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Our Relationship with Cognitive Dissonance

The Self, Travel, and the Experience of Cognitive Dissonance: The Cure of Mindfulness

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Introduction

It was a snowy day and the Fjords were covered in ice and snow from the previous months. The last bit of the hike swung around the side of the mountain opening up to a 100-meter long, slightly steep graded path. This was the pinnacle of an over two-hour hike. The end destination was a major rock formation that protruded out from the side of the mountain over the water (over 600 meters below!) like a diving board at the local pool. Preikestolen, or “Pulpits Rock” in English, was the name of this particular Fjord located in Norway. A group of friends and I had the luxury of hiking to this beautiful outlet during Easter break in 2015. It was one of many places that my travels have taken me over the years. During my collegiate career in particular I have done three exchanges, and all were windows into my own behaviors and cognitions.

What does traveling have to do with the self and cognitive dissonance? Often times, traveling leads to acting in ways that conflict with one’s self-views. Psychologists argue that these experiences can lead to cognitive dissonance, or to aversive states of arousal. Cognitive dissonance is when one believes one way but acts in an opposite manner, or when one holds contradicting beliefs. Being in completely new situations sheds light onto these dissonances more so than being in familiar surroundings. It is as if one was a baby born again, but this time with enough self-awareness to better understand the setting. Although there are many positives from traveling and understanding the dissonance present in one’s life, there are negative effects as well. Discord, discomfort, denial, and a sense of instability in previously strong-held beliefs are some of the possible outcomes. Yet, growth from the understanding and cultivation of methods for alleviating dissonance is possible as well. While travel itself can well be a method for optimal development, this paper plans to explore more in depth the cognitive effects of

dissonance that are results of traveling/living abroad. These effects are possible from experiences at home as well. So this paper also examines how cognitive dissonance in non-travel situations, such as economic scenarios, life and death situations, and other major cognitive aspects of life like religious affiliations, are also affected by cognitive dissonance. Specifically, the relationship between one's conception of self and the cognitive dissonant states one experiences during their lifespan is studied, and how this self-cognitive dissonance relationship can be dealt with to promote more personal optimal development.

What is Cognitive Dissonance?

Cognitive dissonance arises when a situation involving two conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors occurs. When people smoke (behavior) even though they know that it causes cancer (cognition) is a good example of cognitive dissonance (McLeod, 2014). This person's cognition in the form of a belief is to live healthy, yet they engage in activities that harm his or her health. When dissonance appears there is motivated arousal for the person to alleviate the dissonance by eliminating the inconsistency. Leon Festinger, the author of *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* has his own hypothesis to help explain this phenomenon. Festinger (1957) believes that even though we humans live (or at least strive for) mostly consistent lives there are times where inconsistencies pervade without any reasonable explanation. People will feel troubled or discomforted when these inconsistencies occur. The first part of his hypothesis suggests that the existence of dissonance (inconsistencies) will motivate the person to reduce the dissonance and strive for consonance (consistency). His second point states that people will not only try to reduce the dissonance, but will actively avoid situations and information that increases the dissonance in their lives. Basically cognitive dissonance is a state in each of us when we believe

and think one-way but act the other way, so we try to alleviate the state or avoid it all together by selectively attending to information or changing our cognitions.

Cognitive dissonance isn't only a disconnect between thought and *behavior* but can also include contradictions between cognitions we hold and our own ideas about ourselves (so between thought or inter-cognition). For example when traveling there are situations where one may have a belief about something but the context of the trip brings an alternative view that questions the original belief on the subject. Research by Festinger and others also advocates that cognitive dissonance is not only found between behavior and thought, but also between thoughts themselves or within the cognition of the person. As Festinger (1957) states, "By the term *cognition*, here and in the remainder of the book, I mean any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior." (p. 3).

