive consistency was Festinger's (1957) assertion that the importance of cognitive elements is key to determining the magnitude of dissonance. Dissonance is experienced only if the cognitive elements matter to the individual. However, as raised by Kruglanski et al. (this issue), this very point received relatively little attention in later work that was originally inspired by Festinger's theory. Cognitive consistency studies often emphasized the inconsistency itself, with little consideration of the relevance or importance of the underlying elements. Kruglanski et al. rightly question whether a need for consistency underlies many so-called "consistency" effects that have been described in the literature or whether, instead, other sources of motivational relevance might be involved, such as wanting to reach desired conclusions and achieve certainty. They provide examples from the consistency literature in which inconsistent cognitions don't necessarily produce affective or behavioral responses unless they are experienced as relevant to reaching desired conclusions or achieving certainty.

We agree that it is important to rethink this issue and consider seriously the potential limitations of consistency theory while honoring its contribution to the shift from hedonic to truth motivation. In the review, Kruglanski et al. open the door for considerations of the conditions under which consistency effects will occur as a function of factors that determine relevance beyond a need for consistency per se. Critically, echoing Festinger's original position, a central point Kruglanski et al. make is that not all inconsistencies are created equal; for example, those composed of cognitive elements that feel truer will be more epistemically relevant and have a greater psychological impact. The truer these elements feel, the stronger their affective and behavioral consequences will be.

Building on Kruglanski et al.'s theorizing, we raise the following question: What variables determine the extent to which cognitions feel true? That is, where does truth relevance come from? We suggest that previous research on cognitive consistency has not fully addressed this question. For example, research has often examined the relation between or among cognitions (consistent vs. inconsistent) without considering where those cognitions came from to begin with. What is their history? How were they originally acquired? As suggested by Higgins, Kuiper, and Olson (1981) decades ago, to predict the effects of cognitions, one needs to know the history of their acquisition. The same belief expressed by two individuals who acquired that belief in different ways will have different effects on each of them. Further, these cognitions are typically acquired through social learning. Thus, when examining cognitive consistency effects, it is critical to consider not only intrapersonal factors, which have received the lion's share of attention (see also Abelson, 1983, p. 41), but also social, interpersonal

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factors. We believe that the interpersonal factors underlying the acquisition of cognitions contribute in a major way to the truth relevance—the importance—of those cognitions.

There is substantial evidence that people typically turn outward—to each other—and not inward, to determine the truth (Higgins, 2012). We propose that these interpersonally established truths carry greater psychological weight than those conceived within the confines of an individual's mind. In other words, we agree with Kruglanski et al. that not all inconsistencies are alike and that the ones that feel truer and more real matter more. In addition, we explicitly propose that it is those consistencies and inconsistencies whose cognitive elements are shared with others that have the greatest motivational power. In this article, we systematically examine sources of truth relevance to demonstrate that consistent and inconsistent cognitions have the greatest impact when they are interpersonally derived as shared realities.

Shared Reality Theory

According to shared reality theory, humans turn to one another to establish the truth (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Higgins, 2012). By validating and verifying their perceptions with others, they strengthen the sense that their feelings, beliefs, and concerns are objective rather than subjective. For example, when recalling an event, people feel more certain that they understand what really happened during that event if others hold the same interpretation. Once shared reality is established, interpretations feel more valid and certain—they feel truer (Echterhoff & Higgins, 2017; Higgins, 2012).

The motivation to create a shared reality is so great that people in conversation tune not only what they say to the attitudes of others but also what they later remember (Echterhoff et al., 2009; Higgins, 1992; Higgins & Rholes, 1978). Thus, the process of constructing a shared reality has a lasting impact on one's mental representations—on what one thinks is real and true about something. This process has been called the "saying-is-believing" effect (Higgins & Rholes, 1978).

