

## Elastic Shifts of Opinion: Determinants of Direction and Durability

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In a pair of studies, subjects were found to shift their positions on an issue while they were expecting to engage an opponent in a discussion of that issue. As predicted, it was possible to influence the size and direction of these anticipatory shifts by manipulating the personal relevance of the discussion topic and the timing of the discussion onset. It was also possible to nullify the shifts by canceling the expectation of discussion. The results were taken to support a general formulation of anticipatory shifts as strategic responses to immediate situational pressures rather than genuine changes in attitude. Additionally, it was found that the durability of anticipatory change was associated with the tendency to engage in cognitive activity supportive of the change. The possibility is discussed that most "attitude change" studies have not involved attitude shifts but rather the "elastic shifts" obtained in the present experiments.

In a study by Cialdini, Levy, Herman, and Evenbeck (1973), the expectation of discussion with a peer on a topic was found to produce moderation of position (i.e., movement toward the middle of the opinion scale) on that topic prior to the discussion. These anticipatory moderation shifts were seen to be quite similar to those typically found in traditional forewarning studies (e.g., Cooper & Jones, 1970; McGuire & Millman, 1965; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962). It was further demonstrated that when the discussion expectation was canceled (i.e., when participants were told that they were controls and thus would not have to engage in a discussion after all), subjects "snapped back" to their initial, premoderation positions on the topic. Both the moderation and snap-back aspects of the Cialdini et al. (1973) data have been

replicated by Hass in studies employing a standard forewarning paradigm (Hass, 1975; Hass & Mann, 1976).

Cialdini et al. developed a general formulation of anticipatory shifts to account for these and a variety of previous findings. They contended that position changes that occur on an issue in anticipation of some kind of interaction with that issue may be seen as strategic maneuvers designed to maximize the rewards of the impending situation. Hass (1975) and Hass and Mann (1976) have theorized similarly concerning the tactical character of anticipatory opinion changes. Such shifts are viewed, in contrast to prior work, as quite different from what has traditionally been known as attitude change and are conceived as having, by themselves, little or no effect on true attitude. They are said to occur primarily in the interest of situational utility and are characterized by their elasticity. Much like an elastic band, one's position on an issue may be stretched and distorted under situational pressures only to snap back to its original form as soon as the pressures are released.

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In keeping with the basic assumption of their formulation that anticipatory shifts are

tactics designed to maximize situational outcomes, Cialdini et al. (1973) maintained that position moderation on a topic is not the *necessary* response to an anticipated discussion with another person. They argued that moderation would occur only when the rewards of the immediate context favored a moderate issue position. They speculated that a person expecting to discuss a topic with another would become more moderate on the topic prior to the interaction only when the topic was of small personal relevance. In such a case, an individual's prime concern in the upcoming discussion would not likely be a strong presentation of his or her own position on the topic. Rather, when the issues at hand are of little personal import, a discussant's personal position on the topic becomes less salient than the presentation of a defensible and/or admirable face. Thus, the most valued stance in such an instance is not necessarily the most accurate one but the one that allows the discussant to be in a relatively invulnerable position and to appear open and broad-minded. A moderate issue position is seen by Cialdini et al. as an especially favored one in these regards. When anticipating a discussion on a personally important topic, however, a person's concern for appearances should be dwarfed by outcomes connected with the topic itself. That is, one would not wish to weaken a personal position on an issue of strong self-relevance. Cialdini et al. (1973) hypothesized that with a highly important issue one might well polarize in anticipation of a discussion on that issue. It was one purpose of the present study to test the above aspect of the Cialdini et al. argument by examining the effects of topic importance on anticipatory shifts.

Another way to test the Cialdini et al. conception of anticipatory moderation shifts as operating only to enhance the achievement of situational ends would be to arrange a situation in which such ends could not be immediately attained through a change in issue position. That is, if a person were anticipating immediate discussion, tactical position shifts would be expected to take place at once so as to maximize the receipt of positive outcomes in the imminent discussion situation. However, if a person were anticipating a long

delay before the onset of discussion, such shifts would be less likely to occur, since holding for an extended time an issue position that is different from one's true attitude might involve considerable cognitive effort and serves no immediate, situational purpose. Here, a discussant might be expected to refrain from anticipatory position change until a time shortly before the discussion onset.

