

SELF-JUSTIFICATION AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

SPRING 2018

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Festinger's Assumptions:

1. When you have two cognitions that go together you feel satisfied ("Consonance")
2. When you have two cognitions that conflict you feel uncomfortable ("Dissonance")

Cognitive Dissonance: state of tension and discomfort that arises from holding 2 inconsistent cognitions

HOW DO YOU REDUCE THE DISSONANCE?

1. Change one of your cognitions
 - “Smoking isn’t that bad for you”
2. Add a third cognition that is consistent with the behavior
 - “Smoking relaxes me”
 - “I’d rather die early and have fun”
 - “I take care of myself in other way (e.g., eating healthy, working out)...this is my one vice!”

INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION

- Surgeon General's report in 1964
- How did non-smokers vs. smokers interpret the report?
 - Non-smokers – overwhelmingly believed the evidence
 - Smokers – tended to debunk the report
 - 40% of heavy smokers said the link had not been proven to exist



① Here you are, a reasonably happy, content person with a good amount of self-esteem.



② Then you do something that goes against your image of yourself... Something stupid, immoral or foolish.



③ You experience Dissonance! An unpleasant arousal state that You are motivated to reduce!



⑤ You could change your behavior...



⑥ You could change one of your cognitions...



④ But How?



⑦ Or you could add consonant cognitions.



⑧ Successfully doing any of these three will reduce your dissonance. You're a happy camper once again!

TABLE 6.5

Ways to Reduce Dissonance

"I need to be on a diet, yet I just dove head first into a tub of chocolate fudge brownie ice cream." If this were you, how would you reduce dissonance aroused by the discrepancy between your attitude and your behavior?

Techniques	Examples
Change your attitude.	"I don't really need to be on a diet."
Change your perception of the behavior.	"I hardly ate any ice cream."
Add consonant cognitions.	"Chocolate ice cream is very nutritious."
Minimize the importance of the conflict	"I don't care if I'm overweight—life is short!"
Reduce perceived choice.	"I had no choice; the ice cream was served for this special occasion."

DISSONANCE REDUCING BEHAVIOR (LORD, ROSS & LEPPER)

- Shown two research studies - one that confirmed existing beliefs & one that disconfirmed existing beliefs
- Results???
 - found data within each study (either confirming data or disconfirming flaws in the experiment) to support their initial beliefs
 - people tended to believe that research that supported their original views had been conducted better and was more convincing than research that didn't

JONESTOWN

While watching think about the techniques used to encourage:

- Conformity
- Compliance (e.g., foot in the door)
- Obedience
- Persuasion
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Norms

IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT – REACTION TO JONESTOWN

- Overall reaction
- Do you think the concept of cognitive dissonance helps explain cult behavior?
- How was social influence used (conformity, compliance, obedience)
- Can concepts such as the 'power of social influence' and the 'power of the situation' help explain how cults function and are able to retain members?
- Is there danger in viewing cult members as naive, crazy, or weak when trying to explain the behavior of someone involved in a cult?
- Any other comments?

CULTS

Describes a pattern of social relations
within a group

- Dependency
- Leader-oriented

Systematically apply principles of social
influence and persuasion

CULTS CONTINUED

1. Eliminate all outside sources of information
 - Cult's Eye View
2. In-group / Out-group
3. Create commitment through rationalization trap
 - Start Small: donate to the cause
4. Establish leader's credibility & attractiveness

CULTS SHARE HALF A DOZEN RECOGNIZABLE CHARACTERISTICS:

- Powerful and exclusive dedication/devotion to an explicit person or creed
- The use of “thought-reform” programs to integrate, socialize, persuade, and therefore control members
- A well-thought-out recruitment, selection, and socialization process
- Attempts to maintain psychological and physical dependency among cult members
- Reprogramming the way people see the world
- Consistent exploitation of group members, specifically to advance the leaders' goals
- A tendency to go in for milieu control signals: an unfamiliar setting with different rules, terms, and behavior patterns
- Ultimately using psychological and physical harm to cult members, their friends and relatives, and possibly the community as a whole