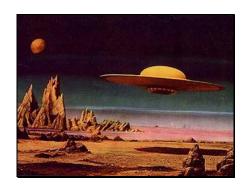
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# Cognitive Dissonance Theory

# Slide 2



# Slide 3

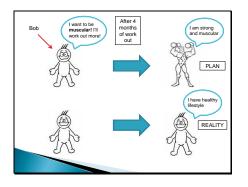



Slide 4





# Slide 6






### Slide 8

What has happened in all of these examples?

Cognitive dissonance has occurred



### Slide 9

### Cognitive dissonance

- Cognitive = involving thinking
   Dissonance = disharmony, discord
   Cognition\* = beliefs, attitudes, behavior

Cognitive dissonance = unpleasant state that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent

This unpleasant state  $\,$  is highly  $\underline{\text{motivational}}.$  It drives us toward reducing the dissonance.








## Cognitive dissonance

Who thinks that people are rational animals?

We are not rational animals. We are rationalizing animals.







### Slide 11

### **Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

- The presence of a cognitive inconsistency of sufficient magnitude will evoke an aversive motivational state dissonance that drives cognitive work aimed at reducing the cognitive inconsistency. (Festinger, 1957)
- Magnitude = number of Dis/Con psychological importance of Dis/Con
- The routes of dissonance reduction: Subtracting dissonant cognitions Adding consonant cognitions Decreasing the importance of dissonant cognitions Increasing the importance of consonant cognitions



### Slide 12

### Research has shown that dissonance processes can:

- Reduce prejudices
- Increase water conservation
- Increase the purchasing of condoms
- (Stone, Aronson, Crain, Winslow, & Fried, 1994)

  Reduce hunger and thirst
- Reduce pain





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... they can also lead to changes in attitudes toward a variety of objects and issues such as:

- Boring tasks
- Delicious chocolate
- Eating grasshoppers
- Sour beverages made with vinegar
- Increasing tuition at one's university
- Mandatory comprehensive final exams

### Slide 14



### Slide 15




# JUSTIFYING UNTRUTHS • (Festinger, Carlsmith, 1959) • "The boring task" experiment Subjects received \$1 or \$20 reward for lying about enjoyableness of the task How enjoyable were tasks? (rated from -5 to +5) Were tasks scientifically important? (rated from 0 to +10) Are you willing to participate in similar experiments? (rated from 2 to +10) Tages from -5 to +5)

### Slide 17



### Slide 18

# JUSTIFYING DIFFICULT DECISIONS (Brehm, 1956) "You can keep one toaster" experiment 1. Women rated toasters 2. Then given chance to take one of them 3. Suddenly... ... chosen is way better unchosen toasters are way worse Postdecisional spreading of alternatives

### JUSTIFYING EFFORT

- (Aronson, Mills, 1959)
   "Petting vs. erection initiation" experiment
- Women joined the sex discussion group via easy OR hard "initiation process". Then they heard boring presentation. The "hard initiation group" members reported more positive attitudes toward the discussion group.
- The power of rites of passage



### Slide 20

### JUSTIFYING A FAILURE TO ACT

- (Aronson, Carlsmith, 1963)
   "Severe vs. mild punishment for playing with a forbidden toy" experiment
- Children prohibited from playing with an attractive toy by a mild threat subsequently found the toy less attractive that did children prohibited by a severe threat.
- Practical application:
- "Good boy vs. Bad boy framing"

### Slide 21

### Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Cognitive dissonance = unpleasant state that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent

- Attitude change in American POW's in Korean War
   Stan's Oldsmobile
- Justifying untruths
- Justifying difficult decisions
- Justifying effort
- . Justifying failure to act
- · Counterattitudinal advocacy

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