According to the above analysis, then, the Cialdini et al. (1973) model would predict that the expectation of discussion would produce moderation of issue position only when the onset of discussion was to be immediate and the topic were personally unimportant to the discussant. One final prediction can be derived from the Cialdini et al. formulation: If anticipatory shifts in the face of discussion are truly instrumental in nature, functioning only to achieve immediate ends and having by themselves little lasting effect on genuine attitude, then by cancellation of the discussion expectation it should be possible to make the shifts disappear; that is, the issue positions should snap back to their original forms as occurred in Cialdini et al.

In order to investigate the effects of differential outcome contingencies on the operation of anticipatory position shifts, an experiment was conducted employing three independent variables—issue to be discussed, personal relevance of that issue, and timing of the anticipated discussion. The design was a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  factorial with four control conditions.

## EXPERIMENT 1

### *Method*

*Subjects.* The subjects were 81 students at a girls' parochial high school located in the Bronx, New York. The subjects constituted all the members of the school's senior class who were present on the day of the experiment.

*Procedure.* Through the cooperation of school officials, a "senior class assembly" was called on the morning of a regular school day. At the assembly students were addressed by a male experimenter who stated that he and his research team were from Columbia University and were part of a "national study designed to find out what American high school students think about a variety of issues." He then stressed the need for honesty in response to the questions to be asked of the subjects and assured them of the confidentiality of their responses. At this point, he distributed to each subject a three-

page booklet that presented the experimental manipulations. The first page contained short descriptions of the two issues used in the experiment and asked subjects to make a dichotomous for-or-against response to each of the following issues:

Do you think a girl should wait at least a year after high school graduation before she marries, even if she thinks she knows who she wants to marry?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Would you favor shortening the number of years of medical training for doctors, thereby permitting the training of more doctors and lengthening each doctor's active practice?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

In addition, below each issue appeared a 5-point scale on which subjects were asked to answer "How important do you feel this issue is for you?" The scales' categories were labeled "very important," "pretty important," "somewhat important," "slightly important," and "not at all important."

The second page of the booklet described the study as primarily interested in the attitudes of high-school students on certain issues and the discussions that result from these issues. All subjects were informed that they would be assigned to discuss one of the issues from the first booklet page with a classmate whose position was opposite to their own. Half of the subjects were then instructed, via a checkmark on their booklets, to expect to discuss only the deferred marriage issue; the other subjects were instructed in similar fashion to expect to discuss only the shortened medical training issue. Finally, the booklet's second page informed half of the subjects that the discussions would take place immediately after the booklets were collected; the other subjects were informed that the discussions would occur when the experimenters returned in a week.

On the last page, subjects were told that before the experiment began it would be necessary for them to give a more specific indication of opinion on the two issues than they had provided on the initial booklet page. This was done by marking a series of four 7-point semantic-differential scales for each topic.

After all of the booklets had been completed and collected, the large body of subjects was divided into two smaller groups and taken to separate rooms. When each group was settled in its room, an experimenter entered and told the subjects that they had been assigned to a control group and thus would not have to participate in the discussion sessions after all. Specifically, he said:

You people in this room have been randomly chosen as control subjects. That means that you will not have to perform in the discussion that was described in your booklets. Instead of discussing an issue, all you have to do is respond on a questionnaire to some statements that usually come up during a discussion of the issues de-

scribed in your booklets. Respond to each statement by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with it. [Here the experimenter distributed a Likert-type questionnaire consisting of eight statements related to the experimental issues. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the subjects were debriefed and dismissed.]

*Independent variables.* The following three independent variables were employed: assigned issue (deferred marriage or shortened medical training), timing of expected discussion on that issue (immediate or 1 week later), and personal relevance of that issue to the subject (high or low). Subjects were assigned to the levels of the first two of these variables at random. However, subjects assigned themselves to the levels of the third variable by virtue of their responses to the personal importance question on the initial booklet page. A subject who indicated that the issue was personally very important or pretty important was categorized in the high personal relevance condition. A subject who indicated that the issue was somewhat, slightly, or not at all important was placed in the low personal relevance condition.

