

DBA707

# Introduction to Dissonant Cognitive Forms

*An Explanation of the Proposed Model of Measuring Cognitive  
Dissonance in Consumer Behavior*

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4/21/06

# Purpose

- An explanation of the proposed model of measuring cognitive dissonance in consumer behavior
- This presentation does not show the theoretical details that support this model of measuring dissonance.
- Note that the direction of the arrow depicting object meaning is reversed from the dissertation due to limitations of the PowerPoint cycle diagram.

# Overview

- What is Cognitive Dissonance?
- Measuring Cognitive Dissonance.
- What are Dissonant Cognitive Forms?
- Implications for Consumer Behavior.
- Extended Example: Scripting Dissonance Induction / Reduction.
- Review and Questions?

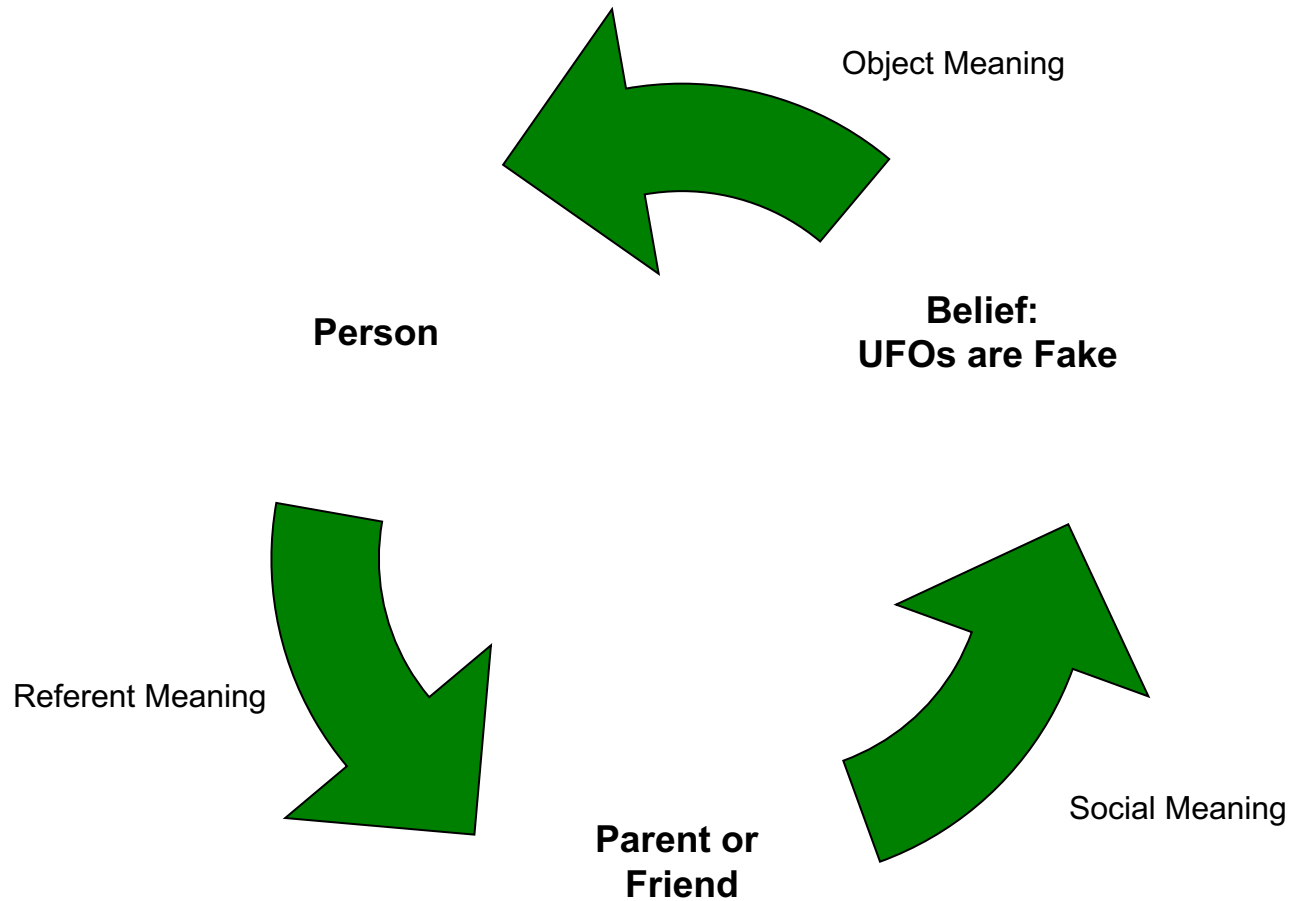
# What is Cognitive Dissonance?

- Cognitive Dissonance is the psychological discomfort experienced while simultaneously thinking about two, non-fitting social cognitions.
- Belief Disconfirmation: UFOs are Fake vs. UFOs are Real.
- Free Choice: I bought an Accord but now wish I had purchased a Lexus.
- Effort Justification: Unpleasant trash sorting to achieve the lofty goal of a green Earth.
- Induced Compliance: Aggressively selling a mediocre product for large sales commission.

# Proposed Model of Measuring Dissonance

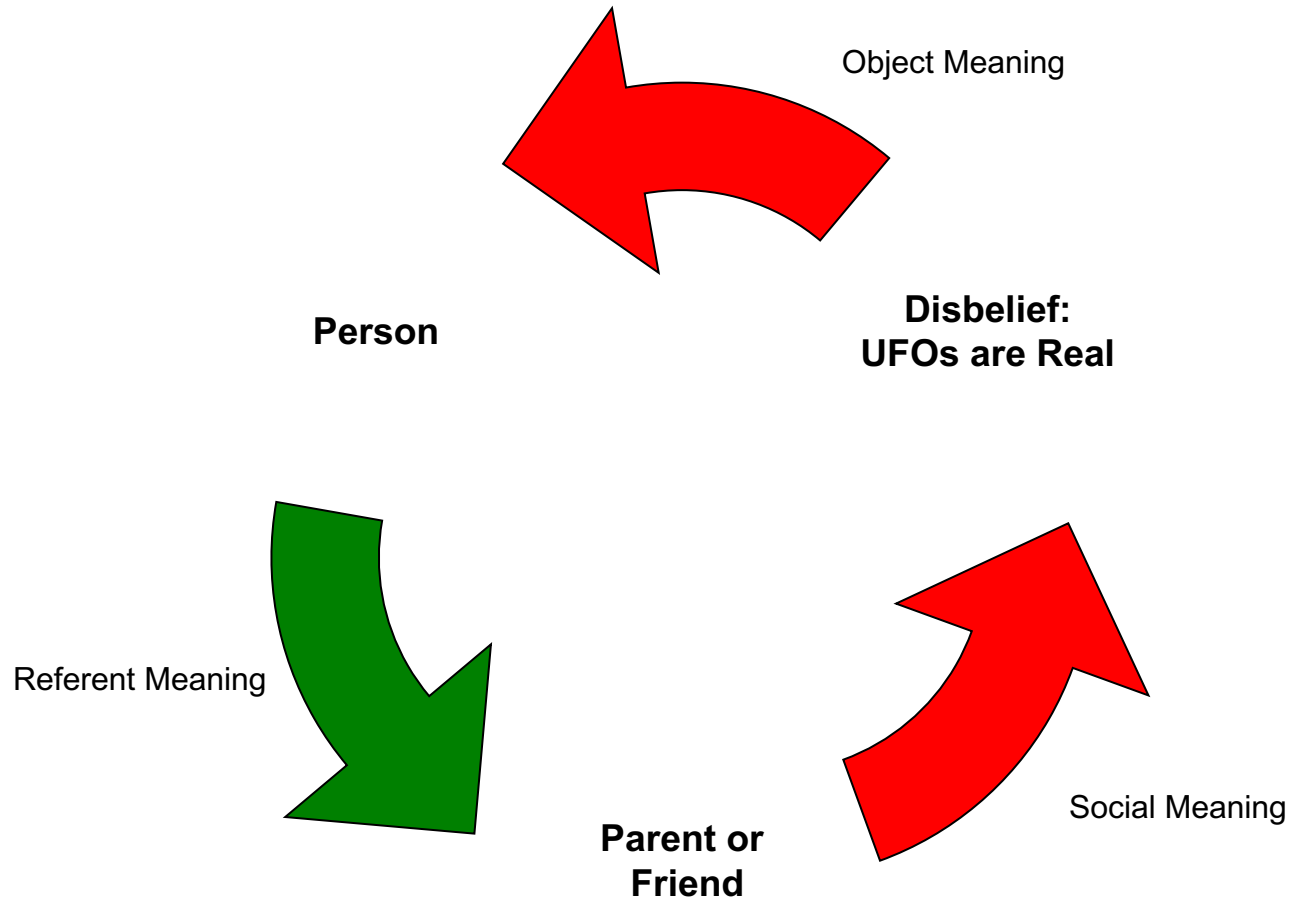
- Balanced and Imbalanced Cognitions
- Magnitude of Cognitive Dissonance
- Measurement Dimensions of Cognitive Dissonance
- Inducing / Reducing Dissonance
- Dissonance Induction / Reduction Example

# Balanced Cognition – UFOs Fake



**Green** = Positive  
**Red** = Negative

# Balanced Cognition – UFOs Real



**Green** = Positive  
**Red** = Negative

# Magnitude of Cognitive Dissonance

- Magnitude of Dissonance relative to Object Under Consideration (OC) – UFOs Fake / Real
- Magnitude of Dissonance determined by Social Comparison Referent (SCR) – Parent or Friend.
- Dissonance is Caused by Imbalance between Person's perception of SCR (referent meaning), Person's perception of OC (object meaning), and Person's perception of SCR's perception of OC (social meaning).



