

Social Psychologists and Attitudes

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Meaning of Attitudes in Social Psychology

Attitude, in our everyday life, is used with a negative connotation that a person might have some problem in his/her behavior when we use this term as “Hey, you’ve really got an attitude.” However, Social Psychology refers to attitudes as a set of emotions, behaviors, or beliefs towards a specific event that are often the result of certain experiences which influence how people act in their various social situations (Strauss, 1945). This field of Psychology reserves the term “attitude” to refer in a different way to our relatively enduring evaluation of an object that might be a social group, person, or product. Social psychologists consider the term “attitude” as the central concept in Social Psychology and define it as a stable and learned predisposition to the positive or negative evaluation of the object or event in order to respond with favor or disfavor regarding it (Hogg & Smith, 2007).

Explicit and Implicit Attitudes

The evaluation of attitudes exists at two contrasting levels named explicit attitudes and implicit attitudes with different behavioral tendencies towards the social group or objects. The former level of attitude is at the conscious level, easy to self-report, and deliberately formed whereas the latter attitude level is at the unconscious level, automatic, unknown, and involuntarily formed. For instance, I have met someone and instantly liked her or have a weird feeling because she has colorful hair. Liking her hair color is something of explicit attitude but having weird feelings about her colorful hair and not knowing exactly why an implicit attitude example is. The main difference between implicit and explicit attitudes is that implicit attitudes function unconsciously and involuntarily whereas implicit attitudes function consciously and deliberately (Kimuyu, 2018).

Influence of Attitudes on Social Interaction

The choice between which attitude level is more important in shaping social interactions is difficult as both implicit and explicit can have a profound impact on behavior and play a significant role as both influence an individual’s attitude and behavior towards other people and things. However, implicit attitudes may be more significant and crucial as they can operate beneath conscious awareness and can be influenced by various factors that are beyond an individual’s control such as social conditioning in unintended ways. Research studies have suggested that implicit attitudes can majorly affect the behavior of an individual that is less noticeable and more automatic such as eye contact with peers during a debate or non-verbal communication (Mitchell & Tetlock, 2015). Thus, it is significant to examine and acknowledge both implicit and explicit attitudes for a comprehensive

understanding of how behaviors can be shaped and affect others in social interaction.

Implicit Bias and Discrimination

Discrimination that leads implicit attitudes to create biases is the act of treating someone in a different manner than others often unjustly based on their membership in a particular group. The reason why implicit attitude relates to racial, ethnic, social, and religious biases or prejudices is that these attitudes can be perpetuated through personal experiences, media portrayals, and cultural as well as societal norms. These are unconscious prejudices that individuals hold towards others based on varying characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, race, or culture and can be strong predictors of biased prejudices against a certain group. Furthermore, implicit attitudes can also impact how people of different communities interact with each other and manifest in different biased ways such as negative stereotyping and discrimination. These impacts lead to both positive and negative outcomes and can be changed through various interventions such as self-reflection (Oswald et al., 2013). Moreover, it is essential to understand the significant role that implicit attitudes play in the exposure to counter-stereotypical information and in perpetuating prejudice towards marginalized groups to actively reduce biases through education and awareness.

Implicit Association Test and Personal Results

The Implicit Attitude Test (IAT) is a computer-based measure that works by presenting the participants with a series of stimuli so that they can associate particular concepts with negative or positive emotions and stereotypes. Participants sort stimuli such as images or words into different categories such as good or bad to assess their implicit attitudes toward a certain object. The IAT measurement tool assesses the accuracy and speed with which individuals are able to categorize specific objects or stimuli. This computer-based measure was created by researchers including Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji at Harvard University (Nosek & Banaji, 2009). The category I chose for completing the IAT test was Gender-Career Implicit Attitude Test which was divided into seven parts in which I was asked to categorize words specific to family and gender as fast as I could. The categories were mixed together to measure attitude and the automatic reaction between names of males and females and the association of words with different categories. The results of the IAT conducted suggested my slight unconscious association for females with family and males with careers because I hold moderate ideals about the corresponding category of females being in charge in the household. On the other hand, the automatic association of males with careers is because of the attitude that males are usually the ones associated with careers and are successful ones in their workforce. I was not surprised by the score because I believe that this test was the accurate measurement tool to assess my implicit attitude towards certain objects, i.e. gender and career as my attitudes are cognitively based on social influence and beliefs. After all, the people I live with have similar beliefs and lifestyles.

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