

# CHAPTER FIVE THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMITMENT

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Our fundamental model of commitment is a dialectic one in which instigating determinants of action are integrated with opposing forces. Only if the forces that oppose a line of action are reconciled can an actor proceed in the commitment indefinitely. Enduring lines of action thus require persistence in the face of difficulties because opposing forces cannot be made to disappear. They must be made compatible with instigating forces by some process of reinterpretation—that is, by integration. Once opposing forces have been integrated with instigating forces, their negative effects are neutralized. Indeed, as we have seen, the end product of this integration represents a stronger form of commitment, accompanied by stronger motivation than was present prior to the appearance of the opposing forces. Moreover, the commitment is also stronger than it would have been had the negative forces not been integrated with the positive ones.

Our fundamental postulate is that this integration, or *bonding*, of positive and negative elements cannot remain unchanged for long. It is continually subject to new forms of challenge or stress that ultimately lead either to a new integration or an unraveling of the commitment. In other words, commitments are completely rationalized or stable only momentarily, and then new inconsistencies or contradictions emerge. There are no final stages, solutions, or end points. Thus, the *development* of a commitment is seen here as a dialectical process, and a commitment itself is seen as a dynamic and ever-changing phenomenon.

## THEORETICAL ROOTS FOR A THEORY OF DEVELOPMENT

### Dialectical Theories

The notion of a dialectical process in philosophy is at least as old as Plato. We must, however, be careful to distinguish between the dialectical nature of the evolution of ideas and the dialectical nature of development of behavior in the real world. Here we follow the distinction between "dialectical contradiction" and "real opposition" discussed by Colletti (1975). At a philosophical level, the principle of dialectical contradiction implies that two logically contradictory ideas can exist at the same time. Indeed, to assert that A is true is also to assert, at some level, that not-A is also true. One cannot comprehend the existence of beauty without also comprehending the existence of ugliness. Each of these two notions is incomplete without its opposite, and a full understanding of the two requires their integration into a still more complex idea—which will, in turn, involve the assertion of the logical contradiction of that idea. Although this kind of philosophical dialectic is a valid description of thought, clearly it cannot account for the relationship between instigating and inhibiting forces in connection with commitment. Colletti (1975) stated clearly that the dynamic of change in historical materialism involves the *real opposition of contending forces* rather than the logical contradiction of incompatible ideas. Although it contrasts with a number of previous Marxist interpretations, that is the notion of dialectics that we shall use here.

Inhibiting forces in commitment development are not necessarily logically contradictory with instigating forces. They are forces that work toward a contrary direction or line of action. The existence of instigating forces in the real world does not imply that inhibiting forces also exist. However, both occur together as part of the process of developing a commitment, and both are necessary. The model of commitment is incomplete without a full understanding of the two.

There are many other models in psychology that postulate that behavior is governed by an ebb and flow of contending forces. Schneirla (1959), for example, argued that a great deal of animal behavior could be explained by a biphasic process in which approach tendencies and withdrawal tendencies were alternately dominant. Shontz (1975) has claimed that the sequence of steps by which victims adapt to trauma is characterized by a continual shifting between cognitive confrontation (encounter with the crisis) and retreat (withdrawal from thinking about it). Atkinson and Birch (1970) have developed an elaborate series of equations to describe how persistence in a form of behavior is determined by the relative strength of different forces. Some of these forces are functions of the length of time since the individual engaged in that behavior (the instigating force, which increases motivation to engage in that behavior). Other forces are functions of the amount of time the individual has spent engaging in that behavior (the consummatory force, which decreases motivation to engage in that behavior). None of these models qualify as dialectical, however, because none of them consider the question of how contending forces may be integrated and qualitatively transformed or how the integration of con-

tending forces at one point in time may serve as the basis for a new round of conflict at a later point in time.

One model in psychology that has more in common with our approach than any other is Solomon and Corbit's (1974) opponent-process theory of motivation, which has received considerable attention in experimental psychology. It will be discussed in greater detail than those mentioned above, although it is not truly dialectical either. Opponent-process theory comes from the observation that many affective sequences seem to involve two opposite states: an initial state, which is either positive or negative, and a second state, which is opposite to the initial state. The essential idea of opponent-process theory is that all primary affective reactions, whether positive or negative, arouse a secondary process that opposes and suppresses the initial hedonic state. The opponent process is opposite to the initial process and is slow to begin, slow to build to its maximum intensity, and slow to decay. The affective state of the organism at any point in time is a function of the difference between these two yoked processes. Opiate addiction is the example used most frequently to illustrate the positive-negative sequence: Individuals feel good during the presence of the drug-induced stimulation and bad after this stimulation stops. Fear reactions are the examples used most frequently to illustrate the negative-positive sequence: Individuals feel bad anticipating or experiencing an aversive stimulus (e.g., an electric shock for dogs), and relieved or good after the stimulation stops.

With the addition of a second powerful postulate, opponent-process theory is able to explain the rather dramatic changes in affective tone that occur with repeated exposure to certain forms of stimulation. Solomon (1980) and Solomon and Corbit (1974) postulate that the opponent reaction becomes quicker, stronger, and longer lasting the more frequently it is elicited. Since the strength of the initial affective process that elicits it does not change, the overall quality of the experience comes increasingly to resemble that of the opponent process. The intensity of the initial affect is weakened, and the intensity of the opposite reaction is strengthened. For example, in the case of addictive drug use, the intensity of the initial positive reaction is reduced, and the intensity of the subsequent negative reaction (withdrawal) is increased. With electric shocks to dogs (or parachuting or using saunas for people), the initial experience of terror or discomfort becomes less intense, and the subsequent experience of exhilaration or relief becomes more intense.

There are many attractive features to opponent-process theory from our point of view. It calls attention to the mixture of positive and negative elements involved in the pursuit of behavior and to the gradual shift in orientation or motivation underlying a pursuit; in this general sense, it is similar to our model. The major points of difference derive from the fact that we are concerned with how people take action and make decisions, whereas Solomon and Corbit are concerned with an automatic process invoked by exposure to stimuli. Since the opponent process has not been experienced prior to exposure to the stimulus, it cannot serve as a source of ambivalence in the minds of individuals over whether to expose oneself to the stimulus the first time.

Within opponent-process theory, the initial decision to seek stimulation is

determined by the valence of the initial state. People tend to seek out stimulus experiences whose initial impact is positive (including drug experiences)—unless restrained by other forces—and to avoid stimulus experiences whose initial impact is negative (including exposure to saunas or fear-inducing experiences like parachuting)—unless compelled by other forces. Over time, however, the increasingly intense opponent process can serve as a powerful source of additional motivation that will cause individuals to change the basis on which they approach the activity. If the opponent process is increasingly aversive, increasingly difficult to avoid, and more and more potent in canceling the initial positive effects of the primary reaction (e.g., pleasure from drug use), individuals will need to justify their continued pursuit of this behavior. Thus, for Solomon and Corbit, addiction is simply the result of repeated exposure to a certain form of stimulation that elicits an initial positive reaction and, over time, an increasingly intense yoked negative reaction. For us, addiction is something else in addition: a sense of commitment to seeking this form of stimulation, and a series of steps involved in continuing to do so despite the increasing costs associated with seeking the stimulation.

If the initial reaction to an activity is aversive—for example, the intense fear experienced by novice parachutists (Epstein, 1967)—the change in the opponent process makes people feel thrilled and exhilarated afterwards. In this case, the decision to continue pursuing the activity may be easier because the positive component rather than the negative component is being strengthened. Nonetheless, people must do so despite the continued presence of some initial negative motivation, and without the external support (e.g., hand-holding, encouragement, or teasing by friends) that may have seen them through the first few episodes. Thus, here too we would see the continued pursuit of a line of action despite the presence of negative elements as requiring commitment and a series of steps in continuing to do so. In the case of parachuting, this might involve the accumulation of moral, spiritual, and physical value attached to the sport—forms of justification that are hardly necessary when an activity does not have an aversive side to it. In other words, a negative-positive sequence like parachuting can lead as strongly to what behavior observers would call addiction as can positive-negative sequences like opiate use. It is ostensibly the second element in each sequence that is being strengthened over time. A similar process may take place for jogging enthusiasts.

Both opponent-process theory and our model of commitment can explain these addictive processes, but in our view, there is more ambiguity in the exact sequence of positive and negative elements than opponent-process theory allows. In the case of parachuting, for example, prior to the fear upon actually climbing into the plane for one's first jump, there is an extended period of interest and excitement that permits the person's recruitment to the activity in the first place. In the case of drug addiction, there are many instances (alcohol and cigarettes are two well-known examples) in which initial reactions are not positive at all but only gradually become so.

Opponent-process theory, in summary, assumes that all affective reactions elicit opponent processes. This means that all motivation involving a repeated

exposure to stimulation will necessarily undergo an evolution. Our model makes similar predictions and on a similar basis: Most (but not necessarily all) outcomes involve the experience of both positive and negative elements, and the quality of the experience changes as these elements change. But we will not assume that the elements occur in fixed sequence, that one is necessarily yoked to the other (i.e., they may have independent sources), that only the yoked element changes over time, or that the transformation of motivation is the same in all cases, involving nothing more than the algebraic sum of a fixed initial reaction and a growing opponent process.

In our analysis, the nature of subsequent motivation depends on what kind of integration of prior contending forces the individual has been able to achieve. There is no such dialectical element in opponent-process theory, where the two states are never brought together into any kind of overall synthesis, and where indeed the intensity and quality of the initial reaction is assumed never to change. In contrast, we argue that the fact that parachutists become less intensely fearful before jumping as they grow more experienced (and also experience their fear at an earlier point in their preparation to jump; Epstein, 1967) is not merely an automatic result of a strengthening antifear or relief response but is a contingent product of an increasing commitment to jumping. The stressful experience of the period before jumping is qualitatively transformed or integrated with the episodes that follow—the actual descent and the emotional aftereffects. Meaning and value is attached to activities that were mechanical or uncertain before. Preparatory activities become both reassuring to experienced jumpers who better comprehend their significance and expressive of the personal significance attached to jumping. Of course, not all jumpers achieve their bonding of positive and negative elements; thus, not all jumpers continue jumping. The governing dynamics of the process are not merely the algebraic sum of two automatic emotional reactions (even if these reactions exist exactly as Solomon and Corbit posit) but include the manner in which the individual experiences these reactions as part of a larger whole. In consequence, an individual sees himself or herself as either committed or not committed to the entire sequence.

### Structural Models

Whenever psychologists have been concerned with structures, dialectical models have appeared. Structures are by definition resistant to change. To be adaptive, however, a structure must eventually incorporate new information to respond to altered circumstances. Most structural models in psychology have dealt with cognition rather than affect. Thus, we have dialectical elements in the structural theories of Neisser in perception, Piaget in cognitive development, and Kuhn in the history of scientific thought. According to Neisser (1976), perception involves a kind of dialectical process in which anticipations interact with often conflicting information to in turn create new anticipations or schemas. For Piaget (1970), the fundamental movements of thought are those in which the individual

is trying either to assimilate information to an existing structure or to change the structure to accommodate information that cannot be assimilated. Structures resist change until they are no longer capable of assimilating the information they are called to face. Children pass from one developmental stage to another when they begin to experience contradictions that did not theretofore bother them (e.g., inconsistencies in their judgments about which of two quantities is larger). Each new stage thus represents the synthesis of the previous structure with new information that had come to be experienced as contradictory with it.

Scientific revolutions, according to Kuhn (1962), represent a similar process in which previous knowledge is integrated with an accumulated series of facts that could not be accounted for by existing theory. (It should be noted, by the way, that the new structures need not retain all the elements of either the previous structures or the conflicting observations but may be built selectively out of those elements of each that best fit together.) Contradictory evidence may accumulate slowly and imperceptibly, whereas a change in structure is substantial and dramatic. Thus, dialectical processes of this sort tend to superimpose discontinuous or structural change onto a process of continuous change or accumulation of evidence. This may explain why we sometimes experience things in our lives as taking a sudden leap forward when in fact their development has been quite gradual but has only captured our attention after a certain critical point was passed (e.g., children's growth, work accomplishments).

The major theory that has postulated emotional or affective structures, Freudian psychoanalysis, is curiously devoid of a dialectical element. This is perhaps because the major elements of personality in psychoanalytic theory are unconscious, and the unconscious can tolerate inconsistencies. Conflicting impulses and wishes can exist side by side in the id or the superego without requiring any change. Only the ego, the sole element of personality that is predominantly conscious and predominantly concerned with adaptation to its environment, is sensitive to contradiction. Not surprisingly, as ego theory has developed in the hands of Erikson (1950), it has taken on the aspects of a dialectical process. Successful passage through each of Erikson's eight major stages of development requires the resolution of a polar conflict between two opposing potential identities (e.g., trust versus mistrust).

#### COMMITMENT AS A DIALECTICAL PROCESS

Commitment is conceptualized here in dialectical terms as conjoined cognitive-affective change. An initial orientation to an object is a *thesis*. Emerging evidence that tends to oppose, weaken, or cancel this orientation is an *antithesis*, and the orientation that emerges to integrate the opposing forces is a *synthesis*. Contradictions are the drive behind the development of a commitment—that is, they are essential for its growth.

#### Contradictions to a Line of Action: Antitheses

Contradictions to a line of action or a decision are often imposed by external events. The pursuit may be made unpalatable by difficulties or negative consequences that had not been foreseen or that the individual had hoped to avoid. New options, temptations, or choices may also arise. As people go through different life stages, they become sensitive to issues and elements that they were quite oblivious to before. These events may change the calculus of the balance of forces affecting one's actions (Riegel, 1975).

However, it is our view that antitheses to a decision will emerge even in the absence of external stresses; in fact, they are inevitable. If Solomon and Corbit (1974) are indeed correct that any positive state is eventually followed by a negative one, this suggests that individuals eventually have something to regret about their decisions, however good they may be. But the same conclusion can be reached without making assumptions nearly as demanding as those of opponent-process theory. It is enough to understand that humans, like all species, are not entirely coherent in their own internal wiring. It is impossible to make a decision that will not, eventually, have negative reverberations somewhere else in the psychic system. Human intelligence is not the result of a master circuit or chip, designed all at once and tested for consistency and reliability in all its components and combinations. It has evolved through a series of improvisations and a patchwork of adaptations. It is built not only to tolerate error but, in some curious sense, to produce and profit from error as well. As usual, the biologist Lewis Thomas (1979) is especially eloquent on this point:

We could never have [evolved human intelligence] with human intelligence, even if molecular biologists had been flown in by satellite at the beginning, laboratories and all, from some other solar system. We have evolved scientists, to be sure, and so we know a lot about DNA, but if our kind of mind had been confronted with the problem of designing a similar replicating molecule, starting from scratch, we'd never have succeeded. We would have made one fatal mistake: our molecule would have been perfect. Given enough time, we would have figured out how to do this, nucleotides, enzymes, and all, to make flawless, exact copies, but it would never have occurred to us, thinking as we do, that the thing had to be able to make errors. . . .

To err is human, we say, but we don't like the idea much, and it is harder still to accept the fact that erring is biological as well. We prefer sticking to the point, and insuring ourselves against change. But there it is: we are here by the purest chance, and by mistake at that. Somewhere along the line, nucleotides were edged apart to let new ones in; maybe viruses moved in, carrying along bits of other, foreign genomes; radiation from the sun or from outer space caused tiny cracks in the molecule, and humanity was conceived. . . . (pp. 28-30)

Another way to understand that our actions contain an element of internal contradiction may be through the paradox that freedom is consumed by use. Freedom of choice is always an element of initial commitment and is one basis on

which we know that some positive element is present in the situation. But the freedom to choose alternatives is sacrificed by any consequential choice, though new forms of choice may open up in the future. To speak of the road not taken does not mean that it could be traversed at any time if the person chose to, but that it can no longer be taken because that option—that career, that relationship—is no longer available. This sacrifice of other options may eventually be experienced as a loss, an emergent antithesis, even if the chosen option and its consequences are entirely successful and without further negative elements. Some evidence indicates that we can justify our choices only to the extent that we can say to ourselves that we could reasonably foresee their consequences (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). Since we can only foresee a limited way into the future, there eventually comes a point at which our current outcomes no longer seem to us to have been predictable when we made our choices long ago—and hence it is no longer fully possible to justify our choices or to experience ourselves as committed to them.

In general, it takes psychic energy to integrate negative elements with positive ones and to maintain the sense that an ambivalent decision is justified. Like all stress adaptation processes (see Selye, 1957), this level of effort or energy can only be supplied for a limited time. What is needed to sustain a choice or decision, we suspect, is not a continual effort to justify that decision but a subsequent flow of smaller choices or decisions, each built on the last, each requiring its own effort and energy and each serving to dissolve the tensions that have arisen since the previous decision.

The dissonance literature already contains some evidence to this effect. Perhaps the best known of these is Walster's (1964) study of shifts in army draftees' ratings of chosen and rejected job assignments at various points in time after having made their decision (immediately, four, fifteen, or ninety minutes after the decision). Walster obtained evidence of dissonance reduction (i.e., enhanced rating of the chosen job relative to the rejected one) only at the 15-minute point. By the end of the 90-minute period, there was no longer any evidence of dissonance reduction. However, from the point of view of the present analysis, there was a very special feature to the Walster study. After making their decisions, subjects were simply left alone until the time of the posttest. Thus, they had no occasion to do any of the things that individuals ordinarily do in the moments after making such a decision—go to pick up further information or other material relevant to their prospective assignment, explain the reasons for their choice to a friend, or take any of a number of other small steps, each of which would serve to confirm or bolster the initial decision. Compare this with the procedure in a well-known study (Freedman, 1965) that obtained effects of dissonance reduction that endured over a period of two months. Children who had been induced to avoid playing with certain attractive toys under mild (rather than severe) experimenter pressure continued to avoid these toys in a posttest two months later. Note, however, that in the initial treatment in this experiment, not only did the children make a decision (at least implicitly), but they then went on to repeatedly behave in a way consistent with that decision in the time that followed (i.e., choosing to play with a variety of other toys rather

than the tempting one that had been forbidden). Thus, the change in their view of themselves and their preferences can be thought of as based not on just one decision but on a sequence of behaviors calling for a series of mutually reinforcing decisions.

Repeatedly reinforcing a decision may simplify the structure and content of that choice in much the same way that repeatedly telling a story reduces the story to a simple structure of essentials (Bartlett, 1932). To be sure, in the work on story transmission, the simplification occurs through the actions of different message transmitters, each of whom understands the story in a slightly different way, thus dropping details that are perceived to be irrelevant. In the present context, the analogy is one of a single actor going over a particular "story" (a decision and its rationale) on different occasions. The story will be reduced to simple structure by repeated telling in this case as well, if only because the source and audience are familiar with it. Thus, a few simple cues can serve to stand for the whole. There is, moreover, strong evidence in work on memory indicating that what people remember is not the details of the original stimulus but their encoding of that stimulus (Higgins & King, 1980, Study 4; Lingle & Ostrom, 1979; Srull & Wyer, 1980).

The fact that social psychology has such a vast literature on impression formation based on first impressions and so little, relatively speaking, on subsequent impressions and their relationships to behavior may represent a profoundly misplaced emphasis. The direction may be set by a first impression, but it is what follows that anchors or does not anchor the impression. Similarly, simply exposing people to persuasive communications has surprisingly little effect, and what effects do obtain typically decay over time (Cook & Flay, 1978). On the other hand, alternative procedures, such as placing subjects in a situation in which they are required to make a series of decisions based on initial information (e.g., in the Luchins water jar problem) or to elaborate reasons for an impression (Ross & Lepper, 1975) or to interpret a range of their subsequent behavior consistently with the persuasive message they have received (Miller, Brickman, & Bolen, 1975), have effects that are surprisingly persistent. The key, once again, is to embed the persuasive messages in an ongoing stream of subject behavior, with the messages influencing the interpretation of the behavior and the behavior (and the decisions it involves), giving life and strength to the messages.

Some classic studies of first impressions have merely involved giving subjects some initial information about another person and then having them observe and judge that person in a standard situation, like a classroom (e.g., Kelley, 1950). More recently, experiments have given subjects information that is allegedly about a target person and then had them interact with this target, who is actually a naive other subject (see, e.g., Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977; Snyder & Swann, 1978). We would predict that, if these studies were conducted over time, whatever the effects on the target person, subjects' commitment to their own impressions, and the persistence of these impressions, should be greater in the latter set of experiments than in the former.

Many things that appear to be single decisions turn out, upon closer examination, to represent the cumulative process of a series of steps, choices, or decisions,

each of which involves encountering and surmounting some form of stress or negation. For example, most religious conversions are actually reconversions or commitments (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975) involving a series of steps. Another example is an enduring marriage. There is universal agreement in the marriage and family literature that successful couples continue to invest energy in their relationship to counteract the centrifugal forces that besiege all bonding. Such couples seem to undergo periodic difficulties and resolutions resulting in greater commitment.

#### **Characteristics of Commitments as Syntheses**

It is useful to think of a synthesis as a solution, resolution, or answer. It is, in a sense, an answer to the question, What is to be the relationship between the thesis and the antithesis? A good synthesis thus has the properties of a good answer. Perhaps the most important property of a good answer is a structure that is coherent, preferably simple, and readily apparent and that allows for few alternatives. Garner (1970) shows that good patterns in this sense are high in redundancy; that is, they have many interconnections between their elements:

Perhaps now we can understand why circles and squares are good patterns, whereas ink blots are not; there are very few ways in which circles and squares can be made, but many ways in which ink blots can be made. This smaller number of ways circles and squares can be made is the same thing as redundancy, and thus there is a direct relation between pattern goodness and redundancy. To summarize, poor patterns are those which are not redundant and thus have many alternatives, and the very best patterns are those which are unique, having no perceptual alternatives. (p. 42)

In semantic or thematic materials, good answers, patterns, stories, or schemas will have the property of assimilating or absorbing into themselves elements that might otherwise be perceived as incongruent or susceptible to alternative interpretation. Allport and Postman (1947) listed a variety of ways in which this process would occur to make rumors simpler and better in the retelling: assimilation to the principal theme (everything is made more consistent with the main point, and irrelevant or inconsistent details are dropped out), assimilation by condensation (elements are combined into fewer units), assimilation to expectation (elements are made consistent with general expectations for such a situation), and assimilation to the storyteller's individual interests and prejudices.

Answers, integrations, or syntheses also have a compelling quality. Once people know the answer to a question, it is not only hard for them to think of alternative answers but also hard for them to believe that they did not know this answer all along. Fischhoff (1977, 1980) has repeatedly demonstrated that subjects overestimate how likely they would have been to come up with the correct answers to questions once they have been told these answers. One of the consequences of this hindsight bias is that it makes past events seem more inevitable than they appeared before they happened.

It is ironic that the very process that gives us the feeling that we understand the past—the knowledge of outcomes, and the construction of categories based on these outcomes to represent what came before—may deny us access to the past and reduce our ability to learn from it (Fischhoff, 1980). A great deal of recent work has been devoted to demonstrating the ways in which current states and needs determine individuals' memory for the past. Past behavior that is incompatible with current attitudes is remembered as less likely to have occurred. For example, when people are persuaded that brushing their teeth has negative consequences, they report having brushed their teeth less frequently in the past (Ross, McFarland, & Fletcher, 1981). People also remember themselves as less committed to past sexual partners than they are to current ones. The farther back in time the experience, the more they feel this is so (Jedlicka, 1975).