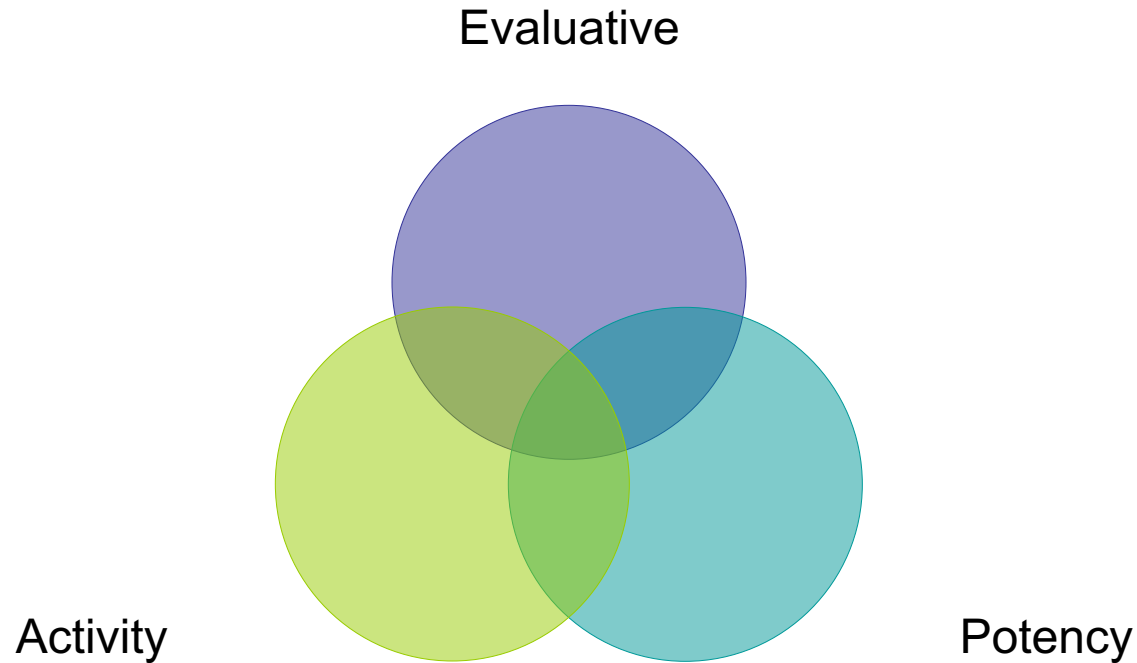
# Dimensions of Meaning of Cognitive Dissonance

- Referent Meaning, Object Meaning and Social Meaning are Measured in Three Dimensions with Semantic Differential (Polar Adjectives).
- Dimensions: Evaluative (e.g., Positive-Negative), Activity (e.g., Important-Unimportant), & Potency (e.g., Strong-Weak).
- Evaluative Example: Football player who plays quarterback position and the game well.
- Activity Example: Football player who captures the attention of fans.
- Potency Example: Football player who is known to be fast and strong.

# Why Measure Three Dimensions of Cognitive Meaning?

- Hard to distinguish between what I prefer and what I prefer really means. Must remove “me”.
- Example: I’m a fan of three different American football quarterbacks.
- Terry Bradshaw played for Pittsburgh Steelers
- Joe Montana played for SF 49ers.
- Troy Aikman played for Dallas Cowboys.
- All three played for different teams, are preferred by different people I know, and are liked differently by me.

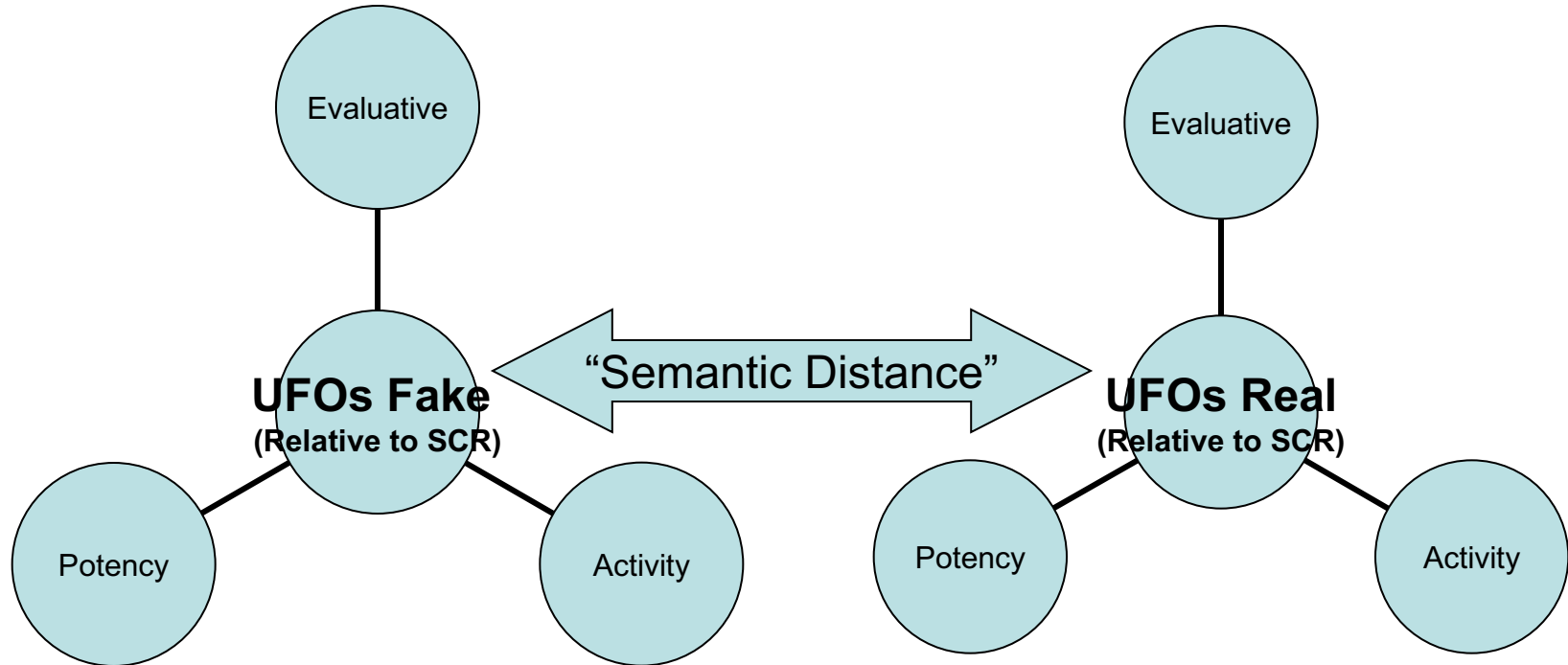
# Cognitive Meaning Measurement Dimensions



# Cognitive Meaning Measurement Dimensions with Polar Adjectives

<b>Evaluative</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Potency</b>
Positive- Negative	Active-Passive	Hard-Soft
Important- Unimportant	Fast-Slow	Heavy-Light
Meaningful- Meaningless	Complete- Incomplete	Strong-Weak

# Measuring “Semantic Distance” Between Dissonant Object, Referent, & Social Meaning



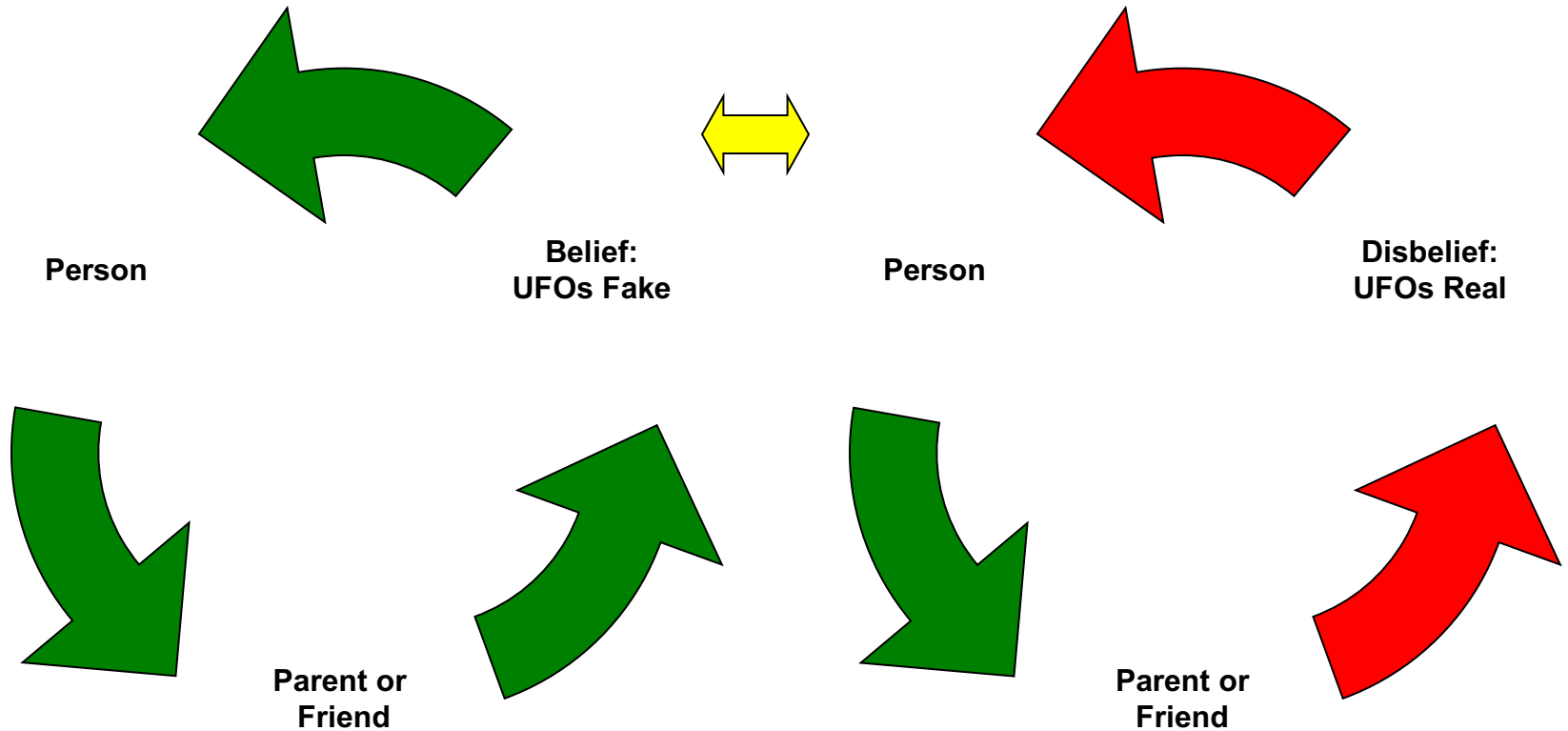
# Inducing / Reducing Dissonance

- Dissonance is Increased by Information that Changes Referent Meaning, Object Meaning, or Social Meaning.
- Dissonance is Decreased by Balance Seeking as Individual Self-Persuades and Learns New Ways to Think.

# Dissonance Induction Example – 1<sup>st</sup> Stage

- Green Arrow Signifies Positive Relationship; Red Arrow Signifies Negative Relationship.
- Person thinks UFOs are Fake and Trusts opinion of Parent or Friend who also thinks UFOs are Fake.
- Person also thinks UFOs are not Real and Trusts opinion of Parent or Friend who also thinks UFOs are not Real.
- Low Dissonance – there is no cognitive discrepancy.

