

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:

Joel Cooper discussed the history of the development of the theory of cognitive dissonance, and its application to explain humans' drive to be in a comfortable and consistent environment. Cooper stated that Cognitive dissonance occurs because of "the inconsistency between your expectation and your experience" (p. 3). The inconsistent cognitions cause tension, which is experienced in an unpleasant state, and people are driven to reduce it. For instance, Cooper talked about the Seekers to demonstrate the desperate length humans will go to achieve consistency in their lives. Cooper then introduced a unique feature of cognitive dissonance, magnitude, which calculates the quantitative amount of discrepancy a person experiences and helps determine actions people may take and cognitions they may espouse to reduce the dissonance. One way people reduce discrepancy is known as the free choice paradigm, which occurs when people who choose between two outcomes tend to view the rejected result less favorably, and the chosen outcome more favorably than they did before. Cooper also discussed the effects of cognitive dissonance and how it can unconsciously alter beliefs and attitudes to resolve the inconsistency. Throughout the article, Cooper also talked about other significant applications of cognitive dissonance such as justification, punishment, and success.

Key Concepts

- **Cognition** – “any ‘piece of knowledge’ 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).
- **Cognitive Dissonance** – "occurs when people believe that two of their psychological representations are inconsistent with each other" (p. 6).
- **Magnitude of Dissonance**– "proportional to the discrepant cognitions a person has (the elements above the line in the formula) and inversely proportional to the number of cognitions that are consonant (below the line), each weighted by its importance" (p. 8).

Key Quotes

- "Cognitive dissonance was like a drive that needed to be reduced implied that people were going to have to find some way of resolving their inconsistencies" (p. 3).
- "Attitudes, beliefs, perceptions of the environment, values, and behaviors all fell under a single rubric and all were grist for the mill to determine the level of consistency or inconsistency" (p. 21).
- “Dissonance is impacted not only by the existence and the degree of discrepancy between cognitions but also by other factors.” (p. 7).

Essential Question

- How was the theory of cognitive dissonance founded and developed?
- What are the different applications of cognitive dissonance?