

Cognitive Dissonance

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Agenda

- Understanding cognitive dissonance and its various consequences
- How do we react to dissonance
- How can we start learning to respond and react less

What is Cognitive Dissonance?

- **Cognitive Dissonance** is the *psychological* discomfort we feel when holding conflicting beliefs, values, or attitudes
- Conflicting attitudes or beliefs eventually lead to actions/decisions that do not feel or look good – creating discomfort

Sources of psychological discomfort

We all experience anxiety- but it is not always **realistic** (eg., anxiety before a stage performance).

A lot of anxiety stems from **psychological conflicts** (imagined/anticipated problems) that happen as a result of experiences we are going through

Sources of psychological discomfort

Life experiences could involve conflicts like:

Approach-approach conflict : When a person faces two desirable options but must choose only one (eg., a McKinsey job + Masters in Harvard)

Approach-Avoidance Conflict: When the same situation has a very strong positive side together with negative consequences (eg., not wanting to go to the class + lose grades that you desire)

Sources of psychological discomfort

Life experiences could involve conflicts like:

Avoidance-avoidance conflict : having to choose between two undesirable options (eg., priorities mismatch in a relationship - stay or leave a relationship)

Double Approach-Avoidance Conflict: Both situation(s) have pros and cons. Eg., choosing a job with high pay and no work-life balance VS a low paying job with high work life balance

Do you agree?



What is our typical response?

When we face such conflicts, we take actions to reduce anxiety:

- Deny
- Distort
- Defend our ego
- Destroy our rigid ego and create a more adaptable self

How do we “deny”

- Rationalization and projection are two common strategies (called **defense mechanisms**) that we employ to reduce dissonance
- *Rationalization* is when a person justifies or explains away their behavior, thoughts, or feelings in a way that makes them seem more acceptable or logical, even if the reasoning is false or misleading.
- *Projection* is is when a person *unconsciously* attributes their own unwanted feelings, thoughts, or traits to someone else to avoid dealing with their own emotions.

How do we “deny”

Simple example to explain rationalization and projection:

Rationalization: “A lapse of judgement”

*This suggests that the mistake was a **momentary error**, rather than something that reflects deeper **beliefs, biases, or values**.*

How do we “deny”

Simple example to explain rationalization and projection:

Projection: People get offended too easily.

Instead of accepting that his words were problematic*, he shifts the blame onto the audience, implying that the issue is with *them being too sensitive* rather than *him saying something inappropriate*.

*in this case we see that he accepts that his words might be problematic

How we distort?

Distortion involves **twisting reality** to make it align with one's beliefs or reduce discomfort. One way in which distortion is manifested is **justification of effort** : tendency for individuals to increase their liking for something they have worked hard to attain.

Eg., Someone who went through a difficult hazing process to join a club may believe the club is amazing—just to justify the pain they endured.

How we distort?

We can also distort by engaging in **trivialization** in which we draw conclusions to the effect that the behaviour (of concern) is not important enough to focus on

Spot the response to dissonance...



Defending the ego

The final aim of using any defence mechanism is to defend our ego:

Both phrases allow him to acknowledge the mistake without fully confronting it. They help reduce cognitive dissonance by preserving his self-image ("I am a good person who just made a mistake") while also addressing the backlash in a way that limits damage to his brand.

Defending the ego

Interestingly, we can engage in **hypocrisy** to defend our egos.

The act of pretending to have exceptionally high standards (in speech)-
this prevents cognitive dissonance

Lapse in judgement seems like a pandemic?



**Lapse in judgement
seems like a pandemic?**



Abhay Deol

1 hr · 🌐

It says "2-IN-1 FAIRNESS cream". If you notice her eyes are also lighter than they are in real life. So '2-in-1' must be you can put it in your eyes to change their colour.

It's not so much a 'FAIRNESS' cream as it is a coloured lens for the eyes. And who wouldn't want grey eyes eh? It's the colour of Delhi in the winter. What a patriotic cream!



Hypocrisy Paradigm

The arousal of dissonance by having individuals make statements that run counter to their behaviours and then reminding them of the inconsistency between what they advocated and their behaviour. The purpose is to lead individuals to more responsible behaviour.



