Some Comments in Reply:
Analysis, Synthesis, and Contemporary Social Psychology

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The authors briefly respond to several of the issues raised in the articles commenting on their analysis of research traditions in social psychology and specifically on their treatment of dissonance theory. The authors' goal was not to engage in a protracted debate but to highlight some overarching issues in contemporary social psychology in order to encourage social psychologists to consider how they conduct their science.

Although we do not intend to get into a prolonged debate with anyone, we are pleased to be able to participate in this exchange of views. When we wrote our article, our hope was to encourage social psychologists to consider how they were conducting their science, not to bemoan a supposed crisis in this field. We do not think that social psychology is in a bleak state or that it is in danger of losing its soul, and we do see progress in the discipline — in the accumulation of knowledge and in the development of important scientific concepts and analyses. But for all its very real advances, we also believe that not enough attention is being given to the development of a relatively "big picture," theoretical ideas having a fairly broad sweep that are capable of integrating seemingly different kinds of data.

This is not to say, as Cooper and Fazio think we did, that we regard all analytic research as being concerned only with trivial matters. (Indeed, the senior [in age] author has conducted a good many experiments of exactly this nature. His movie violence studies [Berkowitz, 1984], for example, are a relatively fine-grained examination of conditions affecting the impact of observed aggression on the audience's aggressive inclinations.) Science obviously requires close and precise analyses of the phenomena of interest to it. However, science also progresses through synthetic endeavors in which observations from apparently different areas of study are brought together and shown to be special cases of a more general principle. We agree with all the commentators that dynamic interplay between analysis and synthesis is crucial for the development of a science. However, from our perspective there are too few synthetic attempts in contemporary social psychology.

Also contrary to the Cooper-Fazio characterization of our position, we do not believe that social psychology's efforts can be readily classified as entirely either analytic or synthetic in nature (nor do we consider analytic approaches the "bad guys" of social psychology). Quite a few articles in recent years, including Fazio's articles on the conditions under which attitudes are related to overt behavior (e.g., Fazio,

1986), have pursued both goals to a greater or lesser extent. Again, however, it is a matter of emphasis — the scope of one's synthetic aspiration. Fazio's conception is an innovative blend of cognitive and associationistic notions, indicating that he is interested in integrating ideas from both these theoretical approaches. Might it not be of value to go even further and attempt other, somewhat similar integrations in other realms of human behavior? We might then be able to achieve a broader understanding of when people's behavior is governed largely by "higher order" cognitive processing and when it is controlled to a greater extent by more automatic, associationistic processes. But whatever is done along these lines in the future, the field as a whole seems to be all too uninterested these days in wide-ranging formulations that can tie together the multifaceted aspects of human behavior. Where are today's theories that rival dissonance theory in sweep or even come close to it in ambition? Several social psychological formulations do attempt to transcend the boundaries of a single research area, such as the various self-concept or identity theories and information-processing notions. However, as we see it, these formulations are not now generating a systematic research program showing that a relatively simple set of theoretical principles can be applied to observations gathered from several different areas of study. Maybe efforts to establish such a program are too out of tune with the times.

Cooper and Fazio claim that our discussion of analysis, synthesis, and contemporary social psychology suggests that synthesis and cognitive approaches to social psychology are incompatible. This is not at all what we intended. We would argue, however, that models that focus primarily on cognitive representations have, to date, led to an emphasis on analysis to the relative neglect of synthesis. This is not to say that this is a necessary outcome or that cognitive approaches and synthesis are incompatible. We fully recognize the potential for cognitive models to contribute to broad-ranging theories. In fact, both of us take advantage of cognitive processing models in our own theoretical endeavors.

Although Cooper and Fazio did not intend this, their rejoinder illustrates our thesis regarding contemporary social psychology's somewhat narrowed perspective, and does this in at least two ways. First, they insist that the Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) article has nothing to do with dissonance theory, even though eminent dissonance researchers, including Festinger himself (L. Festinger, personal communication, November 9, 1987), Aronson (1987 APA symposium commemorating the 30th anniversary of dissonance theory), and others did see the connection. The Cooper-Fazio view of dissonance theory clearly is much narrower than the conception these other social psychologists had in mind.

If their formulation departs from the traditional cognitive consistency version of dissonance theory, as they say it does, maybe it should be called something else. But more important, we might ask, what is the relation between their ideas and other relevant theoretical statements? It is in this respect that Cooper and Fazio apparently are insufficiently synthetic (at least in their 1984 *Advances* chapter). Although they did discuss the self-perception and impression management interpretations of dissonance theory at some length in their *Advances* chapter, from where we stand they do not give sufficient consideration to the possibility, raised by Aronson and others, that

the person exposed to a dissonance manipulation suffers a threat to his or her self-identity or a loss of self-esteem. The Scher and Cooper (1989) study mentioned in the Cooper and Fazio rejoinder certainly is susceptible to such an interpretation. At the very least, it seems to us, Cooper and Fazio should explain why the perception of aversive consequences is so important.[1] It should be fun, and we think it is scientifically desirable, to speculate, to consider the possible relationships among different theoretical ideas, and to wonder whether seemingly disparate phenomena might somehow have certain things in common. As we commented in the original article, quoting Robert Browning, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?"

NOTE

[1] We are still inclined to believe that such a perception can intensify dissonancelike reactions but is not necessary for these reactions to occur. Interestingly, Frey (1986) did not list this perception as being among the conditions that produce selective exposure.

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