Imagine a typical political campaign battle in which two candidates are running against each other and hold opposing positions on most major issues. Now imagine that Eddie, an avid opponent of abortion rights, is exposed to a persuasive appeal from one of the candidates in which the candidate argues in favor of the woman’s right to choose. Because this message is incongruent with Eddie’s attitude, he generates counterarguments against it and thus resists attitude change. The present chapter asks whether when Eddie resists the advocacy, his initial attitude against abortion rights might still be impacted in other, subtle ways. Our specific interest is in the possibility that when Eddie resists persuasion, he might under specifiable conditions become more or less convinced of the validity of his own attitude. In other words, when people resist persuasive attacks, are there any implications for the certainty with which their original attitudes are held?

Over the years, attitude change researchers have been most concerned with making persuasion successful. Beginning with the seminal work on persuasion by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953), considerable attention has been focused on developing models that predict the conditions under which persuasive communications will produce attitude change (see also Greenwald, 1968; McGuire, 1968; Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981). The basic assumption underlying much
of this work has been that if a persuasive message does not change the target attitude in terms of valence or extremity (i.e., the message has been resisted), it has simply failed. Even researchers interested in resistance to persuasion as a topic worthy of study in its own right (e.g., McGuire, 1964) appear to assume that once someone resists a persuasive message, the initial attitude has not been impacted.

In the present chapter, we argue against this view of resistance. We propose that when people resist persuasive attacks, their initial attitudes can change in terms of the certainty with which they are held. We argue that depending on the meta-cognitive inferences people form about their attitudes after a persuasive message is resisted, they can either gain or lose confidence in these attitudes.

WHAT IS RESISTANCE?

In the attitude change literature, many different meanings have been associated with the concept of resistance. Indeed, it can be viewed as an outcome, a process, a motivation, or a quality of attitudes or people (Petty, Tormala, & Rucker, in press). Perhaps the most common conceptualization of resistance has been as an outcome. In this sense, resistance refers to the absence of attitude change, or even attitude change away from the persuasive appeal (i.e., boomerang; see Johnson & Smith-McLallen, this volume).

As a process, resistance refers to the various mechanisms through which people prevent persuasive messages from changing their attitudes. Numerous mechanisms of resistance have been identified. For example, when exposed to a persuasive attack someone might generate counterarguments or negative thoughts (e.g., Brock, 1967; Killeya & Johnson, 1998; Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981), bolster his or her initial attitude (e.g., Lewan & Stotland, 1961; Lydon, Zanna, & Ross, 1988), derogate the source of the message (e.g., Tannenbaum, Macauley, & Norris, 1966), or experience negative affect and attribute it to the message or source (e.g., Zuwerink & Devine, 1996). Recent research suggests that there may be individual differences in the mechanisms of resistance people use (Briñol, Rucker, Tormala, & Petty, this volume).

As a motivation, resistance refers to having a goal to resist attitude change or protect the existing attitude (see also Jacks & O’Brien, this volume; Knowles & Linn, this volume). Several specific motives have been identified as sources of resistance. For instance, reactance involves the motivation to maintain or restore freedom (Brehm, 1966). Consistency motives have also been implicated in this regard. According to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and balance (Heider, 1958) theories, people are motivated to resist changing their attitudes when doing so will result in inconsistent cognitions. Resistance could also be guided by accuracy motives, which might lead a person to defend the current attitude if he or she is highly confident that it is correct (Petty & Wegener, 1999).
Finally, as a *quality*, resistance has been used to describe the types of people or attitudes that do not change. That is, certain types of people (e.g., those high in dogmatism or authoritarianism; Rokeach, 1960; Miller, 1965) are generally more difficult to persuade than others (for a more detailed discussion see Briñol et al., this volume). Similarly, certain types of attitudes—such as those that are high in certainty or accessibility—tend to be more resistant to persuasion than others (see Petty & Krosnick, 1995, for a review).

