

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Leon Festinger (1957)



Cognitive Dissonance

- ❑ Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, & Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the End of the World* (University of Minnesota Press; 1956). Mrs. Marion Keech, had mysteriously been given messages in her house in the form of "automatic writing" from alien beings on the planet "Clarion," who revealed that the world would end in a great flood before dawn on December 21 1954.
- ❑ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford University Press; 1957).

Festinger Influenced by

- Kurt Lewin- (University of Iowa) Social psychology, Group Dynamics, experiential learning

Dissonance

- ❑ Dissonance is created by psychological inconsistencies
- ❑ Dissonance is a drive state with arousal properties. Elkin and Leippe (1986) study
- ❑ People are motivated to reduce dissonance

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- ❑ the feeling people have when they find "themselves doing things that don't fit with what they know, or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold."
- ❑ consistency theories
- ❑ S-O-R psychology

Magnitude of dissonance

- ❑ The degree of importance, or significant of the issue to the individual
- ❑ the dissonance ratio, or dissonant cognitions relative to the amount of consonant cognitions.
- ❑ the rationale(s) that a person can summon to justify the inconsistency.

Minimal justification

- ❑ \$1/\$20 experiment, Festinger and Carlsmith (1957)
- ❑ assigned experiment participants a boring, repetitive task sorting spools into lots of twelve and giving square pegs a quarter turn to the right for one hour.
- ❑ The researcher explained that they needed another person to continue doing this task and asked the participants to recruit a woman in the waiting room by telling her how enjoyable the task was. Some of the men were offered \$1 to recruit her and others were offered \$20 for the same behavior.
- ❑ Those who received \$20 said that they really thought the task was boring while those who received only \$1 stated that they really believed the task was enjoyable.

Avoidance of information that increases dissonance.

- ❑ Selective exposure
- ❑ Selective attention
- ❑ Selective interpretation
- ❑ Selective retention

Seeking more positive information

- buyer's remorse associated with automobile purchases, Donnelly and Ivancevich (1970)

Counterattitudinal Advocacy

- (Simmons, Webb, & Brandon, 2004) having students who were smokers in the creation of educational videos about the risks of smoking resulted in an increased intention of quitting smoking among those students.

Cognitive Dissonance and Persuasion

1. Bring attention to inconsistency in beliefs
2. Make the inconsistency important
3. Emphasize choice and responsibility
4. Show that dissonance can hurt self-esteem or increases guilt
5. Show how dissonance can be reduced
6. Show why other ways to reduce dissonance (like avoidance) will not work
7. Emphasize the amount of hard work or lack of external reward