Within the persuasion literature, the most common treatment of the term “resistance” involves the outcome of showing little or no change to a persuasive message, (e.g., McGuire, 1964). However, to understand resistance truly, one must recognize that the study of resistance is more than simply the outcome of a persuasive message. Petty, Tormala, and Rucker (in press; see also Tormala & Petty, this volume) noted recently that within the persuasion literature, resistance has also been examined as a psychological process (e.g., one can resist by counterarguing), a motivation (i.e., having the goal of not being persuaded), and a quality of an attitude or person (i.e., being resistant to persuasion).

Many of the chapters in the present volume discuss variables or situations that affect the outcome of resistance (e.g., Jacks & O’Brien, this volume; Tormala & Petty, this volume; Quinn & Wood, this volume), the process of resistance (e.g., Wegener, Petty, Smoak, & Fabrigar, this volume), or people’s motivation to resist (e.g., Knowles & Linn, this volume). The present chapter differs in that our interest lies in identifying personality attributes or aspects of the individual related to resistance. We focus our discussion on individual differences in resistance expected to be constant across topics, sources, situations, and so on. Thus, we deal primarily with resistance as a quality of a person. In this chapter, we introduce a new meta-cognitive approach to understand individual differences in resistance.
That is, we examine individuals’ meta-cognitions about their own resistance. We begin by providing a brief review of past work on individual differences in resistance, and we suggest that future research could benefit from adopting a metacognitive perspective. Finally, we present empirical evidence and apply the meta-cognitive framework to understand: how individuals’ beliefs affect their actual resistance to persuasion (resistance as an outcome); the qualities an individual possesses (resistance as a quality); and the processes by which an individual chooses to resist (resistance as a process) when his or her goal is to resist (resistance as a motivation).

META-COGNITION

Meta-cognition refers to the study of thinking about thinking, or thoughts about thoughts. The topic of meta-cognition has received considerable theoretical and research attention, being considered one of the “top 100 topics” of psychological research (Nelson, 1992). According to Jost, Kruglanski, and Nelson (1998), social meta-cognition includes (a) beliefs about one’s own mental states and processes as well as beliefs about those of other people, (b) momentary sensations as well as enduring naïve theories, and (c) descriptive beliefs about how the mind works and normative beliefs about how it ought to work.

It is necessary to distinguish between two qualitatively different aspects of meta-cognitive beliefs. First is the nature of the belief itself—What does a person believe about his or her thoughts and attitudes, or the type of person he or she is? For example, with respect to resistance, individuals might believe they are either difficult or easy to persuade. These beliefs need not be grounded in reality. For example, although there is ample evidence that explicit persuasive communications can change attitudes (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and that subliminal messages are ineffective (e.g., Vokey & Read, 1985), people still tend to believe that they can not resist the influence of subliminal information, whereas they think that they can control the influence of supraliminal persuasive communications. Consequently, people do not mind exposing themselves to strong persuasive arguments (that change their attitudes) but they prefer to avoid subliminal messages (that do not change their attitudes; see Wilson, Gilbert, & Wheatly, 1998). Similarly, individuals might believe that they are very resistant to persuasive attempts (or very easy to persuade), and these beliefs may be unrelated to the extent to which they actually resist different persuasive messages. A second aspect of a person’s belief is a value judgment of the belief. Specifically, people may believe that it is either appropriate or inappropriate to possess the thoughts, attitudes, or the personality characteristics they believe that they have. We address both types of meta-cognition in this chapter.

Research on meta-cognition and resistance is in its infancy. As one example, in a recent series of studies, Petty, Briñol, and Tormala (2002) have shown that the confidence or doubt people have in the validity of their own thoughts can
either increase or decrease resistance to persuasion depending on the nature of the thoughts elicited by the message (see also Briñol & Petty, 2003; Tormala, Petty, & Briñol, 2002). When people generate counterarguments against a persuasive message, for example, those counterarguments are more effective in instilling resistance when they are held with relatively high confidence. When people doubt the validity of their counterarguments, they are less effective in facilitating resistance. Conversely, when people generate mostly favorable thoughts to a message, increasing doubts in these favorable thoughts increases resistance. The literature on attitude confidence has also demonstrated that the overall confidence a person has in the validity or accuracy of his or her attitude has implications for resistance to persuasion. The more confident one is that his or her attitude is correct, the more motivated and willing one is to defend that attitude against persuasive attempts (see Gross, Holtz, & Miller, 1995; Petty & Wegener, 1999).

We propose that people’s beliefs about their own personality might operate in a similar manner. That is, one’s beliefs about one’s personality dimensions might also be influenced by the perceived validity or appropriateness of those beliefs. For example, if an individual is aware of a belief she possesses regarding her personality but views this belief as inappropriate, she may attempt to correct for it, undermining or even reversing the impact of the personality characteristic. Furthermore, the perceived appropriateness of her belief may vary depending on contextual factors. As another example, an individual may believe that he is very resistant to persuasion in general and feel that being resistant is valid or appropriate. However, if the individual is on a jury panel he might consider this belief to be temporarily inappropriate and thus be motivated to control for its potential influence when forming a judgment.

