

Self-justification

- People are motivated to justify their actions, beliefs and feelings
- When they do something, they will try, if at all possible, to convince themselves (and others) that it was a logical, reasonable thing to do
 - I.e. Prasad and Sinha's rumors in neighboring village p.145

Cognitive dissonance

- Theory of human motivation developed by Leon Festinger
- A state of tension occurs whenever an individual holds two cognitions (ideas, beliefs, opinions, attitudes) that are psychologically inconsistent
 - It can also be an inconsistent belief and behavior
 - I.e. How can I believe homelessness is an important issue and yet I don't do anything personally to help?
- Two cognitions are dissonant if they don't match up
 - I.e. How can I believe ____ and ____?
- Dissonance is unpleasant, therefore, people are motivated to reduce it
 - Similar to the need to reduce other drives, such as hunger and thirst

Reducing cognitive dissonance

1. Change one or both cognitions so that they are more compatible (more consonant) with each other
2. Add more cognitions that bridge the gap between the original cognitions
 - I.e. smoker and report of medical evidence linking cigarette smoking to lung cancer
 - "I smoke and it's linked to lung cancer" are dissonant. (pp. 147-8)
 - I.e. Executive of cigarette company
 - "I am a decent, kind human being" and "I am contributing to the early death of many people" are dissonant. (pp. 149-50)
 - I.e. 1997 Heaven's Gate purchase of telescope to see comet and spaceship traveling behind it and then returned it (p. 150)
 - I.e. Princeton/Dartmouth football game—viewed differently the film of the game and more likely to see fellow students as victims of illegal infractions vs. aggressors (p. 151)
3. People don't want to see or hear things that conflict with their deeply held beliefs or wishes
 - Remember cognitive conservatism?

Dissonance and interpreting information

- People are not passive receptacles of information
- Our interpretations are deeply impacted by how committed we are to a belief or course of action
- We will distort objective reality in order to reduce dissonance

Diss. reduction & rational behavior

- It's not that people are *incapable* of rational behavior, but rather that people are capable of *justifying* irrational behavior
- Dissonance-reducing behavior is ego-defensive behavior, by reducing dissonance, we maintain a positive image of ourselves
 - I.e. Arguments remembered best
 - A silly argument in favor of one's own position arouses dissonance because it raises doubts about the wisdom of that position or the intelligence of the people who agree with it.
 - A plausible argument on the other side of the issue also arouses dissonance because it raises the possibility that the other side is right.
 - Tended to remember the plausible arguments agreeing with their own position and the implausible arguments agreeing with the opposing position
 - I.e. Lord, Ross, Lepper research articles opposing and favoring capital punishment—we do not process information in an unbiased manner, but rather we distort it in a way that fit our preconceived notions

Diss. as consequence of decision-making

- Making a decision produces dissonance
 - This is because the chosen alternative is seldom entirely positive and the rejected alternatives are seldom entirely negative
- Negative aspects of the chosen object are dissonant with having chosen it
- After making a decision, people seek information that is reassuring to validate their choice and reduce dissonance
 - I.e. purchase van vs. compact car
 - I.e. women rated the appliance more positively after the decision

Foot-in-the-door technique

- Using small favors to encourage people to agree to larger requests (escalation)
- The small request provides justification for complying with the larger request
 - I.e. Jonestown
 - Requested donations of money or work on smaller projects
 - I.e. Milgram's shocks starting small vs. at 450 volts
 - Homeowners agreeing to post a small sign in their yard and then a large billboard
 - Homeowners signing a petition and then posting a sign in their yard
- The behavior needs to be justified so attitudes change and this attitude change influences future decisions and behavior

