



## Self-Justification

Justifying your own actions, beliefs and feelings

---

---

---

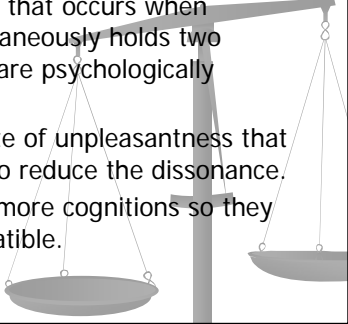
---

---

---

---

---



## Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance

- State of tension that occurs when someone simultaneously holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent.
- Results in a state of unpleasantness that motivates one to reduce the dissonance.
- Change one or more cognitions so they are more compatible.

---

---

---

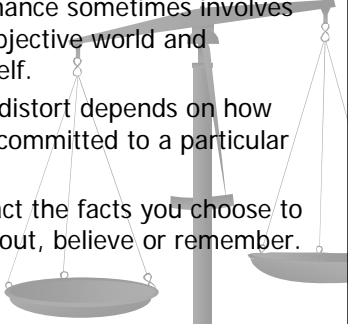
---

---

---

---

---



## Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance

- Reducing dissonance sometimes involves distorting the objective world and deceiving yourself.
- How much you distort depends on how deeply you are committed to a particular belief or action.
- It can also impact the facts you choose to attend to, seek out, believe or remember.

---

---

---

---

---

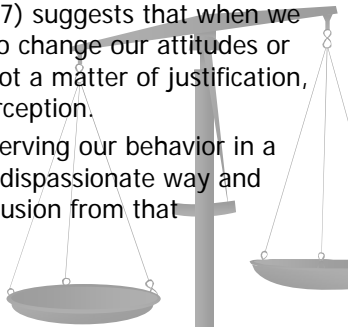
---

---

---

### Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance

- Daryl Bem (1967) suggests that when we are motivated to change our attitudes or behavior, it is not a matter of justification, but just self-perception.
- Are we just observing our behavior in a more calm and dispassionate way and drawing a conclusion from that observation?



---

---

---

---

---

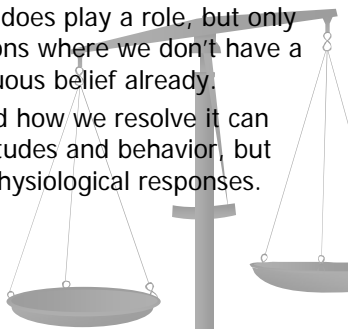
---

---

---

### Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance

- Self-perception does play a role, but only in those situations where we don't have a clear, unambiguous belief already.
- Dissonance, and how we resolve it can change our attitudes and behavior, but also even our physiological responses.



---

---

---

---

---

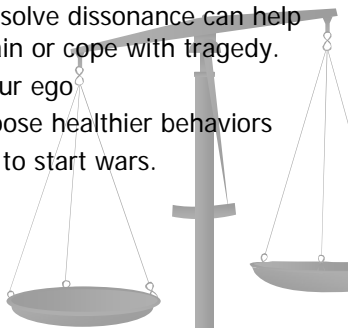
---

---

---

### Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance

- Our ability to resolve dissonance can help us overcome pain or cope with tragedy.
- It can protect our ego
- Cause us to choose healthier behaviors
- Or can be used to start wars.



---

---

---

---

---

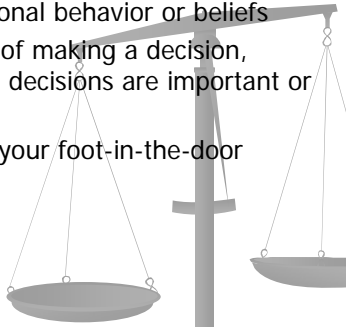
---

---

---

### What Invokes Cognitive Dissonance?

- Otherwise irrational behavior or beliefs
- A consequence of making a decision, especially when decisions are important or irrevocable
- Already having your foot-in-the-door



---

---

---

---

---

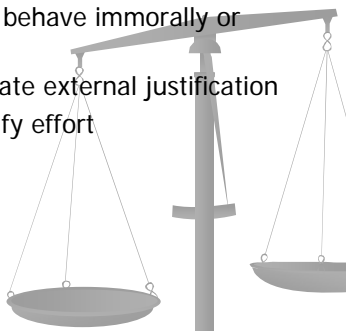
---

---

---

### What Invokes Cognitive Dissonance?

- The decision to behave immorally or cruelly
- Having inadequate external justification
- Needing to justify effort
- Inevitability



