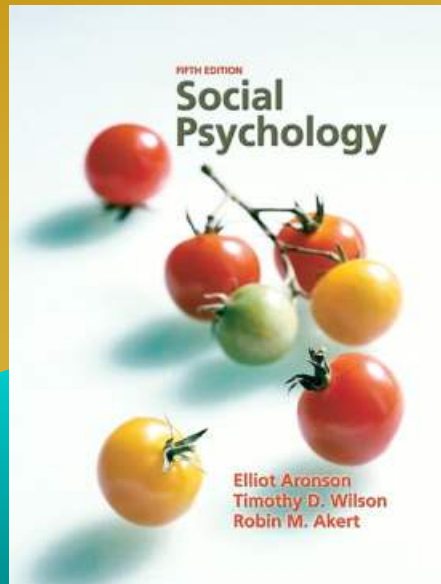


# Chapter 6

## The Need to Justify Our Actions



Aronson Social Psychology, 5/e  
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# **PowerPoint Presentation**

**Prepared By**

**Fred W. Whitford**

**Montana State University**



# Chapter Outline

## I. Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

# **Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image**

**One of the most powerful determinants of human behavior is the need to preserve a stable, positive self-concept.**

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance**

Leon Festinger originated the concept of *cognitive dissonance*, defining it as inconsistency between two thoughts. Cognitive dissonance may arise when a person engages in an act that is discrepant from one's self-concept.

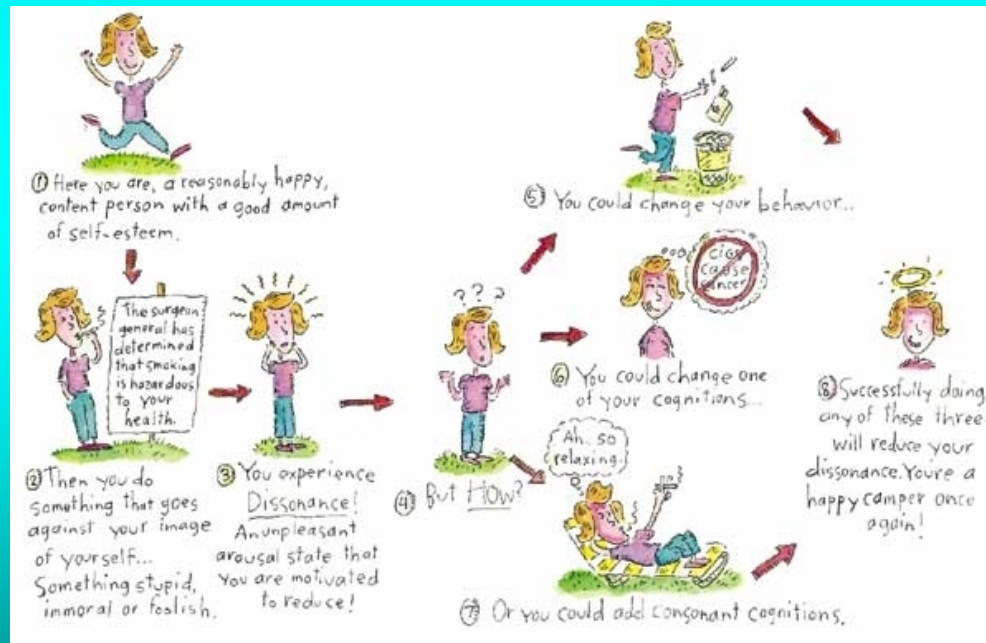
# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance**

***Cognitive dissonance*** is the feeling of discomfort caused by information that is discrepant from your customary, typically positive, self-concept. Experiencing dissonance motivates an attempt to reduce it.

