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# The Inconsistency of the Preference For Consistency: Different Facets Have Different Effects on Processing and Behavior

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# Content

- The consistency motive
- Individual differences
  - The *Preference For Consistency* scale (PFC, Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom, 1995)
  - Extension: *Preference for Balance* scale
- Three studies
  - Factor structure and reliability
  - Effects
    - on needs, expectations, information processing and discussion behavior
    - in balanced and imbalanced situations
- Conclusion

# The Consistency Motive

- Consistency theories assume *general* motive for consistent cognitive structures
  - Balance theory (Heider, 1946)
  - Congruity theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955)
  - Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957)
  - Affect control theory (Heise, 1979)

# Individual Differences in the Consistency Motive

- Several consistency phenomena only occur for people with **high Preference For Consistency (PFC)**, (Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom, 1995)
  - Attitude change after writing attitude-inconsistent essay
    - only in high-choice condition
  - Higher evaluation of fellow student
    - only if interaction is anticipated
  - Compliance to request of foreigner
    - only when preceded by a smaller request
- People with **low PFC** are generally more open to new attitudes, people, or behaviors.

# The *Preference for Consistency* (PFC) Scale (Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom, 1995)

## 18 Items: Examples

1. I want my close friends to be predictable.
2. It is important to me that my actions are consistent with my beliefs.
3. It doesn't bother me much if my actions are inconsistent. (reversed)
4. I'm uncomfortable holding two beliefs that are inconsistent.
5. I make an effort to appear consistent to others.

# What does the PFC Scale Measure?

- Preference for consistency between ...
  - two or more actions
  - two or more attitudes
  - actions and attitudes
- But
  1. without specifying any *content* of actions or attitudes
  2. without explicating the specific *rule* of (in)consistency
- Does it also measure **preference for balance** as specified in balance theory (Heider, 1946, 1958; Herkner, 1978)?

# Balance Theory (Heider, 1946, 1958) and its Specifications (Cartwright & Harary, 1956; Herkner, 1978; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955)

## 1. Content of cognitive structures is specified

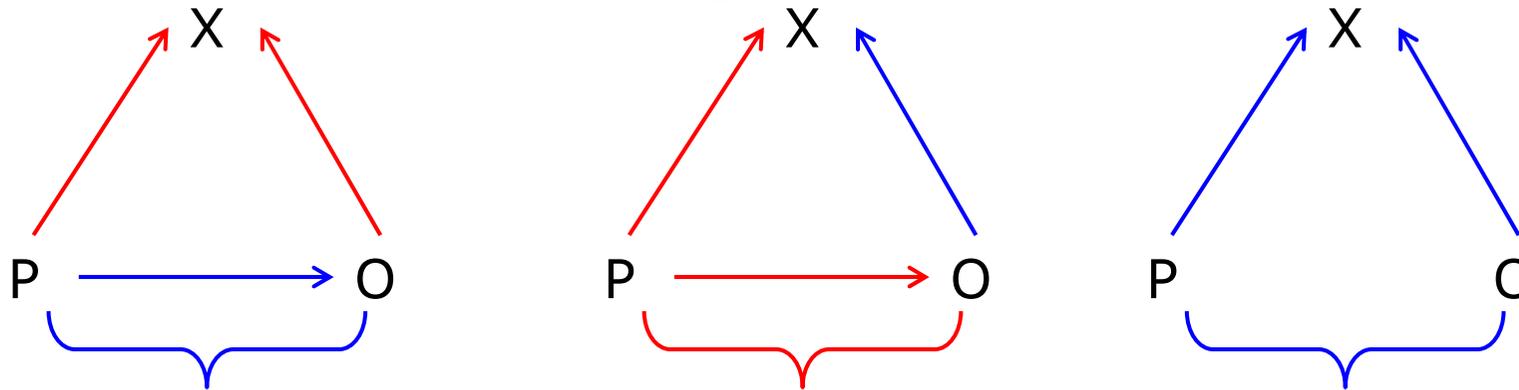
- P = own person
- O = other person  $\Rightarrow$  explicitly *social* content
- X = object
- Positive or negative *sentiment* relations
- Positive or negative *unit* relations

