CONFLICT, DECISION, AND DISSONANCE

Chapter 5

Post-Decision Regret and Decision Reversal
Leon Festinger and Elaine Walster

The Temporal Sequence of Post-Decision Processes
Elaine Walster

The Post-Decision Process

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We have now come to the point where we can examine the post-decision process in somewhat more detail. From our theory, and from much of the experimental evidence that we have presented, one is clearly led to the conclusion that the act of decision makes a crucial difference. The act of decision initiates a qualitative change in the cognitive process.

It seems important, then, to consider the immediate post-decision situation. Since we know that the process changes, it is of interest to know the exact nature of the transition from one to another process. Are the effects of the decision immediate? Is the transition sudden or gradual?

To help us start thinking about the matter, let us go back to our conclusions about the interaction between pre- and post-decision processes. On the basis of the experimental evidence presented in Chapters 2 and 3, we asserted that the greater the extent to which existing information is considered and thought through before dissonance exists, the more rapidly and effectively does dissonance reduction proceed after dissonance has been created. How might the transition from pre- to post-decision processes proceed in order to produce this kind of result?

If the pre-decision period is, indeed, spent mainly in impartially evaluating both the positive and the negative aspects of each alternative, then the more the person has done this, the more he knows about each alternative at the moment of making his decision. Furthermore, as we know from the previous chapters, after the usual type of decision is made the cognitive process of dissonance reduction begins. But, undoubtedly, it takes time and cognitive work in order to change one's evaluations effectively so as

to reduce dissonance. If the cognitive work has already been done, the process of dissonance reduction may proceed quickly. If the various aspects of the alternatives were not very well thought through in the pre-decision period, this process of examination must take place in the post-decision period in order to facilitate the reduction of dissonance.

The foregoing account implies that in order to reduce dissonance in the post-decision period, the person is mainly preoccupied with attending to the dissonance that exists. Hence we are led to propose the following characteristic of the transition from pre-decision to post-decision process. As soon as the decision is made, all the negative aspects of the chosen alternative and all the positive aspects of the rejected alternative become salient for the person. In other words, immediately after the decision the person focuses his attention on the dissonance that exists and, of course, attempts to reduce it. This notion of immediate post-decision salience of dissonance has already been suggested by Brehm and Cohen (1962), who also present the results of an experiment to support the idea.

In that experiment each subject was asked to check, on a list, the personality characteristics that he possessed. He was also asked to check the same list about a close friend of his. Each subject was then shown an artificially prepared list supposedly checked about him by his close friend. On this artificially prepared list a certain number of items were checked by his friend exactly as he had checked them about himself. A certain number were checked differently, however. In other words, on a certain number of items he was evaluated differently by his friend from the way he saw himself. These items presumably introduced dissonance. Brehm and Cohen report that immediately after the subject had seen the artificially prepared check list, there was a preponderance of recall of the dissonance-producing items. After a period of a few days, however, consonant items were primarily remembered.

While such data lend some support to the idea of immediate post-decision salience of dissonance, the support is rather weak. For one thing, the data do not pertain to a post-decision situation. But this is perhaps a minor point. More important is the fact that the data are amenable to other, simpler interpretations. One could explain the immediate-memory result very readily in terms of con-

trasting items being easily noticed rather than in terms of salience of dissonance. One would, obviously, like to have better corroboration.

Let us consider some of the consequences to be expected if there does, indeed, exist such immediate post-decision salience of dissonance. Phenomenally, such salience of dissonance might be experienced as a feeling of regret, something that most of us have felt, probably, at one time or another. A person, for example, may shop around for an automobile to buy, investigate several kinds, and finally decide on which to purchase. As soon as the purchase is accomplished and final, he may very well be assailed by a sudden feeling of "Oh, my, what have I done!"

Others have noted this type of phenomenon. Lewin (1938), for example, says: ". . . frequently after the decision is made, the goal not chosen seems to be the more attractive one . . . ." (Pp. 206–7.) The existence of such post-decision regret was also noted by Festinger (1957) in his statement of the theory of cognitive dissonance. In this statement, however, Festinger probably misinterprets the phenomenon. He discusses it as perhaps a defensive reaction to avoid dissonance. He states: "Avoiding post-decision dissonance can also be accomplished to some extent by psychologically revoking the decision as soon as it is made. Thus, for example, if immediately after having made a decision, irrevocable though it may be in actuality, the person is convinced that it was absolutely the wrong thing to do, he is again preparing himself for the impact of possible dissonance and avoiding this impact." (P. 270.)