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the way in which properties of current syntheses may block access to the past is the recent research on mood and memory (Bower, 1981). When people are happy, they are more likely to recall happy words from lists of words they have memorized, happy episodes from daily diaries they have filled out, or happy childhood experiences. When they are sad, they are better able to recall unhappy elements from the past. Such selective memory may make the present seem inevitable. The perception of something as inevitable may in turn be an important form of commitment to it, especially if the person sees himself or herself as having played a critical role in making it inevitable. This may have some adaptive value in enabling the person to get on with the future. There is, for example, some evidence that people try to come to terms with heart attacks by restructuring their autobiographies in order to see the attack as something that followed from previous events and lifestyles such that it could have been anticipated, and thus future attacks can be prevented (Cowie, 1976). This process of draining the surprise from our perceptions of the present makes it inevitable that we will again be surprised by the future.

If a synthesis represents the integration of many different parts, it will make it not only more difficult to think of alternative integrations, but also will make it harder to think of the constituent parts of the synthesis in isolation. Hayes-Roth (1977), in her theory of knowledge assembly, postulates the transformation of many memory elements into a single unit that is activated in an all-or-none process. Once a knowledge structure has acquired a unitary representation, its constituent parts can be retrieved only if the unitary representation is activated and decomposed. This leads to the interesting and somewhat unobvious prediction that it may take longer for subjects with such an integration to access the constituent parts of memory than subjects without such an integration, and also that it may be harder for such subjects to retrieve parts of their knowledge structure than to retrieve the whole. Considerable evidence supports this theory. Horowitz, Day, Light, and White (1968), for example, found that subjects could turn an incomplete version of a unitized stimulus into a complete version twice as fast as they could produce the part that was needed to complete it. In addition, subjects can identify words faster than they can identify their constituent letters (Johnson, 1975). Langer (1979) has argued that when a task has been sufficiently overlearned, it may be

impossible for people to retrieve the isolated movements and skills that go into their performance.

The masking of constituent elements within syntheses represents a critical issue in commitment, since it involves the masking of ambivalence. If people are really committed to something, they are unlikely to report that it has many negative elements, even though their commitment may in fact rest upon their having processed and integrated such negative elements. In processing them, however, they will come to experience them as no longer so negative, perhaps no longer negative at all. The difficulty, of course, lies in knowing whether ambivalence has been surmounted (or transformed) or simply never existed in the first place—two very different states of psychic reality. In longitudinal research, this information may become available as we track the ebb and flow of subjects' feelings during their pursuit of an activity (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). In addition, it may be possible to get some contemporaneous measures of subjects' ambivalence by using two different versions of questions: a direct format, in which subjects are asked how they feel about some features of their situation, and a quasi-projective format, in which subjects are asked how they think other people would feel about this feature. The presumption is that if subjects think that something could or would be negative for other people in that situation, they understand, at some level, that it could be negative for them as well. But the question of comparing how ambivalent subjects could be (or could have been) about some activity with how ambivalent they actually are remains an important challenge for future research on commitment.

The syntheses involved in commitments are like answers in another way: the process by which they come into people's heads. They do not have nearly the same quality if they are given to people or imposed upon people that they have if they are generated by people themselves. It now appears, from an outpouring of recent research, that answers are more like commitments (i.e., are better retained by subjects) if subjects play an active role in generating them. Slamecka and Graf (1978), for example, found generally better memory by subjects for words they were asked to generate (given a general rule and a first letter) than for the same words (and the same rules) given to subjects in their entirety (see also Cosden, Ellis, & Feeney, 1979); Erdelyi, Buschke, & Finkelstein, 1977; Hamilton, Katz, & Leirer, 1980). Subjects are especially likely to remember stimuli that they have been asked to judge with reference to themselves (Rogers, Kuipers, & Kirker, 1977) or with reference to someone else they care a lot about, like their mother (Bower & Gilligan, 1979). Cognitive theorists have preferred to interpret these last findings as due to the fact that judgments involving self (or other familiar and highly involving concepts) are more likely to be tied into an elaborate and well-differentiated memory structure, and thus are more likely to be available for retrieval by a variety of different and well-established routes. These results, however, are also quite compatible with the idea that judgments with reference to self are more likely to lead to effort to come up with what is experienced as a "genuine answer" than are judgments with reference to abstract entities.

Participating in the process of generating answers or explanations causes sub-

jects not only to remember them better but also to believe in them more strongly, even in the face of disconfirming evidence. This is the "belief perseverance" effect studied by Ross and Lepper and their colleagues. An initial study (Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975) showed that simply telling subjects after an experiment that the feedback during that experiment had been arbitrary was in no way sufficient to remove subjects' conviction that the person they had seen repeatedly receive such feedback (either themselves or someone else) was in fact good or poor at the task in question. Subjects had implicitly involved themselves in explaining or rationalizing this feedback, and it was these self-generated explanations that proved resistant to subsequent attempts by the experimenter to discredit the observations.

In a later study, Ross, Lepper, Strack, and Steinmetz (1977) examined this phenomenon more directly. Subjects were asked to explain particular events in the later lives of clinical patients whose case histories they had read, and then to estimate the likelihood of the events in question. The task of identifying potential antecedents to explain these events uniformly caused subjects to increase their estimates of the likelihood of these events. Anderson, Lepper, and Ross (1980) found that subjects could be induced to convince themselves that there was either a positive or a negative relationship between the quality of riskiness and success as a firefighter simply by being told that there was such a relationship (by reading one of two case studies) and then asked to explain it. Once they had done so, subjects were resistant to experimenters' attempts to indicate that there was, in fact, no such relationship or that the opposite relationship was equally plausible (see also Sherman, Skov, Herritz, & Stock, 1981).

There is another way in which syntheses come into a person's head like good answers. They are not predictable or obvious in advance, however right and inevitable they may appear in retrospect. Our model for this property is the ideal solution in the game of Twenty Questions wherein the object is to stump the others. This answer is something that no other player can think of in the course of the game, but something that everyone immediately recognizes when it is revealed. Likewise, the most compelling ending to a novel or a play is one that cannot be foreseen in advance but that seems eminently right, foreseeable, and even inevitable in retrospect.

The property of not being obvious in advance is as much a phenomenological property of answers to difficult questions as is the property of seeming obvious in retrospect. This will be the case especially when the syntheses can, in some sense, be thought of as emergent goals (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; March & Simon, 1958) or structures that have been created out of the matrix of previous actions rather than structures that existed from the start. Insofar as part of the purpose of a line of action is discovered during the course of the action, and the observation of its consequences and adaptation to these consequences takes place subsequently, it can hardly have been predictable or knowable in advance.

There has always been some debate in the dissonance literature about whether negative consequences to an action had to be foreseen or known in advance in order to elicit dissonance and dissonance reduction. In our analysis, and in the most

recent versions of dissonance theory, the critical question is instead whether or not the subject accepts responsibility for these consequences. It appears to be sufficient that the consequences were foreseeable rather than actually foreseen (i.e., things that people feel they could have anticipated given the information they had at hand, even if they did not). Thus, Goethals, Cooper, and Naficy (1979) compared subjects' reactions to having a counterattitudinal speech they had prepared sent to the college admissions board under one of three conditions. In the foreseen condition, subjects knew their speeches might be sent to the board; in the foreseeable condition, they knew their speeches might be sent to other interested groups but did not specifically know that the admissions board was such a group; and in the unforeseeable condition, they did not know that their speech might be sent to other groups. It should be noted that the quality of foreseeability—that an event seems to follow from or make sense in terms of some previous events—is present in both the foreseen and the foreseeable conditions. As predicted, self-justificatory attitude change was found in both the foreseen and the foreseeable condition, but not in the unforeseeable condition.

The present analysis suggests that the evolution of a good synthesis may involve some of the same stages as have been postulated for various problem-solving or creative processes. Wallas (1926), for example, hypothesized that creative thinking involved several stages: preparation (preliminary work is done on the problem); incubation (mental activity may be occurring outside of awareness, but there is no conscious attention or perceptible progress on the problem); illumination (the solution pops into awareness); and verification (the solution is tested for adequacy, generality, and stability against a variety of known facts). In one version or another, similar stages of intellectual activity have been postulated in a wide variety of models of thought (see Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

For purposes of our discussion at this point, the most noteworthy feature of these models is their consensus that the answer appears suddenly in consciousness in the form of an insight, a new idea, a shift in figure/ground focus. There is even some fascinating evidence that people will better remember solutions that come to them after an initial period of incomprehension than those that are obvious to them from the start. This has been called the "aha" effect (Auble & Franks, 1978). It no doubt works in part on much the same basis as the experiments that we described earlier, on the role of active processing by subjects. But it highlights a feature of active processing we did not note in that earlier discussion: Such processing involves a period of challenge or frustration, a period in which what will later be the "obvious" answer has not yet appeared.

Zajonc (1980) has recently argued that affect may be independent of and exist prior to cognition, based on evidence that people are sometimes able to tell that they like or do not like something without being aware of the properties on which these feelings are based, or without even being able to recognize the stimuli that are flashed before them in a microsecond display. By our analysis, individuals are often in situations in which they are attempting to complete their understanding of some experience toward which they have feelings but whose exact nature

and meaning is unclear to them (e.g., career events, a relationship, or a brief visual stimulus). The intensity of their affect will come, in part, from the effort they make to supply themselves with this understanding when in the midst of the challenge.

In summary, syntheses are relationships between theses and antitheses. They vary in quality; good ones are coherent and simple, allowing for few alternatives and effectively absorbing or assimilating incongruent elements. Syntheses have properties like answers or solutions: Once they are developed, it is hard to think of alternatives and to believe the solution was not known all along. Good syntheses are not obvious in advance but seem predictable or inevitable in retrospect, and memory is thus affected by syntheses. It is difficult to think of constituent parts of a synthesis in isolation, because this involves the masking of ambivalence and reinterpretation of negative elements as no longer so negative. Syntheses are stronger if people have active roles in generating them. Finally, the emergence of a synthesis involves stages like those in problem solving and creative processes, particularly a period of challenge or frustration.

#### ESCALATION AND CHANGE IN COMMITMENT: THE PROGRESSIVE IRREVERSIBILITY OF CHOICE

##### Justifiable Increments and Unforeseeable Consequences

Dialectical processes differ from purely circular or cyclical ones in that new syntheses are not merely repetitions of old ones but are different in systematic ways. The cumulative effect of these differences may be a state vastly different from the initial state, one perhaps not at all anticipated at the initial point.

Over and over again, people wind up demonstrably more involved in situations or more committed to lines of action than they had intended or foreseen. We have already discussed a number of examples of this in our chapter on rationality. The most dramatic of these, such as the Staw (1976) study of responses to unsuccessful investment decisions and the Brickman (1972) investigation of subjects' decisions about when to stop in situations in which outcomes are getting progressively better or worse (see also Shapira & Venezia, 1981), indicate a strong tendency by subjects to try to recoup their losses, and thus (under unfavorable circumstances) to wind up losing far more than they had initially considered risking. This seems to be especially true in conflict situations, and it illustrates the dynamics of escalation that occur in most commitments.

In the famous Deutsch and Kraus (1962) trucking experiment, the two subjects wind up blocking each other's routes and costing each other money simply because each responds to perceived provocation by the other. Likewise, in the previously discussed dollar auction game (extensively researched by Teger, 1979; and Brockner, Shaw, & Ruben, 1979), subjects continue investing money both in



order not to lose what they have already put up and to keep their competitor from profiting from his or her own stubborn refusal to quit. As the behavior escalates, moreover, the rationalizations or justifications for the behavior also escalate and subtly shift in quality.

A poignant and pointed example of this process is provided by the physicist Freeman Dyson (1979) in his recollection of the explanations he gave himself for his progressively greater involvement in World War II—an eminently justifiable involvement on some levels, and yet one he found ultimately touched with great ambivalence:

At the beginning of the war, I believed fiercely in the brotherhood of man, called myself a follower of Gandhi, and was morally opposed to all violence. After a year of war, I retreated, and said, 'Unfortunately, nonviolent resistance against Hitler is impracticable, but I am still morally opposed to bombing.' A couple of years later, I said, 'Unfortunately, it seems that bombing is necessary in order to win the war, and so I am willing to go to work for Bomber Command, but I am still morally opposed to bombing cities indiscriminately.' After I arrived at Bomber Command, I said, 'Unfortunately, it turns out that we are, after all, bombing cities indiscriminately, but this is morally justified, as it is helping to win the war.' A year later, I said, 'Unfortunately, it seems that our bombing is not really helping to win the war, but at least I am morally justified in working to save the lives of the bomber crews.' In the last spring of the war, I could no longer find any excuses [since even this last had been called into question]. (p. 56)

It should not be thought, however, that such progressive involvement is characteristic only of negative actions. Goldstein, Davis, and Herman (1975) conducted a study in which subjects were given a graded series of positive reinforcements and were asked to administer these to a learner at any level they chose. These subjects tended to give more and more intense degrees of reward over time. Subjects in another condition, who had available to them a graded series of punishments, tended to give more and more intense degrees of punishment over time. Indeed, the progressive escalation of involvement through gradual and sometimes imperceptible steps appears equally characteristic of the most highly valued and positive life involvements as it does of various forms of conflict and pathology. Both marriages and careers seem to follow this pattern. For example, Rusbult (1980) reports that students see themselves as more committed to a romantic relationship simply as a function of the more things (including time) that they have put into that relationship. Waller (1938) long ago reported that the decision to marry was less a dramatic episode than something that appeared to unfold gradually in the eyes of both the couple and various others in the couple's lives (see also Rubin, 1973). Masters and Johnson (1974) describe a case history that illuminates this point, in which a wife who is dissatisfied with her marriage but unwilling to leave it deliberately sought out a lover with whom she would have as little as possible in common, thus minimizing level of commitment. The lover did not even speak the same language. However, the tenderness they discovered despite these barriers became highly involving over time, and eventually the wife left her husband for her lover.

Careers often follow the same pattern of unexpected changes in the basis of involvement. For example, J. Q. Wilson (1962) describes the process by which newcomers to politics gradually find the initial reasons for their involvement in politics (i.e., idealism and ambition) replaced by a more professional set of concerns, in particular the concern with playing the game and winning. Ginzburg, Ginzburg, Axelrod, and Herma (1951), like Becker (1960), see career commitment as a consequence of having received job training as well as the cause of having sought that training in the first place. After training the individual must justify the time, effort, and money spent and therefore becomes acutely aware of the costs that would be incurred in switching careers.

With increasing concentration on one set of skills may come a progressive loss of interest (and ultimately aptitude) for work or recreation in other areas. Charles Darwin's confession of his loss of taste for poetry is one of the most famous examples of such a change. In many of these instances, to be sure, part of what may be happening is simply that a longstanding goal—a goal present right from the start—is simply coming closer, and the person's concern for this now highly salient goal is accordingly heightened (see Brown, 1951; Atkinson & Raynor, 1974). Distraction or disruption at this point will be more aversive and more strenuously resisted than distraction when the sequence of behavior had just been begun.

In other instances, it may make more sense to speak of new goals as having emerged and been attached to a sequence of behavior to which they were initially quite irrelevant. In his analysis of the case histories of four famous American abolitionists, for example, Tomkins (1965) makes it clear that none of them set out with the goal of becoming famous abolitionists in the first place. Though there were certain predisposing factors—all were deeply Christian, all had parents concerned with public service, and all were physically active and extroverted—the critical events that turned them into committed reformers were largely unanticipated. These lay in the vigorous and hostile public reactions to their early statements and in their manner of response to this opposition. Society's need for an abolitionist crusade, and their personal needs to participate in it, were things discovered rather than known from the start. In another era, on another side of a very complicated fence, Arthur Jensen's career as a vigorous defender of the validity of IQ tests and the heritability (on both individual and group levels) of IQ differences may be understood in part as his own response to what he has confessed was the quite unexpected fury that his 1969 *Harvard Educational Review* article aroused.

Deviant careers are launched and consolidated into personal identities in much the same incremental and incidental way as conventional careers. However, the point at which a deviant identity is publicly recognized may involve a more dramatic change than the same point in the history of a conventional career. Few people decide to become criminals as their first choice of career. Rather, as Matza (1964) indicates, most criminals start with minor offenses, get into trouble with the police, continue in this vein for a while, and then find it increasingly difficult to convince the straight world that they have abandoned their deviant behavior pattern even when they have (at least temporarily) actually done so (cf. Ray, 1961, for a

parallel discussion of drug addicts). Women working in massage parlors typically begin without any commitment to sexual manipulation of customers (and are not necessarily required to do so by owners), but they gradually accede to more and more customer wishes because doing so is profitable and because there seems little difference between the next step and the step just taken (Velarde, 1976).

In the history of deviant careers, there may occur a special process that allows individuals to take a major irreversible step with little awareness of the consequences. Lofland (1969) has called this process "encapsulation." All attention is focused on the actor's immediate troubles and how to get out of them. This shortening of the time span over which consequences are considered makes actors discount the possibility of future detection and punishment even more sharply than usual. The deviant act may be, privately, relabeled and reinterpreted. This is most elegantly illustrated in Cressey's (1953) study of embezzlers. Cressey found that this crime would not occur unless the person went through a period of rationalizing the act without calling it embezzlement so that it seemed more like taking a loan or some other justifiable form of using someone else's money. Only in retrospect do they realize that they must have been kidding themselves by thinking that they would or could repay the money they took.

The major crimes and atrocities of this century can also be understood as a process wherein each precipitating event was just a small step to the perpetrators—and sometimes to the victims—when it was committed. When people first heard about Watergate, for example, an initial reaction was often to say, "How could they have been so stupid? Why would Nixon's people want to take the risks involved in breaking into the Democratic National Headquarters, and how could they have thought they could get away with it?" The answer, as subsequent revelations made clear, was that the Nixon administration had been running similar illegal covert operations in a variety of contexts for years and getting away with them quite nicely. Watergate was just the next step. One of the reasons the Nixon people may have been so puzzled by the public outrage over Watergate (assuming that their reaction was not entirely a matter of self-presentation) is that they knew it was no big deal compared to other things that had been happening all along and to which they (though not the public) had adapted.

The mass suicide at Jonestown is even more baffling to observers. How could people be led to poison their children and then themselves? Once again, it is critical to realize that the suicide plan was not something that was sprung on cult members all at once at the last moment. Accounts of events at the People's Temple (see Osherow, 1981, for a social psychological analysis) make it clear that the suicide ritual was something that had been repeatedly rehearsed, at first jokingly or at least light-heartedly, and gradually with increasing seriousness, elaboration, justification, and reality. Moreover, the willingness of Jones's followers to comply with this desperate measure had been previously prepared by a long series of steps in which they had been induced to comply in lesser forms of cruel or degrading acts—witnessing the beating of a child, for example, or participating in some form of sexual humiliation. Still earlier, Temple members had been induced to cut their ties with

outsiders, invest their worldly goods in the Temple, participate in more ordinary forms of church services, and take many of the steps that build loyalty to a communal group (Kanter, 1972).

A very similar account can be given of the events leading up to the massacre at My Lai (Hersh, 1970). The soldiers of Charlie Company, like those of many similar units in Vietnam, were often exhausted, upset, angered by the deaths of their buddies, and frustrated or enraged by an enemy they could not seem to find. The first ventings of these feelings might be simple vandalism. Then would follow the beating and terrorizing of suspected Vietcong. Some members of Charlie Company later assaulted innocent women and old people. In the absence of social control by equally frustrated platoon leaders, other soldiers who had been initially reluctant to engage in these minor acts of violence eventually came under pressure from peers to participate as a means of establishing their own loyalty to the company. Each of these additional acts of coercion and violence was accompanied by additional reasons and justifications, which cumulatively led to a perceived justification for massacre just as the previous acts led to the massacre itself.

Similarly, Fein (1979) makes clear that the concentration camps in Nazi Europe did not spring into existence full-blown with their mission and machinery of death in place. They were the product of a long and complex process in which minorities, and in particular Jews, were gradually separated from the mass of citizens, first by symbolic means (e.g., the donning of yellow stars), then by economic and political restrictions (e.g., limitations of where they would work), and finally physically. Only then were the deportations ready to begin. In a number of instances in which the process of isolating and derogating Jews was stopped before this point (Denmark being the most famous example), the local population was unwilling to participate in deportations and murders. On the other hand, once the first of the irrevocable murders had begun, no goodwill in the world could have reversed the action or the pressure to understand and justify it.

There may be something special about the first episode of violence. However mild and limited it is, it marks the crossing of a line that all parties had hitherto been able to count on as a limit on the extent to which their conflict would escalate. Schelling (1960) has defended the ban on the use of tactical nuclear weapons in just these terms. The weapons themselves may be no more destructive than conventional weapons, and they may well shorten the particular battle or give significant advantage to one side. However, a clear rule well understood by both sides has much merit: no nuclear weapons. Once this rule is breached, there is no subsequent barrier to the incremental use of more numerous and more powerful nuclear warheads.

In the memory of participants in Synanon, one event stands out as a turning point in the decline of that organization from a harsh but high-minded community dedicated to rescuing drug addicts to a bizarre cult in which members perpetrated violence on each other and on outsiders. The group had always featured a strict prohibition against physical attack, even though brutal verbal attacks on what were regarded as self-serving and self-defeating lies by fellow addicts were common and

marathon group encounter sessions were used to dismantle these life stories. But Charles Dederich, Synanon's leader, violated this one day simply by getting up and pouring a glass of root beer over the head of a woman whose carrying on he had found to be too much. The group was shocked by this act, yet years later they were no longer shocked by beatings of children and attempts to murder outsiders who threatened to reveal what had occurred in the group. The literature on spouse abuse attaches a similar significance to the first act of violence. It is not nearly as easy to have confidence that the event will not recur (perhaps even in worse form) as it was to believe that it wouldn't happen in the first place.

One of the things that has always puzzled students of family and cult violence as well as historians of the Holocaust and similar tragedies is why victims so often remain in vulnerable situations when they would seem to have ample opportunity to leave. Once again, the key is to understand how the psychological reality of this opportunity to leave can be progressively blocked by an escalating process of commitment to stay and by justification of this decision. In the early stages, victims are often encouraged to remain in the situation by deliberate deception on the part of others. When cult members are recruited, for example, there is often no indication in the early stages of what they will be asked to do later on, such as give up all outside contacts, endure privation and hardship, or demonstrate unquestioning obedience. The initial contact between women and rapists is often quite ordinary and gives no cause for alarm. Jews in World War II were encouraged, right to the end, to believe that they were being shipped to resettlement camps in the East rather than extermination centers.

In each case, there comes a point before anything terrible has actually happened when the victims become apprehensive about the true purposes and potentials of the situation. Psychologically, it may be very difficult to break away at this point. Conceivably, they may be motivated to believe that the worst will not happen. In addition, norms of polite and civilized behavior, reluctance to create the kind of disturbance that would often be involved in escaping, and obligations to others who appear kind and helpful in many ways may all be operating to inhibit action. By not taking any step, despite inner and outer signs that one should do so, however, individuals remain at risk and slowly are transformed into victims—compliant victims, if not willing ones.

