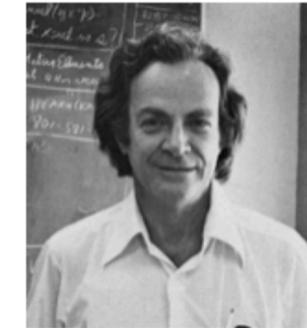


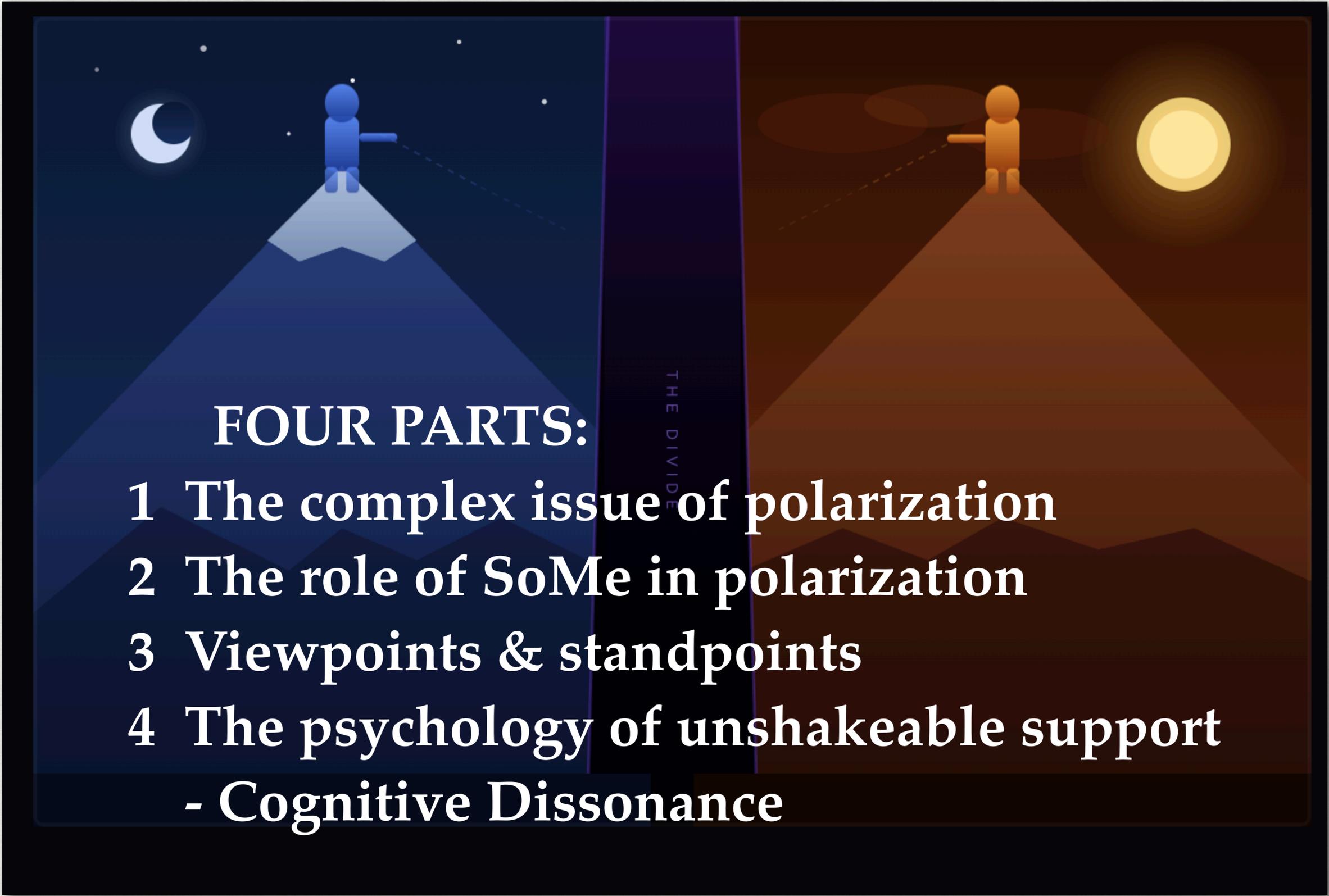


## *BIG IDEAS FORUM - ANTHEM*



Where people, who are not satisfied that they have learned enough, meet

**Viewpoints & Cognitive Dissonance**  
**How can we overcome a polarized society?**



**FOUR PARTS:**

- 1 The complex issue of polarization**
  - 2 The role of SoMe in polarization**
  - 3 Viewpoints & standpoints**
  - 4 The psychology of unshakeable support**
- Cognitive Dissonance**