Through this process of creating shared realities with others, truths that are interpersonally achieved come to feel more "real" than those that have not been socially verified. In other words, beliefs that are shared with others feel truer than beliefs that are held individually. Festinger (1954) himself said that people often depend on the judgments of others to construct a social reality and that reality exerts pressure on individuals to bring their cognitions in correspondence with it (Festinger, 1957, p. 11). In fact, the dissonance literature has a saying-is-believing paradigm that refers to a process by which people come to believe what they have said to others (i.e., when they "come to believe their own lies"; Aronson, 2003, p. 165). Notably, however, this social factor has been more implicit than explicit in consistency theories, which have emphasized intrapersonal, nonsocial factors instead. Indeed, returning to Festinger (1954), he proposed that people turn to others "to the extent that objective, non-social means are not available" (p. 118).

Festinger argued that nonsocial means feel most objective. In contrast, shared reality theory (Hardin & Higgins, 1996) proposes that it is social reality, shared reality, which provides the ultimate sense of objective truth or validity.

Revisiting Classic Consistency Effects from a Shared Reality Perspective

In this section, we present evidence for our proposal that consistency effects are strongest when they are composed of cognitive elements that have been socially verified and feel true because they are rooted in shared reality.

Consistency Effects from Person-Other Beliefs

Although Newcomb's work is not as influential as the work of some other cognitive consistency theorists, we see his theorizing as having most strongly considered the importance of interpersonal factors. Newcomb proposed that different types of balance and imbalance vary in their psychological impact–more specifically, that those cases involving a positive relationship with another person (e.g., a liked person) have a greater effect than those involving an unimportant or negative relationship (see, e.g., Newcomb, 1968). For example, if person P dislikes person O, then P will be unconcerned about O's attitude toward object X, and will not experience significant imbalance if O disagrees with P about X. As an extreme case example, he noted individuals' unconcerned amusement at the opinions of the village idiot (Newcomb, 1968, p. 32). To our knowledge, Newcomb was the first to take seriously the interpersonal relationship between P and O, and to provide evidence that this relationship determines the strength of imbalance effects.

The findings discussed by Newcomb (1968) are consistent with a shared reality explanation. Positive relationships typically have a stronger shared reality than unimportant or negative relationships (Hardin & Higgins, 1996). Disagreements between individuals whose relationship lacks shared reality will not threaten their individual sense of truth and will not motivate a change in opinions. Without shared reality, the inconsistency will not be epistemically relevant and, as Kruglanski would predict, will produce negligible consistency effects. Notably, research testing shared reality theory (e.g., Echterhoff, Higgins, & Groll, 2005) has demonstrated that the saying-is-believing effect is typically stronger when individuals are communicating to an ingroup member (a positive relationship) than when they are communicating to an outgroup member (a negative relationship). In addition, there is evidence in the close relationships literature that disagreements within relationships characterized by a strong sense of shared reality are more epistemically threatening (Rossignac-Milon & Higgins, 2018).

Although Newcomb made a significant contribution by highlighting the importance of the P–O relationship for consistency effects, it should be noted that his theorizing is still an intrapersonal account, which he himself admitted (Newcomb, 1968). All the cognitive elements in his balance or imbalance constitute one person's personal set of sentiments and units. Although Newcomb (1968, p. 32) qualified

that P's assumptions about O's feelings toward him or her are included in his or her psychological processes, his theorizing did not include the effect of P's perception of O's feelings toward him or her. A truly interpersonal model would include P's experience of having or not having a shared reality with O about their relationship (e.g., Does P perceive that he/she and O share the belief that they have a positive relationship?). There is a fundamental difference between P experiencing their relationship as positive and P experiencing that O shares that belief about their relationship (see other-perception vs. meta-perception and assumed reciprocity; Kenny, 1994). If P experiences a shared reality with O about their relationship being positive, then we predict that any inconsistency regarding a third element X would have a stronger effect than if P did not have this experience of shared reality. This moderating variable was not part of Newcomb's theorizing, nor has it been tested.

