

# Cognitive dissonance in psychology

Psychology



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## Cognitive Dissonance In Psychology

Upon reviewing the theory of cognitive dissonance, and the clinical work which has been completed in order to shore up the weakness of Festinger's original theories, I find that Aronson's work holds a stronger application to the theory. While individuals often want to believe that they are logical and rational beings, mankind's history is filled with examples of the opposite. Some of the greatest tragedies mankind has inflicted on themselves is the result of one man's irrational beliefs foisted on another. The attempt by Nazi Germany to conquer the world is a fitting example. This tiny, landlocked nation had limited resources, limited man power, and faced warfare on every border in order for them to achieve their goal. If a logical, rational, and non-passionate evaluation of the Nazi's goals had been undertaken, WWII would never have started.

In the same way, some of mankind's greatest triumphs have been the result of one man's, or a small group of men's desires followed through with passion and effort which is also illogical, or irrational. Columbus' desire to find a route to the Far East by sailing west flew in the face of all known, rational belief systems regarding the world at that time. In the same way, the Wright brothers' relentless pursuit of flight was a dream that they uniquely held, in the face of others beliefs and other inventor's failures. In the same way, Aronson concluded that mankind's belief systems and any resulting cognitive dissonance was not the result of logical inconsistency. He believed, and I believe mankind's overall historical pattern supports that mankind is not necessarily a logical being. Therefore any theory built on the foundation that men are a rational logical being is a theory built on a fallacious assumption. Aronson took this foundational understanding of cognitive

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dissonance and redirected it as a measure of mankind's psychological inconsistency rather than rational or logical inconsistencies. This approach is demonstrated to more accurately represent the experiments created in the lab, and to be supported by real life experiences.

Psychological inconsistency can be understood to include the subset of logical or rational inconsistency. Psychological inconsistency reaches beyond the limits of rational thought to include a person's belief system and to include the amount of emotional and psychological energy a person has invested in a particular belief system. Aronson used the example comparing the cognitive dissonance which would be created by two men in the armed services who were motivated (or forced) to break the rules they had come to accept during basic training. Since it is true that the military training of regular army recruits is not as demanding, nor as culturally transforming as that of a marine recruit, Aronson hypothesized that the amount of cognitive dissonance an army soldier would feel when going against his training would be less than the dissonance felt by the marine in a similar event. This dissonance can be measured by the amount of outside force that would be required to force an action which violated these men's respective training, and learned belief system.

If logical, rational decisions were at the core of the cognitive dissonance experience, then the marine and the army soldiers would experience similar levels of dissonance, and they would require similar levels of motivation in order to create the dissonant activity. However, Aronson's hypothesis is correct, and the marines as a group are less likely to engage actions which result in cognitive dissonance – they are having 'stronger wills,' or are 'more resolute' in common terms. In the language of this research, they are

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less likely to engage in activity which would result in cognitive dissonance because of the high amounts of emotional and psychological energies they have invested in their belief systems, which are fused into the marine's identity.

In conclusion, individuals will often select behaviors regardless of positive or negative outcomes, if they are so motivated, and selfish, self seeking motivations are often at the core of what motivates individuals to disregard the consequences of their actions. Self affirmation is also a fuzzy indicator, which must have other elements as a foundation; otherwise self affirmation is not universally sought by individuals. I believe that Aronson's approach to measure dissonance as a function of psychological inconsistency is a more accurate measure of the phenomenon.