



Cognitive Dissonance: Catalyst for Discriminatory Development among American Teens

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if a correlation exists between cognitive dissonance in high school, caused by conflicting experiences with others, and the development of discriminatory behavior and mindsets. Prior research shows that cognitive dissonance has been steadily increasing as America has become more diverse. Cognitive dissonance is a state of imbalance within one's mind that is created when another's notions, practices, beliefs, or more conflict with those of your own. The subconscious attempt to reduce this dissonance is the primary factor that is speculated to cause social discrimination. Data was collected through a survey in Google Forms. Multiple-choice questions were used for quantitative analysis and optional free-response questions were used for qualitative analysis. The population sample consisted of 40 high school students of various ethnicities. Over 50% of the participants showed high rates of dissonance and conflicting experiences, and a large majority recorded negative outward mental effects towards others. Therefore, the study concludes that dissonance plays a large role in fostering discriminatory development in teenagers. However, the smaller population sample may have skewed results in this direction. Future research should attempt to replicate this study and improve upon it by studying less diverse high schools in both rural and urban centers.

KEYWORDS: Cognitive dissonance, discrimination, subconscious, diversity, Students

INTRODUCTION

Cognitive dissonance theory is complicated, yet promising. Subsequently, it has fallen under the scopes of countless researchers for quite some time. Leon Festinger (1962), a renowned psychologist of the 20th century, coined the "Theory of Cognitive Dissonance" in 1957. This theory states that when a human is presented with external stimuli such as ideas, behaviors, ideals, etc. that conflict with their own, a state of mental imbalance develops resulting from a mental split between the two factors. The human brain attempts to reduce this dissonance in many ways, either via accepting new factors, dismissing them, or more. Although many people believe cognitive dissonance is merely a figment of the imagination and does not hold any substance, its existence has been proven through extensive studies, both social and biological. Furthermore, cornerstone work on the subject gives evidence that a person's attempts to reduce cognitive dissonance can alter their outlook and behavior. According to Kimberly A. Mahaffy (1996), the attempt to reduce dissonance may cause people to adjust their ideas and thought processes to match their lifestyle, therefore altering the way they think and interact with others. Within a survey conducted on 163 lesbian Christians in America, it

was found that many women completely left the church or altered/eliminated their religious ideologies to compensate for their sexuality. This demonstrates how dissonance can force individuals to change thought processes and alter their environments to rid themselves of mental imbalance. Furthermore, the actions of these women in this study show that the attempt to reduce dissonance can end in one of three ways: acceptance, dismissal, adaptation. Accepting would occur when one accepts the new ideal over their own, whilst dismissing is the opposite. Adapting is somewhere in between, in which a person accepts some of both outlooks. According to Keise Izuma, Madoka Matsumoto, and other researchers from the Brain Science Institution (2010), cognitive dissonance is caused by choosing between two favorable alternatives, and "after making a difficult choice between two equally preferred items, the act of rejecting a favorite item induces an uncomfortable feeling (cognitive dissonance), which in turn motivates individuals to change their preferences to match their prior decision" (p. 1). This assertion was made via studies of human neuroscience, and the findings show a trend in preferences to previously accompanied factors. This not only shows that actions can create a preference but also works on large scales to illustrate how humans are likely to accept the information or



ideal that they are most familiar with. When relating this to the lesbian-Christian study, there seems to be an extremely prevalent skew towards the dismissal dissonance reduction attempt. This is because their choice to accept their sexuality resulted in the dismissal of values expressed by the church.

Within the past century, diversity in America has increased at immense rates. The “American Dream” of economic opportunities, religious and political freedom, and more have brought in an influx of immigrants from various cultures around the world. As these cultures interact with others on the United States stage, culture shock and cultural diversion occur. Groups form within American communities, yet even within these groups, there are various subdivisions of political, economic, cultural, and religious opinions. While this idealistic diversity grows, so too has discrimination. Discrimination and intergroup-hostility are unjust treatments of different people or things, especially based on differences in race, age, opinion, or sex. Within a scholarly article published by the College of Health and Human Development (2019), it is asserted that the stress experienced by teens during prejudice-based attacks can cause detrimental health effects in later life such as heart disease and cancer mortality. Furthermore, they refute the common claim that discrimination endured by adults is more important than children since the discrimination experienced by teenagers can cause long-term alterations to the way they interact and behave with others. This article provides evidence that research into discrimination development and reduction should be centered around teens. This is the basis for the study within this paper.

Countless sources and studies have researched cognitive dissonance and its relationship to cultural fusion, and countless other studies have researched discrimination and its effects. Even with this plethora of research, no study has attempted to find a link between the two. The identification of a causal relationship between dissonance reduction and the development of discrimination in teens could open future paths to discrimination reduction that target its quintessential cause. This cause would be an intricate and extreme outcome of the dismissal attempt to reduce dissonance. This type of reduction is most common, and could potentially cause discrimination if it leads to a total assailment of the other side.