Question

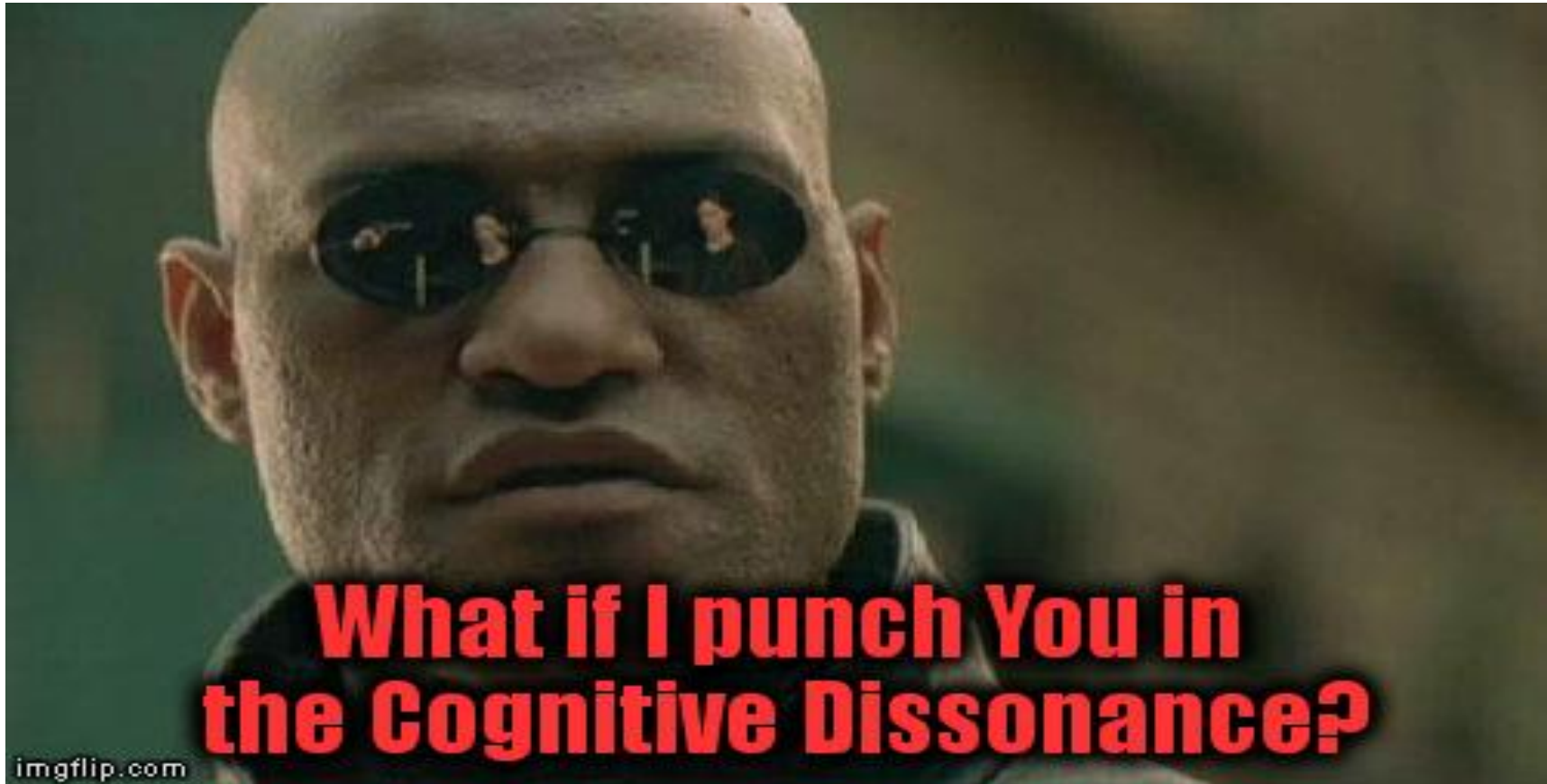
What are the pros and cons of using defense mechanisms? Is it a good or a bad thing to employ these tactics to counter dissonance?

Answer

What are the pros and cons of using defense mechanisms? Is it a good or a bad thing to employ these tactics to counter dissonance?

Absolutely healthy and normal to use defense mechanisms. The problem starts when we become “stuck” – that’s when we know we are *over-using* them.

The Art of Getting Unstuck!



Why do we stay stuck in situation-ships?

Precisely because humans want to avoid cognitive dissonance and consequently employ all measures (denial, distortion, defensiveness) to avoid pain that comes with cognitive dissonance.

The main reason why we remain in the (above) place is because of **impact bias**: we overestimate the effect of negative emotions/pain and do not believe that we will be able to reduce dissonance.

The Art of Getting Unstuck: Awareness

Question: How do we react when someone calls us out/points to an inconsistency in our behaviour?

What if they also want us to change?

