Case Study Of Cognitive Dissonance

Jane met the seemingly perfect co-worker Ray Brown and fell in love with him. Their relationship progressed fast that they decided to move in together. As a result, Jane stopped renting her original living place. The relationship kept sailing despite Ray not breaking up with his 3-year girlfriend Dee. When Ray finally broke up with Dee, he also broke up with Jane before they moved in together. The reality hit Jane hard since she lost Ray and her living place at the same time. Jane then took the vacancy in Eddie's apartment. She started her reading on different "psychology" books to come up with the "old cow theory" to justify Ray's leaving her. In Jane's stay, Jane and Eddie knew more about each other and sparked love interest/chemistry.

Being encouraged by a friend who worked in a newspaper, Jane wrote a column about love masquerading with a fake identity of a old woman with a related PHD. The column became popular which made the media all wanted to interview the popular wise old lady. Jane first was rejoiced by her fame but soon realized the situation got out of control. She accepted a phone interview with her Tv company who decided to show up with her real identity at last. She gave a speech of disapproving the "the old cow theory" and understanding her values, getting rounds of applause. Eventually, Jane and Eddie confessed their love to each other and got together.

Jane convinced herself with the "old cow theory" to rationalize the break up.

It was how Jane coped with her cognitive dissonance. Being the outsider, we could easily notice the absurdity of Jane's new belief. We think we are smarter than Jane to believe such nonsense. However, oftentimes, we are Jane. When contradiction appears in two thoughts, we tend to change one belief to match with another to have the peace of mind again. Jane, having low self-esteem, was also more prone to self-justification. By interpreting how Jane dealt with the break up, we may become more self-aware and avoid walking Jane's path.

The idea of cognitive dissonance was first proposed by Leon Festinger, an American psychologist. It is proposed that humans strive for internal psychological consistency to function mentally in the society. Having a clear and consistent picture of the world could help us make better decisions. When a person has two contradictory thoughts, there exists the inconsistency in mind which affects our perception of the world and our ability of decision-making. As a result, one experiences the state of mental discomfort called cognitive dissonance. The person is motivated to resolve the dissonance to restore the psychological consistency and resolve the discomfort. (Festinger, 1957) Self-justification is when the person tries to reduce or eliminate the contradiction. There are several ways to resolve dissonance, for example, changing a thought, changing a behavior and adding a new thought. (Festinger, 1957) We can understand more by applying on the Jane's case.

We can tell that Jane was much in love with Ray and she thought Ray also loved her. However, things went out of Jane's expectation when Ray called their relationship an end. Jane had this original belief that Ray loved her. The fact that Ray leaving her struck her mind. If Ray did love her, there was no way he would leave her. This was how Jane's logic went. At that moment, things were illogical to Jane. There came an apparent contradiction in two cognitions.

Subsequently, Jane experienced a cognitive dissonance.

Jane had a lot of emotions knowing the bad news. She was devastated. She also felt the discomfort triggered by the cognitive dissonance, pressuring her to find a way to reduce the discomfort. To settle the inconsistency and to feel better, she adopted one of the ways as Festinger suggested ? adding a new thought. Jane came up with the “old cow theory” which was supported by bits of information from various scientific researches and biological books. She read that bulls refused to mate twice with the same cow even when the cow was disguised in the scent of another cow. She got inspired and propose that men were like bulls and women were like cows. Eventually, men would dump women once they became “old cows”. She had to believe the fact that Ray left her was only the nature of men because she was afraid to accept the truth that men do not leave women, men leave her. She justified Ray’s leave who found comfort under such delusion. The cognitive dissonance thus was resolved.

Self-esteem catalyzes Jane’s experience of cognitive dissonance. Holland’s research shows that low self-esteem people are more likely to engage in self-justification than those with high self-esteem. It is because the former has less accessible positive thoughts about themselves that can successfully reduce dissonance. Hence, they experience more discomfort after a self-threat than high self-esteem people.

Jane showed signs of low self-esteem. She did not seem to understand Ray was an unfaithful man who did not worth her time and love. Not knowing her values, Jane easily got the conclusion that she was the problem and that was why Ray left her, men all left her. However, this idea made her feel worse about herself. Consequently, she was so eager to find reasons and explanations to justify the break up. Self-justification helped the bad news more tolerable and helper her easier to move on. Despite of the fact that the “old cow theory” was illogical and ridiculous as it sounded, whatever calmed her nerves worked for her. In addition, she compared herself, a grown woman with independent thinking, with a cow. She bought this self-deprecating theory which further showed her low self-esteem and her desperation to recover from her pain.