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance



# **Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image**

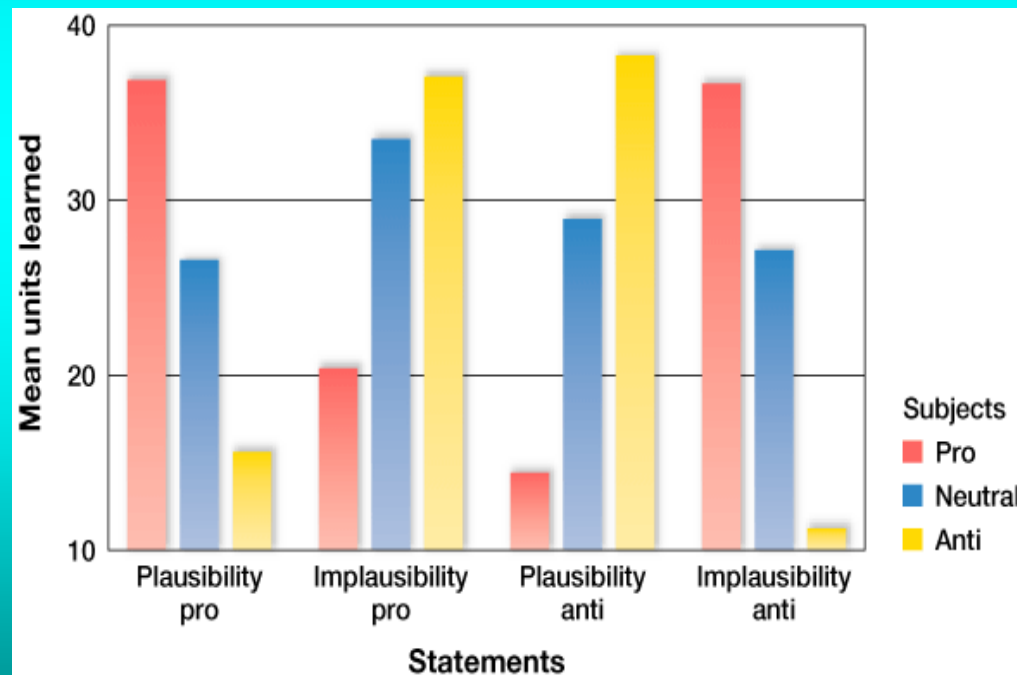
- **Rational Behavior Versus Rationalizing Behavior**

**The need to reduce dissonance and maintain self-esteem produces thinking that is rationalizing rather than rational.**



# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- Decisions, Decisions, Decisions



# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Decisions, Decisions, Decisions**

***Postdecision dissonance*** is aroused after we make any important decision; it is reduced by enhancing the attractiveness of the chosen alternative and devaluating the rejected alternative.

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Decisions, Decisions, Decisions**

**One way to engage in postdecision dissonance reduction is to proselytize, recommending your decision/behavior to others.**

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Decisions, Decisions, Decisions**

The more permanent a decision, the greater the need to reduce dissonance after making it. Feeling that one's decision is irrevocable may lead to falling prey to a sales technique called *lowballing*. Lowballing makes the customer feel compelled to pay a higher price for an item after first agreeing to pay a much lower price.

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Decisions, Decisions, Decisions**

**Dissonance reduction following a difficult moral decision can cause people to behave either more or less ethically in the future, because people's attitudes will polarize in the attempt to justify the ethical choice they made.**