The Art of Getting Unstuck: Awareness

We usually do not have a very adaptable response to these two incidents and what follows is (mostly):

Reactance: A negative reaction to efforts by others to reduce our freedom by getting us to believe or do what they want

Selective Avoidance: Not engaging with content/conversations that are not in congruence (in line) with our belief system

Counterarguing: We engage in more active attempts to resist change of attitudes by developing strong counter arguments

Summary

In short, we do not respond very well to others' attempts of changing us (called **persuasion**). But what about the times when you are the one understanding the need to change?

Question: Do we resist our own attempts to change?

The Art of Getting Unstuck: Awareness

The first step of
change is to become
aware of your own
bullshit.

*You cannot take up a
change until you are
aware of the problem.
Cognitive dissonance
makes us aware of the
problem.*

*yes, we resist and resist very hard. However, if we understand the nature of dissonance, we may create a different experience for us

The good side of dissonance: Awareness



Elizabeth Gilbert ✓

@GilbertLiz

Following



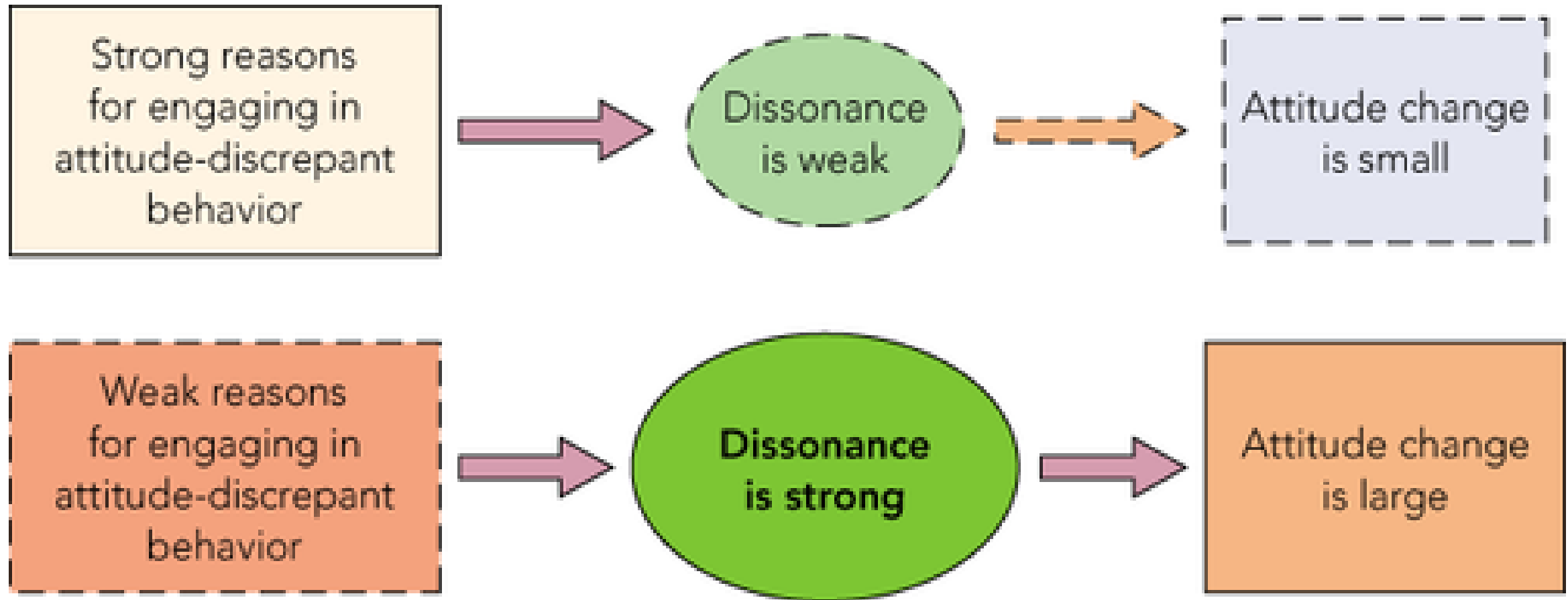
I've never seen any life transformation that didn't begin with the person in question finally getting sick of their own bullshit.

2:32 PM - 6 May 2014

The good side of dissonance: Awareness

Understanding dissonance can help us increase people's likelihood of making **healthy, safe choices**

When do we *actually* change?



