

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

Author, Joel Cooper examines the concept of cognitive dissonance which was developed by Leon Festinger in the 1950's. The concept concentrates on the inconsistencies between an individual's expectations and experience and the need to reduce the inconsistency and restore consistency. The premise of the theory is that people do not tolerate social inconsistency well and need to reduce the dissonance by changing either their attitude or behavior to resolve inconsistency. The magnitude of the dissonance determines the change to be made and "in general, cognitions that are consonant with one of the discrepant cognitions can serve to reduce the total magnitude of dissonance." (p.7) The author provides real life examples and research studies to explain the theory as well as free choice paradigm and dissonance arising from induced compliance and suffering. The author also cited studies which questioned the old Skinner and Hull theories that "the greater the reward, the greater the learning." (p.16). Additional research challenged the effects of reward and suffering on attitude changes. Cooper notes that the theory shows that we need to see consistency in our social world just as we do in our perceptual and physical world.

### Key Concepts

- **Cognitive Dissonance:** "when people believe that two of their psychological representations are inconsistent with each other...a pair of cognitions is inconsistent if one cognition follows from the obverse (opposite) of the other" (p. 6).
- **Social Psychology:** "examining the way people functioned in groups and the influence that groups- or simply other individuals- had on an individual citizen" (p.2).
- **Cognition:** any 'piece of knowledge' a person may have...knowledge of a behavior, knowledge of one's attitude, or knowledge about the state of the world" (p.5).

### Key Quotes

- People are "driven to find a way to restore their consistency-driven to find a new belief that would make sense of what they had done and driven to convince a skeptical world of the truth of their new position" (p.5).
- "The holding of two or more inconsistent cognitions arouses the state of cognitive dissonance, which is experienced as uncomfortable tension. This tension has drive-like properties and must be reduced" (p.6).
- "Now the theory of cognitive dissonance was threatening to question the dominance of reinforcement and learning. At the very least, it had made clearly derived predictions about the relationship of rewards to attitude change and supported these predictions" (p. 16).

### Essential Questions

- Do individuals who consistently, repeatedly and intentionally behave contrary to their purported attitudes experience cognitive dissonance?
- How is resolving cognitive dissonance any different than rationalizing poor behavior