The hypothesis on which this study is based is as follows: Cultural fusion in the United States during the 20th and 21st centuries has led to an increase of cognitive dissonance and dissonance reduction, which leads to a significant increase of discrimination and potentially harmful prejudice as attempts to reduce dissonance by antagonizing and dismissing the opposing side. The purpose of this study was to determine if a correlation exists between cognitive dissonance in high school, caused by conflicting experiences with others, and the development of discriminatory behavior and mindsets. This study attempts to identify a correlation and a potential

cause between dissonance (resulting from conflicting experiences) and the development of discriminatory behaviors and attitudes within high school students in the United States. The purpose of this study is to either accept or reject cognitive dissonance as a cause of discrimination, so that future research may find ways to manipulate this dissonance to prevent these developments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

All sources provided throughout the paper have been peer-reviewed and analyzed in depth. Source engines include Jstor, Google Scholar, and Gale. Keywords were *cognitive dissonance, diversity, teenagers, intergroup hostility, and discriminatory development*.

Annually, thousands of people from different countries and alien cultures travel to the United States for political, economic, and social refuge. This has created a ‘melting pot culture,’ meaning a place where different ethnicities, cultures, ideas, and views are mixed. This diversity has fostered cultural and political discrimination/prejudice, causing many to seek socioeconomic factors that may interconnect these two conditions. In 1957, Leon Festinger (1962), an acclaimed American Social Psychologist, coined the theory of cognitive dissonance - a mental state where thoughts and beliefs oppose actions, or vice-versa, causing imbalance and potential backlash via reduction attempts. These attempts to reduce cognitive dissonance can take many forms, such as justification of actions, antagonization of the opposing side, repression, and more. This “cognitive dissonance” may provide the potential to connect between diversity and discrimination, and if a correlation can be made between dissonance and discrimination, people may begin to work for a solution.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND POLITICAL BEHAVIORS

Cognitive dissonance has indicated profound effects on political discourse and attitudes in America. Before these effects are expanded upon, a crucial point must be understood. Although many believe that dissonance is a product of our competitive and highly functional society, this is untrue. In an experiment conducted by Yale psychological researchers, chimps and children were both given two uniformly preferred alternatives, in which they found that both chimps and the children gave more significance to a particular option after they chose it in an original ultimatum (Louisa C. Egan et al, 2007). The study not only shows that the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance developed long ago in our evolution, but it also highlights political trends influenced by this evolutionary tendency. In a survey conducted at the American Economic Journal, American individuals were given questions to evaluate their political attitudes before and after elections. The data demonstrates that most participants were more polar and extreme to one side or the other (democratic & republican) after casting their particular vote (Mullainathan & Washington, 2009).

This can be further supported by a study conducted by Ryan K. Beasley and Mark R. Joslyn (2001), in which they also evaluated post attitude conditions among civilians over a span of 6 elections. From this data, they concluded that not only were voters more biased post-vote, but losers of the election were more likely to change their views than winners. These findings demonstrate the extent to which dissonance affects the mindset of modern Americans regarding political attitudes. Furthermore, since this tendency is traced back to primate evolution, there may be future treatments and/or techniques to restrict it. Throughout history, political opposition has fostered hatred and prejudice to the point of normalcy. In such a politically divisive time, it is imperative to understand the underlying factors that might build hostile attitudes built on extreme bias and self-esteem, which are two major motivators in cognitive dissonance.

Dissonance and The History of Diversity

The past century has seen a significant increase in American diversity. While American demographics become increasingly diverse and interconnected, discrimination persists. The melting pot culture of American society is a relatively new term, and its causes are extremely valuable when determining the effect of dissonance. According to Jennifer Van Hook and Barrett Lee (2017), the vast increase in American diversity first came from a wave of immigrants after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which was designed to base immigration off of reuniting families and skilled labor. They also determine that diversity is self-sustaining since the increase of birth rates in contrast to death rates is solidifying and growing the immigrant American population. There has been a consistent trend throughout American and world history that depicts diversity and syncretism causing conflict, and the perennial diversity in America shown in this article highlights the importance of knowing what evolves diversity into discrimination.