---

---

---

---

---

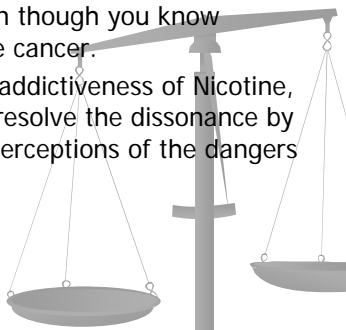
---

---

---

### Examples: Justifying Irrational Behavior or Beliefs

- You smoke even though you know cigarettes cause cancer.
- Because of the addictiveness of Nicotine, many smokers resolve the dissonance by lowering their perceptions of the dangers of smoking.



---

---

---

---

---

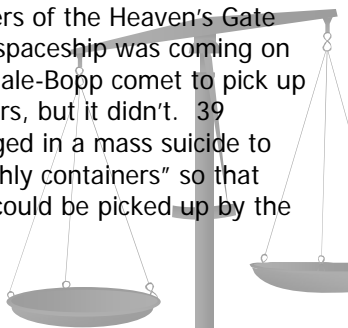
---

---

---

### Examples: Justifying Irrational Behavior or Beliefs

- In 1997 members of the Heaven's Gate cult believed a spaceship was coming on the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet to pick up the true believers, but it didn't. 39 members engaged in a mass suicide to "shed their earthly containers" so that their essences could be picked up by the spaceship.



---

---

---

---

---

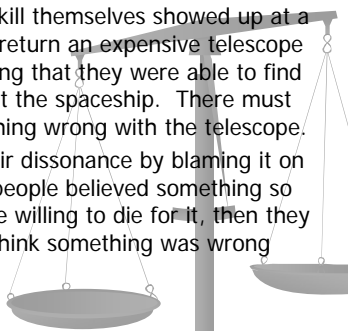
---

---

---

### Examples: Justifying Irrational Behavior or Beliefs

- Those that didn't kill themselves showed up at a specialty store to return an expensive telescope they bought, stating that they were able to find the comet, but not the spaceship. There must have been something wrong with the telescope.
- They resolved their dissonance by blaming it on the telescope. If people believed something so strongly they were willing to die for it, then they would not easily think something was wrong with the beliefs.



---

---

---

---

---

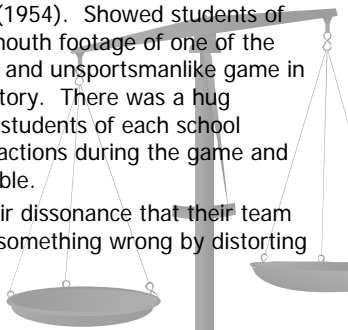
---

---

---

### Examples: Justifying Irrational Behavior or Beliefs

- Hastorf & Cantril (1954). Showed students of Princeton & Dartmouth footage of one of the roughest, dirtiest, and unsportsmanlike game in either school's history. There was a huge difference in how students of each school perceived the infractions during the game and who was responsible.
- They resolved their dissonance that their team might have done something wrong by distorting their perception.



---

---

---

---

---

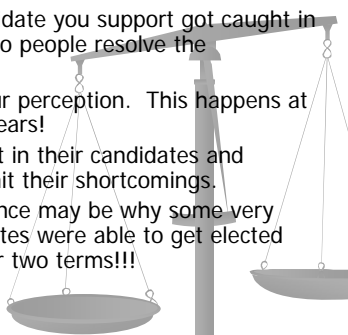
---

---

---

### Examples: Justifying Irrational Behavior or Beliefs

- The political candidate you support got caught in a scandal. How do people resolve the dissonance?
- Again...distort your perception. This happens at least every four years!
- People invest a lot in their candidates and cannot easily admit their shortcomings.
- Cognitive dissonance may be why some very unworthy candidates were able to get elected and hold office for two terms!!!