Where do we look for the “reasons”

When we engage in an attitude discrepant way, we look for external or internal justifications (reasons):

External Justification: A reason or an explanation for the dissonant personal behaviour that resides outside the individual (eg., large reward or to avoid punishment/forced compliance)

Internal Justification: A reason or an explanation for the dissonant personal behaviour that resides inside the individual (eg., attitude or belief)

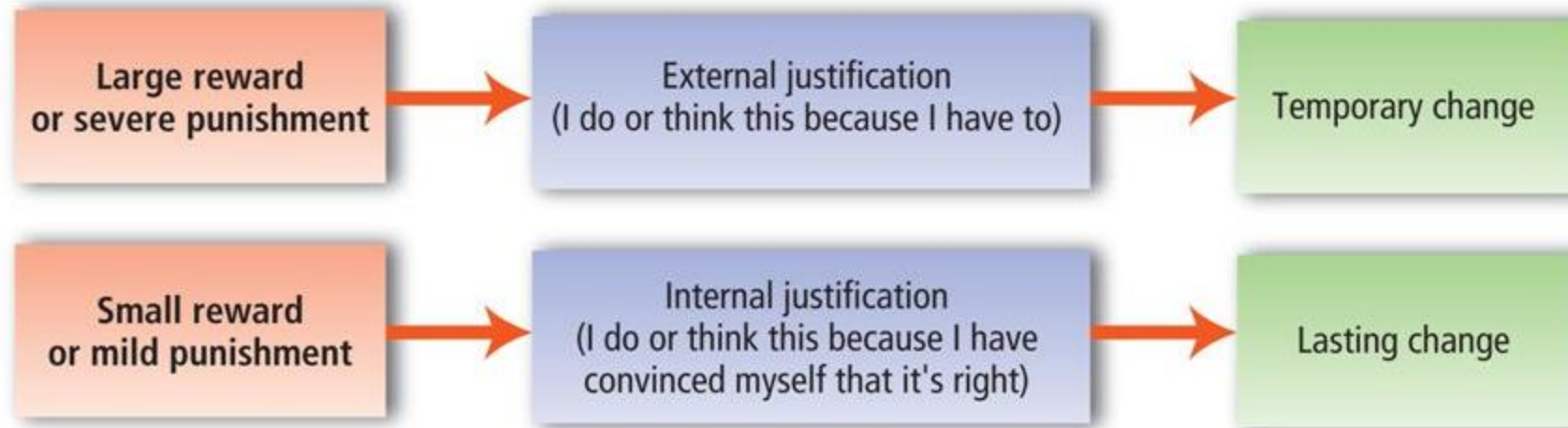
Where do we look for the “reasons”

When we engage in an attitude discrepant way, we look for external or internal justifications (reasons):

External Justification: Largely *create compliance* but prevent real attitude change (large rewards or severe punishment threats lead to this)

Internal Justification: Create *lasting attitude change* (small rewards or punishments leading to momentary compliance, the greater will be the eventual change in attitude and therefore more permanent is the effect)

Where do we look for the “reasons”



External versus Internal Justification

As this graphic summarizes, insufficient punishment or reward leads to self-justification, which in turn leads to self-persuasion and lasting change. Larger rewards or punishments may produce temporary compliance, which rarely lasts.

Where do we look for the “reasons”

Therefore, short term, feel-good effects are created by large rewards or severe punishments

And, long-term consistent change is created by low stimulations

Eg., Revenge body vs health behaviours/habits

Or, Teaching to deliver lectures vs nurturing students

Or, Dating a hot guy vs a stable man

When do we *actually* change?

#1 When there are strong rewards or punishments (we change temporarily here though)

#2 When we have strong internal justification such that we are convinced (here rewards are small and momentary but lead to lasting change)

When do we *actually* change?

#3 conflict with self concept or threat to self esteem

Dissonance is strongest and most painful, and people are most motivated to reduce it, when information or behaviour conflicts with an important part of their self concept or threatens their self esteem.

When do we *actually* change?

#4 When our decisions create discomfort

Decisions involve choosing one thing over the other, often creating dissonance. The thought that we may have made the wrong choice causes discomfort- **postdecision dissonance – especially when it threatens our self-image.**

How do we get unstuck?

- **Self-Persuasion:** A long lasting form of attitude change that results from attempts at self-justification
- We need to engage in an honest process of self-justification and determine our goal (short or long term change?)
- Most times, this involves getting over our usual reactions to dissonance (deny, distort – includes hypocrisy and defend) and choose appropriate responses that align with our goals

Finally, what reduces dissonance?

1. Justification of effort

2. **External vs Internal Justification:** Always remember, the lesser the external justification (reward or punishment), the greater the internal justification and hence bigger attitude change happens

3. **Insufficient or mild punishment:** less or insufficient punishment means less external justification. Therefore, internal justification might get induced and self persuasion might happen (eg., silence over guilt inducing)

Finally, what reduces dissonance?

4. Hypocrisy Induction

5. **Learning from our mistakes:** When we act counter to our values, we can consciously pause the self-justification process to reflect on our action