The Flexible Correction Model (FCM; Petty & Wegener, 1993; Wegener & Petty, 1995, 1997) can be used to help us predict when people will correct for their default beliefs. The FCM asserts that correction will only occur when an individual both suspects the presence of some biasing agent and is motivated and able to exert the increased cognitive effort to compensate for it. Moreover, according to the FCM, attempts at avoiding or removing bias are guided by perceivers’ naive theories about the nature of the default belief or bias. To the extent that people become aware of a potential biasing factor and are motivated and able to correct for it, they consult their theory of the direction and magnitude of the bias and adjust their judgment accordingly (see also Wilson & Brekke, 1994). Interestingly, this can cause judgments to move in a direction opposite to people’s presumed direction of bias (Wegener & Petty, 1997; 2001; Wegener et al., this volume). For example, if people think a positive mood has a favorable impact on their judgments, and they overestimate this bias, the corrected judgment can become less positive or even negative (e.g., Berkowitz et al., 2000; DeSteno, Petty, Wegener, & Rucker, 2000; Ottati & Isbell, 1996). In short, the default response may be for an individual to act in accordance with the belief he or she possesses unless the belief is salient and viewed as inappropriate.
In the present analysis, people who perceive themselves as resistant to persuasion probably act resistant in many cases, showing little or no change in the face of persuasive messages. However, to the extent an individual believes it is inappropriate or invalid to possess the beliefs or characteristic he or she does (i.e., “I should not be ‘resistant’ in this situation”), the individual may attempt to correct for the trait. Thus, an individual who believes that he or she is resistant, but also that it is wrong to be resistant in a given situation, may act less resistant in that context. Importantly, however, this correction would require the motivation and ability to correct.

Although we are interested in people’s beliefs about their own persuasibility because of the potential implications for resistance to persuasion, such beliefs may also play a central role in people’s values and identities. For example, Schwartz’s (1992) theory about universal human values is structured by two main motivational dimensions: The Self-Transcendence/Self-Enhancement dimension and the Openness to Change/Conservation dimension. Importantly, the second dimension reflects a conflict between favoring change versus protection of stability. In consonance with the literature on personality (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1997), this work implies that almost everyone may have beliefs about their own resistance to change and that such beliefs might be an integral part of the self-concept.

An interest in the study of what people believe about persuasion and the appropriateness of such beliefs has recently motivated a considerable amount of work in applied fields, such as consumer behavior (e.g., Briñol, Petty, & Tormala, in press; Wright, 2002) and organizational behavior (e.g., Vonk, 1998). For instance, Fristad and Wright (1994) have argued that people’s persuasion beliefs are an important determinant of how they deal with persuasion attempts. According to their view, people develop knowledge about persuasion and use this knowledge when interpreting and responding to ads or sales presentations, as well as when evaluating the effectiveness or appropriateness of such persuasion attempts. These lay beliefs about persuasion contain theories about the effects of different external or internal stimuli. People’s beliefs about persuasion can influence the impressions of an influence agent (such as a salesperson), but only when the beliefs are made salient and people are able to think carefully about the information (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). Despite this conceptual emphasis on people’s beliefs about persuasion, very little is known about how these beliefs affect persuasion or resistance and the specific circumstances under which such influence might occur. For that reason, in the present chapter we will examine different beliefs about persuasion and their consequences for resistance.

More specifically, in the present chapter we discuss individual differences in people’s meta-beliefs about their own resistance and why acknowledging these individual differences can be advantageous in studying resistance. We present two lines of research. In the first set of studies, we examine individual differences in whether people think they are generally resistant to persuasion or not, and the impact these meta-beliefs have on actual persuasion. Furthermore, in this line of research we also examine whether individuals ever attempt to correct
for their beliefs. In the second line of research, we examine individual differences in people’s beliefs about how they resist persuasion (beliefs about the processes of resistance they use) and the impact these beliefs have on actual resistance processes. However, before introducing our research on individual differences in meta-cognitive beliefs, we provide a brief overview of previous attempts to examine general individual differences in resistance.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN RESISTANCE: CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Classic Research

From prior literature, it is unclear whether a single general dimension of personality exists that makes some people more resistant to persuasion than others. However, research does suggest that there are clear individual differences in the degree to which people are persuaded by the same message. For example, McGuire found that across a wide array of topics, some individuals consistently changed a great deal, whereas others consistently changed only a small amount (McGuire, 1969).

Attempts to identify individual differences in persuasion originated in the early 1950s, when several scholars were focused on the study of different forms of cognitive rigidity—the stability of individuals’ beliefs. One of the most ambitious attempts is represented by work on the “authoritarian personality” (Altemeyer, 1969). The authoritarian personality arose out of the idea that some people were predisposed to agree with statements related to the fascist ideology (Stagner, 1936). The initial measures of authoritarianism inspired similar measures, such as the Anti-Semitism Scale (Levinson & Sanford, 1944), the Ethnocentrism Scale (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), and the California F Scale (Adorno et al., 1950). As an alternative to the authoritarian personality, Rokeach (1954) developed the dogmatism scale, which was designed to measure individual differences in open versus closed belief systems.