*Dependent variables.* Each subject indicated her position on both of the experimental issues on two different types of nondichotomous measures during the experiment. The first measure was administered while she was still expecting to discuss her assigned issue. It consisted of a series of four 7-point semantic-differential scales: harmful-beneficial, wise-foolish, bad-good, favorable-unfavorable. The subjects responded to the second measure after they no longer expected the discussion to occur. The measure was a Likert opinion index composed of eight statements; four concerned each experimental issue. Subjects indicated their level of agreement or disagreement to each statement on a 7-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Each participant served both as an experimental and a control subject in the study. A participant was an experimental subject on the issue she was assigned to discuss and was a control subject on the issue she was not assigned to discuss.

Two major dependent measures were used in the study. The first was calculated as a difference score between a subject's score on the semantic-differential scales and the mean score of the comparable control group on those scales. The appropriate control group for an experimental subject was composed of those subjects who had made a similar initial for or against choice (as measured by the booklet's dichotomous opinion scale) on the critical issue but did not expect to discuss it. The first dependent measure, then, represented the amount of position change on the assigned issue resulting from the subjects' discussion expectation on that issue. This measure is referred to as the *anticipation measure*. The second dependent measure was obtained similarly except it was calculated as a difference score between a subject's own score on the Likert questionnaire statements, administered after subjects were told that they would not have to discuss, and the mean score

of the comparable control group on those statements. It represented the amount of position change still present after subjects no longer expected to discuss the assigned issue. This measure is referred to as the *canceled anticipation measure*. Both change scores were calculated such that a moderation shift was given a negative sign and a polarization shift was given a positive sign.

### Results

The experimental group means collapsed over issue<sup>1</sup> for the anticipation and canceled anticipation measures are presented in Table 1. These means represent differences from control subjects who, as compared with experimental subjects, made the same initial for or against choice on the critical issue but had no discussion expectation regarding it. As predicted, only when the discussion was to be immediate and it involved an issue of low personal relevance did subjects moderate their positions in anticipation of discussion. A planned comparison testing the low-relevance/immediate-discussion condition against the other three conditions on the anticipation measure was highly significant,  $F(1, 77) = 10.24, p < .002$ . Further, tests of each condition's movement from the control position showed significant or marginally significant effects in all conditions. That is, a subject's expectation of discussion of a personally unimportant issue produced a more moderate position than control subjects when the discussion onset was to be immediate,  $F(1, 77) = 3.31, p < .07$ . However, a subject's expectation of discussion produced a more *polarized* position than controls in the other experi-

mental cells: low-relevance/delayed,  $F(1, 77) = 2.89, p < .09$ ; high-relevance/immediate,  $F(1, 77) = 4.00, p < .05$ ; high-relevance/delayed,  $F(1, 77) = 4.54, p < .05$ .

An examination of the canceled anticipation means provided in Table 1 shows, as expected, that subjects in all conditions tended to snap back to control issue positions after the expectation of discussion on the issues was canceled. None of the canceled anticipation measure means was reliably different from the control position. However, it can be seen that one group of subjects, those in the high-relevance/immediate-discussion cell, seemed substantially more resistant to the snap-back effect than the other groups. This aspect of the data suggests that our manipulations may have activated qualitatively different processes in the anticipatory shifts that occurred.

### Discussion

There are a number of noteworthy aspects of the data of Experiment 1. First, as predicted, subjects moderated their positions prior to the discussion of an issue only when the issue was personally unimportant and the discussion onset was to be immediate. This result lends support to the contention that the anticipatory moderation shifts of earlier studies were strategic in nature, occurring in the interests of situational utility. That is, when the situational contingencies did not favor moderation or did not require immediate moderation, no such shifts took place.