It seems much more likely that such post-decision regret is simply the manifestation of the fact that the dissonance has suddenly become salient. After all, if after the choice is made the person's attention becomes spontaneously directed mainly toward the bad aspects of the chosen alternative and the good aspects of the rejected alternative, it would seem reasonable for him to feel regret and to think that perhaps he did the wrong thing.

How can we test this interpretation adequately? After all, if such post-decision regret is due to sudden salience of dissonance, it must be a rather momentary affair in most experimental decision situations. There is certainly enough experimental evidence that very shortly after the decision one may observe an increase in

relative preference for the chosen alternative. Thus, at least for the kinds of decisions we can deal with in the laboratory, it would seem that any manifestations of post-decision regret would be observable only momentarily. The very process of rerating the alternatives after the decision may, in many cases, provide enough time for dissonance reduction to overcome the regret.

One possible test procedure suggests itself, however. If, during the period when dissonance is salient, a person were given the opportunity to reconsider, he should show some inclination to reverse his decision. Thus, if we could produce a situation in which *immediately after* having made a decision the person is asked to make the decision, we should obtain an excessive amount of decision reversal. The preceding sentence may sound like gibberish, but it is possible to approximate such a condition plausibly. Festinger and Walster report such an experiment below.

Experiment

Post-Decision Regret and Decision Reversal

Leon Festinger and Elaine Walster

The purpose of this experiment was to ascertain whether or not there is a tendency to reverse one's decision immediately after making it. If there is such a tendency, this would provide some evidence for the hypothesis concerning the immediate post-decision salience of dissonance.

There is, of course, some difficulty in creating a laboratory situation in which it is plausible to ask a person to make a decision twice, especially if one wants the second decision to occur with minimum time delay after the first. The idea for how to set up such an experimental situation was suggested to us by an experiment by Brehm, Cohen, and Sears (1960). In this experiment there was an attempt to obtain both pre-decision and post-decision ratings of the alternatives involved in a choice. This was done in the following way. The subject was asked to rank each of a number

of objects. He was then told that he would have a choice between the objects he had ranked third and fourth as a free gift. The experimenter asked the subject not to make his decision yet, but first to rank all the objects again. After he had finished the reranking, the subject was asked to make his choice.

A rather striking, and somewhat baffling, methodological problem arose in this experiment. Of a total of 49 subjects, 20 chose the object that they had originally ranked fourth. In short, 40 per cent of the subjects chose the alternative that they had considered the less attractive. While it is possible that this could have occurred simply because of very low reliability of the initial ranking, this does not seem plausible. Forty per cent seems like a very high figure.

The theoretical idea about post-decision regret suggested another explanation. The subjects in this experiment knew, when they performed the second ranking, which two objects they would be asked to choose between. The process of making the second ranking under these circumstances virtually forced them to make a choice. Since they must rank one of the two objects higher than the other, and since they know they must choose between these two objects, this ranking is close to expressing a decision. Immediately after having expressed this "decision" they were asked to choose between the two objects. It is possible that salience of dissonance following the decision expressed by the ranking procedure could account for the very high rate of decision reversals when they were asked to state their choice formally.

The present experiment, designed to test the hypothesis concerning post-decision regret, was modeled along these same lines. Subjects would be asked to rank a number of objects before being asked to make a choice. During the process of ranking, subjects in one condition would know, whereas subjects in the other condition would *not* know, which two objects they would be asked to choose between. If our hypothesis is correct, the former group would, after the ranking, experience regret and would show a high proportion of decision reversals, that is, ultimate choice of the alternative originally rated as less attractive. The latter group, of course, not knowing anything about the choice alternatives while they made the ranking, would not be making a decision and,

hence, could not experience post-decision salience of dissonance after the ranking. Hence, this group should not show as many decision reversals.

Procedure

Sixty-eight female students at Stanford University were used as subjects in the experiment. Forty-nine of these came from the course in introductory psychology, the other 19 from other courses. All subjects knew beforehand that they were to participate in some market research concerning hair styles.

Each subject was scheduled individually for the experiment. When the subjects arrived at the appointed time and place, they were led into a room through a door marked "Market Research—Duart-Clairol, Inc." The room contained several large posters advertising permanents and tints. Various hair style magazines were conspicuously displayed on a table.