There are some indications that authoritarianism measures, including dogmatism, can predict change in response to external pressures. For example, Crutchfield (1955) reported a correlation of .39 between authoritarianism and yielding to group pressure in a variation of the Asch (1956) conformity paradigm. Altemeyer (1981) also reported a correlation of .44 between authoritarianism and obedience in a replication of the Milgram (1974) obedience to authority paradigm. In both examples, individuals low in authoritarianism were more likely to resist group conformity and obedience pressures. These findings suggest that measures of authoritarianism can be partially useful in predicting susceptibility or resistance to social influence. Overall, however, reviewers of this work have argued that individual difference approaches to understanding cognitive rigidity have proven only marginally successful (Abelson, 1968; Wick-
lund & Brehm, 1976). Furthermore, these measures have rarely been applied to examine resistance to the more common verbal persuasive messages.

Contemporary Research

In recent times, researchers’ interest in identifying general individual differences in resistance to persuasion has been rekindled. For example, Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom (1995) developed a measure of individuals’ preference for consistency (the PFC Scale). This scale includes items such as “I typically prefer to do things the same way” and “I don’t like to appear as if I am inconsistent.” The scale has been found to be reliable in predicting individuals who would and would not be susceptible to cognitive consistency effects such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) or the foot-in-the-door technique (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). However, the PFC is focused exclusively on situations where attitude change occurs as a result of cognitive inconsistency. The realm of attitude change involves numerous scenarios where persuasion is not based on consistency pressures (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). For this reason, we consider work on consistency, as well as the original research on authoritarianism, to address the phenomena of individual differences in general resistance to persuasion.

Recently, several new scales have emerged to help plot individual differences in resistance. For example, Knowles and Linn (this volume) measure resistance by assessing three interrelated components: Reactance, Scrutiny, and Distrust. These measures assess the degree to which resistance takes the form of opposing influence, cautious thought, and skepticism, respectively. Although these scales appear promising, to date they have not been used to predict resistance to persuasive communications.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES
IN RESISTANCE:
A META-COGNITIVE APPROACH

Although past research has tried to identify stable individual differences related to resistance, researchers have for the most part failed to examine individual differences in people’s beliefs about their own resistance to persuasion. One exception is recent research by Albarracín and Mitchell (2002). Albarracín and Mitchell proposed a measure of defensive confidence as a way to tap individual differences in resistance to persuasion. Defensive confidence refers to one’s belief that one’s own position can be defended and is assessed with items such as “I have many resources to defend my point of view when I feel my ideas are under attack,” or “No matter what I read or hear, I am always capable of defending my feelings and opinions.” According to Albarracín and Mitchell, the beliefs people have about their ability to defend their attitudes can moderate their approach to attitude-relevant information. Specifically, individuals who feel confident in their ability to defend their beliefs (i.e., high in defensive confi-
dence) do not feel a need to ignore counter-attitudinal information. Individuals who do not feel confident about their abilities, however, prefer to avoid counter-attitudinal information.

This recent line of inquiry is suggestive in showing that the beliefs people have about their own abilities to defend their attitudes can influence information exposure. However, this research does not provide any information about how these specific beliefs influence information processing and yielding. We now turn to discuss how the more general beliefs people hold about their own resistance to persuasion can provide a direct predictor of attitude change. Specifically, we examine how individuals’ meta-beliefs about their general susceptibility to persuasive attempts can affect their resistance to persuasive communications.

One way people’s beliefs about their own resistance to persuasion might influence attitude change is by triggering relatively simple cognitive inferences. That is, people might sometimes rely on beliefs about themselves as relatively simple cues to behavior (or persuasion). In research on self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1997), for instance, it has been shown that beliefs about self-efficacy can determine how information is processed, whether people engage in coping behaviors, how much effort will be expended in some task, and how long effort will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. For example, someone might say, “Since I can accomplish everything I want, I will be able to finish this tedious task.” Similarly, people might rely on their beliefs about their own resistance and reason, “I am a person who is difficult to influence, so I am not going to change my opinion in response to this persuasive attempt.” In the next section we describe several experiments conducted to test this notion.

Individual Differences in Perceived Persuasibility

In an initial test of the relationship between people’s beliefs about their persuasibility and their actual persuasibility, we exposed college students to an editorial in favor of the idea of including more broccoli in their diet. Participants were asked to read the editorial and to write down all the thoughts that they had while reading the message. After completing the thought listing, participants reported their attitudes. Finally, all participants were asked to report their beliefs about how resistant they were in general on a series of scale items. Examples of such items included, “It could be said that I am an easy person to persuade,” and “It is really hard to persuade me of something.” As predicted, persuasion varied directly as a function of participants’ beliefs regarding their own vulnerability to persuasion. That is, Experiment 1 showed that participants were less resistant to persuasion when they reported themselves as easily persuaded.

