

Cooper, J. (2007). Chapter 1: Cognitive dissonance: In the beginning. In J. Cooper (Ed.), *Cognitive dissonance: Fifty years of a classic theory* (pp. 1-27). Sage Publications Ltd.

Synopsis:

Cooper discussed the theory of cognitive dissonance, which was established by social psychologist, Leon Festinger. Cooper identified and pointed out through the studies of Festinger that people are not comfortable with inconsistency in their lives. This inconsistency produces the state of cognitive dissonance in individuals who are then driven to find ways to reduce that inconsistency. The competing cognitions in one's psyche results in a magnitude of cognitive dissonance. Cooper stated that "the more discrepant two cognitions are, the greater the magnitude of dissonance" (p. 6). Once dissonance is aroused, it needs to be lowered. Cooper noted that dissonance occurs when deeply held beliefs are challenged or when we act in ways that do not align with our beliefs. When this happens, we reduce dissonance by reducing or lowering the discrepancy by changing attitudes or behaviors. The author used an example of the theory of dissonance demonstrated in the lives of a doomsday cult, the Seekers. The Seekers believed in a pending destruction of the world. When this event did not happen, they were compelled to reduce this inconsistency by changing their beliefs.

Key Concepts:

- **Cognitive Dissonance:** "when people believe that two of their psychological representations are inconsistent with each other" (p. 6).
- **Cognition:** "is any piece of knowledges' a person may have. It can be knowledge of a behavior, knowledge of one's attitude, or knowledge about the state of the world" (p.5).
- **Inconsistency:** "a discord between expectation and experience along with the result of being uncomfortable and an unpleasant state of cognitive dissonance" (p. 3).

Key Quotes:

- "The holding of two or more inconsistent cognitions arouses the state of cognitive dissonance, which is experienced as uncomfortable tension. This tension has driven-like properties and must be reduced" (p. 6).
- "People who think highly of themselves and expect to succeed would suffer dissonance by failing, but people who think poorly of their ability might experience dissonance from success" (p. 20).
- "Cognitive dissonance is a ubiquitous phenomenon each time we make decisions, we are subjected to the experience of cognitive dissonance and are likely to take action to reduce it" (p. 22).

Essential Question:

- What would it take for human beings to conquer cognitive dissonance and reduce their discomfort when their deeply held views are threatened?