

Cognitive Dissonance

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Leon Festinger (1956)

When Prophecy Fails

Told the story of a doomsday cult.

Automatic writing revealed to members of a UFO Religion that the world would end on Dec. 21, 1954

Festinger predicted they would proselytize and evangelize more actively after the failure of their prophecy

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UFO Religion

Some people left jobs, college and family members to escape the end of the world

Altering beliefs would be difficult due to the level of commitment

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Prosteletizing and Evangelizing

- 1) Deep conviction relevant to the believer's action.
- 2) Important action that is difficult to un-do.
- 3) Real-world event unequivocally refute the belief.
- 4) Disconfirmatory evidence is observed directly by the believer.
- 5) Social support. Unlikely that one person could maintain the belief. Attempts to persuade others are an attempt to maintain the belief.

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Cognitive Dissonance

Among the most well studied and important theories in psychology
Originally a motivational theory

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Motivational Theory

Why do people do the things they do.
Can we predict the circumstances under which they do certain things?
Can we alter their behavior?

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Cognitive Dissonance

- Something uncomfortable happens in the brain when people are forced to hold two different ideas that do not agree
- NOT a theory of emotion
- CD attempts to explain behavior
- Can be used in attempt to modify beliefs or attitudes (sour grapes) (racism)
- Can be used to modify behavior (smoking)
- Can be used to explain physiological reactions during PDD testing.

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Psychological Set

- A person's fears anxieties and apprehensions are channeled towards the situation which holds the greatest immediate threat to his self-preservation or general well-being. He tunes in that which indicates trouble or danger by having his sense organs tuned for a particular stimulus, and he tunes out that which is of a lesser threat to his self-preservation or general well-being. (Matte & Grove, 2000)
- Not found in published psychological literature

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Is the cognitive basis for **salience** among PDD stimuli

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Salience

- Described in neuroscience as the state or quality of standing out relative to neighboring items
- Considered to be a key attentional mechanism
- Facilitates learning and survival
- Similar to Psychological Set
- Includes Behavioral Conditioning and Cognition as a possible basis of physiological response

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Is the difference in the brain when a person attempts to hold onto two different ideas that do not agree.

One idea is what one knows about one's past behavior.

The other idea is what one says about that past behavior while answering polygraph questions.

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Cognitive Dissonance

Assumes normal (non-psychotic) psychological functioning.

Assumes normal level of intelligence.

Assumes that people remember and know the truth about what they did or did not do.

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End.

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