# Low Dissonance – UFOs Fake vs. UFOs Real

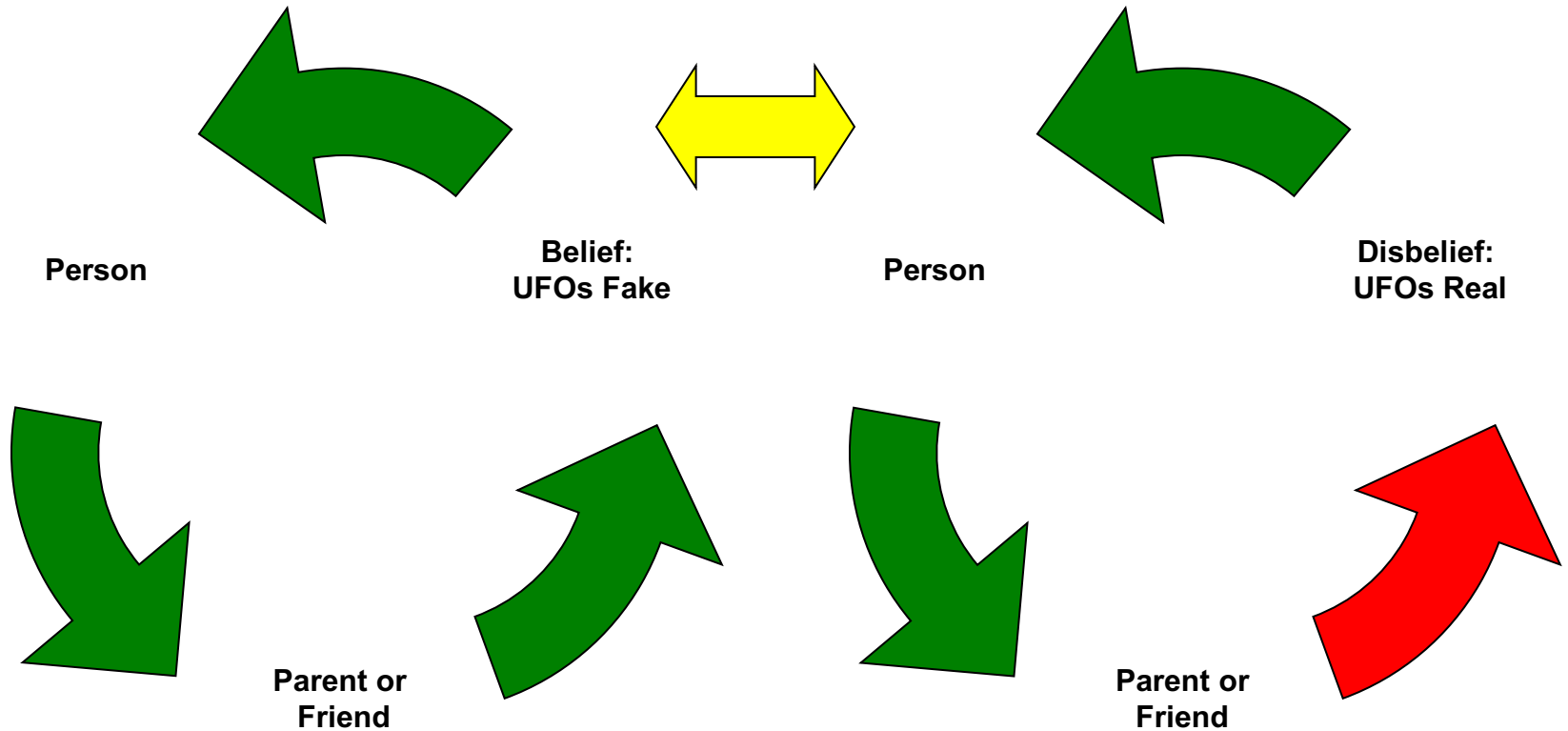




# Dissonance Induction Example – 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage

- Person watches History Channel Program covering the vast amount of information supporting the existence of UFOs.
- Person considers the notion that UFOs are real.
- There is substantial cognitive discrepancy (semantic distance) and discrepancy is growing.
- High Dissonance

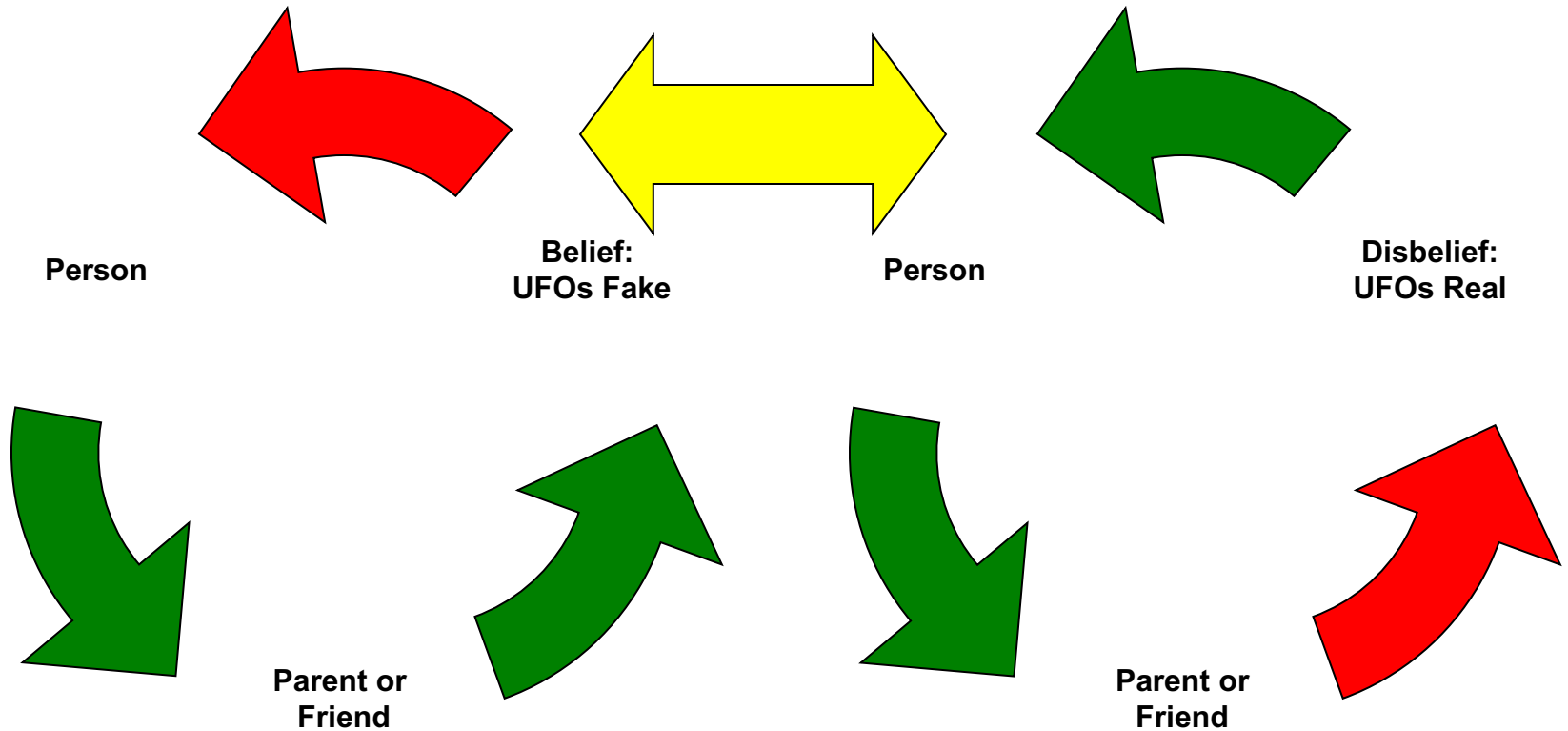
# High Dissonance – UFOs Fake vs. UFOs Real



# Dissonance Induction Example – 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage

- After more thought about History Channel program, Person considers that UFOs are Real (not Fake) AND strongly doubts the previous position that UFOs are Fake.
- Additional thought erodes old position that UFOs are not Fake.
- Both the cognitions are imbalanced.
- Dissonance at Highest Level.

# Highest Dissonance – UFOs Fake vs. UFOs Real



# Dissonance Reduction / Balance Seeking (1<sup>st</sup> Cognition)

- Several ways to reduce dissonance
- 1<sup>st</sup> Cognition: Belief UFOs not Fake Recanted
- 1<sup>st</sup> Cognition: Change SCR's Perception to Believe UFOs not Fake
- 1<sup>st</sup> Cognition: Change Perception of SCR discredit SCR view of UFOs Fake

# Dissonance Reduction / Balance Seeking (2<sup>nd</sup> Cognition)

- Additional ways to reduce dissonance
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Cognition: Belief UFOs Real Recanted
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Cognition: Change SCR's Perception to support belief that UFOs Real
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Cognition: Change Perception of SCR to discredit view of UFOs Real

# Recap -- Proposed Model of Measuring Dissonance

- Information Can Balance and Unbalance Social Cognitions
- “Semantic Distance” Between Related Balance and Unbalanced Cognitions is the Magnitude of Dissonance
- Semantic Distance of Dissonance Can be Measured with Polar Adjectives
- With the Perception of Appropriate Social Comparison Referents an Individual Can Learn that UFOs are Real or UFOs are Fake.

# Dissonant Cognitive Forms

- Four Balanced Cognitions
- Four Unbalanced Cognitions
- 64 Combinations of Balance and Unbalanced Combinations
- 64 Combinations Each in Evaluative, Activity, and Potency Dimensions
- Total 192 Dissonant Cognitive Forms to Describe Many Scenarios



# Implications for Consumer Behavior

- Dissonance is common phenomenon in everyday life and consumer behavior.
- Dissonance is measurable.
- Chosen Social Comparison Referent (SCR) Determines Dissonance Induction / Reduction Path via Decision / Importance.
- Groups can become Social Comparison Referents.

# Implications for Consumer Behavior (Cont.)

- Information Understood by Individual Alters Referent, Object, & Social Meaning.
- Dissonant beliefs can skew formal Attitude Measurement by researchers.
- Individuals can learn to believe nearly any message no matter how right, wrong, beneficial or harmful, if (perceived) social support can be found for the belief.

