

# Social psychology theories - the impact of attitudes in society



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People usually have a more immediate influence on us when we are actually in their presence. However some psychologists claim that all psychology is social psychology as all our behaviour takes place in a social setting, even when alone our behaviour tends to influence others. Social psychology looks at interpersonal relationships of how people form different impressions and views of other people and groups in society which affects their behaviour. (McElwee, 2005) It examines the impact that society and interaction has on attitudes and behaviours.

In this essay it will examine how attitudes of people in society is of importance in social psychology, how it can be seen and also the effect it has on areas in social care. Also examining Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory to show the imitation of behaviours that we see others perform because of their attitudes. Also we will look at theories based on learning by association which can be the foundations of forming attitudes. Attitude can be defined as:

“ Attitude is a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution or event.”

(Ajzen, 2005)

The study of attitudes is one of the major areas in social psychology. Attitudes are evaluations of any aspect of the social world, they help us understand people's responses to new stimuli. Once formed, such attitudes can influence behaviour even when those attitudes are inconsistent with those we are obviously expected to have. Many of our views for example, how we interact with or observe the behaviours of others is done through <https://assignbuster.com/social-psychology-theories-the-impact-of-attitudes-in-society/>

social learning. (Richard Gross, 2000) This is where a person learns different behaviours or attitudes from other people.

Our attitudes are affected by different forms of influence from our families, to our peers, to media, to the society we live in. This is why psychologists examine attitudes in terms of three areas, cognitive, affective, and behavioural. This is usually known as the ABC's of attitude. Cognitive attitude is what the person thinks, their beliefs and understanding. Affective is their emotional attitudes around certain people or groups and behavioural attitudes are the person's actions, were they may avoid a person due to their beliefs. (G Neil Martin, 2000) Attitudes can be explicit, which is where the person is aware that he/she is behaving like this towards somebody, however they can also be implicit where the person is potentially unaware that they are showing this type of behaviour. The quicker the persons reaction is to a certain group or person, along with negative words towards them, shows obvious negative attitudes towards that group or person, example a person with a disability. (Richard Gross, 2000)

In society you can clearly see attitudes arise when it comes to people with a disability, intellectual or physical etc. People with attitudes or pre-conceived ideas about people with a disability brand them all with the same thought. That they are not able to do things for themselves. When people look at a person's disability rather than their ability they being to dis empower them. They begin to disable them more rather than encourage them to do things. This behaviour can be seen to be learned by association or by personal experience.

According to Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), classical conditioning is a learning process that is based on associations. People learn negative attitudes towards various social groups as a result of a parent, peers teachers etc. having the same views. Their attitudes are shaped by their observations. The social learning process can include classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning and observational learning. (Lalor, 2009)

Classical Conditioning occurs in three stages neutral, unconditioned and conditioned.

Continued;

Classical Conditioning has important consequences for attitude formation. For example a child may grow up in a home where the mother frowns and shows signs of displeasure every time she sees a person or people with a disability. At the beginning the child is neutral towards members of this particular group and their visible characteristics or traits. The child has not yet grasped to categorize these people into a certain group based on attitude. However once the mothers negative reactions are repeated when she is around this particular group in society then classical conditioning occurs. The child becomes to react as negatively as the mother. The child is after pairing the person disability with the reaction of the mother. Now the child's attitude has been formed and the child has learned by association to act like this. The child doesn't acknowledge that he or she is acting this way, to them it is the norm. At the beginning the child has no reaction and opinion to people in different social groups, the persons characteristics, traits or

lifestyle have no impact on the child however after witnessing negative attitudes the child will copy this “ Classical Conditioning”.

Another way in which attitudes are acquired is through a process called Instrumental Conditioning, which is based on a rewards and punishment by which actions we present. (McElwee, 2005) A Social Care Practitioner may support a service user with challenging behaviour with rewards like smiles, approval, positive reinforcement or even a reward chart. The reward chart would be based on the service user’s goals, and if the particular goals are met every day then they would receive a star and if their behaviour is good all week, meeting their goals then they would get a treat at the end of the week. This type of reward system gives the service users something to aim for, keeping them busy and giving them something to focus on. This helps the service user have positive outcomes and avoid negative outcomes which means it may be repeated again to achieve their desired goals. They base their attitudes on what they think they will get a reward for or get punished for. Even if their attitude is wrong if they believe they will receive a reward for it then they will act.

A third form of learning has been identified by Albert Bandura , the social learning theory, which is when a person’s behaviour changes after viewing the behaviour of another person. The person will react to the way the other person is treated and mimic the behaviour. (Lalor, 2009) Observational Learning can be verbally, textually, and through the media approach i. e. television, movies, and the internet.

According to Bandura

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“ Most human behaviour is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”

(Bandura A. , 1977)

This form of learning has many implications for example the child will do as their parents do and not as they say. It is reasonable to think that we start with our many different attitudes and it is these attitudes that then help to determine our behaviour towards a person, group or even an object.

In Banduras famous “ Bobo doll” study he established that children learn and imitate behaviours they have observed in other people. Young children watched a film where an adult act aggressively towards an inflatable Bobo doll. They used actions such as hitting the doll, throwing it around the room and making noises such as “ Pow and Boom”. These words were chosen as if the children repeated the behaviour and the words it would be evident that were imitating the adults actions. In the second film the children saw an adult behaving in a normal manner to the Bobo doll, however Bandura beleived the children that had seen the first video were more likely to attack that same doll. Later the children were allowed to play in the room with the Bobo doll and they began to imitate the aggressive actions they had previously observed with the adult. They began hitting the doll and throwing it in the air, using the same language as the adults did previously. In other words the children learned this attitude and acted on it with inappropriate behaviour.

However people may act in these manners and mimic others when they have pre-conceived ideas and attitudes however these can appear to change in what is called the mere exposure effect. People at one time may act in a certain way towards people of a certain group etc. However when they approached the same situation again sometime later their attitudes appeared to change. They may have different attitudes to the people they are around, or merely they have not remembered their previous actions. They didn't cognitively process the events that happened before.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion people learn their behaviours which turn into attitudes later. People as children mimic others while learning how to deal with and approach different situations and people, these they learn from their parents or from a model adult they are around. Even though the child doesn't understand and acknowledge that these attitudes and behaviours may be wrong they learn by association which was examined and proven by psychologist Ivan Pavlov. People can learn these long term attitudes about different people and groups etc. which can affect their lives later on. When meeting people for the first time they may already have pre-conceived ideas if that person is of a minority group, looks different or isn't of the norm of society. Their attitudes towards people will lead to their behavioural change, for example avoiding them, not engaging with them or disempowering them by looking down on them.

These attitudes can affect a small number of people involved, however when we look at it on a greater scale it is affecting our society as a whole. A

society with an attitude towards a person with a disability for example are <https://assignbuster.com/social-psychology-theories-the-impact-of-attitudes-in-society/>

the ones who are pointing out the disability rather than their abilities. Society is disabling them more, rather than empowering them to live life to the maximum.