Each girl was handed 12 photographs of different hair styles and told to examine them until she was familiar with all of them. After about two minutes and while the subject still had the photographs before her, she was asked to rate the attractiveness of each one. Specifically, the subject was told: "Considering your face and figure—and whatever else you would take into consideration—rate how you would feel about having your *own* hair done in each of these hair styles." The ratings were done on a 13-point rating scale on which 1 was described as "I would like to have my hair done in this style extremely much," 7 as "I don't know if I would like to have my hair done in this style or not," and 13 as "I would dislike having my hair done in this style extremely much."

When the subject had completed this initial rating of the 12 hair styles, she was given another task that consisted of choosing attractive trade names for various hair colors. The purpose of this second task was merely to fill some time with seemingly appropriate things. While the subject was thus engaged, the experimenter examined the ratings she had just completed in order to select two hair styles that the subject would later be asked to choose between. In order to have the choice be as similar as possible, psychologically, to all subjects, to avoid the use of alternatives that were actually disliked, and to prescribe a strict procedure

for the experimenter, the following criteria were used in the selection of the two hair styles:

1. Both styles had to be appropriate for the subject's hair length.
2. The two styles had to be rated exactly one unit apart on the 13-point rating scale.
3. No style rated lower than 7, the neutral point, was to be used, nor was the style rated as the most desirable to be used.
4. Among the pairs of hair styles that met these qualifications, that pair was chosen which was rated more attractive. Thus, if possible, those hair styles rated second and third best were chosen.

It was not always possible to satisfy all these conditions completely. Under such circumstances, requirement 2 was sacrificed. Thus, seven subjects had alternatives separated by two units, and five subjects had alternatives separated by half a unit. These exceptions were divided as equally as possible between the two conditions.

After the experimenter had made the selection of the two hair styles that were to be used later for the choice and after the subject had completed the second task, she was asked to *rank* the 12 hair styles which she had previously rated. Rank 1 would indicate "Would most like to have my hair done in this style," while rank 12 would indicate "Would least like to have my hair done in this style." At this point the procedure for the two experimental conditions diverged.

"No-Prior-Decision" Condition. In this condition the subjects proceeded to rank the 12 pictures according to the instructions. After the ranking was completed, the experimenter said: "Now that you've finished the ranking, I can give you some information." The subject was then told that when Duart-Clairol asked to interview psychology students, the Department of Psychology was not very enthusiastic about it. They felt that students would learn very little by participating in such an "applied" study. Hence the Department felt that the company should somehow recompense the students for their time. The company agreed to offer each participant a free haircut and hair set at a nearby salon. However, the subject was told, since the company was interested in seeing the relation between preferences and hair characteristics, she could not have her hair set in just any style. She could have her hair done in "whichever of these two styles" she preferred.

At this point the experimenter handed to the subject the photographs of the two hair styles that had previously been selected. The subject was asked to indicate which one she wanted. When the subject made her choice, the experimenter wrote it down on a "free coupon" that was given to the subject to present at the salon.

"Prior-Decision" Condition. The only difference between the procedure for this condition and the one already described was the order of events. All instructions were otherwise identical. Just as the subject took the 12 photographs and was about to begin to rank them, the experimenter said, "Oh, I might as well tell you now," and then proceeded to give her "information" identical to that in the other condition. At the conclusion of the information statement, the experimenter put paper clips on the two photographs which the subject was to choose between, so that they were clearly identifiable to the subject, and said, "Don't tell me which one you want now. We'll talk about it later. Right now, just finish the ranking." The experimenter then looked away to discourage conversation.

As soon as the ranking was completed, the experimenter asked the subject to choose the one she wanted for her free hairdo and wrote the information on the free coupon as in the other condition.

Thus, in the prior-decision condition the subject knew that she was going to choose between two particular hair styles during the time that she was doing the ranking. In this condition, then, the rank order of those two hair styles is an expression of a decision by the subject. In the no-prior-decision condition, on the other hand, the subject did not even know she was to make a choice while doing the ranking. Thus, for this condition, the first time the subject made a decision was when she was asked to indicate her choice at the completion of the ranking.