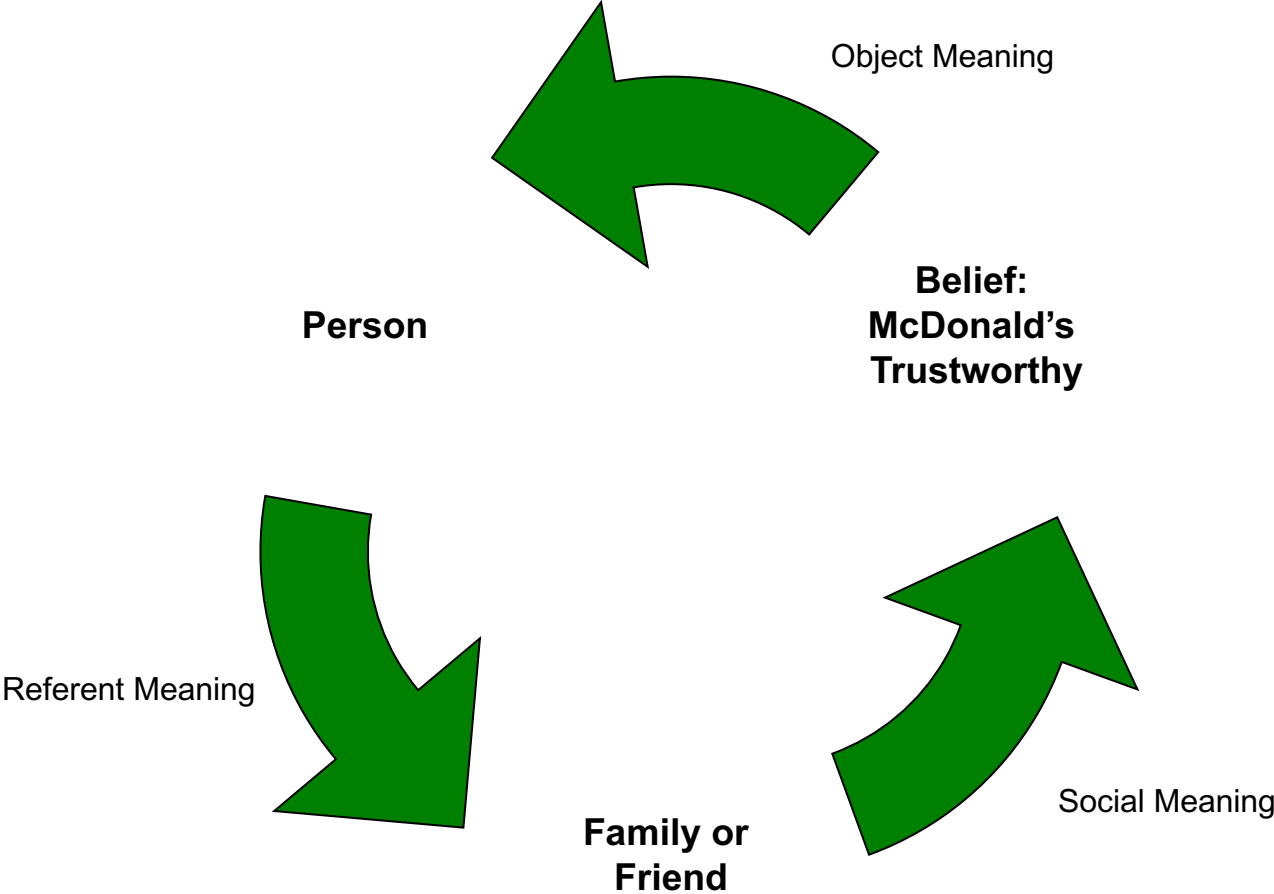
## An Extended Example: Scripting Dissonance Induced by Negative Information Relative to Brand Trustworthiness

- Test: Belief Disconfirmation Cognitive Dissonance relative to McDonald's Brand Trustworthiness (Stage 1 to Stage 3 and back to Stage 1)
- Sample: Health Conscious Adults and Vegetarians
- Initial Condition: With no other info, we should expect McDonald's to be rated as Trustworthy

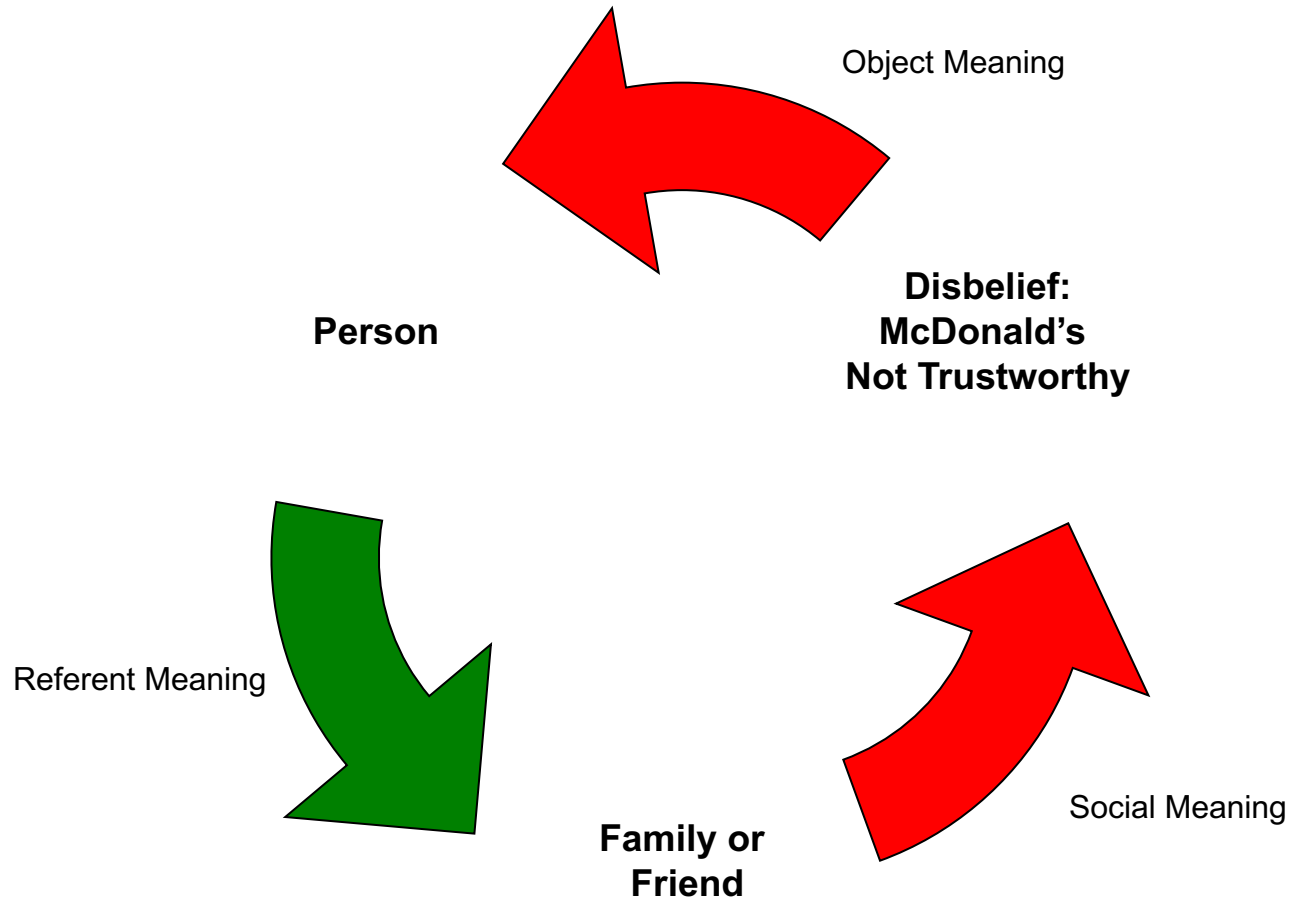
## An Extended Example: Scripting Dissonance Induced by Negative Information Relative to Brand Trustworthiness

- Treatment Condition: After info about McDonald's cooking in Animal Fat. And info that: Family and friends believe that McDonald's continues to be Trustworthy. We should expect McDonald's to be perceived as more Trustworthy than the alternate condition (see below).
- Or, Family and Friends believe McDonald's Not Trustworthy. We should expect McDonald's to be perceived as less Trustworthy than alternative condition (see above).

# Balanced Cognition – McDonald’s Trustworthy



# Balanced Cognition – McDonald's Not Trustworthy



# Stages of Dissonance

- Stage 1 – Low Dissonance – Initial Condition: McDonald's is Trustworthy
- Stage 2 – High Dissonance – Info: Newspaper says McDonald's Cooks with Animal Fat -- McDonald's may not be Trustworthy
- Stage 3 – Highest Dissonance – Info: Television says McDonald's Does not always cook with Vegetable Oil -- McDonald's is not Trustworthy

# Stages of Dissonance (Cont.)

- Stage 4 – High Dissonance – Info: Radio says Parents Cannot Know About McDonald's Untrustworthiness
- Stage 5 – Low Dissonance – Info: Individual Reasons Parents Cannot Know About McDonald's Trustworthiness
- Stage 6 – Low Dissonance / SCR Shift – Info: Public Television Special Report on Vegetarians' Struggle with Corporate Fast Food Chains



# Stages of Dissonance (Cont.)

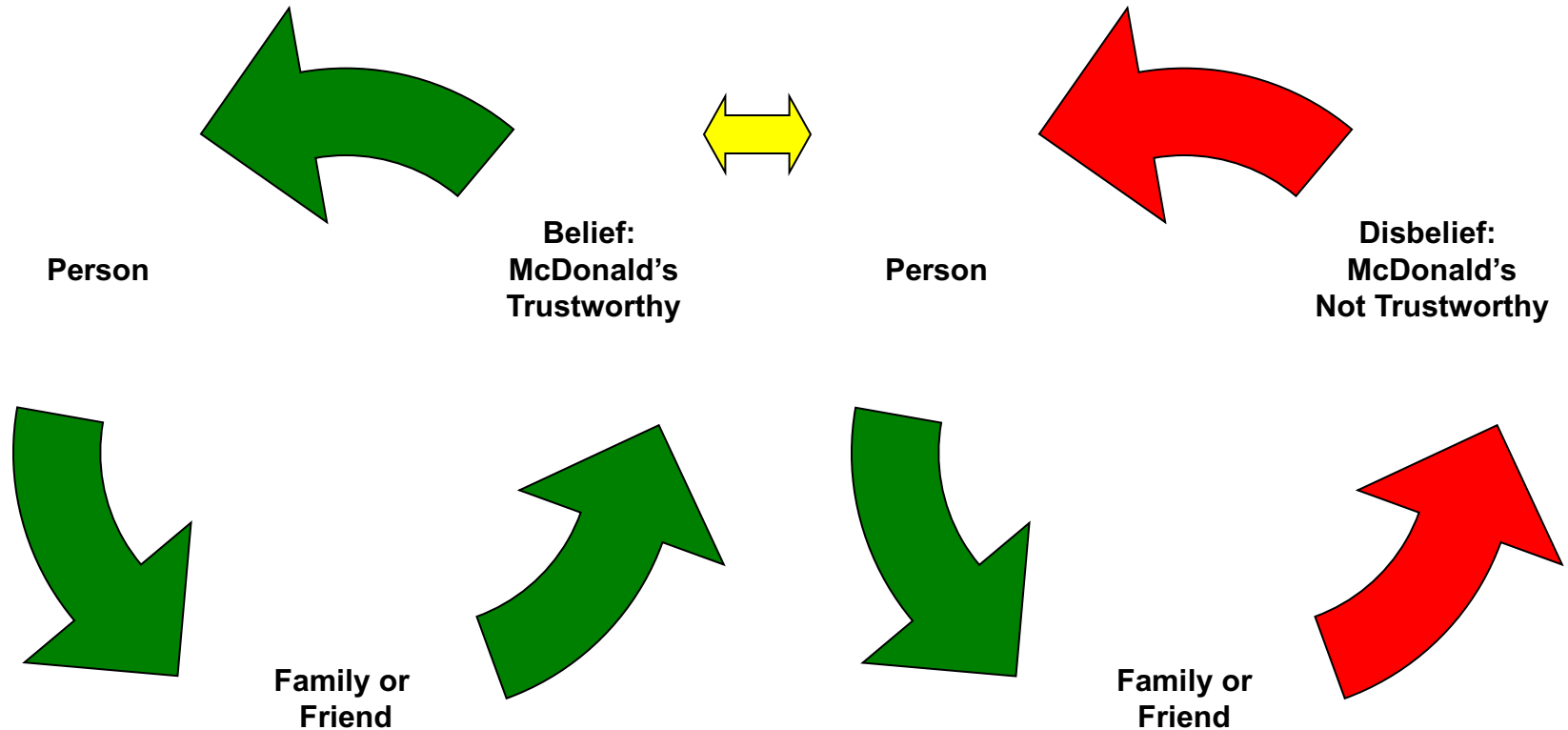
- Stage 7 – High Dissonance – Info: Newspaper Reports McDonald's says McDonald's Cooks with Vegetable Oil.
- Stage 8 – Highest Dissonance – Info: Oprah says McDonald's Never Cooks with Animal Fat.
- Stage 9 – High Dissonance – Info: Web Blog infers Friends Cannot know About McDonald's Cooking with Vegetable Oil.