Interestingly, though, we also uncovered a boundary condition for this effect. Specifically, participants’ beliefs only affected their responses to persuasion under relatively low-elaboration conditions. At the end of the experiment, partic-
Participants were asked to report the extent to which the topic was personally relevant for them and the extent to which they had paid attention and thought carefully about the message. Participants’ beliefs about persuasion and self-reported elaboration were treated as continuous factors in the regression analyses. As shown by a significant interaction between resistance beliefs and self-reported elaboration ($\beta = -0.17$, $p = 0.05$), only those who were relatively low in elaboration (i.e., low personal relevance, low attention given) showed a direct impact of their beliefs regarding their own persuasibility. That is, low-elaboration participants showed significantly more attitude change when they thought they were low in resistance to persuasion ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.65$) than when they thought they were relatively high in resistance ($M = 6.33$, $SD = 2.22$), $t(46) = -2.03$, $p < 0.05$ (both variables split at the median). Participants who reported relatively higher levels of message elaboration did not change their attitudes as a direct result of their beliefs toward persuasion. In fact, high-elaboration participants tended to show more persuasion when they thought they were high in resistance to persuasion ($M = 7.88$, $SD = 2.23$) than when they thought they were relatively low ($M = 6.78$, $SD = 1.43$) in resistance, $t(37) = 1.69$, $p = 0.09$.

Taken together, these findings suggest that individuals’ beliefs may have different effects on persuasion depending on the amount of elaboration. When elaboration is relatively low, participants use their beliefs about their own persuasibility as a cue, adjusting their attitudes in the direction of their beliefs. This pattern of results is consonant with previous research in persuasion (e.g., Albarracín & Wyer, 2000; Chaiken & Baldwin, 1981; see also Taylor, 1975; Wood, 1982). However, when elaboration is relatively high, participants showed no direct effect of their meta-beliefs. In fact, there was a tendency for a reverse effect, demonstrating more persuasion when people thought they were difficult to persuade. This pattern of results tentatively suggests that under high elaboration, participants might attempt to compensate or correct for the influence of their own self-views. If true, these findings would be consistent with prior research demonstrating that participants high in elaboration sometimes attempt to correct their judgments for biases to which they perceive they have succumbed, producing over-correction effects (e.g., DeSteno, Petty, Wegener, & Rucker, 2000; Wegener & Petty, 1995, 1997). This assumes, of course, that viewing oneself as very easy or difficult to persuade could be identified as inappropriate. In situations where this is not the case, correction is unlikely to occur.

In a second experiment, we developed a standardized instrument to measure people’s beliefs about their own resistance to persuasion. First, we created a large pool of items designed to measure people’s beliefs about their own susceptibility to persuasion. Based on initial analyses, we retained a set of items that composed the Resistance to Persuasion Scale (RPS). The RPS included the original items from Experiment 1 as well as other items, such as “I find my opinions to be changeable,” “My opinions fluctuate a lot,” and “It is hard for me to change my ideas” (reversed). High scores on the scale indicate less perceived resistance to persuasion. This scale was submitted to different samples
of students at The Ohio State University and evinced excellent psychometric properties.

In our first formal test of the predictive power of the RPS, participants were asked to read the transcript of an editorial from a college radio station on the topic of a new state foster care program. The foster care program was described as a system designed to take care of children who came from broken homes, as well as children who were victims of parental abuse and neglect. All participants received a message in favor of the program. After reading the message, participants were asked to write down the thoughts they had while reading the message and to report their attitudes toward the proposal. Finally, participants completed the 18-item version of the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984) for the purpose of distinguishing between participants high and low in their motivation to elaborate the information. The need for cognition scale contains statements such as, “I prefer complex to simple problems,” and “Thinking is not my idea of fun.”

We predicted and found that individuals exhibited persuasion consistent with their own beliefs about their persuasibility when need for cognition was low, but people appeared to correct for their beliefs when need for cognition was high. That is, a significant interaction between resistance beliefs and need for cognition ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < .01$) revealed that participants low in need for cognition showed more persuasion with low ($M = 7.14$, $SD = 1.27$) rather than high ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 2.31$) scores on the RPS, $t(37) = -3.16$, $p < .01$. However, participants high in need for cognition tended to show more persuasion with high ($M = 6.93$, $SD = 1.60$) rather than low ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 1.43$) scores on the RPS, $t(37) = 1.26$, $p = .26$. These findings replicated our pilot study and provided initial support for the validity of the RPS. This experiment also provided further evidence regarding the multiple roles that persuasion beliefs can play in attitude change.

It is also worth noting that in both of the above experiments, we manipulated argument quality in the persuasive messages and it did not interact with participants’ beliefs about their own general resistance. Also, across studies, the role that these beliefs played was unaffected by the topic of the message, the way in which elaboration was assessed, and the specific measure of resistance beliefs. However, in both experiments the key variable, beliefs about resistance to persuasion, was measured rather than manipulated. For this reason, we conducted a third experiment in which beliefs concerning resistance to persuasion were manipulated by providing participants with false feedback about their general resistance to persuasion. This experiment was designed to help establish the fact that one’s beliefs about one’s own persuasibility have a casual impact on persuasion.

Previous research suggests that individuals’ beliefs about their attitudes can be manipulated and can ultimately affect resistance to persuasion. For example, Chaiken and Baldwin (1981) induced participants to believe they had strong beliefs in favor or against the environment by asking them to answer extreme
statements in a bogus personality questionnaire. As expected, they found that participants used their manipulated beliefs to infer their attitudes. In more recent research, Albarracín and Wyer (2002) used false feedback to induce participants to believe they either supported or opposed the institution of comprehensive exams at their university. Albarracín and Wyer found that participants induced to believe that they supported the institution of comprehensive exams reported more favorable attitudes toward the policy than participants induced to believe that they opposed the policy.