# THE COMPLEX ISSUE OF POLARIZATION

UNDERSTANDING THE FORCES & FINDING PATHWAYS FORWARD

## POLARIZATION IN GENERAL

- ✓ **STATUS/PERCEPTIONS:** Country fractured along partisan lines.
  - ★ Internet & Social Media exacerbate divisions.
  - ★ Disinformation & Hate Speech proliferate in digital spaces.



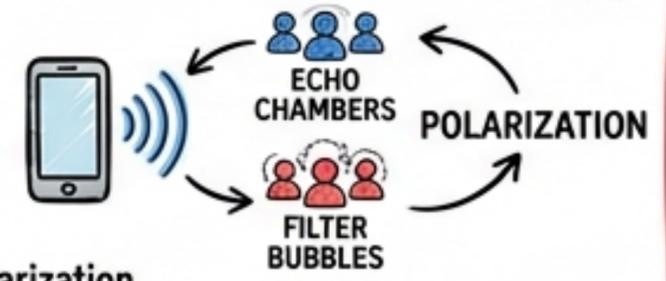
### CONSEQUENCES

- Affective polarization (animus towards political others) undermines democracy (e.g., partisan standoffs on COVID-19, climate change).
- Real-world violence (Jan 6 Capitol, Pelosi assault).
- Leads to violation of democratic norms.

## ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS & DIGITAL PLATFORMS

How Social Media Inflames Polarization:

- Reach,
- Algorithms segment political audiences,
- Personalization of recommendations.



### KEY TRENDS:

- Partisan cues increase polarization.
- Sensational/Moral Outrage/Divisive content goes VIRAL.
- Trends incentivize divisive content from politicians/news/influencers for ENGAGEMENT.

## HOW TO REDUCE POLARIZATION?

1. **INTERGROUP CONTACT:** Interaction with 'out-group' improves favorability (exposure alone helps).
2. **CORRECT MISCONCEPTIONS:** People often overestimate division (Dems & Reps dislike each other LESS than perceived).
3. **CORRECT PERCEPTIONS:** Address how bad polarization really is.

## DOROTHY E. SMITH'S STANDPOINT THEORY



A feminist sociology for women, for people.

**DEFINING VIEWPOINT (Passive):**  
Spontaneous, lived experiences, everyday perspectives shaped by social "location" (gender, class, race), without critical reflection.

**DEFINING STANDPOINT (Achieved):**  
Dynamic, achieved position rooted in struggle & CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING. Transforms viewpoint into systematic critique of RULING RELATIONS.

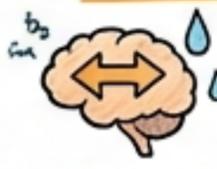


### BIFURCATION SPLIT!

- ↳ Actual World (e.g., domestic labor) vs.
- ↳ Ruling Relations/Discourses (abstracted, dominant knowledge).

Requires COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE to overcome bifurcation and connect personal experiences to broader social structures.

## COGNITIVE DISSONANCE: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF UNSHAKEABLE SUPPORT



**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCOMFORT**

Discomfort when holding contradictory beliefs, values, or behaviors. A MASS PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAP involving basic needs, info manipulation, fears.

### RESOLUTION STRATEGIES (To Reduce Discomfort):

1. Change Attitudes/Behaviors.
2. Justify/Rationalize Choices (e.g., Effort Justification, Belief Disconfirmation).
3. Avoid Conflicting Information → **CONFIRMATION BIAS** (Seek confirming info, disregard contradictory evidence).  
Examples:
  - Smokers rationalizing habit,
  - Financial overspending justifications.

### CONCLUSION:

We hang on to views to avoid admitting we were wrong. NOT about intelligence, but **COGNITIVE DISSONANCE** is the underlying factor!