It should also be noted that Newcomb's theorizing exemplifies an issue characterizing balance theories in general. Heider (1958) described relational elements of the triad as sentiments and units, but it is sentiments that have been primarily examined to the relative neglect of unit relations (e.g., if P likes O, and O likes something that P dislikes, this creates imbalance). No specific predictions are made for how units versus sentiments might differ in their consistency effects. We propose that when the relation between P and O is a unit-relation, a "we" (Aron et al., 2004; Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998), which would be an especially interpersonal experience, imbalance regarding a third element X would be particularly problematic—more than when the relation is purely a sentiment relation such as P likes O, which remains intrapersonal. Shared reality is an important contributor to the development of positive unit-relations: When partners feel they are on the same page and that they see the world in the same way, they come to think in terms of "we" (Rossignac-Milon, Bolger, & Higgins, 2018; Rossignac-Milon & Higgins, 2018). Thus, we expect that within unit relationships, which are characterized by a high degree of shared reality, imbalances will be more likely to trigger attitude change.

To illustrate this point, Heider would not distinguish between the following two imbalance scenarios: (a) P likes an acquaintance O (positive sentiment relation) and then discovers that O dislikes a poem that is P's favorite, and (b) P experiences a shared reality with O about their sense of "we"-ness (positive unit relation) and then discovers that O dislikes a poem that is P's favorite. We predict that P would feel more discomfort in the second case than the first case because this disagreement would threaten the sense of "we." In contrast, in a purely sentiment relation, P can like O for reasons that have nothing to do with sharing feelings about poems.

Consistency Effects from Self-Beliefs and Other-Beliefs

Consistency and Self-Beliefs

Aronson (1968, 1997) posited that dissonance arises when cognitions are inconsistent with one's self-beliefs or self-concept. For example, cognitions that are inconsistent with the idea of being a competent, intelligent, and honest person will produce dissonance for an individual whose self-concept contains these qualities but not for an individual who sees himself as incompetent, stupid, and dishonest. Aronson subsumed theories such as self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) into the broader conceptual framework of his revised dissonance theory (Aronson, 1997), thereby considering instances when the actual self is perceived to be inconsistent with the ideal self as dissonance-producing.

This perspective on dissonance also limits the analysis to intrapersonal factors (e.g., "my beliefs about myself"). But where exactly do these self-beliefs come from? As conceptualized by Higgins (1991, 2016) and illustrated by Moretti and Higgins (1999), they are interpersonally established through shared realities with significant others. Self-beliefs, both about who people think they actually are and who they ideally want to be (or believe they ought to be), are socially constructed and only powerful in so far as they are shared with others. So much so that discovering that they are not shared can be deeply disturbing (De La Ronde & Swann, 1998). In other words, a discrepancy between an individual's actual and ideal self that is purely intrapersonal will not have the same effect as one involving interpersonally established selves. Again, this point also echoes Higgins and colleagues' (1981) emphasis on the importance of acquisition. They discussed how stored schemas have differential information-processing and behavioral effects depending on their source, specifically, their learning history. Researchers need to examine the source of individuals' self-beliefs to better understand their consequences. Self-beliefs that are shared realities are especially significant.

Shared reality is so powerful that even "immoral" behaviors can be seen as consonant with an ideal self if there is an interpersonally rooted, shared belief that this behavior is acceptable or even strategic. A classic example of dissonance is that of a young man who comes to believe that a lie he told others is true because he wants to uphold his personal idea of himself as being an honest person who would never tell a lie. Notably, this classic consequence is based on the assumption that lying is only about being honest. But what if this young man also wants to be a politician and has a shared reality with others that politicians need to strategically lie to be effective politicians? If so, then his lying will be consonant with his vision of himself as a future politician. This socially enhanced truth-relevance can make this cognitive element more powerful than a personal belief about being an honest person, thereby reducing or even eliminating any dissonance. We predict that dissonance effects from interpersonally established selves will be more powerful than those from intrapersonally established selves.