Second, under the conditions that did not call for moderation shifts, subjects tended to polarize in anticipation of interaction on an issue. This finding is wholly in keeping with the outcomes of previous studies (Brock &

TABLE 1  
POLARIZATION AND MODERATION SHIFTS ON THE  
ANTICIPATION AND CANCELED ANTICIPATION  
MEASURES OF EXPERIMENT 1

Measure	Personal relevance			
	High		Low	
	Imme- diate discus- sion	Delayed discus- sion	Imme- diate discus- sion	Delayed discus- sion
Anticipation <sup>a</sup>	1.79	1.68	-1.67	1.72
Canceled anticipation <sup>b</sup>	1.33	.22	.58	.52
n	20	26	19	16

Note. Positive means indicate polarization shifts from the control; negative means indicate moderation shifts.

<sup>a</sup>  $MS_e = 16.23$ .

<sup>b</sup>  $MS_e = 21.57$ .

<sup>1</sup> Despite our expectation that the marriage issue would have more personal relevance for our subjects than the medical issue, it was the case for both issues that approximately 56% of the subjects fell into the high-relevance category. The importance of the medical training issue may have been attributable to the school's proximity to a major medical center and to the fact that many of the girls' parents were employed there. In other respects as well, the data were similar for the discussion topics; consequently, we collapsed over the issue factor in all analyses.

Fromkin, 1968; Greenwald, 1969; Jellison & Mills, 1969) demonstrating that the expectation of simply stating, in public, one's own position on a topic causes one to become more extreme on that topic. One plausible explanation for these polarization shifts is suggested by Jellison and Mills (1969), who say of their subjects that "the commitment to state their position publicly could have increased their desire to be certain that their side on the issue was the correct one" (p. 346). The desire for certainty was presumably satisfied by preliminary polarization shifts. Thus, for such subjects the maximization of situational outcomes required movement toward a more extreme position.

A final result of interest concerned the tendency of the anticipatory effects to revert toward the control position when the expectation of discussion was canceled. This snap-back effect replicates the findings of the studies of Cialdini et al. (1973) and Hass and Mann (1976) and again provides support for the claim that anticipatory position changes are tactical and elastic in character. With the cancellation of the discussion expectation, the situational pressures producing the preliminary shifts were removed, and subjects snapped back to their original positions without residual effects. However, though none of the canceled anticipation measure means was significantly different from controls, the subjects in one condition (high-relevance/immediate-discussion) were decidedly and unexpectedly less susceptible to a snap-back effect than were those in the other conditions.

The tendency of subjects expecting an immediate discussion on a personally relevant issue to be resistant to a snap-back effect was an intriguing one for us. It suggested that the manner in which the anticipatory shift occurred in such subjects made the initial change relatively nonelastic. One possibility is that only subjects in the high-relevance/immediate-discussion cell were motivated to undertake cognitive activity in support of their position. That is, subjects in each of the other cells were expecting a discussion that was on a topic of little importance to them, that would not take place for a week, or both; thus, they may not have been willing to do the cognitive work to solidify their position

shifts. Greenwald (1968) has proposed a cognitive response analysis of persuasion suggesting that persisting persuasion effects are a function of one's cognitive responses to an issue or message. That is, genuine shifts to an attitude position are said to occur to the extent that one engages in cognitive activity supportive of that position. It may have been, then, that in Experiment 1 a tendency of subjects in the high-relevance/immediate-discussion cell to generate and rehearse thoughts that supported their side of the issue caused their anticipatory polarization shifts to become nonelastic, real changes in attitude. The situational contingencies in the other three cells, however, may not have motivated subjects to do the cognitive work necessary to make their position shifts durable; thus, when the discussion was canceled and the discussion-related influences were removed, the shifts disappeared as well.

To test this possibility, a replication and extension of Experiment 1 was performed. Experiment 2 served three major functions. First, it provided a test of the above-described hypothesis concerning snap-back effects; this was done by including as dependent variables several measures of cognitive activity taken while subjects were still expecting discussion. Second, it allowed an assessment of the generality of the results of Experiment 1 over issues and populations; the subjects of Experiment 2 were college students of both sexes rather than high-school girls, and the issues employed were different from those of Experiment 1. Finally, it represented a more methodologically sound study in that subjects were experimentally assigned to levels of the personal relevance factor rather than selecting themselves for these levels.