People acquire what they later feel are bad habits, like drinking, smoking, or eating too much, by the same graded series of steps. In interviews with a dozen smokers, Ken Abosch and Chris Millen (working with Brickman) found that 11 of them had started smoking for extrinsic reasons, such as to gain acceptance, to imitate parents, to feel grown up, to have something to do in social situations, or simply to experiment with something new. Virtually all respondents reported that these reasons became unimportant as time progressed. When asked what smoking currently meant to them, smokers tended to reply that they simply enjoyed either the taste, the relaxing effects, or the feeling of smoke running down their throat. By that time the people were committed to the behavior itself because of the physiological effects or its role in their life-styles.

As Lemert (1962) and Coates and Wortman (1980) make clear, similar cycles are involved in locking people into paranoid or depressive identities. Once a person has fallen into such an identity—for whatever personal or historical reasons—he or she makes desperate attempts to gain reassurance from others, to feel that others are not avoiding, rejecting, or being angry or hostile toward him or her. However, these attempts are so unpleasant to others that they begin to avoid and reject the person (at least covertly) in a way that confirms the person's worst fears. This outcome leaves everyone more convinced than ever that the person is in a state from which he or she cannot recover.

People get involved in movies, books, games, and just about everything else in the same way. In an undergraduate honors thesis done under the supervision of Brickman, Eric Teplitz had subjects watch Hollywood feature films in five-minute segments and rate after each segment how they felt about the movie and then choose either to go on with that movie or to sample the next segment from another movie. Over time, subjects were less likely to switch movies and more likely to indicate their commitment to (and interest in) the movie they were watching. Introducing still another alternative movie that they could watch if they chose had no effect on subjects' subsequent tendency to switch away from their current favorite, although they were more likely to try the new alternative when it was introduced early rather than late in the process.

Brickman (1978), in an analysis of what makes games and other situations real for the parties involved, emphasizes the point that all roles (i.e., in a game, in an experiment, or in the outside world) are unreal at first and become progressively more real through people's own behavior and other people's responses. They do not start out feeling real. For example, it is only over time that people come to feel that they are really members of a profession or are really married. The manner in which they do so is by engaging in behavior that has consequences ("external correspondence" of behavior) and that elicits feelings ("internal correspondence" of behavior). As another example, the famous Zimbardo prison simulation (Zimbardo, Haney, & Banks, 1973) may have been quite different in many ways from an actual prison, but the processes by which participants came to treat that prison experience as real—including, among others, being punished by other participants for not taking it seriously enough—may be quite similar to those by which participants in other prisons come to treat their experiences as real.

There is considerable overlap between the concept of phenomenological reality (Brickman, 1978) and our definition of commitment. For the purpose of establishing links with other literatures, commitment is a more useful way to describe the phenomena of interest than phenomenological reality. However, based on the earlier analysis, we propose that commitment helps to establish the very sense that a situation is real for a person, and the absence of commitments establishes a sense of unreality.

The cumulative nature of behavioral involvements may be summarized as follows: Particular acts lead to other acts in a manner that extends and intensifies the motivation inherent in the earlier acts. Moreover, there is a sense in which each

act in the sequence is incomplete in itself, or is complete only momentarily, but soon comes to serve as a kind of lead-in to the acts that follow. These acts tend to finish, justify, and place into perspective the earlier acts and also to extend them in a way that motivates still further developments. We are engaged by our own behavior in somewhat the same way we can be engaged by soap operas or comic strips. In isolation, each episode of a soap opera, a comic strip, or a baseball season is meaningless. After a while, however, each episode serves to answer a question left over from a previous episode and, soon, to pose a question that will need answering in the next episode. The fact that there is a delay between episodes (as there is between most episodes of the same behavior) may raise the tension level involved in this process and enhance its overall effectiveness (Auble, Franks, & Soraci, 1979).

Behavior, in this sense, is a chain in which the last link is always open, and the next link is often an imperceptible addition. It may be quite rare, in life, that there is a Rubicon to cross. More often, as C. S. Lewis has noted, there are no milestones on the road to hell, or perhaps on any road, until we look back on it and give it structure with the advantage of hindsight. Though each step seems small and builds only slightly on the previous one, when one looks back over many changes, the shifts may seem dramatic. The fact that the change from each episode to the next is in itself minor, together with the fact that each episode tends to call forth the next, gives behavioral sequences the property of momentum we have endeavored to display in this chapter. Brockner, Shaw, and Rubin (1979) have shown that subjects are more likely to stop a process of escalation if they are required to make a series of explicit decisions to continue than if they are not. Most sequences in life resemble the latter condition, in which subsequent events occur readily unless the person makes an active effort to stop them or to withdraw from the situation. There is a saying that single steps begin the longest journeys. The usual purpose of this aphorism is to remind people that they must start somewhere, in however modest a way, if they wish to accomplish anything great. For our analysis, however, the saying has another point. It is that within that single, first, small step may begin a journey of unknown length and consequence.

Not surprisingly, many of the most dramatic and influential experiments in social psychology have focused on this kind of commitment process, especially in the area of obedience or compliance. In all cases, subjects wind up agreeing to do something that observers find astonishing, something far more costly than most people would be expected to do. In all cases, the dynamics of the experiment involve getting subjects to agree to a variety of lesser things without knowing what will later be requested or what the implications of their earlier actions for this later request will be. Thus in the Milgram (1965) study of obedience, subjects accept money from the experimenter, accept their role assignment (as teacher) in the experiment, and administer a substantial number of initially mild but increasingly painful shocks to another person before they are confronted with the fact that they are inflicting pain and suffering on this other person. By the time a subject has administered a shock of, say, 170 volts to the confederate, and it has become clear that the confederate does not want to go on, the subject is no longer in the

same psychological position as someone reading about the study, who has incurred none of the obligations and has not rationalized the behavior.

In the Freedman and Fraser (1966) research on the "foot-in-the-door" effect, subjects were more likely to agree to display a large, ugly sign on their lawn if they had earlier been induced to agree to a lesser request (to display a smaller window sticker). DeJong (1979), reviewing the many subsequent studies on the foot-in-the-door technique, concludes that the procedure is reliable and that it is most likely to work under conditions that maximize the chances that subjects will see themselves as having made a commitment when they agreed to the initial request. The initial request must be large enough to cause people to think about the implications of their own behavior (Seligman, Bush, & Kirsch, 1976) but not so large as to cause them to refuse to do it (Müller & Suls, 1977). And people must feel that their having agreed to the initial request was the result of their own free choice, not the result of coercion or pressure (Uranowitz, 1975; Zuckerman, Lazzaro, & Waldgeir, 1979).

Two other recent studies have established that there can be considerable advantage in simply masking the actual cost of carrying out an action from subjects until after they have agreed to carry it out. Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, and Miller (1978) have called this the "low-ball procedure," named after a technique in which car salesman first get customers to agree to buy a car at a good price and then later report that they cannot actually get it for them at that price but can at a somewhat higher figure. Cialdini et al. (1978) found that subjects were more likely to agree to take part in an inconvenient experiment (one that required them to show up at 7:00 A.M.) if they were informed of the starting time after they had initially said that they would participate than if they were informed before making the decision to participate.

#### **Transformations in Motivation and Affect**

The idea that motivation is transformed over time is embodied in Gordon Allport's (1937b, 1961) principle of functional autonomy. Allport wished to call attention to the fact that the bases on which a behavior is started may be quite different than the bases on which it is continued, and to make clear that we should not mistake understanding of one for understanding of the other. Put simply, the principle of functional autonomy states that any activity or behavior may become an end or a goal in itself, whatever its original purpose may have been. (Cases in which behavior is originally pursued for one instrumental reason and later pursued for another instrumental reason—as when one hunts first in order to eat, or to express one's inborn aggressive instincts, but never just for the sake of hunting itself—would not be considered examples of functional autonomy, Hall & Lindzey, 1957, but could represent some of the processes that work to build commitment in our sense.) Allport went on to distinguish two kinds of functional autonomy: perseverative behavior (such as addictions, routines, or simple motor patterns like scratching that might persist beyond the point of receiving any reinforcement) and

for and its perceived instrumentality for goal attainment markedly lower after a year on the job, and they maintained these low ratings for at least the next two and one-half years. Bray, Campbell, and Grant (1974) found that the expectations of a group of newly hired managers at AT&T dropped every year for the first five years, though there was an upturn in the sixth and seventh years for the better performers.

Hall and Schneider (1973) describe new priests, following the joy of ordination, as experiencing reality shock on four different levels: They move from being rather idealistic to being more realistic about the priesthood; they become aware of the interpersonal or political aspects of the priesthood; they come to appreciate how difficult it will be to make changes they are enthusiastic about because of the rigidity of church rules and procedures or because of the resistance of their pastor; and they experience dismay at the low level of challenge and the underutilization of their competencies in their first job. Wanous (1976) found similar declines in expectations for intrinsic organizational rewards among both MBA students and telephone operators. The decline of idealistic and humanitarian motives among medical students over the course of their years in school has been repeatedly noted (e.g., Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1964; Coombs & Boyle, 1971), although there is controversy over whether some of this idealism returns after graduation. It may be affected by the physician's specialty (Gray, Newman, & Reinhardt, 1966).

In a study of 120 Loyola University undergraduates carried out by Philip Brickman, Robert Chave, and Joshua Fox, year in school was found to be negatively correlated with the belief that one's major is valuable as a stepping stone toward a career or as something that pleases one's family (both measures of extrinsic value), indicating that the choice of major had been rationally made. However, year in school was positively associated with commitment to and interest in the major (intrinsic value).

Many of these issues are dramatically illustrated in the movie *Serpico*. The movie tells the true story of a rookie policeman in New York City, Frank Serpico, who decides not to go along with the widespread corruption he finds in the department. The explicitness of the corruption and threat of violence make this story different and more extreme than the other career examples we have been reviewing, but it involves the general theme of a young person who discovers that current practices in a profession are quite different from what he or she expected. This gap between the beliefs and values that draws one into a profession in the first place and the reality encountered may be universal.

A variety of studies illustrate within our romantic relationships effects similar to those described in careers. Kerckhoff and David (1962), for example, found that more negative adjectives were used to describe partners in long-term than short-term relationships. Burgess and Walter (1968) found that couples, and especially male partners, tend to rate each other less physically attractive after marriage than before. Hobart (1958) found evidence of postmarital disillusionment, especially in the areas of personal freedom, marital roles, children and in-laws, neatness, money, and attitudes toward divorce. Much survey research indicates that

appropriate behavior (new patterns of interests, values, and sentiments, which might derive from the exercise of an ability that was initially acquired for strictly instrumental purposes). Allport's formulation remained fuzzy in the eyes of his critics because he would not call upon an array of experimental (or naturalistic) observations to demonstrate both the generality and the limiting conditions of the processes that lead to functional autonomy. Although he alluded to a number of processes he felt were relevant to an understanding of how functional autonomy developed, he could not, in the end, specify either the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms or the adaptive advantages that would have made the idea of functional autonomy fully credible. Indeed, Allport ultimately preferred what he calls nonmechanical explanations of functional autonomy, which, taken together, "amount to saying that functional autonomy comes about because it is the essence or core of the purposive nature of man" (Allport, 1961, p. 250). There may be some truth to this, but it is clearly unsatisfying as a scientific explanation without a very clear link to a specification of instances, limiting conditions, mechanisms, and function.

On one level, our survey of commitment may help to supply these missing elements. Unlike Allport, however, we do not view the kind of functional autonomy supplied by commitment as necessarily good, individualizing, conscious, adult, or mature, as the previous examples of this chapter should make clear. The unduly rosy or optimistic qualities attached to the development of functional autonomy is another reason that Allport's formulation has been unacceptable to many psychologists and limited in the amount of research it has generated.

Nor does the idea that people become more involved in situations over time, that behavior over time becomes more functionally autonomous or intrinsically motivated, mean that individuals necessarily become more satisfied or happy over time. First of all, much of happiness, or at least pleasure, is located in extrinsic reinforcements whose subjective value declines as they become more familiar over time (Brickman & Campbell, 1971) or as opponent processes are set more strongly in motion over time (Solomon & Corbit, 1974). A level of praise or an amount of money that is quite gratifying the first time it is received may eventually seem routine and may come to be expected or taken for granted. It is also possible that people may become satiated with behavior that is intrinsically motivated, at least under circumstances in which this behavior is not done with any strong sense of purpose (Klinger, 1977, pp. 126-127).

The archetypical or paradigmatic sequence is one in which idealized, romanticized, and optimistic initial expectations are shattered and reshaped by contact with reality. As usual, we can document this proposition with data from the two major domains of lifelong commitment, careers and marriage. Lawler, Kuleck, Rhode, and Sorensen (1975) studied a sample of 431 accounting students while they chose jobs and during their first year on the job. Although after the job choice the chosen firms increased in attractiveness and the rejected firms decreased in attractiveness, after a year of employment subjects rated all firms lower in attractiveness than they had before they applied for jobs. Vroom and Deci (1971) also found that young managers rated both the attractiveness of the organization they worked

marriages seem to become gradually less satisfying, on the whole, over at least their first 20 years (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Hicks & Platt, 1970). According to Pineo (1961), the drop is not only large but most significant in such vital areas as sharing of interests and activities, frequency of intercourse, consensus, and sense of permanence and love. Many of these changes no doubt represent the effects of the different issues that couples face over the course of their lives and not simply the process by which initially attractive incentives gradually lose their power. Nonetheless, the data certainly make the point that increased commitment does not necessarily imply increased satisfaction and happiness. Increased happiness, as we shall see in our chapter on mental health, depends on the form the commitment takes. It should also be mentioned that changes of the sort we have been describing are not limited to marital relationships. Pollis (1969), for example, compared respondents who differed in their degree of emotional involvement with their dating partners. Subjects, again especially males, were less likely to idealize their partners the more involved with their partners they were.

The initial motivation for action must almost by definition be extrinsic: If the action itself has not yet been experienced, motivation can hardly spring from the action. As Blau (1964) writes, "Although men may want to associate together exclusively for the sake of sociable fellowship and have no interest in deriving any extrinsic advantage from their social relations, they must prove themselves attractive to each other by demonstrating qualities that make them preferable to other possible associates, qualities that must be comparable and that consequently are, in a relative sense, extrinsic" (p. 38). These attractive qualities may in the end be neither necessary nor sufficient for the relationship to endure, but they are necessary for it to begin. The problem comes when people either believe that this initial idealized motivation or the incentive value of these initial attractions can endure, or they mistake it for commitment. Thus one can be led into decisions that cannot be sustained and might otherwise not be made.

Interestingly enough, experts in human change are suspicious of what seems to them to be premature commitment or enthusiasm. Linda Brownell and Naomi Tabachnik, working with Philip Brickman, conducted interviews with four rabbis in the Chicago area involved in either sponsoring or teaching converts to Judaism. By virtue of their role, these rabbis were especially sensitive to the question of whether the motivation brought to the conversion would lead to a successful and enriching commitment to Judaism or an unsuccessful and superficial one. Most potential converts are female, and most are doing it for the sake of either a prospective or current marital partner. Although the rabbis were uniformly suspicious of potential converts who seemed to be interested for strictly opportunistic reasons—to "catch" the Jewish spouse or pacify his family—they were also suspicious of converts whose initial reasons seemed too abstract, intellectual, or even religious. As one said:

If an individual comes to me on a very abstract, objective, intellectual plane, that person may or may not follow through. The conscious, intellectual,

rational approach is not a guarantee of a real commitment. Those who come for many reasons which in the traditional sense may be the wrong reasons, those may turn out to be the most efficient motivational factors.

The best predictors of conversion were simply such things as repeatedly attending services, joining a congregation, following Jewish customs, and so forth. Some of the rabbis were willing to vary what they required of converts, provided that the approach of the converts is active, "positive, and honest." In a rather different yet also similar context, Brehm and Cohen (1962) found that the Chinese Communist captors of American soldiers in Korea were unwilling to trust early claims of sympathy for the Communist cause until the prisoners had gone through a series of visible steps—participating in group discussions, confessing errors, preparing and signing documents—that made their own conversion something concrete and tangible in both their own eyes and those of their fellows.

One of two kinds of things can happen when early extrinsic motivation fades: People can find alternative intrinsic motivations, or they can increasingly attend to past or anticipated future extrinsic reward. If they follow the second path, then it is these future extrinsic rewards that they are committed to, not the actual activity. Regarding the former path, Hall and Schneider (1973) find that after an initial period of declining self-image and satisfaction, priests undergo a marked increase in both of these respects. In general, beyond the period of reality shock discussed above, job satisfaction is correlated with seniority (Salancik, 1974). However, this finding is hard to interpret because those who are most dissatisfied are most likely to leave, and in addition, seniority is generally associated with at least some increase in tangible and intangible benefits. Nonetheless, evidence on intrinsic interest over the life of a career is relevant.

Shepard and Herrick (1972), for example, asked workers how often they left work with the good feeling that they had done something particularly well. The percentage saying "very often" to this item rose sharply with age. In jobs that workers described as having little or no variety, older workers were much less likely than younger ones to say that this lack of variety bothered them. Similarly, salary was less related to satisfaction for university faculty who had tenure or who had been with the organization for a long time than it was for younger faculty (Pfeffer & Lawler, 1980). Thus in at least some instances, the absence of conventional extrinsic rewards is made up for by the addition of an array of unique, private satisfactions.

In romantic relationships, there is some evidence that the basis of love may change over time in a way that provides new satisfactions as some of the earlier incentives fade. Driscoll, Davis, and Lipetz (1972) showed that love was more highly correlated with trust and acceptance for married couples than for unmarried ones—marking what they suggested was a shift from "romantic love" to "conjugal love." Parental interference in the couple's relationship was positively correlated with romantic love—driven, in part, by the couple's enhanced sense of commitment if they stayed together despite the parental opposition—but not for married couples.

For the latter, the corrosive effect of continued parental interference on trust—now a more important component of love—was likely to cancel any beneficial effects it might have had on the couple's earlier sense of intrinsic motivation to their relationship. In interviews with freshmen and seniors from five Northwestern University sororities, Kathy Krasovec and Melinda Stolley, working with Philip Brickman, found that freshmen regularly mentioned the prestige of the sorority and the opportunities it afforded for new experiences, while seniors stressed only their interpersonal ties and feelings for other members.

When actors do experience this kind of increase in intrinsic motivation, it is often imperceptible to observers. A continual theme running through the eloquent testimony of individuals in many walks of life in Studs Terkel's (1975) book *Working*, is that their jobs were less extrinsically rewarding (paid less well, brought less prestige) and more intrinsically rewarding (demanded more skill, brought more satisfactions from achievement) than outsiders realized. In a study carried out by Jolene Galegher and Philip Brickman, the nature of students' career choices was rated both by the students themselves and by people the students had nominated as knowing them well. Actors were more likely than observers to say that they chose their prospective career because it seemed interesting and challenging and because it offered an opportunity to contribute to society. They were also more likely to say that they made their plans to please themselves rather than to please others and that their plans had a special meaning for them. They were less likely than observers to say "why not—nothing better to do" described their reasons for choosing their career plans. Similar findings occur in other areas, including instances in which the observers are professional helpers. Wikler, Wasow, and Hatfield (1981) found that parents of retarded children were more likely than social workers working with such parents to say that the parents' experiences with their retarded child have made them stronger rather than torn them apart. Parents were also likely to say that social workers could best have helped them by encouraging them to be strong, whereas social workers were likely to say that parents could best be helped by giving them permission to be weak.

Alternatively, people come to experience their involvement as increasingly coercive and to attend more and more to fading past extrinsic rewards or hoped-for future ones. They see themselves as no longer having a choice; they psychologically undo or regret their initial choice and would quit the line of activity if they could or felt they could. This is not at all uncommon. In response to a request on the topic, Ann Landers received a vast outpouring of mail from parents, the majority of whom indicated that they were sorry that they had had children. Similar anecdotes have been reported about couples who have been married many years; many express doubts as to whether they have married the right person. The studies we reviewed earlier showed that glamorized initial expectations and the shock of actually entering a career or a relationship can lead to an involvement that is ultimately experienced as coercive if there are not changes in either the nature of the activity or the person's orientation to the activity.

The word *burnout* has recently become popular (e.g., Maslach, 1976; Cherniss,

1978) to describe the state of helping professionals who lose their ability to care about and feel for client populations they once cared for tremendously. These professionals once felt they could help, but, eventually, they were overwhelmed by a system that seemed immune to every effort to make it more humane or more effective. If people under these or similar circumstances are unable to find intrinsic satisfactions in their activity to replace their fond initial hopes or the initially attractive extrinsic incentives, it follows that they should focus more and more on whatever fragments of extrinsic reward are available. It is then these extrinsic rewards, in fact, whose value may be enhanced.

We argue, as a key proposition, that one must become increasingly committed to something as a line of action is pursued. But this something does not necessarily have to be the value of that action per se. If healing the sick seems insufficient to justify the grueling hours and bureaucratic controls that characterize life as an intern and yet the person persists in his or her medical career, then perhaps the prospect of financial reward will take on added value. If love disappears from a marriage yet the couple stays married for the sake of their children or their social status, then it is the couple's commitment to these factors that will be progressively enhanced. In an analysis of survey data from a wide variety of occupations, Greenberg (1980) found exactly this: Extrinsic rewards became more important in situations where workers felt that intrinsic rewards were unavailable. A great deal depends on whether people retain the sense that they have chosen and are choosing the line of activity they are pursuing. If they do, as Pfeffer and Lawler (1980) found for university faculty, then extrinsic rewards like pay play a relatively small role in determining their satisfaction. If they do not, high pay is an important determinant of whether they are motivated and productive workers (Folger, Rosenfield, & Hays, 1978).

We have now only the vaguest understanding of what individual and situational differences cause people to wind up in one of these two states rather than the other, but there are certainly individual differences. Teplitz, in the honors thesis referred to earlier, found that subjects who described themselves as inclined to make commitments were more likely to become interested in the movies they watched. But for now, all we aim to establish is that behavior must eventually emerge into one of two progressively more distinct absorbing states. In looking back, people say either that they really wanted to or that they really had no choice. Each of these represents a form of commitment. The former represents a commitment to the activity; the latter, a commitment to something other than the activity. Alternatively, the former represents a commitment to the activity as an end itself; the latter, a commitment to the activity as a means to some other end. Each is also a form of illusion, since there is usually both some element of choice and some element of coercion or external force in all behavior. What happens is that one of these elements comes to dominate the psychological field in which the activity is experienced, and the activity is thus felt as either entirely free or entirely coerced. Children may sometimes need reminders to do their chores and sometimes not need reminders, but as time goes by, they are progressively more likely (by this

analysis) to settle into one of two relatively stable states: a state in which they almost never need reminders, having developed their own sense of commitment to the activities, or a state in which they almost always need reminders, having developed a sense that the activity is alien to them and one they continue solely as the result of external pressure. If disillusioned with the activity early on, people can easily disengage (this will be described in the next section), but once commitment processes have been fully engaged, there is eventually no region of noncommitment left. The person is either committed to doing the activity or committed to not doing it; he or she can no longer have neutral feelings about the activity.