The focus of the present chapter is on the types of inferences people form about their own attitudes once the outcome of resistance has occurred. In addressing this question, though, our research touches upon resistance in all its forms. That is, we examine situations in which people are *motivated* to resist a personally relevant and counterattitudinal message. We then induce them to generate counterarguments against this message (*process*). Once people perceive that they have resisted persuasion (*outcome*), we explore the implications of this perception for the *quality* of their initial attitudes (i.e., how certain they are about the attitudes, how resistant the attitudes are to subsequent persuasion, and how well the attitudes predict behavioral intentions).

**ATTITUDE CERTAINTY**

Before turning to our studies, it is useful to discuss our primary dependent measure—attitude certainty. Attitude certainty refers to the sense of conviction with which one holds one’s attitude, or one’s subjective assessment of the validity of his or her attitude (Festinger, 1950, 1954; Gross, Holtz, & Miller, 1995). Research on attitude certainty has shown that it has numerous implications for other kinds of evaluative responding, including attitude-relevant behavior, an attitude’s resistance to persuasion, and an attitude’s temporal persistence. Fazio and Zanna (1978), for instance, examined the attitude–behavior relationship in a study addressing people’s attitudes toward participating in psychology experiments. Participants were asked to report the number of psychology experiments in which they had previously participated, their attitudes toward psychology experiments, and the certainty with which they held these attitudes. At the end of the experimental session, the researchers allowed participants to volunteer for psychology experiments scheduled for later in the year. They found that the more certain participants were about their attitudes toward psychology experiments, the more these attitudes predicted volunteering for future participation. In other words, increased attitude certainty strengthened the relationship between attitudes and behavior.

Attitude certainty has also been shown to facilitate resistance to persuasion (e.g., Babad, Ariav, Rosen, & Salomon, 1987; Bassili, 1996; Krosnick & Abelson, 1992; Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988; Wu & Shaffer, 1987). Bassili (1996), for instance, used a telephone survey to examine people’s attitudes and attitude certainty with respect to three target issues. After respondents reported
their attitudes toward each of these issues over the phone, they were challenged by a counterargument against the attitude they had expressed. Bassili found that high levels of attitude certainty enhanced resistance to persuasion on all three of the target issues as compared to lower levels of certainty—that is, the more certain people were, the less they changed in response to the argument against their attitude. In a separate study, Bassili (1996) also examined the temporal persistence of attitudes and found that the more certain respondents were about their attitudes, the more stable these attitudes were, or the less they changed, over a two-week period.

As this research suggests, attitude certainty is an important characteristic of people's attitudes that has very real consequences. Nevertheless, little prior research has explored the possible effects of resisting persuasion on attitude certainty. Although we know that certainty can enhance resistance, we know less of what the effect of resistance is on certainty. In other words, researchers have identified various other antecedents of attitude certainty (see Gross et al., 1995, for a review), but little is known about whether resisting a persuasive message can influence attitude certainty. In the following sections we outline our perspective. In brief, we believe that under some conditions resisting persuasion can lead to either an increase or a decrease in attitude certainty. Following our conceptual position, we describe some of the evidence we have obtained that is consistent with this view.

RESISTANCE AND INCREASES IN ATTITUDE CERTAINTY

One intriguing possibility is that when people resist persuasion, the certainty with which they hold their initial attitudes can be augmented. We propose a meta-cognitive framework for this phenomenon, whereby when people resist persuasion they can perceive their own resistance and form corresponding inferences about their attitudes (e.g., feeling more certain that their initial attitude is correct). Following the logic of attribution theory, in the meta-cognition literature it is typically assumed that when people "observe" their thoughts or meta-cognitive experience, they only use this information to form a judgment if it is perceived to be diagnostic (see Strack & Föster, 1998, for a related discussion). When meta-cognitive information is deemed less diagnostic, reliance on it in forming a judgment is attenuated (e.g., Jacoby & Kelley, 1987; Schwarz, Bless, et al., 1991). In other words, just as salient situational explanations for someone else's behavior tend to dampen dispositional attributions about that person (see Gilbert, 1998, for a review), salient alternative explanations for one's own meta-cognitive experience can lead people to discount that experience or information.