## 2. Rule for consistency is clearly explicated

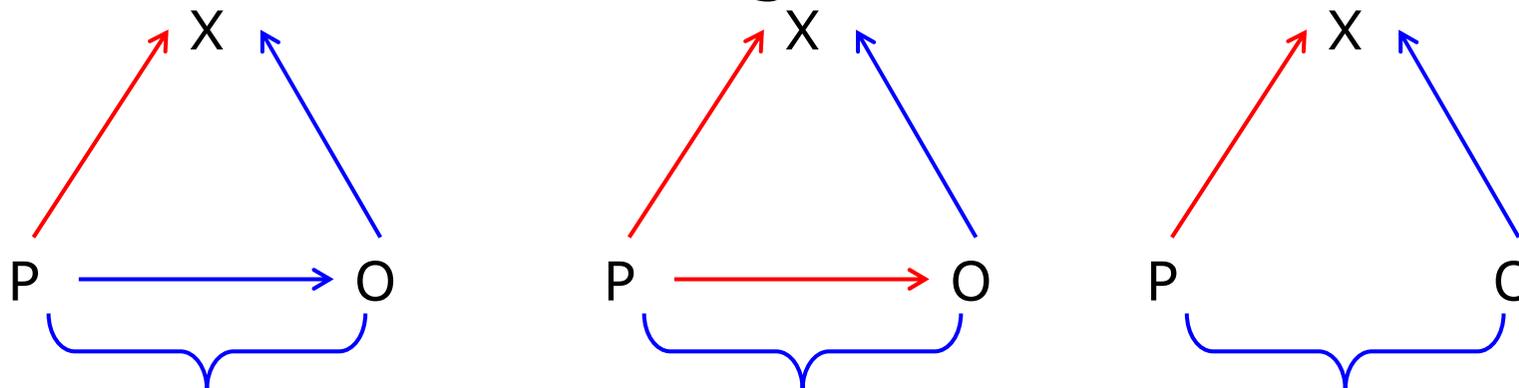
- A (semi)circle is consistent (balanced) when the product of the relations' signs is positive
  - e.g. ++, --, +++, +--

# Examples of Balanced and Unbalanced Structures

## *Balanced* cognitive structures



## *Unbalanced* cognitive structures



— positive sentiment relation  
— negative sentiment relation

— positive unit relation  
— negative unit relation

## Extension with *Preference for Balance* (PfB)

### 9 Items: Examples

1. It is important to me that my friends' evaluations of other people resemble my own evaluations.
2. I feel uncomfortable when someone I like disagrees with me on important issues.
3. I feel validated when a famous person I don't like advocates positions I disapprove.
4. I am embarrassed when someone I don't like supports my position in a group discussion.
5. When I don't like and have no contact with a person, I prefer him/her to have a different opinion.

# Assumptions

Distinction possible between **Preference for ...**

	<b>Action-attit. cons.</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Motive	Maintain attitudes	Attain balanced structures
Effects on info processing	Repel attitude-inconsistent information (e.g., by ignoring or devalueing)	Change attitudes to achieve balance Process unbalanced structures more systematically and less biased
Effects on behavior	Express own attitude even in unbalanced situations	Express own attitude more in balanced situations

# Three Studies: Questionnaire Data

	<b>Study 1</b>	<b>Study 2</b>	<b>Study 3</b>
Recruitment of participants	Open day at Humboldt-Universität, feedback on own results	HU students, financially compensated	HU students, financially compensated
N	255	176	210
Female / male participants	58% / 42%	60% / 40%	72% / 28%
Mean age (SD)	34 years (14)	24 years (5)	25 years (4)
Number items: existing PFC / PFB	18 / 14	9 / 9	11 / 9

# Factor Structure and Reliability

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Variance explained by one factor (PCA)	21%	23%	22%
Variance explained by two factors (PCA)	29%	35%	32%
Number of items / Cronbach's $\alpha$			
1. Preference for Action-belief cons. (PfA = former PFC):	10 / .79	8 / .64	8 / .71
2. Preference for Balance (PfB = new items)	9 / .76	7 / .81	8 / .77
Intercorrelation	** .28	** .24	** .33

\*\*  $p < .01$

# Correlations with Need for Structure

... as one aspect of *Need for Cognitive Closure*

	Study 2	Study 3
Preference for Action-belief consistency (PfA) – Need for Structure	** .39	** .51
Preference for Balance PfB – Need for Structure	** .26	** .30

\*\* p<.01

- Not possible to separate PfA and need for structure in factor analysis.
- Possible to separate PfB.

## Study 2: Experimental Data

1. Personality questionnaire (few days before experiment)
2. **Manipulation** of sentiment relation to „discussion partner“ (PO: **positive = likable** vs. **negative = dislikable** behavior on a video) in “first experiment on person perception”
3. Anticipation of joint decision with „partner“ about introduction of tuition fees (X)
4. Questionnaire on expectations and needs with regard to discussion
5. **Manipulation** of agreement on attitudes to tuition fees (PX-OX: **dissent** vs. **consensus**) by “initial audio-statement of partner”
6. Recording of participants’ “initial” statement  
⇒ N = 77 (after exclusion of 22 disbelievers)

# Assumptions

Distinction possible between Preference for ...