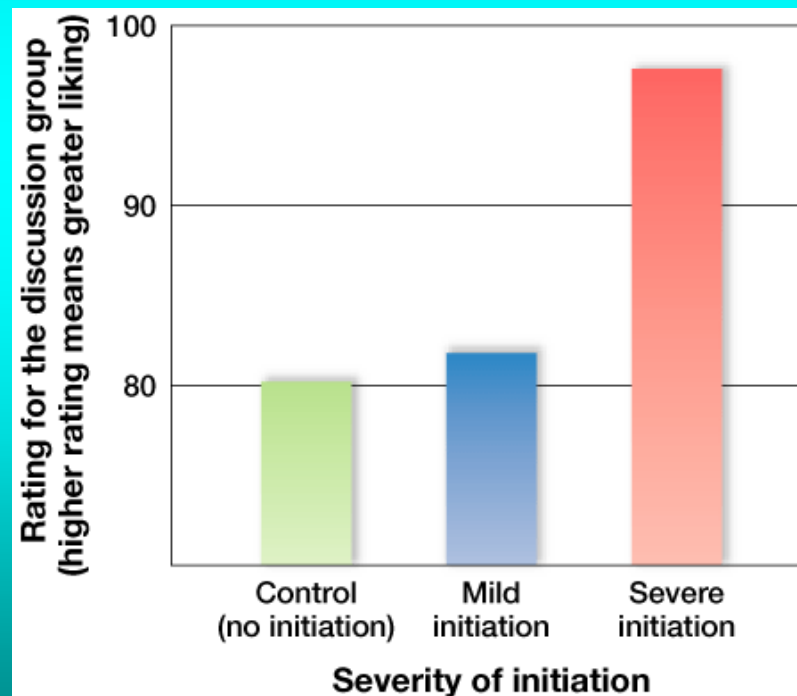
# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Justify Your Effort**

What happens when a person voluntarily works hard and the goal doesn't seem worth it after all? People are unlikely to change their self-concept to believe they were unskilled or foolish; instead they change their attitude towards the goal and see it positively. This is called the *justification of effort*.

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Justify Your Effort**



# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **The Psychology of Insufficient Justification**

When people attempt to reduce their dissonance by changing something about themselves, for example their attitudes, they are using *internal justification*. When people attempt to explain their dissonant behaviors by focusing on reasons that reside outside of themselves, for example being paid a large sum of money, they are using *external justification*.



# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **The Psychology of Insufficient Justification**

***Counterattitudinal advocacy*** is the process by which people are induced to state publicly an attitude that runs counter to their own attitude. If there is no external justification for counterattitudinal advocacy, a person's attitude may change in accordance with the view that was expressed publicly.

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Counterattitudinal Advocacy, Race Relations, and Preventing AIDS**

Harsh punishments teach us to try to avoid getting caught, and thus require constant vigilance to be effective. In contrast, *insufficient punishment* induces dissonance about why one is not engaging in the behavior, and inspires dissonance reduction by devaluing the forbidden activity or object.

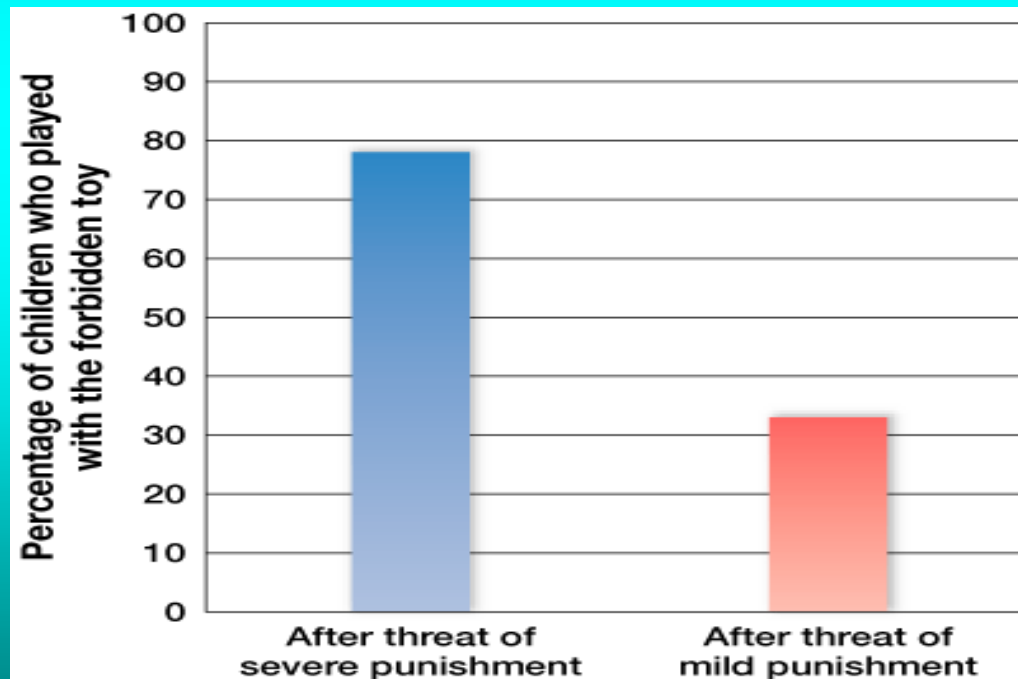
# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Counterattitudinal Advocacy, Race Relations, and Preventing AIDS**