We use the same attributional logic in an attempt to understand the role of meta-cognition in resistance to persuasion. We argue that increases in attitude certainty following resistance likely stem from a meta-cognitive attribution pro-
cess, whereby people make inferences about their attitudes based on their perception of their own resistance. When people perceive that they have resisted persuasion, they might infer that their attitude is correct, and feel more certain about it. Indeed, if their attitude were incorrect, they should have changed it in the face of persuasion. Consistent with the attribution literature, however, we also postulate that people consider “situational” factors before reaching such conclusions about their attitudes. More specifically, resisting a persuasive attack viewed as cogent should confer more certainty about one’s attitude than resisting an attack viewed as specious. A clearly weak attack is less challenging to one’s attitude, and resistance to it might therefore be perceived as less diagnostic. That is, resisting a weak attack might indicate that one’s attitude is correct, but it might also indicate that the message simply lacked the power to change even an erroneous attitude (thus leaving certainty unchanged). In short, when the weak nature of an attack provides a salient situational attribution for resistance, resistance becomes uninformative.

In sum, we propose that when people resist persuasion, they can detect their own resistance, form an inference that their attitude must be correct, and adjust for situational factors such as the perceived strength of the attack. Our framework suggests, then, that one situation in which resistance will increase attitude certainty is when the message recipient both believes the persuasive message has been resisted and views the resisted attack as reasonably strong. If one or both of these conditions are not met, attitude certainty is not expected to increase.

In a recent series of experiments we tested this possibility (Tormala & Petty, 2002). In each experiment we exposed undergraduates to a counter-attitudinal persuasive message promoting the implementation of senior comprehensive exams as a graduation requirement at their university (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Participants were told that if they failed to pass these exams, they would not be allowed to graduate until they had successfully retaken them. All participants were told that we were conducting this research on behalf of their university to assess student reactions to the exam policy, and that in this capacity we would be asking them not only to report their opinions of comprehensive exams, but also to provide a list of the counterarguments they could raise against the proposal. Following these instructions, participants were presented with the persuasive message in favor of comprehensive exams, after which they listed their counterarguments, completed attitude measures, and indicated the extent to which they were certain about their attitudes.

Importantly, each experiment contained three basic message conditions: a perceived strong message condition, a perceived weak message condition, and a control condition. In the two persuasive message conditions, participants actually read the exact same message in favor of comprehensive exams. In both conditions, participants read more detailed versions of the following arguments (adapted from Petty & Cacioppo, 1986): Grades would improve if the exam policy were adopted, implementing the exams would allow the university to take part in a national trend, the average starting salary of graduates would increase, and implementing the exams would allow students to compare their
TABLE 4.1  
Attitude, Attitude Certainty, and Attitude-Behavioral Intention Consistency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Measure</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>“Weak”</th>
<th>“Strong”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.82&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.91&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.03&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.10&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.33&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>6.16&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.68&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.96&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.81&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certainty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.83&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.78&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.39&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude-Behavior</td>
<td>.68&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.72&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>.89&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Tormala and Petty (2002). Means with the same subscript do not differ from each other (interpret within rows only).

scores with those of students at other universities. Although participants in both persuasive message conditions read the exact same arguments, their perception of these arguments was manipulated. In the “strong” message condition, participants were led to believe the proposal contained the strongest arguments the university could muster. In the “weak” message condition, participants were led to believe the proposal contained weak arguments, so that the researchers could collect students’ reactions to all kinds of points that might be raised in support of the issue. Thus, participants in these conditions read the same message, but were induced to believe it was either strong or weak. In the control condition, participants were told about the possible exam policy, but then read an unrelated article and were not asked to think of counterarguments.