Consistency and Other-Beliefs

A similar logic can be used to revisit the application of consistency theory to understanding how people maintain their beliefs about others, particularly the effects of stereotype confirmation and disconfirmation. Sherman, Allen, and Sacchi (2012) explained that conflict between existing stereotypic beliefs and novel information that violates those beliefs

(i.e., disconfirmation) produces psychological discomfort. This conflict between incompatible cognitions is eliminated by, as dissonance theory predicts, altering the cognition that is least resistant to change—specifically, the new disconfirming information. They argued that the stereotype is more resistant to change because of its functional value, including disambiguation, cognitive efficiency, ego-protection, and system-justification.

We suggest that this reasoning is also constrained to the intrapersonal level of analysis. Interpersonally speaking, stereotypes are constructed through shared reality and consensus (Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Haslam et al., 1996; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001). Because they are shared with and verified by others, stereotypes feel true, legitimate, and objective. This consensus increases their truth relevance, which in turn heightens their accessibility and salience (see Eitam & Higgins, 2010). Higher accessibility and salience produces selective attention.

Therefore, it is not necessarily a stereotype's functional value that produces the obtained consistency findings but rather its truth relevance. Critically, this truth relevance stems from shared reality. But further, shared reality theory predicts that a stereotype will be more resistant to change than a personal belief because, as a shared belief, it cannot be changed by an individual alone. A shared belief is not the individual's psychological possession. To remain shared, consensus is necessary: The individual must change it with others. If changed alone, the shared reality will be lost, along with the epistemic and relational benefits associated with it.

Thus, stereotypes function fundamentally differently from personal beliefs precisely because they are socially constructed and therefore, by definition, require social verification, social agreement, to be changed. Moreover, to change it on one's own, without verification or agreement from the others who shared it, risks disrupting one's relationships with these others. This critical condition of agreement from the others with whom one shared the stereotype makes a stereotype much more resistant to change and therefore much less likely to be altered as a consequence of inconsistency (i.e., disconfirming information). This context is yet another instance in which examining the source of truth-relevance—the history of acquisition—can improve prediction. Beliefs acquired as shared realities, such as stereotypes, will be more resistant to change than those that are not acquired as shared realities.

Revisiting the "Dissonance New Look" from a Shared Reality Perspective

In a significant revision and extension of classic dissonance theory—the Dissonance New Look—Cooper and his colleagues (e.g., Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Scher & Cooper, 1989) proposed that dissonance occurs only when a person's actions produce foreseeable, aversive consequences. As an example of the importance of aversive consequences, Cooper and colleagues demonstrated that dissonance effects replicate only when the participant's communication partner appears convinced by the participant's lie or counterattitudinal

speech, and not when the partner seems unconvinced (Cooper & Worchel, 1970; Goethals & Cooper, 1972). These are important findings, but it should be noted that they go beyond Festinger's (1957) original dissonance theory. The simple fact that the communicators know that they freely chose to give a counterattitudinal speech to an audience should produce dissonance even if the audience seems unconvinced. Why did it not produce dissonance? We believe that Festinger would say that the fact that the audience seemed unconvinced allows the communicators to rationalize that their speech did not really matter because it had no effect. The audience's response therefore allows them to rationalize their behavior. But, of importance, such rationalization according to Festinger would mean that there never was any dissonance to begin with: "Only rarely, if ever, are they accepted psychologically as inconsistencies by the person involved. Usually more or less successful attempts are made to rationalize them" (Festinger, 1957, p. 2). Note that Festinger (1957, p. 2) explicitly replaced the word "dissonance" with "inconsistency." Thus, when rationalization is successful, people do not experience dissonance to begin with.

