After deciding the case, the participants indicated their liking for everyone in the group. Supporting Schachter’s (1951) hypothesis, the data displayed in Figure 8.8 indicate that highly cohesive groups were more disparaging toward a dissenter than were groups that lacked cohesiveness. Subsequent research has found that this is particularly true when disagreement threatens the group’s legitimacy or superiority (Matheson, Cole, & Majka, 2003; Scheepers, Branscombe, Spears, & Doosje, 2002).

Timing also matters. Dissent is tolerated during the beginning stages of a deliberation, but when it comes time to make a decision, those who refuse to go along with the group tend to be ridiculed and rejected (J. R. Kelly & Karau, 1999; J. R. Kelly & Loving, 2004; Kruglanski & Webster, 1991). This finding explains why the confederate who first disagreed but then relented was not disliked.

2. Group Polarization Effects

So far, we have seen that groups tend to deal harshly with deviants and that group members tend to converge when making a judgment. In the situations we have discussed, group members holding extreme positions have been in the minority. But what happens when moderates and extremists are equal in number? To return to an earlier example, suppose four advertising executives meet to design a new advertising campaign. Two of the members favor a risky but potentially profitable approach, and the other two favor a more cautious, moderate approach. What is the group decision likely to be? Will it be extreme, will it be conservative, or will the group members split the difference and produce a decision that’s intermediate and temperate?

A great deal of research has addressed this question, and the answer is now clear: Group judgments tend to be more extreme than the judgments individuals make on their own (Myers & Lamm, 1976). An investigation by Myers and Bishop (1970) demonstrated this group polarization effect. Working alone, high school students were initially asked how they felt about various issues pertaining to racial diversity. Later, the students met in small groups to discuss the issues. The groups were composed of members whose prejudice scores were near one another, so that high-prejudiced students interacted with one another and low-prejudiced students...