

# Cognitive Dissonance in Social Justice

Many times what happens is that we are in a state of dilemma and restlessness when we are exposed with some new information which collides with the already existing information inside our mind , this situation is termed to be state of cognitive dissonance.

Some misunderstandings are remedied easily but when some new information collides with the old prejudices -when new truth battle established beliefs for space in our consciousnesses – we tend to respond with all manners of defense mechanisms . We employ these defenses in response to the psychological stressors that emerge from such inner-battles.

Understanding and Removing the state of Cognitive Dissonance among the people helps them in a better understanding of the concepts and help them make better decisions in their lives.

We all know that Abraham Lincoln – president of the United States was against slavery and also against the racial discrimination between the whites and the blacks. But once he quoted:

*"I am not now, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social or political equality of the white and black races. I am not now nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor of intermarriages with white people. There is a physical difference between the white and the black races which will forever forbid the two races living together on social or political equality. There must be a position of superior and inferior, and I am in favor of assigning the superior position to the white man."*

According to his quotes it is clear that he racially discriminated blacks from the whites but we may completely disregard the truth of this statement as this statement completely disregards the previous concepts ( thoughts ) we had in our mind regarding **Abraham Lincoln**. The above statement creates in our mind a state of cognitive dissonance.

The people in this situation behaves in two ways :

One way is to that individuals respond to the new information provided to them and start thinking about them means that they start collecting new facts which support the new information provided to them and tend to remove their state of dilemma.

Another way would be not to accept the current information as it hinders the established beliefs among the individuals regarding the pre-notion that we have towards the subject of the information ( subject for the cognitive dissonance ).

The first way to gather the newly supplied information and then working on it to prove its correctness prove to be quite helpful as in this way we tend to filter our thoughts and also develop a better understanding of our thoughts.

According to the small survey within our group taken by us when we were asked who said the above quote , Most of the people answered **George Wallace** or **Jesse Helms** ( these were the other two options provided by us along with **Abraham Lincoln** and these two people were against the **equality** among the blacks and the whites ) , Most of the people were stunned when they came to know the above quote was said by Abraham Lincoln.

Most of the people disproved the fact but some of the people accepted the fact by firstly researching on Abraham Lincoln. This is because the Abraham Lincoln was known to be a person who abolished slavery in America and believed to be a man who talked about the equality of the rights , liberty and democracy and other options that we So people don't accept of him to be a person of such sought who would believe in the differences in the blacks and the whites and would also advocate for the superior position of the whites over the black.

This fact creates a sense of dissonance in the mind of the person regarding the image of Abraham Lincoln. So to deal with this dissonance there are two ways of going through this :

a) One is to actually the deny the fact and raise various questions about it's correctness.

b) Another way is to actually research on him more and find out more information about him and also find out the information regarding quotes made by him.

## **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and Social Justice**

**Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** is a psychotherapeutic approach that addresses dysfunctional emotions, maladaptive behaviors and cognitive processes and contents through a number of goal-oriented, explicit systematic procedures. This therapy is based upon cognitive theory , behavioral theory and also on the combination of these two therapies. Most therapists while dealing with their patients in these problems with depression and anxiety use a blend of these two therapies.

The National Association of **Social Workers** (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional **social workers** (people working for the upliftment of the society) in the world, with 150000 members. Now according to the National Association of Social Workers they suggested that the social workers should ensure that clients have access to needed information, resources, and services, as well as equality of opportunities and participation in decision making. Although for majority of the time **Social Justice** has been linked to the macro-level-practices such as social reforms like poverty , discrimination and economic deprivation , however **Jerome Wakefield** said that only these practices are not only linked to social justice but also clinical social work is also a natural part of the justice-oriented profession .

According to the **NASW** , Clinical social work has a primary focus on the mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being of individuals, couples, families, and groups. It centers on a holistic approach to psychotherapy and the client's relationship to his or her environment. Clinical social work views the client's relationship with his or her

environment as essential to treatment planning.

Wakefield also suggests that “minimal distributive justice” in social work ensures not only that individuals receive at least a minimal level of socially produced goods to allow for effective rational action but also that “anyone falling below the social minimum in any of the social primary goods is brought above that level in as many respects as possible”. This would make the individuals better in their decision making because if the individual is in the best state of mind as possible then the individual could make the best decision as compared to previous in which he was not in a great state of mind.

One question may arise in our mind that how the practice of cognitive-behavioral theory might be compatible with the notion of social justice and how does it facilitate the access to such socially produced goods . To answer this question we refer to **John Rawls** , who defines social primary goods as goods that a rational person may want to pursue in order to improve the quality of his/her life and also them in better decision making. Building on **Rawl's** ideas, **Jerome Wakefield** argues that a major purpose of clinical social work is to aim at psychological justice, and that a key function of psychological justice is the establishment of self-respect, a social primary good, essential for pursuing a rational course of action, a good that is acquired out of one's interaction with one's social environment.

According to many authors they believe that the **Distributive Justice** (socially just allocation of goods in a society) can occur at the macro level of practice , through seeking and advocating of policy and social reform and also at the micro level through direct clinical social work.

Many Individuals , who from an early age have been subjected to systematic abuse, emotional and physical neglect, degradation, etc., may be at risk of internalizing negative core beliefs about the self (e.g., “I am not good enough”; “I am unlovable”; “I am defective”), about the world (e.g., “The world is a dangerous place”), and about others (e.g., “Others are cruel”; “People cannot be trusted”).

As you see in the above paragraph that the person who has a negative core belief about himself tend to make beliefs that the world and others are also the same.

The existence of such beliefs increases the chances that the person will face difficulties in adaptation that interfere with his or her capacity to pursue a rational course of action, to function effectively within the social environment, and to establish healthy relationships. Since core beliefs develop out of the early interactions of the individual with his or her social environment, **Cognitive-behavioral therapy** aims to understand not only the content of the beliefs but also the social context that contributed to the formation of such beliefs. **Cognitive-behavioral therapy** encourages practitioners to understand the full impact of those experiences on the client's thinking and also help the individuals to remove these core-beliefs from their mind and have a more holistic approach to the decision making and also pursue a rational course of action.