

## **Chapter 6: Attitudes, Behavior, and Rationalization**

### Predicting Behavior from Attitudes

- Attitudes Sometimes Conflict with Other Powerful Determinants of Behavior
- Attitudes Are Sometimes Inconsistent
- Attitudes Are Sometimes Based on Secondhand Information
- The Mismatch between General Attitudes and Specific Targets
- “Automatic” Behavior That Bypasses Conscious Attitudes

### Predicting Attitudes from Behavior

- Cognitive Consistency Theories
- Experiencing and Reducing Dissonance
- When Does Inconsistency Produce Dissonance?
- Self-Affirmation and Dissonance
- Is Dissonance Universal?

### Self-Perception Theory

- Inferring Attitudes
- Evidence of Self-Directed Inference
- Testing for Arousal
- Reconciling the Dissonance and Self-Perception Accounts

### Beyond Cognitive Consistency to Broader Rationalization

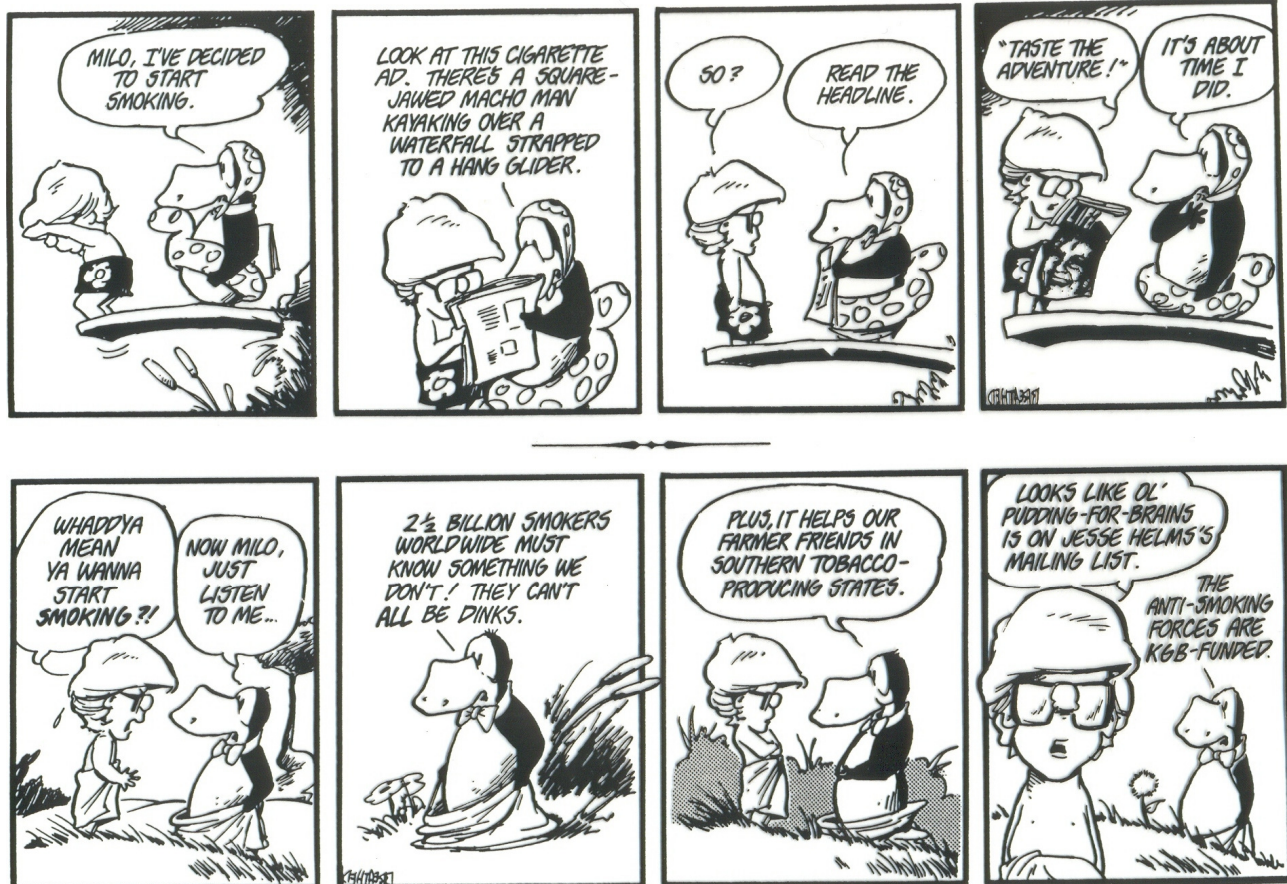
- System Justification Theory
- Terror Management Theory

## Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance: An unpleasant state of psychological tension or arousal that occurs when two (or more) thoughts, perceptions or behaviors are inconsistent.