---

---

---

---

---

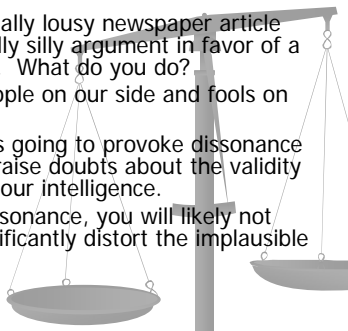
---

---

---

### Cognitive dissonance can impact how we perceive and remember information.

- You just read a really lousy newspaper article that offered a really silly argument in favor of a topic you support. What do you do?
- We want wise people on our side and fools on the other.
- A silly argument is going to provoke dissonance because it might raise doubts about the validity of our position or our intelligence.
- To resolve the dissonance, you will likely not remember or significantly distort the implausible argument.



---

---

---

---

---

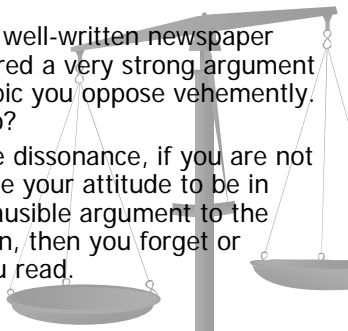
---

---

---

### Cognitive dissonance can impact how we perceive and remember information.

- You just read a well-written newspaper article that offered a very strong argument in favor of a topic you oppose vehemently. What do you do?
- Again to resolve dissonance, if you are not willing to change your attitude to be in line with the plausible argument to the contrary position, then you forget or distort what you read.



---

---

---

---

---

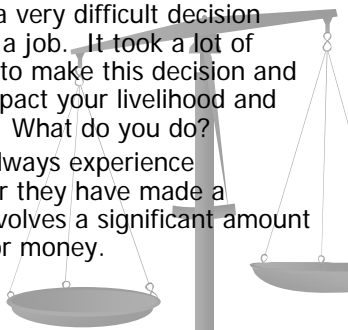
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Consequence of Decision-Making

- You just made a very difficult decision about choosing a job. It took a lot of effort and time to make this decision and it is going to impact your livelihood and where you live. What do you do?
- People nearly always experience dissonance after they have made a decision that involves a significant amount of effort, time or money.



---

---

---

---

---

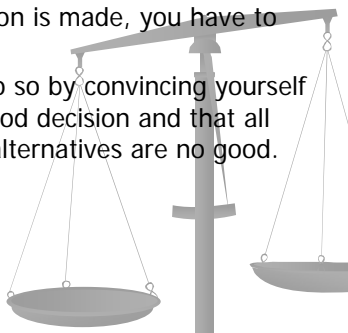
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Consequence of Decision-Making

- Once the decision is made, you have to justify it.
- Typically you do so by convincing yourself that it was a good decision and that all other possible alternatives are no good.



---

---

---

---

---

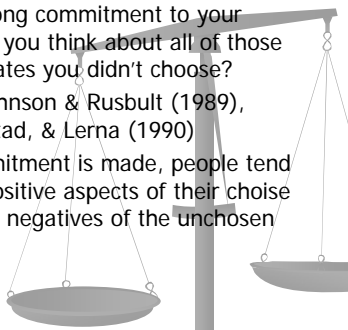
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Consequence of Decision-Making

- You made a life-long commitment to your spouse. What do you think about all of those other potential mates you didn't choose?
- Brehm (1956), Johnson & Rusbult (1989), Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerna (1990)
- Once a firm commitment is made, people tend to focus on the positive aspects of their choice and downplay the negatives of the unchosen alternatives



---

---

---

---

---

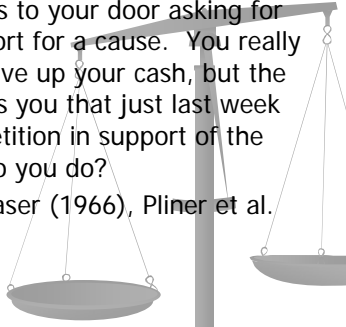
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Foot-in-the-Door

- Someone comes to your door asking for monetary support for a cause. You really don't want to give up your cash, but the solicitor reminds you that just last week you signed a petition in support of the cause. What do you do?
- Freedman & Fraser (1966), Pliner et al. (1974)



---

---

---

---

---

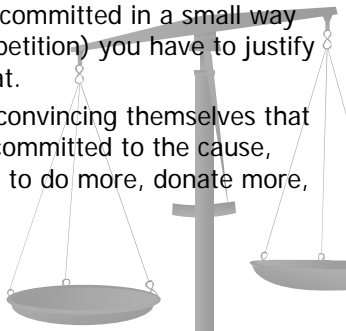
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Foot-in-the-Door

- Once you have committed in a small way (e.g. signing a petition) you have to justify why you did that.
- Many do so by convincing themselves that they are more committed to the cause, and thus willing to do more, donate more, etc.