In the initial experiment using this paradigm, we examined the basic hypothesis that when people resist persuasion they become more certain, but only when the message they resist is believed to be strong. The data were highly consistent with this notion. First, as indicated in the top portion of Table 4.1, participants in both the perceived strong and perceived weak message conditions resisted persuasion. Resistance was indicated by the lack of significant difference between attitudes in either of these conditions and attitudes in the control condition, where a persuasive message was not even presented. There was, however, a significant effect of message condition on attitude certainty. As illustrated in
Table 4.1, certainty increased relative to the control when participants resisted a message they believed to be strong, but not when they resisted a message believed to be weak. This effect was particularly telling given that the “strong” and “weak” persuasive messages did not really differ in any substantive way, but only in whether they had been labeled as strong or weak.

In subsequent experiments we extended these findings. For example, using the same procedure as the first experiment, we conducted a study in which we also included a measure of behavioral intentions in order to determine if the certainty effects uncovered in our initial work had any implications for the attitude–behavior relationship. This experiment was essentially a replication of the first, but at the end of the session we asked participants how they intended to vote on the comprehensive exam issue if it were placed before undergraduates. To create a sensitive measure of voting intention, we asked participants to respond on a 9-point scale ranging from definitely against to definitely in favor. As indicated in the lower portion of Table 4.1, we replicated the attitude and attitude certainty effects from the first study, but also found that the findings had implications for the correlation between attitudes and voting intentions. Although the simple attitude–behavioral intention correlation was positive and significant in each condition, it was also moderated by message condition, such that it was significantly higher in the perceived strong message condition than in the other two conditions, which did not differ from each other. Importantly, then, we found that when people resist persuasion, their feelings of increased certainty can have ramifications for behavioral intentions. Such intentions are consequential in that they are highly predictive of actual behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

In a separate experiment, we also assessed the consequences of the certainty effect for resistance to subsequent persuasion. In this experiment, participants listed their counterarguments and reported their attitudes after a first message, which was identical to that used in the other studies. Then participants engaged in an unrelated filler task for approximately 15 minutes. Following the filler task, participants were exposed to a second persuasive message in the same direction as the first, but with new arguments. The amount of attitude change evinced in response to the second message served as a measure of resistance, such that less attitude change indicated greater resistance to the second message. The findings, illustrated in Fig. 4.1, matched our predictions based on the certainty effect. That is, participants were most resistant to the second attack after having resisted an initial attack believed to be strong. In fact, in this condition the difference between time 1 and time 2 attitudes was not significant. When participants resisted a message believed to be weak, however, attitude change from time 1 to time 2 was significant and equivalent to the amount of change in the control condition. Therefore, only when participants believed that they had resisted an initial strong message did they resist the second attack, even when that initial message was objectively no different from the one labeled as weak.

It is important to note that in each of these experiments we also examined the counterarguments participants generated against the comprehensive exam
FIG. 4.1. Attitudes after first message (time 1) and after second message (time 2). (Adapted from Tormala & Petty, 2002).
proposal. Analysis revealed that there were no differences in any study in the number, quality, or focus of counterarguments generated. Thus, it appeared that participants were not resisting the message any differently when they thought it was strong versus weak, but they formed different inferences about their attitudes based on their perception that it was either strong or weak. In fact, in a separate experiment we found that participants did see the messages as differentially compelling depending on our perceived message strength manipulation, and they actually felt that their resistance had been more successful when the message was viewed as strong. What is more, these effects were moderated by people’s perceptions of whether or not they had resisted persuasion. Only under conditions in which participants were led to believe they had resisted did certainty increase. When participants were led to believe they did not resist persuasion, certainty was unaffected. These findings are consistent with the notion that people must have the subjective perception that they have not changed their attitudes following a (strong) persuasive attack for certainty to be augmented.