Although cognitive dissonance doesn't directly have a defined link between these inconsistent states and the idea of "self", it is implied. To a significant degree, humans are who they think they are (religious beliefs, behaviors rationale, their knowledge on subjects, etc.). Therefore when dissonance arises one observes the discrepancy by looking at it through the perspective of and relating it to the self. Picture one's conception of the "self" manifesting cognitive contradictions similar to someone watching him or herself on video for the first time. If one who believes they are an honest person is engaging in dissonant thoughts or actions, like lying to family or friends, they might not register the conflict of self-views until they view the video of themselves doing it. Without the video one doesn't see the dissonance and may continue their actions without hesitation. Yet, once one watches the video, and sees the dishonesty in their being first hand (self-perception), the dissonance becomes observable.

So what happens when the conception of self is compromised? What does one do when they see their dissonance on video for the first time? Well as stated before many times this situation never happens. Most of the time people avoid situations that bring dissonance. Festinger (1957) believes that although people tend to avoid these situations, sometimes it is impossible. During those instances where cognitive dissonance is inevitable one will take various defensive actions to reduce it. First they might change the action directly therefore changing cognition. If something is giving them dissonance, once they change the action bringing that state to align with their cognition it should cease. Secondly one can change his/her knowledge or cognition on the subject. This entails, either changing beliefs to align with the action or changing knowledge structures in a way that eases the dissonance by converting to one side of the issue and disregarding the other. Festinger uses the example of the smoker who changes his knowledge on smoking to only include the good aspects of smoking (e.g., relieves stress), eliminating the bad aspects (e.g., causes cancer). The problem is that with enough inspection one can find areas of their thinking with major dissonance not solvable by a change in action or change in cognition. Festinger (1957) writes, "This may occur when two or more established beliefs or values, all relevant to the area of cognition in question, are inconsistent. That is, no opinion can be held, and no behavior engaged in, that will not be dissonant with at least one of these established beliefs." (p. 7). So what happens in these situations? One place to start is to look at our conception of possible selves. Instead of adopting an unitary view of self and our cognition, it is important to acknowledge the multiplicity or variability present in our self-conceptions.

Implications of Cognitive Dissonance

Research by Markus & Nurius (1986) titled *Possible Selves* directly deals with the concept of our ever-changing and multifaceted identity. In their study they look primarily at the notion of possible selves, which they describe as, “Possible selves derive from the representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future. They are different and separable from the current or now selves, yet are intimately connected to them.” (p. 954). We all create possible selves for our own life and are free to create whatever type of self we wish. Children imagining themselves as policemen or as doctors growing up are simple examples of this. Although adults have more limitations, these limitations mostly stem from societal or historical constraints as well as our specific skill set limits. The history of where one grew up and the media or culture has a lot of influence on the construction of possible selves. Still Markus & Nurius believe that possible selves can be contrived to represent someone’s true nature. The environment of someone’s location growing up portrays uniquely positive and negative paradigms of who to be that are particular to each individual. Because of this possible selves are selves that we strive to be and are selves we try to avoid, which gives rise to the significance of possible selves and our self-schemas.

Self-schemas are created by our past experiences and are used to bring coherence to our construction of self. We use these schemas to interpret information related to ourselves in daily life. The self-schemas influence which outside stimuli we attune to, which we disregard, and how we interpret the relevance of that information to ourselves. They help us to understand and construct our self-knowledge structure (which is vital to comprehend our past behavior) but more importantly how we approach future behaviors. Since possible selves deal with our goals, fears, and motivations, they tie into our self-representations and schemas of who we want to be in the future as well as who we perceive to be now. Markus & Nurius believe possible selves create the

criteria for how we view the outcomes of events. Because of this our possible selves are the most vulnerable and responsive to change and are the first elements of our self-concept to absorb and react to new information. “As representations of potential, possible selves will thus be particularly sensitive to those situations that communicate new or inconsistent information about the self.” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 956). Given that possible selves influence how we interpret the world and ourselves, they also are a key component in how cognitive dissonance can arise. Add this to the idea of a working self-concept model that outlines a dynamic interpretation of self, one stating that personality differs between time and situation, and we can see the extent of how vast and expansive our conception of self is. If our formation of self is consistently adapting and altering while our possible selves (which are not necessarily constructed on facts of self from the past, but rather varied interpretations about who we are) are guiding our analyses of the world, it makes sense that inconsistencies are bound to arise.