In our third experiment, participants were seated in front of individual computers and informed that they were going to participate in two different research projects. They were told that the first portion of the study was designed to validate different psychological scales for future research interested in predicting people's personalities. Participants were then asked to fill out a questionnaire composed of 16 items, all of them endorsing extreme assertions of resistance to persuasion. These items were worded in an extreme way with the objective of biasing participants' responses in the opposite direction. For example, to induce participants to respond as being low in resistance to persuasion, they received items such as "I do not let anybody convince me of anything," "It is almost impossible for me to change my ideas," and "I have never changed the way I see something." On the other hand, participants in the high resistance to persuasion condition were asked to respond to items such as "I let anybody convince me of anything," "I find my opinions to be very changeable and malleable," and "My opinions always fluctuate a lot."

After completing the questions, participants were asked to wait for a few seconds while the computer processed their previous responses. During this period, participants completed the need for cognition scale. Following this, participants received false feedback on their personality. In the condition of low resistance to persuasion, participants were told they had characteristics such as flexibility, open-mindedness, ability to deal with change, and a willingness to consider others' opinions. In the high resistance to persuasion condition, participants were told they had characteristics such as being resistant to external influences, ability to defend their own points of view, holding consistent beliefs, and having a low vulnerability to outside influence. This false personality feedback has worked in the past to influence people's cognitive responses (see Petty & Brock, 1979).

As illustrated by Fig. 5.1, we found that the false feedback influenced peoples' beliefs and influenced their resistance to the persuasive information. Again, a significant interaction between resistance beliefs and elaboration emerged from the analysis (β = −.24, p < .05), such that participants low in need for cognition showed more attitude change when they were induced to believe that they were low in resistance to persuasion (M = 5.62, SD = 1.77) than when they thought that they were resistant to persuasion, (M = 4.17, SD = 1.55), t(36) = −2.64, p < .05. For participants high in need for cognition, however, attitude change tended to be greater when they were induced to believe that they were resistant to persuasion (M = 6.54, SD = 2.09) than when they were induced to believe
they were vulnerable to persuasion ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 2.43$), $t(35) = 1.89$, $p = .06$. These results conceptually replicated our previous findings in which beliefs about resistance to persuasion were measured rather than manipulated.

In summary, our three experiments examining individuals’ beliefs about their own resistance, whether measured or manipulated, all point to the same conclusion—people’s beliefs about their own resistance impact actual resistance. Specifically, when elaboration is low, individuals who believe they are more resistant to persuasion show less attitude change than individuals who believe they are easily susceptible to persuasion. The fact that this occurs only under low-elaboration conditions suggests that, at least in the present experiments, these self-beliefs function as a cue for people to decide whether or not to adopt a message position. Just as people can rely on external cues when elaboration is low (e.g., source expertise or the mere number of arguments; see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), they can also rely on more internal beliefs about themselves.
Potential Implications of Perceived Persuasibility

These initial findings open up many possibilities for further research and have implications for applied fields. For example, certain contexts in which individuals believe an attempt is being made to persuade them are likely to increase the accessibility of individuals’ beliefs about their own resistance. Conventional wisdom suggests that more persuasion will be possible when people do not realize they are being exposed to a persuasive attempt. The present findings demonstrate that in certain scenarios (i.e., when elaboration is low and individuals believe they are resistant to persuasion) the conventional wisdom would be correct. A salient persuasive message would cause people to consult their persuasion beliefs, they would realize that they generally resist persuasion, and resistance would become more likely. However, our findings also suggest that if an individual believes that he or she is relatively easy to persuade, the activation of such beliefs might increase the impact of persuasive communications, at least under low-elaboration conditions.

In situations where people are more motivated to process, however, individuals may attempt to correct for their beliefs if they think that their natural tendencies are biasing. For example, judges or jury members are often assigned to the task of being as objective and fair as they possibly can. In this situation, individuals who recognize that they are typically resistant to persuasive attempts may become especially vigilant and try to keep an open mind when hearing testimony, statements, etc. These individuals may then become more accepting of arguments and information than usual, provided they have the motivation and ability to correct for their “resistance bias.” The recognition and application of individuals’ beliefs about persuasion is an interesting and exciting area for future research.

The present research also suggests that our perceptions of our own persuasibility are relatively malleable. It is possible to think that beliefs about persuasion might vary from one context to another, and thus one way to manipulate individuals’ beliefs might consist of selecting precisely those contexts in which people believe they are more easily persuaded. Future research should explore these and other issues such as the antecedents of beliefs about persuasion and potential moderators of their effects. For example, in another line of research it has been found that normative beliefs that people hold about persuasion (i.e., beliefs that persuasion is good or bad) can interact with beliefs about persuasibility to predict attitude change (Briñol & Petty, 2002).