RESISTANCE AND DECREASES IN ATTITUDE CERTAINTY

In other recent research (Tormala & Petty, 2003), we have explored the possibility that attitude certainty can also decrease when someone resists a persuasive attack. That is, under some conditions, meta-cognitive inferences might lead a person to conclude that his or her attitude is less correct, thus reducing confidence in it. We postulate more specifically that even when people objectively resist persuasion, they can become less certain about their initial attitudes if they believe they struggled to resist. For example, people can perceive that they have resisted a persuasive attack but also perceive that it was difficult to do so, or that the counterarguments they generated were specious. If people have the perception that a persuasive attack has only been resisted by the skin of their teeth, they might logically conclude that the initial attitude is less valid and thus become less certain about it. In essence, this perspective retains the attributional logic used to explain increases in attitude certainty but explores the impact of a new type of situational factor—the perceived efficacy of one’s resistance. We suggest that in some situations people can perceive that they have resisted persuasion but also realize that they barely resisted and therefore lose confidence in their attitudes.

In an initial test of this possibility, we presented undergraduate participants with a counter-attitudinal persuasive appeal, again promoting the implementation of a new comprehensive examination requirement for graduation. After introducing participants to the issue, but before presenting them with the persuasive message, we asked them to report their attitudes and attitude certainty, based on what they knew right then. Participants were subsequently told that they would be allowed to read the proposal in favor of the comprehensive exam policy, and
that we would be asking them to provide a list of the counterarguments they could raise against it. After reading the message, which contained the same arguments as in the experiments described earlier in the chapter, participants listed their counterarguments. Immediately following this procedure, participants were led to believe that the computer program they were using was designed to analyze their counterarguments as they were entered by comparing them to a larger pool of counterarguments generated by other participants earlier in the term. Participants were randomly assigned to receive bogus feedback, based on these ostensible comparisons, that their counterarguments were either strong or weak. Finally, participants completed time 2 measures of attitudes and attitude certainty.

Analysis of time 1 and time 2 attitudes indicated that there was no attitude change following exposure to the persuasive message. That is, participants resisted persuasion, as expected given that the message was counter-attitudinal and they were explicitly instructed to think of counterarguments. There was, however, a significant interaction on attitude certainty. As illustrated in Fig. 4.2, participants became significantly less certain of their attitudes after being led to believe they had generated specious counterarguments. When participants had been led to believe their counterarguments were strong, attitude certainty did not decrease, but rather was maintained at a relatively high level. Thus, the data from this experiment were consistent with the notion that under some conditions individuals can resist persuasion according to conventional standards (i.e., zero attitude change in response to a persuasive appeal), but lose confidence in their attitudes when they believe they did not do a good job resisting (i.e., their counterarguments were weak).

In this study we also examined the correspondence between participants' post-message attitudes and behavioral intentions. As a measure of behavioral intentions, we told participants that we would be attempting to solicit some volunteer assistance in making telephone calls to other undergraduates at the same university to inform them of the benefits of the comprehensive exam policy. Participants were asked to report how many phone calls they would be willing to make if we contacted them in the future, and responded on a 1–9 scale ranging from 0 calls to 40 to 45 calls. As expected, we found that attitudes were more highly correlated with behavioral intentions when participants were led to believe their counterarguments were strong, \( r = .42, p < .05 \), than when they were led to believe their counterarguments were weak, \( r = .16, p = .42 \). This finding suggests that the attenuation of certainty had real implications for other outcomes.

