Chapter I

ORIENTATION OF PROBLEM

Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, which considers cognition or cognitive element as "any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behaviour" (Festinger, 1957, p.3), states that (a) dissonance arises when two cognitions are inconsistent with each other, (b) the experience of dissonance is uncomfortable, and that (c) the individual experiencing dissonance is motivated to reduce it and achieve consonance. The dissonance may be reduced either by changing one or more of the otherwise inconsistent cognitions or by adding new consonant cognitive elements. The theory has led to a substantial amount of research using varied paradigms, like 'counterattitudinal behaviour' (Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959), 'post-decision change' (Brehm, 1956), and 'discrepant communication' (Zimbardo, 1960), etc.

In many of the researches that have been done to study the effect of cognitive dissonance on opinion change there is a good deal of controversy on the question of the arousal of cognitive dissonance. Specifically, in researches using the
paradigms of 'counterattitudinal behaviour' and 'post-decision change' the arousal of cognitive dissonance has been questioned (Bem, 1967; Kelley, 1967; Gerard, Blevans and Malcolm, 1964).

Truly speaking, in researches using these two paradigms, the arousal of cognitive dissonance is not clear, because the existence of inconsistency between two cognitive elements is not concretely identifiable. It is only in the researches using the paradigm of 'discrepant communication' that the existence of inconsistency between two cognitive elements is concretely identifiable, because in these researches discrepant communication is provided by the experimenter, and hence is manipulable by him.

Certain important questions arise regarding the researches using the paradigm of 'discrepant communication' in which the inconsistency between two cognitive elements is concretely identifiable: What is a discrepant communication? Does a discrepant communication necessarily arouse cognitive dissonance? When will a discrepant communication arouse cognitive dissonance? Several authors (Derlega, 1972; Zimbardo, 1960) consider involvement in the cognitive elements to be an important variable which affects the magnitude of cognitive dissonance. However, as Kiesler et al. (1969), while discussing the question of involvement in the arousal of cognitive dissonance, have pointed out, the concept of involvement has not been clearly defined in terms of the antecedent conditions which produce it, or the manner one can vary it both in degree
and in type. In fact, different experimental procedures have been employed to induce involvement so that it is difficult to say which one of these procedures is more appropriate.

In order to clarify the meaning of involvement as it relates to the arousal of cognitive dissonance, it is important to note the observation made by Festinger (1957), that if two cognitive elements are dissonant with one another the magnitude of the cognitive dissonance will be a function of the importance of the cognitive elements. What Festinger seems to mean by the above mentioned observation is that cognitive dissonance would be aroused in an individual when both the cognitive elements, i.e., the one implied in his opinion that has already been accepted by him and the other implied in the discrepant information that is being communicated now are important from the point of view of the individual. Now, the question arises as to what are the conditions under which the two cognitive elements would assume importance for the individual.

Empirical data seem to suggest that the importance of the two cognitive elements is contingent upon the type of involvement experienced by the individual in a given situation. If the individual is 'ego-involved' with regard to the opinion he is expressing on a particular issue, i.e., is keen to express his own personal beliefs and values, the cognitive element of the opinion he holds will certainly assume importance for him and the cognitive element of any communicated information
which is discrepant with the opinion he holds will be irrelevant and unimportant to him. If, on the other hand, the individual is 'task-involved' in expressing his opinion on an issue, i.e., is keen to express a correct and objective view regarding that issue, then both the cognitive element of the opinion he is holding and that of any information that is discrepant with the opinion he is holding will be important to him. It follows from what has been stated above, that cognitive dissonance will be aroused only when the individual is 'task-involved' in expressing his opinion on an issue and not when he is 'ego-involved' in expressing his opinion.

