

Attitude Strength Reduction as a Method of Reducing Cognitive Dissonance

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Background

Cognitive dissonance refers to a sense of psychological discomfort that follows from the recognition of inconsistency among cognitive elements (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, behaviors; Festinger, 1957). Because dissonance is aversive, individuals implement strategies to eliminate the uncomfortable state.

Dissonance research has focused primarily on the role of attitude change following counterattitudinal behaviors in dissonance reduction (Devine et al., 2002). However, we see great value in research exploring the viability of alternative dissonance reduction strategies.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the viability of decreasing the importance of personal beliefs (i.e., attitude strength reduction/trivialization) as a method of dissonance reduction.

Method

Undergraduate students (N = 16, 68% Female, 62% Caucasian) completed the following:

Pre and Post Test Attitude Position:

- 7-point semantic differential scales assessing students' opinions toward allowing "7:00 am Courses at UT-Tyler" (adapted from Thomas et al., 2018).

Pre and Post Test Attitude Strength:

- 7-point Likert-type scales assessing attitude certainty, the centrality of attitudes to the self-concept, and overall level of knowledge regarding allowing 7:00 am courses at UT Tyler" (adapted from Thomas et al., 2018).

Induced Compliance Paradigm:

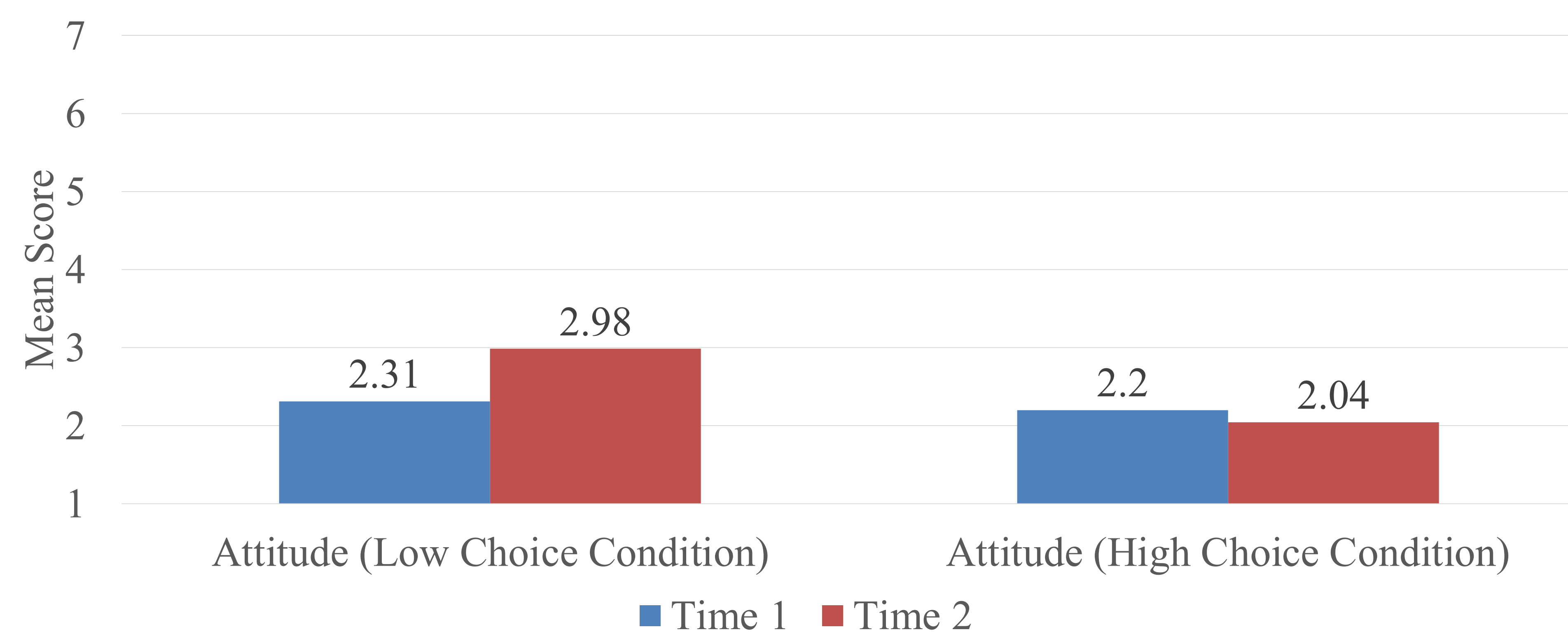
- Participants were instructed to write an essay in support of allowing 7:00 am courses at UT-Tyler under high and low-choice conditions (adapted from Elliot & Devine, 1994).

