



The Role of Cognitive Dissonance in the Dilemma of Abandoning or Reconstructing Faith

İnanıcı Terk Etme veya Yeniden Yapılandırma İkileminde Bilişsel Çelişkinin Rolü

 Ali Osman TEZCAN^{a*}

 Merve Armağan BOĞATEKİN^b

^a İbn Haldun Üniversitesi,
ali.tezcan@stu.ihu.edu.tr

^b Dr. Öğr. Üyesi/Asst. Prof., Sağlık Bilimleri
Üniversitesi,
mervearmaganuml@gmail.com

* Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author



Künye:

Cilt/Volume: 5
Sayı/Issue: 3
Sayfa/Page: 167-178

Geliş Tarihi/Received: 04 Haziran 2025
Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 04 Aralık 2025
Yayın Tarihi/Publication Date: 15 Aralık 2025

Atf/Cite as: Tezcan, Ali Osman–Boğatekin, Merve Armağan. "The Role of Cognitive Dissonance in the Dilemma of Abandoning or Reconstructing Faith". *İdrak Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5/3 (Aralık 2025), 167-178.



Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmaların CC BY-NC 4.0 Lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır. İkonlar Font Awesome'a aittir.

The authors own the copyright of their work published in the journal and their work is published under the CC BY-NC 4.0 License. Icons by Font Awesome.

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of cognitive dissonance in the process of religious conversion and its effect on individuals' faith commitments. As a method, 30 fundamental studies published in the literature of religious psychology and sociology between 1954 and 2021 were examined using thematic analysis. The findings of the research show that cognitive dissonance arises particularly in three main situations: conflicts between religious teachings and life experiences, inconsistencies among religious leaders, and the conflict between religion and science. It was found that individuals follow two different strategies to alleviate this psychological distress: Some individuals abandon their beliefs to resolve the dissonance and construct a secular identity, while others cling more tightly to their beliefs and use this process as a motivational tool to strengthen their faith. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that the cultural structure and social dynamics in which the individual lives are factors that influence how this conflict is resolved. It highlights that the process of abandoning one's faith can potentially create a sense of freedom in the individual, but it can also bring emotional burdens such as social isolation and alienation. Consequently, cognitive dissonance is not only a factor that causes people to stray from religion, but also a dynamic mechanism that plays a key role in the restructuring of belief systems.

Keywords: Psychology, Psychology of Religion, Cognitive Dissonance, Religious Deconversion, Religious Disaffiliation.

Öz

Bu çalışma, bilişsel uyumsuzluğun dinî dönüşüm sürecindeki rolünü ve bireylerin inanç bağlılıkları üzerindeki etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yöntem olarak, din psikolojisi ve sosyolojisi literatüründe 1954-2021 yılları arasında yer alan 30 temel çalışma, tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları, bilişsel uyumsuzluğun özellikle üç temel durumda ortaya çıktığını göstermektedir: Dinî öğretiler ile yaşantısal deneyimler arasındaki çelişkiler, dinî liderlerin tutarsızlıkları ve din-bilim çatışması. Bireylerin bu psikolojik rahatsızlığı gidermek için iki farklı strateji izlediği tespit edilmiştir: Bazı bireyler uyumsuzluğu gidermek adına inançlarını terk ederek seküler bir kimlik inşa ederken, diğerleri inançlarına daha sıkı sarılarak bu süreci inançlarını güçlendirmek için bir motivasyon aracı olarak kullanmaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışma bireyin yaşadığı kültürel yapı ve sosyal dinamiklerin bu çatışmayı nasıl çözdüğünü etkileyen faktörler olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Kişinin inancını terk etme sürecinin bireyde bir özgürlük hissi yaratabileceği potansiyeli ile beraber sosyal izolasyon ve yabancılaşma gibi duygusal yükler de getirebileceğini vurgulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak bilişsel uyumsuzluk, yalnızca dinden uzaklaşmaya neden olan bir faktör değil, aynı zamanda inanç sistemlerinin yeniden yapılandırılmasında kilit rol oynayan dinamik bir mekanizmadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Psikoloji, Din psikolojisi, Bilişsel Uyumsuzluk, Dini Dönüşüm, Dinî Terk.



