

Cognitive dissonance


Engineering Psychology

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Cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant feeling that comes when you have multiple contradictory ideas simultaneously. The theory of cognitive dissonance is that humans have a need to reduce their dissonance by changing their attitudes, opinions and actions. Open people will change their beliefs but others are stuck in their faith to the point that they must find a way to explain away what they experienced. In other words people get dissonance reduction by justify, blame and denying things.


The best known case in the early research of cognitive dissonance was described by Leon Festinger, based on his experiences when he infiltrated a cult which believed that the earth would end a certain date. When the earth, not surprisingly, still existed after that date the members choose that instead of realizing its mistake and take the consequences of it, they instead shared their opinions with other like-minded in order to gain acceptance, with the result that they got closer and the individuals dissonance reduced.

Leon Festinger introduced the theory in his book *A Theory on Cognitive Dissonance* (1957). Dissonance, he described, is experienced physically as an uneasy feeling in your stomach that you reflexively trying to get rid of. It is based on one of our most significant excesses, feel good and feel satisfied with what you are performing and how to act. You can say that cognitive dissonance is your conscience telling you when you do not behave as you, according to yourselves, should do. These perceptions we received from the cultural environment we been brought up in. It also works in prevention so that we stay away from such situations that we find unpleasant, that is creating cognitive dissonance, and rather keeps to things we recognize ourselves in (Festinger, 1957)¹.



If you take a person with good general knowledge and who sees himself as a well-educated, but whom have grown up with a religion that says it's wrong to eat pork, that person might find arguments like it doesn't tastes good, it is unhealthy or that it is not good for the environment. These arguments can all be seen as more rational than that you shouldn't eat pork because a burning bush said this to a bearded homeless man 3000 years ago.

I think this whole thing is fascinating, I haven't heard of it before but meanwhile I read what's on the net about it I started to reflect on myself, my surroundings and how situations are handled. I once heard that if I go into a supermarket to buy food I have to do more choices than a caveman did in a whole lifetime. All these choices create dissonance; did I really take the right kind of milk? As a farmers girl I want to support the local farmers, but still I'm a poor student and it is 50% more expensive... With all chooses the expectations to pick the perfect one increases and the bigger or more important decisions are, the stronger the malaise.



One of my closest friends has a tendency to always get in relationships where the guy is a true bastard. She's this one who's in love with the love and just can't imagine being single. We are totally different in the most and I find it so hard to understand why she stays with the guy or how she can let him behave the way he does. Thanks to one of the articles I read about cognitive dissonance I now have a better understanding about the psychological game of what's happening between them.

I short the article is about how a person, who's still in love, handle that the partner goes from a loving and caring person into someone who dominate and abuse the other and plant the idea in hers head that it's her own fault and that she forces him to do that to her. The one who's still in love and have the hopes on a cosy future in a nice house can't cope rational about this and start to question what she did to upset him and begin to work harder to please this person. She needs to reduce the dissonance because she starts believe that if other could please him, why can't she. This suite the narcissi person well, he don't want to take responsibility for his actions, he just want to make sure he get the feeling of power when he can have two sides. One when he raises her to the stars and one when he bring out all the dominating things and push the limits, just depending on if he think he get what he "deserve" out of the relationship at that moment².

From this I got some new angles on how I can approach the problem next time my friend calls me for advice and someone who can kick her ass so she head for the right direction.



Me myself I know I'm good at finding excuses, or avoid decision and people I'm not comfortable with. There are certain most personal things I know I changed my mind or behaviour about the last years. I have done that because I know that the way to adapt to the norm is just too difficult and disclosure, so by adopting an attitude that is a bit provocative, I can use it as a shield to avoid having to deal with reality. This reduces the cognitive dissonance (as it's so fancy called), but if it helps me to be happy I'm not sure. Because even if I find excuses to reduce the dissonance I can't escape the fact that in the end of the day I'm the one who's responsible for my actions.

Source

1) <http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=1331250&fileId=1331251>

2) <http://www.tuvaforum.se/kognitiv-dissonans.asp>

http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/cognitive_dissonance.htm