Thus, results like those found by Cooper and his colleagues are not predicted by classic dissonance theory. Indeed, according to Cooper and Fazio (1984), these findings imply that "dissonance has precious little to do with the inconsistency among cognitions per se, but rather with the production of a consequence that is unwanted" (p. 234). Because classic dissonance theory is silent about the effects of aversive consequences, these findings raise the question of which other mechanisms are at play. We suggest that the interpersonal factor of shared reality could be contributing to these findings. By convincing another person of a particular point of view, participants may come to feel that they have created a shared reality with this person. The lie or counterattitudinal statement thereby becomes an interpersonally established truth, which attains higher truth-relevance than their previously held personal belief or attitude. Indeed, similar work from the field of shared reality has demonstrated that when one has failed to create a shared reality—analogous to when the partner is unconvinced—the saying-is-believing effect disappears and participants do not incorporate their partner's attitude into their own (Echterhoff et al., 2005).

Cooper, Zanna, and Goethals (1974) also found, similar to Newcomb (1968), that the dissonance effect occurred when the participant communicators liked their communication partner but disappeared if they did not. As mentioned earlier, this effect is similar to the finding that saying-is-believing occurs when the communication partner is an ingroup member but not when the partner is an outgroup member (Echterhoff et al., 2005). Finally, being able to "take back" one's lie and explain that it was merely part of the study also eliminates the dissonance effect (Davis & Jones, 1960). This "taking back" would break the shared reality that was previously established and therefore produce no attitude change from the message itself.

In these examples, producing a counterattitudinal message only led to a dissonance effect when participants felt that they had convinced another person, whom they liked, of their lie. Thus, it was only when the lie became interpersonal that the dissonance effect occurred. If consistency effects were simply intrapersonal, then the dissonance effect should have occurred even when the communication partner seemed unconvinced or dislikeable. However, it is possible that there was no dissonance to begin with because the conditions permitted rationalization to occur. But in this case, dissonance theory would be silent and some other theory would be needed to account for the findings. We propose that the other theory that can account for these findings is the interpersonal, shared reality theory. Counterattitudinal messages, which have been characterized as lies in the dissonance literature (e.g., Aronson, 2003), may no longer feel like lies when they are experienced as being shared by an ingroup member. Instead, the message may begin to feel like the truth, that is, to have truth relevance, and therefore the attitude expressed in the message may begin to feel like the true attitude—thereby producing attitude change. We also predict that if the communicators were asked to recall information about the attitude topic, their recall would be reconstructed to match their counterattitudinal message because it now has truth relevance, impacting salience and accessibility, which in turn impacts memory (see Eitam, Miele, & Higgins, 2014). Future research should test this possibility. Of course, when the interpersonal conditions for communicators to experience a shared reality with the audience are removed, then the counterattitudinal message will no longer be truth relevant and will not impact attitudes or memory (see Echerhoff et al., 2009). With respect to attitudes, this pattern is what was found in these Dissonance New Look studies.

Finally, let's consider the case of vicarious dissonance. Work by Norton, Monin, Cooper, and Hogg (2003) found that people can experience cognitive dissonance vicariously—on behalf of other people. Specifically, witnessing an ingroup member engaging in counterattitudinal behavior induces vicarious dissonance in observers, which in turn motivates attitude change. Critically, these effects are moderated by identification with the ingroup, such that attitude change is produced only when participants highly identify with the ingroup. These effects also make sense from a shared reality perspective. Shared reality is associated with greater group identification (Hogg & Rinella, 2018). Thus, participants experience vicarious dissonance only when they feel that they have a shared reality with the ingroup member to begin with—when they see this person as an epistemic authority to whom they are connected and with whom they share an initial attitude. When participants observe this person agreeing to give a speech that contradicts this initial attitude, participants infer that this person's attitude has changed and become open to sharing this change.

Notably, participants do not experience vicarious dissonance when they first find out that the ingroup member agrees with the counterattitudinal viewpoint to begin with. In other words, when their shared reality with this other person is broken from the beginning because of attitudinal disagreement on a relevant issue, they no longer exhibit vicarious dissonance. Thus, the experience of vicarious dissonance is contingent on the maintenance of shared reality, stemming from identification with the same group and initially having attitudinal agreement.