Results

Attitude Position

A split-plot ANOVA was used to compare pre and posttest attitudes between participants assigned to low and high-choice conditions. Results revealed the main effect of "time", main effect of "condition" and interaction were not significant, $F(1,14) = 1.53, p > .05, n^2_p = .09$, $F(1,14) = 2.99, p > .05, n^2_p = .17$, & $F(1,14) = 3.94, p > .05, n^2_p = .22$, respectively.

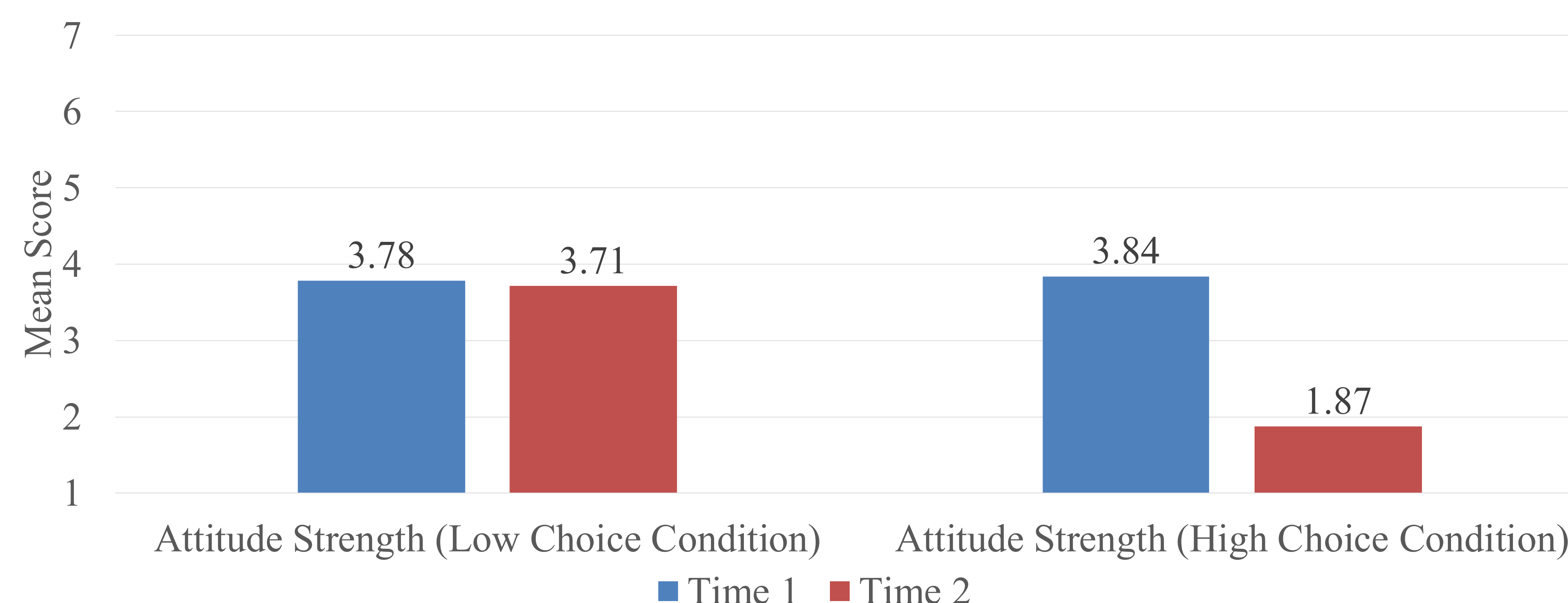
Pre and Post Test Attitude Scores Across Experimental Conditions



Attitude Strength

A split-plot ANOVA was used to compare pre and posttest attitude strength between participants assigned to low and high-choice conditions. Results of the analysis revealed a significant interaction between "time" and "condition", $F(1,14) = 27.50, p < .05, n^2_p = .66$. Specifically, our results indicated that posttest attitude strength was significantly lower than pre-test attitude strength among participants assigned to the high-choice condition.

Pre and Post Test Attitude Strength Scores Across Experimental Conditions



Conclusion

Consistent with the predictions of Festinger's (1957) original conceptualization of dissonance theory, our results revealed that trivialization (or attitude strength reduction) is a viable method of dissonance reduction following counterattitudinal behavior.

The results of the current investigation have important implications for educational practice given the popularity of instructional frameworks suggesting cognitive conflict is a motivating influence that pushes learners to engage in meaningful knowledge/belief revision. Specifically, our results suggest that learners may rely on alternative methods of conflict resolution when meaningful attitude/knowledge/belief change is difficult to achieve.

References

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