Other researchers have found that people’s feelings or beliefs about themselves can increase or decrease vulnerability to persuasion, depending on situational factors. For example, Jacks and O’Brien (this volume) have found that feeling good about oneself (through self-affirmation) can, under specifiable conditions, decrease resistance. Moreover, Sagarin and colleagues (this volume) have found that increasing confidence in oneself by learning how to resist “in-
valid” persuasive attempts (e.g., from famous sources) can ironically make people more vulnerable to “legitimate” persuasive attempts (e.g., from expert sources). We would like to extend these arguments and posit that increasing confidence in oneself, through one mechanism or another, might increase or decrease resistance to persuasion depending on the type of beliefs the individual holds regarding his or her own persuasibility and the degree to which these beliefs are viewed as appropriate. Assuming the meta-beliefs are seen as appropriate, in a person who believes he or she is resistant to persuasion, increasing confidence should enhance resistance; for a person who believes he or she is easily persuaded, increasing confidence should reduce resistance. If a person views his or her default tendencies as inappropriate or biasing, however, and elaboration is relatively high, he or she may try to correct for these beliefs, and the pattern could be attenuated or even reversed.

In the remainder of this chapter, we explore the possibility that in addition to beliefs regarding the extent to which a person is resistant to persuasion, individuals’ beliefs about how they resist can impact persuasion processes and outcomes. That is, we consider the possibility that the specific way in which people believe they resist persuasion might influence the way in which they actually respond to persuasive information under some conditions. We examine the association between people’s perceptions of the effortful strategies they employ to resist persuasion, the actual strategies employed, and the consequences for attitude change.

**INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED RESISTANCE STRATEGIES**

When a person wants to resist an advocacy, there are several processes a person can implement to defend his or her attitude against counter-attitudinal information. The individual might attempt to derogate or discredit the source of the information (e.g., Tannenbaum, Macauley, Norris, 1966; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996; see also Pratkanis, Greenwald, Leippe, & Baumgardner, 1988), or discount the message altogether (see Gruder, Cook, Hennigan, Flay, Alessis, & Halamaj, 1978). Resistance can also be achieved through selective attention to attitude-congruent information, or selective avoidance of attitude-incongruent information (Albarracín & Mitchell, 2002; Frey, 1986; Gilbert, 1993). Simply responding to a message with negative affect or irritation has also been found to enhance resistance (e.g., Cacioppo & Petty, 1979; Jacks & Devine, 2000; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996). As just discussed, individuals may also rely on their perceptions of their own persuasibility to resist a message (i.e., “I am resistant to persuasion so I won’t change my attitude.”). These strategies, by nature, do not necessitate a great deal of thought to be implemented.

However, there are resistance strategies that do require considerable thought to execute. First, resistance might be accomplished by actively generating coun-
arguments or negative thoughts against the opposing viewpoint (e.g., Brock, 1967; Killeya & Johnson, 1998; Papageorgis, 1968; Petty & Cacioppo, 1977; see Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981). For example, an individual in favor of capital punishment, when confronted with a message against capital punishment, may actively attempt to resist the message by finding fault in it. This individual actively searches for information about what is wrong with the opposing viewpoint.

A second effortful way to accomplish resistance is through attitude bolstering, or reinforcing one’s own stance on an issue (Lewand & Stotland, 1961; Lydon, Zanna, & Ross, 1988). For example, an individual in favor of capital punishment might resist a message by actively thinking about everything that supports capital punishment. Rather than looking for fault in the opposing message (i.e., counterarguing), this individual seeks out merit in one’s own viewpoint. For a similar distinction, see McGuire’s discussion of supportive versus refutational resistance strategies (1964).

Although the multitude of resistance strategies is interesting and worthy of study, we first examined individual differences in attitude bolstering and counterarguing. These are both effortful resistance strategies likely to produce enduring resistance, but, as just surmised, they are fundamentally different approaches to resistance. We propose that one determinant of whether an individual will bolster or counterargue is the individual’s own set of beliefs about how he or she resists persuasion. We now turn to discuss the construction of an individual difference scale to identify preferences for counterarguing versus attitude bolstering methods, and to discuss some consequences of these preferences.

**Scale Construction**

We began with a set of 25 items designed to measure preferences for resisting through bolstering versus counterarguing. Examples of items geared toward those who prefer to counterargue included, “When someone challenges my beliefs, I enjoy disputing what they have to say,” and “I take pleasure in arguing with those who have opinions that differ from my own.” Items geared toward those who prefer to bolster included, “When someone gives me a point of view that conflicts with my attitudes, I like to think about why my views are right for me,” and “When someone has a different perspective on an issue, I like to make a mental list of the reasons in support of my perspective.”

In our first study, 600 Ohio State University undergraduates completed the scale. We divided our sample into two groups of 300. The first group was used for the purpose of an exploratory factor analysis, and the second group was used for purposes of a confirmatory factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis revealed clear support for two distinct factors that were only slightly positively correlated ($r = .20$). Based on parsimony and goodness of fit, 12 items were retained from the exploratory analysis for inclusion in the Bolster-Counterargue Scale (BCS). Six of the items were related to bolstering (factor one) and six
were related to counterarguing (factor two). After developing the scale based on
the exploratory analysis, a confirmatory analysis was carried out. The confirm-
atory analysis revealed that a two-factor solution with the same six items for
the counterarguing and bolstering subscales fit the data well. The confirmatory
analysis also found that the two factors showed a small positive correlation
($r = .18$).

The results of our first study suggest that the two-factor solution we obtained
using the 12 items is reliable. The fact that the two factors are only slightly
correlated suggests that preferences for bolstering and counterarguing are essen-
tially orthogonal. Thus, an individual high in bolstering may be either high or
low in counterarguing.

