



Cognitive Dissonance

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Psych 1A – Social Psychology



THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kaurna people,
the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we gather on.

We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the
Kaurna people to country and we respect and value their past, present
and ongoing connection to the land and cultural beliefs.

Length: 9m

Introduction

This presentation discusses what happens when our behaviours are inconsistent with our cognitions.

Learning Outcomes:

1. You will gain an understanding of what happens when we act inconsistently with our attitudes and what people generally do about it
2. You will have an understanding of cognitive dissonance and self-perception theory

What is Cognitive Dissonance?

Cognitive Dissonance is an unpleasant state of tension that is a result of inconsistency between behaviours and cognitions that motivates people to subsequently try to reduce their dissonance...

... often by rationalizing or justifying the behaviour



Photo by ALLAN LAINEZ on Unsplash

"I am eating fast food even though I don't think that it is good for me"

"Oh well, I don't eat it that often, **it doesn't matter just this once**"

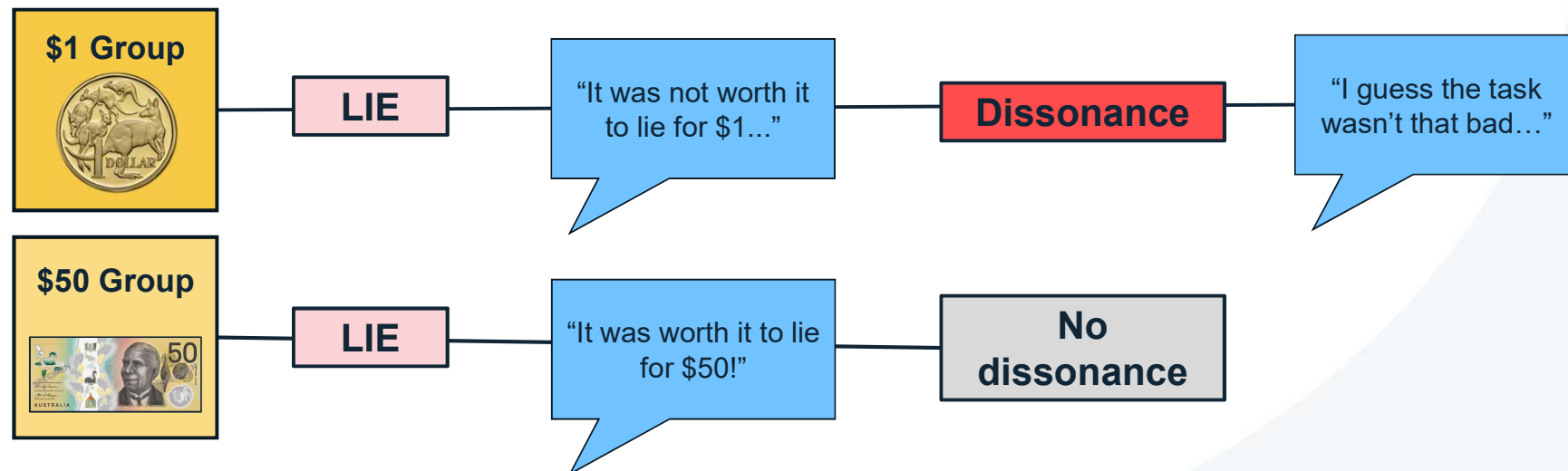
Carlsmith and Festinger 1959

1. Asked participants to do a really boring task for an hour
2. Told participants: “When you leave, tell the person sitting outside that the task was really interesting”
3. Half of the participants were paid \$1 each to lie; the other half were paid \$50 each to lie
4. Afterwards, participants were asked to rate how interesting the task was

Results: Participants who were paid \$1 to lie were more likely to have favourable attitudes toward the task

How Can We Explain These Findings?

- \$1 Group experienced cognitive dissonance and decided to view the task favourably to justify lying about the task being interesting
- \$50 Group didn't experience cognitive dissonance as the \$50 justified the lie



Reducing Dissonance

We usually attempt to reduce dissonance by rationalising. We can rationalise behaviours using a **Reframing Strategy**:

- i.e. downplay importance of the issue in our life
- e.g., Stanford Prison Experiment (pres 11): Justified behaviours by further dehumanising prisoners
- We can also excuse ourselves: “I should not be smoking, but I will quit soon, so it does not matter.”



Photo by ALLAN LATINEZ on Unsplash

“I don’t really care *that* much”
“I’m sure it isn’t *that* unhealthy”
“I won’t have it again for another month!”
“I’ll balance it out with a salad”

Self-Perception Theory

An alternate perspective...

According to **Self-Perception Theory**, we don't necessarily always experience cognitive dissonance.

- Instead, we presume our behaviour reflects our attitude
- Particularly for things that are minor and or for people who are not very self-aware



Photo by ALLAN LAINEZ on Unsplash

"I am eating the burger, so I guess I don't really have a very negative attitude about eating unhealthy food after all."

Summary

We experience tension called cognitive dissonance when there is inconsistency between our behaviours and cognitions.

- We reduce dissonance by rationalising and or justifying our behaviours
- We may not always experience cognitive dissonance



make
history.