# 1. THE COMPLEX ISSUE OF POLARIZATION

### 1) POLARIZATION - IN GENERAL

#### Status/Perceptions:

- the country has fractured along partisan lines
- the internet and social media exacerbate divisions
- disinformation and hate speech proliferate in digital spaces

#### Consequences:

If the free exchange of ideas between non-likeminded people is a basic tenet of democracy, then affective polarization threatens to undermine democracy itself. In the United States, affective polarization now underlies partisan standoffs over everything from COVID-19 policy and vaccines to climate change.

## 1) POLARIZATION

“Polarization is widely recognized as one of the most pressing issues now facing the United States.

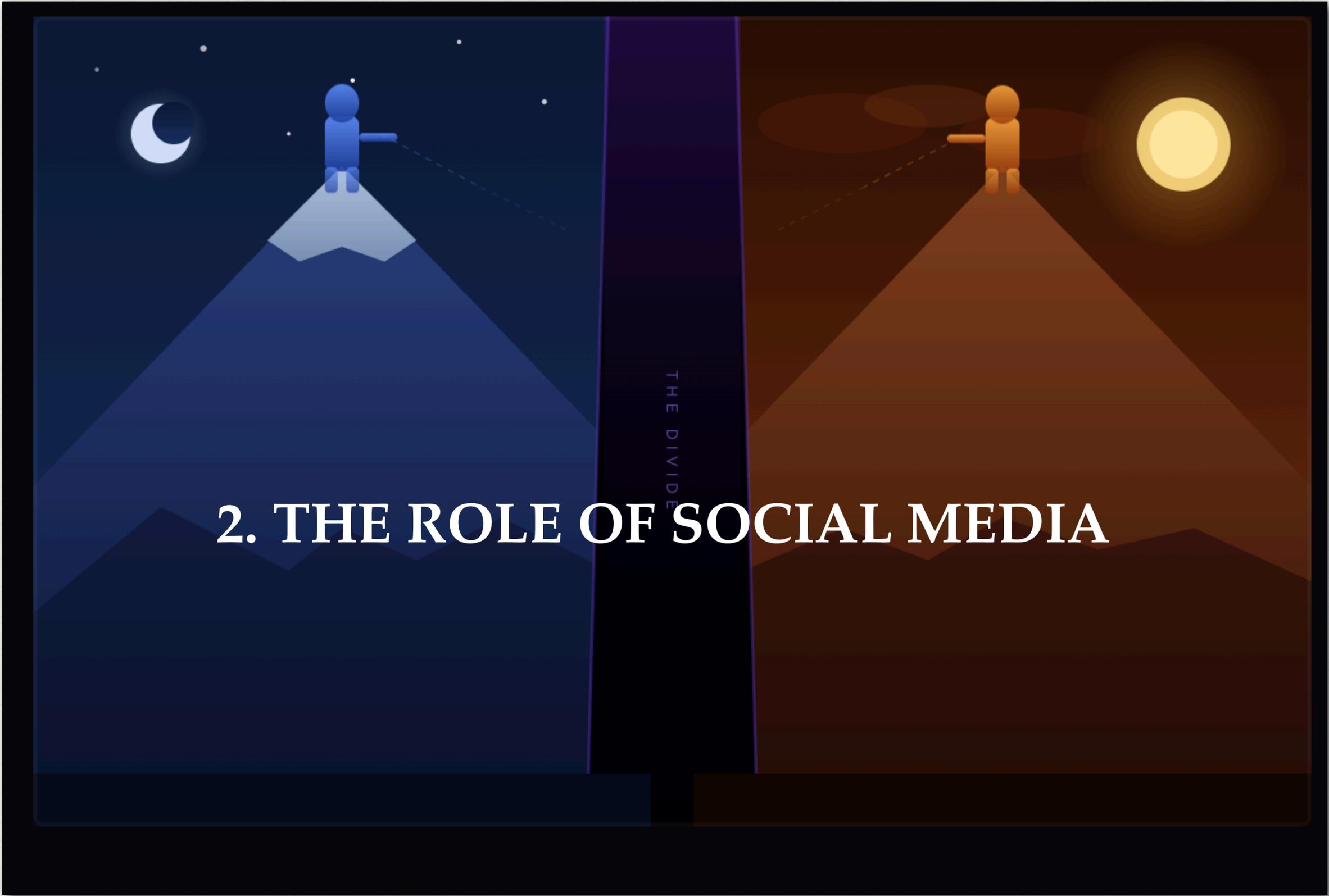
Americans dislike their political adversaries more than they used to.