1. The Role of Cognitive Dissonance in Religious Deconversion

Religious beliefs serve as the fundamental building block for individuals to form their identity by shaping and ordering their worldviews, ethical values, and social relationships.¹ However, with individualisation and secularisation, there is significant evidence to support the idea that in society the people are turning away from religion.² This constantly changing social landscape often creates tension between traditional religious teachings and modern life experiences. One of the main psychological factors that play a role in this religious deconversion is cognitive dissonance.³ This comprehensive review will address the role of cognitive dissonance in the deconversion process by synthesizing insights from different studies. This study examines the relationship between cognitive dissonance and religious belief, aiming to understand the cognitive mechanisms individuals employ when distancing themselves from religion.

1.1. Methods

This study was conducted as a narrative literature review. A total of 30 significant studies published between 1954 and 2021 were selected based on their relevance to the topic, with a particular focus on the fields of psychology of religion and sociology of religion. The selection includes peer-reviewed articles, books, and both quantitative and qualitative studies. Keywords such as “cognitive dissonance,” “religious deconversion,” “religious disengagement,” and “faith crisis” guided the research. The collected sources were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach, following the six-stage framework proposed by Braun and Clarke.⁴ This method involved familiarizing oneself with the data, creating initial codes from the literature, and reviewing themes to identify common patterns and contradictions regarding the role of cognitive dissonance in religious conversion, without conforming to a pre-existing coding framework.

2. Cognitive Dissonance: A Theoretical Overview

The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957), the work of Leon Festinger, argues that a psychological discomfort occurs when individuals' cognitions such as beliefs, attitudes and values contradict.⁵ This discomfort encourages the dissonance to disappear by either changing one of the cognitions, acquiring new knowledge or reducing the importance of this conflict. In fact, cognitive dissonance serves as an alarm, signaling that something is amiss and needs to be addressed. However, this change does not necessarily mean a positive change since there is a mental conflict, and our brain tries to resolve this conflict. Even if it seems to lead to a negative way, the persistence of this conflict can be a short-term advantage. Religious contexts provide fertile ground for the emergence of cognitive dissonance due to their strong existential and moral claims. In conclusion, cognitive

¹ Heinz Streib vd. (ed.), *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 15.

² David Voas – Mark Chaves, “Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?”, *American Journal of Sociology* 121/5 (2016), 1517-1556.

³ Bob Altemeyer – Bruce Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith and Others Abandon Religion* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 116-121.

⁴ Virginia Braun – Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology”, *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3/2 (2006), 79.

⁵ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957). 3.

dissonance is the brain's way of warning us that something is wrong and prompting us to seek a solution.⁶

3. Manifestations of Cognitive Dissonance in Religious Contexts

Cognitive dissonance experienced in a religious context can lead to significant changes in individuals, as religion occupies a substantial place in their lives. This dissonance can lead to changes in the extent to which individuals leave their religion, but it can also result in a stronger attachment to religious values. The intensity of this dissonance, which affects a religious identity in matters such as religious beliefs, varies depending on the place religion occupies in that person's life.⁷

3.1. Conflict Between Doctrine and Experience

A common source of dissonance arises when religious doctrines conflict with personal experience. Batson et al. show how people who suffer and witness injustice can question the validity of religious doctrines that promise divine justice and goodness.⁸ Similarly, Zuckerman argues that the suspicion arising from the discrepancy between religious teachings and lived realities acts as a catalyst for the act of apostasy.⁹ In other words, it has an accelerating effect on religious deconversion. Individuals may stray from the lifestyle recommended by religious teachings due to the life they have adopted. When they realise this, they often experience cognitive dissonance, and an internal struggle begins. When people live a life that is inconsistent with their beliefs, they must either change their lives or change their beliefs in order to overcome cognitive dissonance. Those who wish to change their lives may do so by strictly adhering to the teachings of their religion. On the other hand, those who do not wish to alter their behaviour may either interpret religious teachings in a more lenient manner or completely turn away from religion to escape this uncomfortable situation. In short, cognitive dissonance arises as a result of the contrast between religious doctrine and lived experiences, and this can be the source of a series of actions that lead to religious abandonment.