In both conditions, after the subject had indicated her choice and had been given her free coupon, she was asked to evaluate the 12 hair styles once more on rating scales identical to those used for the initial rating. The excuse used for this second rating was that the "company thought it was possible that the girls' preferences might be influenced by the academic setting we're in." The experimenter then asked the girl to think about dorm friends and activities for a few seconds to "get into a dorm-like mood" and then to do the ratings.

After the completion of these final ratings, the experiment was over. The purpose of the experiment was fully explained to each girl.

Results

Our main interest in the data is to compare the initial ratings made by the subject with the hair style she finally chose. The reader will recall the theoretical expectations concerning this. Subjects in the prior-decision condition, at the time they are asked to state their choice, should be experiencing salience of post-decision dissonance, since, in essence, they have just expressed their decision in the ranking. Consequently, one would expect that there would be a higher incidence of decision reversal in this condition than in the no-prior-decision condition. A decision reversal would be an instance in which the subject, when asked finally which style she wanted, chose the hair style that she had initially rated as less attractive. In short, post-decision regret, if it existed, should lead to tendencies toward decision reversal.

The data are quite clear on this matter. In the no-prior-decision condition, out of a total of 36 subjects, ten (28 per cent) chose the less attractive alternative. In the prior-decision condition, out of a total of 32 subjects, 20 (62 per cent) chose this less attractive alternative. The difference is highly significant. Chi-square is equal to 8.33, significant beyond the 1 per cent level. In short, the prior-decision condition does indeed show a high incidence of decision reversal. We may take this as evidence that post-decision regret is, indeed, a general occurrence.

One can, of course, question why the percentage who choose the initially less attractive alternative is so high in the no-prior-decision condition. The figure of 28 per cent decision reversals might be due simply to the unreliability of the initial ratings, or it might be due to some unknown aspect of the procedure that somehow encouraged this kind of behavior. If the latter were true, it could raise a serious question about our interpretation of the data. Consequently, the chance expectation of choosing the initially less attractive alternative was computed on the basis of unreliability of the initial rating. This was done in the following way. Changes from the initial rating to the final post-decision rating were tabulated for all hair styles not involved in the choice that had been

rated initially between 2 and 7 on the rating scale. In other words, we examined the changes in ratings of hair styles that were initially rated at the same levels as those used for the choice but which had themselves not been used for the choice. We could then compute the probability of a reversal occurring between any pair of ratings, that is, between a pair initially rated 2 and 3, between a pair initially rated 3 and 4, and so on. Weighting each of these probabilities according to the distribution of such pairs in the actual choices that were presented to the subject, we calculated the chance expectancy of choosing the less attractive alternative. Both conditions are virtually identical in this regard. For the no-prior-decision condition one would expect 35 per cent to choose the initially less attractive alternative simply because of unreliability of rating. The corresponding figure for the prior-decision condition is 37 per cent.

It turns out that the incidence of actually choosing the less attractive alternative in the no-prior-decision condition is fully compatible with the unreliability of the rating. Actually, it is slightly, and insignificantly, less than chance expectation. The incidence of decision reversal obtained in the prior-decision condition, on the other hand, is significantly greater than the chance level ($\chi^2 = 8.78$, significant at less than the 1 per cent level).

It will have occurred to the reader to ask about the extent to which the reversals that occurred were already apparent in the ranking that was done before the subject was expressly asked to choose. The data show that for both conditions slightly more than half of the reversals are already present in the ranking. This, however, is not a very revealing result. Many subjects, after having ranked their hair styles, went over them again, changing the rank positions of some of the styles. Many of the reversals due to post-decision regret in the prior-decision condition occurred at this point. Indeed, the fact that the procedure allowed this immediate response to the salience of dissonance probably contributed to the success of the experiment. It is of interest, however, that there was an almost total absence of "re-reversals." That is, only three subjects in the entire sample reversed from the initial rating to the ranking and then reversed again by choosing the one initially rated higher. This may indicate that the regret phenomenon is, indeed, fleeting and does not produce an unending sequence of reversal tendencies.

It is also of interest to inquire into the pattern of post-decision dissonance reduction shown by the two experimental conditions. After all, the period of salience of dissonance must be a relatively brief one in this situation and, given a little bit of time, dissonance reduction should show itself. By the time of the final post-decision rating of the hair styles one should be able to observe the usual post-decision systematic re-evaluation of alternatives.