## EXPERIMENT 2

### *Method*

*Subjects.* The subjects were 133 Ohio State University undergraduates who participated in the experiment as partial fulfillment of the requirements of an introductory psychology course. Seniors who had been assigned to a high personal relevance condition were omitted from the analyses because, as seniors, the issue would not have high relevance for them; removal of seniors from the low-relevance cells produced no differences in the significance levels of the analyses. Also, subjects who failed to respond to key opinion items were eliminated. In

total, eight subjects were eliminated from the analyses.

*Procedure.* Subjects were run in groups of from 3 to 11 members and completed a questionnaire taken from a randomly ordered stack. The first page of the booklet informed the subjects that the experimenters were interested in investigating university student reactions to local campus issues. They were also told that they would be discussing one of the two issues listed with a partner whose position on the issue was opposite to their own. Either Issue 1 or Issue 2 was circled, indicating that this was the issue they were to discuss. The first issue concerned the establishment of required comprehensive examinations for seniors at Ohio State University, whereas Issue 2 dealt with the division of the Ohio State University into separate graduate and undergraduate campuses. Issue 1 was circled in half of the booklets and Issue 2 in the other half. Subjects were told that they would never be involved in a discussion of the noncircled issue. Half of the booklets explained that the discussion would take place within a few minutes, and the other half stated that the discussion would take place in 1 week. The next page contained a short description of Issue 1, the establishment of senior comprehensive exams. Subjects were also asked to indicate where they stood on the issue—for or against.

In addition, before giving their own opinion on the issue, half of the subjects were informed that the Faculty Senate had endorsed the proposal calling for the establishment of senior comprehensive exams and that it would take effect in 1 year. The other half of the subjects were told that the plan would take effect in 6 years. This page also included a 7-point scale on which subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which the issue involved them personally. The scale ranged from "no personal involvement" to "extreme personal involvement." Page 3 contained a brief description of Issue 2, identical in format to that of Issue 1. Again, subjects were asked to indicate their stand on the issue and the extent to which the issue involved them personally.

Next, in a procedure similar to that employed by Brock (1967), Greenwald (1968), and Osterhouse and Brock (1970), subjects were informed that the experimenters were interested in their thoughts on Issue 1. The booklets instructed subjects to

Simply write down the first idea on the topic that comes to mind in the first box, the second idea that occurs to you in the second box, etc. Please put only one idea or thought in a box. You might have ideas all on one side of the issue or the other, or a mixture of the two. Either case is fine. You may IGNORE SPELLING, GRAMMAR, AND PUNCTUATION. You will have *three minutes* to write your ideas.

Fifteen 7-inch (17.8-cm) horizontal lines, each about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches (3.8 cm) from the one above, created the boxes in which subjects were to write their ideas. Within each large rectangular idea box were two much smaller square boxes, one on the extreme right-

hand side and one on the left. When the 3 minutes had elapsed, subjects were told to

indicate in the left hand box by each idea you recorded, whether your idea was (+) in favor of senior comprehensive exams, (-) opposed to senior comprehensive exams, or (0) neither in favor of nor opposed to senior comprehensive exams. Please place a +, -, or 0 in each idea blank that you used.<sup>2</sup>

When this had been completed, subjects were asked to indicate in the right-hand box by each idea they recorded how confident they were in the validity of the idea, using a 7-point scale on which 1 indicated no confidence and 7 indicated extreme confidence. After all subjects had rated their ideas on Issue 1, an identical thought listing and rating procedure was conducted for Issue 2.

On the last page of the booklet, the subjects were told that before they were assigned to discussion groups, it would be necessary for them to give a more specific indication of opinion on the two issues. This was done by marking a series of four 11-point semantic-differential scales for each topic.

After all of the booklets had been completed and collected, the group was divided in half. Each subgroup was then brought to a separate room so that discussion assignments could be made. When a group was settled in its room, an experimenter entered and told the subjects that they had been assigned to a control group and thus would not have to participate in a discussion.