3.2. Inconsistencies in Religious Leadership

Silver emphasises that the recognition of hypocrisy in some religious leaders creates cognitive dissonance.¹⁰ When religious leaders fail to embody the moral principles they espouse, their followers often feel a sense of betrayal, which can lead to dissonance and a questioning of their faith. Individuals who serve as religious role models generally do not have the luxury of making mistakes. Their mistakes are seen as mistakes of the religion rather than individual mistakes. When these behaviours or mistakes are not in line with the teachings of the religion, their followers who are aware of this feel uncomfortable. While they may be able to free themselves from this thought by not respecting the individual and considering them not to be a role model, they may occasionally fall into the mindset that religion is being used as a tool and begin to question their faith. To summarize, when

⁶ Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 3.

⁷ Ralph W. Hood vd., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 21.

⁸ C. Daniel Batson, Patricia Schoenrade ve W. Larry Ventis, *Religion and the Individual: A Social-Psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 88.

⁹ Phil Zuckerman, *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 105-109.

¹⁰ Christopher F. Silver, *Atheism, Agnosticism, and Non-Belief: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of Type and Narrative* (Chattanooga: University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2013), 56.

religious leaders act contrary to their own teachings, it may lead to cognitive dissonance in individuals, which can result in outcomes such as religious deconversion.

3.3. Conflict Between Religion and Science

Barbour and examine the tension between religious doctrines and scientific discovery.¹¹ For example, when beliefs about creationism conflict with evolutionary biology, people experience cognitive dissonance. This leads to the questioning of religious beliefs. However, scientific theories like evolution are based on falsifiability and are open to revision.¹² In western world the conflict between science and religion has always been a source of controversy.¹³ Although science does not claim to be the ultimate truth, some people have attributed a sacredness to science and used it as a judge.¹⁴ However, science is based on fallibility.¹⁵ For example, science, which held for a certain period that atoms were indivisible, revised this view when it was proven that this was not the case. This change demonstrates that scientific models are not absolute truths, but are open to development and correction.¹⁶ This limitation is not problematic, as science is primarily viewed as a methodological tool for investigating natural phenomena rather than the sole arbiter of ultimate truth.¹⁷ However, individuals misunderstand this issue and elevate science. Sometimes, religious knowledge and science appear to be in conflict. Individuals who regard scientific knowledge as more authoritative than religious teachings often resolve this cognitive dissonance by prioritizing science and distancing themselves from religious dogmas.¹⁸ Other individuals may conclude that science is not yet sufficiently developed and has not yet discovered what religious knowledge has to say. Consequently, people experience cognitive dissonance when scientific theories conflict with their religious beliefs, as seen in the tension between evolutionary biology and creationist narratives, and this situation may push them to re-examine their religious values.¹⁹

3.4. Moral and Ethical Contradictions

Hunsberger and Altemeyer argue that ethical dilemmas within faith traditions, such as seemingly discriminatory practices or rigid gender roles, may cause individuals' moral intuition and religious beliefs to conflict.²⁰ For example, criticism from feminist movements and progressive social groups often highlights the patriarchal nature of religious institutions. Individuals influenced by these perspectives may begin to interpret religious texts through a critical lens. This conflict between modern egalitarian values and traditional religious gender roles leads to cognitive dissonance.²¹ At first glance, modern systems of thought and religious texts may appear to be contradictory. While some people choose to abandon this way of thinking and become more deeply committed to their religion, others may question

¹¹ Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), 10-17.

¹² Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 78.

¹³ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 3.

¹⁴ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 78.

¹⁵ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 106.

¹⁶ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 98.

¹⁷ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 84.

¹⁸ Zuckerman, *Faith No More*, 37.

¹⁹ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 82.

²⁰ Bruce Hunsberger – Bob Altemeyer, *Atheists: A Groundbreaking Study of America's Nonbelievers* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2006), 51-53.

²¹ Hunsberger – Altemeyer, *Atheists*, 54.

it more deeply and become more sceptical, eventually leaving the religion altogether. When combined with other factors such as the secularizing pressures of modern life, it becomes predictable that individuals encountering such cognitive dissonance will display a negative attitude towards religion.²² This dissonance leads to deeper reflection and potentially to disengagement from religion.