As we develop, this division of our separate selves can lead to chaos. How can we expect any sort of consistency in life if we have a delicate balance of self-concept as it is now? Research has shown that around age 30 our Big 5 personality traits (common traits used to measure personality style) tend to stabilize. This implies our cognitive dissonance should decrease as well. Even Markus & Nurius propose as we develop individuals can contribute to their own development through selection and achievement (or resistance) of certain possible selves. Research by Chow & Thompson (2003) with regards to development and cognitive dissonance supports this point as well. In their study they administered the Personal Development Test (PDT) and the Cognitive Dissonance Test (DISS) to 320 university students. The PDT was created to measure personal development derived from the “Global Functioning” concept of development used in several models of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders. It specifically focuses on maturity and social integration, which they believe is essential for, “success in all human endeavors”. (Chow & Thompson, 2003). The PDT has eight scores measuring self-esteem, coping skills, positive assertiveness, locus of control, team membership, sympathy, self-efficacy, and caring. The DISS on the other hand is designed to measure the cognitive dissonance found in the unconscious of the individual. It has questions on eight themes to designate these problems: home, emotional, moral, health, school, social, survival, and race. The logic behind the study was that personal development comes from factors within the person and from society. When one is personally developed they should become a functioning member of society. But if there is cognitive dissonance, growth is stunted, problems occur, and there is no self-actualization for the individual or positive input into the community. Results showed high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha of .826 for the PDT and .952 for the DISS) as well as a negative correlation between Personal Development Test scores and Cognitive Dissonance Test scores. A fun additional fact found was that non-smokers had higher PDT scores and lower DISS scores than smokers. But the main results show that indeed personal development and flourishing in life is achieved further with less cognitive dissonance. This also suggests that with more development in life, self-inconsistencies will naturally subside.

Do inconsistencies and cognitive dissonance really subside as we develop? Or is the method of alleviating dissonance just more ingrained? One way of answering this question is looking at the implications of dissonance in economic models. Neoclassical economic views assume that agents (people) making economic decisions are using full rationality. The individual would evaluate the information, understand the relevance, weigh the pros and cons, and then make an optimal decision once all aspects are considered. One reason economic policies don’t consistently work is because they assume that rationality is human nature, and that therefore

irrational behaviors like cognitive dissonance do not influence human decisions. Psychology has shown rationality is not a given. Many times irrational behaviors are influencing decisions at an undetectable level. Rather than assuming rational behavior, which would hold true if cognitive dissonance were to subdue with development (more development equals more time to lower inconsistencies and therefore behave more rationally), economics has started to acknowledge the presence of irrational behavior. The subfield of behavioral economics has shown cognitive dissonance influencing human economic decisions, suggesting that as people develop in life the inconsistencies don't necessarily go away, rather the methods of alleviating them are more ingrained in the individual's behavior.

Utility maximization in economics is when an agent will try to gain the most he/she can out of engaging in an action. He/she will try to maximize their utility (benefit) from the behavior. In economics this is something like gaining the most profit possible from policy decisions. In non-economic behaviors, an example of maximizing utility could be gaining the most joy from a vacation by choosing specific activities to participate in. Both cases involve choosing behaviors that cost less (either monetarily or psychologically) and give maximum benefit. Neoclassical economic theory indicates that utility maximization is a result of two components: choice variables and exogenous parameters (Gilad et al, 1986, pg. 65). Changing the behavior of an agent in order to make an optimal decision to maximize utility requires changing the solution of the choice variables. The choice variables are actions and their effects that the agent can directly manipulate. These choice variables are influenced by the exogenous parameters. Exogenous parameters are constraints derived from outside the agent's control (environment, other institutions, etc.). According to neoclassical views, when exogenous parameters change, the individual will process the change fully and instantly adapt a behavior for maximizing utility.