Sharing-is-Believing

Recent work testing shared reality theory more extensively has demonstrated that saying-is-believing occurs only when participants are motivated to create an interpersonally achieved sense of truth (Echterhoff & Higgins, 2017). In the saying-is-believing shared reality paradigm, participants communicate with a lab volunteer about a third person (e.g., Michael). They first read an evaluatively ambiguous passage about Michael. Then, their goal is to describe Michael, without mentioning his name, to an audience (the message recipient) so that the audience, who knows Michael as a member of a larger group to which the audience also belongs, can recognize Michael as the target of the message. The participant communicator is also told that the audience either likes or dislikes Michael. Without conscious intent, participants typically tailor or tune their description of Michael to match the audience's attitude; for example, if the audience dislikes Michael, participants describe Michael more negatively. Thus, the message is evaluatively biased toward the audience's attitude. At the end of the study, participants are given a surprise recall task in which they are asked to recall everything they originally read about Michael. The saying-is-believing effect occurs when participants' memory is biased in the same evaluative direction as their message.

Critically, the saying-is-believing effect manifests only under certain conditions. For example, when the audience is an outgroup member, participants still tune their description of Michael to the audience's attitude (out of politeness), but they do not change their memory of Michael accordingly (Echterhoff et al., 2005; Echterhoff, Higgins, Kopietz, & Groll, 2008; Echterhoff, Kopietz, & Higgins, 2013). This effect is explained by epistemic trust: Participants trust the ingroup audience, but not the outgroup audience, as a source of truth, and thus they treat the message tuned to the attitude of the ingroup audience as reflecting the truth about Michael (Echterhoff et al., 2005, 2008, 2013). The high truth relevance of this message about Michael then impacts memory of Michael's behaviors, such that there is a reconstructive memory bias that matches the biased message.

Significantly, the saying-is-believing effect for ingroup audiences disappears when participants are told that the audience failed to identify Michael (Echterhoff et al., 2005), and when participants are given an ulterior motive to tune their description of Michael to the audience (e.g., when their goal is to entertain the audience or get the audience to like them; Echterhoff et al., 2008). Participant communicators exhibit the saying-is-believing effect only when their motive for tuning their message is to share with their audience

what Michael is really like (i.e., to form an accurate shared understanding of Michael) and when they believe that they have successfully done so. Thus, tuning one's message to evaluatively match the audience's attitude is not enough. It is not the "saying" itself that leads to "believing." It is specifically when one experiences that, through one's message, one has created a shared reality about Michael with the audience. Therefore, the effect is not actually "saying-is-believing" but is instead "sharing-is-believing" (Higgins, 2018).

As discussed by Echterhoff et al. (2009), the effects from "sharing-is-believing" cannot be explained in terms of classic, intrapersonal dissonance theory. For example, the classic dissonance account would predict that when communicators tune their message to an outgroup (vs. ingroup) audience, they should experience greater dissonance because they are making an effort to match the attitude of an audience they don't like or trust. Greater dissonance should produce a stronger effect of the message (i.e., greater memory bias), but instead there is a weaker effect. As another example, when communicator participants are told that the audience failed to recognize Michael, this aversive consequence (i.e., failure) of freely choosing to bias their message to match the audience's attitude should increase the dissonance effect of the biased message (i.e., greater memory bias), but instead the effect is eliminated.

Finally, a dissonance account would predict an inverse relationship between trust in the audience's attitude and the dissonance effect (i.e., greater memory bias): Trusting the audience's attitude is consonant with having tuned toward the audience's attitude, which should reduce the magnitude of dissonance from the biased message. The audience-tuned message is now not a lie, or less of a lie, which should reduce or eliminate dissonance. But instead, consistent with shared reality theory, Echterhoff and colleagues found that a stronger memory bias was found when communicators had greater trust in the audience's attitude (Echterhoff et al., 2005, 2008, 2013), because the audience-tuned message was perceived as a more accurate description of Michael. These results indicate that "sharing-is-believing" effects cannot be treated as dissonance effects. Further, they cannot be accounted for purely by the need for truth per se: They are a product of the need to establish a sense of truth *with others*.