The recently developed language of catastrophe theory, briefly described in the chapter on value, provides a powerful representation of this process. Two good descriptions of the application of catastrophe theory to social psychological problems are provided by Flay (1978) and Tesser (1978), and the present account draws on both of them. In its simplest form, catastrophe theory represents the strength of a behavior as a function of two variables with different properties. One variable is called the normal factor; as in our previous discussion, the normal factor is the instigating force that motivates the individual to pursue the behavior. The second factor in catastrophe theory is called the splitting factor. In our analysis, this is the inhibiting force or the force that makes the individual prefer not to do the behavior. The critical postulate of catastrophe theory under these circumstances is that when the inhibiting force is strong, no moderate or intermediate form of behavior is available. The individual will enact either approach behavior or avoidance behavior in extreme form and may shift suddenly from one to the other as the balance of forces changes even slightly in a critical region. This model describes our discussion to this point if we just make the assumption that inhibiting forces (the splitting factor) can, for all practical purposes, be represented as increasing (perhaps in a negatively accelerated manner) as a function of time. As time goes by, any line of action or any relationship is encumbered with additional costs in the form of investments, pressures from public opinion, residues of past conflicts, and so forth. These do not mean that the activity or the relationship must be discontinued, but they do mean that neutrality toward that activity or relationship becomes increasingly impossible. If the strength of positive forces is sufficient, the individual will experience a high degree of commitment to that relationship. If the strength of positive forces is not sufficient, the individual will experience a high degree of alienation from that relationship. In either case, according to a catastrophe theory representation, there will be a strong inertial tendency that makes people's commitment change more slowly than the underlying positive forces. But if the change does come, it will be rapid and drastic beyond their expectations.

In summary, commitments are formed by small and unique, nonrepetitive increments, the consequences of which are often unforeseeable and unintended. Examples drawn from conflict situations, from positively reinforcing contingencies such as marriage, and from careers are illustrative. Escalation in commitment occurs in two ways: through heightened concentration as goal attainment is closer and through the emergence of new goals. Many psychological, social, political, and historical phenomena (e.g., deviant careers, Watergate, Jonestown, violence and

victimization, addiction, depression, and simple leisure activities) can be understood in light of an analysis of incremental change and commitment development.

The gradual development of a commitment implies transformations in the bases of both motivation and affect. Increased commitment, however, does not imply greater satisfaction or happiness; the archetypal sequence is early idealism and later reshaping in light of reality. Careers and romantic relationships are particular examples of this. As developed further below, we believe that the initial motivation for action is generally extrinsic but that it is soon replaced with imperceptible increases in intrinsic involvement, an involvement that steadily grows with time.

## STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMITMENT

### The Importance of Negative Elements

It is clear from the foregoing that we believe that early extrinsic motivation is bound to fade, and when it does a new motivation must be found if commitment is to fully develop. In this section, we will argue that the development of a commitment follows a characteristic pattern in which an early, unreflective positive motivation is challenged and eventually replaced by a different form of motivation that integrates the negative elements of the challenge. In theory, the same end result could be achieved through the integration of initially negative elements with positive elements that followed. We will discuss an important special case in which this might occur. In general, however, if the initial elements of the stimulus situation are negative, the individual will not embark on action in the first place. One reason that bystander intervention in emergencies may be surprisingly rare (as Latane & Darley's 1969 famous research has shown) is that such situations immediately confront people with highly salient negative elements—risk of danger, the prospect of time-consuming delay, the possibility of being embarrassed. Extrinsic incentives for helping in such circumstances are much less salient. Furthermore, unless the individual has a history of action to generate intrinsic motivation or commitment, there are also no strong internal forces to induce action. On the other hand, people will make remarkable sacrifices to help others if the need for help occurs later in the sequence of events, after earlier interactions have established the motivation on which this help can draw.

If no negative elements or contradictions to the decision become salient, we do not think of it as a commitment. A simple example to illustrate this point is the phenomenon called functional fixedness (see e.g., Adamson, 1952). Subjects learn a moderately complicated rule necessary to solve a series of logical or perceptual problems. Sometimes this rule is simply the residue of past experience with an object (e.g., a paper clip or a hammer). Then the subject is confronted with a problem that can be solved by a much simpler rule, or a problem that can be solved only if the familiar object is used in a novel way. Typically, without some further cues



from the experimenter, subjects will continue using the complicated rule or continue trying to use the familiar object only in the familiar way. Functional fixedness is generally discounted as an example of commitment because subjects are usually not aware of, and may never have been aware of, alternatives to their present habits in these problem-solving situations. Nor are they aware of the fact that these habits now involve substantial costs in their current situation. In that sense, we could predict that unlike true commitments, these habits would be quite vulnerable to any event that either made salient their costs or made available attractive alternatives, and this is indeed the case. Even subtle cues from the experimenter, which subjects do not remember receiving, may be sufficient to cause them to change their approach to the problem completely. The situation thus also resembles McGuire's (1966) findings on naive bases of belief and vulnerability to persuasion. If subjects have believed certain things simply as truisms (for example, brushing one's teeth is good), without ever having examined their premises or considered possible pro and con evidence, they are surprisingly vulnerable to persuasion that their belief has been mistaken. They are much less vulnerable to such persuasion when they have previously been led to consider (in weakened form) such counter-arguments.

It is possible—and, we suggest, not at all unusual—to have both a favorable first impression of someone or something and a favorable second (or enduring) impression and still pass through an interval in which the positivity of the first impression has faded and the positivity of the second impression has not yet emerged. This has, in other analyses (e.g., Festinger, 1964), been called the period of regret, during which elements contradictory or antithetical to the first impression have accumulated and not yet been integrated into a synthesis. Several previous authors have made the point that the development of commitment in interpersonal relationships appears to have these three general phases. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) call the critical intermediate period one of commitment testing, and they suggest that during this time stress on the relationship is sometimes introduced deliberately by one partner in order to test the extent to which the other person is genuinely serious about the relationship and willing to make sacrifices for it. It should be noted, by the way, that one can test the seriousness of one's own commitment as well as the seriousness of the other person's commitment in this manner.

Merton (1949) has suggested that in the context of science, it is the element of discipline that carries the researcher over the barren periods after which the early excitement has faded and no answers are in sight. C. S. Lewis (1964) has suggested that such a stage in any worthwhile enterprise is actually part of God's plan for ensuring that people take responsibility for their actions rather than simply being led to do good by divine power. According to one of Lewis's devils, this period of disappointment or anticlimax that follows each endeavor (e.g., joining a church) is a rich opportunity to work evil:

The Enemy [God] allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavour. It occurs when the boy who has been enchanted in the nursery by *Stories from the Odyssey* buckles down to really learning

Greek. It occurs when lovers have got married and begin the real task of learning to live together. In every department of life it marks the transition from dreaming aspiration to laborious doing. The Enemy takes this risk because He has a curious fantasy of making all these disgusting little human vermin into what He calls His "free" lovers and servants—"sons" is the word He uses, with His inveterate love of degrading the whole spiritual world by unnatural liaisons with the two-legged animals. (Lewis, 1964, p. 17)

Our major addition to this theoretical outline is to postulate the existence of a second crisis point, called into existence by the very solution to the first crisis, or the success of the first synthesis, and to show that the character of the commitment or synthesis emerging from this second period of testing is demonstrably different from the commitment forged by the first crisis. We will also define, in more detail than has been done previously, the nature of each of these stages and the evidence that bears on them, their relationship to the breaking as well as the making of commitments, to the problem of mental health, and to the question of awareness.

#### Description of the Five Stages of Commitment

For quick descriptive reference, Stage I commitments may be described as *exploratory*. People are exploring a potential activity or relationship, in either a cautious or carefree manner, but in general with concern only for what positive elements are present that might make further exploration worthwhile. What we are calling Stage I commitments can be thought of as precommitments because they generally involve an unreflective positive orientation toward the potential object of commitment. This is also, in a different way, true of Stage II commitments, which involve the emergence of negative elements but not yet the existence of a synthesis (the first true commitment). But these first two periods are so important to our understanding of the commitment process that it seems both silly and unnecessarily cumbersome to call them precommitment stages. In addition, these processes have generally been referred to as stages in previous discussions of the growth of commitment (e.g., Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). One's actions during these stages foreshadow and shape the nature of the commitment to come (if it does) even if only in ways that are largely implicit and unrecognized. Earlier in this chapter we reviewed many of the studies that characterize beginning commitments as positive and unreflective.

Stage II commitments can be described as *testing*. Negative events of some sort have been encountered, and people assess their willingness and ability to accommodate these events. People may also be involved in testing their environment, such as the willingness of a partner to make concessions or the prospects that a task can be solved. Clearly, Stage II commitments, like Stage I commitments, involve information search, but in Stage II the search is about the nature of negative rather than positive features and is therefore more troubled. The orientation in Stage II is external or environmentally focused. The crisis at this time is one of encountering unfamiliar and perhaps unexpected events and the threat of not

achieving goals or fulfilling wishes. The threat subjects experience is from something outside themselves; it is a threat to something that has, at that moment, primarily extrinsic value for them. In all of these features, as we will note in a moment, it contrasts with the Stage IV crisis.

Stage III commitments can be described as *passionate*. There may have been numerous minor and essentially unnoticed syntheses earlier, but this stage is marked by the first major synthesis of positive and negative elements and by the first recognition of the entire process as a commitment. Stage III commitments have two striking features: They are *fiercely and unrelentingly positive*—the existence of negative features is virtually denied—and they are highly self-conscious. Fanatical commitments are Stage III commitments, as are commitments that involve a rigid adherence to a certain behavioral schedule without exception and without regard to costs (Ainslie, 1975).

Stage IV commitments can be described as *quiet*. This stage emerges slowly as the energy needed to maintain a Stage III commitment fades and as the intensity of the ambivalence, which contributed to the need for this level of energy, likewise fades. With this fading, however, comes another kind of crisis or antithesis. The crisis is posed not by the prospects of failing to get the object of commitment or to sustain the commitment but by the actuality of having attained the object of commitment and of having sustained the commitment. The crisis is slowly and insidiously posed by familiarity and expectedness, not unfamiliarity and unexpectedness. In contrast to Stage II, the orientation of people in Stage IV is internal. The threat subjects experience is from something inside themselves, and the threat is to something that has, at this point, primarily intrinsic value for them. It can be thought of as the crisis of boredom.

Stage V commitments can be described as *integral*. They represent a higher level of integration of positive and negative elements, but integration more complex and flexible than the earlier bonding. The structure now absorbs the periodic emergence into awareness and fading from awareness of a variety of positive and negative elements without losing its basic form. Indeed, the entire commitment may move into and out of awareness. The cognitive and emotional quality of the commitment at this point depends markedly on whether it is in or out of awareness. We argue that cognitive complexity is lost when things are put out of awareness. Thus an increasing ability to put things out of awareness means an increasingly simple cognitive structure. Similarly, increasing awareness is paralleled by increasing cognitive complexity. Rational consideration of the pros and cons of the object of a commitment is typically done in awareness.

Emotional complexity, on the other hand, is lost when things are held in focal attention or focal awareness and competing impulses are excluded. Thus we suggest that an increasing ability to hold things in focal awareness means an increasingly simple emotional structure, and that putting things out of awareness enhances emotional complexity. Emotional working through of conflicting feelings, as well as the creative association of previously unattached thoughts and feelings, is usually done out of awareness. As commitments evolve over time, individuals come to have

both a greater capacity for keeping them out of awareness and a greater capacity for keeping them in awareness. Thus, during Stage V individuals have the capacity to treat their commitments in a cognitively simple or mindless way, simply acting out of habit or following a well-known script. They also have the capacity to treat their commitments in an emotionally simple or single-minded way: They resurrect the Stage III passion. Both of these simplifications allow actions to be relentlessly followed without either cognitive or emotional ambiguity, which could make such dedicated pursuit difficult to maintain. Commitment could not continue, however, if cognitive and emotional complexity (doubts) were also not sometimes salient. Furthermore, we hypothesize that with time, individuals make transitions from one of these states to the other more easily.

#### Further Differences Among the Five Stages

Table 5-1 summarizes the preceding description of the five stages as well as the discussion to follow of several further distinctions among the five stages. The stages differ in the major tasks involved, whether the positive or negative elements of the object are salient, the primary basis of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic), and whether the commitment is in focal awareness.

As elaborated shortly, the five stages also differ importantly in dialectic form and in rate of growth or change. Also, it is speculated that individuals in different stages of a commitment differ in perceptions of control, feelings of playfulness, experience of freedom, and categorization of the commitment in stimulus or response terms. Finally, the stages are suggested to differ in the slopes of the approach or avoidance gradients. It is hoped that the speculative comparison of these properties of the five stages help to illuminate how the stages are qualitatively different from one another.

*Differences in the stages in dialectic terms.* The five stages can be described in the language of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model of commitment. Stage I represents the initial statement of the thesis or approach motivation; Stage II represents the initial emergence of the antithesis or avoidance motivation; Stage III represents the initial emergence of a synthesis of these two, which we have characterized as a rigid synthesis; Stage IV represents the emergence of a second antithesis, produced by strains from within the initial synthesis rather than threats posed from outside; and Stage V represents the evolution of a higher-level synthesis, which we have characterized as more open and flexible.

Of course, this is a macroscopic view of the commitment process. Beginning with the first acknowledgement of negativity in Stage II that is somehow dealt with (i.e., synthesized), countless syntheses occur throughout the life of a commitment. Commitments are dynamic; they are constantly being challenged and transformed. There may be structure to enduring commitments, but it is changing rather than stable. As Giele (1976) writes concerning relationships:

There is no holding a relationship to a single form. . . . A good relationship has a pattern like a dance and is built on some of the same rules. The partners do not need to hold on tightly because they move confidently in the same pattern, intricate, but gay and swift and free, like a country dance of Mozart's. . . . The dancers who are perfectly in time never destroy the 'winged life' in each other or in themselves. (pp. 69-86)

It is the nature of the particular antitheses and syntheses that distinguishes one stage from another. Figure 5-1 provides a schematic representation of this process. Each peak in the intrinsic motivation curve represents a synthesis. Extrinsic motivation is hypothesized to rise rapidly during Stage I but then to gradually decline throughout the life cycle of the commitment (except in special cases in which one's commitment shifts to the extrinsic factors, as discussed earlier). In contrast, intrinsic motivation develops slowly but increases dramatically during Stage III with the occurrence of the first large synthesis within awareness. During the Stage IV crisis, intrinsic motivation gradually erodes, but it rises again to at least the Stage III level when this crisis is resolved by the synthesis that initiates Stage V. Levels of intrinsic motivation closely parallel the individual's sense of how committed he or she is. Extrinsic motivation is not insignificant in commitments, as we define them. It can serve important functions, particularly in times of crisis. However, intrinsic motivation is the essential ingredient in a commitment in our formulation.

*Differences in stages in rate of growth.* As can also be seen in Figure 5-1, the five stages represent very different rates of growth and change. Stage I involves a slow, often imperceptible change in sentiments. Stage II represents a break in the Stage I process of growth. Stage III is a period of rapid growth, even sudden change. Stage IV represents an erosion of the achievements of Stage III growth and Stage V, finally, is a dynamic equilibrium in which lesser versions of previous changes are reenacted in a basically stable structure.

*Differences in stages in perceived control.* Stage I commitments feature the illusion of control. The exploration of the new object, activity, or person appears to be entirely under one's control, though the individual is actually under at least partial control of extrinsic motivators at this time. In Stage II commitments, individuals confront this and experience a lack of control. The consequences of choices already made become more apparent at this time. Greater knowledge of the object of commitment and its inherent negative features leads the person to recognize that he or she is not in control. The object is unlikely to change in any fundamental way, and one must come to terms with this. Stage III commitments are characterized by the illusion of "no control." That is, the person feels swept along by impulses, events, and inevitabilities that must be followed whether he or she wishes to or not. This is the stage in which people will say that they *have* to do something (i.e., invest more resources in a war, pursue an addiction) because they really have no choice. Although the person maintains some degree of control at

STAGE	Major task	Salient elements of commitment	Basis of motivation	Commitment in focal awareness	Dialectic form	Rate of growth	Perception of control	Playfulness	Type of freedom	Approach/avoidance gradient	Stimulus or response categories
I	Exploratory	Positive elements	Extrinsic	No	Thesis	Slow growth	Illusion of control	Playful	Precision freedom	Avoidance gradient	Readily accessible stimulus categories
II	Testing	Negative elements	Extrinsic	No	Antithesis	Break in this growth	Confronted with lack of control	Uncertain and ambivalent	Unfree (perception of external constraints)	Avoidance gradient	Not readily accessible stimulus categories
III	Passionate	Positive elements	Intrinsic	Yes	Synthesis	Rapid growth and change	Illusion of no control	Serious	Postdecision freedom	Approach gradient	Readily accessible response categories
IV	Quiet	Negative elements	Intrinsic	Yes	Antithesis	Erosion of growth	Recognition of past control	Uncertain and ambivalent	Unfree (perception of internal constraints)	Approach gradient	Not readily accessible response categories
V	Integral	Positive and negative elements	Intrinsic	Off and on	Synthesis	Growth and erosion fluctuating	Realistic sense of partial control	Playful and serious	Free and postdecision freedom	Approach gradient	Idiosyncratic response categories

TABLE 5-1 Description of Stages in the Commitment Process

this stage, as at every stage, one's perception at this stage is of being out of control. Stage IV commitments involve a confrontation with what we may call "over control," or the recognition of past control. Individuals come to realize how large a role they have in fact played in determining events and must struggle to come to terms both with that fact and with the fact that their feelings about these events may no longer be what they once were. Stage V commitments bring individuals to a more realistic sense of partial control. Some actions have been and will be the individuals' own doing, and others have been imposed on them by events, and it is the function of commitment at this point to accommodate both of these facts.

*Differences in stages in playfulness.* Stage I commitments could be described as playful, Stage III commitments are typically very serious, and Stage V commitments are, at different points, both serious and playful. Stage II and IV commitments are both uncertain and ambivalent.

Stage I commitments are flirtations; for example, in developing interpersonal relationships, requests and offers made at this point are deliberately lighthearted so that they can be refused without anyone's not yet fully engaged feelings being hurt. Stage III commitments, in this analogy, represent a later and much more serious stage of courtship, with feelings very much on the line in every offer and request. Stage V commitments are more like established marriages—the parties are aware of the external problems that are unknown at Stage I and the internal stresses that are unknown at Stage III, but they are capable of dealing with each of them in turn with aspects of previous orientations. It is, in a sense, as if seriousness were a necessary solution to the questions posed by Stage II ambivalence, while a return to playfulness is a necessary solution to the questions posed by Stage IV ambivalence. Seriousness represents the drive needed to conquer external obstacles; playfulness represents the flexibility and relaxation needed to dissolve the tensions of an over rigid internal structure. Commitments that survive into Stage V must thus have the capacity for both seriousness and playfulness.

*Differences in stages in freedom.* Stage I, Stage III, and Stage V commitments also involve significantly different orientations to freedom. Understanding the differences in people's experience of freedom at these different points in time will help us grasp not only the nature of freedom but the nature of commitment and the relationship between the two. Thus we will describe these different aspects of freedom before describing how they differ in importance at the various stages.

There has been considerable debate over what freedom means in both psychology and philosophy (see Adler, 1958, or Dewey & Gould, 1970 for reviews of this vast literature). Much of the debate has been over the relative importance of two different components or types of freedom: people's ability to make choices among alternatives without being subject to external constraints, and people's

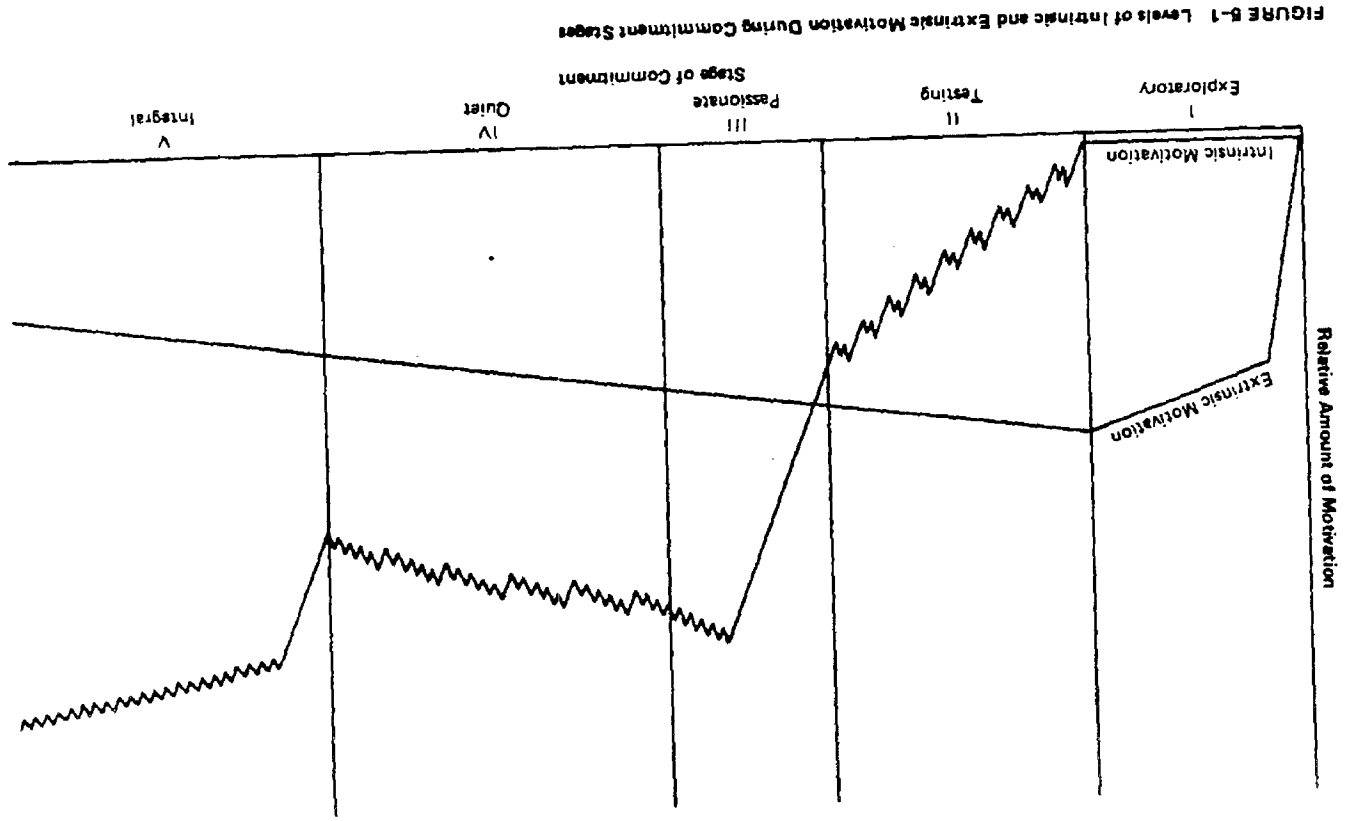


FIGURE 5-1 Levels of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation During Commitment Stages

ability to achieve for themselves satisfactory outcomes. Ordinarily, these two might seem to be the same, since people who can choose freely among outcomes will ordinarily be expected to choose for themselves a satisfactory outcome. But what is their state if they can choose freely but there are no truly satisfactory outcomes available? Alternatively, what is their state if there is a highly satisfactory outcome available but it is the only one, thus precluding the objective possibility of choice? Writers have differed as to whether people are truly free, or will feel free, in these two conditions. Variations of these two conditions have also been used to describe what authors have felt were two different kinds of freedom. For example, Berlin's (1969) notion of negative freedom is largely freedom from constraint, while his notion of positive freedom is largely freedom to achieve positive outcomes. Steiner's (1970) conception of decision freedom is primarily freedom from constraint on choice (in this case, constraint imposed by differences in the actual value of the alternatives, which would serve to make the choice predictable), whereas his conception of outcome freedom is primarily freedom of access to desirable outcomes.