Dissonance and Cultural Influences

Understanding the bridge between diversity and discrimination/conflict requires the knowledge of a term called "Culture Shock", which is defined as the pain or distress incited in a person that is caused when introduced to people that present ideals which are contradictory to the person's cultural beliefs. Nickel and Collins (1975), writers at the Educational Psychology department at Wichita University, describe how this plays a role in cognitive dissonance. They state that this culture shock occurs when people from different countries and cultures come to America and experience a relatively abstract world. They assert that this fosters dissonance since the state of imbalance in one's mind becomes so substantial that it can influence their decisions and attitudes towards others. The implications of dissonance resulting from culture shock are: disregarding opposing information and possibly antagonizing the opposition to reduce the imbalance (antagonization is the primary response

on which this study tests). Though there are several benefits of cultural syncretism and culture shock, such as increased exposure to better education and a more holistic worldview, it often results in the hostile actions stated previously. One extreme example of mass violence that potentially stemmed from dissonance and culture shock was the Cambodian genocide in the 1970s. According to Alexander Laban Hinton (1996), an Anthropologist Ph.D. candidate at Emory University, it was dissonance that incited the horror of the Cambodian genocide. The increasing cultural syncretism between the Khmer Rouge and the Cambodians facilitated cultural shock, stimulating a state of clashing cultural beliefs and intergroup hostility. The Khmer Rouge dealt with this state of internal imbalance by creating "Agents of Death" (p. 12), who attempted to completely eradicate the Cambodians. Though this event did not occur in America, the ever-increasing diversity in the American nation runs the risk of fostering these violent and discriminatory trends. While looking at both foreign trends like the Cambodian genocide and the increase of the "melting pot" American society, the question of Dissonance's influence arises. So far, there is an overall lack of research being provided into what drives these hostile developments, especially since it has the observed capacity to cause death and destruction. With respect to the increasing diversity in American societies today, what role does cognitive dissonance have in fostering discriminatory/divergent behavior in a sociocultural sense among modern teenage American citizens?

METHOD

The primary focus of dissonance research is to determine the level of cognitive dissonance that is present in one's mind, and this study will determine the extent to which that dissonance has fostered malintent and discrimination amongst teenagers in high school. Since the information collected is primarily subjective in nature, the survey research method would fit dissonance research best. With a survey, the perspectives of a variety of people, that are key in understanding the impact of dissonance on discrimination and hatred development, are accessible. Other research methods, such as experimentation, natural observation, and more are unfit for the large sample size needed for this study. The goal of the survey is to understand background information regarding ethical, schooling, and locational considerations, and then to measure the amount of dissonance and discrimination one has or has not experienced. It is known that methods to reduce dissonance can take many forms, anything that helps ease the mind with its imbalance can be subconsciously implemented. In this case, the use of prejudice and discrimination as an attempt to shut out and antagonize the opposition is being researched. Throughout a detailed narrative contained within the survey, proper connections between cognitive dissonance, events that cause dissonance, and its mental and behavioral effects can be evaluated and analyzed.

Subjects and Procedure of Survey

In order to achieve a thorough understanding of dissonance and its influences on the public, the survey must break down into a series of questions with a broad range of answers for each. There are three basic and essential stages of an online survey. The first is the planning stage, the second is conducting the survey, and the third is collecting and analyzing the findings (Magee et al., 2001). To complete the second phase, the population, location, questions, and tools of the survey must be defined. In this survey, no tools will be needed other than the online platform it will need to run on. For this, Google Forms will be used. Google Forms is a free platform to create surveys with a broad range of customizable viewers. The location utilized is Katy, Texas, since the town has seen an influx of diversity which is a plausible spot for abundant discrimination and dissonance. The population of the survey is directed to high school students within my schooling district. According to Christia Spears Brown and Rebecca S. Bigler (2005), studies indicate that students have experienced discrimination in the form of “Teasing or exclusion based on race” (p. 2) since the 1980s. Considering this information, it is an adequate assumption that dissonance and discrimination develop and thrive during youthful years. These developments, perhaps, could be the basis for much discrimination and prejudice in America today. Furthermore, the highly diverse nature of schooling provides an abundance of information regarding dissonance and prejudice.

Surveys have the potential to cause dishonesty and a plethora of other confounds. This was avoided by breaking the questions into three parts so that there is no room for interpretation or contradiction. The first phase of the questions asked about ethnicity, location, and existing knowledge on the Dissonance subject. These questions were direct and properly ethical, with the option to skip if needed. The second and third phases of questions were asked synchronously, with many phases two questions being

immediately followed by a phase three question. Within the survey, there are a total of 19 questions, with five of those being qualitative free-response questions that prompt a new idea or clarify the prior question. The second phase asked questions about the magnitude of discrimination the person has experienced, and the mental effects of these experiences in regards to mental and behavioral development. These questions are multiple-choice and required, providing sufficient answer choice categories that are widely applicable. These questions were modeled on a scale of 1 to 5 (Choice 6 is available to some regarding peer behavior), whereas one represents the smallest rate and five represents the most. These questions asked about the rate of incoming conflicts, categories of mental effects resulting from these conflicts, and yes/no questions testing understanding. The third phase questions is an optional free-response regarding in-depth descriptions of answers given in phase two questions. Any personal information, except race, schooling, and gender, is optional. The findings of the survey were cross analyzed and graphed to perceive a relationship.