Truth-Relevance from Shared Reality Validation and Co-Creation

Why are interpersonally established truths so much more convincing and believable than those established intrapersonally? Humans are constantly inundated with thoughts and feelings. How do they know which of these thoughts and feelings are legitimate and real? Which ones should be taken seriously? Discovering that another person has had the same thought or feeling about something can serve as a powerful, validating cue that this thought or feeling can be trusted as an accurate reflection of what the outside world is really, truly like ("I'm not the only one who sees it this way"). Shared realities serve as anchors to reality, keeping people

from floating into uncertainty and confusion ("Is this just my imagination?").

Further, the more specific those shared thoughts are, and the more interpersonally derived they are, the more real and true they will feel. For example, we predict that when two people co-create a shared reality about something, they will feel that this shared reality is especially true. Thinking together is an extremely special experience. When people are thinking aloud together—discussing something and making sense of it together—they know the trajectory of each other's thoughts. They have traced out their reasoning together, so they can trust that they know exactly where the other person is coming from and that they agree for the same reasons. For example, being informed that another person has the same attitude toward a certain legislation bill is starkly different from discussing it with that other person and together forming a shared attitude. In the former, both individuals could have different reasons for having that attitude. In the latter, both individuals can be certain that they hold this attitude for the same reasons because they came up with those reasons together. They co-created that truth.

In the context of inconsistencies involving both intra- and interpersonally established cognitive elements, which element do people decide to trust: the one they came up with alone, or the one they share with others? We argue that the one that is shared—especially if it was co-created—is going to feel more valid. It will be taken more seriously, whether it is an attitude, a self-belief, a belief about others, or even a perception of enacted behavior. The cognitions that are shared with others will be, in the words of dissonance theorists, the most resistant to change.

Concluding Comments

Consistency theories made a major contribution to psychological research in demonstrating that humans need to establish coherence and make sense of their world. Recent theorizing questions whether consistency effects are driven strictly by the need for consistency per se, or by the need to attain desired conclusions or achieve certainty (Kruglanski et al., this issue). Kruglanski et al. propose that dissonance will be most influential when it stems from cognitions that are epistemically and motivationally relevant—notably, cognitions that feel truer. In this article, we build on this theorizing to propose that the source of this truth-relevance—how it was acquired—further determines the consequences of dissonance, such that dissonance is most problematic when it involves cognitive elements that were acquired from creating shared realities with others. In other words, the cognitive elements resulting from a shared reality are the ones that truly matter.

The historical, intrapersonal focus of cognitive consistency theories is symptomatic of a larger issue in social psychology. Social psychological theories, despite being about social phenomena, are often constrained by being studied as intrapersonal phenomena—as processes that play out within individuals. Rarely are they studied across minds. Even methodologically, the vast majority of social psychological studies are conducted on individuals isolated in front

of a computer. These intrapersonal theories may be less complicated than their interpersonal counterparts, and those empirical studies may afford more experimental control and be easier to conduct. But, as put forward by various relationship researchers (Kelley et al., 1983; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), this intrapersonal focus is fundamentally divorced from the reality of how people think and feel. Humans are profoundly interpersonal beings. People constantly communicate with one another, tell one another their thoughts and feelings, listen to one another, make sense of things together, and think and feel together. And in the moments when they believe that another person is thinking and feeling with them—that another person has jointly experienced the same mental journey to reach the same conclusion—those are the moments in which people experience the world as making sense. These shared thoughts and feelings are the ones that are experienced as most true, serving as anchors to the real world. The heightened truth-relevance that is created by shared realities with others should be taken seriously in the context of cognitive consistency theories and any other social psychological theory.

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