When exogenous parameters change there is a level of surprise. This surprise is the result of discrepancy between expected utility from a commitment and actual experienced utility of the action. If the expected utility and experienced utility are equal there is no surprise. What you expected to happen happened. When expected utility is greater than experienced there is a negative surprise. The individual expected something but reality fell short. As long as the discrepancy between expected utility and experienced utility is small enough, or below a threshold, the agent will not update the information brought on by the change in exogenous parameters. Once the surprise is too much and exceeds the threshold, the agent will finally look back on their original commitment and update to a new behavior. If surprise deals with a commitment to action that the individual also feels responsibility for, cognitive dissonance will arise. If this dissonance is below the threshold, the individual will create an information filter. This information filter blocks information from changing parameters that is against the behavior the agent is committed to. They avoid this information to convince themselves that their action is ok. As long as the benefits of a positive self-image are exceeding the costs of using the filter, the agent will continue his behavior. But, just like in neoclassical economic models, once the cost is greater than the benefit the filter will cease and the behavior will change (Gilad et al, 1986, pg. 67). Cognitive dissonance principles show that the agent is not truly maximizing utility. Rather they are maximizing utility after a filtration process. This can result in lost of utility due to the self-deception of the agent. A loss in utility in economics can mean losses in revenue. In psychology this loss in utility can translate into a loss of well-being. Both cases show that maximizing utility after a filtration process hinders the possibilities for the individual decision maker.

Contrary to economic rational models, cognitive dissonance is playing a role in human judgment. People in decision-making scenarios aren't making optimal decisions because of less inconsistent thoughts due to their development. They are actually falling subject to ingrained methods of cognitive dissonance reduction by using an information filtration system to keep inconsistent info and cognitions at bay while they continue in their policy. Once the agent actually changes his/her behavior, often times it is too late and serious economic consequences can occur. The problem with cognitive dissonance, unlike certain other cognitive problems that you can help with methods like cognitive behavioral therapy, is that the dissonance mechanisms resulting in inconsistencies aren't easily understood. Obviously possible selves have some influence on inconsistent self-conceptions and it's plausible that natural development can inherently reduce dissonance. Yet, in business and other examples we see its prevalence. We can't pinpoint a specific place to look for a root cause. One solid place to start the search is to study the introduction of new environments or knowledge to someone's strongly held opinions.

Ying Li (2010) did exactly this when he studied the effects of Chinese students becoming exposed to Christianity in a large university in the USA. This study not only looked at culture change, but also the effects of a major change in belief systems. Christianity in China is not nearly as popular as in western countries. It has a negative stigma. Christianity can be regarded as being a religion for the poor because China has a predominately atheist or Confucian history. With the increased globalization of China many university students have now started studying in western universities. Li states that it is evident from previous research that traveling or living in locations of differing faith will cause cognitive dissonance to occur. So in order to measure and analyze cognitive dissonance in these Chinese students studying in the US, this study interviewed 12 students on various topics and later analyzed the results. They had students

answer eight major questions and five follow up questions. Questions asked participants about religious affiliations, demographic information, perceptions of Christianity in China and the US, Psychological changes after coming to the US, and how they dealt with the changes (Ying Li, 2010, p. 42).