# Stages of Dissonance (Cont.)

- Stage 10 – Low Dissonance – Info: Individual Reasons Friends Cannot know About McDonald's Never Cooking with Animal Fat.
- Stage 11 – Low Dissonance / SCR Shift – Info: McDonald's TV Commercial Depicts Family Enjoying Meal at McDonald's Restaurant.

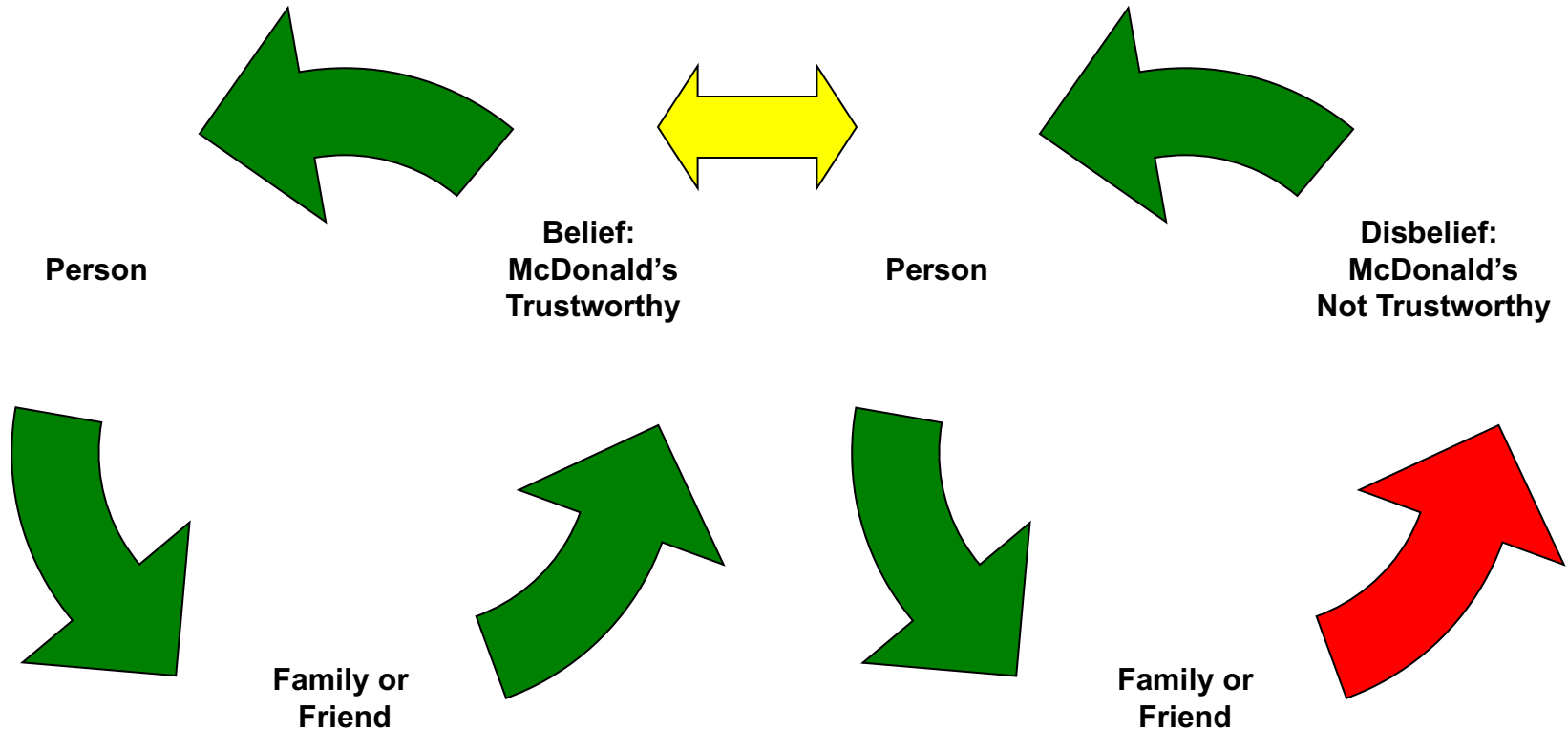
# Stage 1 – Low Dissonance

Belief Accepted Relative to Strong and Durable SCR  
(SCR has Rewarding Legitimate Power over Belief – No Legitimate Power over Disbelief)



# Stage 2 – High Dissonance (Imbalancing / Induction)

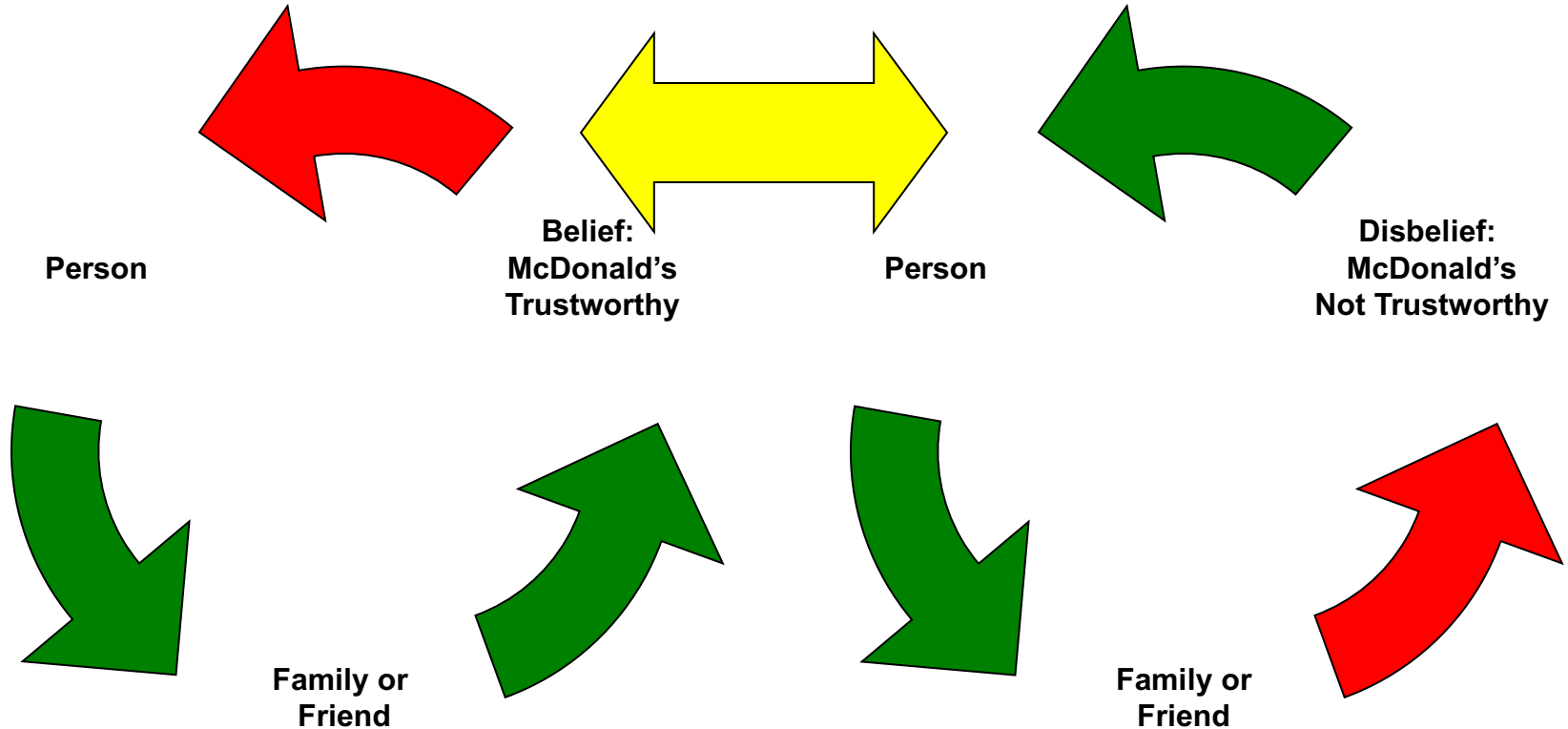
Favorable Information about Disbelief Understood -- Disbelief Compared to SCR Doubted Partially



Info: Newspaper says McDonald's Cooks with Animal Fat -- McDonald's may not be Trustworthy