Irrevocability

- Once you have committed to a decision, the need to justify it becomes compelling
 - I.e. once you've put your money down on the house
 - I.e. gamblers more certain they'd win **after** placing their bets since the money can no longer be taken back at that point
- Before your decision is final, there is no need to create justification
- Lowballing
 - Offering the customer a low "ball" (price) and then coming back with a higher one once committed to purchase
 - I.e. car purchase calculation error from \$8942 to \$9384 (can purchase elsewhere at \$9300)
 1. Decision is reversible, but committed by writing check
 2. This commitment triggered anticipation of pleasant experience—driving out with new car
 3. The final price is higher than thought would be, but only slightly higher than elsewhere →already filled out paperwork so why wait

Decision to behave immorally

- Dissonance from making a difficult decision can make a person more honest
- If you want to soften moral attitudes, tempt people enough that they perform a misdeed
 - Can reduce dissonance by minimizing the negative aspects of the action →change attitude re. cheating
- If you want to harden moral attitudes, tempt them, but not enough to actually perform the misdeed
 - I.e. Mill's 6th graders tempted to cheat
- The same mechanism that enables people to cling to an attitude can induce them to change the attitude depending upon which action will most reduce dissonance under the circumstances

Inadequate justification

- External justification
 - Dissonance created by making an untrue public statement can be reduced if there is a sufficient reason for the statement
 - I.e. a “white” lie, told so as not to hurt someone's feelings—the painting Joyce painted
- Internal justification
 - If there is NOT a sufficient reason for an untrue public statement, dissonance must be reduced some other way
 - Attitude change (in the direction of the statement) often results, as that is an efficient way to reduce dissonance
 - I.e. Castro discussion at party

“Saying is believing” paradigm

- We begin to believe our own lies—but only if there is not abundant external justification for making the statements that run counter to our original attitudes
- When it comes to producing **lasting** change in attitude, the greater the reward the **less** likely any attitude change will occur –an actual change vs. compliance
- We are changing our attitudes because we have succeeded in convincing ourselves that our previous attitudes were incorrect
- Festinger study convincing another that the spool task is interesting for \$1 vs. \$20 reward

Types of external justification

People can be induced to say and do things that contradict their beliefs by:

- Threats of punishment
- Rewards other than money--praise, desire to please
- Being asked as a favor by a friend
 - I.e. would you enjoy eating grasshopper more when asked to eat by good friend or someone don't like? Less external justification with person don't like →higher need to justify

Inadequate justification

- A small reward (i.e. \$1 vs. \$20) may be sufficient to induce someone to do something
- However, a small reward results in more dissonance
- The resulting dissonance may require additional rationalization in the form of attitude change
- If we have adequate external justification for our actions, dissonance and attitude change don't occur

Dissonance and self-concept

- Reformulation of dissonance theory that incorporates the fact that dissonance is most powerful in situations in which the self-concept is threatened
 - Having misled people in that "I have told people something I don't believe" is dissonant with my self-concept of "I am a person of integrity"
 - I.e. someone opposed to marijuana advocating the use of it to people opposed to or committed to using marijuana wouldn't induce dissonance as if spoke to individuals with no prior information about marijuana
- Most individuals like to think of themselves as decent people who wouldn't ordinarily mislead someone
- Lying produces greater attitude change when uncompensated for lying, especially when lie is likely to evoke a change in the audience's belief or behavior
- Dissonance effects are greatest when
 1. People feel personally responsible for their actions and
 2. Their actions have serious consequences
- The greater the consequence and the greater our responsibility for it the greater the dissonance; the greater the dissonance, the greater our own attitude change
 - I.e. door-to-door request for charity contribution states appeal and adds "even a penny will help" leads to difficult to refuse—what kind of person is too stingy to come up with a penny?
 - This request led to contributions more often and donations of almost twice as frequently as the standard plea and the "even a penny will help" leads to no reduction in size of contribution

Inadequate rewards applied to education

Several researchers have found that:

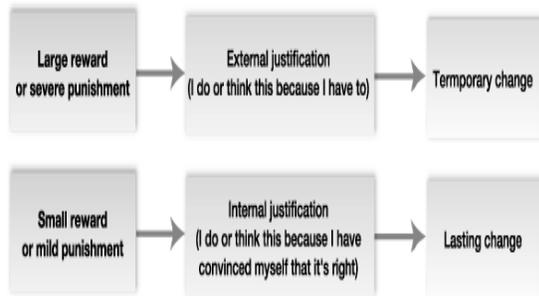
- High rewards (external justifications) diminish effort and enjoyment
 - I.e. Deci puzzle—college students worked individually on puzzle for hour—next day experimental group paid \$1/piece completed and control group paid none—3rd session, neither were paid→ unrewarded group spent more free time on the task
 - Lepper—praise beneficial only if done in moderation and in a way child feels competent and not focused on competition
 - Dweck—praise is most effective if focused on the child's effort rather than the talent or ability so when encounter difficult task will work at effort rather than believing not as smart and people thought was
- Consider also paying kids for grades and the amount of allowance kids receive for contributions to the household

Insufficient punishment

Several researchers have found that:

- Harsh punishments (external justifications) diminish internalization of values
 - I.e. obey speed limit when patrol cars around to prevent ticket
 - I.e. students not cheating when teacher in room watching teaches to avoid getting caught which requires constant vigilance
- The less severe the threat, the less external justification
 - I.e. 5 y.o. found forbidden toy less attractive after mild threat, but more desirable for children severely threatened. Severe threat→ external justification while mild threat required internal justification that required them to convince themselves it was undesirable
 - Results held as long as 9 weeks after Freedman left
 - Parents who use severe punishment to stop a child's aggression tend to have children who may not be aggressive at home, but display a lot of aggression at school and play away from home

Rewards and justification type and length of change



Justification of effort

- If a person goes through a difficult or painful experience in order to attain some goal or object, that goal or object becomes more attractive
 - I.e. joining a fraternity—passing initiation and having a roommate with peculiar habits→ will try to reduce dissonance by seeing roommate in favorable light
- Importance of **volunteering** to go through the unpleasant experience

Justification of cruelty

- A person will generally derogate their victim in order to justify cruel behavior and convince themselves that the victim deserved what they got because he did something to bring it on himself or because he was a bad person
 - I.e. Kent State Univ 4 students shot and killed by national guard led to rumors spread about these students
- Because nice people don't go around hurting innocent people, you must have deserved the nasty things done to you (person with high s-e)
- People with low self-esteem have less need to derogate their victim
- If the victim can retaliate, there is less need to derogate them
 - I.e. during war, soldiers might have a greater need to derogate civilian victims (because they can't retaliate) than military victims
 - I.e. DV—she deserved it
 - Hitler and Nazi Germany re. the Jews

Psychology of inevitability

- People tend to make the best of things by cognitively minimizing the unpleasantness of the situation
 - I.e. Children volunteered to eat a vegetable previously said disliked. After eating veg, ½ told the could expect to eat more of the veg in the future and others not told this. The children led to believe it was inevitable convinced themselves it wasn't so bad
 - I.e. If haircut is too short, must make the most of it because it will have to be like that until it grows out
- People tend to make the best of something they know is bound to happen
- De-emphasizing the negative can be maladaptive
 - I.e. UCLA students responded to expected earthquake by doing nothing to prepare for it. Those at most risk who didn't think about and underestimated the severity

Alternative explanations

- Self-perception theory—Daryl Bem
 - Rather than seeking to relieve a “negative drive state” or “dissonance,” people infer their attitudes from their own behavior in the same way that an outside observer would
 - It includes attribution theory
 - We make inferences about our attitudes by observing our behavior (as others do) and concluding what attitudes must have caused them
 - When we are unclear about the reasons we have engaged in a particular behavior, we look at our behavior and try to figure out why we did what we did
 - “This is my second sandwich; I guess I was hungrier than I thought”
 - “I’ve been biting my nails all day; something must be bugging me.”
 - Being asked to give a pro Castro speech would lead to viewing themselves as being more in favor of Castro.