A number of recent conceptions of freedom, however, have tended to dissolve the distinction between these two aspects in a manner that follows from our analysis of the origins of meaning and value. To establish whether an outcome is valuable or desirable to any particular individual, it is necessary to know not simply the objective properties of that outcome but the subjective state of that individual: what he or she feels, wants, and desires. As we have seen, the outcome will be experienced as meaningful and valuable by the individual to the extent that the individual feels he or she has chosen it and is committed to it. Thus the first element of freedom (the experience of choice or the sense of having chosen the outcome) is necessary for the second element of freedom (the experience of the outcome as subjectively of value). Conversely, it is probably also true that outcomes cannot be indefinitely experienced as chosen without also being felt to be desirable. People feel free, in this general sense, when they feel that their actions and their consequences are their own, flowing from their own selves. Thus, according to Bergman (1977), the making of a choice does not in and of itself give rise to the feeling of freedom but does so only if the actor identifies with what he or she perceives as the agency that does the choosing (i.e., regards the thought processes that made the decision as truly his or her own) even if it has been conditioned or influenced by external forces. Dworkin (1970) describes an individual as acting freely if and only if the act in question is performed for reasons the individual does not mind. Kruglanski and Cohen (1973) and Trope (1978) have both shown that subjects view actors as free to the extent that they see these actors as behaving in a manner congruent with their personal disposition, or with the manner in which they could be predicted to behave in the absence of external pressures to behave otherwise. Thus, in the Trope (1978) study, actors were seen as more free when the rewards present in the choice situation (joining a painting club or an electronics club) were biased in favor with what the actor already wanted to do than when they were biased against what the actor wanted to do.

With this as background, we want to offer a distinction between two kinds of freedom. The distinction is related to elements of the foregoing discussion of analytical confusion in previous distinctions. We think it is worthwhile to distinguish between the freedom people may experience before they make a decision (predecision freedom) and the freedom they may experience after they have made a decision (postdecision freedom). In each case, the match between the person's inner state, a line of action, and an outcome is the critical concern, but in predecision freedom we are talking about a number of possible lines of action and a number of prospective outcomes (if these are indeed available), whereas in postdecision freedom we are talking about a single (chosen) line of action and, eventually, a single (obtained) outcome. The reason that the number and quality of alternatives and the ability to choose among these alternatives without constraint are important in the consideration of predecision freedom is, in this view, simply because an increase in any of these raises the probability (in actors' or observers' eyes) that a course of action can be selected that will lead to a satisfactory outcome (an outcome congruent with the person's inner dispositions). Once a decision has been made, however, the number and quality of alternatives other than the one chosen and the ability to choose among these alternatives without constraint should be much less relevant. The experience of postdecision freedom, we suggest, will depend only on whether the particular course of action chosen corresponds to the person's inner dispositions and self-perceptions.

This issue has not been salient in past analyses, in good part because past analyses and most lay thinking about freedom have focused on the question of making (rather than enacting) decisions or on predecisional states. Moreover, most past analyses have not drawn another distinction alluded to earlier in this paragraph, namely, between the choice of a behavior and the choice of attainment of an outcome. If choosing a particular alternative automatically means obtaining the particular outcome associated with that alternative, many of the issues we have been concerned about here—and elsewhere in this book—become moot. People will obtain that outcome regardless of the extent to which they are committed to the line of action designed to lead to it, or regardless of how effectively they pursue that line of action. In most important cases, however, people choose only lines of action whose ultimate value will depend upon how successfully and vigorously they pursue them. Under these circumstances, feeling that such a line of action was freely chosen and that it represents enthusiastic rather than reluctant mobilization of inner energies will have functional value. As Csikszentmihalyi and Graef (1979) write, lack of what we call postdecision freedom "produces a split in consciousness: part of one's attention is concentrated on the task at hand because one has to deal with it, but part of one wishes to be elsewhere doing something else" (p. 98). On the other hand, when Martin Luther said "Here I stand; I can do no other," he was clearly experiencing no split in consciousness. In this most famous example of postdecision freedom, Luther indicates complete oneness with his action, an identifica-

tion enhanced rather than diminished by his assertion that—for him, at that point—nothing else was possible.

If we identify Stage I commitments with predecision freedom and Stage III commitments with postdecision freedom, it will come as no surprise at this point that we feel Stage V commitments require elements of both predecision and postdecision freedom for their sustenance. In Stages II and IV, people do not feel free. Stage II begins with the erosion of Stage I's sense of predecision freedom, or the increasing perception of some form of external constraints. Stage IV begins with the erosion of Stage III's sense of postdecision freedom, or the increasing perception of some form of internal constraints that make impossible the indefinite continuation of Stage III's enthusiasm. In an enduring Stage V commitment, people need and seek a sense of predecision freedom, not so much because they are in fact interested in revoking their current choice or in pursuing alternatives but because they need to revive the sense that this is possible in order to retain the feeling that they are indeed committed to their current state and not just trapped by it—that is, that they have postdecision freedom. Maccoby (1977), in his analysis of corporate gamesmen, notes that these talented, enthusiastic executives, who play the corporate game for its own sake and are most effective in this role, regularly need to reassure themselves that they could leave the corporation they are working for any time they wanted to—despite the fact that they are usually highly committed to the corporation and never do leave it. In our analysis, it is the very fact that these executives are so strongly pressed to maintain such a high level of dedication, enthusiasm, and loyalty (which include heavy emphasis on team play and conformity) that requires them to try to maintain the prerequisite for such feelings—a strong sense of postdecision freedom. This requires, in turn, a periodic infusion of the sense of predecision freedom. In the variety of programs designed to renew or revitalize the commitment of participants, such as Marriage Encounter weekends or retreats for stressed and potentially burned-out helping professionals, the fact that participants have options, however scary, are always either an explicit or implicit part of the agenda.

In an unpublished study on actor-observer differences, Galegher and Brickman found some strong indications that the determinants of predecision freedom are different from the determinants of postdecision freedom. Northwestern University students were surveyed about their career interests and plans. Two different questions about freedom were asked: how free people felt to choose among possible careers, and how free they felt to carry out their choice. We were interested in the extent to which these perceptions could be predicted from two other variables—the number of career alternatives people felt they had, and the extent of their commitment to a particular career alternative. People who felt they had a large number of career alternatives rated themselves as significantly freer to choose among alternatives than did people who felt that they did not have a large number of alternatives. This variable was unaffected by degree of commitment to a particular career. On the other hand, feeling free to carry out a career choice was unrelated to the number of career alternatives people felt they had. It was, instead, positively and

significantly related to the degree of commitment people reported having to a particular career choice.

*Differences in stages in approach-avoidance gradients.* Our commitment stages can also be articulated within the framework of approach and avoidance gradients first carried out by Miller (1948), although the later stages require a reversal of Miller's assumption that the avoidance gradient is steeper than the approach gradient. Miller made this assumption, and carried out his entire analysis of goal gradients, in part to explain the fact that rats running toward an object about which they were ambivalent (e.g., a food box at which they would get shocked) ran more slowly as they got closer to the goal. This could be understood if the rat had independent bases of approach and avoidance motivation—hunger and fear, respectively—and if hunger were relatively constant regardless of whether the rat was close or far from the goal box, while fear increased sharply as the rat got closer to the box. In our view, the first two stages of commitment can be described as analogous to these two regions of a graph in which an avoidance gradient is steeper than an approach gradient. Stage I commitments feature unambivalent approach because the object is distant and the avoidance motivation that will be aroused is weak. Stage II commitments begin when avoidance motivation becomes more imminent, salient, and perhaps restricting (Eidelson, 1980). Avoidance then begins to seriously challenge approach motivation, perhaps even overwhelming it.

Stage III begins with a cognitive and affective transformation of a more fundamental sort, which changes the relative steepness of the approach and avoidance gradients so that the approach gradient becomes steeper. In the earlier stages, forces operate to push subjects to an intermediate position—to move away if they get too close (because when subjects are close, avoidance motivation is stronger than approach), and to move closer if they get too far (because in the relative safety of distance, approach motivation is stronger than avoidance). Once the gradients have been transformed by that first commitment synthesis, forces operate to push subjects to one of two extreme positions: extreme closeness if they are somewhat close (because their approach motivation gets still stronger), or extreme distance if they are somewhat distant (because their avoidance motivation gets still stronger). This is another way of representing the fact (which we have discussed at length earlier) that once commitment enters the picture (as it does in Stage III), regions of effective neutrality become inaccessible. Stage III commitments can be pictured as states in which subjects are close to a goal in a situation where the approach gradient is steeper than the avoidance gradient, hence the passionate, unrelenting plunge toward the goal. Similarly, Stage IV commitments emerge when events—including those triggered by simple exhaustion or satiation—move subjects further away from the goal, hence the potential for the dissolution of the commitment. Stage V commitments involve some kind of slow and relatively stable oscillation between these two regions. During most of Stage V, approach is predominant. During each period of doubt or hesitation (i.e., emergence of a new antithesis), however, avoidance will predominate until resolution (i.e., a new synthesis) occurs.

*Differences in stages in stimulus versus response categorization.* Still another way of characterizing our commitment stages, this time in the domain of social cognition, is to suggest that in our first two stages people think in terms of stimulus categories and in our last three stages they think in terms of response categories. In Stages I and II, in other words, people are thinking primarily about positive and negative features of the stimulus. They are considering only the attractiveness of their partner or their job. In Stages III and IV, they are thinking primarily about positive and negative features of their own response—that is, their enthusiasm towards their partner or their job. Within each framework, the stages may occur in the order they do in part because positive categories are more readily accessible and more likely to be recognized and reported than negative categories, as the literature on memory and judgements of self and others has repeatedly shown (e.g., Zajonc, 1968b). Thus initial impressions are based on readily accessible stimulus categories, and Stage II impressions are based on less readily accessible stimulus categories. Stage III impressions are based on readily accessible response categories, and Stage IV impressions are based on less readily accessible response categories. Stage V thinking, we suggest, involves a mixture of the foregoing, by which point the person will have evolved idiosyncratic personal categories for thinking about the commitment. Some antitheses and syntheses will involve the resolution of new stimulus features (e.g., use of a new text in a course), and others will involve new response features (e.g., boredom after teaching a course for the fifth time).

It should be noted that a breakdown of cognitive processes at the different stages thus places the twin tasks of ambiguity reduction and ambivalence reduction (Newman & Langer, 1981) at two different points in time. Ambiguity reduction, or trying to figure out what kind of a person or situation the individual is dealing with, is the dominant concern of the first two stages. Ambivalence reduction, or trying to figure out and manage what conflicting forms of motivation the individual has about the situation, is the task of subsequent stages.

*Evidence consistent with the stages.* There are no studies in the literature that offer a direct test of all five of these stages. There are, however, many highly provocative works of research on the development of dyadic relationships, which collectively offer some suggestive evidence for the distinctions we are making. Our theory is equally relevant to the development of commitment in groups, but with a few exceptions (e.g., Bales, 1950; 1951; Schutz, 1958; Tuckman, 1965), there is no relevant research to review. What we would most like to show through a consideration of past studies is that there are two points of decline in the development of commitment, corresponding to our Stage II and Stage IV crises. A study of Eidelson (1980) and another by Braiker and Kelley (1979) provide evidence for the first crisis.

Eidelson (1980) hypothesizes that relationships develop under the influence of two conflicting motives, affiliation and independence, and that, moreover, the intensity of the conflict between these motives is likely to peak at a point midway

through the process of relationship formation. Before that point, the individual can satisfy his or her need for affiliation in the relationship without yet encountering any restrictions or limitations on his or her independence. After that point, if the individual decides that the relationship is still worth pursuing despite the restrictive costs it entails, these costs are assumed to lose their salience by a process in which the individual redefines his or her independence and adopts a new frame of reference in which the relationship is now taken as a given. These points correspond nicely to our first three commitment stages, with the reorganization at the last point representing what we have called the first major commitment synthesis.

Eidelson interviewed university freshmen at two-week intervals for periods of five or six weeks. Participants' degree of involvement in each of the friendship relationships they rated was calculated as a function of the proportion of interpersonal time the person spent with that friend during successive time periods. Relationships were classified at each point in time as having one of four levels of involvement. Two separate comparisons were conducted. One compared subjects' feelings about many different relationships that differed in their level of involvement. The other compared subjects' feelings about a single relationship as a function of fluctuations in involvement over time. The same pattern was found in both studies. Satisfaction with the relationship rose from level one to level two involvement, dropped from level two to level three, and rose again from level three to level four. We, of course, would look eventually for a further drop and rise in relationship satisfaction, occurring for different reasons and with different consequences.

Braiker and Kelley (1979), on the other hand, had newlywed couples rate retrospectively the various stages of their courtship. A factor analysis identified four dimensions of relationship development: love, or the extent of belongingness or attachment; conflict, or the amount of negative affect and overt argument; maintenance, or the degree of mutual self-disclosure and discussion about the relationship; and ambivalence, or the degree of confusion or uncertainty about the future of the relationship. As we would expect in successful relationships, especially when viewed in retrospect, scores on the love and maintenance dimensions showed a pattern of linear (or at least monotonic) increase over all stages of courtship. In a pattern very similar to that uncovered by Eidelson's (1980) quite different approach, Braiker and Kelley found that reports of conflict increased from the period of casual to serious dating but leveled off afterwards. Most interesting of all, from the present point of view, was the ambivalence factor. Overall, ambivalence tended to decrease over the stages of the relationship. In addition, however, its meaning seemed to change. In the early stages, ambivalence was associated with the conflict factor, suggesting a crisis associated with (from each partner's perspective) external factors, or our Stage II crisis. Later, however, ambivalence was associated with the love factor, and in particular with waning feelings of love, suggesting a crisis associated with what each partner would experience as internal factors, or our Stage IV crisis. Very similar results have been reported in another study of courtship and marriage by Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, and Cate (1981).

Finally, we might remind ourselves in this context of the shift in the correlates of romantic love reported in the study discussed earlier by Driscoll, Davis, and Lipetz (1972). In the period of courtship, romantic love was associated with the resolution of conflict and stress (e.g., parental interference), or external factors reminiscent of Stage II crises. Later in marriage, love was more strongly associated with trust, whose presence is more strongly suggestive of internal peace, or the resolution of a Stage IV crisis, than it is of romantic tension and passion. The Driscoll, Davis, and Lipetz (1972) finding on the changing relationship between love and trust over time has been replicated by Dion and Dion (1976).

We ourselves have conducted three studies of the evolution of commitments over time. The first, carried out by Abbey and Dunkel-Schetter (1979), was a longitudinal study of changes in students' feelings about courses they were taking over the entire quarter. All students participating in the study were enrolled in an introductory social psychology class, but the courses they chose to rate covered a wide variety of academic disciplines (i.e., they were not required to rate the social psychology class, and only a few did). Thus, the patterns that emerged can be considered to generalize across a wide variety of different university courses.

Among other things, students were asked to rate each week the extent to which each of the following words described their involvement with their class at this moment: *exploring/tentative; testing/challenging; passionate/intense; placid/quiet; and complete/fulfilled*. They also rated how anxious they felt about their class at that moment, how happy they felt about it, how much they thought about it, and whether they had come to any new conclusions about it. The pattern of students' self-descriptions of their involvement with their classes provided suggestive evidence for our five distinct stages. Students were significantly more likely to describe themselves as exploring during the first three weeks of the class than at any subsequent time. They were more likely to describe their orientation as one of testing during weeks three through five than during any time either before or after that period. Week five was a very special week in this pattern—it was the week in which subjects were significantly more likely to use the word *passionate* or *intense* in describing their involvement than they were at any other time. Week five was also one of two points at which subjects were most likely to describe their involvement as complete or fulfilled. The other such point was week ten, the end of the data collection and end of classes (though not exams). In between these two points, in weeks six through nine, none of these descriptive adjectives was especially salient, thus implying (by negation) a period in which commitment was relatively dormant. Thus, subjects' unfolding involvement in their courses seems to pass through periods possibly akin to each of the five stages we have outlined.

The pattern of change on other weekly variables paralleled this discrimination. Subjects moved from a period in the first three weeks, in which they were relatively happy and not terribly anxious, to a period in weeks four through six in which they were both anxious and happy. In weeks seven and eight they were

primarily anxious, and in weeks nine and ten they were again happy yet still anxious (especially in week nine). The exploratory stage was thus, as expected, one of relatively pure positive affect; the next two stages were characterized by growing anxiety; then followed a stage in which happiness eroded, and a final stage in which positive affect again emerged. It is interesting that students' reports of spending time thinking about the class peaked at week five, the point at which the first major commitment synthesis emerged. This was also (along with week two, during the exploratory period) the point at which the largest percentage (44%) of students reported having reached new conclusions about the class.

Clearly, many of the particular features of this pattern have to do with the rhythm of classes at a university, such as the fact that midterms and the associated stress typically fall midway through the course and that the course has a known termination date. It has never been our contention, however, that the episodes in the development of commitment are entirely internally paced. Like all responses, they are paced in part by the occurrence of external events, to which they are a response.

Another such data set, collected by Hamilton and Jacque (1977) with Brickman, maps (in a cross-sectional design) students' commitment to and enthusiasm about academic life and personal success over their four years in college. Commitment and enthusiasm were both high in the freshman year, dropped during the sophomore year, rebounded during the junior year, and tailed off again during the senior year. The first three years correspond nicely to what we have come to expect from Stage I through Stage III commitments: an early period of unconflicted and somewhat naive positivity, superseded by a growing awareness of what sacrifices it will take to succeed, followed by the emergence of that we have called the first major commitment synthesis, and in this instance, the acquisition of new skills and experiences relevant to this commitment. The drop-off in the senior year is harder to interpret, however, since it could represent either the fading of motivation (as the major goals of undergraduate work have been achieved and the time of graduation approaches) or some kind of anticipatory disengagement from a path and a way of life that will, for most of our sample, soon be abandoned for other pursuits. (We will turn shortly to a discussion of the processes involved in breaking or undoing commitments.) In the present data set, some erosion of the peak of commitment in the junior year seemingly takes place. We cannot say whether this represents a new ambivalence, which would eventually have to be restored by a new synthesis, or a reorientation to what subjects expect will be the end of their involvement in academic life.

Another data set that supports our commitment stages is from a large study conducted by Silver and Dunkel-Schetter (1981). They gave a medical career questionnaire to a cross-sectional sample of doctors and prospective doctors at nine different points in their medical careers: high school students, college freshmen and juniors, seniors enrolled in an honors program, first-year medical students, third-year medical students, interns, residents, and practicing physicians (alumni).



Subjects' commitment to their medical career was assessed by an index of seven items.<sup>1</sup> The results for this index are displayed in Figure 5-2. As can be seen, the fit of this study with our hypothesized five-point model is dramatic. College freshmen were moderately highly committed to medical careers; juniors were more ambivalent; first year medical students displayed a peak of commitment, which began to drop off by the third year of medical school; interns reported an all-time low in commitment; while residents and practicing physicians showed a return to the same level of commitment as the freshmen, although of a qualitatively different sort. It was, for example, both more tense and angry, and more content and satisfied than that of the freshmen.

This pattern of results may be interpreted as consistent with a naive Stage I commitment, a passionate and intense Stage III commitment, and a relatively modulated and mature Stage V commitment. It also reveals two dramatically different commitment crises occurring at just the points where we would expect them in this sequence. The Stage II crisis occurred during the junior year in college, and the Stage IV crisis occurred among interns. It should be noted that ratings of stress were highest among juniors and among interns. Otherwise, however, the crises have quite different correlates. Juniors were lowest in how free they felt to determine the course of their medical career (see Figure 5-3). Juniors also represented the major dip in the curve regarding feeling in control of their success or failure in becoming a doctor. In other words, juniors were at the point where they had already worked hard to become doctors and were quite aware of how much they had given up and how much of their college lives they had sacrificed in this quest, and yet they had no assurance that any of these efforts would be worthwhile. They had not yet been admitted to medical school and did not know if they ever would be. Interns, on the other hand, were not affected by these issues. They were lowest in how free they felt to determine their *everyday activities*. They were also highest in feeling that the pursuit of a career in medicine *conflicted* with other areas of life, such as friends and social life; love relationships; home responsibilities; hobbies, sports, and recreation; personal time or time to oneself; and development of new interests. (An index comprised of these six items is shown in Figure 5-4.) Interns were not wondering about whether they could become doctors; they were wondering about whether they could *stand* having become doctors. The Stage II crisis is about whether something *can* be achieved; the Stage IV crisis is about whether it

<sup>1</sup> The seven items were: (a) To what extent are you dedicated to your career in medicine no matter what stands in your way? (b) To what extent are you dedicated to your career in medicine no matter what impact it has on the rest of your life? (c) To what extent are you open to alternatives to a career in medicine at the present time? (This question was reverse-scored) (d) Within the last three months, have you felt like giving up your career in medicine? (This question was reverse-scored) (e) To what extent do you feel that it might be possible for you to give up your career in medicine right now? (This question was reverse-scored) (f) Given what you know now, would you choose medicine again as a career? (g) Considering all aspects of your life at the present, from the most important to the least important, how important is your career in medicine to you? Not all of these items were applicable to high school students; therefore, this group does not appear in Figure 5-2.