In the light of the aforementioned analysis, it seems possible to resolve the divergence between the findings of two experiments, one carried out by Zimbardo (1960) and the other by Derlega (1972). Zimbardo reports an experiment in which Ss with 'high involvement' show greater amount of change in their opinion than do Ss with 'low involvement', when an information which is discrepant with the opinion they hold is given to them, and the opinion change increases as the discrepancy between the opinion the Ss hold and the communicated information increases. Contrary to this finding, Derlega reports an experiment in which Ss with 'low-involvement' show an increase in their opinion change as the discrepancy between their opinion and the communicated information increases,
whereas Ss with 'high-involvement' show a decrease in their opinion change as the discrepancy between their opinion and the communicated information increases. In both the experiments, the instructions given to the Ss to induce involvement are the same, namely, that 'high involvement' is induced by giving the S the instruction that the opinion he is required to express is indicative of his personality, and that 'low involvement' is induced by giving the S the instruction that the opinion he is required to express has nothing to do with his personality, thereby appearing to induce the same kind of involvement in the experimental Ss, i.e., 'highly involved' Ss. If one examines these instructions in the light of the specific task assigned to the Ss in the two experiments, one could immediately see that these instructions tend to induce 'ego-involvement' in the case of Derlega's Ss but in the case of Zimbardo's Ss, instead of inducing 'ego-involvement', these instructions tend to induce 'task-involvement'. In Zimbardo's experiment, the Ss are asked to judge the locus of blame in a case study of a juvenile delinquent which obviously requires them to be objective in forming their opinion, and hence, when they are given the instructions that the opinion they are required to express is indicative of their personality they tend to express that aspect of personality which reflects the ability
to do things as best as one can according to an external
criterion, which may well be designated as 'task-orientation'.
In contrast to this, in Derlega's experiment the Ss were asked
to indicate their personal opinion, i.e., an opinion having
no external criterion or frame of reference but based purely
on their own scale of preference, regarding the amount of
time one should spend in watching the television. Here, the
same instructions obviously tend to refer to that aspect of
personality which has little to do with any objective frame
of reference and may be defined purely in terms of subjective
and personal standard and criterion involving one's own ego.
Thus, the same instructions seem to have been construed
differently by the 'high-involvement' Ss in the two experiments,
depending on the nature of the task assigned to them, with
the result that the involvement of the Zimbardo's Ss takes the
form of 'task-involvement' whereas the involvement of Derlega's
Ss takes the form of 'ego-involvement'.

When viewed in the light of this analysis, the findings of
Zimbardo and Delega may be regarded as not conflicting at
all. The 'high-involvement' Ss of Zimbardo's experiment who
were 'task-involved' understandably changed their opinion for
the sake of objectivity when some relevant information which
appeared to be discrepant with their existing opinion was
communicated to them, whereas the 'high-involvement' Ss of
Derlega's experiment who were 'ego-involved' ignored the
communication which was in conflict with their personal opinion,
and hence, refused to change their personal opinion. From the above discussion, one is justified in concluding that when the Ss are 'task-involved', i.e., are required to be objective in expressing their opinion any communication which is discrepant with their existing opinion will, of course, arouse cognitive dissonance; when they are 'ego-involved', i.e., are required to express their personal opinion based on their own liking or dislike, without a reference to any external criterion or standard, any communication which appears to be discrepant with their existing opinion fails to arouse cognitive dissonance.

Taking a lead from this conclusion, one may propose to study, the effect of 'cognitive dissonance' upon opinion change in a risk-taking situation such as gambling in which the Ss are expected to be 'task-oriented' in so far as they are required to be objective in their choice of risk alternatives each risk alternative being based on communication indicating probability of success and amount of payoff.

As it has been stated earlier, cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant state of tension and an individual experiencing it is motivated to reduce it. Cognitive dissonance may be reduced in different ways. As Alpert and Haber (1960) have stated, there are two general kinds of responses which an individual may make to stressful situations: (a) facilitative or adaptive response, and (b) debilitating or maladaptive response. An individual experiencing cognitive dissonance,
which is also a state full of stress, may respond to it in one of these two ways in order to reduce tension, with the source of dissonance being removed by the facilitative response involving adjustments and necessary modifications but being only glossed over by the debilitative one involving some kind of defense mechanism. Since these two types of responses are closely bound up with the global personality dimension called adjustment-maladjustment, the facilitative response being used by a well-adjusted individual while the debilitative one being used by a maladjusted individual, the question of whether the individual will make this or that type of response in a situation involving cognitive dissonance understandably depends upon such personality characteristics of the individual as are related to adjustment-maladjustment.