As in our earlier research (Tormala & Petty, 2002) there were no measurable differences in the counterarguments generated by participants across conditions. One intriguing question, however, is why did attitude certainty not increase when participants were led to believe they had generated compelling arguments against the persuasive attack? Two possible explanations for the lack of increase seem plausible. First, there was a potential ceiling effect in the strong counterargument feedback condition. Pre-message certainty in that condition was ap-
FIG. 4.2. Pre-message certainty (time 1) and post-message certainty (time 2) as a function of counterargument feedback.
proximately 7 on a 9-point scale. In other words, there was little room for substantial increase in certainty in that condition. Second, based on the Tormala and Petty (2002) findings, we would not necessarily expect attitude certainty to increase in that condition. A key finding in that research was that for people to become more certain about their attitudes after resisting persuasion, they must perceive that the persuasive attack they have resisted is a strong one. Perceived message strength was not manipulated in the present experiment. Moreover, the message that was used was moderate in strength, containing both strong and weak arguments. As a consequence, any spontaneous assessments of message strength were likely to produce ambiguous judgments. In short, perceptions of message strength may not have been high enough to elevate certainty in the strong counterargument condition.

Also provocative is the question of what happens when people truly fail to resist—for instance, when people attempt to counterargue a message but are ultimately persuaded by it. Recent research by Rucker and Petty (in press) provides one possible answer to this question. In a series of studies, Rucker and Petty found that when people attempt to resist a message that is extremely compelling, counterarguing can become quite difficult, thus opening the door for attitude change. Interestingly, Rucker and Petty found that when this occurs, people can become even more certain about their new attitudes than if they had not attempted to resist in the first place. That is, individuals who were persuaded when trying to resist were more confident in their new attitudes than were individuals who were changed to the same degree as a function of more objective thinking. From a meta-cognitive perspective, unsuccessfully attempting to resist an incoming attack appears to highlight the strength of the opposing attitudinal position, making people more certain that their new (changed) attitudes are correct and more likely that they will behave in accord with their attitudes in the future.

**SUMMARY**

As discussed earlier, we believe our findings follow from the meta-cognitive inferences people make about their own attitudes when they perceive that they have resisted persuasion. Following this logic, we suspect that when people resist persuasion with relative ease and “observe” this resistance, the default inference is probably that the initial attitude is correct, thus instilling confidence in that attitude. Importantly, though, this inference appears to be corrected to account for potential situational forces that may also have been at play. For example, people appear to take the perceived strength of the persuasive attack into consideration. When the attack is perceived to be strong, the inference that the attitude is correct is bolstered and people feel more certain about their attitude than they did before. When the attack is perceived to be weak, on the other hand, the inference that the attitude is correct is undermined because am-
bigness remains as to whether a stronger attack would also have been resisted. Under these circumstances, attitude confidence does not increase.

People also appear to attend to perceptions of the strength of their own resistance. We found that people can become less certain of their attitudes when they believe the counterarguments they generated were not compelling. In other words, when people perceive that they have struggled to resist in some way, they can actually lose confidence in their initial attitude, even when by conventional standards they have resisted persuasion. We suspect that the subjective experience of difficulty resisting would produce similar effects.

Importantly, we have also shown that these effects on attitude certainty have implications for other forms of evaluative responding. In the first set of studies (Tormala & Petty, 2002) we found that by successfully resisting a message believed to be strong, people’s attitudes can become more predictive of behavioral intentions and more resistant to later persuasion. When the resisted message was viewed as weak, resistance did not confer these same benefits. In the study examining reductions in attitude certainty (Tormala & Petty, 2003), we showed that this effect can be reversed. That is, when people resist persuasion but perceive that their resistance was not too compelling, they not only lose confidence in the attitude, but they also show a reduced willingness to rely on their attitudes when forming behavioral intentions. Therefore, even resisted attacks can have a hidden kind of success in terms of weakening the target attitude.

THE PRESENT FINDINGS IN CONTEXT

The current findings represent a potentially important contribution to the persuasion literature. Most traditional approaches to the study of persuasion have assumed that the story ends when persuasion is resisted—that is, the persuasive message has simply been unsuccessful. Thus, when resistance has occurred, inquiry has stopped. We question this assumption and suggest that in many cases inquiry might fruitfully begin when resistance has occurred. In other words, resistance itself appears to have many potentially important consequences. We have postulated and demonstrated that it can affect attitude certainty, attitude–behavior correspondence, and future resistance to persuasive attacks. We see these studies as having intriguing connections to other areas of persuasion research and social psychology more generally.

