Beliefs and Attitudes

Intro Psychology
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Today
- Beliefs
- Attitudes

Beliefs
- Cognitive content held to be true
- The ideas that shape your behavior
- Axiomatic, not necessarily logical or reasoned
- Fairly stable (at least, that tends to help)

- The Earth is round. There is sentient life on other planets. 2+2=4. It is important to help others. One should not steal.

Beliefs
- How do you find out about people’s beliefs and attitudes?
- How stable are they, and how does that affect your behavior?
- Solomon E. Asch - What is the influence of social pressure on your stated beliefs?

Beliefs
- Subjects picked a line that matched a standard line

Beliefs
- The more confederate opponents, the less likely they were to remain independent.
Beliefs

- Subjects did not “believe” that the line was the correct one but were afraid to go against the group.

Beliefs

- As task gets more difficult (harder to pick a line), social influence increases (Suls & Miller, 1977)

Attitudes and attitude change

- Attitudes are a fairly stable evaluative disposition that makes a person think, feel, or behave either positively or negatively toward some concept, person, group, or social issue.
- Problem - our attitudes are not always well worked out.

Where do attitudes come from?

- Cognitively based
  - Classification of attitude "object" based on evaluation of information available.
  - Relatively dispassionate, open to give and take
- Affectively based
  - Based more on emotions than objective information
  - Difficult to change – topics banned from dinner table.

Where do attitudes come from?

- Behaviorally based
  - Attitudes that seem based more on an inference about one’s own behavior.
  - Most interesting!
- Festinger and Cognitive Dissonance

How Strong are Our Beliefs and Attitudes?

- Do we hold our beliefs?
- Do our attitudes change?
- If so, what can affect our attitudes and beliefs?
Festinger's Dissonance

- People prefer consistency between their attitudes and their actions.
  - “I’m basically a good person”
- Inconsistency between attitudes and actions results in dissonance that is unpleasant
  - Change behavior, or...
  - Bring attitude in line with behavior

Brehm’s distortion of likes and dislikes

- Posed as a representative of consumer testing service
- Asked women to rate the attractiveness and desirability of household appliances (it’s the 1950’s)
- As reward, women given a choice between two items identically rated in attractiveness and desirability.

Brehm’s distortion of likes and dislikes

- 20 minutes later, women were asked to re-rate all the products
- Selected appliance was now slightly more attractive than before
- Other appliances were much less attractive than before (!)

Justification of great effort

- Effort is
  - Consonant with positive outcomes
  - Dissonant with aversive outcomes
- Aronson & Mills (1959)
  - Women in a discussion group; must pass screening test
    - Averse test: reading “taboo” words aloud to experimenter
    - Mild test: reading ordinary word list

Justification of great effort

- Aronson & Mills (1959)
  - After “passing” test, listen to sample of discussion group
    - “Mumbling, confused, one of the most worthless and uninteresting discussions imaginable…”
  - Now rate how interesting the discussion was
  - Predictions?

Justification of great effort

- Aronson & Mills (1959)
  - Mean ratings of interest (out of a 100)
    - Control group (no screening) – 80
    - Mild screening – 82
    - Severe (“taboo” words) screening - 96
Justification of great effort

• With increasing effort (i.e., to get into the group/club), the value of the goal (i.e., being in the group/club) tends to increase.
  – Many many many examples
  – Boot camp, frat hazing

Forced compliance

• Festinger & Carlsmith (1959)
  – Stanford students spent an hour performing excruciatingly boring and repetitive tasks.
  – At end of experiment, students told to convince the next subject (i.e., lie) that the experiment that they would be in will be extremely interesting and enjoyable.
  – Half of these lying subjects given $1, half given $20.

Forced compliance

• Festinger & Carlsmith (1959)
  – Subjects then asked by experimenters to rate how much they really enjoyed the tasks
  – $20 paid subjects – boring, boring, boring.
  – $1 paid subjects – not so bad, could have been worse, even a little interesting.

Hmmm, forbidden donut…

• Aronson & Carlsmith (1963)
  – Children asked about a set of toys, which ones did they really like, which ones were yucky.
  – Experimenter picked toy especially liked by child
  – Experimenter left room telling half of the children that they would be punished severely if they played with the toy, half were told they would be given a mild punishment.

Hmmm, forbidden donut…

• Aronson & Carlsmith (1963)
  – What happened?

Hmmm, forbidden donut…

• Aronson & Carlsmith (1963)
  – Desirability of toy in severe punishment condition went up.
  – … in mild punishment condition, it went down.
Results from Dissonance studies
• Desire for consistency can lead to changes in attitudes or behavior
• Paradoxically, meager rewards and punishments may have larger effects in some cases.

Self knowledge?
• We do know ourselves, but we also seem to have a different, idealized “knowledge”
  – “What would you really do if…?”
• Dissonance studies suggest less accurate self knowledge than we think
  – Mismatch between behavior and beliefs/attitudes can change either behavior or attitude
  – Underlying cause for the change is typically not easily identified (and change is rarely noted)
  – Recall Schacter and Singer?

Self knowledge?
• Nisbett & Wilson (1977)
  – Hearing stories with and without noise
  – Diary studies of mood and causes of moods
  – Judgments of clothing quality and order effects

Inferences about others, inferences about ourselves
• We seem to have limited insights into actual causes of our decisions, attitudes, and behaviors
• Inferences about causes of our own behavior may be similar to inferences about others
• Bulk of “thinking” seems to go on below level of actual awareness.

Upcoming
• Emotions
• Social Context
• Psychopathology
• Final Exam