At this point, the experimenter distributed a Likert-type opinion questionnaire consisting of eight statements related to the experimental issues. Subjects responded to each statement by indicating their level of agreement or disagreement on an 11-point scale. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the subjects were dismissed.

*Independent variables.* The following three independent variables were manipulated: assigned issue, time of the expected discussion, and personal relevance of the issue. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of two issue conditions—senior comprehensives or separation of campuses. The time of the expected discussion was manipulated by having the subject expect to discuss either within a few minutes of completing the initial booklet or a week later. The personal relevance of the issue to the subjects was manipulated by telling them that the proposals were to take effect in 1 year (in which case they would be personally involved) or in 6 years (in which case they would not be involved).

*Dependent variables.* The anticipation and canceled anticipation measures were constructed in a way identical to that of Experiment 1. Measures of cognitive activity occurring while subjects expected discussion were constructed from the thoughts that

<sup>2</sup> This procedure, in which subjects rate the valence of their own thoughts, was adapted from Cullen as presented in Greenwald (1968, p. 157).

each subject listed and rated on the assigned discussion issue. One measure was the number of thoughts a subject recorded that were either favorable toward his or her own position or unfavorable toward the opposing position; this was called the supportive-thoughts measure. A second measure was the number of thoughts a subject recorded that were not supportive thoughts. Finally, a subject's confidence in the validity of each recorded thought was measured.

**Predictions.** We expected that Experiment 2 would show the same pattern of results as Experiment 1 on the anticipation and canceled anticipation measures. The major prediction of this study, however, was that the relative lack of a snap-back effect in the high-relevance/immediate-discussion cell would be related to greater position-supportive cognitive activity among subjects in that condition than among those in the other conditions.

### Results

An examination of the check on the manipulation of the personal-relevance variable ("Please indicate the extent to which this issue involves you personally") revealed that the manipulation worked for just one of the two experimental issues. Only on Issue 1, mandatory senior comprehensives, did subjects in the high (5.07) and low (2.93) personal relevance cells differ on this item ( $p < .001$ ); Issue 2 did not show any such effect between high (4.27) and low (3.91) personal relevance subjects ( $p < .54$ ). Because one purpose of Experiment 2 was to test the effects of a truly experimental manipulation of personal relevance, only the data for Issue 1 were fully analyzed.<sup>3</sup>

Table 2 presents the means of the anticipation and canceled anticipation measures of Experiment 2. The pattern of those means closely replicates that of Experiment 1. As in Experiment 1, only subjects in the low-relevance/immediate-discussion condition showed a mean moderation shift on the anticipation measure,  $F(1, 57) = 3.84$ ,  $p < .06$ , and that mean was significantly different from the combination of the other three,  $F(1, 57) = 6.74$ ,  $p < .02$ . Again paralleling the results of Experiment 1, only subjects in the high-relevance/immediate-discussion cell were substantially resistant to a snap-back effect on the canceled anticipation measure. A planned comparison of the amount of snap-back in that cell as opposed to the other three gave evi-

TABLE 2  
POLARIZATION AND MODERATION SHIFTS AND NUMBER OF SUPPORTIVE THOUGHTS PER CONDITION IN EXPERIMENT 2

Measure	Personal relevance			
	High		Low	
	Imme- diate discus- sion	Delayed discus- sion	Imme- diate discus- sion	Delayed discus- sion
Anticipation <sup>a</sup>	1.76	1.63	-2.67	.86
Canceled anticipation <sup>b</sup>	1.48	0.00	-.55	-.58
Supportive thoughts <sup>c</sup>	3.78	2.77	2.87	2.27
<i>n</i>	18	13	15	15

Note. Positive means for the anticipation and canceled anticipation measures indicate polarization shifts from control; negative means indicate moderation shifts.

<sup>a</sup> *MS*<sub>e</sub> = 27.88.

<sup>b</sup> *MS*<sub>e</sub> = 22.48.