We might expect to find a difference between the two conditions, however. In the prior-decision condition, having made their decision during the ranking, the subjects have had more time to recover from the post-decision regret and, hence, might be expected to show a larger dissonance-reduction effect by the time of the final rating. Table 5.1 presents the data for the two conditions on the initial rating and the final rating of the chosen and rejected alternatives. The last column in the table presents the usual measure of dissonance reduction, namely, increase in attractiveness of the chosen alternative plus decrease in attractiveness of the rejected alternative.

There is a problem in examining such data in this experiment that was primarily designed for a different purpose. This problem arises because of the different number of reversals in the two conditions. It is quite obvious that those who reverse, that is, who choose the initially less attractive alternative, will have appreciably larger dissonance-reduction measures than those whose choices are consistent with their initial rating. Consequently, if we simply looked at the data for each condition as a whole, there would be an effect favoring the prior-decision condition, since there were many more reversals in that condition. Table 5.1, consequently, shows the data separately for those who reversed and those who did not.

It is clear from an examination of the data that irrespective of experimental condition and of whether the choice was consistent with, or a reversal from, the original rating, there is evidence of dissonance reduction by the time of the final rating. In all cases the dissonance-reduction measures are significantly different from zero at or beyond the 5 per cent level. Also, of course, the dissonance-reduction measures are larger for the "reversal" subjects than for the "consistent" ones. This is trivial, however, since simply having the final ratings consistent in direction with the choice would produce a large number.

TABLE 5.1

Comparison of Average Initial and Final Ratings of the Chosen and Rejected Hair Styles

	Initial Rating		Final Rating		Dissonance Reduction
	Chosen	Rejected	Chosen	Rejected	
Consistent Choice					
Prior Decision					
(N = 12)	3.6	4.7	2.6	5.1	+1.4
No Prior Decision					
(N = 26)	3.5	4.6	2.9	4.8	+0.8
Reversal Choice					
Prior Decision					
(N = 20)	5.0	4.0	3.2	4.6	+2.4
No Prior Decision					
(N = 10)	4.6	3.6	3.4	3.8	+1.4

Of greater interest is the comparison between the two experimental conditions. Regardless of the direction of the choice, the subjects in the prior-decision condition show greater dissonance reduction than those in the no-prior-decision condition. However, neither the difference for the consistent choice subjects nor that for the reversal choice subjects is significant, although the latter approaches significance with a t of 1.51. No attempt was made to push the statistical analysis farther considering the huge difference between the two conditions in type of decision. We are content simply to accept the results as suggesting that it takes time to recover from the post-decision regret.

While the data certainly support the notion of post-decision salience of dissonance, we should examine whether or not there are plausible alternative explanations. At least one other possible explanation suggests itself. In the prior-decision condition, the effect of knowing during the ranking which two they would be asked to choose between may have been to focus attention on the two critical hair styles for a longer time and may have induced more detailed examination and consideration of these two styles. Given the fact that the initial ratings are relatively unreliable, such increased attention and consideration might have produced

the obtained effect. Perhaps the more the two hair styles were considered, the more likely it would be for new considerations to enter, thus increasing the likelihood of choosing the alternative originally rated as less desirable.

In order to check on the validity of this alternative explanation, another experimental condition was run which we may call the "attention-focusing" condition. The procedure here was identical to the procedure for the other two conditions except that the step of ranking the 12 hair styles was omitted. In its place a procedure was substituted to focus the subject's attention on the two styles that were to be used for the choice. The girl was told that the company was interested in more detailed descriptions, and more detailed reactions, to a few of the hair styles. She was handed one of the photographs and asked to comment in detail on it. She was then handed another and was similarly encouraged to react to it in detail. Altogether, four photographs were thus commented on. At the conclusion of these descriptions, she was given the same "information" as in the other experimental conditions and was asked to make a choice between two of the hair styles that she had reacted to in detail. In short, in this condition the subjects did not make any prior decisions but had their attention focused on detailed consideration of the alternatives that they were later to choose between.

Nineteen girls were run in this condition. Four out of the 19 (21 per cent) chose the alternative that they had originally rated as less attractive. Clearly, the alternative explanation is not valid. At least in this situation, focusing attention and detailed consideration did not induce a greater number of reversals.

