Attitudes: General introduction

Goal
- Define attitudes
- Review models of attitude change, formation
- Discuss general relationship between attitudes and behavior

Definition
- Attitudes are **affective, behavioral, and cognitive evaluations** that include
  - Direction
  - Intensity
Attitude formation
- Self-perception theory
- Cognitive dissonance
- Elaboration likelihood model

Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972)
- People infer attitudes from their behavior

(Adapted from Wells & Petty, 1980)
Self-perception theory  
(Bem, 1972)

- **Foot-in-the-door technique:** Get people to agree to something small, then ask for more
  - Request can’t be too trivial
  - Can “help” people infer correct attitude from behavior
- Doesn’t predict more deeply considered or processed attitudes

Cognitive dissonance

- Festinger (1957): Inconsistent attitudes and behaviors lead to uncomfortable state of tension
  - Motivates people to reduce cognitive dissonance, increase consistency of attitudes, behaviors

Cognitive dissonance

- Three basic responses to cognitive inconsistency
  - Reducing importance of current attitude
  - Adding new, consistent beliefs
  - Changing the attitude or behavior
Cognitive dissonance

- Concepts
  - Selective exposure
  - Sufficient justification
  - Insufficient deterrence
  - Effort justification
  - Post-decision dissonance

Other sources of attitudes

- Normative influence
  - Related to *public conformity*
- Informational influence
  - Related to *private acceptance*

Elaboration likelihood model

- Petty & Cacioppo (1981; 1986)
- Two routes to persuasion
  - Peripheral route: Persuasion based on surface features, superficial processing
  - Central route: Persuasion based on systematic consideration of arguments
- Choice of route affected by
  - Motivation
  - Capacity
Attitudes and behaviors

Two general routes

- Automatic
- Thoughtful

Attitude-consistent behavior

Automatic (direct) effects

- Direction of attention
- Bias in processing
  - Assimilation
  - Contrast
  - Biased interpretations of ambiguous information

Thoughtful (indirect) effects

Factors affecting attitude-behavior link

- Automatic vs. thoughtful route
  - Time and opportunity?
  - Motivation?

- Cognitive accessibility of attitudes
  - We can influence which attitudes are more accessible for processing
  - We can pick attitudes that are more directly relevant to target behavior

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