# Stage 3 – Highest Dissonance

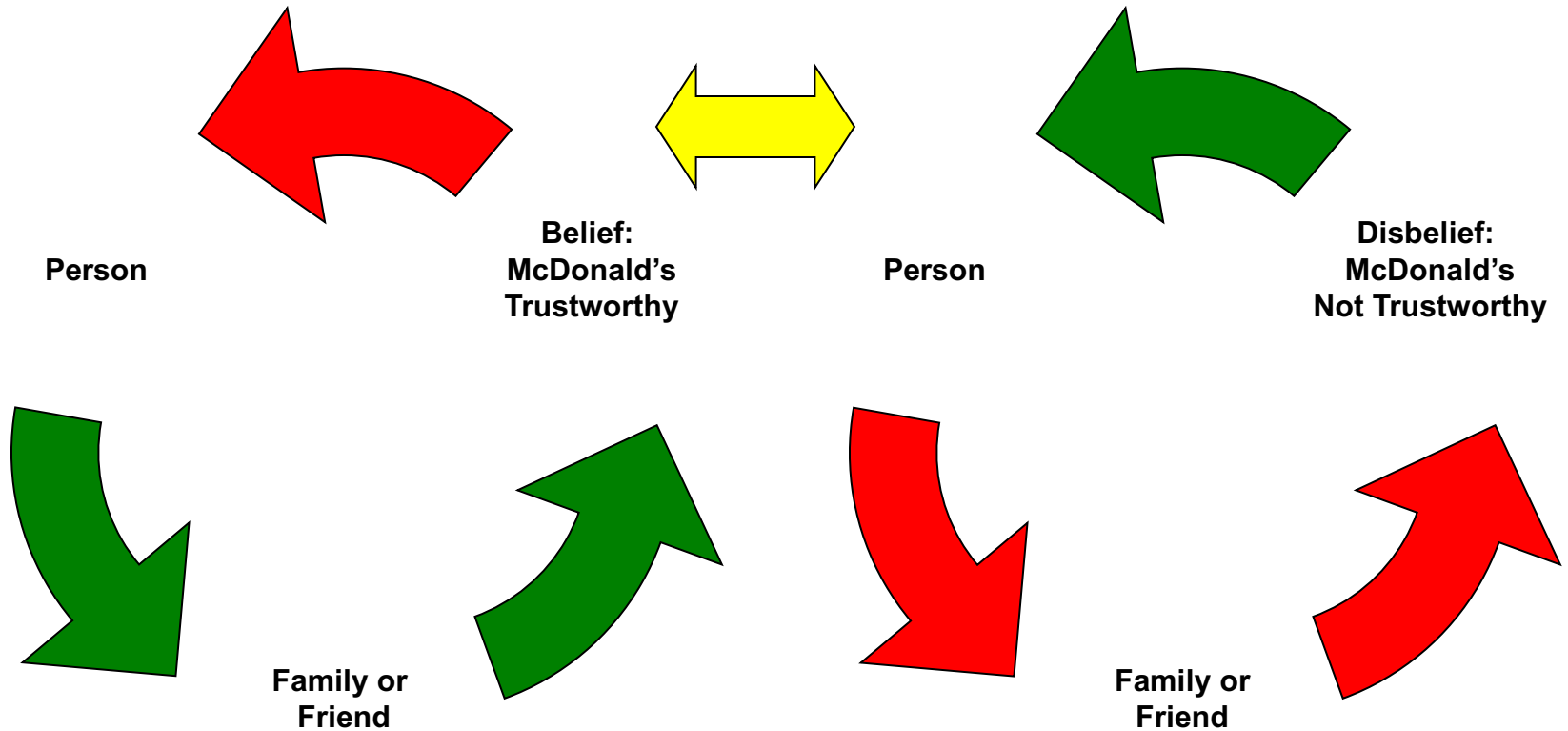
Unfavorable Information About Belief Understood -- Belief Compared to SCR Doubted Totally



Info: Television says McDonald's Does not always cook with Vegetable Oil -- McDonald's is not Trustworthy

# Stage 4 – High Dissonance (Balancing / Reduction)

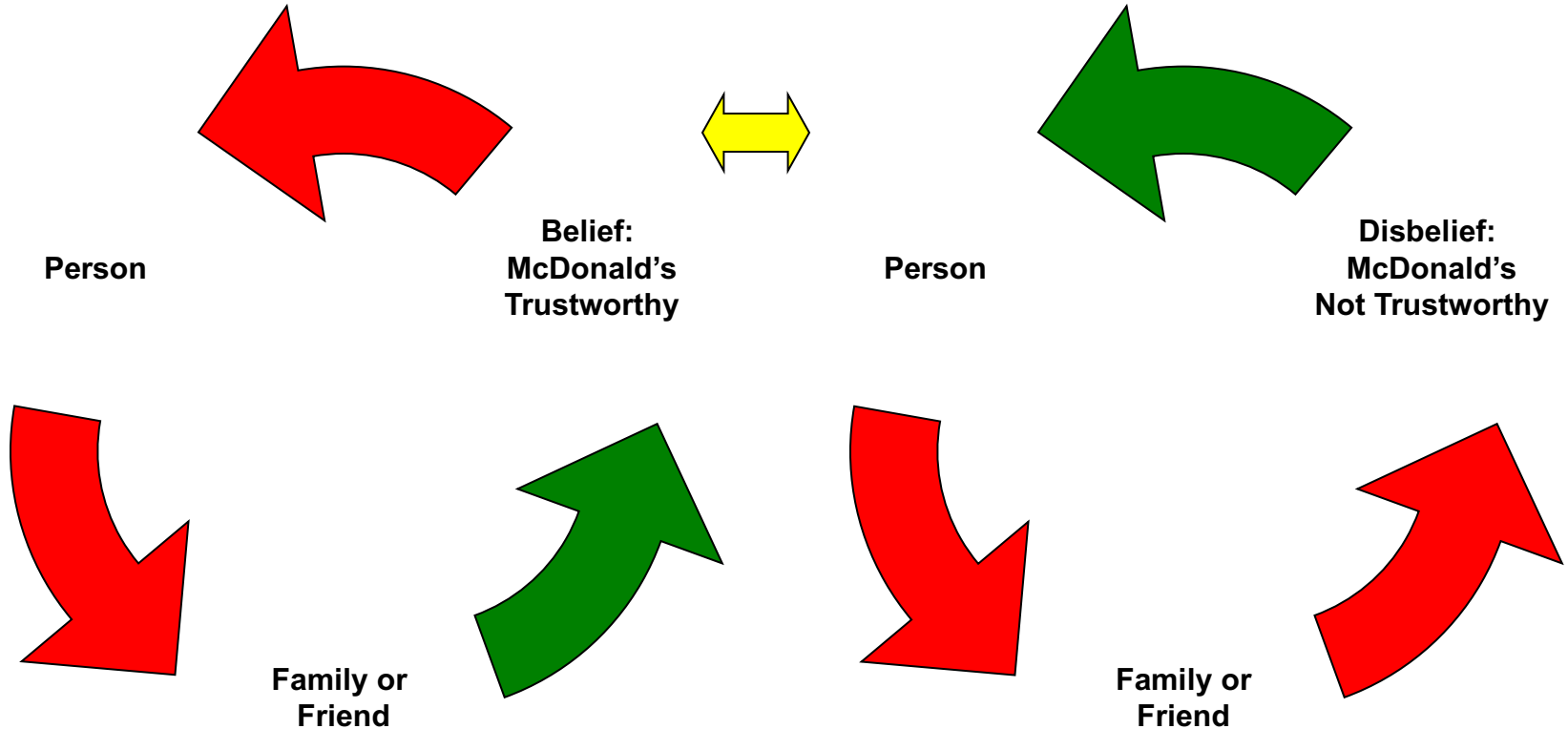
Unfavorable Information About SCR about Disbelief Understood -- Disbelief Compared to SCR Partially Rejected (SCR loses Legitimate Power over Disbelief)



Info: Radio says Parents Cannot Know About McDonald's Untrustworthiness

# Stage 5 – Low Dissonance

Unfavorable Information About SCR about Belief Understood –  
Belief Relative to SCR Totally Rejected  
(SCR loses Reward Legitimate Power over Belief)

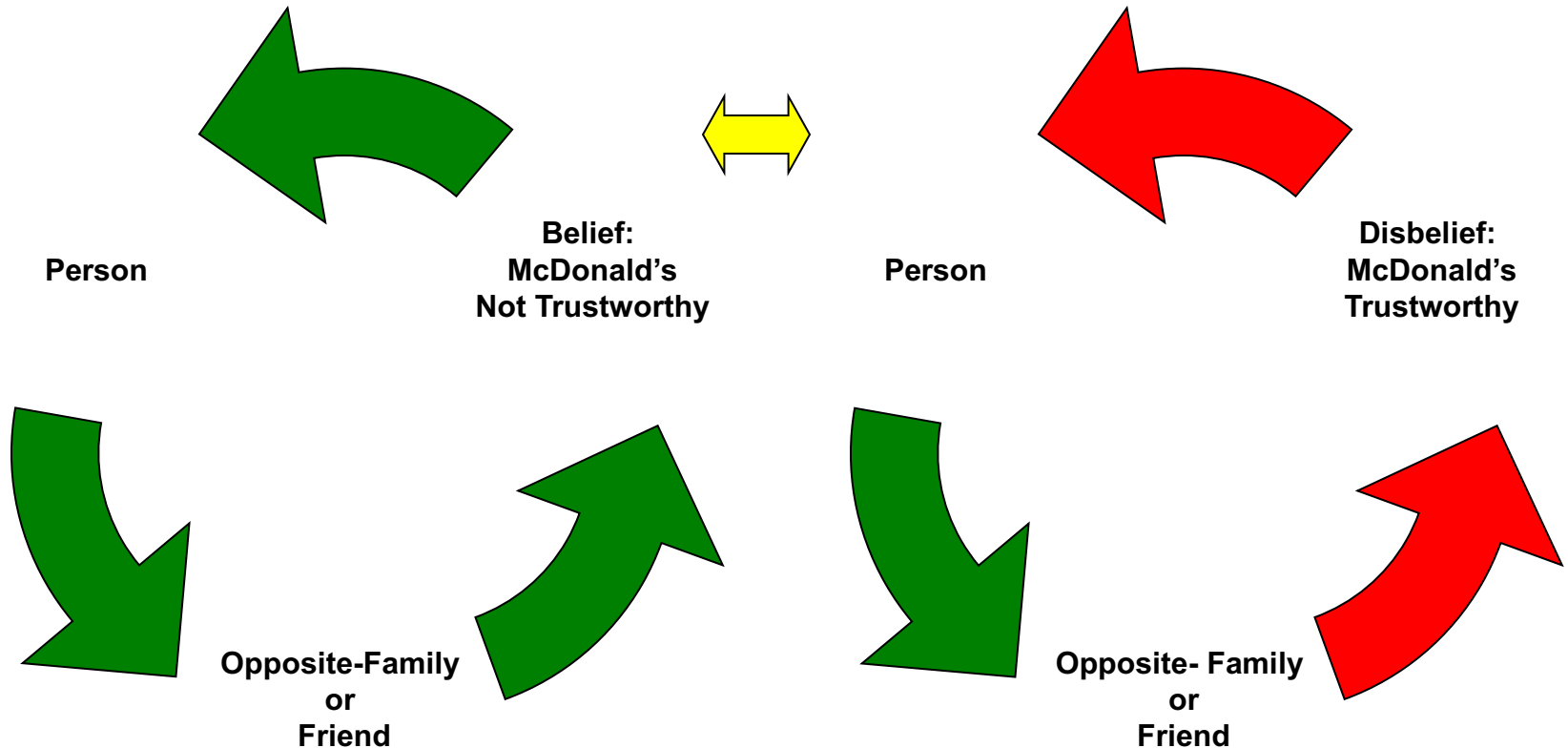


Info: Individual Reasons Parents Cannot Know About McDonald's Trustworthiness

# Stage 6 – Low Dissonance (SCR Shift)

Favorable Info Linking Opposite-SCR with OC

(Opposite-SCR has Reward Legitimate Power over Favored Belief)