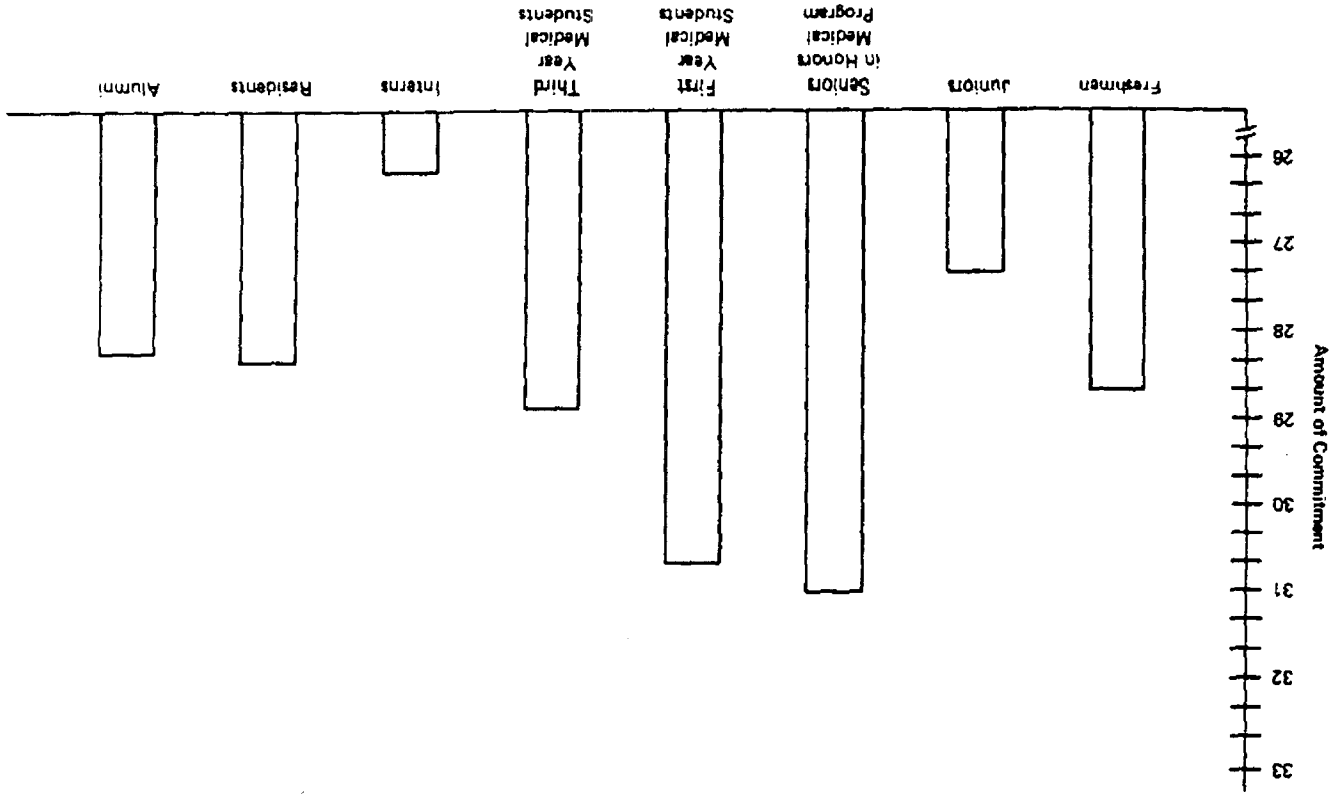


FIGURE 5-2 Group Differences in Commitment

FIGURE 5-4 Group Differences in Conflict

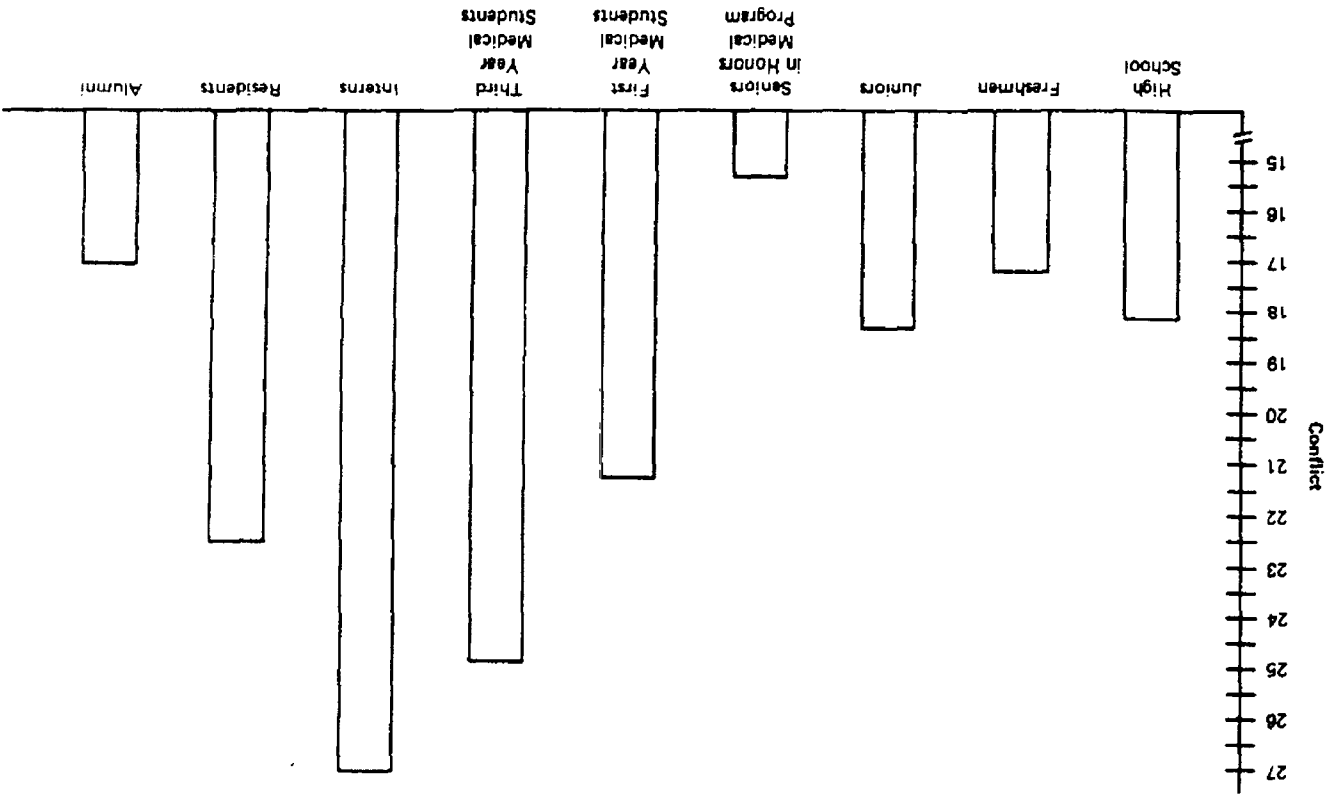
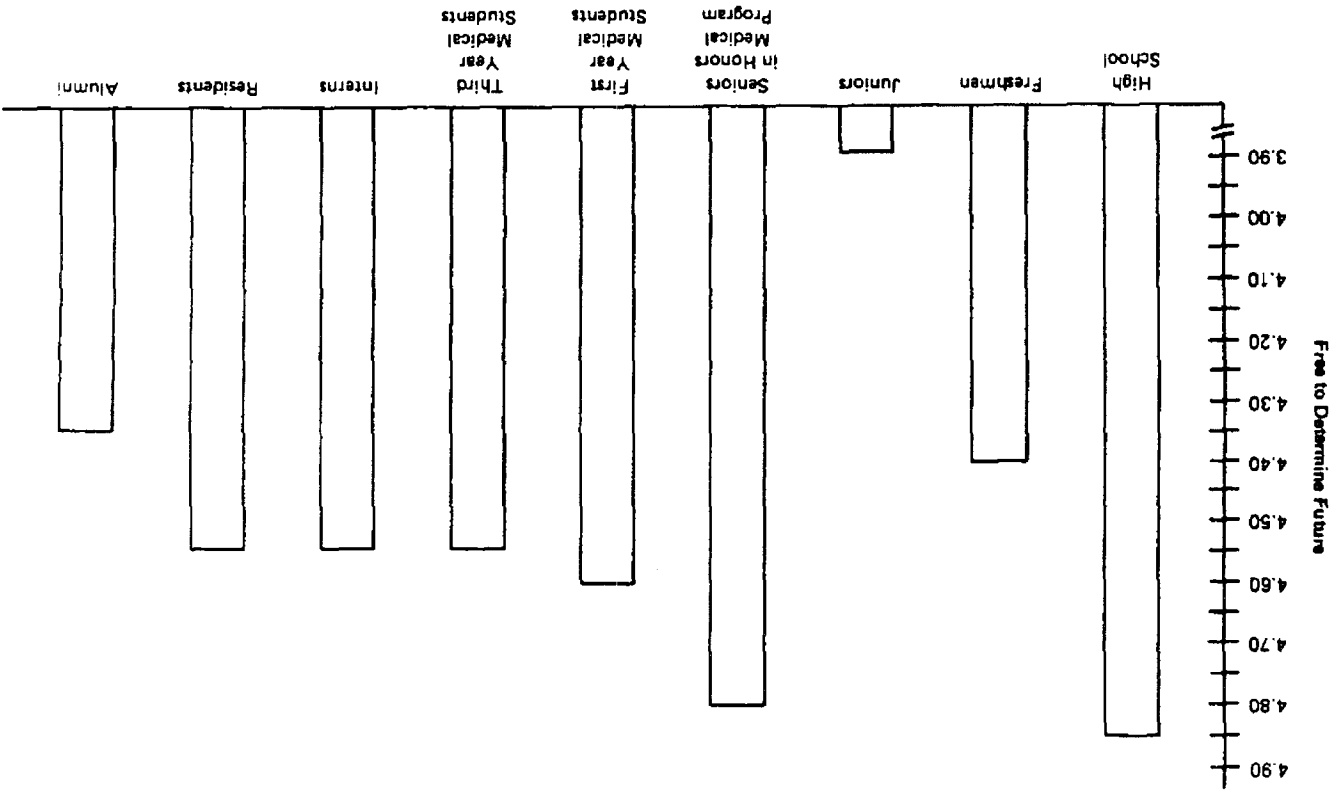


FIGURE 5-3 Group Differences in Freedom



was worth achieving and whether it should be *sustained*. The pattern across groups on the commitment index (in Figure 5-2) was quite similar to patterns on related measures such as *intrinsic motivation*. This was measured by endorsement of various incentives, such as the opportunities to contribute to medicine, society, and humanity, to care for and help others, and to experience intellectual challenge. Juniors and interns were lowest in intrinsic motivation. They were also most likely to say that medicine had changed them as persons.

Finally, on theoretical grounds, we expected that commitment would be greatest when respondents indicated that the negative aspects of their chosen career were necessary to that career (rather than being some form of arbitrary impediments). Subjects were asked to describe the most negative and second most negative aspects of continuing their careers at the present time and to rate how necessary each of these was. Juniors and interns once again represent dips on this curve. Sacrifices were generally seen as more necessary by respondents earlier in their careers, with the middle of medical school—and, no doubt, the accumulation of a substantial financial debt (Abbey, Dunkel-Schetter, & Brickman, 1983)—representing the general breaking point in this curve.

Only some of the main findings from this data set relevant to the course of commitment over time have been presented here. Data concerning subjects' affect, coping styles, the specific conflicts they experienced with their medical careers, and the effects of all these things on the development of their commitment to medicine are beyond the scope of our discussion. Nonetheless, the preliminary findings from this study and from the other literature discussed earlier conform to our ideas about the stages of commitment. Much more research is clearly needed, especially longitudinal research, and especially research addressing the predictive utility of knowing that subjects are in one stage of commitment or another, in order to provide a definitive assessment of the validity and significance of this conceptualization.

#### Variations in the Sequence

Although we hypothesize that the order of the stages is invariant, the pace at which people progress through them, and their awareness of each stage, is not. It may sometimes seem that Stage I has been skipped, for example, since the events that constitute it are often minor, pleasurable, and without conflictful or tension-inducing properties that would propel them into focal awareness. Or else these events may have been spread out over such a long period of time as to escape notice. Sometimes, for example, someone undertakes a course of action with highly salient negative features, such as risk or danger, that are apparent right from the start. Most people may avoid helping a bystander in an emergency—as we discussed earlier—but some will charge right in even when potential costs are high. We argue that this would only happen when people have been quietly prepared by a long prior history of socialization to make this commitment. That is, through previous actions or training they have come to accept an image of themselves, whether they have realized it or not, that enables them to encounter and work through a Stage II

crisis without the ambivalence (or simple avoidance) that would be elicited in someone without this prior history.

Sometimes, of course, people are forced to make a choice whose negative features are salient right from the start because a better choice is not available. This happens, for example, when people must take their second choice of a job because they are not offered their first choice. If the element of coerciveness is high enough, this is of course not a commitment at all. If the restriction of freedom involved is only moderate (e.g., if there are third- and fourth-choice jobs the person refuses), the job still represents a commitment. It is, however, one in which the person is forced to confront elements of a Stage II crisis sooner than would ordinarily be the case. It should be noted, however, that our previous review of the literature on the fate of early idealism in jobs and relationships makes it clear that everyone will arrive at such a crisis eventually.

More rarely, it may appear that both Stage I and Stage II have been skipped. This seems to be true when a passionate commitment seems to emerge full-blown, as in the case of religious conversions. Students of conversion, however, are generally agreed that the event of conversion is preceded by a period of ambivalence and turmoil in the convert's life, though perhaps in domains far removed from the explicit concerns of religion (Downton, 1979; Frank, 1963; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Underwood, 1925). Indeed, the early steps in many conversion strategies call for proselytizers to locate and intensify sources of ambivalence in the potential converts' lives, as is done, for example, in est training. It is relatively rare for Stage II to proceed outside of awareness; if there is ambivalence, the "agony of Saint Augustine" is more common than the apparently unconflicted pursuit of an opposite commitment like that of Saint Paul, who was an active persecutor of Christians until his sudden conversion on the road to Damascus. This type of conversion, however, is possible. One question for future research is what the consequences are of passing through Stage II with greater or lesser awareness for the future development and stability of the commitment. Without a direct and considered confrontation of the potentially negative elements, a commitment may be formed with weaker roots. Thus, a commitment that approaches Stage II gradually and passes through it thoughtfully may have better prospects for lasting than one that moves through it quickly and dramatically. For example, Starbuck (1912) found that 87% of 92 revival converts reverted within six months, whereas only 40% of a group of gradual converts lapsed in the same period.

It is also true that any of these stages can be prolonged, in some cases to the detriment of the commitment ultimately formed. Stage I can be prolonged simply because there is no negative element to challenge a line of behavior and force a commitment or an exit. It can also be prolonged by persons trying to avoid making a commitment. Procrastination, indecisiveness, buck-passing, disclaiming, perpetual joking, denial of responsibility, and callousness may all be understood—and explored in future research—as devices to this end. Stage II is prolonged when it is not possible for a person either to reach a solution to his or her ambivalence or to exit from the situation. This can be an intensely painful experience. Classic animal

studies by Pavlov (1927) and Masserman (1943) have shown that animals become paralyzed and highly emotional when confronted with a discrimination they must make (e.g., to escape shock) but which has gradually been made too subtle for them to make. The classic psychoanalytic definition of neurosis is essentially a prolonged Stage II crisis in which one element of the conflict (either an unacknowledged fear or an unacknowledged impulse) is unconscious. As we see below, in our discussion of Weiss's (1975, 1976) analysis of ambivalence in separation, the prolongation of a Stage II crisis while the commitment dissolves is extraordinarily painful.

Stage III is prolonged when a residual tension remains to energize the commitment or when the commitment is not allowed to relax because the ambivalence that preceded it cannot be fully absorbed. Commitments fixed at this stage look like pathological rigidity or fanaticism (issues to which we will return in the next chapter). Commitments of this form may sometimes be sought as desirable, as in the case of romantic passion, and deliberate efforts may be made to prolong them. As celebrated (and lamented) in literature and song, these efforts typically involve the introduction into the relationship of new challenges, tests, and difficulties—which may sustain or rekindle passion but may also place the relationship in new peril.

Stage IV is prolonged, like Stage II, when it is not possible for a person either to reach a new synthesis or to exit. A prolonged Stage IV crisis takes the form of persistent boredom and self-absorption. Finally, the attainment of Stage V does not, of course, mean the end of change. Over the years, numerous new negative elements will demand new syntheses that in turn evolve their own antitheses, as in the dialectical process we discussed in opening this chapter. New crises may return a commitment to all the turmoil and uncertainty of Stage II, although this is less a case of regression than it is the experience of an analogous stage in what can be understood as a further commitment cycle, or even a decommitment cycle. One of the leading questions for future research is how the handling of different sorts of positive and negative elements, alternative commitments, and so forth differs according to the maturity of the existing commitment or the number of previous syntheses on which this commitment rests. For example, we hypothesize that long-term Stage V commitments may eventually accumulate so much intrinsic motivation and meaning that they become overwhelming. Some kind of pruning or reduction of this meaning and value may be necessary for the commitment to survive. Research on couples who have been married twenty or more years or individuals in the same job for similar lengths of time would provide fascinating evidence on this issue.

To summarize, we hypothesize that the formation of commitment involves a five-stage process. Commitments begin when positive, extrinsic rewards encourage individuals to pursue a particular activity. Eventually, negative aspects of the activity become salient; at this point individuals either withdraw from the activity, and a commitment never forms, or they continue. If they continue, they do so because they have somehow created intrinsic meaning by integrating these negative elements with positive elements. Such syntheses involve not a denial of negative

factors but their transformation into something positive; we love our partner because of his or her flaws rather than in spite of them. After this synthesis, there is a stable period, but eventually a new crisis evolves. Whereas the first major antithesis involved external factors, this second major antithesis involves internal factors. Now that the desired activity is achieved, individuals begin to question if it is really what they want. This crisis of familiarity must be resolved for the final stage to be achieved. In the final stage, commitments are not static; instead, they involve a continual ebb and flow in which negative elements are raised and resolved. It is our contention that negative elements inevitably arise, due to either external or internal forces. Thus commitments are always growing and evolving—just as the individual who holds the commitment continually grows and evolves.

The five stages are distinguished by differences in the rates of change occurring, perceptions of control, degrees of playfulness and freedom, approach-avoidance orientations, and cognitive categorization. Progression through the stages is invariant, but the pace is not, nor is an individual always aware of his or her progression. Stages may appear as if they have been skipped, and they may also be prolonged. The extent of such variation is a fascinating issue for future research.

## THE DISSOLUTION OF COMMITMENTS

There are two apparently contradictory elements in people's experience of breaking commitments or losing objects of commitment. The first is the unexpected suddenness with which desirable commitments may end, often triggered by a seemingly minor event in a manner that appears to catch one or both parties by surprise. The underpinnings of the commitment had apparently been eroded without at least one party having been aware that this had taken place. This can refer either to the person's own commitment ("I awoke one day and suddenly I realized that the feeling was gone") or to the perception of another person's commitment ("I had not realized that her feelings had changed until one day she told me that she was leaving").

The second puzzle concerning the breaking of commitments is the agonizing slowness with which undesirable commitments seem to fully dissolve. Years later, someone who has left the church or lost a marital partner may encounter situations or stimuli that remind him or her of this past commitment and cause him or her to reexperience in miniature the entire process of grief and emotional loss (Weiss, 1975). In the more immediate aftermath of a major commitment, people may feel that they have done the right thing in relinquishing that commitment and that there is nothing they could have done to prevent the loss of that commitment. Yet they find themselves engaged in an endless, obsessive review of past events, a review they know to be fruitless and punishing but are still unable to avoid. Our analysis provides a clue to both of these puzzles. The apparent slowness with which commitments are eroded, and the apparent suddenness with which the feelings associated with them vanish, refer to different stages of the process of commitment with-

drawal—a process which, in its essentials, seems quite parallel to the process by which commitments are established in the first place, though the affective quality of the different stages is in general more turbulent, intense, and painful. Such stages in the ending of a commitment are explored in a preliminary fashion in the following section.

#### Stages in the Dissolution of a Commitment

Stage I in the process of ending a commitment is a stage in which the basis of the commitment is gradually, often imperceptibly eroded. A person carries out a series of small actions that are increasingly discrepant with the nature of the commitment or observes a series of such actions carried out by a partner. For example, a married individual may become progressively more and more involved in an extramarital affair, but in tiny, inconspicuous increments. Ordinarily, in strong commitment systems, these actions are defended against (either before or after they occur) by psychological reactions of guilt or jealousy, which serve to flag them, inhibit them, or motivate people to try to undo them after they have occurred (emotional means of defending commitments will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter). If the defenses or inhibitions against discrepant acts fail, however, there will nonetheless usually be no immediately dramatic emotional consequences. This process is one of small but unresolved antitheses accumulating over time. As in our catastrophe theory representation, feelings are at this point relatively stable and inelastic. This leaves people unprepared for the fact that with further discrepant acts they will move into a region in which their feelings change suddenly or catastrophically. The image is of rolling down a gentle slope and then over a cliff.

In the first phase of commitment dissolution, like the first phase of commitment formation, there is no hint of this point of discontinuity. In a series of economic and political illustrations, Hirschman (1970) notes that consumers or voters may grumble for a long time (exercising "voice," if there is anyone to hear their complaints) before taking the much more drastic and decisive step of switching the product they buy or the party they vote for ("exiting"). The loyalty of at least a substantial number of such consumers or voters, and the attendant inertia in their behavior, has the functional advantage of giving the company or the party some lead time to correct its mistakes before it loses its entire membership. This, of course, requires that people (or at least some people) be sensitive enough to the problem to report it while they (or others, in our collective example) simultaneously are insensitive enough to it to persist in their present relationship.

Stage II in the ending of a commitment is the discovery of renewed ambivalence and reentry into the associated state of emotional turmoil. There is a kind of shock to this stage, and also a general intensification of behavior designed to protest, deny, or ward off the loss. This stage thus corresponds to the invigoration stage of Klinger's (1975) analysis of the process of disengagement from incentives, and to the protest stage of Bowlby's (1960, 1973) theory of attachment and loss. Freudenberg (1974) and other students of burnout among helping professionals

report that immediately prior to burnout there is often a period in which the volunteer or the professional increases his or her investment in the halfway house, working longer hours, assuming more and more responsibility for the fate of clients. More generally, the person alternates between periods of intense effort to sustain or repair the commitment and periods of collapse or escape. One of the most painful aspects of this process is the switching between times of hope and times of despair and the cost of being on an emotional roller coaster. As Weiss (1975) notes, it is the joy of repeated reconciliations that intensifies the agony of subsequent disappointments, quarrels, and estrangements, while of course the agony of the latter likewise intensifies the pleasure of the former. Novelist John Fowles (1977) describes this "hopeless downward progression" with great poignancy:

Such changes in a person's character, and in the character of a relationship, don't announce themselves dramatically; they steal slowly over months, masking themselves behind reconciliations, periods of happiness, new resolves. Like some forms of lethal disease, they invite every myth of comforting explanation before they exact the truth. (p. 90)

There is considerable evidence that high expectations, which are ordinarily conducive to success, may lead to pathological forms of persistence and costly life disasters when the goal being sought is in fact impossible to obtain (Janoff-Bulman & Brickman, 1981). And no expectation is likely to be stronger than the one people hold for something they have always been able to expect, and to get, in the past. At the same time, however, as the object of their commitment becomes more frustrating and remote, people tend to become both attracted and repulsed by it. One kind of evidence for this growing ambivalence is the alternately detached and clinging behavior exhibited both by young children (Bowlby, 1973) and young monkeys (Kaufman, 1969) when reunited with their mothers after a period of separation. They are both angry at their mothers for having left, happy that they have returned, and fearful that they will leave again—a complex set of emotions that has no simple behavioral expression. This stage in decommitment is one of a slowly developing major crisis, much like a slow growing tumor.

The third stage in the breaking of commitments involves the dismantling of the perceptual field that was created when the commitment was formed and has existed and sustained the commitment since that time. The shutting back and forth between attraction and repulsion of Stage II is superseded by a stable anti-commitment, a strong and coherent negative orientation to the former object of commitment. In catastrophe theory terms, this is the state that exists after people have completed their tumble from the prior positive orientation. Stage II may be thought of as a period in which people are caught in the process of tumbling, trying to and at times succeeding in scrambling back, but in general caught in the turmoil of change. Stage III corresponds to Klinger's (1975) stage of aggression or Bowlby's (1973) stage of anger as reactions to the loss of the commitment object. This stage represents the orientation of zealous ex-converts, who are now as active in proselytizing against the sect or cult they have left as they once were in pros-

elytizing for it. If the passage through Stage II of commitment withdrawal has been brief, it may seem as if the person has suddenly switched from being committed one way to being committed another. This is also the period in which people undertake that process of reconstructing the past to make it compatible with (and, indeed, a component of) their new commitment orientation. What were once seen as minor flaws in a relationship, for example, will now be seen as fatal weaknesses that were found, sooner or later, to disrupt the relationship. Since there is a quality of new synthesis to Stage III, it might be seen as one involving integration toward a new state or object of commitment.

