

Beliefs and Attitudes

Intro Psychology
Georgia Tech
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Today

- Beliefs
- Attitudes

Beliefs

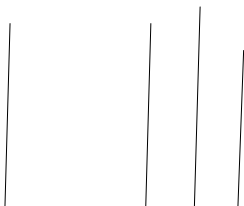
- Cognitive content held to be true
 - The ideas that shape your behavior
 - Axiomatic, not necessarily logical or reasoned
 - Fairly stable (at least, that tends to help)
- The Earth is round. There is sentient life on other planets. $2+2=4$. It is important to help others. One should not steal.

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



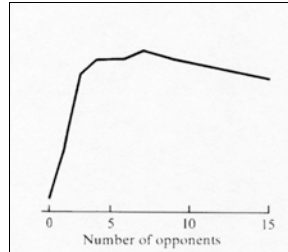
Beliefs

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



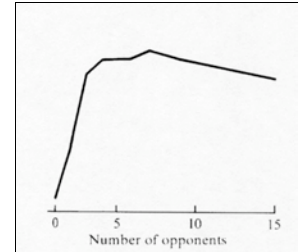
Beliefs

- 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

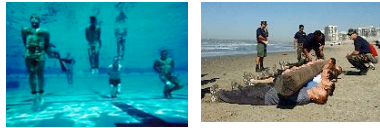
- Aronson & Mills (1959)
 - After “passing” test, listen to sample of discussion group
 - “Mumbling, confused, one of the most worthless and uninteresting discussions imaginable...”
 - Now rate how interesting the discussion was
 - Predictions?

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