---

---

---

---

---

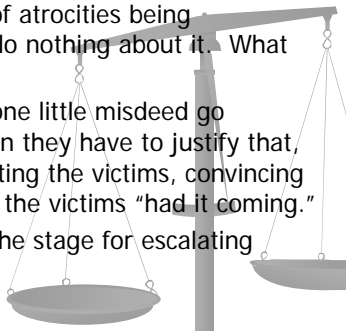
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Foot-in-the-Door

- You are aware of atrocities being committed but do nothing about it. What do you do?
- If someone let one little misdeed go unchecked, again they have to justify that, often by derogating the victims, convincing themselves that the victims "had it coming."
- Often this sets the stage for escalating atrocities.



---

---

---

---

---

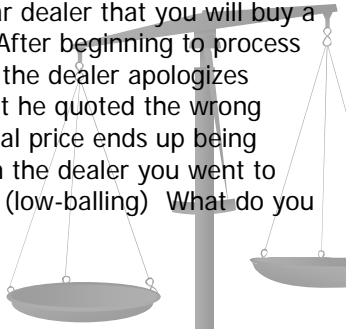
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Irrevocability of a Decision

- You've told a car dealer that you will buy a particular car. After beginning to process the paperwork, the dealer apologizes and informs you that he quoted the wrong price. The actual price ends up being \$100 more than the dealer you went to the day before. (low-balling) What do you do?



---

---

---

---

---

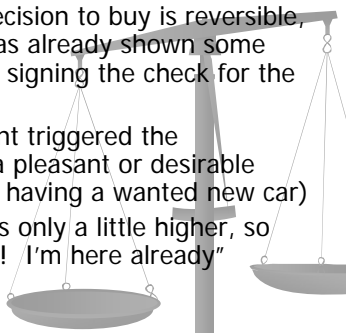
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Irrevocability of a Decision

- Although the decision to buy is reversible, the customer has already shown some commitment by signing the check for the down payment.
- This commitment triggered the anticipation of a pleasant or desirable experience (i.e. having a wanted new car)
- The final price is only a little higher, so "What the heck?! I'm here already"



---

---

---

---

---

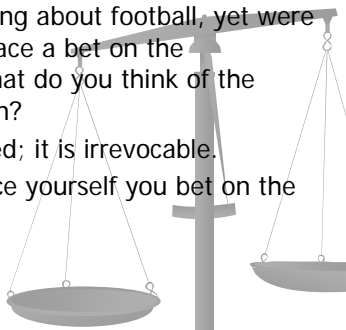
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Irrevocability of a Decision

- You know nothing about football, yet were convinced to place a bet on the Superbowl. What do you think of the team you bet on?
- The bet is placed; it is irrevocable.
- You will convince yourself you bet on the best team ever.



---

---

---

---

---

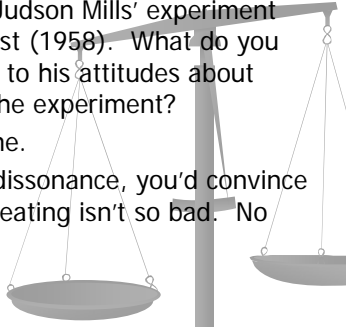
---

---

---

## Irrevocability of a Decision and Justifying Immoral Behavior

- A 6<sup>th</sup> grader in Judson Mills' experiment cheated on a test (1958). What do you think happened to his attitudes about cheating after the experiment?
- The deed is done.
- To resolve the dissonance, you'd convince yourself that cheating isn't so bad. No one got hurt.



---

---

---

---

---

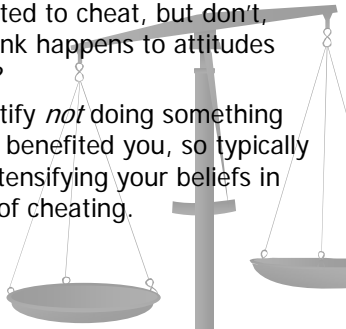
---

---

---

Dissonance as a Result of "Those who *almost* decide to live in glass houses are frequently the first to throw stones."