RESULTS

In this survey, a total of 40 participants provided legitimate feedback regarding the correlation between cognitive dissonance and the development of discriminatory behavior/ thoughts. All participants attend high school, with a large majority residing in the same Texas school district (Name N/A). 12 participants identified as male, while 28 identified as female. All 34 responses to age were either 16 or 17. Of the 40 respondents, 16 identified as Caucasian, 14 as Latino, 6 as African American, and 4 as Asian. Respondents were asked a series of scaled questions following a provided explanation of cognitive dissonance and examples of its causes. Figure 1 depicts the rates, from 1-5, at which participants’ values, ideas, or practices are heavily contrasted with those of others in high school. Figure 2 depicts responses to a 1-6 scaled question regarding the effect of these contradictions on respondents’ mental state.

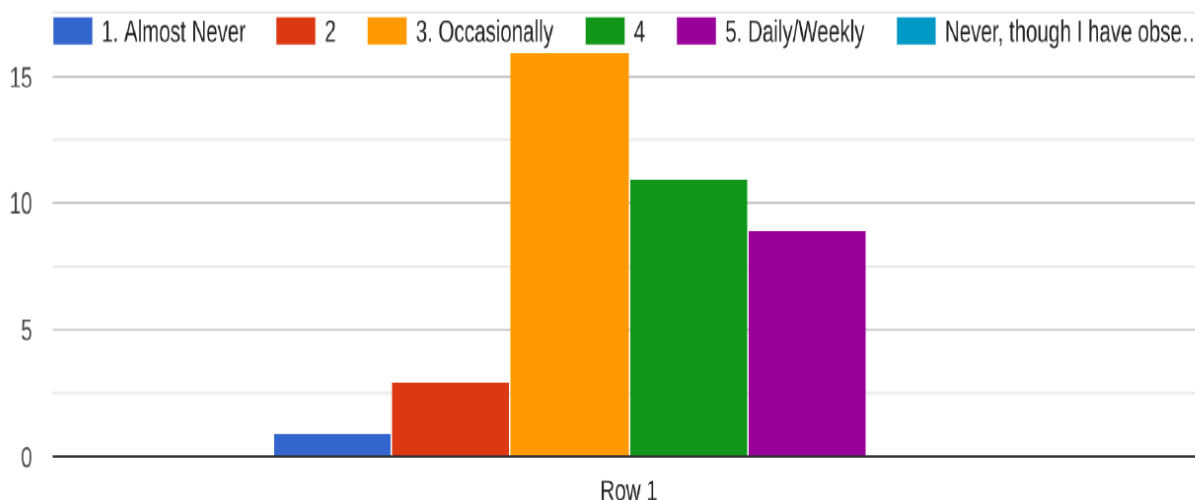


Figure 1. Rate of exposure to conflicting ideas, practices, and values in high school

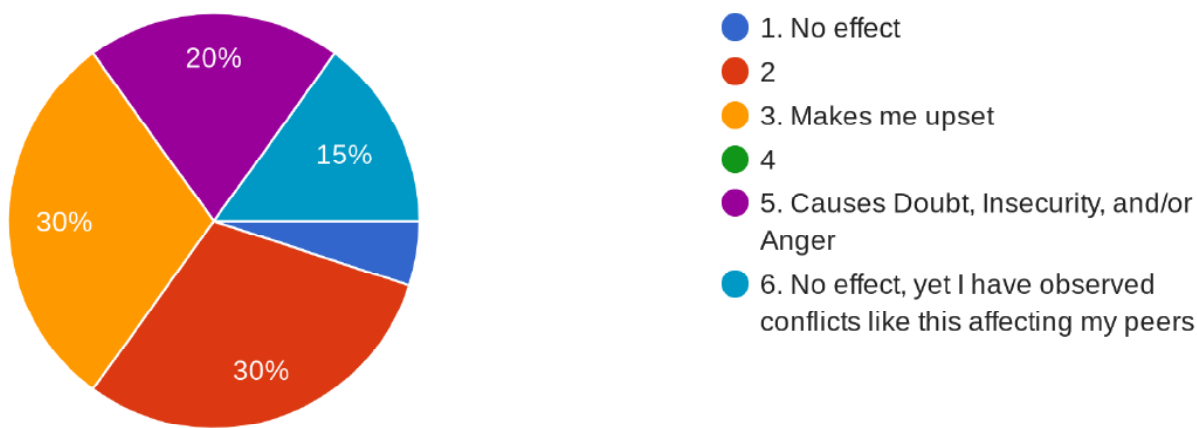


Figure 2. Effect of the idealistic conflicts on one’s mental state

Following an explanation of how attempts by the subconscious to reduce this dissonance can lead to the development of discriminatory behavior/thinking, respondents were asked to give a self-reflection of these effects.