Scale Prediction

Having established that the BCS has good structural properties, we sought to
examine its predictive utility. Past research has shown that when individuals are
instructed to counterargue or bolster, attitude change is often attenuated (Killeya
& Johnson, 1998; McGuire, 1964). Thus, we expected that individuals naturally
inclined to bolster or counterargue would show less attitude change when con-
fronted with a persuasive message. That is, higher scores on either of these
dimensions should be associated with reduced attitude change. To examine the
relationship between our scales and attitude change, an experiment was con-
ducted.

In this experiment, all participants read an advertisement for “Brown’s De-
partment Store,” reported their attitudes toward Brown’s, and completed the
BCS. Participants’ scores on each subscale were calculated and then submitted
to a regression to predict attitude change. As predicted, higher scores on the
bolstering subscale were significantly associated with less attitude change ($\beta = -.27, p = .02$); similarly, higher scores on the counterarguing subscale
were significantly associated with less attitude change ($\beta = -.25, p < .05$).
There was no interaction between the bolstering and counterarguing subscales
in predicting attitude change.

The results of this experiment provide initial evidence that individuals’ per-
ceptions of how they resist have implications for attitude change. The more
individuals saw themselves as inclined to use a resistance method—whether
bolstering or counterarguing—the less likely they were to succumb to a persua-
sive message. However, the experiment does little to distinguish between the
bolstering and counterarguing subscales. Thus, based on this experiment, it is
unclear whether our two scales predict the use of specific resistance strategies
or simply a general preference for resistance. The fact that the correlation be-
tween the scales is low, however, supports the independence of the resistance
strategies. Nevertheless, it would be useful to demonstrate that the subscales
predict how people resist.

If the subscales predict how individuals resist persuasion, this should be ap-
parent in the type of thoughts individuals generate when resisting a message.
Specifically, individuals high on the bolstering subscale should generate thoughts toward a message that represent arguments in favor of their position, as opposed to arguments against the opposing position. Likewise, individuals high on the counterarguing subscale should primarily generate thoughts that reflect arguments against the opposing position, rather than arguments in favor of their own position.

To test the influence of people’s resistance preferences on actual thoughts, a second experiment was conducted. In this experiment, all participants were presented with a message advocating the adoption of senior comprehensive exams at their university. Participants were told that a policy of senior comprehensive exams would require them to pass an exam before they could graduate from their university, and that failing the exam would require the student to take additional classes (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Thus, the topic was designed to be counter-attitudinal and create a situation in which participants were likely motivated to resist persuasion. After being informed about the exam policy, participants were given the arguments in favor of the exams, followed by the opportunity to list their thoughts about and attitudes toward the exam. Finally, all participants completed the BCS.

Replicating the findings of the first experiment, scores on both the bolstering subscale (β = −.22, p = .06) and counterarguing subscale (β = −.25, p < .05) were negatively correlated with attitude change. To examine participants’ resistance methods, we coded thoughts as representing ideas bolstering their own position (e.g., “The current method of doing things already has the right balance of exams”) or counterarguments against the message (e.g., “Implementing comprehensive exams will also cause a lot of unnecessary stress”). After coding the thoughts, we examined the predictive utility of our measures. The bolstering subscale was positively and significantly correlated with the number of bolstering thoughts: the higher an individual’s preference for attitude bolstering, the more bolstering thoughts that were exhibited (β = .30, p = .01). The bolstering subscale was uncorrelated with the number of counterarguments generated (β = −.02, p = .90). Furthermore, the counterarguing subscale was positively correlated with the number of counterarguments generated: the higher an individual was in the preference to counterargue, the more counterarguments that were generated (β = .22, p = .07). However, the counterarguing subscale was uncorrelated with the number of bolstering thoughts generated (β = .07, p = .55). There was no interaction between the two scales in predicting thoughts. Thus, the results of the second experiment demonstrate that each subscale uniquely predicts the type of thoughts people generate when trying to resist a message.

In summary, the present research supports the idea that there are general differences in the extent to which people use different thoughtful resistance strategies, such as bolstering and counterarguing. The spontaneous generation of each type of cognitive response when trying to resist a message may vary from one individual to another, and the BCS may prove useful in assessing these individual differences. Furthermore, collapsing across the experiments, a simultaneous regression showed that both the counterarguing and bolstering scales
uniquely predicted attitude change, even when controlling for the other. This suggests that each scale possesses unique predictability above the other.

These findings help us understand how peoples’ beliefs about themselves can influence the method by which they resist persuasion, and they also raise new questions that should be addressed by further research. For example, it would be interesting to examine whether individuals who tend to bolster, versus counterargue, differ in their responses to specific influence strategies. On the one hand, bolstering may be more effective when individuals have little knowledge about an opposing viewpoint and thus are unable to counterargue. On the other hand, counterarguing may be more effective when individuals have knowledge about the opposing viewpoint and are able to dispute it, as the successful refutation of a message may add new counterarguments to individuals’ counter-persuasion arsenal (for other implications of successful refutation, see Tormala & Petty, this volume). Also intriguing is the possibility that argument strength might have a differential impact on attitude change depending on someone’s preferred resistance strategy. If a message is argued very cogently, for example, counterarguing may be quite difficult, so people who prefer bolstering over counterarguing may more effectively defend their attitudes in these contexts.