The analysis of the interview included finding interesting features in the interviews and spotting reoccurring themes. The two research questions of the study dealt with: 1) did the students experience cognitive dissonance while studying in the USA? 2) How was the dissonance reduced or changed once living here? Results showed six students disregarded Christianity as a superstition, while the other six were willing to think critically about Christianity. Four of the twelve even became Christians. Also, importantly, three major themes were shown to be correlated with the level of cognitive dissonance in students. These dealt with heightened awareness, uncertainty, and a denial towards Christianity. Awareness in particular was heightened the most when changing environments and helped the students' analysis of their own dissonance. Again with the study we see how a change in belief and the confrontation of major cognitive elements can stimulate cognitive dissonance. In the case of the Chinese students, it was a greater necessity to cope with the inconsistencies in their lives because of the impact it had in their current daily environment.

When dissonance does arise in daily situations, where is the brain affected? De Vries, et al. studied the affected areas of the brain in a study titled *Cognitive dissonance induction in everyday life: An fMRI study*. They used a whole-brain perspective to look at what areas of the brain are activated during cognitive dissonance. First they collected surveys asking which types of events brought dissonance and consonance in people's life. From the 160 items on events they used 72 items that were experienced by over 80% of the survey takers for the fMRI study.

During the fMRI, participants were given three sessions of 24 trial blocks using the 72 selected items grouped into four trials, one being dissonance inducing and the other three being control conditions. The sequence of each trial went: value primer, memory prompt, and then discomfort measurement. In the machine the first slide (value primer) would show an event from one of the items and ask a yes/no question priming if the individual supported the statement. The second slide (reflection prompt) asked a question related to the behavior of the value primer event but the question differed according to condition (justification, dissonance, etc.). Lastly the discomfort measure (only in the dissonance condition) asked the individual to rate their level of discomfort after thinking about the event. The experimental condition had individuals reflect on an experience that induced dissonance where the individual behaved differently than the value they subscribed to. Control conditions included justification, consonance, and non-self related conditions. Control conditions weren't supposed to produce dissonance. Results compared the brain activity between the dissonance condition and each of the three control conditions. There were three major findings. First, the control conditions never showed stronger activation levels than the dissonance condition. Second, "the experience of cognitive dissonance was associated with increased neural activation in several key brain regions including the ACC (anterior cingulate cortex), AIC (anterior insular cortex), IFG (inferior frontal gyrus), and precuneus" (de Vries, et al., 2014). Third, these brain regions deal with emotional processing, cognitive conflict, control and social cognition, attentional motor control, and self-referential memory retrieval (de Vries, et al., 2014).

So far cognitive dissonance has shown up in about every aspect of life. From the small everyday inconsistencies we see on a daily basis, to its prevalence in major cognitive elements like culture or religion, as well as its existence throughout our development and lifespan.

Although we are constantly trying to avoid the dissonance it is as inevitable as death. So do we see cognitive dissonance playing an important role within life and death situations? The short answer is yes. One example in particular is that of high altitude mountaineers from the article *Cognitive Dissonance and the Role of Self in High Altitude Mountaineering*. “Due to the dangerous and life-threatening nature of the activity, the cognitive elements that are implicated in dissonant relations are likely to be of great psychological importance to the people who risk their lives to reach their goal of standing on the summit of a mountain.” (Burke & Sparkes, 2009).

This article looked into the cognitive dissonance of mountaineers because of its high likelihood of occurrence during the hikes. By analyzing six mountaineer’s autobiographies they found three major themes related to cognitive dissonance: 1) Experiences with psychological discomfort are inextricably connected to the self; 2) the presence of a cognitive inconsistency of sufficient magnitude evokes a portrayal of self as decent but afflicted; and 3) reducing inconsistencies between cognitions involves a process of retrospective self-justification motivated by the need for self-cohesion (Burkes & Sparkes, 2009, p. 329). Mountaineer Reinhold Messner wrote in his biography about how he lost his brother. On the hike his brother Gunther became too sick to climb down the mountain. In order to save him Reinhold left him behind to get supplies and help. Ultimately he was unable to save his brother, leaving him for dead. This has left, “a scar on his psyche for years to come” (Burkes & Sparkes, 2009). From this article and many others it is evidently clear that cognitive dissonance can have some major implications on one’s mental health and well-being. Inconsistencies in thought can create major identity problems, lead to depressive states, general unease, and fear or uncertainty about one’s life now and in the future.