Inoculation Theory

The objective of the current chapter, like many other chapters in this volume, is to offer a fresh perspective on resistance to persuasion. Nevertheless, it is important to consider historical perspectives on resistance, and how our findings relate to other theoretical frameworks. In particular, our findings appear to have implications for McGuire’s classic work on inoculation theory (McGuire, 1964).
In this work McGuire argued that people's beliefs can be inoculated against persuasive attacks through exposure to an initial attack that is easily resisted. In other words, inoculation theory suggested that when people resist an initial persuasive message, they sometimes become more resistant to future messages, presumably because they gain motivation and ability to build strong defenses. Although this enhanced resistance effect is similar on the surface to some of the findings discussed in the present chapter, the current conceptual framework is actually quite different from inoculation theory (see Petty et al., in press; Tormala & Petty, 2002, for more detailed discussion). Most importantly, our framework for future resistance to persuasion revolves around attitude certainty effects and the inferences people form about their attitudes after resisting an initial attack. By adopting this perspective, we are able to account not only for future resistance, but also for increased attitude–behavior consistency, and even cases in which the apparent strength of the attitude is reduced following initial resistance. In short, we simply note that our conceptualization of resistance differs from McGuire's innovative work on inoculation theory, and has potentially broader implications for people's future evaluative responding.

**Minority Influence**

Our findings might also have implications for the literature on minority influence and delayed attitude change (for a review, see Wood, Lundgren, et al., 1994). In some stimulating research in this domain, it has been found that persuasive attacks can sometimes fail to alter a target attitude in the immediate situation but still exert a delayed impact on that attitude. More specifically, researchers have found that people can resist persuasion from minority sources but evince delayed attitude change in the direction of the minority position as time passes, particularly if the minority message is strong and message recipients process it relatively extensively (e.g., Crano & Chen, 1998).

As described earlier, attitude certainty has a well-established association with attitude stability, or attitudinal persistence over time (e.g., Bassili, 1996). Given this association, and our finding that certainty can sometimes decrease after resistance has occurred, it seems reasonable to speculate that when people resist persuasive messages from minority sources, they might under some conditions become less certain about their attitudes than they initially were. Perhaps when people resist minority influence, they recognize that they did not resist by "legitimate" means—that is, they realize they resisted because of the minority status of the source even though the message itself was reasonably sound. As a result, they may have doubts about how easily they could have resisted had they actually attempted to counterargue the message. This, in turn, could create doubt about the validity of the initial attitude, thus destabilizing it or opening it up to change in the future. Considering the implications of the current framework for the minority influence literature may turn out to be a useful direction in future research.
The Self-Validation Hypothesis

The research described in this chapter may also have ties to other recent work in the area of meta-cognition. In work on the self-validation hypothesis, for instance, Petty, Briñol, and Tormala (2002) found that in addition to the two dimensions of thinking that have traditionally been examined in the persuasion literature—the amount and direction (valence) of issue-relevant thought—attitude change and resistance are also critically dependent on the confidence people have in their cognitive responses to persuasive messages. In some studies, Petty et al. (2002) assessed participants’ cognitive responses to a persuasive message and then asked them to report their confidence in these cognitive responses. In other studies, the researchers experimentally induced participants to feel confidence or doubt in their thoughts about a persuasive message. This research revealed that participants’ confidence in their thoughts moderated the impact of those thoughts on attitudes. When thoughts were primarily favorable, high confidence in thoughts increased persuasion relative to low confidence in thoughts. When thoughts were primarily unfavorable, however, the pattern was reversed, such that high thought confidence increased resistance relative to low thought confidence (see also Briñol & Petty, 2003; Tormala, Petty, & Briñol, 2002).