Stage IV in commitment dissolution sets in with the erosion of the emotional anticommmitment. Anticommmitment, in turn, is even more difficult to sustain than most Stage III passions, since it must fight against and overcome what is (if the past commitment has been strong) an extensive and unruly residue of attachment. As the negative commitment erodes and some ambivalence reasserts itself, feelings of sadness, loss, and grief set in. In Stage II of commitment loss, attachment to the commitment object was still dominant, and the ambivalence centered on the newly recognized negative features of that object (e.g., disinterest or hostility on the part of a relationship partner). In Stage IV of commitment loss, detachment from that object is now dominant, and the ambivalence centers on newly recognized positive features of that object that are incompatible with the negative Stage III anticommmitment.

Weiss (1976) describes the often unexpected persistence of attachment in this period as "echo effects" of the lost commitment. Separated or divorced couples are often taken aback by how much they not only miss one another but still enjoy—at least for brief periods—one another's company, which may lead, for a while, to a strange situation:

Having told their family and their lawyers how much they have suffered at each other's hands, a husband and wife can hardly admit that they now look forward to evenings together. As a result, some couples may temporarily adopt a bizarre variation of the marital practice of hiding fights from public view; now they may be estranged in public but affectionate in private. (Weiss, 1976, p. 44)

Divorce lawyers are regularly frustrated by what appear to be clients' irrational changes of mind during this period of obsessive, interminable review by people of what went wrong, including a search for causes or explanations (Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978), especially explanations that provide some reassurance that the same thing will not happen again in the future. Much of the terror and loneliness that characterize this stage in the loss of a major life commitment derive from the fact that the person has lost a major source of meaning and value in his or her life and hence must cope not only with inner feelings of ambivalence about and grief for the loss, but also with a sense of inner emptiness that makes the beginning of a search for alternatives all the more difficult. This stage, like the previous ones, has been described for people coming out of religious cults (Singer, 1979) in a

manner strikingly similar to the manner in which they have been described for people coming out of marital relationships (Weiss, 1975, 1976). Stage IV in the decommitment process clearly corresponds, in its affective tone, to the stage of depression or apathy in the analyses of Klinger (1975) and Bowlby (1973).

If the positive feelings for the commitment object have been lost, slowly and then drastically, in Stages I, II, and III of commitment loss, it may appear something of a puzzle to determine what fuels the sense of loss or grief of Stage IV. We explain much of it as the encounter with the sense of emptiness that has replaced the earlier emotions (both positive and negative). Weiss (1976), however, also draws an instructive distinction between attachment and love:

Most people would seem to think of love as a condition combining positive regard for another with urgent desire to maintain the other's accessibility. Rubin (1973) has shown that love is ordinarily a syndrome including a number of components such as trust, idealization, and liking which can exist independently of one another. Attachment would be one such component. It would appear that in unhappy marriages most of the components of love fade, sometimes to be replaced by their opposites. In this way trust may change to mistrust, idealization to disrespect, liking to disdain. Attachment, however, seems to persist. It appears that most components of love are modifiable by negative experience, but that attachment once developed can be sustained by proximity alone and fades only slowly in response to absence. (pp. 138-139)

The fifth and final stage in the commitment dissolution process involves a gradual decline in the importance of the old commitment accompanied by an increasing occupation of the person's life space by new or alternative commitments. This is most akin to the process of beginning a commitment but with a new target. There is a sense in which old commitments, like old soldiers, never die; they just fade away. The person may appear to achieve a return to indifference toward the object of commitment, but this indifference is more apparent than real; it has within it elements that make it quite different from the kind of indifference the person might have felt before the involvement. It is an indifference sustained by the stable capacity to look away, stay away, and find meaning and value in other domains and other commitments, rather than an indifference of no interest or no repulsion at all.

In this sense, recovery from the loss of a vital commitment, like the recovery from any major life trauma, is never complete, and, as Silver and Wortman (1980) make clear in their review of the literature on coping with undesirable life events, any stage theory that implies that it is complete in this sense is dangerously misleading. Similarly, one can recover from an injury or an operation and function as well as or better than before, but scars will remain, sensitive when touched. "At anniversaries, for example, or when an old friend comes to call unexpectedly or when a forgotten photograph is discovered in a drawer all the feelings or acute pining and sadness return and the bereaved person goes through, in miniature, another bereavement" (Parkes, 1970b, p. 464). At first, any small reminder may be

sufficient to trigger some such reaction. Eventually, it may take a fairly strong or prolonged exposure to trigger a reaction. One couple known to one of the authors had come to the following understanding of their relationship years after separation. "We are still friends, but we have learned that we can have about five good hours together. After that, we start getting on each other's nerves again." (See also Weiss, 1976). They tried to make good use of this time together when they could and not to ask for more. The reaction to the ex-commitment object, depicted in this fashion, is allergic. There may be no feelings in its absence, and fond feelings in its anticipation or early contact, but eventually there are elicited some of the feelings—either irritation or sadness—that accompanied the commitment itself, and which mark the person experiencing them as different from someone who had never had that commitment. This stage is clearly analogous to Klinger's (1975) recovery stage.

If the commitment involved has been minor, this entire set of stages may be swept through without incident, or with only minor emotional work. For example, if a person is unable to see a movie that he or she had especially wanted to see, all of the above steps may be triggered: a period in which the events that make this impossible occur without the person's awareness, a point of ambivalence when this is realized, a moment of anger, a feeling of loss, and a turning to other activities. In this case, the object is so unimportant, and the number of satisfactory alternatives so great, that the recovery stage may be quite transient. Nonetheless, we would still expect such a person to feel differently about the missed movie than a person who had never intended to see it in the first place or who didn't care one way or the other.

#### **The Role of Alternatives in the Ending of Commitments**

Since the role of making alternative commitments is so important both to the unraveling of existing commitments (the alternatives representing the discrepant acts that in Stage I begin to undermine the existing commitment) and to the repairing of damage once commitments have been unraveled, it is clear that we need research that focuses on the relationship between growing and declining commitments. What difference does it make to the growth of a new commitment—the pace with which it passes through various stages, the nature of the difficulties it encounters—whether it begins when an old commitment is still intact or when an old commitment has partially or completely unraveled? What difference does the stage of a commitment that is being completed make to the process by which any new commitments may develop? Marriages and careers are both marked by a series of smaller commitments that gradually overlap and replace one another, even when the marriage or career retains its essential shape. The process by which marital partners accommodate their commitment to children or to each other, to a new career interest on the part of one of them (or the process by which researchers test out later career involvements in teaching, editing, or administration) should be fertile grounds for the investigation of these questions. The process by which

adolescent children leave home, of which there are many variations, some even peaceful (Goleman, 1980), is another example. Goleman's discussion of work in this area seems to indicate that the difficulty of the transition is related not so much to the strength of the initial commitment to home life but to the quality and nature of the conflicts embedded in that commitment. Adolescents who are most conflicted about leaving home—both pulled to leave and pulled to stay—have the hardest time making the transition. In our terms, they are most likely to be trapped in Stage II or Stage IV emotions.

One study that sheds some light on the process by which new commitments supplant old ones is the senior honors thesis done by Philip Brickman (1964) on how Harvard students move closer to what they perceive to be Harvard norms rather than the norms of their home town, family, and high school. This study found that the event of going home for Christmas vacation was an important episode in this change process, with students rating themselves as closer to Harvard norms after they returned than before they went. Upon arriving at Harvard earlier in the fall, students were no doubt made highly aware of features in their accents, background, training, and dress that were characteristic of their places of origin. Thus their initial experience of Harvard made them more, rather than less, conscious of their prior identity—and, we hypothesize, more committed to that prior identity, both in reaction to pressure to change and out of nostalgia for valued elements of their past that were now out of reach. Ironically, at the same time, small changes were taking place that in fact represented the beginnings of the acquisition of an identity as a Harvard student. These changes only surfaced in awareness, in many instances, when students returned home, perhaps full of nostalgia and happy to be back, only to be told by the folks at home, "What happened to you? You're so different! Harvard has changed you." Small characteristics, habits, and possessions that were undistinguishing at Harvard are highly noticeable badges of identity in home territory. Furthermore, the act of displaying and defending such new characteristics may enhance one's commitment to them. Thus we can isolate certain processes of commitment change that take place in the absence of the object of commitment and others that take place in the renewed presence of that object. The former are likely to be small and imperceptible, the latter are those that entail the emotional consequences of recognizing and reacting to the former. This same dynamic, we think, is part of what makes it hard for even the best-intentioned and most loving couples to survive long periods of separation (as is regularly shown, for example, by postwar divorce statistics). Even as they are missing one another and feeling more loving than ever before, they are changing in small ways that may prove irreconcilable when they get back together again.

Can a broken commitment, like Humpty Dumpty, but put back together again? Yes, but not in its original form. The reconstructed commitment must have, as one of its constituent elements, the knowledge that it has been broken and can always be broken. With this additional history, it is therefore like a new commitment. Some commitments thus pass through a more extended cycle in which they

alternately are made and broken, as do those of couples who (at least for a time) repeatedly break up and make up.

#### Variations in Patterns of Commitment Endings

There are two important variations in the circumstances under which commitments are dissolved, in addition to the usual pattern described above. The first is the case in which an object of commitment is taken away—through the departure, death, or failure of some sort by the person—before any of the psychological processes involved in relinquishing that commitment have begun. The loss of a commitment object can result, for example, from a sudden, unexpected, and traumatic accident. In this case, the psychological commitment may be intensified rather than diminished by the loss. Although we would expect people to still pass through the decommitment stages we have outlined before that commitment is relinquished, their journey through these stages may be delayed or otherwise altered in ways that can only be tested in future research. The fact that the object of commitment has been definitively and decisively lost at the start in a manner that cannot be altered by any future behavior would certainly have implications for decommitment.

The second variation is when the end of a commitment is anticipated long in advance, perhaps even from the point at which the commitment is initiated. These are time-limited or temporary commitments. In such cases, people might prefer to hold back their emotional investments because they know what it will cost to relinquish such investments. Time and again, however, people find that what they had entered into as temporary arrangements draw them in much further than they had anticipated—as amply demonstrated by our review of the literature on the cumulative effects of choice. A case in point is an instance in which a couple sets a deadline for parting—the end of a summer, the end of a year, a time when one or another party would have to go back to another job or another relationship. This termination date seems reasonable and agreeable to both parties at the time it is set, but it eventually places a tremendous burden on the relationship. One party encounters unexpected and increasing distress as the end approaches, and the other becomes increasingly irritable and withdrawn in response. Even people who know, rationally, that the end of a current situation would be a good thing, and who have been anticipating the end for a long time, may find themselves reacting with panic and dismay as the end actually approaches. In political science, the phrase “terminal horror” has been coined to describe the response of voters who, at the last minute, wind up voting for the incumbent president rather than an opposition candidate whom they have supported all along. The incumbent is a known quantity, however unattractive, whereas the opposition candidate raises the prospect of unknown levels of change. It is well known in prisons and mental hospitals that some inmates exhibit more unruly or disturbed behavior as the time for their release approaches, expressing indirectly their ambivalence about leaving and sometimes compelling the institution to keep them longer.

With regard to time-limited commitments, or commitments that are known to be temporary right from the start, the critical difference is whether people enter into them because they are temporary or in spite of the fact that they are temporary. Many tasks, for example, are ones that people are willing to make a commitment to doing precisely because they know they will be completed, and can be forgotten, in a reasonable period of time. The commitment, in this case, is to the completion, rather than the continuation, of the task. The well-known Zeigarnik effect (see Chapter 3) describes the fact that, in such instances, people are extraordinarily aware of the task until it is completed, and eager to return to it if interrupted, and quite unmindful of it—unable to recall details, uninterested in it—afterwards. The original observation of this was of German waiters in a particular restaurant, who kept all customers' tabs in their heads until the customers had paid their bills, then promptly forgot them. People go to see movies knowing they will end, eager to see how they end, and comfortably aware of the fact that other movies and comparable opportunities will be available upon their completion of the current one.

The initial effect of knowing and welcoming the fact that a commitment is temporary, we hypothesize, will be to reduce conflict about getting involved and facilitate passage through Stage II ambivalence. Costs, like the commitment itself, are known to be temporary. On the other hand, accepting a commitment as temporary may also make it less likely that people will experience a Stage IV crisis, precipitated by their being forced to consider the nature and extent of their intrinsic motivation to continue the commitment. They may be able to bypass this question simply by knowing that the commitment will soon be over. Finally, accepting a commitment as temporary makes it most likely that people will experience a strong goal gradient effect, or an intensification of motivation (and an increasing degree of upset at being interrupted) as the goal approaches. (This is in contrast to the pattern of motivation we expect for commitments reluctantly accepted as temporary, as discussed subsequently.)

A good example of this pattern—together with a good example of a rather different pattern—is the way in which undergraduates, as opposed to graduate students, get involved in research projects with faculty. In general, it never occurs to undergraduates that their involvement is other than temporary; in most instances, they are committed only to doing well, learning something, and acquiring a credential. For graduate students, on the other hand, a career and an identity rest in part on the project, and they have a keen sense that their involvement is likely to be open-ended rather than limited. Undergraduates thus get involved more quickly and with less ambivalence, less subsequent questioning of the intrinsic value of the experience, and more eagerness to finish.

Accepting a commitment in spite of the fact that it is temporary, on the other hand, should lead to a very different pattern of involvement. It should first delay involvement and escalate ambivalence, as people weigh not only the usual costs of involvement but the additional cost of knowing the benefits they might like will not continue indefinitely, or that the value of their adaptation will only



be temporary. When they do get involved, however, we would expect their involvement to be all the more intense because it represents the surmounting of this intensified ambivalence. This helps account for some of the heightened, idyllic, bittersweet quality of summer romances or vacation experiences in general. The commitment itself is likely to end before a Stage IV crisis, or a questioning of intrinsic motivation, has arisen. But there is a sense in which the approaching end of the commitment provokes something like a Stage IV crisis, but one in which subjects are oriented to relinquish, rather than overcome, their motivation to continue, because they know that continuation is impossible.

This may also account for the characteristic inverted U-shaped curve found to depict the involvement of sojourners in foreign cultures (e.g., Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1960) or prisons (Wheeler, 1961; Clark, 1976) or colleges (see the earlier discussion of the study by Hamilton & Jacque, 1977). The peak of involvement by travelers with their host country, its norms and habits, is intermediate in their stay; likewise, the peak of involvement by prison inmates with what has been called inmate culture (featuring, especially, antiguard norms) seems to be intermediate in their term of imprisonment. Before this, newcomers do not know enough to become effectively involved with the local culture and may be hesitant to become involved both because of their ignorance and because of their fear of losing valued past identities. Later, as the end of their stay approaches, sojourners begin to anticipate returning to the world from which they came, shedding some of the new values and customs they have acquired in anticipation of this return. Nonetheless, when they do return to this world, the Brickman study (1964) suggests that they will be further surprised to discover how much their travel has changed them in small ways that they did not even recognize. Thus, although accepting commitments because they are temporary speeds up the process of involvement, allows involvement to be more casual, and causes involvement to peak as the end approaches, accepting commitments in spite of the fact that they are temporary delays involvement, forces involvement to be more serious, and causes involvement to peak part way through the sequence of events and to decline as the end approaches.

In summary, two elements of the experience of ending commitments have been highlighted. One is the unexpected suddenness with which desirable commitments appear to end and the other element is the agonizing slowness with which undesirable commitments typically seem to dissolve. The dissolution process is proposed to parallel the process by which commitments are established. Stages in the ending of commitment that are suggested are as follows: first, a stage of gradual erosion; second, a stage of growing emotional turmoil and ambivalence; third, a stage of dismantling the perceptual field; fourth, a stage of lessened emotional attachment but parting grief and loss; and finally, a stage of the fading away of the importance of the object.

The role of conflicting commitments in supplanting existing ones was explored. Also, two variations on the standard pattern of commitment dissolution were explained, one in which the object of the commitment is taken away or lost, and the second in which the commitment was always temporary, having occurred either because of this or despite it.

### COMMITMENT THROUGHOUT THE LIFE CYCLE

There is a developmental sequence not only to individual commitments but to the manner in which people make and sustain commitments over the course of the life cycle. The clue to the characteristic difference between commitment in adults and children can be found in what each group envies about the other. Children envy adults' predecision freedom, while adults are nostalgic for children's postdecision freedom. Children see adults as having many choices or many options that are not available to them. They have to wait until they are older before they can stay up as late as they would like, go places on their own, and in general do all the desirable things they perceive adults as able to do. Adults, on the other hand, often remember childhood as a time when they had a sense of freedom they have now lost or now experience much more rarely. This freedom, they believe, came from the ability to feel free in relatively impoverished environments, to make do with a few simple things, to be enthusiastic about a particular activity without regard for the fact that other activities might also be competing for time and attention. In the language of Brickman's (1978) essay on what makes people treat things as real, children take for granted internal correspondence (that their actions correspond with their feelings) and work to achieve external correspondence (that their actions will have desired or appropriate consequences on their environment). Adults are better able to assume external correspondence and more likely to have to struggle for internal correspondence.

We are socialized to ambivalence: to think first, not act first; to anticipate consequences, difficulties and conflicts; to remember past courses of action and where they went wrong; and to deal with possible objections that may be raised to our choices by an inner observer (the internalized other) who represents all those people who have praised and criticized us in the past. As children grow older, they become more aware of contradictions between their judgements at one time and their judgements at another time, and they become more concerned with avoiding these contradictions (Piaget, 1972; Kohlberg, 1969). They become more aware of discrepancies between the kind of person they would like to be (ideal self-image) and the kind of person they actually are (real self-image; see Katz and Zigler, 1967). They become more aware of the extent to which situations are ambiguous, the extent to which human knowledge is limited, and even the extent to which their own mastery of the knowledge that exists in a particular field is limited—a process Fox (1979) has eloquently discussed as one of the explicit aims of medical education.

All of these things make choice harder. Where there is more ambivalence—more complex alternatives and consequences to be considered—it is more difficult to select a single course of action as best. This is especially true, as Mann and Taylor (1970) have shown in a study of college women's choices among paintings, when the decision is understood to be irrevocable and one that they would later have to justify publicly. More decisions appear to have this quality as individuals grow older. As children grow older, they come to attach more qualifications to the inferences they make about themselves and others (Leahy, 1976). They also become more

participant and as reasonable to end when this is not the case; older children are more likely to see friendship as collaboration with others for mutual and common interests, including the sharing of plans and feelings; still older subjects are aware of the risks, uncertainties, and commitment involved in friendship. Berndt (1981) found that older children were more likely to mention intimacy, trust, loyalty, and faithfulness as aspects of friendship. Horrocks and Mussman (1973) and others found that altruistic wishes increased with age (and materialistic ones declined).

The literature on friendship has generally interpreted these findings as indicating that children acquire a richer, more internal, and more differentiated conception of friendship with age. Our analysis does not contest this development, but it offers a somewhat different view of what it means. Adults and older children are not necessarily less aware of or less concerned with what benefits they get from friendship or what extrinsically desirable features their friends have. They are, however, more aware of what friendship costs and what investments are required to maintain a friendship. A simple cost-benefit accounting is not sufficient to sustain commitment to a friendship through difficult times, nor is it sufficient as a public account or explanation of that friendship. The more psychological, symbolic, and intrinsic language with which older children and adults describe friendship derives, in our view, from developmental changes in their own complex and ambivalent motivations toward other people.

One thing that enables adults to sustain often conflicting commitments in the face of considerable ambivalence is their acquired ability to compartmentalize, ignore, lie, delay, and procrastinate. Older children are better than younger children at focusing their attention on one thing and tuning out other things that would be distracting (Lane, 1980; Zuckier & Hagen, 1978). This is, of course, a critical element in the capacity for commitment and self-control. It is also, according to Newman (1976), a critical element in adults' ability to manage conflict in interpersonal relationships by smoothing over or ignoring uncomfortable episodes (see also Goffman, 1961). Children's friendships are more volatile—best friends today are enemies tomorrow and friends again the day after—in part because children are more wholeheartedly involved in each episode as it occurs. Once adults do get involved in a negative episode, on the other hand (e.g., taking sides in a fight between their own children and those of a neighbor), the conflict is much more likely to have enduring consequences, again because of the greater tendency of adult behavior to require and involve substantial commitment.

At what age do children begin to have the capacity to make commitments in our sense? Certainly some parts of what we regard as commitment are present in very young children. Gunnar-Vongnechten (1978) has shown that children as young as a year old are reassured by having the ability to determine when a potentially frightening mechanical toy started, a process that in part rests (as we have argued in the control chapter) on their ability to make a commitment to seeing the toy move. There is also a definite sense in which learning to walk and talk are commitments, ones that are highly programmed to succeed in the face of difficulties, falls, errors, and other setbacks. Yet these are relatively unconflicted commitments, as we can

reflective and less impulsive in their problem-solving style, for example, in taking more time to decide which of six closely related stimuli is the correct answer to a question (Mussen, Conger, & Kagan, 1974). If images are related to simple and unconflicted decision making, these changes may also be related to the fact that children seem more likely to use imagery than adults (Kosslyn, 1976).

And yet we are also socialized not only to act in the face of this ambivalence but to act in a consistent, persistent fashion that other people can predict and count on (Becker, 1960). As children grow older, they are more likely to be rated by teachers as showing self-control—keeping promises, maintaining a steady quality of work, being patient, working for long-range goals, sticking to one thing (Kendall & Wilcox, 1979). Older children are more likely to choose moderately difficult tasks to work on, whereas younger children choose easy tasks (Veroff, 1969). Some of this more consistent and persistent quality of behavior is achieved by routinization and practice. People do things repeatedly, become good at them, come to like them, and then do not have to make many conscious choices in doing them (as we saw in our earlier discussion of mindlessness). Another part of developmental change, however, refers to a more self-conscious awareness of making commitments, of seeing future events as contingent on present decisions, and of accepting the implications of this awareness. Both components contribute to a growing perception of a part of the self as constant, immovable, or nonvolitional—that is, fixed by past habits, past obligations, and past choices. Part of the self thus becomes experienced as part of the world, and the difference between awareness of self and awareness of the world (what Wicklund and Duval, 1971, call objective and subjective self-awareness) decreases.

Thus, if adults have a greater capacity for commitment, they also have a greater need for it. Because they have more ambivalence to overcome, they have a greater need for their actions to have symbolic justification. We hypothesize that as children have less ability to delay gratification (to postpone the time at which they will receive a reward in order to receive a larger reward), adults have less ability to delay justification (to postpone coming up with reasons for their behavior in order eventually to come up with better reasons or better understanding).

In general, adults also have less pure motives but better reasons for their behavior. Some of this is very nicely illustrated in the developmental literature on changes in individuals' orientations to friends and friendship. In a pilot study carried out by Brickman with Lisa Fritz and Lynn Paxton, six third and fourth graders and six high school seniors, all females, were interviewed about their best friends. The younger children were uninhibited and enthusiastic in explaining their friendship choices in extrinsic terms: The friend has nice toys, the friend lives close by, the friend is nice, the two of them are a club. The older subjects uniformly used a very different language: I trust and appreciate her, I love her, I dare to act myself with her, we understand each other, we can confide in each other. All six of the older subjects said they loved their best friend, none of the younger subjects did. Selman and Selman (1979) report that younger children are more likely to see friendship as justified by the fact that it satisfies the separate self-interests of each

recognize by the very fact that they are so highly programmed to succeed. Except in the most unusual of cases, there are no important alternative attractions, no serious temptations not to learn to walk or talk, and no important opposition to walking or talking by parents or other sources.

