Theories of Attitudes and Behavior

Dr. K. A. Korb
University of Jos

Learning Goals

- Understand the relationship between attitudes and behavior
- Understand the prominent theory of how attitude influences behavior (Theory of Planned Behavior)
- Understand how behavior can change attitudes (Theory of Cognitive Dissonance)
- Understand variables that can change the relationship between attitudes and behavior (moderator variables)
Attitudes and Behavior

- First Research Question:
  - Do attitudes determine behavior?

Attitudes → Behavior

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LaPiere’s Classic Study (1934)
- American’s perception of Chinese

Corey (1937) attitudes and cheating study

Wicker (1969) reviewed 42 studies
- Average correlation between attitudes and behavior was .15
- Recommended to abandon construct of attitude
Attitude Questionnaire Items

- I think exam malpractice is acceptable.
- HIV/AIDS
  - I feel free around people with HIV/AIDS.
  - I would take food from a person with HIV/AIDS.
  - I think people with HIV/AIDS should be treated the same as others.
- Sharing answers with coursemates is acceptable.
- I like minerals.
- I like bitter lemon.

Attitudes and Behavior

- Reasons why **Attitudes** may not have a strong relationship with **Behavior** in research studies
  - Expressed attitudes may not be the same as true attitudes
  - Aspects of attitude have varying relationships with behavior
    - Affective, Behavioral, or Cognitive
  - Differences in perceptions of the question
  - General vs. Specific Attitudes and Behavior
General vs. Specific Attitudes and Behavior

- Most research studies tried to predict specific behaviors from general attitudes
- Two solutions:
  - Predict wide range of behaviors
  - Measure specific attitudes

Conclusion:

- If measure general attitude, use multiple behaviors
- If predicting specific behavior, measure attitude toward that specific behavior
Conclusion

- Attitudes do not perfectly predict behavior
- Fishbein & Ajzen concluded that Attitude is one of a number of constructs that influences behavior
- Current research questions:
  - What variables moderate the influence of attitudes on behavior?

Theory of Planned Behavior
(Ajzen, 1985)

- Developed to predict behavior from attitude
  - Predicts deliberate behavior
- Behavior is determined by intention to perform behavior
  - Intention: Cognitive representation of readiness to perform a given behavior
Theory of Planned Behavior
(Ajzen, 1985)

- Intention determined by:
  - **Specific Attitude** toward specific behavior
  - **Subjective norms**: Belief about how significant people will view the behavior in question
  - **Perceived behavioral control**: Perceptions of ability to perform behavior

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**Theory of Planned Behavior**

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Attitude

Subjective Norms  Behavioral Intention  Behavior

Perceived Behavioral Control
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Theory of Planned Behavior

- Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Behavioral Control are not equally weighed
  - Depend on person and situation
    - If a person cares little of what others think, Subjective Norms will not influence behavioral intentions quite as much as those who care much of what others think

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Theory of Planned Behavior: Educational Implications

- Attitude
  - Positive Attitude
  - Negative Attitude
- Subjective Norms
  - Peers
  - Parents
  - Culture
  - Teacher
- Perceived Behavioral Control
  - Peers
  - Teacher
  - Infrastructure
Theory of Planned Behavior: Educational Implications

- Class Attendance
- Classroom Behavior
- Attitude toward Education in General
- Attitude toward a Particular Subject
- Attitude toward Achievement

For me to attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis is extremely difficult: 1 : 2 : 3 : 4 : 5 : 6 : 7 : extremely easy
Theory of Planned Behavior Sample Questionnaire

- **Attitude**
  - For me to attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis is – **extremely good/bad**
  - For me to attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis is – **extremely valuable/worthless**

- **Subjective Norms**
  - Most people who are important to me think that – **I should/I should not** – attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis.
  - Most of the students in this class with whom I am acquainted attend meetings of this class on a regular basis – **definitely true/false**

- **Perceived Behavioral Control**
  - For me to attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis is – **extremely difficult/easy**
  - I am confident that if I wanted to I could attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis – **definitely true/false**

- **Behavioral Intention**
  - I plan to attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis – **extremely likely/unlikely**
  - I will make an effort to attend the meetings of this class on a regular basis – **I definitely will/will not**
Cognitive Dissonance

- **Dissonance**: Mental conflict
- Humans have a basic need to avoid dissonance
- **Cognitive Dissonance**: Humans have a mental conflict when there is a difference between one’s Attitude and Behavior
- To reduce the tension, it is easiest to change an attitude to be consistent with behavior

Necessary Conditions for Cognitive Dissonance to Occur:

1. The difference between the attitude and behavior is perceived by the individual
2. A person feels personally responsible for the behavior
Cognitive Dissonance

- Will change attitude to justify:
  - Effort
    - How much is a university degree valued if little effort is put forth to receive it?
  - Money spent
    - More expensive jewelry is more prized than cheap jewelry
  - Time
    - Voter registration
  - Suffering
    - Gangs/Cults

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Cognitive Dissonance: Educational Implications

- Attitude change
  - Offer just enough reward or punishment to change behavior
  - Attitude change will follow
  - High pressure and rewards achieve short-term obedience, not long-term attitude change

- Prejudice within the school
  - Enforced policies that dictate how students interact with each other will lead to attitude change

Moderators of Attitude-Behavior

- **Moderator**: Variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relationship between an independent and dependent variable
  - **Independent Variable**: Proposed cause
  - **Dependent Variable**: Proposed effect
Moderators of Attitude-Behavior

- Characteristics of **Attitude** that increase Attitude-Behavior Relationship
  - Direct Experience with the Attitude
    - Direct experience gives clarity, confidence, and certainty
  - Strength of Attitude
    - For strong attitudes, attitude predicts behavior
    - For weak attitudes, behavior predicts attitudes
    - Strength is a function of:
      - Knowledge
      - How closely related to one’s value system
      - Accessibility of attitude
  - Specificity: Specific attitudes predict behavior better than general attitudes

- Situational factors: Theory of Planned Behavior
  - Social Norms
  - Perceived Behavioral Control

- Person factors
  - **Self Monitoring:** Tendency to adjust behavior to fit the situation
    - Attitudes are better predictors of behavior for low self monitors

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University of Jos
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I can only argue for ideas which I already believe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I would probably make a good actor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I rarely need the advice of my friends to choose movies, books, or music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I sometimes appear to others to be experiencing deeper emotions than I actually am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I laugh more when I watch a comedy with others than when alone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>In a group of people I am rarely the center of attention.</td>
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