3.5. Strengthening Religious Beliefs While Reducing Cognitive Dissonance

The relationship between religious beliefs and cognitive dissonance may have different consequences depending on how individuals handle this dissonance. In some cases, cognitive dissonance may lead individuals to move away from their religious beliefs, while in other cases, the same dissonance may become a motivation to hold on to their beliefs more tightly. According to Festinger's theory, when people experience cognitive dissonance, they either change their beliefs or strengthen their existing beliefs.²³ Hood et al. found that individuals who experience cognitive dissonance in a religious context usually overcome this state of dissonance by strengthening their beliefs, adopting new religious interpretations, or increasing religious worship.²⁴ Similarly, Paloutzian and Park suggest that the search for religious meaning serves as a mechanism to reduce cognitive dissonance.²⁵ This enables the individual to gain a stronger spiritual identity. This suggests that cognitive dissonance can be shaped in the direction of both questioning and deepening belief, depending on the individual's resolution strategies. In other words, people question religion with a positive outlook and take a favourable view of religion's views on profound issues. Once these views satisfy them, their love and devotion to their religion increases, and they become more devoted followers. For example, someone who views his religious beliefs—let's say Islam in this case—negatively in terms of valuing women begins to read religious texts and question them. He then examines the historical context in which these beliefs originated and realises that their religion actually elevates women. Cognitive dissonance then disappears, and a more devoted individual emerges, no longer confused by such claims. In conclusion, while people may leave their religion due to cognitive dissonance, they can also overcome this dissonance by becoming more devoted to their religion.

3.6. Reducing Cognitive Dissonance Through Religious Deconversion

Another way to eliminate cognitive dissonance is to change religious beliefs. Barbour argues that many individuals reinterpret sacred texts away from their original meaning in order to reconcile their beliefs with modern ideas.²⁶ However, complete apostasy is also observed when such an interpretation fails.

Streib et al. state that religious deconversion aims to achieve psychological coherence.²⁷ By abandoning their beliefs, individuals harmonise their lives with their new values and get rid of the cognitive dissonance that previously plagued them. For example, a sinful Muslim feels uncomfortable every time he commits a new sin because he has done something against his religious values. In this scenario, the individual effectively rejects

²² Zuckerman, *Faith No More*, 15.

²³ Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 18-22.

²⁴ Hood vd., *The Psychology of Religion*, 119-120.

²⁵ Raymond F. Paloutzian - Crystal L. Park (ed.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2013). 362-364

²⁶ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 98.

²⁷ Streib – Keller, *Deconversion*, 21-23.

these values by separating himself from religion. As a result, the concept of sin may no longer carry weight which makes his lifestyle 'normal' in his own eyes and thus eliminates cognitive dissonance. However, this internal cognitive restructuring is rarely an isolated event; it is often reinforced by external social dynamics. Lofland and Stark emphasise that social networks have a great influence on the phenomenon of conversion.²⁸ Participating in communities of like-minded people makes it easier to endorse their views. When individuals with religious doubts participate in non-religious communities, they believe that these doubts are confirmed and adopt non-religious views, leading to a decrease in cognitive dissonance.

3.7. Psychological Outcomes of Deconversion

Although leaving religion reduces cognitive dissonance, it also has emotional and social costs. Hunsberger and Altemeyer reports that individuals generally experience alienation, grief and loneliness after leaving religion.²⁹ When this loneliness cannot be resolved, it can push individuals towards more extreme behaviour, negatively affecting their lives, and making it much more difficult for them to return to their religion. They also struggle for a long time to escape from the depression they have fallen into. However, these feelings are somewhat balanced by the sense of freedom that comes with eliminating cognitive dissonance. For individuals whose lives are not deeply rooted in religious practices, leaving religion is often experienced as a liberation. Zuckerman notes that these individuals, who view religion simply as a cultural phenomenon, tend to feel a sense of freedom and are largely unaffected by the potential negative psychological costs of leaving religion.³⁰ Hood et al. report that as a result of their study, converts generally report conformity with their values, which is the result of reducing cognitive dissonance.³¹ As a result, while leaving religion has very serious negative psychological effects on individuals, for some people the feeling of freedom that comes with leaving religion fills this void. Yet the negative aspects should never be ignored, as they can lead to severe and long-lasting consequences. Pargament points out that unresolved grief and alienation can turn into chronic depression and permanent social disconnection, which can create irreversible wounds in a person's private life.³²

3.8. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Cognitive Dissonance and Religion

Studies by Streib et al. and Köse suggest that cultural environments shape cognitive dissonance.³³ Since religion is deeply embedded in social identity in societies where Muslims and evangelical Christians are dominant, cognitive dissonance related to religion is more intense in these societies. In these and similar societies, when religious values are everywhere in life, it is normal for those who harbor doubts about religious values and do

²⁸ John Lofland – Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective", *American Sociological Review* 30/6 (1965), 871.

