This week's assignment is to choose a complex term in our field of study or work, and define it in three different ways (parenthetical, sentence, and expanded) for our writing teams. As people may come from different fields/backgrounds it is imperative that, as a writer, one can communicate the context needed for an in-depth understanding. These definitions can come in different forms depending on the audiences’ expertise in the subject and the writer’s purpose. For this assignment, I chose the word cognitive dissonance, a term commonly used in psychology, which I will define in each of the three forms for an audience who is unfamiliar with the field of psychology.

*Parenthetical*

Jamie, who is an avid animal activist, may experience cognitive dissonance (psychological stress) when eating burgers on a night out with friends.

*Sentence*

Cognitive dissonance is a state that is caused by an inconsistency between a person's beliefs, attitudes, and actions. This state is characterized by a state of psychological stress that lasts until beliefs, attitudes, and actions align.

*Expanded*

Cognitive dissonance

**What is Cognitive Dissonance?**

Cognitive dissonance is a state that is caused by an inconsistency between a person's beliefs, attitudes, and actions. This means that a person may hold two or more contradictory beliefs or may carry out an action that goes against a belief. When this occurs a state of psychological stress ensues and persists until either one belief is chosen or the person's actions and beliefs start to meet.

**History**

The state of cognitive dissonance was put forward in the theory of cognitive dissonance proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957 (Metin, 131). Festinger’s theory had a substantial impact in the field and replaced the theory of reinforcement as the main focus of social psychology (Metin, 131). The reinforcement theory focused on the social and behavioral aspects of anxiety and how it can be resolved by conforming to the group (Metin, 131). The cognitive dissonance theory instead puts the focus on the cognition (thinking) of a person and how anxiety may arise within oneself and can help explain behavior (Metin, 131).

**Required conditions and Reduction Strategies**

Cognitive dissonance theory relies on the notion that humans want to be consistent in their beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Any inconsistencies, or dissonance, that occurs between any of these elements results in a state of psychological distress. Therefore to experience any distress there must exist an inconsistency. There are two main forms of cognitive dissonance/inconsistencies. The first is when there are two or more opposing beliefs that one person holds, and the greater the disparity between the beliefs the greater the distress. The second is when one's beliefs don't align with their actions. The differences between actions and beliefs as well as between a belief and another opposite belief is called the “magnitude of dissonance” (Boring, 683). The greater “the magnitude” the greater the impact on one’s well being and psychological stress (Boring, 683). Experiencing distress, people try and seek ways to alleviate themselves by implementing one of the four strategies. (1) A person can either alter their behavior, (2)explain the behavior or thought by changing the conflicting thought, (3) explain the behavior or cognition by creating additional actions or beliefs, (4) or deny that any actions that may have conflicted with the beliefs (Festinger). After implementing any of the four coping strategies, a person will then reassess their state of cognitive dissonance until there is little to no anxiety or stress left.

**Example**

A common example of this occurs when someone considers themselves an ex-smoker but they end up smoking a cigarette. The person finding an inconsistency between their belief, of being an ex-smoker, and their actions, smoking, would begin to experience psychological distress. They would then: 1) decide to never smoke again 2) they think “nobody is perfect. I can get away with it this one time because I rarely mess up” 3) they decide to make up for their mistake by eating healthy foods for the rest of the week 4) they deny that one cigarette will have any lasting impact on them as an ex-smoker and they will be just fine. Taking any one of these four steps will help reduce their cognitive dissonance. Other examples include, but are not limited to: a person committing a racist act when they believe themselves to be unbiased and fair, a person cheating during a relationship when they have fully committed to the other person, and eating junk food during a diet.

**Visual**

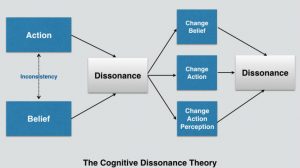
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Figure 1. Shows a two step process in (step 1) how cognitive dissonance originally occurs and (step 2) three ways in which a person can try and reduce/eliminate any dissonance. This shows the second main form of cognitive dissonance where one's actions and beliefs do not align. (Pappas).

Citation

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Festinger, Leon. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Anniversary ed., Stanford University Press, 2020.

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Pappas, Christopher. “3 Tips To Apply The Cognitive Dissonance Theory In ELearning.” *ELearning Industry*, 23 Sept. 2019, elearningindustry.com/apply-cognitive-dissonance-theory-elearning.