Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance: An uncomfortable mental state due to a contradiction between two attitudes or between an attitude and behavior (page 530).

Typically dissonance results from the awareness that attitudes and behaviors are in conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking is bad for you</td>
<td>≠</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once we are aware of these conflicts (whether conscious or not), we are motivated to reduce this tension.
Reducing Dissonance

When behavior and attitudes are inconsistent, psychology tension arises. We are motivated to reduce this tension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking is bad for you</td>
<td>≠</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I smoke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cognitive dissonance cause anxiety, and we are motivated to reduce it.

Generally, when we notice a discrepancy, we are motivated to reduce it by
- changing the behavior—**stop smoking**
- changing your attitude—**smoking isn’t that bad**

Changing your attitude through a distortion of reality tends to be easier than changing what you did (your behavior).
We can also reduce the dissonance by rationalizing or trivializing the discrepancy (page 530). “Distorting reality”, allows you to maintain your belief—**the research is biased**. If the research is biased, then smoking may not be that bad for you.

A “distortion of reality” allows you to maintain your belief and keeps you from changing your world view. A distortion would be a major deviation from a reasonable interpretation.
Cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance affects our attitudes and behavior in several ways. **Warning: this could be counter intuitive**

1. **postdecisional dissonance**

   ![Image](https://example.com/postdecisional_dissonance)

2. **insufficient justifications**

   When people are paid very little ($1) for lying about a boring spool turning task, they are more likely to believe that the boring spool turning task was interesting than those who are paid a lot ($20) for lying about a boring spool turning task.

3. **justifying efforts (e.g. hazing)**

   ![Image](https://example.com/justifying_efforts)
Cognitive Dissonance

In the book *Influence: Science and Practice*, by Robert Cialdini (1985) describes a good example of cognitive dissonance that helps students realize that cognitive dissonance influences their lives.

The story is about a young woman who is involved in an unsatisfying relationship. Her boyfriend doesn’t treat her well; he drinks too much, and he is unwilling to hold a steady job. Finally, she manages to break off the relationship with this man, and shortly thereafter, she meets a new fellow and falls deeply in love. This second relationship flourishes nicely and culminates in wedding plans; the date is set, the hall reserved, the invitations sent, and everything looks like it is turning up daisies for her until she receives a phone call from a repenting first boyfriend. At first the woman is unwilling to talk with him; after all, she is engaged to another man. But gradually her resolve weakens and she listens as he pleads for a second chance and promises her that he will change. To everyone’s disappointment, she finally breaks off the engagement and goes back to her first boyfriend.

At first, things go well for the woman, but as all of the students anticipate, it is not long before the boyfriend reverts back to drinking and treating her badly. What surprises students, however, is that the woman does not seem at all disappointed; indeed, she now seems happier, more committed, and more in love with him than ever before.
What are the inconsistent behavior(s) and belief(s)?
Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance may explain the woman’s odd reaction. We base our beliefs and feelings on our behavior. Hence, in this case, the woman concluded she loved the man precisely because she had given up so much for him.

1. Identify some inconsistencies that create psychological tension (cognitive dissonance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I’m in a bad relationship</th>
<th>≠</th>
<th>Unhealthy relationships are bad for you</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I went back to my bad relationship when I was in a good relation</td>
<td>≠</td>
<td>I’m a smart and sensible person (people don’t choose bad relationships)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What are some ways to resolve these inconsistencies?

3. What beliefs about the self might make cognitive dissonance more likely?
Reducing Dissonance

We have many attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with each other. It is difficult to notice these inconsistencies when they occur far apart in time. We may not recognize these discrepancies until someone points them out, or we reflect upon our own behavior.

However, we might not WANT to recognize these inconsistencies because it would produce psychological tension to acknowledge we have these inconsistencies. These inconsistencies can threaten our self-concept.
Homework on Cognitive Dissonance

(a) Identify a belief and behavior that produces cognitive dissonance

(b) Explain why this inconsistency would produce cognitive dissonance

(c) Describe how one could reduce this dissonance by:
   • Changing your behavior
   • Changing your attitude (belief)
   • Distorting reality

(d) Explain why recognizing cognitive dissonance is important.
The Influence of Others

• Social Facilitation
• Social Loafing
• Deindividuation
Social Facilitation

When the mere presence of others enhances performance (page 537).

Psychological Science, 4/e Figure 12.17
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Social Loafing

The tendency for people to work less hard in a group that when working alone (page 537). Warning: this could be counter intuitive.

Versus

Social loafing tends to occur when your behavior is not monitored and your efforts cannot be directly accounted for.
Deindividuation

Deindividuation is a state of reduced individuality, reduced self-awareness, and reduced attention to personal standards; this phenomena may occur when people are part of a group (page 537).

The feeling of anonymity can arise from being masked, dim lighting or large groups.

What are the negative effects of deindividuation?
What behaviors does this help explain?
• Hooded Klu Klux Klan members
• Masquerade parties
• Parties at night
• Large groups
• Riots

What are the positive effects of deindividuation?

How do you reduce effects due to deindividuation (for the negative effects)?