²⁹ Altemeyer – Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions*, 218.

³⁰ Zuckerman, *Faith No More*, 95.

³¹ Hood vd., *The Psychology of Religion*, 218-219.

³² Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 384.

³³ Streib vd., *Deconversion*, 256-258; Köse, Ali. *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts* (London: Routledge, 1996), 118-124.

not strive to resolve them to feel deep discomfort because they are exposed to things they do not believe in.

On the other hand, individuals living in secular societies find it difficult to live their beliefs freely within the dominant culture. Berger states that as a result of the secularisation of social structures, religious worship is marginalised, and therefore, an environment, where individuals who want to live their religious beliefs may experience cognitive dissonance, can occur.³⁴ Kettell states that if this incompatibility is not resolved, people may move away from religion with the aim of achieving psychological balance.³⁵ The reason for this is that personal belief systems may conflict with public.

3.9. Cognitive Dissonance's Impact on Social Relationships and Cultural Values

When individuals encounter different beliefs and behaviours in social environments, cognitive dissonance creates tension in interpersonal dynamics, significantly affecting social relationships. For example, Festinger's basic theory suggests that the discomfort arising from dissonance leads individuals to change their beliefs to align with those of people in their close social network, thereby maintaining relational harmony with others.³⁶ The culture in which we most frequently encounter this phenomenon is collectivist culture.³⁷ Conversely, cognitive dissonance can also disrupt social bonds, as individuals experiencing cognitive dissonance may resort to withdrawing from social environments in order to reduce it.³⁸

Furthermore, cultural values play a significant role in the emergence of cognitive dissonance. In societies with rigid cultural norms, social pressures make it more likely that dissonance will result in conformity.³⁹ For example, Markus and Kitayama emphasise that in interdependent cultures, individuals experiencing dissonance often downplay their personal beliefs in order to conform to cultural expectations and maintain social harmony.⁴⁰ In contrast, Western cultures that emphasise individualism are more likely to encourage direct confrontation with incongruence, which may lead to potential value changes or ideological opposition.⁴¹

Additionally, cognitive incongruence can lead to cultural evolution by challenging traditional norms and encouraging changes that appear progressive. Research suggests that movements such as gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, which are often viewed as repugnant in religious societies, typically begin with the incongruity arising from the conflict between individuals' personal values and established cultural norms, and the resolution of this incongruity.⁴² This resolution process may lead to significant cultural transformations

³⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 10-11.

³⁵ Steven Kettell, *Faith in Secular Society: Religious Belief and Public Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 12-14.

³⁶ Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 177.

³⁷ Harry C. Triandis, "Individualism-Collectivism and Personality", *Journal of Personality* 69/6 (2001), 907-924.

³⁸ Hunsberger - Altemeyer, *Atheists*, 91-94.

³⁹ Peter B. Smith - Michael H. Bond, *Social Psychology Across Cultures: Analysis and Perspectives* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 123-126.

⁴⁰ Markus, Hazel R. – Shinobu Kitayama. "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation". *Psychological Review* 98/2 (1991), 224-253.

⁴¹ Steven J. Heine – Darrin R. Lehman, "The Cultural Construction of Self-Enhancement: An Examination of Group-Serving Biases", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72/6 (1997), 1268-1283.