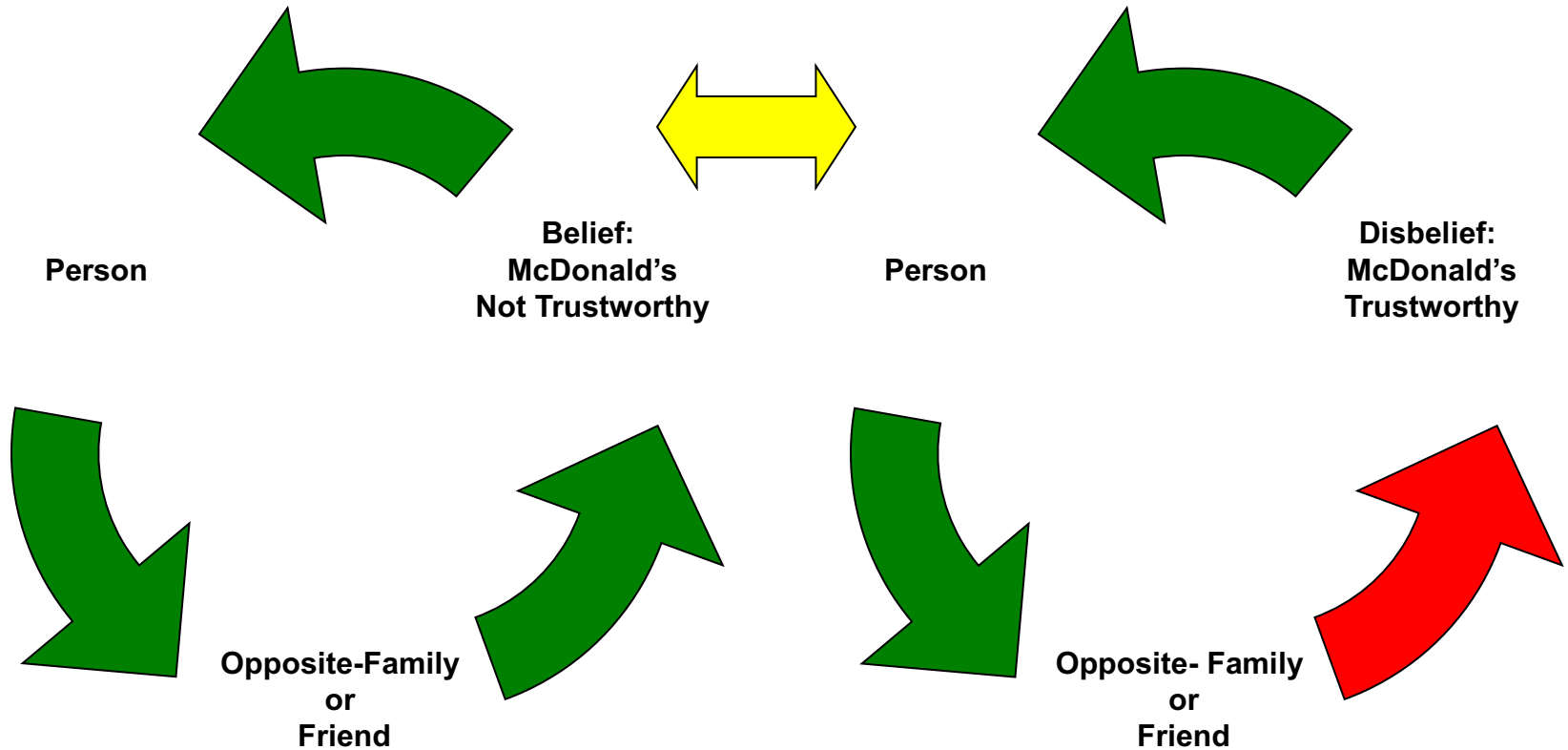


Info: Public Television Special Report on Vegetarians' Struggle with Corporate Fast Food Chains



# Stage 7 – High Dissonance (Unbalancing / Induction)

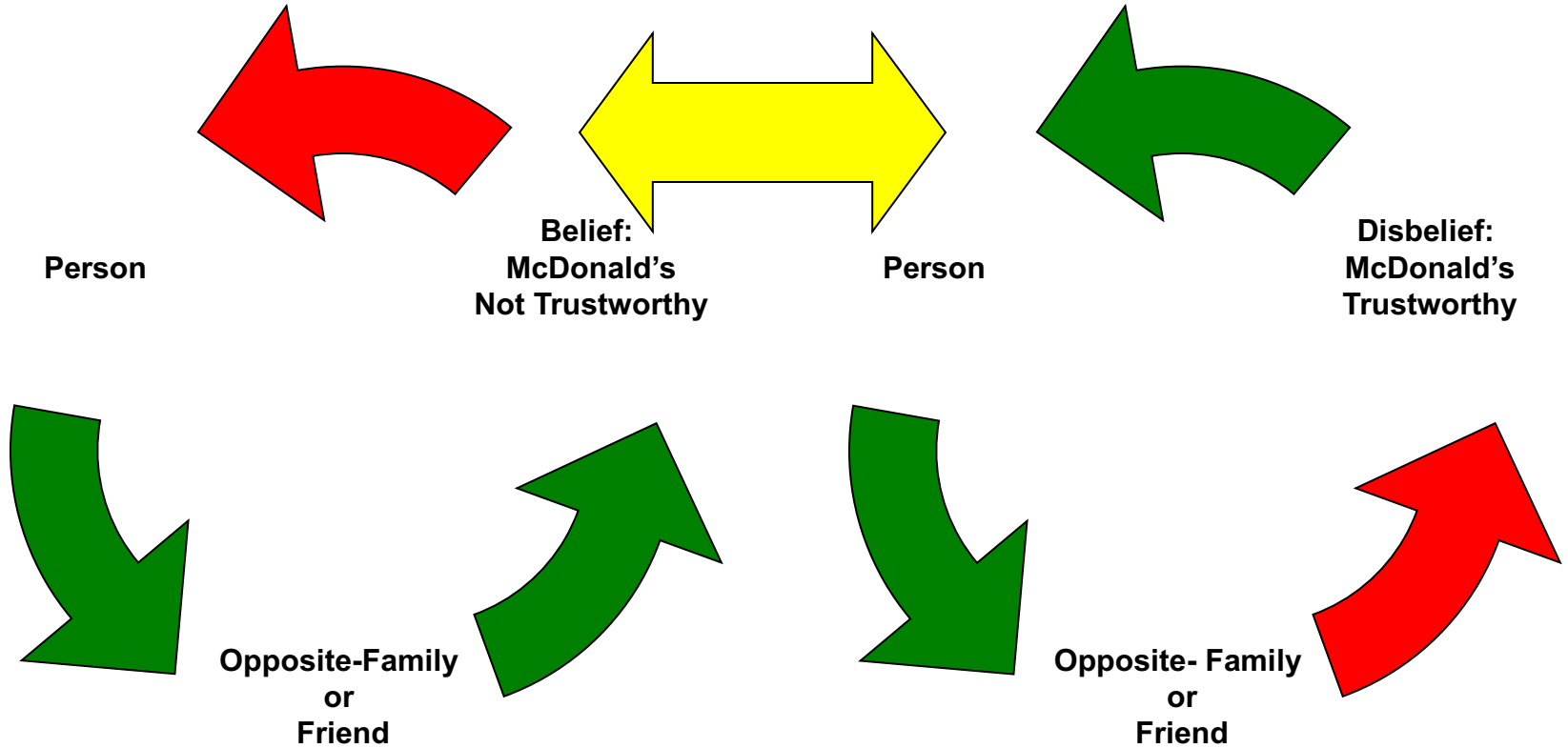
Favorable Information about Disbelief Understood -- Disbelief Compared to Opposite-SCR Doubted Partially



Info: Newspaper Reports McDonald's says McDonald's Cooks with Vegetable Oil.

# Stage 8 – Highest Dissonance

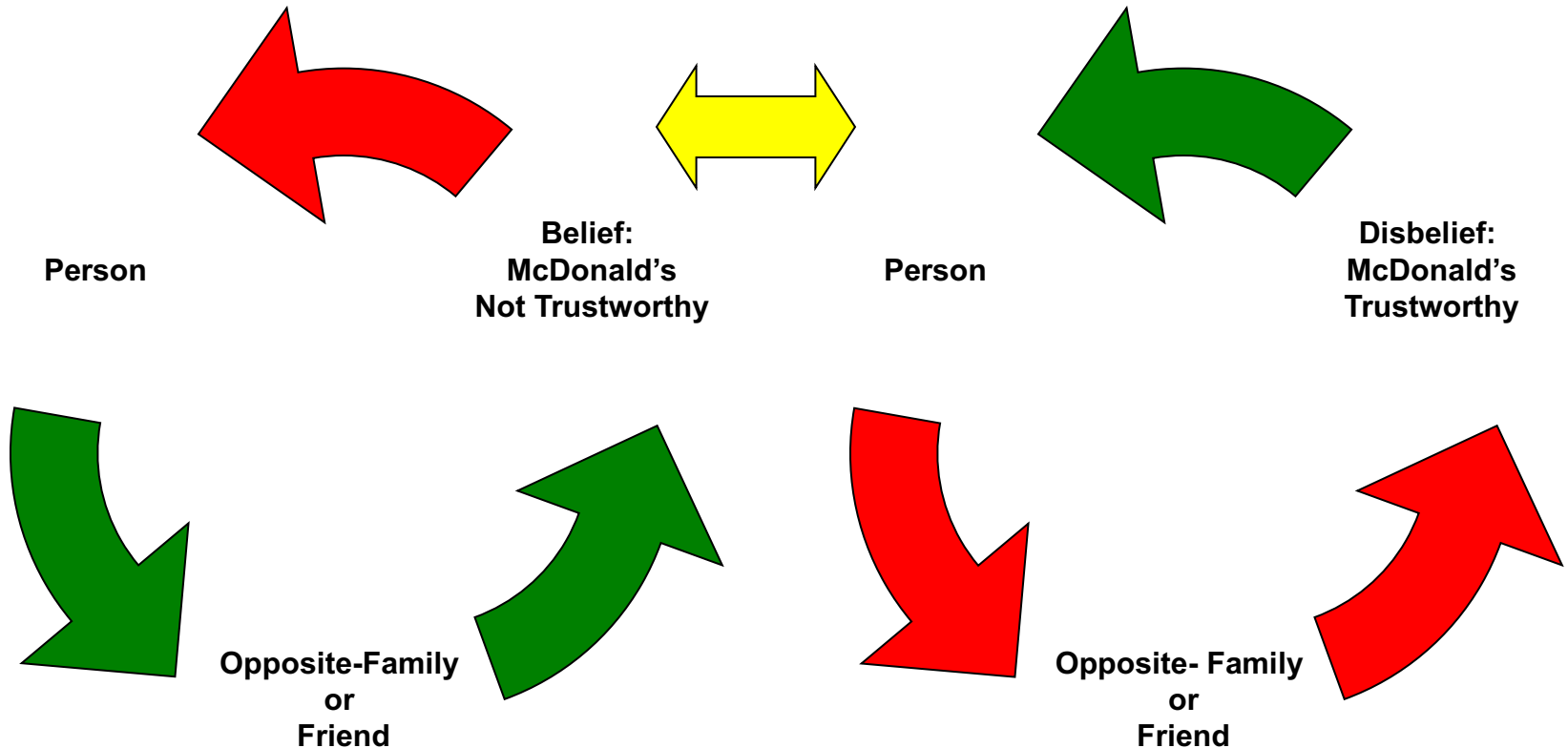
Unfavorable Information About Belief Understood -- Belief Compared to Opposite-SCR Doubted Totally