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

Belief		behavior
Smoking is bad for you	≠	I smoke



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

## Cognitive Dissonance



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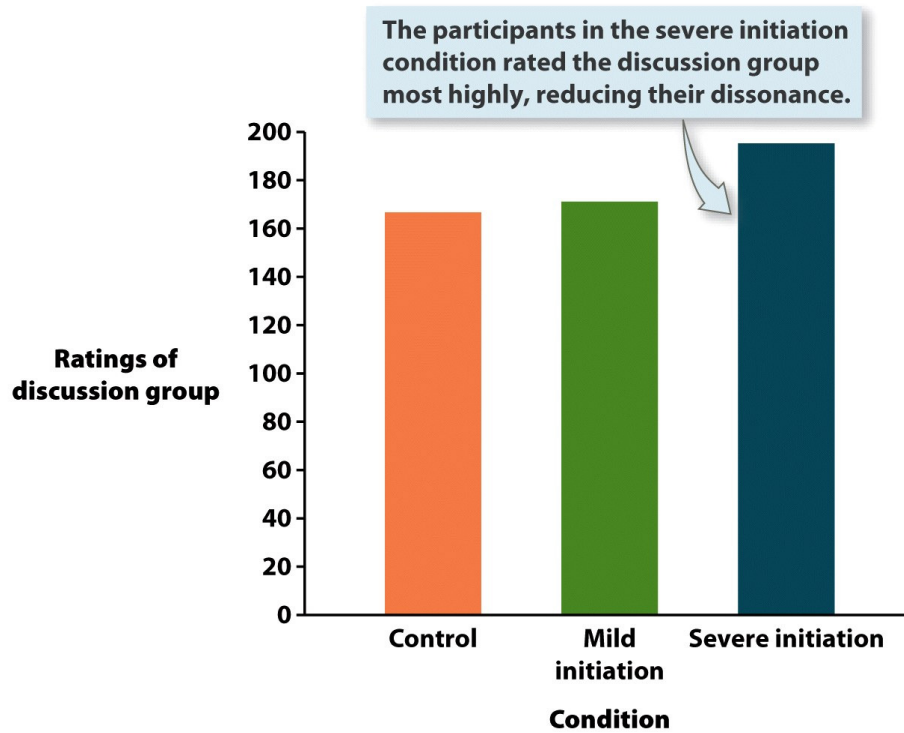


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## Cognitive Dissonance



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## When does Inconsistency Produce Dissonance?

Not all inconsistencies between belief and behavior produce cognitive dissonance.

Dissonance tends to occur when there are inconsistencies that challenge our core sense of self (see the self-concept from week 1) which can also include honesty, rational decision making, and competence.

### Factors that influence Cognitive Dissonance

<b>Less Dissonance</b>	<b>More Dissonance</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of no choice in the action that led to an inconsistency               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Your brother was being held hostage so you said those bad things</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of Free Will in the action that led to an inconsistency               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of sufficient justification for action that led to an inconsistency               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ getting paid 50 cents to lie</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of Insufficient Justification for action that led to an inconsistency               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ getting paid \$50 to lie</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the inconsistency leads to positive consequences               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The inconsistency caused me to be late for a flight</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the inconsistency leads to negative consequences               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The inconsistency caused me to be late for dinner</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of being able to foresee the consequences of your actions that led to an inconsistency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of being unable to foresee the consequences of your actions that led to an inconsistency (ignorance is bliss because it reduces dissonance)</li> </ul>

## Reducing Dissonance

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



Belief

Smoking is bad for you

≠

behavior

I smoke

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**
- “distorting reality”, thus allowing you to maintain your maintain your belief—**the research is biased**. If the research is biased, then smoking may not be that bad for you.