	<b>Action-attit. cons.</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Motive	Maintain attitudes	Attain balanced structures
Effects on info processing	Repel attitude-inconsistent information (e.g., by ignoring or devalueing)	Change attitudes to achieve balance Process unbalanced structures more systematically and less biased
Effects on behavior	Express own attitude even in unbalanced situations	Express own attitude more in balanced situations

# PfB Enhanced Need for Consensus. PfA Reduced Need to be Liked.

<i>Predictor</i>	Need for consensus Item example: „It is important to me that we adapt our positions.“	Need to be liked Item example: „It is important to me that my partner will like me.“
Partner's likability	.15	* .23
PfA	.05	** -.31
Likability x PfA	-.16	.07
PfB	# .21	.07
Likability x PfB	.12	.06

Standardized  $\beta$ -weights of multiple regression

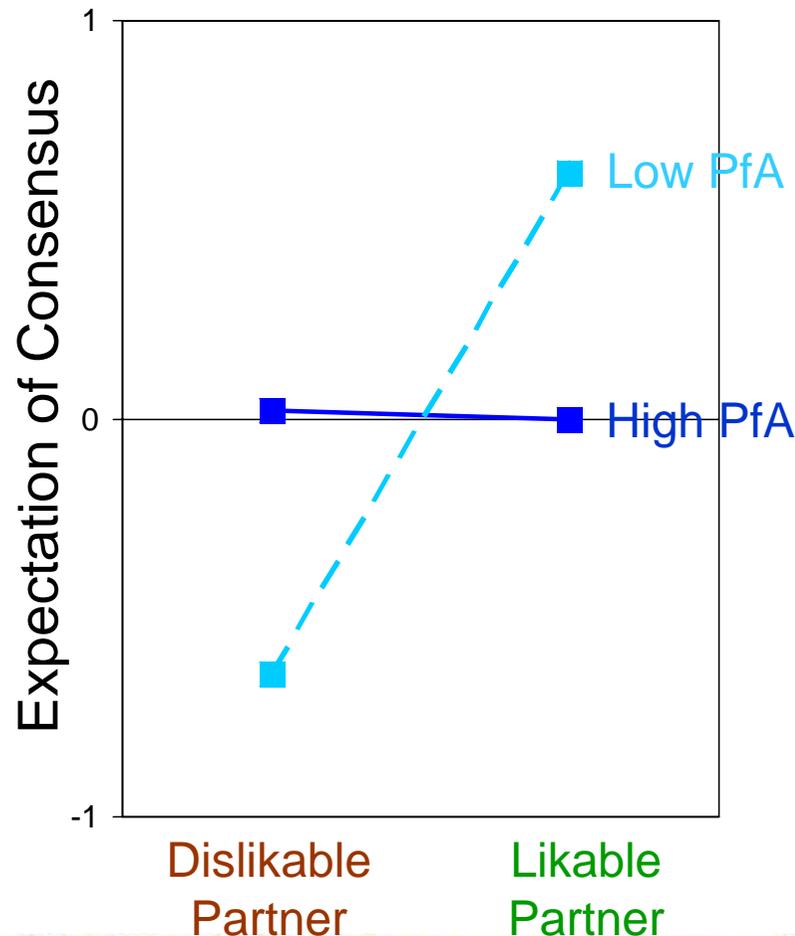
Onetailed tests of hypotheses: #  $p < .05$

Twotailed tests of other effects: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

# PfA Reduced

## Effect of Likability on Expectation of Consensus

Item example: „We will likely agree on the discussion issue ‚introduction of tuition fees‘.“



<i>Predictor</i>	$\beta$
Partner's likability	** .31
PfA	.01
Likability x PfA	** -.32