Meanwhile, disinformation and hate speech (often produced by actors with strong incentives to inflame existing social and political division), proliferate in digital spaces.

The real-world consequences are far from trivial; consider

- the violence at the Capitol on January 6
- the assault on Nancy Pelosi's husband.

It is hard to imagine events like these occurring *absent* such a polarized political climate.



## 2. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

### 2. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Recent research suggests that social media can inflame and drive polarization (especially in established democracies) by virtue of

(a) their **reach**

(b) the way some **segments political audiences** (using algorithms), and

(c) personalization of **recommendations**.

The *extent* to which online echo chambers and filter bubbles contribute to polarization is not well understood, However . . .

## 2. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

-In a 2020 study . . .

- \* researchers asked some participants to **refrain from using** Facebook for four weeks. Afterward, these participants reported holding **less polarized political views** than the control group (who had not been asked to refrain from using Facebook).
- \* Deactivating Facebook also made people who get news content on Facebook regularly **less hostile toward** “the other party”.

## 2. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

*Because* people are **inclined to favor sensational content**, messages with moral outrage or bashing one's outparty tend to be particularly successful at going viral . . .

That trend **incentivizes** politicians, news outlets, and influencers *because* that yields the engagement they crave.

### SO, HOW CAN WE REDUCE POLARIZATION?

Research shows two key ideas for how to reduce polarization:

First,

- **increase our exposure** to someone from our social “outgroup”
  - intergroup activity dampens prejudice toward various minority groups.

Second,

- **correcting our *perception*** of the problem of polarization (perception is reality)
  - many Americans think the nation is more divided than it truly is. DEMS and REPS think they dislike each other more than they actually do. These **misconceptions** can, ironically, drive the two sides further apart.



### 3. VIEWPOINTS & STANDPOINTS

### 3. VIEWPOINTS & STANDPOINTS

#### Dorothy E. Smith (1926–2022)



was a pioneering British-born Canadian sociologist, feminist theorist, and ethnographer renowned for developing standpoint theory (in the 1970s) and institutional ethnography

- BA from the London School of Economics
- PhD in sociology from the UC, Berkeley (1966)
- Prof. at the University of British Columbia, the University of Toronto until 2005, and later at the University of Victoria.

Smith's ideas transformed sociology into a tool "for women, for people," influencing feminist epistemology and research into power dynamics.

She was awarded the Order of Canada (2019) for her work.

## 3. VIEWPOINTS & STANDPOINTS

### 3) DOROTHY E. SMITH'S STANDPOINT THEORY

Dorothy E. Smith distinguishes “standpoint” from “viewpoint,” emphasizing that they represent **different levels of awareness and achievement** within social positioning

#### Defining Viewpoint

Viewpoints refer to *immediate/spontaneous, lived experiences* in the *actual world* (such as domestic labor, childcare, or community interactions) shaped by one's “*social location*” (such as gender, class, or race), *without critical reflection*.

Viewpoint formation is *passive* and location-based, easily bifurcated by ruling relations (i.e. contrast with dominant “ruling relations”). They offer unique access to social processes that are *invisible* from *privileged* social locations.

### 3. VIEWPOINTS & STANDPOINTS

Smith describes *bifurcation* as a split between (1) a *women's\** experiences of daily life and (2) the *abstracted, ruling discourses* of institutions / experts that dominate public knowledge.

This forces marginalized individuals, especially women, to adapt to a masculine or dominant viewpoint, rendering their own realities invisible or devalued.

\*) or another marginalized individual

NOTE: Who is responsible for domestic work (“help or share;” who decides “pay for equal work”)?

### 3. VIEWPOINTS & STANDPOINTS

#### Defining Standpoint

Standpoint, by contrast to viewpoints, is a *dynamic, achieved position* rooted in social location and *political struggle* (often collective) and is gained through *critical consciousness-raising*, and aims at a *systematic critique of ruling relations*.

### 3. VIEWPOINTS & STANDPOINTS

In her standpoint theory, Dorothy E. Smith's work centers primarily on **gender** but acknowledges identical intersections with **class** and **race**\* where *subordinated positions intensify* marginalization from ruling relations\*\*.