⁴² Milton Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 216-218.

or, in the long term, to the erosion of traditional cultural identities. The mechanism behind this lies in the cumulative effect of individual maladjustment solutions; as Berry points out, when individuals continuously resolve conflict by adopting dominant social values at the expense of their traditional heritage (assimilation), the group undergoes a process that can lead to the gradual erosion of its unique cultural characteristics.⁴³ In short, social relationships can be reshaped as a result of cognitive dissonance. In some cases, as individuals seek social support to validate their beliefs, the harmony and intensity of these relationships increase, while in other cases they decrease due to withdrawal from conflicting social environments. In some cases, they increase, while in others they decrease. It also has a significant impact on culture and has the power to change it. However, this change may not be positive. It can be a precursor to changes that lead to the disappearance of cultures and generations.⁴⁴

3.10. Cognitive Dissonance Dynamics in Societies with Multiple Religions

In societies where multiple religions coexist, individuals may experience cognitive dissonance as they navigate between religious beliefs and practices in different social environments. For example, Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis suggests that exposure to different religious views can either reduce prejudice or increase cognitive dissonance, depending on the context, intensity, and quality of the exposure.⁴⁵ High-quality interreligious contact typically fosters understanding while reducing intergroup tension, thereby alleviating cognitive dissonance.⁴⁶ However, when rigid doctrinal debates and tensions arise where no compromise is possible, individuals may experience increased internal conflict, which can lead to defensive attitudes and strengthened group prejudices.⁴⁷

Cultural diversity further complicates these dynamics by placing individuals in conflict with a broader social group that may clash with their religious identity. Berry argues that acculturation strategies such as marginalisation and integration influence how individuals resolve incongruence in multicultural social contexts.⁴⁸ For example, a Muslim living in a predominantly Christian society may experience incongruence when social norms challenge Islamic values, leading to strategies such as reinterpreting religious texts or compartmentalising cultural identities.⁴⁹

In addition, the power dynamics between majority and minority religious groups also shape the intensity of this cognitive dissonance. Minority religious groups are often naturally exposed to certain structural inequalities due to their numbers, which forces them to conform to prevailing dominant norms while continuing to secretly practise their different

⁴³ John W. Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation", *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 46/1 (1997), 5-34.

⁴⁴ Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation", 9.

⁴⁵ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954), 261-281.

⁴⁶ Thomas F. Pettigrew – Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90/5 (2006), 751-783.

⁴⁷ Henri Tajfel – John C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior", *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel – William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7-24.

⁴⁸ Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation", 9-10.

⁴⁹ Hiam Abu-Raiya – Kenneth I. Pargament, "Empirically Based Psychology of Islam: Summary and Critique of the Literature", *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 14/2 (2011), 93-115.

beliefs, triggering cognitive dissonance.⁵⁰ Such tensions may lead individuals to adopt syncretism or dual identities as these religious groups seek to negotiate their position within the dominant cultures rather than engage in direct confrontation.⁵¹

Finally, globalisation and increasing interconnectedness have intensified cognitive dissonance in multi-religious societies. Exposure to different religious ideologies through the media or migration leads individuals to critically examine their own beliefs and facilitates a process of comparative thinking by comparing them with other religious ideologies.⁵² This comparative process can both enhance and encourage spirituality and an individual's commitment to their religion, as well as lead them to adopt alternative worldviews and renounce their religion.⁵³

4. Implications for Future Research

This review underlines the multifaceted role of cognitive dissonance in religious conversion and deconversion. Future studies should study specific topics such as the effect of sin on cognitive dissonance, the intersection of psychological resilience with cognitive dissonance, and the effect of education on cognitive dissonance. In addition, it would be useful to conduct empirical studies in this field which will reveal the scientific validity of these theoretical approaches.

4.1. Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that cognitive dissonance functions as a fundamental psychological mechanism in the course of religious change. The analysis reveals that the tension between traditional religious values and emerging personal, scientific, or social realities is the primary catalyst for internal conflict. Furthermore, institutional deficiencies and moral inconsistencies in religious leadership have been identified as significant accelerators of this dissonance. A notable contribution of this research is that it frames cognitive dissonance not merely as a gateway to leaving religion, but rather as a transformative lens. Depending on the coping strategies and interpretive frameworks employed by the individual, this psychological tension may either lead to a departure from religion in search of psychological consistency or, conversely, trigger the rebuilding of a more resilient belief structure in the face of modern challenges. However, this study is limited by its reliance on theoretical frameworks and secondary data from narrative literature reviews, it is necessary to emphasize the need for future empirical research to test these mechanisms across diverse religious and cultural contexts.



Hakem/Peer-review: Çift Taraflı Kör/Double Blind.