Future research may also examine whether there are situations in which people attempt to correct for the processing styles they perceive themselves to employ. In the present study, individuals were allowed to process the message in any manner they wished. However, if individuals were in a situation where objectivity was desired (such as the courtroom), and they saw their processing style as inappropriate, correction or overcorrection might occur as in the research using the RPS.

It would also be interesting to test whether these individual differences are operative across a variety of topics, or if individuals only use them when they are motivated to resist the message to some degree. For example, it is unclear at present how these scales would function in a situation where individuals actually wish to accept a message. If these scales only tap resistance strategies, they may not have much predictive power when a resistance motivation is absent. However, if these scales tap chronic dispositions, individuals may employ these strategies even when they wish to accept a message. This might lead individuals high on the counterarguing scale, for example, to be less likely to change their attitude even when attitude change is desired. This last point stresses the importance of considering resistance as a motivation in future research. Of course, before we conclude that the BCS assesses a chronic disposition, it would be important to assess its stability over time.
FUTURE DIRECTIONS:  
MULTIPLE ROLES FOR VARIABLES

According to the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), any one variable can have an impact on persuasion (or resistance) by serving in different roles in different situations. For example, past research has shown mood to play a variety of roles in persuasion (see Petty, DeSteno, & Rucker, 2001). When elaboration is low (e.g., low personal relevance), mood may serve as a simple cue. An individual may misattribute the mood to the message and subsequently show more persuasion when in a positive mood as compared to a neutral mood (Petty, Schumann, Richman, & Strathman, 1993). When elaboration is high (e.g., high personal relevance), mood can bias processing. For example, Petty et al. (1993) found that the thoughts of individuals in a happy mood were more positive than those of individuals processing the same message in a neutral mood. Finally, when elaboration is moderate, mood may determine the amount of processing. Wegener, Petty, and Smith (1995), for instance, found that happy individuals increased processing if they believed a message would maintain their happiness, but decreased processing if they believed a message would reduce their happiness (for a detailed description of these and other roles, see Petty, 1997; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Petty & Briñol, 2002).

In the present research, we found that individuals’ beliefs about their own resistance affected attitude change by serving as simple cues (i.e., research on the RPS scale) or by influencing the type of processing (i.e., research on the BCS). However, beliefs about one’s own persuasibility or how one processes information might take on different roles under varying degrees of elaboration. For example, consider beliefs about one’s own persuasibility. If an individual perceives himself as difficult to persuade, elaboration is high, and his resistance is not seen as biasing, he may actually engage in more defensive processing of the message (e.g., more counterarguing, more bolstering) in an attempt to dismiss it. For example, if people are confronted with an attempt to change their core values about abortion, and elaboration is high, an individual may think, “I’m hard to persuade, and that’s okay in this situation, so I’m going to counterargue this message!”

Likewise, individual differences on the BCS might play different roles as a function of elaboration. Our research on the BCS examined situations in which elaboration was relatively high, as everyone was instructed to process the message and had the resources to do so. When elaboration is moderate, however, these beliefs might determine the extent of message processing. Individuals who are high in counterarguing may process the message more, since processing the arguments would be necessary for counterargumentation to occur. Individuals who are high in bolstering, on the other hand, may be more likely to rehearse their preexisting attitude-relevant knowledge rather than process the message. Examining the multiple roles these beliefs can have is an intriguing and potentially important avenue for future research.
CONCLUSION

As early as the 1950s researchers attempted to understand individual differences in resistance to persuasion. Until recently, however, these measures have been relatively limited in scope. In the present chapter, we suggest a meta-cognitive approach to understanding people’s general resistance tendencies. We presented some early evidence in this regard and focused on an examination of people’s own beliefs about how resistant they are and the ways in which they resist persuasive attempts. Consistent with this meta-cognitive approach, we developed two new individual difference measures. The first measure, the Resistance to Persuasion Scale, assesses individual differences in people’s perceptions of their own persuasibility. The second measure, the Bolster-Counterargue Scale, assesses individual differences in people’s beliefs about what strategies they use to resist persuasion. The combination of both scales may provide a more complete instrument to assess general beliefs about persuasion.

The present research shows that beliefs about persuasion, measured by these scales and manipulated using false feedback, can play different roles in attitude change depending on the situation. When the elaboration likelihood is relatively low, individuals might use their beliefs about persuasibility as a cue to infer their response to persuasive messages. Under relatively high-elaboration conditions, beliefs about how a person resists persuasion can influence the actual thoughts a person has in response to a persuasive message, ultimately affecting attitude change. Finally, if elaboration is high and an individual’s beliefs are seen as a source of bias, the individual might try to correct or adjust for the perceived bias.

In short, the current chapter argues for the utility of considering peoples’ beliefs related to their own resistance and how they resist. The research presented has examined these perspectives in situations where an individual is likely to possess a motivation to resist. Continuing to examine resistance beliefs from these various angles will likely provide a more complete picture of the role such beliefs have in persuasion processes and outcomes.

REFERENCES