- If you are tempted to cheat, but don't, what do you think happens to attitudes about cheating?
- You have to justify *not* doing something that could have benefited you, so typically you do so by intensifying your beliefs in the wrongness of cheating.



---

---

---

---

---

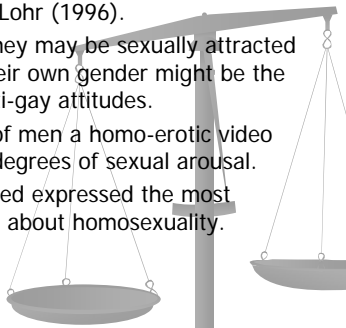
---

---

---

Dissonance as a Result of "Those who *almost* decide to live in glass houses are frequently the first to throw stones."

- Adams, Wright & Lohr (1996).
- Those who fear they may be sexually attracted to members of their own gender might be the most prone to anti-gay attitudes.
- Showed a group of men a homo-erotic video while measuring degrees of sexual arousal.
- Those most aroused expressed the most negative attitudes about homosexuality.



---

---

---

---

---

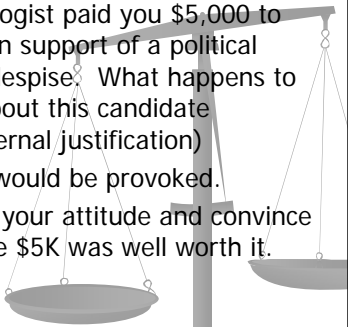
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Inadequate Justification

- A social psychologist paid you \$5,000 to write an essay in support of a political candidate you despise. What happens to your attitude about this candidate afterward? (external justification)
- No dissonance would be provoked.
- You could keep your attitude and convince yourself that the \$5K was well worth it.



---

---

---

---

---

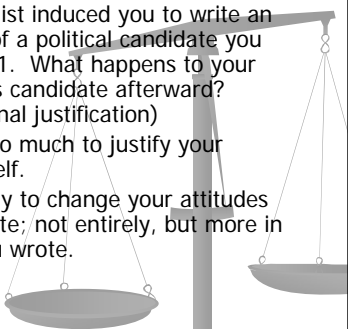
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Inadequate Justification

- A social psychologist induced you to write an essay in support of a political candidate you despise for only \$1. What happens to your attitude about this candidate afterward? (inadequate external justification)
- That buck won't do much to justify your behavior to yourself.
- You would be likely to change your attitudes about the candidate; not entirely, but more in line with what you wrote.



---

---

---

---

---

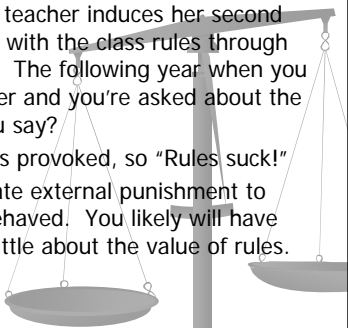
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Inadequate Justification

- A stern and mean teacher induces her second graders to comply with the class rules through strict punishment. The following year when you have a new teacher and you're asked about the rules, what do you say?
- No dissonance was provoked, so "Rules suck!"
- There was adequate external punishment to justify why you behaved. You likely will have internalized very little about the value of rules.



---

---

---

---

---

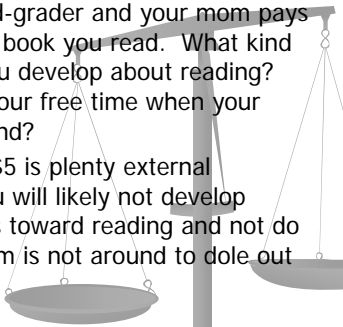
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Inadequate Justification

- You are a second-grader and your mom pays you \$5 for every book you read. What kind of attitude do you develop about reading? Do you read in your free time when your mom is not around?
- Again, for a kid \$5 is plenty external justification. You will likely not develop positive attitudes toward reading and not do it when your mom is not around to dole out the cash.



---

---

---

---

---

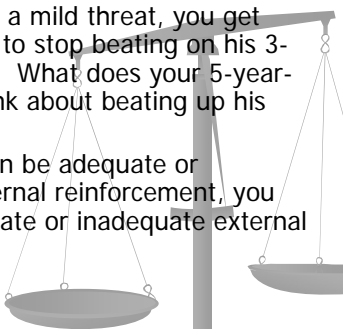
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Inadequate Justification

- With use of just a mild threat, you get your 5-year-old to stop beating on his 3-year-old sibling. What does your 5-year-old come to think about beating up his sibling?
- Just as there can be adequate or inadequate external reinforcement, you can have adequate or inadequate external punishment.