<sup>c</sup> *MS*<sub>e</sub> = 2.42.

dence of the greater resistance,  $F(1, 57) = 3.08$ ,  $p < .05$ , one-tailed.

The crucial dependent variables of Experiment 2 were those measuring cognitive activity occurring while subjects still anticipated discussion. A planned comparison testing the high-relevance/immediate-discussion condition against the combination of the other three conditions showed a significant multivariate effect in the direction of prediction,  $F(5, 52) = 2.33$ ,  $p < .054$ . However, only the number of supportive thoughts measure showed a reliable univariate effect,  $F(1, 57) = 6.93$ ,  $p < .011$ . The other measures of cognitive activity did not approach significance. The mean number of supportive thoughts per condition are displayed in Table 2. Moreover, the mean number of supportive thoughts on Issue 1

<sup>3</sup> It was possible, however, to perform for Issue 2 an internal analysis based on the personal relevance manipulation check, as had been done for the issues of Experiment 1. Although the fit was not perfect, the pattern of these data replicated the important aspects of Experiment 1. That is, only the low-relevance/immediate-discussion cell showed a moderation tendency on the anticipation measure, and only the high-relevance/immediate-discussion cell showed a tendency for residual change on the canceled anticipation measure. Neither effect was significant, however. The means for the anticipation and canceled anticipation measures, respectively, for each condition are as follows: high-relevance/immediate (2.16 and 1.20); high-relevance/delayed (.32 and -.44); low-relevance/immediate (-1.06 and -.65); low-relevance/delayed (.04 and -.73).

recorded by subjects in the high-relevance/immediate-discussion group (3.78) was significantly greater than that of control subjects (2.95), who did not expect to discuss that issue,  $F(1, 79) = 4.86$ ,  $p < .03$ ; however, the combined mean of the other three experimental groups (2.64) did not differ from controls ( $F < 1$ ).

#### GENERAL DISCUSSION

It seems clear from the results of Experiments 1 and 2 that anticipatory position shifts may be either in the direction of moderation or polarization of initial position. An anticipatory moderation change was obtained in both experiments when subjects expected an immediate discussion on a personally unimportant topic. Combining the probability levels of this change for the two studies via the  $Z$  transformation procedure suggested by Mosteller and Bush (1954) yielded a strongly significant effect,  $Z = 2.57$ ,  $p < .01$ . Preliminary *polarization* shifts also occurred in both experiments when subjects were expecting to discuss a personally involving issue. Again, combining probability levels over the two experiments resulted in highly reliable effects both when subjects expected immediate interaction,  $Z = 2.38$ ,  $p < .02$ , and when they expected delayed interaction on the topic,  $Z = 2.23$ ,  $p < .03$ . Only when subjects were expecting a delayed discussion on an issue of low personal import were there no reliable anticipatory shifts across the two experiments,  $Z = 1.61$ ,  $p < .15$ .

The pattern of these preliminary position shifts fits quite nicely with the suggestion that such shifts are strategic in character, occurring in the service of situational goals. As hypothesized, changing the direction and salience of situational pressures through the manipulation of the importance of the discussion issue and the timing of the discussion onset produced large differences in the nature of shifts occurring in anticipation of the discussion. Thus, the anticipation-measure results of the present experiments lend support to the Cialdini et al. (1973) theorizing concerning the tactical quality of anticipatory position changes.

A second important aspect of the present findings involved the elastic nature of pre-

liminary shifts. Cialdini et al. had shown that position moderation resulting from the expectation of discussion disappeared when the discussion was canceled. Hass and Mann (1976) obtained a similar effect in a forewarning situation when the expectation of a message was canceled. Both Experiments 1 and 2 replicated these snap-back effects for moderation shifts and demonstrated that such effects can occur for anticipatory polarization changes as well. The elasticity of anticipatory shifts again indicates their strategic basis and suggests also that they are fundamentally different from genuine modifications of attitude. However, one set of experimental conditions made the preliminary position shifts relatively nonelastic in both of our studies. When subjects expected to engage in an immediate discussion of a personally relevant issue, there was a tendency for the anticipatory polarization shifts that resulted to be resistant to a snap-back effect when the discussion was canceled. When combining the probability levels of both studies, the mean differences from control positions on the canceled anticipation measure for the other three experimental conditions never even approached significance (no  $p < .35$ ); however, the high-relevance/immediate-discussion condition did show evidence of residual change,  $Z = 1.82$ ,  $p < .07$ . Further, Experiment 2 showed that the stability of the anticipatory shifts evidenced by high-relevance/immediate-discussion subjects was accompanied by enhanced cognitive activity favorable to their own side of the issue and unfavorable to the other side (Greenwald, 1968).