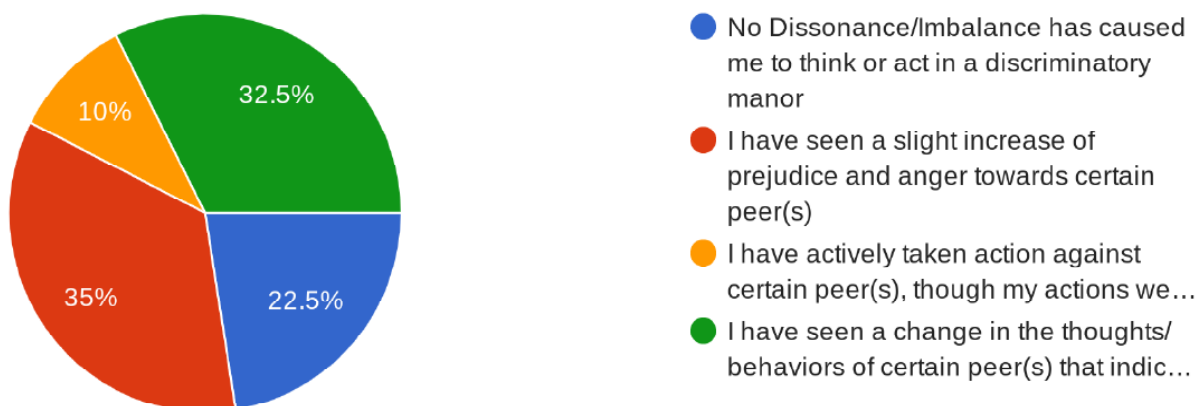


Figure 3. A self-reflection of dissonance based discriminatory development

After this reflection, respondents stated whether or not these behavioral/mental developments resulted from dissonance (Idealistic Confliction). 80% believed it was a direct result, while 20% believed there was a different cause. They then responded to a 1-5 scale, in which one means Never and five means Daily/Weekly, asking how often they or a peer experiences incoming discrimination/prejudice. This is depicted in Figure 4. When asked whether or not this discrimination resulted from dissonance, 22 participants said yes, 16 said maybe, and 2 said no.

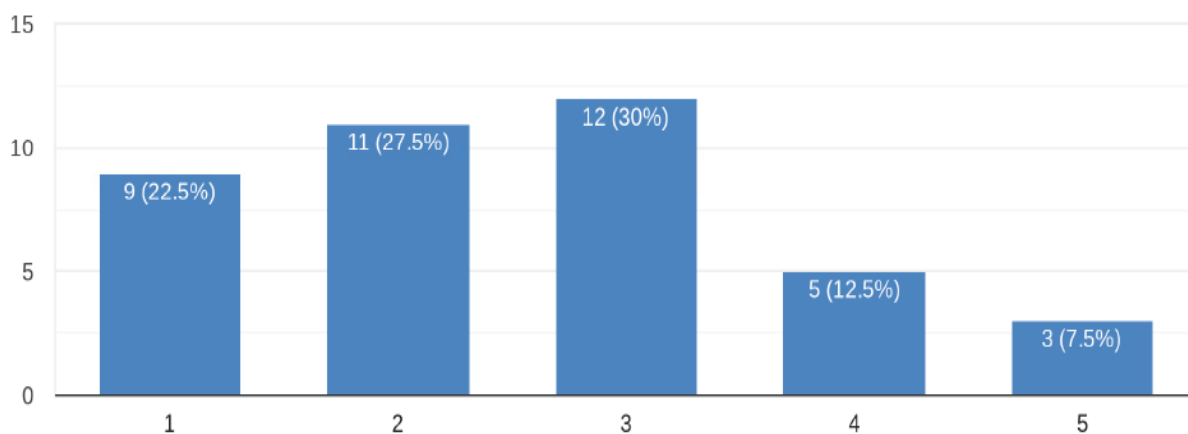


Figure 4. Rate of incoming discrimination/prejudice

Qualitative Responses

Optional free-response questions were provided following the questions/charts above. Two graphs will be provided that summarize and organize the responses to these questions. Figure 5, the first graph, depicts in-depth descriptions of conflicting experiences, which result in cognitive dissonance, that were identified in Figure 1. The second graph includes in-depth descriptions of the mental/behavioral changes or effects, resulting from the dissonance created via Figure 5 causes, that were identified in Figure 3 and Figure 2.