---

---

---

---

---

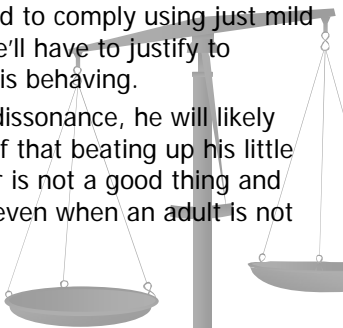
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Inadequate Justification

- If you get a child to comply using just mild aversiveness, he'll have to justify to himself why he is behaving.
- To resolve the dissonance, he will likely convince himself that beating up his little brother or sister is not a good thing and he won't do it, even when an adult is not around.



---

---

---

---

---

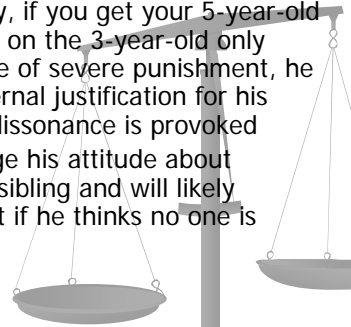
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of Inadequate Justification

- On the contrary, if you get your 5-year-old to stop beating on the 3-year-old only through the use of severe punishment, he has plenty external justification for his behavior. No dissonance is provoked
- He won't change his attitude about beating up his sibling and will likely resume doing it if he thinks no one is watching.



---

---

---

---

---

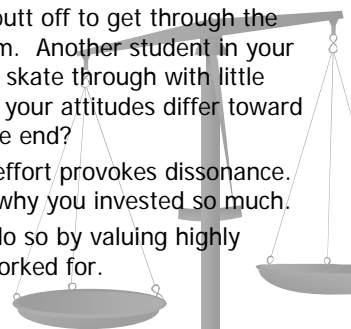
---

---

---

### Dissonance as Justification of Effort

- You work your butt off to get through the Master's program. Another student in your cohort seems to skate through with little effort. How will your attitudes differ toward the degree in the end?
- Hard work and effort provokes dissonance. You must justify why you invested so much.
- Typically you'll do so by valuing highly whatever you worked for.



---

---

---

---

---

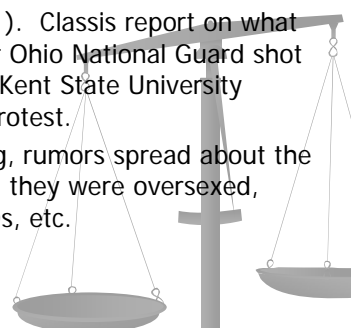
---

---

---

### Dissonance as Justification of Cruelty

- Michener (1971). Classic report on what happened after Ohio National Guard shot and killed four Kent State University students in a protest.
- To justify killing, rumors spread about the slain students: they were oversexed, sinful, had STDs, etc.



---

---

---

---

---

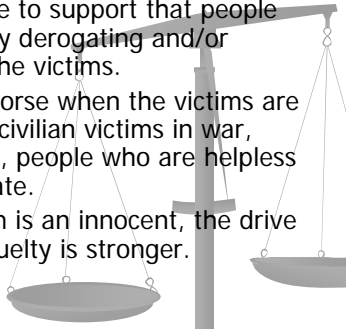
---

---

---

### Dissonance as Justification of Cruelty

- Studies continue to support that people justify cruelty by derogating and/or dehumanizing the victims.
- Derogation is worse when the victims are innocents, e.g. civilian victims in war, minority groups, people who are helpless and can't retaliate.
- When the victim is an innocent, the drive to justify the cruelty is stronger.



---

---

---

---

---

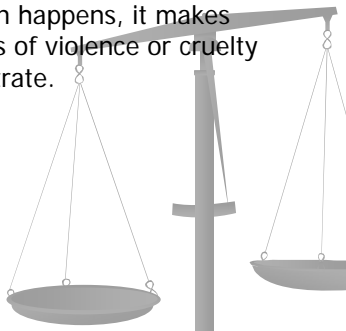
---

---

---

### Dissonance as Justification of Cruelty

- Once derogation happens, it makes subsequent acts of violence or cruelty easier to perpetrate.