Application: What can be done to help with our Cognitive Dissonance?

Western philosophy has much stake in the use of scientifically proven remedies to help our problems. While I do agree that these can work, for example the use of cognitive behavioral therapy, I believe alternative “eastern” solutions are possible to alleviate cognitive dissonance too. Although many of these ideals are labeled as Buddhist I consider them universal applications. Buddhism has just taken the liberty of being the poster child for these concepts.

When cognitive dissonance appears it is correlated with a heightened sense of awareness. As with the Chinese students in a Christian university study showed, the students were more aware of their situation and opinions as they were experiencing the dissonance of thought. When dissonance isn't present (during the filtration system in the economic principles using cognitive dissonance as described earlier) awareness is lacking. Self-awareness is an important element to alleviating cognitive dissonance as it allows us to consciously look at our cognition in a way that isn't hindered by our mental processes. As Anam Thubten (2012) a Tibetan teacher and author of Buddhist texts in the United States writes in his online retreat titled “The Art of Awareness” for *Tricycle* magazine:

Awareness or smirti is the heart of Buddhist practice and the teachings of Buddha. Yet it doesn't belong to Buddhism. Awareness is intrinsic to each of us. It is a state of being conscious and rising above our mental habits that keep us bound to internal limitations. Through awareness we can see the true nature of all things and find unfathomable joy beyond conditions.

Being aware is inherent in all of us. With enough reflection it is apparent that aware states in each of us are possible and have happened regardless of religious or cultural orientation.

Practicing awareness can allow the individual to see the dissonance and critically view, without bias, options that more optimally relieve the dissonance. As Anam Thubten says it lets us rise above our mental habits that bind us down. These habits could be something like our cognitions Festinger talks about (our opinions, beliefs, thoughts, etc.). While one is practicing awareness

they can see clearer the influence their thoughts are having. They can step back and objectively view how personal cognitions are in motion and are explaining how we view the world. It can even be said that our true self is seen when we are aware and judgment is not clouded by the continuous thoughts of the mind. Yongey Minguyr Rinpoche explains awareness as the support or basis of the mind. “It is steady and unchanging, like the pole to which the flag of ordinary consciousness is attached.” (*Tricycle*, 2015). If we are aware and grounded we no longer are swept up in the wind of emotion but rather turn inward and notice our feelings to understand the reasons for those feelings. During times of cognitive dissonance a type of awareness arises because we see our thoughts (inconsistent ones) and try to understand them.

Although not many studies have been done on awareness (mindfulness), one was conducted from Switzerland in 2015 titled *Altered processing of self-related emotional stimuli in mindfulness meditators* (Lutz et al.). This study looked at the emotion processing of long-term mindfulness meditators (awareness meditators) vs. naïve practitioners. Researchers studied reported affective states of participants after they were shown adjectives of self-praise, self-critical, negative but not self-critical, or neutral nature. This was an fMRI study so researchers also looked at the brain activity of the participants, particularly in the dorso-medial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC). “Differences in DMPFC activation and affective ratings point towards increased awareness, potentially mindful regulation of self-critic and self-praise in the long term meditators, while decreased connectivity to other regions of the default mode network could reflect a decreased self-focus in this group” (Lutz, et al., 2015). What the results suggest is that meditators using awareness techniques are much better, on neural and psychological levels, of controlling emotions and cognitions in regards to self-praise and self-criticism. These meditators tend to have less self-focus. The study sheds light onto many useful implications of mindfulness,

but it doesn't explain how awareness only can't alleviate all discomfort from cognitive dissonance. Buddhism offers its own answer to why the problem isn't alleviated with simple awareness. It is because we are still attached to our thoughts that we are aware of.