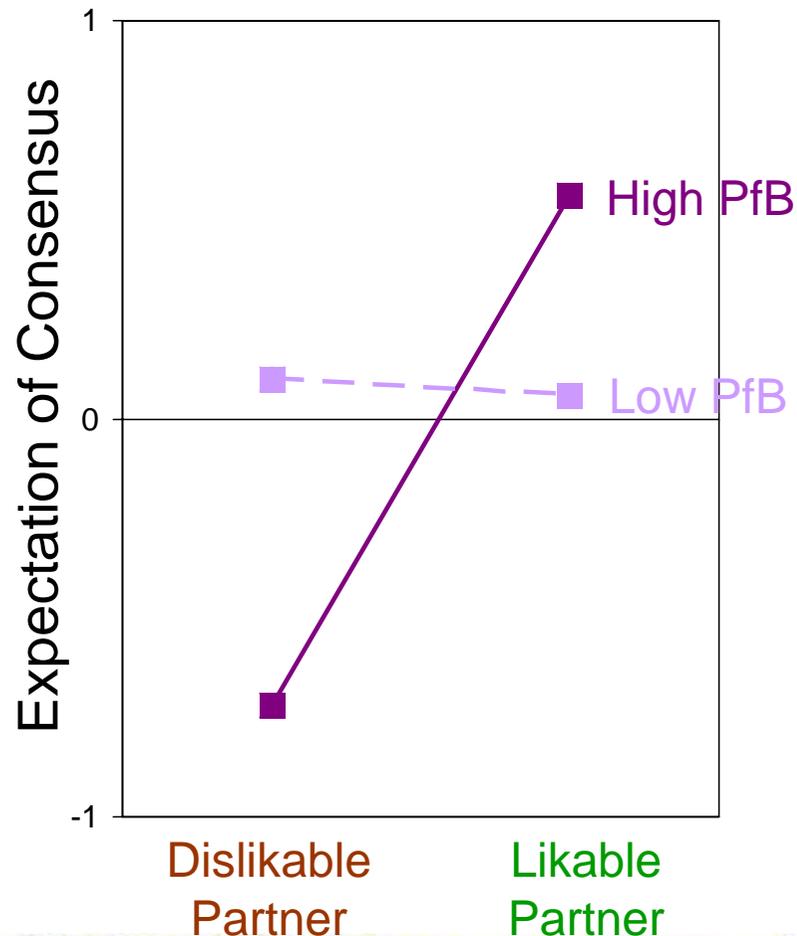
Means estimated by procedures of Aiken and West (1991)

Twotailed tests: \*\*  $p < .01$

# PfB Enhanced

## Effect of Likability on Expectation of Consensus

Item example: „We will likely agree on the discussion issue ‚introduction of tuition fees‘.“



<i>Predictor</i>	$\beta$
Partner's likability	** .31
PfB	-,08
Likability x PfB	## .33

Means estimated by procedures of Aiken and West (1991)

Onetailed tests of hypotheses: ##  $p < .01$

Twotailed tests of other effects: \*\*  $p < .01$

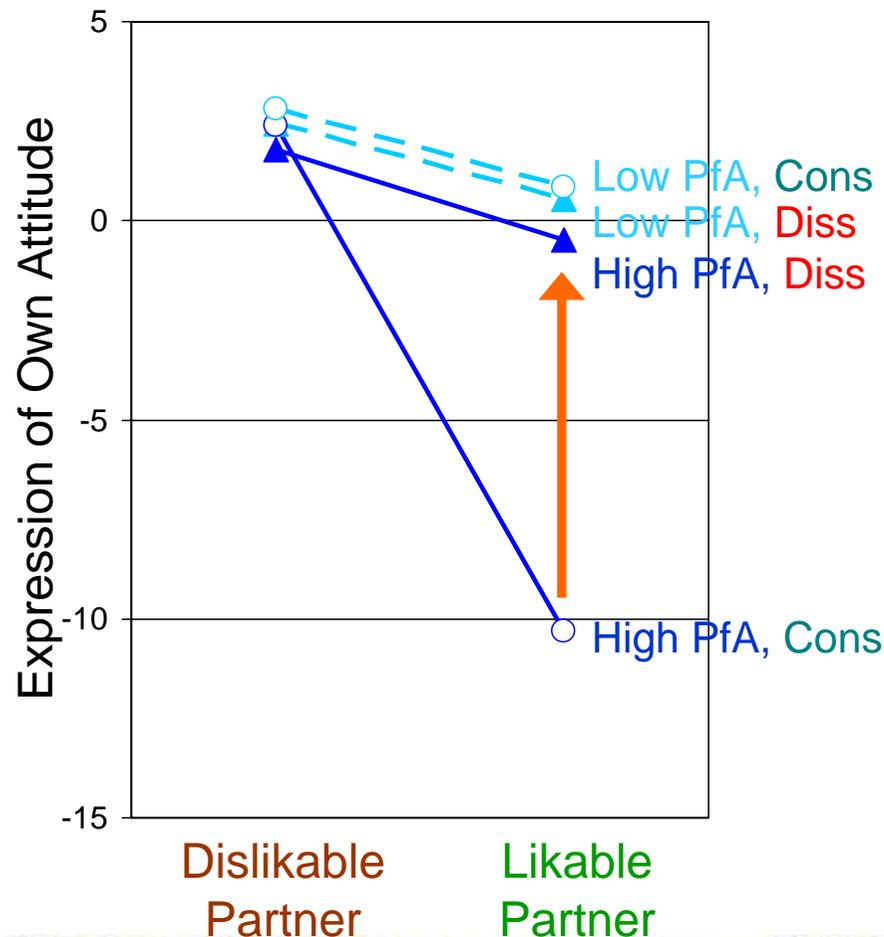
# Assumptions

Distinction possible between Preference for ...

