

Does attitude
determine our
behavior?



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Social psychologists have been asking this question repeatedly how attitudes form. This essay will discuss how we form attitudes; also do attitudes determine our behavior.

We form attitudes from mainly our own personal experiences including influences from other people. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) Osgood (1977) agreed with the idea about how direct experience, form our attitudes i. e. if you had a traumatic time at the dentist. Then you may develop a negative attitude to all dentists. Whereas Zajonc (1968) suggested a different theory in how we form attitudes using the mere exposure effect, this is where a person could hear a track playing on the radio go out and buy the album. As well as the song they like they might like a couple more tracks but may not like the whole album. However the more the person plays and listens to the album the more they will grow to like it. We evaluate a repeated exposure to an object. Janis, Kaye, & Kirschner (1995) suggested we use reinforcement to form attitudes as we can see when they gave one group of subjects a soft drink with literature and the other group without any literature. They found that the group that had stuff to read were persuaded more by what they read about the soft drink than the group that didn't have anything to read.

However other researchers have suggested that the reason we form attitudes is more a cognitive development. Bem (1972) proposed we gain our knowledge about who we are and also examining our own behavior. This he termed his self perception theory. Even though some psychologists have said we form our attitude by modelling ones behavior as a template for another. They need to observe other people experiences and learning new responses. But not directly experiencing positive or negative out comes.

Rosenberg and Hovland (1960) produced the three-component model to explain how attitudes are formed; they suggested that attitude is made up from the cognitive component, affective component and the behavioural component. First, the cognitive component is made from our values and beliefs second affective component is how we feel about something or someone and thirdly behavioural component is how we behave towards a person, object or place.

However All forms of media plays a big part in our attitude formation, as adults we use pairing positive feelings towards an object which is a process of classical conditioning using adverts and jingles that stick in your head pair that with a catchy tune or message and you will probably purchases the item next time you're out shopping as we see in Zajonc (1968) mere exposure theory. We also learn our attitude through our parents when we're young we're told it's not acceptable to tell lies but it is acceptable to always tell the truth to help us form this attitude towards telling the truth parents use instrumental conditioning or operant conditioning by using affection and punishment to reinforce the behaviour in addition we learn our attitude by observing. Bandura (1973) explained with his social learning theory in which we model our attitudes and behaviour on our parents so if for example you're out somewhere with your parents and someone starts to talk to them you can tell by the way they look at them what sort of attitude they have towards this person.

Even though we all have attitudes these might not represent our behaviour as in a study that showed an inconsistency of attitude and behaviour.

LaPiere (1934) over a two-year period visited 128 hotels and restaurants

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with a Chinese couple. This was during the period when the media was reporting lots of prejudice towards Chinese people. During their visits to these places they were only discriminated against once out of all the 128 establishments, However when LaPiere returned back home six months later. He sent out questionnaires to the same establishments and surrounding areas, they had visited asking if they would book a room or reserve a table for a Chinese couple. This questionnaires had three answers to choose from yes no depends on circumstance one said no but 92% said depends on circumstances.

Leon Festinger (1957) cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) concluded that changing ones attitude does not guarantee a change in ones behaviour. But maintained it was the other way round. We may like the idea of cheating but that doesn't actually mean we will go ahead and cheat. Gross (2005) states “the cognition I smoke is psychologically inconsistent with the cognition smoking cause cancer’ (assuming that we don't wish to get cancer)” perhaps a way is to reduce or even give up smoking, However many people will look at other reasons to carry on smoking by convincing themselves that no one should force them to give up i. e. The governments ban to not smoke in pubs. Certain no smoking day's people see this as a way that their not being told what to do and this gives them the attitude to carry on smoking even though they know it can be detrimental to their health. (Gross 2005) Fazio (1977) argued that dissonance might apply when people behave in a way, which is contrary to their initial attitude. Self-perception works if behaviour and attitudes are consistent. Fisk (2004) suggests that Bems theory works for those situations where we do not know our own minds. Bems (1965,

1967) self perception theory (SPT) put forward a alternative explanation for the concept of dissonance effects is both unnecessary and unhelpful this is because we don't have privileged access to our own thoughts and feelings but find out about them in the same way we learn about other peoples.

Eiser & Van Der Pligt (1988) believe it is very difficult to distinguish between the two theories, both processes operate but in a different level and under different circumstances. Gross (2005) states “ attitude forms one determinant of behaviour these may be predispositions to behave in a particular way, but may not be a true representation on the action of our behaviour”. As seen in the LaPiere in when the results came back LaPiere was surprised but began to question his own study and thought the problem was in the questionnaire and how the questions cannot represent real life he surmised that when people were asked if they would let Chinese people into their establishments then they would refer to the articles that the newspaper had written and formed a prejudiced view of the Chinese people but it wasn't the case when they where face to face with them as they didn't fit the stereotype they might have perceived. Psyblog (2008) other psychologist have agreed with LaPiere in that it could be the way a question was asked and what type of stereotypes people had formed when they answer the questionnaire

In conclusion we can see that Janis, Kaye, & Kirschiner (1995) from evidence in that we reinforce our attitudes to form them, Rosenberg and Hovland (1960) three component model shows how attitudes can be formed using behavioral and cognitive values and beliefs. In the behaviorist explanation on why we form attitudes Bandura (1973) social learning theory where we

model our attitudes and behaviour on our parents and others around us. However in LaPiere (1934) study we can see that the results show that even though the proprietor of these establishments may have been racist inside to the Chinese couple, this did not determine their behaviour by not letting them enter their premises. In Leon Festinger (1957) cognitive dissonance theory we see that even if we change ones attitude it doesn't mean it will change our behavior. However in Bems (1956) (1957) alternative explanation for the concept of dissonance effects is both unnecessary and unhelpful. This is because we don't have privileged access to our own thoughts and feelings. It only remains to say that the evidence about attitudes and behaviour is inconclusive people will say they one thing even if there intensions are good but won't act on it for example people say they don't like smoking but don't give up, people say they're worried about global warming but still use cfc products or gases.