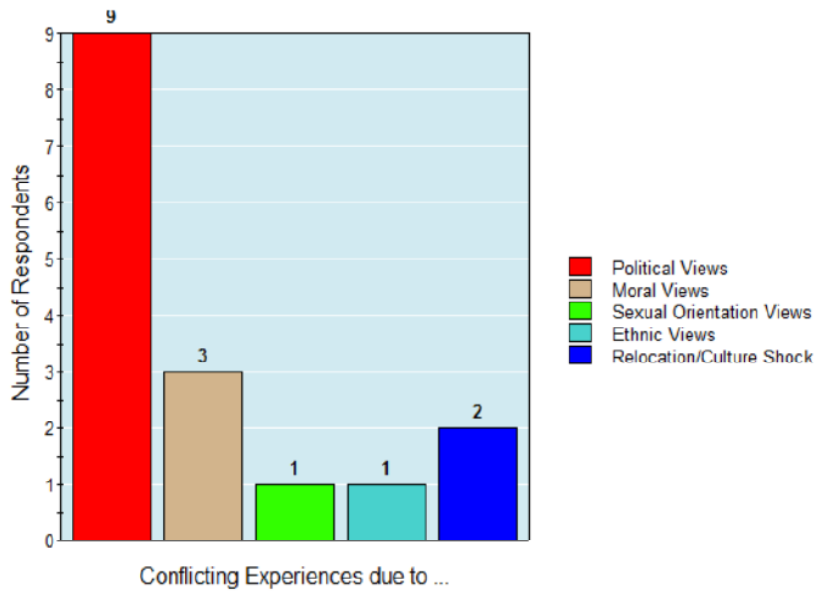


Figure 5. Conflicting Experiences/Causes of Dissonance

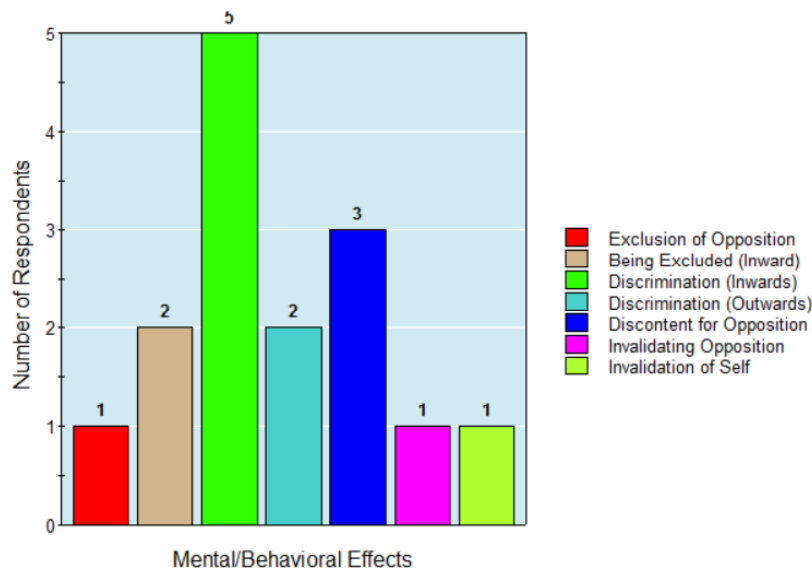


Figure 6. Mental/Behavioral Effects of Dissonance

One in-depth response claimed that her loss of friends, resulting from political disagreements, caused her to become kinder to others. Additionally, one of the responses included in Category 5, Figure 5 (Relocation) claimed that the recent move to a new country caused no additional conflicting experiences beyond the move itself. Furthermore, this respondent asserted that no mental or behavioral effects developed as a result. These two responses heavily contradict the majority, therefore they must be noted.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As depicted in Figure 1, a large majority of participants experience conflicting events between a score of 3 and 5, indicating a rate between occasionally and daily. This skew towards higher rates of exposure (Figure 1) heavily coalign with studies completed by Nickel and Collins (1975), researchers at the Educational Psychology department

at Wichita University. They state that an overall increase in culture shock leads to increases in overall cognitive dissonance. Diversity in America has steadily increased for over a century. According to Jennifer Van Hook and Barrett Lee (2017), diversity in America has become self-sustaining due to the increased birth rate: death rate ratio in the immigrant community, which undoubtedly raises overall culture shock among these groups. This culture shock is a state of disarray caused by exposure to new external factors. This culture shock can, in a sense, be tied directly to cognitive dissonance, since disorientation may lead to negative mental effects. According to Barbara Gallatin Anderson (1971), the “forced accommodation of social elements that are normally part of an alien tradition... terminates not with successful rooting in the new culture but with a final retransplantation back to the mother-culture” (p. 1). This demonstrates how it is human nature to disregard new things and be drawn to