	<b>Action-attit. cons.</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Motive	Maintain attitudes	Attain balanced structures
Effects on info processing	Repel attitude-inconsistent information (e.g., by ignoring or devalueing)	Change attitudes to achieve balance Process unbalanced structures more systematically and less biased
Effects on behavior	<b>Express own attitude even in unbalanced situations</b>	<b>Express own attitude more in balanced situations</b>

# High PfA Participants Expressed Own Attitude to Likable Partner only when she had Expressed Dissent

Number of expressions of own attitude in the audio statement for the partner each weighted by its intensity (1, 2, or 3)



Predictor	$\beta$
Partner's likability	*** -2.11
Dissent	** 1.05
Likab. x dissent	*** 1.32
PfA	*** -1.64
Likability x PfA	** -1.40
<b>Dissent x PfA</b>	<b>### 1.24</b>
<b>Lik. x diss x PfA</b>	<b>** 1.29</b>

Ordinal regression with z-standardized predictors

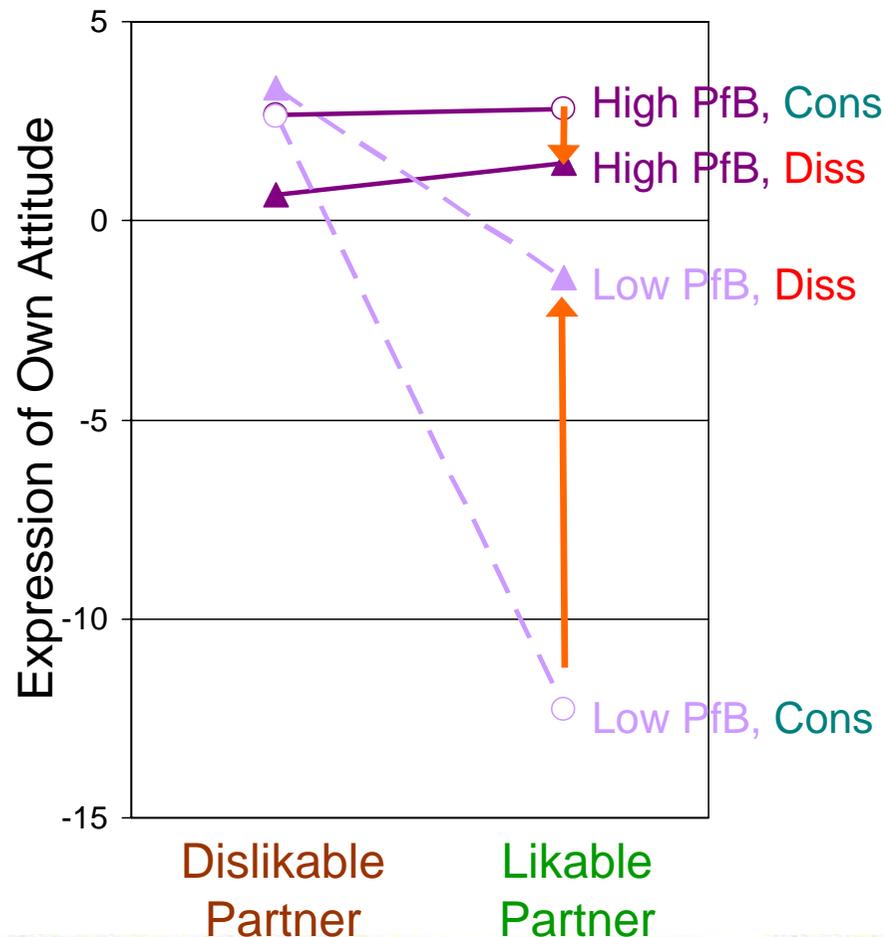
Means estimated by procedures of Aiken and West (1991)

Onetailed tests of hypotheses: ###  $p < .001$

Twotailed tests: \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# The Effect of Dissent on Expression of Own Attitude (towards Likable Partner) Depends on Pfb

