

## 6 THEORIES

### THEORY 1: COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

#### **The Notion of Attitude**

- *Attitude*-is the manner, disposition, feeling or position one holds with regard to a person or thing; a tendency or orientation, especially of the mind
- We cannot necessarily directly observe attitudes so we have to ask people how they feel
- Many theories try to explain how attitudes form, change, and relate to other cognitive processes that influence how we think, act and feel

#### **Consistency Theory**

- *Consonance*- when our attitudes line up with our actions (we desire consistency)  
EX: "I like FSU I wear a garnet shirt and watch football"
- When our actions disagree with our values we experience dissonance
- Then we justify it or do something to counteract it
- Consistency theories deal with how our mind processes and categorizes information (stimuli)
- As information is taken in, it is grouped with similar information to form a pattern that helps make it easier to understand & recall the information later
- Sometimes, even though the information we process relates in some way to information stored in our minds, it is **inconsistent** with the pattern (attitude) we have already created
- Because the mind processes information differently depending on the environment and type of stimuli, there are several different types of Consistency Theories

### **PRINCIPLES OF CONSISTENCY THEORY**

- The mind operates as an intermediary between stimulus and response.
- When people receive information (a stimulus), their minds organize it into a pattern with other previously encountered stimuli. If the new stimulus does not fit the pattern or is inconsistent, then people will feel discomfort. As a result, they will then take steps to reduce the discomfort

**Heider's Balance Theory:** looks at cognitive elements of relationships and the attitudes/evaluations that are attached to these relationships.

**Attitudes as a Balancing Act:** CD focuses on the balance between the pieces of information in our heads that come together to form our attitude about something

### **Creator of CD Leon Festinger:**

- Cognitive Dissonance is a feeling of imbalance, where we do or say things that don't fit with our established beliefs, opinions or values, and we become uncomfortable as a result
- In order to lessen the uncomfortable feelings that dissonance produces, we are driven to reduce (or eliminate) dissonance.

### **Dissolving the Dissonance**

- The inner motivation to eliminate dissonance is one of the core principles of Cognitive Dissonance Theory
- The motivation to eliminate CD can result in behavior and attitude change
- We try to rationalize the dissonance in our lives

### **3 Types of Dissonance Relationships**

1. Consonant Relationship: our beliefs and behaviors coincide

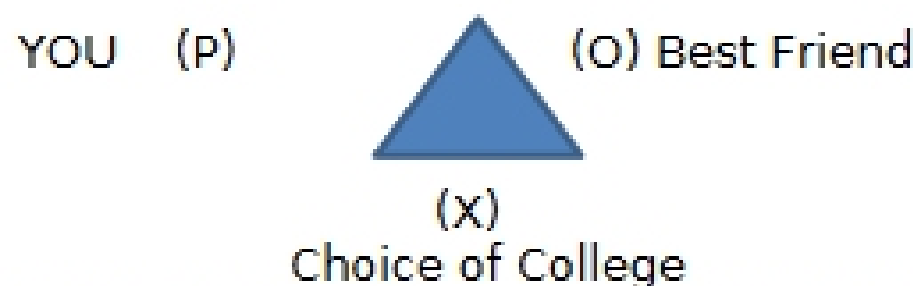
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2. Dissonant Relationship: our beliefs do not fit with our behaviors
3. Irrelevant Relationship: beliefs and behaviors do not relate  
*EX: superstitions*

### 4 Assumptions of CD Theory

1. Humans want consistency between thoughts and beliefs
2. Psychological inconsistencies (when beliefs/behaviors don't fit together) lead to dissonance
3. Dissonance is cognitively uncomfortable
4. We are psychologically driven to reduce dissonance

Consider the triangle below. Imagine that it is a visual representation about the ongoing discussion with your best friend about college



There are attitudes/evaluations attached to this relationship

In general, people prefer a balanced relationship between P, O & X whether it is positive or negative overall

But what happens if there is a piece of information that doesn't fit and could potentially change the way you evaluate a component of that relationship?