Teşekkür/Acknowledgements:

-

⁵⁰ Nancy Foner – Richard Alba, "Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?", *International Migration Review* 42/2 (2008), 360-392.

⁵¹ Charles Stewart – Rosalind Shaw (ed.), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1994), 7.

⁵² Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), 26-27.

⁵³ Köse, *Conversion to Islam*, 103-107.

Beyanname/Declarations:

1. Özgünlük Beyanı/Statement of Originality:

Bu çalışma özgündür.

2. Yazar Katkıları/Author Contributions:

Fikir/Concept: AOT; *Kavramsallaştırma/Conceptualization:* AOT-MAB; *Literatür Taraması/Literature Search:* AOT; *Veri Toplama/Data Collection:* AOT; *Veri İşleme/Data Processing:* AOT; *Analiz/Analysis:* AOT; *Yazma – orijinal taslak/Writing – original draft:* AOT; *Yazma – inceleme ve düzenleme/Writing – review & editing:* AOT-MAB.

3. Etik Kurul İzni/Ethics approval:

Etik Kurul İzni gerekmemektedir.

4. Finansman-Destek/Funding-Support:

Bu çalışma herhangi bir finansman ya da destek almamıştır.

5. Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı/Competing interests:

Yazarlar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedirler.



Bibliography

- Abu-Raiya, Hiam – Pargament, Kenneth I. “Empirically Based Psychology of Islam: Summary and Critique of the Literature”. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 14/2 (2011), 93-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670903426482>
- Allport, Gordon W. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954.
- Altemeyer, Bob – Hunsberger, Bruce. *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith and Others Abandon Religion*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1997.
- Barbour, Ian G. *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*. New York: HarperOne, 1997.
- Batson, C. Daniel vd. *Religion and the Individual: A Social-Psychological Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Berger, Peter L. *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.
- Berry, John W. “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation”. *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 46/1 (1997), 5-34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Braun, Virginia – Clarke, Victoria. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology”. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3/2 (2006), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qpp0630a>
- Festinger, Leon. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.
- Foner, Nancy – Alba, Richard. “Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?”. *International Migration Review* 42/2 (2008), 360-392. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2008.00128.x>
- Heine, Steven J. – Lehman, Darrin R. “The Cultural Construction of Self-Enhancement: An

- Examination of Group-Serving Biases". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72/6 (1997), 1268-1283. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.6.1268>
- Hood, Ralph W. vd. *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*. New York: Guilford Press, 4. Basım, 2009.
- Hunsberger, Bruce – Altemeyer, Bob. *Atheists: A Groundbreaking Study of America's Nonbelievers*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2006.
- Kettell, Steven. *Faith in Secular Society: Religious Belief and Public Policy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Köse, Ali. *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Lofland, John – Stark, Rodney. "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective". *American Sociological Review* 30/6 (1965), 862-875. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2090965>
- Markus, Hazel R. – Kitayama, Shinobu. "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation". *Psychological Review* 98/2 (1991), 224-253. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224>
- Paloutzian, Raymond F. – Park, Crystal L. (ed.). *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. New York: Guilford Publications, 2013.
- Pargament, Kenneth I. *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*. New York: Guilford Press, 1997.
- Pettigrew, Thomas F. – Tropp, Linda R. "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90/5 (2006), 751-783. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751>
- Robertson, Roland. *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage, 1992.
- Rokeach, Milton. *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: Free Press, 1973.
- Silver, Christopher F. *Atheism, Agnosticism, and Non-Belief: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of Type and Narrative*. Chattanooga: University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Department of Education, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2013.
- Smith, Peter B. – Bond, Michael H. *Social Psychology Across Cultures: Analysis and Perspectives*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Stewart, Charles – Shaw, Rosalind (ed.). *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Streib, Heinz vd. (ed.). *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the USA*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009.
- Tajfel, Henri – Turner, John C. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior". *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. ed. Stephen Worchel – William G. Austin. 276-294. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986.
- Triandis, Harry C. "Individualism-Collectivism and Personality". *Journal of Personality* 69/6 (2001), 907-924. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.696169>
- Voas, David – Chaves, Mark. "Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?". *American Journal of Sociology* 121/5 (2016), 1517-1556. <https://doi.org/10.1086/684202>
-

Zuckerman, Phil. *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