Number of expressions of own attitude in the audio statement for the partner each weighted by its intensity (1, 2, or 3)



Predictor	$\beta$
Partner's likability	*** -2.11
Dissent	** 1.05
Likab. x dissent	*** 1.32
Pfb	*** 1.93
Likability x Pfb	*** 2.56
Dissent x Pfb	### -1.83
Lik. x diss x Pfb	## -1.23

Ordinal regression with z-standardized predictors

Means estimated by procedures of Aiken and West (1991)

Onetailed tests of hyp.: ## p < .05, ### p < .001

Twotailed tests: \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

## Study 3

1. Personality questionnaire (few days before experiment)
2. **Manipulation** of sentiment relation to „discussion partner“ (PO) (**likable** vs. **dislikable**) as in study 2
3. Anticipation of joint decision with „partner“ about **best qualified candidate for a travel agency (X)** (Mojzisch, 2003)
4. **Manipulation** of participant's attitudes to candidates (PX) by initial information
5. Manipulation of „partners“ attitudes (OX) as in study 2  
⇒ **Dissent** vs. **consensus**
6. Questionnaire on evaluation of partner's information
7. Opportunity to listen to partner's statement again
8. Second assessment of attitudes to candidates  
⇒ N = 123 (after exclusion of 17 disbelievers)

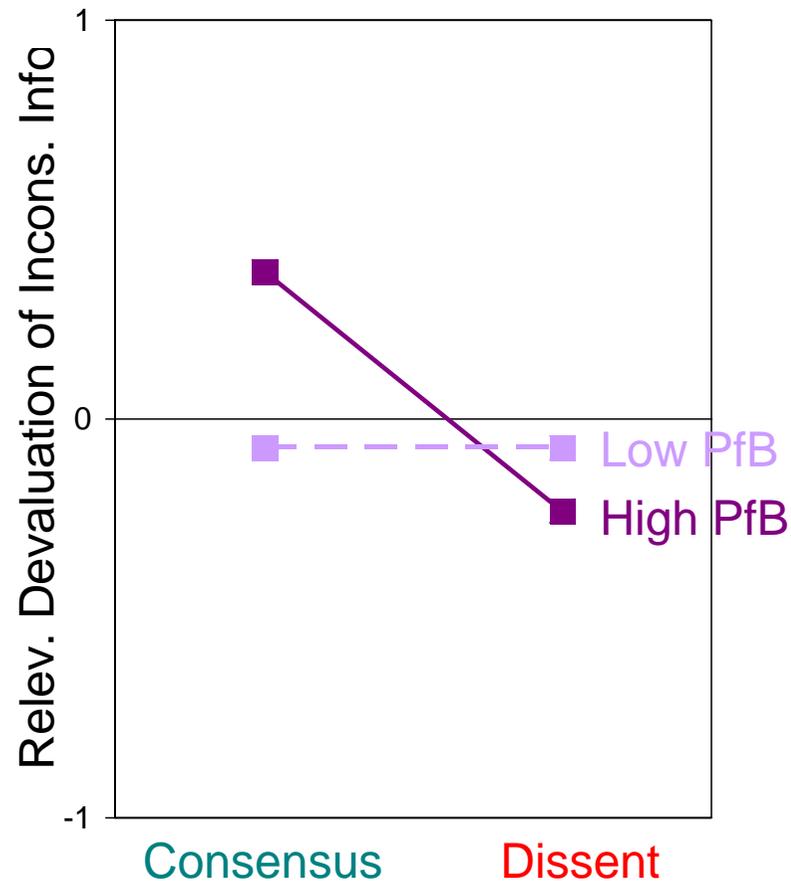
# Assumptions

Distinction possible between Preference for ...

	<b>Action-attit. cons.</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Motive	Maintain attitudes	Attain balanced structures
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Effects on behavior	Express own attitude even in unbalanced situations	Express own attitude more in balanced situations

# PfB Enhanced Negative Effect of Dissent on Relevance Devaluation of Attitude-inconsistent Info

Relevance evaluation of attitude-*consistent* information – relevance evaluation of attitude-*inconsistent* info (subset of 12 pieces of info)



Predictor	$\beta$
Dissent	-.15
PfB	.07
Dissent x PfB	# -.15

Means estimated by procedures of Aiken and West (1991)

Onetailed tests of hypotheses: #  $p < .05$

No other effects of PfB or PfA.