There are recurrent observations in literature, and in some cases empirical findings also, to suggest that, there are among others, four most important personality variables which play a vital role in the adjustment-maladjustment of an individual, namely, anxiety, self-esteem, internal-external locus of control, and repression-sensitization.

The personality variable called anxiety refers to the disposition which is characterized by a relatively pervasive state of emotional tension, i.e., a relatively constant apprehension and feeling of incompetence and helplessness (Cattel and Scheier, 1961; Spielberger, 1966, 1972). The
emotional tension characterizing anxiety plays an important role in an individual's adjustment to his environment. At low levels of anxiety the individual is alert and vigilant so that he is equipped for effective action, while at high levels his behaviour gets disorganized and he loses his ability for effective action (Basowitz et al., 1955). It has been reported that people with a high level of anxiety tend to be rigid and inflexible in their approach to a problem (Cowen, 1952a, 1952b; Jones, 1954; Longenecker, 1962).

Individuals who are afflicted with intense feelings of anxiety tend to behave in an ego-defensive manner particularly in a situation which is uncomfortable and stressful. Once they make a response however inappropriate and inadequate it may be they persist in making that response as they feel that not to do so would amount to admitting their inadequacy. They are more concerned with alleviating their anxiety by defensive methods than with solving their problem in a realistic manner. Mandler and Sarason (1952) consider anxiety to be the source of self-oriented and task-irrelevant responses which tend to interfere with task-relevant responses and thus make an individual maladaptive in his behaviour. Sarason (1957), on the basis of experimental evidence suggesting that Ss obtaining high scores on anxiety differ from other Ss in their behaviour under conditions of stress, makes the inference that when faced with a stressful situation an anxiety-ridden S's performance will be disrupted on account of his inability to cope with the
requirements of the situation. According to Sarason, Ss with high anxiety would be emitting interfering task-irrelevant responses to a greater extent than do other Ss in the anxiety score distribution.

The personality variable of self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of his worth as measured by the extent to which his perception of his real-self approximates his perception of his ideal-self, the assumption being that, the smaller the difference between the perception of the real-self and that of the ideal-self the greater is the worth of the real-self and the higher is the self-esteem, and vice versa. High-low self-esteem may thus be conceptualized as self-evaluation in terms of an ideal. If an individual perceives himself to be measuring upto his ideal, he tends to perceive himself as being likable, worthy, and competent (Cohen, 1959; Combs and Snygg, 1959). If, on the other hand, he perceives himself to be falling short of his ideal, he tends to perceive himself as being unlikable, unworthy, and incompetent (Fitch, 1970).

Evaluation of self in terms of an ideal-self constitutes an individual's self-concept which plays a dynamic role in his capacity to cope with the life situations. The individual, in his actions, tries to be consistent with how he perceives himself in relation to his ideal-self. If his self-esteem is high and he perceives himself to be worthy, likable, and competent etc., this is bound to influence his behaviour and
action in so far as he will tend to exert himself to live 
upto these self-perceived qualities and thus achieve better 
adjustment in life. There is a large body of empirical 
studies which can be cited in support of these formulations 
(Byrne, 1961; Chase, 1957; Hilson and Worchel, 1957; Moses 
and Duvall, 1960; Rogers and Dymond, 1954).