what is familiar, which is the essential nature of this harmful dissonance/imbalance. This can also be seen in Figure 2 since 95% of the participants identified some mental effect of these conflicting experiences being presented in themselves or a peer. 30% stated that these experiences caused them to become upset, while only 20% stated that it caused doubt, insecurity, or anger toward others. Considering the fact that 60% of the participants identified with a minority group along with the trends in Figures 1 and 2, a clear correlation can be drawn between Highschool diversity and growth of cognitive dissonance through small-scale culture shock. Only two out of 14 Hispanic/Latino participants, 1 out of 6 African American participants, and one out of four Asian participants gave a score of less than three (occasionally) for rate of exposure (Figure 1). Although the study defining the nature of dissonance and its relationship to culture shock (conducted by Barbara Gallatin Anderson) is possibly outdated due to its 1971 release, it has been further proven on a smaller scale via evolutionary biology. Studies conducted by Yale researchers (mentioned previously in the Literature Review), in which they found that cognitive dissonance exists within chimps when choosing between two alternatives, one previously chosen and one new, found that dissonance is present in both Human adolescents and chimps when put in similar situations (Egan, L., et al., 2007). This study shows that Dissonance, while influenced by external factors, developed via evolution. The true test is the correlation between this dissonance and the potential emergence of discriminatory behavior, as outlined in the research question. As seen in Figure 3, the Mode response to this dissonance was a slight increase of prejudice and anger towards others, while the second-highest response frequency indicated these same effects in peers. While 22.5% recorded no effect, a shocking 10% reported taking action against the opposition. This is extremely important. Within a study conducted by Alexander Laban Hinton (1996), included in the Literature Review, extremist groups in Cambodia created "Agents of Death" (p. 12) to respond to the increasing syncretism, this response was shown to be a direct result of Dissonance on a large scale. High school could be a prime time frame in which these tendencies arise, yet on much smaller scales. Nevertheless, these violent seeds have a whole lifetime to grow and develop, and this mere 10% could make a much larger difference. Many studies hold the opinion that childhood habits and values are cemented in one's lifelong character. This opinion is easily observable when comparing demographic trends. For example, many of the world's most violent and psychotic people have common characteristics across their varying childhoods (trauma, abandonment, etc.). Through the learning-focused lens of recent psychology, we know that processes such as classical and operant conditioning are responsible for youth behavioral development. While this can result in good adult behaviors, it can just as easily foster discriminatory and violent habits when left unchecked. This small 10% may be an underrepresentation of America's

youth as a whole, but even this small amount could lead to dangerous adult interactions. Only two responses stated that these effects were not a result of dissonance, which aligns with Figure 3 seeing that those who took action stated that they were justified, which is a common mindset geared towards dissonance reduction.

Free Response

When asked about specifics regarding the effects of these conflicting experiences, 5 out of 15 responses recorded experiencing incoming discrimination, while the next three categories of responses, coming in at 3, 2, and 2, were "discontent with opposition", "inward exclusion", and "outward discrimination" (Figure 6). Only 1 out of 15 responses recorded "invalidation of self". This can have some serious implications for the future. If dissonance experienced in High School is inducing a primarily negative outward response, this could lead to negative behavioral patterns of discrimination that grow over time. High school is a prime stage in one's character development, therefore High School Students must learn proper discourse behavior in which they consider the faults and pros of opposing perspectives; This may include a healthy dose of self-doubt and reflection. In the fifth table, which depicts the categories of free response questions pertaining to the cause of the conflicting experience, the Mode response was a political disagreement of some form, while the second most occurring was moral disagreement (Figure 5). This is quite different from the original hypothesis that cultural differences and practices would be the main cause of Dissonance, which was formed based on the chosen district's hefty diversity. This could be caused by a plethora of factors that need further research. For one, it could actually be caused by the district's vast diversity itself, in that it has formed its own culture in which most minorities are already synchronized, thus leaving room for political opinions to take hold and diversify. When analyzing modern issues, this correlation heavily coincides with the hasty political atmosphere that surrounded the 2020 election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. When looking into political trends of the last few decades, a clear polarization of each political party's presidential candidates can be observed. This has undoubtedly had a subsequent effect on the minds of American citizens, which is passed on to the youth. This past year's election is a clear indication of these developments, and should be heavily researched in other studies. Again, this trend can have negative implications for the future, since proper political discourse behaviors and mentality will be a consistent necessity throughout most participants' adult lives.