# PfA Enhanced Credib. Devaluation of Incons. Info and Reduced Systematic Processing

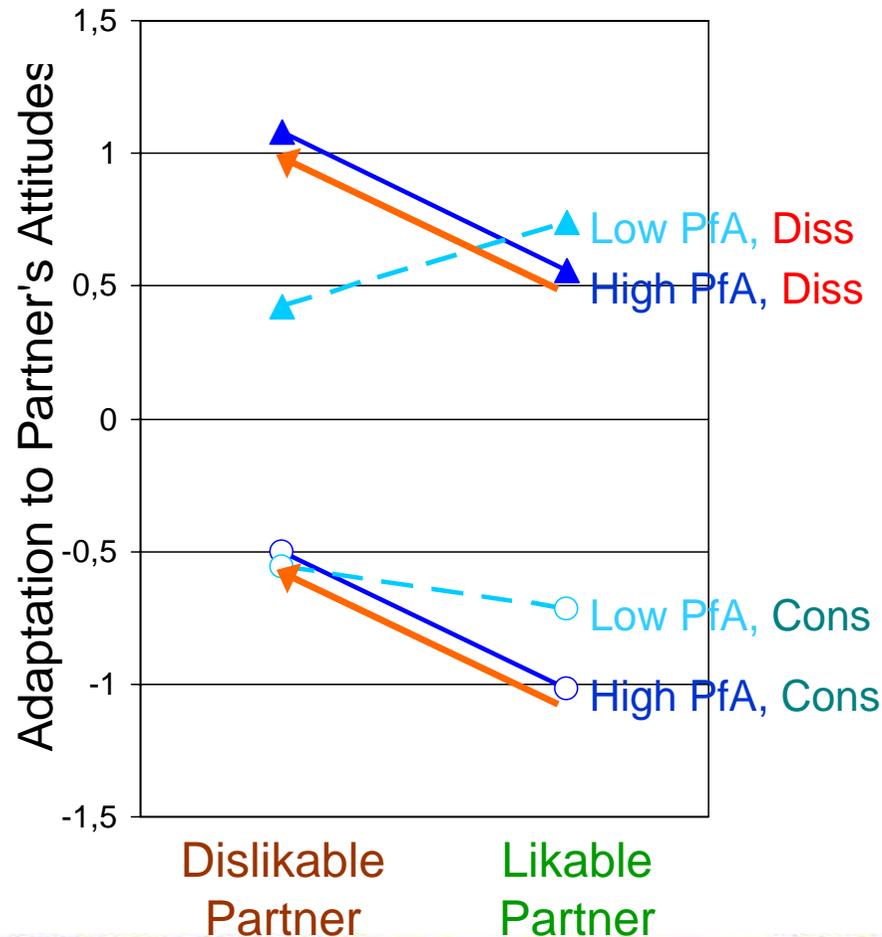
<i>Predictor</i>	Credibility Devaluation of Attitude-incons. Info Credibility evaluation of attit.-cons. info – eval. of <i>incons.</i> info	Systematic Processing Time for final decision, words / evaluative signs on note paper
Partner's likability	.04	-.04
Dissent	-.07	** .26
Likab. x dissent	.08	-.02
PfA	# .19	# -.24
Likability x PfA	-.05	.12
Dissent x PfA	-.05	.17
Lik. x diss. x PfA	.15	-.11
PfB	.00	-.14
Likability x PfB	.08	.03
Dissent x PfB	.12	.06
Lik. x diss. x PfB	-.09	.10

Standardized  $\beta$ -weights of multiple regression.

Onetailed tests of hypotheses: #  $p < .05$ . Twotailed tests of other effects: \*\*  $p < .01$

# PfA Leads to more Adaptation to *Dislikable* than to *Likable* Partners

Consensus (covariance of participant's attitudes to candidates and partner's attitudes) *after* listening to partner's statement – consensus *before* listening



Predictor	$\beta$
Partner's likability	-.11
Dissent	*** .70
Likab. x dissent	.06
PfA	.06
Likability x PfA	* -.15
Dissent x PfA	.09
Lik. x dissent x PfA	-.06