The personality variable of internal-external locus of 
control, which has evolved out of the social learning theory 
of Rotter (1954), refers to the extent to which an individual 
feels that he himself has and does not have control over, and 
consequently is and is not responsible for, the outcome of 
his behaviour. At one extreme end of this dimension are 
'externally-oriented' individuals who believe that 
reinforcements are contingent upon their own actions and hence 
are under their own control, while at the other extreme end 
are 'externally-oriented' individuals who believe that they 
do not have control over the outcome of their action. 
Individuals who are 'internally-oriented', as compared to 
those who are 'externally-oriented', perceive themselves, as 
DuCette, Wolk, and Soucar (1972) have pointed out, as personally 
responsible for the outcome of their action, and such persons 
understandably tend to be more adaptive, capable of utilizing 
feedbacks from their environment, and, hence able to adjust 
themselves effectively with the demands of life. This is not 
only a theoretical formulation but has been born out by 
empirical studies. One of such studies has, for example, 
demonstrated that individuals, who are 'internally-oriented',
in contrast to those who are 'externally-oriented', are less apt to demonstrate non-adaptive behaviour (Du Ceté and Wolk, 1972).

From what has been said above it is reasonable to conclude that 'internally-oriented' individuals are more adjusted than 'externally-oriented' ones.

The personality variable designated as repression-sensitization refers to a bipolar categorization to classify individuals with respect to two characteristic modes of defensive responses to threatening stimuli (Byrne, 1961). At one extreme of the dimension are repressors, i.e., individuals who characteristically employ avoidance, denial, and repression of potential threat and conflict as the primary mode of coping with anxiety, while at the other extreme are sensitizers, i.e., individuals who predominantly employ such defense mechanisms as intellectualization, approach, and obsession-compulsion to cope with anxiety. When first proposed by Byrne (1961) the two modes of defensive responses were conceived as a sign of maladjustment. That is, individuals who are at the extremes on the repression-sensitization were considered to be equally maladjusted but utilizing different defense mechanisms. However, a number of studies have reported a linear relationship between this dimension and adjustment as measured by paper-pencil tests, with repressors showing better adjustment than sensitizers (Byrne, 1961; Lucky and Grigg, 1964; Joy, 1963; Byrne, Golightly, and
Sheffield, 1965; Byrne, Barry, and Nelson, 1963). A linear relationship between the personality dimension of repression-sensitization and adjustment has also been reported in studies which identified adjustment-maladjustment on the basis of clinical diagnosis. Feder (1967) and Tempone and Lamb (1967) have reported that the defensive style of repression occurred with significantly higher frequency in the adjusted population, whereas the defensive style of sensitization occurred with significantly greater frequency in the maladjusted population of clinical and psychiatric patients. Besides these studies inquiring into the relationship between repression-sensitization and adjustment, in problem solving situations also repressors have been reported to be more adaptive. Cohen and Foerst (1968) reported, in an experiment, that repressors developed appropriate problem-solving systems more quickly and utilized their systems more efficiently, as compared to sensitizers.

That there is a linear relationship as born out by empirical evidence, and not a curvilinear relationship as Byrne (1961) would have us believe, between repression-sensitization and adjustment-maladjustment is explicable in terms of one important ability differentiating between repressors and sensitizers, namely, the ability to control emotions. Lefcourt (1966) found a linear relationship between repression-sensitization and 'affect-ideation', by which he means projection of emotions, with sensitizers projecting greater amount of emotions than repressors in
describing TAT figures. It is quite reasonable to believe that individuals who are capable of controlling their emotions can exercise self-restraint better than those who are swayed by their emotions and with self-restraint one can deal with situation and people more adequately. Emotional control and self-restraint are thus among the most important components of adjustment.

The above discussion of the four personality variables, namely, anxiety, self-esteem, internal-external locus of control, and repression-sensitization clearly suggests that, in a situation involving cognitive dissonance, those who are highly anxious, have low self-esteem, are externally-oriented in their attitudes towards locus of control, or are sensitizers will resort to reducing cognitive dissonance by making debilitative type of responses which are defensive and maladaptive in nature, while those who are mildly anxious, have high self-esteem, are internally-oriented in their attitudes towards locus of control, or are repressors will reduce cognitive dissonance by making facilitative type of responses which are adaptive in nature.