When attitude change occurs due to insufficient reward or punishment, it becomes very enduring. Both insufficient punishment and insufficient justification lead to *self-persuasion*, a long-term form of attitude change that results from attempts at self-justification.

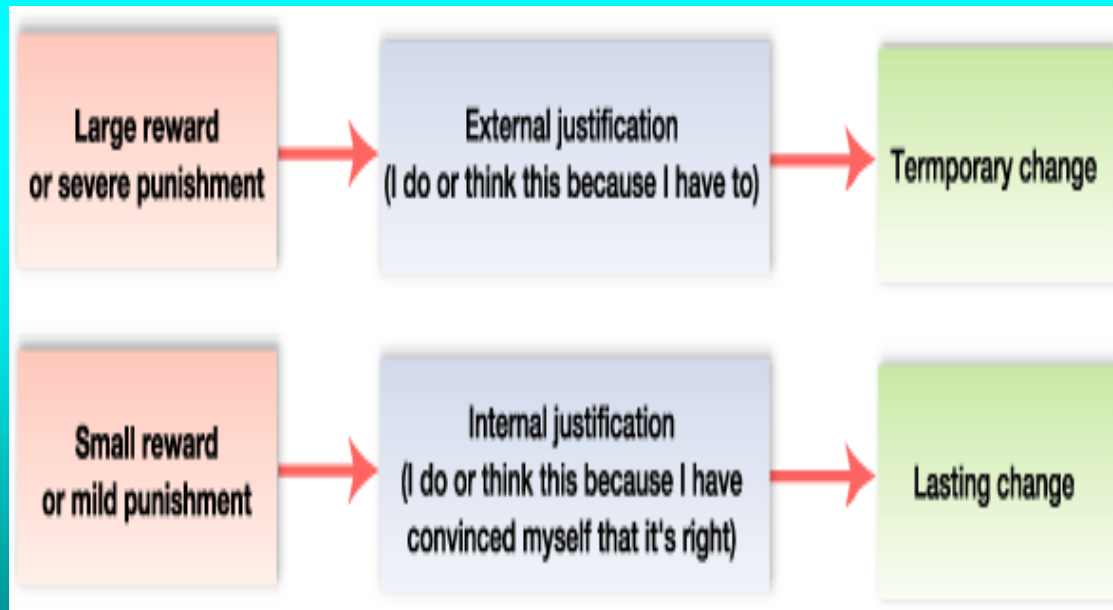
# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- Counterattitudinal Advocacy, Race Relations, and Preventing AIDS



# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Counterattitudinal Advocacy, Race Relations, and Preventing AIDS**



# **Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image**

- **Counterattitudinal Advocacy, Race Relations, and Preventing AIDS**

**Insufficient external justification is justification that is sufficient to produce the behavior, but insufficient for people to believe that they were “forced” through external justifications to do it.**

# **Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image**

- **Good and Bad Deeds**

**Dissonance theory and folk wisdom suggest that we like people not for the favors they have done us but for the favors we have done for them.**

# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Good and Bad Deeds**

**If we harm someone, this induces dissonance between our actions and our self-concepts as decent people; to resolve this dissonance, we may derogate or dehumanize our victims.**



# Maintaining a Stable, Positive Self-Image

- **Good and Bad Deeds**

**We are more likely to derogate people we have harmed if they are innocent victims. Derogating victims by dehumanizing them may lead to a continuation or escalation of violence against them.**

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