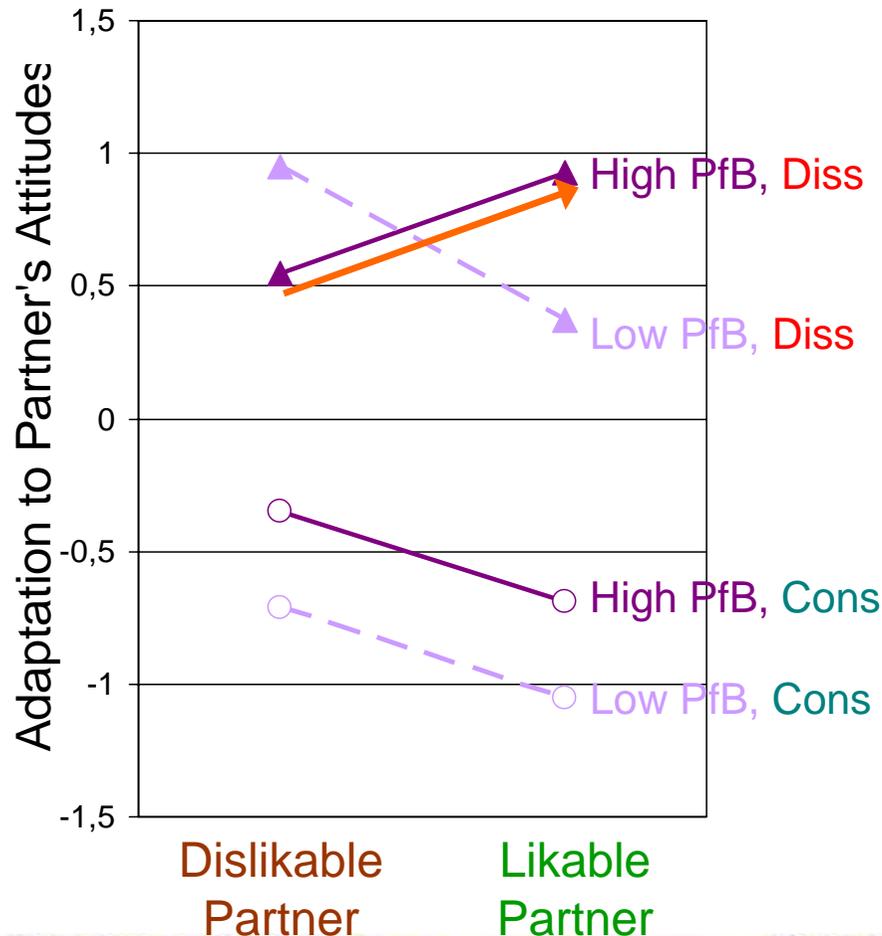
Means estimated by procedures of Aiken and West (1991)

Twotailed tests:

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# PfB Leads to more Adaptation to Likable Partners with Dissenting Attitude

Consensus (covariance of participant's attitudes to candidates and partner's attitudes) *after* listening to partner's statement – consensus *before* listening



Predictor	$\beta$
Partner's likability	-.11
Dissent	*** .70
Likab. x dissent	.06
PfB	.11
Likability x PfB	# .12
Dissent x PfB	-.07
Lik. x dissent x PfB	# .12

Means estimated by procedures of Aiken and West (1991)

Onetailed tests of hypotheses: #  $p < .05$

Twotailed tests of other effects: \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# Conclusion 1: Inconsistency of Preference For Consistency

- Preference For Consistency is an inconsistent attribute divided into
  1. Preference for Action-attitude consistency (PfA: established PFC, Cialdini et al., 1995)
  2. Preference for Balance (of triads of self [P], other [O] and object [X]: PfB)
- Effects on social information processing and social behavior are different or even contrary
- ... due to different ...
  - content (unspecified action and attitudes vs. at least one social attitude)?
  - rule for consistency (unspecified vs. balance principle)?

## Conclusion 2: *Preference for Action-Attitude Consistency* (PfA = existing PFC)

- ≈ Need for structure (part of Need for closure)
- ⇒ Motive to maintain attitudes
  - ⇒ Devaluation of attitude-inconsistent information as less credible
  - ⇒ Less systematic processing of partner's statement
- ⇒ Motive for distinctiveness
  - ⇒ Less need to be liked
  - ⇒ Less expectation of consensus with **likable** partner
  - ⇒ **Consensus** with **likable partner** demotivates to express own attitude
  - ⇒ Less adaptation to **likable partner**

## Conclusion 3: *Preference for Balance* (PfB = extension of PFC)

- ⇒ Motive to attain and demonstrate balance
  - ⇒ Need for consensus with discussion partner
  - ⇒ Expectation of consensus with **likable partner**
  - ⇒ Expression of own attitude (to persuade partner?)
    - especially when **consensus** with **likable partner** (to demonstrate balance)
  - ⇒ Less relevance devaluation of attitude-inconsistent information after **dissent** (in order to prepare attitude change?)
  - ⇒ More adaptation to attitude of a **dissenting** and **likable partner**

Thank you very much  
for your attention!

Questions ...?

Comments ...?