#### *Elastic Shifts and Attitude Change*

In their 1973 article, Cialdini et al. drew a distinction between attitude change and the elastic shifts obtained in their study. Attitudes, as traditionally characterized, are seen to be relatively durable, consistent tendencies to respond evaluatively to some object over contexts and instances. However, the new issue positions assumed by subjects in the Cialdini et al. study, and in the present experiments as well, have shown none of the stability usually associated with an attitude. Instead, they seem momentary, labile, and contingent on the immediate reward context.

It may well be that the concept of elastic shifts is relevant to much more of the literature on persuasion than that concerning anticipatory shifts. That is, much of the experimental laboratory literature on attitude change may tell us nothing about the manner in which attitudes are modified but, rather, may inform us only as to when and how people shift their positions on relevant issues so as to maximize situational outcomes. Evidence in this regard can be found in a number of sources. For example, Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma (1971) have argued impressively that virtually all of the dissonance theory literature can be explained in terms of a tendency for subjects to manage the impressions that the experimenter forms about them. It is their suggestion that a desire to *appear* consistent in the eyes of an experimenter can account for these results more easily than a desire to reduce cognitive dissonance through attitude change.

Further, an extensive review by Hovland (1959) determined that changes in attitude, so often claimed in experimental investigations, almost never occur in survey studies of such change. A possible reconciliation of this seeming discrepancy can be achieved if we argue that experimental and survey studies of attitude change are examining wholly different phenomena. The experimental studies are measuring the temporary position shifts of their subjects who are reacting to immediate situational pressures; the survey studies, on the other hand, are tapping the more stable and resistant *attitudes* of their respondents and thus show less influence.

Finally, various workers in the area of persuasion persistence have commented on the inconsistent nature of the literature (e.g., Cook & Insko, 1968; Watts & McGuire, 1964). Some studies have found a complete loss of induced "attitude change" over time, others have found a partial loss, and still others have found no loss. Again, it may be possible to reconcile this apparent discrepancy by dropping the assumption that each of these experiments involved the same phenomenon—attitude change. Thus, rather than suggesting that attitude change persistence effects are inconsistent, the literature may indicate that distinct kinds of shifts, differ-

ing by nature in their durability, were evidenced in the various experiments. In addition to the results of their own experiment, Cook and Insko pointed out several studies of persistence effects that obtained findings in keeping with such a possibility and with the data of the present article. In each of these instances (Cook & Insko, 1968; Greenwald, 1968; Newcomb, 1963; Peterson & Thurstone, 1933; Watts, 1967; Watts & McGuire, 1964), the greatest persistence effects were found among those subjects who had the greatest opportunity to engage in supportive cognitive activity regarding the persuasive message. Thus, it is conceivable that the majority of variables and procedures said to produce attitude change may have little influence on true attitude but, instead, may only affect transient position shifts. Perhaps these variables and procedures bring about new stances that approach the nature of attitudes to the extent that they provide the motivation and opportunity for cognitive activity supportive of the new positions (Greenwald, 1968).

We do not wish to imply, however, that such a conceptualization of traditional attitude change research renders it unimportant. On the contrary, it is our feeling that the great majority of everyday interaction on one issue or another involves the strategic shifting about of one's position rather than genuine changes in attitude. Hence, the great part of research on "attitude change" is just as relevant as ever. However, it is our contention that the research may well embody a mislabeling of the phenomenon under investigation and that a clearer understanding of the phenomenon's identity will result in a clearer understanding of the processes involved in its occurrence.

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