This survey has not only reinforced the link between culture shock and cognitive dissonance as outlined in previous studies, but it has also provided a potential origin for the development of discriminatory behaviors and outlooks. By demonstrating that there is a correlation between attempts to reduce dissonance and discrimination, combined with

the identification of these events beginning in High School, future researchers may find ways to counteract these effects and create a much more open and healthy future for generations.

Potential Confounds/Skews

There is a potential confound to these responses, however, since a description of the mental effects of cognitive dissonance was given prior to the start of the survey. This description may have led respondents to choose a certain answer, though this likely had a minimal effect due to the variety of options given. Additionally, another skew may have resulted from the relatively acute population. Almost all respondents attend High School within the same School District, which could skew the data toward increased dissonance. This is due to the simple fact that this district is known for its great diversity, and other Urban or Rural districts may not have even half the exposure to conflicting experiences. In fact, according to The Texas Tribune (2019), the student demographics for the 2018-2019 school year across all the district's schools identified the percentage of White students to be a mere 32.9% (p. 2). The only way to address this limitation would be to replicate this study in both urban and rural districts in which a relatively homogeneous population is present. The same questions could be used to maintain consistency, then comparisons could be made between the results. Lastly, it must be noted that some responses had to be excluded due to either inappropriate language and discourse, lack of any information (blank), and duplicates. No responses were deleted that gave any insightful information, no matter the perspective.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the survey's findings identifies a clear relationship between the growth of cognitive dissonance and the development of discrimination amongst American teens. The narrative-based nature of the survey (questions are ordered in the same order of events that theoretically lead from a conflicting experience to discrimination) does bring further evidence of dissonance being a cause of discrimination development, yet to claim an absolute causal relationship would be premature. To truly identify dissonance as a cause of discrimination in teens, an experimental research study must be conducted, yet an experiment in which cognitive dissonance is induced within a participant, along with the intentional exposure to discrimination, is seen as unethical due to guidelines implemented by the American Psychological Association. Although these limitations do provide some difficulties, the identification of a relationship between dissonance and discrimination is significant. The responses to the multiple-choice section of the survey show that the highly diverse nature of the school district has fostered increased amounts of discrimination. Although this diversity is greater there than in most Independent School Districts (ISD), studies on American demographic projections

conducted by Jennifer Van Hook, Barrett Lee, and others show that this increasing trend will continue throughout the entirety of the United States. The responses to the optional free-response questions contradicted the original hypothesis that moral and cultural conflicts would cause the most dissonance. These responses primarily identified the controversial political atmosphere of the 2020 year to be the essential cause. This may have many negative implications for the future adult generation. Although these patterns of poor political discourse may be primarily isolated to students in this ISD, poor discourse habits likely exist across most of the current High School population in America. These habits will not only create immense dissonance that fosters discrimination (according to the results of this survey), they will also impact the discourse between future voting populations. Something must be done to fix these behaviors, seeing that this generation will control U.S. politics in the near future. Lastly, it must be stated that the correlation between dissonance and violence cannot be distinctively identified. Although 10% of the participants identified that they "took physical action" against the opposition, not enough information was provided to give significance. Furthermore, the mere 10% is not a large enough statistic to assume this is a constant for most American high school students.

Future Directions

This study has properly addressed the gap regarding the origin of discrimination and its connection to increasing diversity. This connection is cognitive dissonance itself. This survey has demonstrated how an attempt to reduce dissonance (mental imbalance) may cause outward discrimination via in-depth questioning of the participant. By taking the participant through a detailed questionnaire of their mental processes after being exposed to a conflicting experience, the road to discrimination becomes quite prevalent. These findings do however open up many other gaps that require future attention and research. First, this survey-based research must be extended to both rural and urban ISDs outside of Texas. This research could use the same questions as this survey to maintain consistency and eliminate any potential confounds. This research is important in both confirming the results of this study while also identifying any differences between communities regarding the process of discriminatory development. These differences may be key to finding thorough solutions to large-scale prejudice.

Lastly, this link between cognitive dissonance and discrimination may be used to reduce and even eliminate discrimination in America as a whole. According to Elisa Holmes (2010), anti-discrimination rights, which are often provided by egalitarian legislation, are merely a legal facade of equality and do not accurately prevent discriminatory behaviors. Holmes asserts that laws aimed at anti-discrimination sentiments still allow for unfair treatment of others. This is the primary method of fighting discrimination in the modern century, yet it is largely fruitless. In order to

properly eliminate discrimination, society must prevent its initial development. If it is not pulled out, root and stem, the underlining thought processes that cause discrimination and prejudice will remain. The findings of this survey open up a pathway to a sound solution. Now that cognitive dissonance is shown to be directly related to discrimination, future researchers may attempt to reduce dissonance in a safe so that prejudicial outlooks are never formed. In a world without discrimination, different peoples of the world can interact on even ground, creating a harmonious society for all.

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