---

---

---

---

---

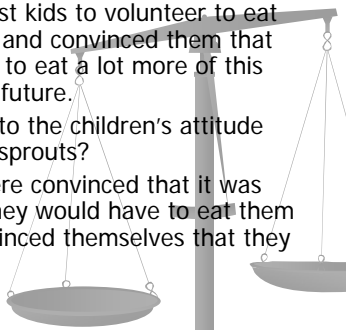
---

---

---

### Dissonance as a Result of the Psychology of Inevitability

- Brehm (1959) just kids to volunteer to eat Brussels sprouts and convinced them that they would have to eat a lot more of this vegetable in the future.
- What happened to the children's attitude toward Brussels sprouts?
- Because they were convinced that it was inevitable that they would have to eat them again, they convinced themselves that they weren't so bad.



---

---

---

---

---

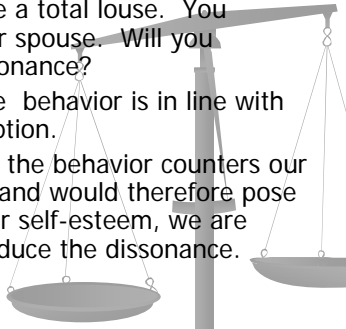
---

---

---

## Dissonance and Self-Esteem

- You think you're a total louse. You cheated on your spouse. Will you experience dissonance?
- No, because the behavior is in line with your self-perception.
- However, when the behavior counters our self-perception and would therefore pose damaging to our self-esteem, we are motivated to reduce the dissonance.



---

---

---

---

---

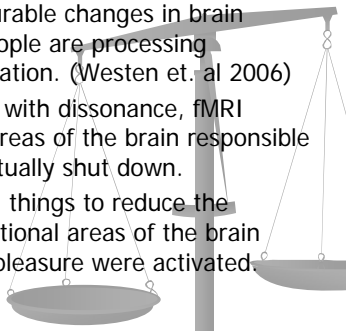
---

---

---

## Applications of Dissonance Theory are Many & Far-reaching

- There are measurable changes in brain activity when people are processing dissonant information. (Westen et. al 2006)
- When presented with dissonance, fMRI shows that the areas of the brain responsible for reasoning virtually shut down.
- When people did things to reduce the dissonance, emotional areas of the brain associated with pleasure were activated.



---

---

---

---

---

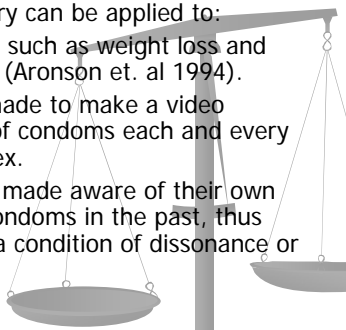
---

---

---

## Applications of Dissonance Theory are Many & Far-reaching

- Dissonance theory can be applied to:
- Health concerns, such as weight loss and AIDS prevention (Aronson et. al 1994).
- Students were made to make a video advocating use of condoms each and every time you have sex.
- Once group was made aware of their own failures to use condoms in the past, thus placing them in a condition of dissonance or hypocrisy.



---

---

---

---

---

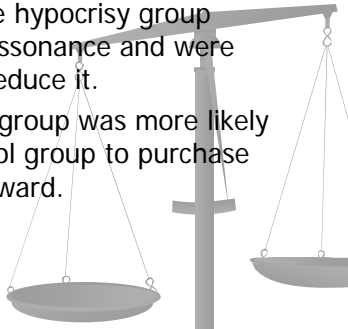
---

---

---

### Applications of Dissonance Theory are Many & Far-reaching

- Students in the hypocrisy group experienced dissonance and were motivated to reduce it.
- The hypocrisy group was more likely than the control group to purchase condoms afterward.



---

---

---

---

---

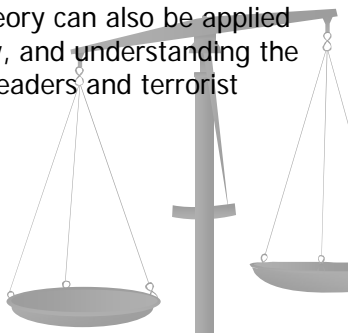
---

---

---

### Applications of Dissonance Theory are Many & Far-reaching

- Dissonance theory can also be applied to public policy, and understanding the power of cult leaders and terrorist groups.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---