Changing your attitude through a distortion of reality tends to be easier than changing what you did (your behavior). A “distortion of reality” allows you to maintain your maintain your belief and keeps you from changing your world view. A distortion would be a major deviation from a reasonable interpretation.

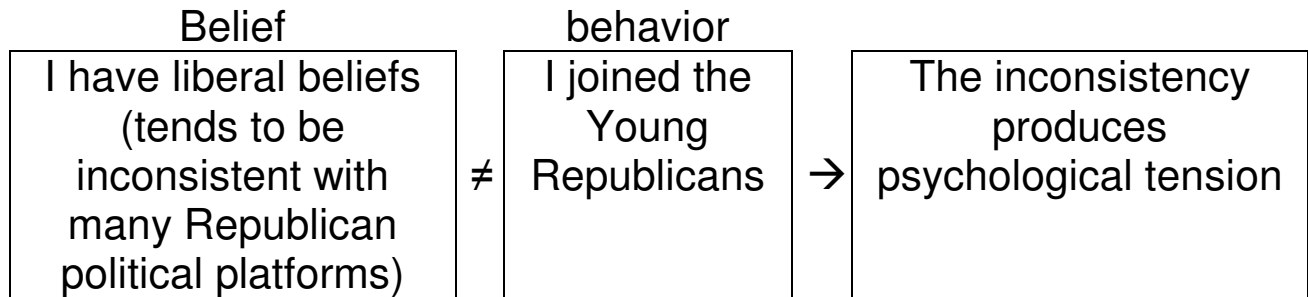
## **Reducing Dissonance**

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.

## Cognitive dissonance

Before:

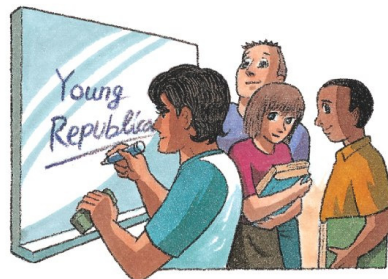


J.J.'s attitude:  
"My political beliefs are  
liberal."

→ **Cognitive dissonance**  
(awareness that attitude  
and behavior are  
inconsistent)



**Dissonance resolved:**  
"Maybe the conservatives  
have a point."



J.J.'s behavior:  
J.J. joins Young Republicans because his  
girlfriend is an officer.

After:





## **Distorting Reality to Reduce Cognitive Dissonance**

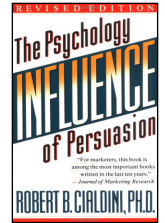
Changing your attitude is easier when you cannot change your behavior. When you cannot change either, you can distort reality such as:

- explaining away the inconsistency,
- reducing the importance of the inconsistency,
- denying the behavior (denial),
- claiming that you are “better than average”,
- surrounding yourself with consonant information to make the inconsistency appear small relative to the consonant information (bolstering),
- saying that the inconsistency is necessary for a more important purpose (transcendence)
  - Lives are at stake, we are at “war”, it’s for your own good
- claim that you were “forced” to be inconsistent,
- or using any of the ego defense mechanism.

Important: Cognitive dissonance theory says nothing about the truth or falsity of the distortions we use to reduce anxiety. Cognitive dissonance theory only that we feel compelled to reduce the anxiety.

## 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.

## 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)

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I'm in a bad relationship	≠	Unhealthy relationships are bad for you
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I went back to my bad relationship when I was in a good relation	≠	I'm a smart and sensible person (people don't choose bad relationships)
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2. What are some ways to resolve these inconsistencies?
3. What beliefs about the self might make cognitive dissonance more likely?

## **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.

## **Student examples of Cognitive Dissonance**

I know that I shouldn't eat junk food but I love chocolate cake so I just tell myself that it's okay to eat chocolate cake because it isn't really junk food; it has eggs and milk in it. It's actually good for you.

In the book *Schoolgirls*, it discusses the low rate of protected sex among young, mostly Latina girls. A theory that explains this statistic is that most girls, especially Catholic Latina girls, are taught and eventually believe that sex is wrong for women. Therefore having protected sex involves a conscious, somewhat premeditated decision to engage in sex.