Info: Oprah says McDonald's Never Cooks with Animal Fat.

# Stage 9 – High Dissonance (Balancing)

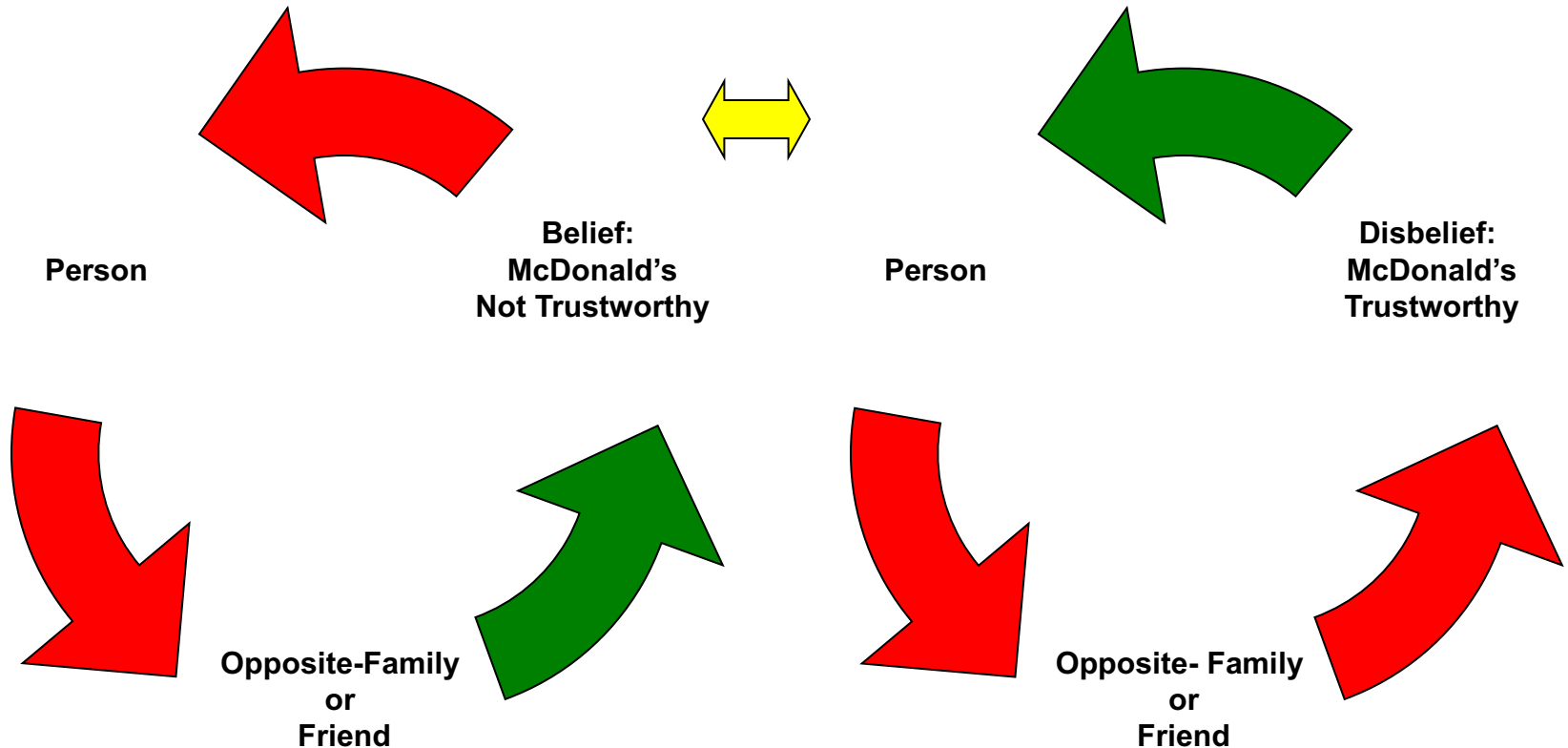
Unfavorable Info About Opp-SCR about Disbelief Understood --  
Disbelief Compared to Opp-SCR Partially Rejected (Opposite-SCR  
loses Legitimate Power over Disbelief)



Info: Web Blog infers Friends Cannot know About McDonald's Cooking  
with Vegetable Oil.

# Stage 10 – Low Dissonance

Unfavorable Information About Opp-SCR about Belief Understood --  
Belief Relative to Opp-SCR Totally Rejected  
(Opp-SCR loses Reward Legitimate Power over Belief)

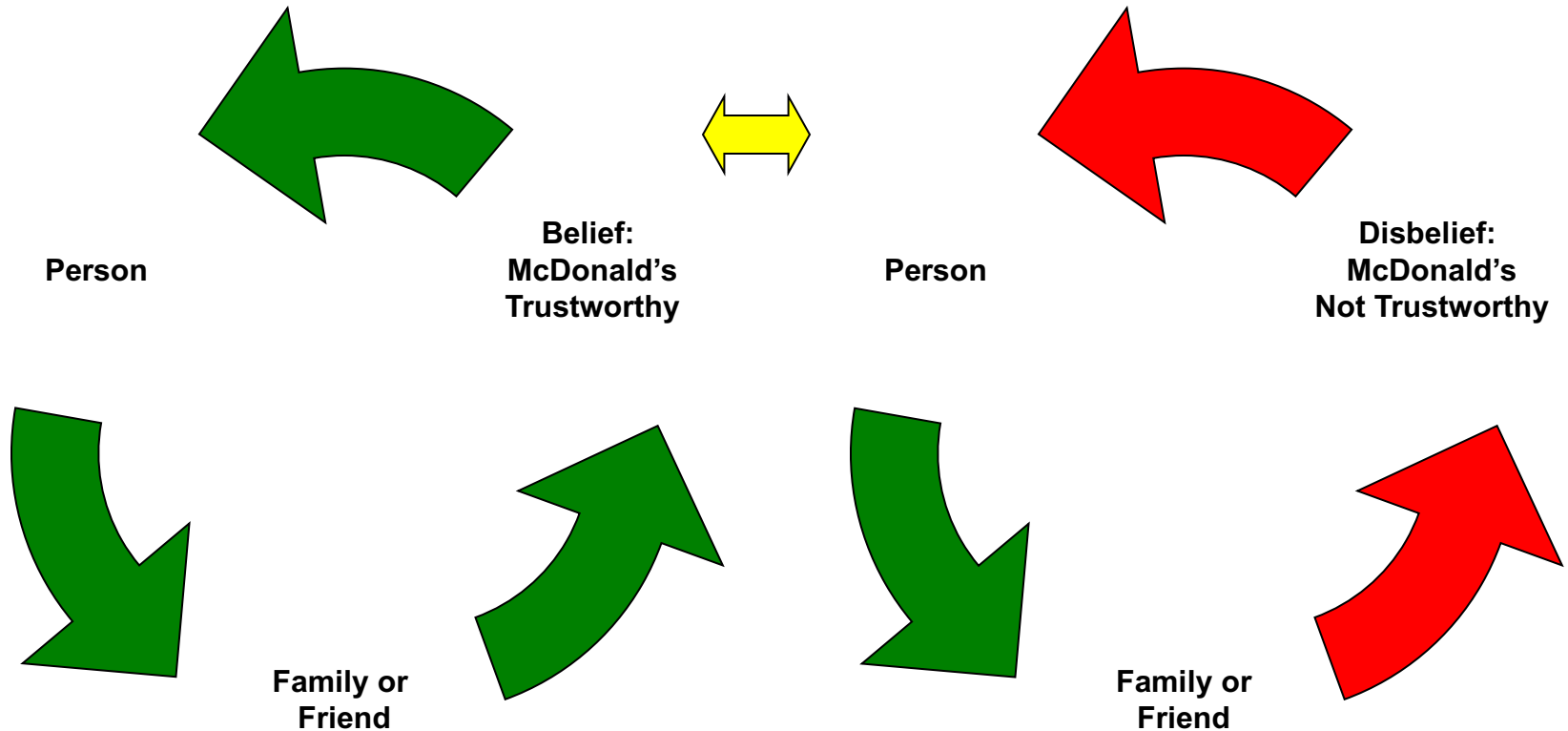


Info: Individual Reasons Friends Cannot know About McDonald's Never Cooking with Animal Fat.

# Stage 11 – Low Dissonance (SCR Shift)

Favorable Info Linking SCR with OC

(SCR has Rewarding Legitimate Power [restored] over Favored Belief)



Info: McDonald's TV Commercial Depicts Family Enjoying Meal at McDonald's Restaurant.

# Dissonance Scripting Recap

- Stage 1 through Stage 11 – One Path of Dissonance Induction / Reduction, Belief / SCR Change, Dissonance Induction / Reduction, and Belief / SCR Restoration.
- Proposed Test Stage 1 to Stage 3 and back to Stage 1.
- Stage 4 to Stage 11 show potential information sequenced leading to inversion of belief and most likely SCR.

# Review and Questions?

- Comments?
- Applications?
- Questions?

# References

- Due to space limitations, references for the concepts presented are documented in my dissertation proposal.