The principle of nonattachment has been largely misinterpreted throughout time and from place to place. Many believe it entails forgetting all attachments with family and friends and going off into the monastic lifestyle, in some similar fashion to the Buddha. But this is incorrect. In fact, Buddhism speaks to the interdependency of people and thought, and is all for the appreciation of people for who they are. It is very much the opposite of cutting ourselves off from others, because without others we cannot experience our own growth or "awakening". Instead nonattachment is better understood as an aversion to possessiveness. Our minds tend to attach or possess onto cognitions about our "selves" and other people as a means of understanding ourselves and construction of self-knowledge. Loch Kelly, the leader of the *Tricycle* online retreat titled "Open-Hearted Awareness: A Cure for Our Addictive Thinking", refers to our thinking as a sixth sense. He states, "It's really the thought looping on itself that creates the separate sense of self." (min. 14). So even the dynamic sense of self that was described by Markus & Nurius as possible selves could stem from our cognition working interdependently to create our interpretations about the self. Self-conception can therefore be attributed to our attachments to thought. When we use the mind to explain ourselves as a sort of filter we become subject to the possessiveness of what we believe whilst explaining ourselves. By using the mind as a canvas or sixth sense we are limiting our ability to see clearly without the influence of other thoughts interfering: which in some instances creates dissonance. What is beautiful about nonattachment (and another concept that is misunderstood) is that nonattachment is the act of using awareness to disengage from the thoughts. Not to disengage and stop thinking,

rather disengage and step back from the prison that is your own mind and back to its normal functioning. The mind's function is to think as part of our body's whole, but as Kelly (2015) says, "thought is a wonderful part of a group but not meant to be the leader or the center of our identity." (min. 15). The mind thinks like the heart pumps blood. We run into problems when they try to fulfill other functions.

So with awareness and nonattachment principles in practice we can come to an alternate view of self. Some would refer to it as a "true nature" of who we are. Others would conclude that it is a self-as-illusion view. What it seems to be is a transcendence of the idea self. By practicing awareness and nonattachment there is an understanding of the interdependency of life in the world. Interdependent themes disregard the sense of an independent self, static or dynamic, and transcend it so not to be stuck in the wind of emotion and carried off in thought. Yet, self is not totally forgotten. So the conception of self is questioned. Therefore what are we, independent or part of the whole? What is our "self"? As Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2014) wrote in his article titled "There is no self", the Buddha would answer to the question of whether or not there is a self with silence. Indicating neither a yes nor no. This was because, "to respond either yes or no to this question would be to side with opposite extremes of the wrong view (Samyutta Nikaya 44.10)" (2014). But this ambiguity is ok for my paper, as I don't wish to instill a definite answer to this question of self. Rather, I hope to raise awareness about how we conceptualize the self.

Conclusion

Cognitive dissonance is found throughout many facets of life. From the small inconsistencies we see every day, to major life and death situations dealing with cognition like the case with the high altitude mountaineers. Inconsistencies are as inevitable as death but from research it is encouraging to see that dissonance tends to be negatively correlated with

development. Still every day brings a new challenge and eventually our major beliefs and opinions (such as religion and culture) will be compromised. But I implore that if we take a look into how the relationship between our own conception of self and the cognitive dissonance we experience we can deal with these inconsistencies in a better way. If we look at the construction of “self” through awareness and the eyes of nonattachment I believe we can better deal with the dissonance we come across. Maybe we find it is just our thoughts going off in an influential raid. Or maybe an independent self isn’t the answer because it limits our view. Taking an alternative view instead can open up answers to the problem that were unreachable by the original perspective. I don’t intend to propose a way to rid of inconsistencies, rather a way to deal with them. Situations dealing with dissonance are as diverse as the people on this planet. Individually understanding this rapport between conception of self and cognitive dissonance states can help lead to unique optimal personal development.

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