Since the attention-focusing condition was run later than the other two experimental conditions, we also, at the same time, assigning subjects at random, ran seven additional girls each in the no-prior-decision and the prior-decision conditions, simply to be sure that the effect we had obtained was still operating. Although the number of cases here is too small for statistical significance to show itself, the results closely duplicate what had previously been obtained in these conditions. In the no-prior-decision condition, two out of the seven girls (29 per cent) chose the less attractive hair style. In the prior-decision condition, four out of the seven (57 per cent) showed decision reversal.

Summary

Two experimental conditions were run in order to test a hypothesis concerning post-decision salience of dissonance. Girls were given a choice of which of two hair styles they wanted for a free hair setting. In one condition the subjects had already made a "decision" by ranking one as more desirable than the other before they were asked to indicate their choice. In the other condition no decision had been made before they were asked, formally, to make one. It was reasoned that in the former condition, post-decision regret would exist when they were asked to make their choice, and that this would be reflected in a high incidence of decision reversals.

The data support this hypothesis concerning post-decision regret. In the prior-decision condition there were significantly more decision reversals than in the no-prior-decision condition. In order to make sure that this result was not obtained because of different amounts of attention paid to the alternatives, another experimental condition was subsequently run. No prior decision was made in this additional condition, but the subjects were induced to give a lot of attention to the hair styles that were to be involved in the choice. The incidence of decision reversal was quite low in this condition. It seems plausible to maintain that following a decision there is a sudden salience of dissonance that is experienced as regret about the decision.

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It is fair to say that, considering the results of the Festinger and Walster experiment, we have some evidence that there does occur a period of post-decision regret. But how compelling is this evidence? In general, there are two things that affect the extent to which certain data compel us toward a specific theoretical interpretation. The first, and the most important, is the availability of alternative explanations that are equally good or better. It is, indeed, difficult to think of adequate alternative explanations for the results of the Festinger and Walster experiment and, to this extent, the data seem reasonably compelling. There is, however,

a second factor. Although it may be difficult, or even impossible, to construct an adequate alternative explanation immediately, one may have various degrees of confidence that a better alternative interpretation will soon be invented. If such a belief is strong, one usually does not regard the data as compelling, regardless of the current dearth of alternative explanations.

Let us examine the Festinger and Walster experiment from this point of view. Although it is rather straightforward and simple from a methodological point of view, it is a highly complicated experiment from a theoretical point of view. The interpretation in terms of post-decision regret rests upon the assumption that once a person knows that he will be asked to choose between two alternatives, the action of ranking these two, together with several others, forces him to make a decision between them. It further assumes that such a "decision," even though it is not a formal one, and even though it is clearly revocable, initiates the same post-decision processes as an actual choice. These assumptions, inherent in the "regret" interpretation of the experiment, may turn out to be questionable.

Another problem exists also. The Festinger and Walster experiment does not have a direct measure reflecting post-decision regret. Instead, the experiment relies on the reasoning that if a sufficiently large number of people experience a sufficiently large magnitude of post-decision regret, then we will observe a large enough frequency of actual decision reversal. The measure employed, namely, the relative frequency of choosing the alternative originally rated as less attractive, is a rather indirect measure. In short, because of the assumptions involved in interpreting the procedure, and because of the indirectness of the dependent variable, the results are not very compelling with respect to the hypothesis about salience of dissonance.

Certainly, a more direct test of the hypothesis should be possible. If there is a temporary period of regret following a decision because of immediate post-decision salience of dissonance, one should be able to observe directly that at some point, soon after the decision, the chosen alternative has become less attractive and the rejected alternative has become more attractive. One should also be able to observe that this phase of the post-decision process is followed by dissonance reduction and the spreading apart of the attractiveness of the alternatives. If one could show this directly

in an experiment, it would certainly lend considerable weight to the whole idea of post-decision regret.

There are obvious difficulties connected with doing such an experiment in the laboratory. Probably, in order to demonstrate the temporal sequence of regret followed by dissonance reduction, one requires a situation in which the post-decision dissonance is very large, the decision very important, and dissonance reduction rather difficult. In this type of situation it seems reasonable to suppose that the immediate post-decision salience of dissonance would be marked enough to show itself clearly in ratings and, if dissonance reduction is difficult, the regret would last for a long enough time to be measurable. It is clearly not easy to construct this kind of decision situation in the laboratory. The experiment reported next by Walster represents a compromise between the laboratory and real life. It is a rather successful attempt to use an important, real decision in a relatively controlled manner for experimental purposes.