Although thought confidence was not directly assessed in the present research, the current findings might tie into the self-validation hypothesis. Indeed, one potential interpretation of the current research is that when people resist persuasion, this resistance has varying implications for attitude certainty depending on the confidence people have in their resistance thoughts, or counterarguments. When confidence in one’s counterarguments is high (e.g., when an ostensibly strong attack has been resisted), attitude certainty increases (and attitudes may become even less favorable). When confidence in one’s counterarguments is low (e.g., when the message or one’s counterarguments are ostensibly specious), however, attitude certainty remains the same or even decreases. Consistent with this notion, we found in one experiment (Tormala & Petty, 2002, Experiment 2) that the attitude certainty effects are mediated by participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness (or success) of their own resistance. Participants in that experiment reported that they had been more successful at counterarguing the message to the extent that the message was believed to be strong rather than weak, even though their counterarguments did not actually differ in any objective way.

Interestingly, the parallels between the present research and the self-validation research suggest an additional moderator of the present attitude certainty effects. In the work on the self-validation hypothesis, Petty and colleagues (2002) found that people attended to their meta-cognitive experience of thought confidence only when they were relatively high in the motivation to think (e.g., when message recipients were high in the need for cognition; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). When the motivation to think was relatively low, confidence in thoughts did not appear to impact attitudes. Extending this finding to the present concerns, it is possible that the meta-cognitive perspective we have taken on resistance applies mainly to situations in which information processing activity is some-
what high. In each of the studies we have conducted thus far, it is reasonable to assume that elaboration likelihood was relatively high as participants were led to believe a personally relevant and counterattitudinal policy might be implemented at their own university. As explained by Wegener, Petty, Smoak, and Fabrigar (this volume), however, resistance can occur through a number of different mechanisms, many of which involve low effort thinking (e.g., relying on cues to reject the message). In accord with the self-validation findings (Petty et al., 2002), it is possible that when people resist persuasion with less elaborative information processing, attitude certainty is unaffected because under these conditions people are presumably paying less attention to their meta-cognitions. Furthermore, it is possible that had a less engaging topic been used, even an active method of resistance such as counterarguing would not have had the same implications (see Quinn & Wood, this volume, for additional discussion of the role of personal relevance in resistance to persuasion). In future research we will explore this issue systematically.

Implications for Self-Confidence

Finally, the argument has been made elsewhere that resistance has implications for the self-concept (e.g., Jacks & Devine, 2000; Jacks & O’Brien, this volume). Given this notion, and the present findings, we surmise that when people resist persuasion and become more (or less) certain about their attitudes, they might also become more (or less) confident about themselves, their general abilities and competencies, and so on. For example, when someone has the perception that he or she handily resisted a strong persuasive attack (particularly on an important topic), he or she might feel successful and generate positive attributions about the self, feeling prouder and more confident than ever. If, on the other hand, someone struggles to resist, he or she might interpret that struggle as a kind of failure and form negative attributions about the self, becoming less proud and less confident. Although this idea is speculative, the possibility suggests that resistance and the self-concept could be even more intertwined than researchers have previously realized.

CONCLUSION

Our perspective is that the studies described in this chapter open the door for new research examining the consequences of resistance to persuasion. Resistance often has been viewed as an outcome, indicating that a persuasive communication has failed to affect the target attitude. Although this is sensible, resistance also has many other dimensions, as the various chapters in the current volume attest. Indeed, the research described in this chapter suggests that in some cases at least, when a persuasive attack appears to have had no impact on the target
attitude (i.e., the attack was resisted), it may actually have had a subtle yet important impact in terms of attitude certainty, attitude-relevant behavior, and the attitude’s resistance to future change. In short, resistance can be viewed as a launching pad for further theoretical and empirical exploration.

REFERENCES