Dominant power structures—patriarchal, class-based, or institutional—*bifurcate consciousness for subordinated groups* (e.g., women in domestic roles), rendering the concrete experiences of the subordinated groups *invisible in abstracted public discourses*. Note: GASLIGHTING!

\*) add **age** to that mix

\*\*\*) meaning: women and class; women and race; women, class and race

### 3. VIEWPOINTS & STANDPOINTS

Smith emphasized that no one possesses **complete, unbiased knowledge**.

Therefore, researchers must reflexively *acknowledge their own standpoint as a starting point for inquiry*.

This approach reveals how the perspectives of the dominant, ruling class (typically white, 'older,' male) bifurcate women's consciousness.

This method (a) challenges *value-neutral* science and (b) emphasizes that **struggle-achieved standpoints are necessary for less distorted social understanding!**



# 4. COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

The psychology of unshakeable support

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

### QUESTION:

Why do people maintain steadfast support for a person whose inappropriate and often unlawful actions or beliefs conflict with their own?

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

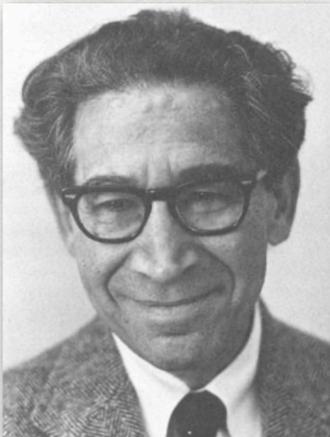
### ANSWER:

### COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

... the psychological discomfort that arises when

- (a) an individual simultaneously holds two or more contradictory *beliefs*, values, or behaviors, or
- (b) when their *behavior* conflicts with their beliefs.

It was first described by psychologist Leon Festinger in 1957.



Leon Festinger (1919–1989) an American social psychologist best known for formulating the theory of **cognitive dissonance** and for major work on **social comparison and group dynamics**

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

### Triggers for Dissonance

Dissonance arises when **actions and beliefs contradict**.

For example: Someone who values honesty tells a lie, or when behaviors go against personal values. Getting new information that challenges held beliefs also causes this discomfort.

**Cognitive dissonance** describes what happens when conflicting information or behaviors cannot be avoided and must be addressed.

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

### 4 types of Dissonance Situations

- **Effort Justification:** People value outcomes more if they've put in significant effort, even if the actual reward is disappointing. This is to justify the effort (or money / resources) spent.
- **Decision Making:** This occurs after a person exaggerates the *value of a chosen option* and downplays the value of the non-chosen option.
- **Confirmation bias**, meanwhile, is the tendency to seek out, prioritize, and remember information that *aligns* with one's existing beliefs, while disregarding contradictory evidence . . . similar to:
  - **Belief Disconfirmation:** When evidence challenges deeply held beliefs, individuals may reinterpret or deny the evidence rather than change their beliefs.

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

### Signs and Symptoms

Individuals might feel anxious, uneasy, guilty, and/or stressed when confronted with the dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance represents the intersection of basic human needs, information manipulation, and deep-seated fears. It *explains* a range of rationalizations and belief-maintenance behaviors (next slide) that people exhibit in challenging or contradictory situations.

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

### Resolution Strategies

People are motivated *to reduce this discomfort*, often by

- **rationalizing** our choices to restore internal consistency
- **avoiding** conflicting information
- **confirmation bias** - accepting information that *confirms* our a-priory opinions
  - calling all other information hoaxes
- **changing** our attitudes

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

### Common everyday examples include:

- Smokers rationalize their habit against health consequences
- Financial decisions: overspending against a budget / hanging on to bad investments
- **Environmental concern conflicts** with behaviors like driving fuel-inefficient cars
- Moral dilemmas: **supporting a morally conflicted politician** or working at an **ethically questionable job**.
- Social behaviors like **voting against one's party** or laughing at offensive jokes for social acceptance.

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

**Conclusion:** We hang on to views that we once had, *even* when they later prove to be wrong... *because* we do not want to admit to ourselves that we were wrong

So, rather than DEMs and REPs are saying about the other that they are stupid or ignorant (like we tend to do), we should realize that *THAT* is not the underlying factor... ***Cognitive dissonance is the factor!***

## 4) COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

If you want to know more . . .

**Sources** (numbers do *not* correspond to source reference in articles above):

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*Thank You!*

THE DIVIDE