The first great Stage II crisis is the crisis of toilet training, thumb-sucking, table manners, or some other such primary battle of socialization. Two sources of gratification are pitted against one another: the pleasure of bodily impulses or uninhibited behavior and the pleasure of parental love, warmth, and approval. Virtually all developmental theorists (e.g., Ilg & Ames, 1981) have postulated that it is out of this primary conflict that the child first comes to acquire some sense of responsibility and some sense of self. This sense of responsibility and self is defined, in the first instance, by the child's ability to say no to parental demands. But whether the child defends his or her own impulses and resists parental pressures or seeks parental approval and relinquishes the pleasures of being dirty or sloppy, he or she must in either case make a significant commitment to the chosen line of behavior because that line of behavior involves abandoning another important source of gratification. The child can make a choice—indeed, must make a choice—that involves both positive and negative elements, and he or she will be held responsible for that choice and its consequences.

Eventually, out of the child's need to justify his or her ambivalent abandonment of instinctual pleasures (including, according to Freud, the impossible wish for sexual gratification with the opposite-sex parent) comes the first major commitment synthesis: the internalization of the parents as the resolution of this crisis. The period of inner conflict is settled with the arrival of a stable solution in which identification with parental wishes, prohibitions, and attributes is given great symbolic value, and contrary impulses are denied or repressed.

In general, we think that children are most likely to make what look like Stage I commitments. As we saw in our discussion of friendship, they are most likely to focus on the extrinsic properties (and indeed the overt physical characteristics, Livesley & Bromley, 1973) of others. They prefer to view real, physical rewards rather than symbolic or pictorial representations of these rewards, even when the presence of the real rewards makes it harder for them to wait the required period of time needed to obtain these rewards (Yates & Mischel, 1979). Their perceptual processes have been described as stimulus bound rather than internally (or socially) regulated. Thus Mackworth and Bruner (1970) write that visual search must develop from a point at which gaze is controlled by the stimulus object and its features to one in which it is actively directed by the perceiver in the service of his or her own aims. Gibson (1969) describes attention as something that changes from being captured to being exploratory as children mature. At a symbolic level, the social judgments of younger children (e.g., of the appropriate length of sentence for a transgressor; see Saltzstein, Supraner, & Sanvitale, 1976) are more subject to direct attempts to influence them than are those of older children. Harter (1981) found that younger children are more likely to rely on the teacher's judgment in classroom situations and less likely to have internal criteria for success and failure. Children's

behavior is, in general, more volatile and changeable—again, exemplified by their orientation to friends. This is what we would expect of behavior that has not in general been confronted with the task of mastering and integrating Stage II ambivalence. Children are probably more curious than adults, but their curiosity does not have the disciplined, purposeful, systematic quality that marks that of adults. There is much to be said for playful curiosity as opposed to worklike activity, but nothing is gained by pretending that there is no difference between the two.

Adolescents are most likely to make Stage III commitments, passionate and intense and extreme. Ambivalence is at its most intense at adolescence, when differentiation has outstripped integration. Adolescents have become aware that they are different people in different situations and relationships and that each of these makes different demands and offers new opportunities, and yet they have no sense of how to resolve these disorienting pulls and pushes. The carefree way in which roles are tried on just for fun and fantasy in childhood is replaced by a more self-conscious, agonized awareness of the costs, benefits, and ambiguities involved in each choice (Douvan, 1974). Not the least of the conflicts in adolescence are those between the personal solutions evolved in childhood—the childhood personality—and the pressures for very different forms of behavior. These pressures arise both from biological maturation and from often drastic shifts in cultural expectations (Benedict, 1938). Thus, once again, the adolescent is caught between a desire to maintain the pleasures of childhood ways and social pressures to abandon these ways for mature forms of behavior, with both tendencies blurred and confused by an emerging and ambivalent sexuality.

So adolescence is a period of exploring alternatives, testing limits, and struggling for identity and freedom. Of all age groups, adolescents are most likely to be immobilized, to feel unable to act, and to worry (Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 1960; Veroff, 1978). When they do act, their actions—as we would expect—are most likely to take extreme forms. These extreme forms can be quite contradictory, and the same adolescent can move from one variety to another. Thus, Kenniston (1960, 1968) has found adolescents embodying both the most intense forms of personal and social alienation and the most intense forms of active involvement and commitment to a political cause. Adolescents are both idealistic and cynical about friendship (Douvan & Adelson, 1966). Their need for identity or for some unification of their disparate fragments is so great, according to Erikson (1959), that if they cannot achieve a positive identity (i.e., one that conforms to norms valued by society, such as achievement in school), they will seek out a negative identity (i.e., one that deliberately flouts and challenges these norms, such as delinquency; Gold & Petronio, 1980). Most religious conversions occur during adolescence (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975), and a fair number of persons report more than one conversion. Some religious sects, such as Meher Baba, may be a means used by adolescents to rescue themselves from entanglements with previous life-styles (e.g., drug culture) that have proved undesirable but are hard to abandon (Robbins & Anthony, 1972).

Among the sources of ambivalence in adolescence, it should be noted, is commitment itself. Some of the apparent rebelliousness, alienation, cliquishness, con-

Schwartz intended with the title of his book of poetry *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*.

The fate of the Dream has fundamental consequences for a man's life. A few men by their early 40s have achieved all or most of what they had set out to do; they feel that they have truly succeeded and are assured of a happy future. Others find themselves seriously disappointed and unable to avoid the conclusion that the satisfactions and peace of mind they thought success would bring were an illusion. Those who have fallen short of their Dreams, on the other hand, may come to believe that they have failed in a profound sense, that they have been found wanting and without value not only in their work but also as persons.

According to Levinson, the major tasks of male adult life up to this point of reconsideration and reevaluation involve pursuit of this Dream, though the connections may not seem evident at the start. One such task is forming a mentor relationship with an older person in the same field who serves as a kind of guide, teacher, counselor, and guru—a substitute father figure, in many ways, who provides in early adult life many of the same grounds for confidence that the man's actual father did in an earlier period. Another task, according to Levinson's research, is forming an intimate relationship with a special woman. Although this relationship ordinarily involves sexual, romantic, and loving feelings, it also turns out to be a kind of mentoring relationship, in which the woman facilitates the man's entry into the adult world and helps him shape and live out the Dream. The special woman supports his pursuit of the Dream while still accepting his dependency, insecurity, and juvenile tendency to idealize her. She is, in many ways, a substitute mother figure, just as the mentor is a substitute father figure, and the coming of the midlife crisis is in part marked by a recognition on the part of all these critical figures—the mentor, the special woman, and the person himself—that they have contributed all they can to the pursuit of the Dream and that it is now time to take stock, to come to terms with what has and has not been achieved, and to move on to other developmental tasks and new kinds of relationships. Whereas Levinson considered only males, others have examined both women's and men's lives from a life course perspective (e.g., Sales, 1978). Career choices made by men and women are sometimes timed differently, but both sexes go through similar periods of commitment to a life goal, ambivalence and reexamination of this goal, and renewed enthusiasm for a revised goal. Thus, our examination of parallels between Levinson's stages and our theory of commitment development will consider both men and women.

Levinson's major stages of early adulthood and early middle adulthood correspond rather elegantly to our five stages of commitment. The first stage according to Levinson, Entering the Adult World, has many of the elements of a Stage I commitment. It extends roughly from about age 22 to 28. In this period, the young adult, though still concerned with keeping eyes and options open, makes first choices of careers and relationships that will form the basis for adult life. The period is, in general, a time of adventure and excitement, though not without confusion and uncertainty as well. The end of this period is marked by a Stage II crisis, the Age-Thirty Transition, which lasts from about 28 to 33. This is a period in

formity, and idealism of adolescence may in fact be understood as protection against the possibility of more realistic but premature commitments (Douvan, 1974). By embarking on a starry-eyed romance with an unattainable movie star or older and married teacher, adolescents can protect themselves against the possibility of involvement with someone nearer to their own age with sexual implications they are unprepared to handle.

Adults are best able to reach Stage V commitments; they evidence less of the high anxiety that drives Stage III commitments. Reviewing a variety of studies of the transition from youth to young adulthood, Neugarten (1972) concludes that the transition is marked by a stabilization of social roles and a concomitant increase in feelings of autonomy, competence, and stability, along with more equilibrium in mood and more integration of ego processes with impulses. The process continues from young to middle adulthood. Roles become more consistent, and according to Maccoby (1976), people derive more of their energy from a sense of coherent relatedness than from the inner upwellings that marked earlier periods of life.

Adult life, too, has important stages, whose properties have recently become much better known through the work of such people as Gould (1972), Levinson (1977, 1978), and Vaillant (1977). According to Levinson (1977), the periods of adult life divide into stable periods (e.g., settling down) and transitional periods (e.g., midlife transition). The movement from one stable period through a transitional period to another stable period corresponds quite well with our understanding of the dialectical manner in which commitments evolve. In a stable period, people make certain crucial choices, such as the career they will pursue or the family they will have, and seek to attain their goals and values within the chosen structure. In a transitional period, the choice and structure are partly or completely called into question, reviewed, and often terminated. Contradictions are recognized, possibilities for change in the world and the self are explored, and tensions are experienced that propel the person toward new choices that will form the basis for a new life structure and another stable period. We suggest that our stages of decommitment and recommitment can be usefully applied to understanding the steps, and the associated emotional changes, whereby the stable structure of one period is undermined and eventually replaced by the stable structure of the next period.

There is, indeed, a useful sense in which the entire drama of a lifetime, the psychological drama of adult life, can be understood as the discovery, unfolding, and coming to terms with a single major commitment, called by Levinson (1978) "the Dream." What makes the midlife crisis as inevitable and powerful as it appears to be is that in it a person deals with the fate of this dream, whether this fate has been success or failure:

From our study of the lives of 40 men—biologists, novelists, executives, working men—we have concluded that many young men have a Dream (we will use the capital to emphasize our specific use of the word) of the kind of life they want to lead as adults. The Dream in its primordial form is a vague sense of self-in-the-adult-world. It has the quality of a vision, an imagined possibility that generates excitement and vitality. The meaning is the one Delmore

which people wonder whether they have made the right choices or whether they have unduly constricted themselves and thus prematurely foreclosed their access to some of the things they will need to pursue their dream. There is a peaking of marital problems and divorce, various kinds of occupational changes, and psychotherapy at this point. The next phase, *Settling Down*, has many of the properties that we recognize as characteristic of Stage III commitments. This period lasts from 32 or 33 to about 39 or 40. The doubts of the *Age-Thirty Transition* are worked through and individuals now turn seriously to their youthful aspirations for work, family, friendship, leisure, or whatever is most important to them. The major tasks of this period, according to Levinson, are establishing a niche (developing a skill and a place) and "making it." These are serious tasks, and they are pursued seriously. The culmination of this period is the point at which the person passes beyond junior status, perhaps with a mentor relationship, to a senior position in which he or she has "become his or her own person"—or, alternatively, realized that this is not to be.

The *Mid-Life Transition*, which occurs between the ages of 40 and 45, is in many ways a Stage IV crisis. It is at this point that people ask what they have done with their lives, whether they are truly using or wasting their talents, what they are getting from (and giving to) their jobs and their families, and what it is that they truly want for themselves and others. This is, of course, a questioning of the intrinsic value of what they have achieved. It is not a cool, rational process, but a time of emotional turmoil and despair. It is a time when people recognize that many of their long-cherished assumptions and beliefs about the world, and about themselves, are illusions. Levinson calls this a period of "de-illusionment." The *Mid-Life Transition* is in part precipitated by a return of the repressed, a reawakening of inner voices calling attention to lost opportunities, alternative identities, and parts of the self that have in general been ignored or overlooked in the pursuit of the Dream. There is some especially interesting evidence that this is the case with regard to traditional sex-role specialization. Older males tend to show more traditionally feminine characteristics (see, e.g., Hyde & Phillis, 1979; Schaw & Henry, 1956)—for example, being more oriented to inner rather than outer worlds—and older females tend to show more traditionally masculine characteristics. These changes have been most extensively described by Guttman (1975):

The transcultural data make it clear that, by contrast with younger men, older men are on the whole less aggressive: they are more affiliative, more interested in love than in conquest or power, more interested in community than in agency. . . .

We also find, across a wide range of cultures, that women age psychologically in the reverse direction. Even in normally patriarchal societies, women become more aggressive in later life, less sentimental, and more domineering. They become less interested in communion and more turned toward agency. (p. 171)

It is parental roles, according to Guttman, that have traditionally called forth the sharpest sex-linked behavior: nurturant roles in women and provider roles in men,

with associated differences in how close to home they stay, how oriented they are to assertiveness or security, and so forth.

Men, the providers of physical security, give up the need for comfort and dependency that would interfere with their courage and endurance, and women, the providers of emotional security, give up the aggression that could alienate their male providers or that could damage a vulnerable and needful child. . . .

As parents enter middle age, and as children take over the responsibility for their own security, the chronic sense of parental emergency phases out, the psychological structures established by men and women in response to this crisis conditional are in effect dismantled, and the sex-role reversals that shape our transcultural data occur. . . . (Men begin to live out directly, to own as part of themselves, the passivity, the sensuality, the tenderness—in effect, the "femininity"—that was previously repressed in the service of productive instrumentality. By the same token, we find, transculturally, the opposite effect in women, who generally become domineering, independent, and unsentimental in middle life. Just as men reclaim title to their denied "femininity," women repossess the aggressive "masculinity" that they once lived out vicariously through their husbands. (pp. 180-181)

We need not and do not subscribe to the view that these stereotypical sex roles have the biological imperative Guttman implies, even in early adult life, or that such a psychological division of labor is unchanging. What we offer is a generalization of Guttman's thesis. Whatever form the major commitment of adult life—the Dream—takes, we are structured to invest in it heavily for the almost 20 years that define early adulthood. During this period, negative elements, antitheses, and other selves are pushed aside or integrated into the major synthesis. Eventually, however—with either the definitive achievement of the goal of this commitment, the clear failure to achieve it, or the simple exhaustion of the time span allotted to the attempt to achieve it—the energy that sustains this life commitment wanes. Negative elements and other selves once again become visible, and the person is faced with the new developmental task of asking which of these various elements he or she wishes to reassemble in a new and more flexible synthesis, a synthesis that may recognize limitations and impossibilities that are not theretofore acknowledged.

Out of this period of turmoil the individual emerges, eventually, into Middle Adulthood (ages 40 to 65), a period we can in many ways recognize as a Stage V commitment. The life structure of this period varies greatly in how satisfactory and viable it is. For some, it is a period of constriction and decline, of coming to terms with the defeats they have suffered earlier in life and finally and irrevocably recognized in the *Mid-Life Transition*. Others continue with their lives, keep busy, and fulfill their responsibilities, but without the sense of self and inner peace that would have been produced by a successful new synthesis. For many, however, Middle Adulthood is reported as the fullest and most creative season of life: they are free of the tyrannies of youthful ambitions, instincts, and illusions, yet still in full command of their powers, more secure in themselves and also more attached, in a mature way, to others.

Finally, in old age, we hypothesize that individuals come full cycle to return, on a very different basis, to Stage III and Stage I commitments. The basic effect of age on psychological functioning, according to Neugarten (1972), is a movement from an active, combative, outer-world orientation to a more adaptive, conforming, inner-world orientation. The loss of the capacity and energy to generate commitments under these circumstances seems analagous, on a psychological level, to the loss of resilience in many physiological structures. Many commitments will, of course, be carried over from earlier points in life. As internal and external resources for supporting these commitments dwindle, the commitments may become more rigid and extreme—that is, more, once again, like Stage III than Stage V commitments. Older parents who are unable to make many changes in their own lives and whose energy must be increasingly devoted to maintaining their own functioning, may be less able to adapt and change the form of their love for one of their children as the circumstances of this child's life change (e.g., through divorce or illness). New commitments, on the other hand, tend to be limited not only by this constriction of resources and new inward orientation but also by a shortened time span and (as a consequence of all of the above) a reduced ability to make substantial investments or side bets on behavior (Becker, 1960). Thus new commitments in old age are more likely to look like Stage I commitments, hedged and foreshortened before Stage II crises can be reached.

New commitments in the elderly will differ from comparable Stage I commitments in children, however, because they embody less energy and also because they represent a stage that might be called postambivalent rather than (as in children) preambivalent. There is some sense in which the elderly, like the young, can act in a less conflicted fashion, although for very different reasons. The young have not yet been socialized to ambivalence. The elderly have, in some sense, come to terms with the dominant forms of ambivalence in their lives during the processes of turning inward, renewing emotional awareness, and life review just mentioned. The solutions and the resolutions may not be entirely satisfactory, though the elderly appear, on the whole, less dissatisfied than most age stereotypes would lead us to expect (Campbell, Converse & Rodgers, 1976; Klinger, 1977; Neugarten, 1972) but the energy that fuels the remaining conflict is, in any event, less than it once was.

It should also be noted that the elderly, through the loss of life roles and life partners through retirement and death, are much more heavily engaged in dealing with decommitment processes; this will absorb a considerable portion of their available psychic energy. It may be hypothesized that turning inward is an adaptive response, in many ways, to a world that now contains fewer external incentives (Klinger, 1977). Langer (1979) has claimed that even an extreme form of turning inward—senility—predicts longer, rather than shorter, survival in nursing homes (if physical diagnosis is held constant). This is so, Langer claims, because senility actually represents an active psychic process—involving, in our terms, repeated commitments to a significant inner world—rather than merely a passive process of decay. Senility is thus preferable to a realistic but passive accommodation to the completely monotonous and unchallenging external environment characteristic of nursing homes.

Our analysis of change in the form and quality of commitments over the life cycle suggests an answer to a question that has repeatedly puzzled observers of relationships between the generations. Commentaries by the older generation on the behavior and character of the young read in a surprisingly similar manner whether taken from yesterday's newspaper or speeches in ancient Greece. The common lament is over the loss of standards, the loss of moral character—in our terms, the perceived loss of commitment—by the young. In general—and certainly in times of prosperity—the young are seen as having it easier than the older generation did, as not having had to sacrifice as much, and as not appreciating what they have. (This is true, by our informal observation, even for the judgments of younger siblings by older ones.) The older generation may not wish to go back to the material standards of past times, but they uniformly regret the loss of what they feel were moral standards of those times. In our view, this characteristic pattern represents less a perception of any actual historical reality than a shift in perspective with age. The older generation has indeed made more sacrifices, accumulated more commitments, and come to see the world more in terms of intrinsic value. The fact that the young have not makes them appear extrinsically oriented, amoral, or even immoral. It is not that the young have lost commitments. Rather, they have not yet gained them—at least not in the full measure dictated by the passing of Stage III commitments into Stage V commitments, by the accommodation to the fate of a Dream, and by the acquisition and resolution of conflicting commitments in a variety of life domains.

There should be no presumption, by the way, that the changes we have been talking about in capacity and inclination for commitment over the life cycle are biological rather than social. They may be due equally to changes in the ways people are treated at different points in life and to changes in the internal worlds of these people. For example, both children and the elderly may be actively discouraged from making commitments by others who treat them as though they do not have the requisite capacity for independent judgment. Commitments, by our definition, involve the perception of choice, some sense of ambivalence, and the recognition of responsibility for the consequences of choice. Our discussion has primarily traced changes in the extent and quality of commitment as a function of changes in the extent and quality of the ambivalence a person confronts at different points in his or her life. Ambivalence, whatever its sources, is primarily located within the individual. But people also differ in how much freedom they are allowed and how much responsibility they are assigned at different points in life. Commitment cannot begin unless people see themselves (in consequence, perhaps, of being seen by others) as free to make choices and take risks. As we have noted, limits on this freedom may constrain the extent to which commitments can develop in the very young and very old. Commitment cannot progress to its higher stages unless people see themselves as responsible for the consequences of their choices—for overcoming obstacles to their pursuits, and for coming to terms with inner dissatisfactions with their results. If, as seems likely, social roles entail the most intense assignment of responsibility to people during the middle years of adult life, we thus also expect the most elaborate development of commitments at this point in their lives.

have much more to do with social and affective development than with the cognitive factors Kohlberg emphasizes. If this is so, and if rigid Stage III commitments are incompatible with the progression from conventional to principled thought, we then have an explanation for the otherwise puzzling interruption in Kohlberg's sequence of moral development.

Although we are encouraged that this wide variety of literature on developmental changes in cognition, affect, and social behavior is eminently compatible with our theory of commitment, studies designed for other purposes can never be adequate to test the critical hypotheses of a given theory. We need a generation of studies that will directly assess the quality of the commitments experienced by people of different ages and how these commitments evolve over time.

Our discussion of developmental changes in the extent and quality of commitments has been speculative because there is little research that directly assesses how commitment processes change over the life cycle. As we have seen, however, there is some related literature that lends itself surprisingly well to interpretation as a special case of change in the predisposition or capacity to make commitments. Thus, we mentioned evidence that children acquire greater capacity for self-control and selective attention as they grow. In a related vein, there is a body of literature indicating that people tend to acquire a greater belief in their capacity to control reinforcements, or in their sense of themselves as causal agents influencing environmental events, as they grow older (Lifshutz, 1973; Nowicki & Duke, 1974), at least until age 50 or 60 (Bradley & Webb, 1976; Lao, 1974; Penk, 1969). From childhood to adolescence there is an increase in the sense of the self as an existential, individualizing, self-determining actor (Montemayor & Eisen, 1977). There is a parallel increase in the tendency to see other people as personally responsible for their actions rather than seeing these actions as environmentally caused—that is, to see actors as choosing things because of properties in themselves rather than properties of the thing chosen (Ruble, Feldman, Higgins, & Karlovac, 1979). All of these various findings imply the development of the three elements we have considered preconditions of commitment: the sense of oneself as making choices, the awareness that these choices have both positive and negative consequences, and the acceptance of responsibility for these choices and their consequences.

Likewise, children's apparent progression through Kohlberg's six stages of moral judgment (Kohlberg, 1972; see also the fine presentation in Brown & Herrstein, 1975) can be understood as regular increases in people's perception that the children are choosing actions as a function of the intrinsic value of these actions rather than as a function of the material (preconventional) or social (conventional) rewards and punishments attached to these actions. To make higher-level moral judgments, in Kohlberg's sense, an actor must be aware that individuals (or societies) make difficult choices (that are affirmed despite the fact that the intended goal of these choices may be impossible to demonstrate (i.e., that moral values are not givens or absolutes). The goal is for the choices to be internally consistent and universally applicable. Making choices of this sort clearly involves the capacity to make commitments. Thus, Kohlberg's argument that young children have not developed the cognitive capacities to make these higher-level moral judgments strongly suggests that such children have not developed the capacity to make commitments. They could, to be sure, have developed the capacity to make commitments but not yet applied it in the sphere of moral judgment, but we regard this as highly unlikely, since moral judgment, and evaluative judgment in general, would seem to be one of the first domains in which one would make commitments. Incidentally, the one anomaly in the data bearing on Kohlberg's hypothesized developmental sequence—that a substantial number of adolescents make more primitive moral judgments than they did earlier (see Trainer, 1977)—is itself highly supportive of our developmental analysis. We have suggested that adolescence is a time when Stage III commitments, which are relatively rigid and intense, are undertaken for reasons that