
Formation Of Positive And Negative Attitude

This essay will explore the components of attitude and theories which facilitate attitude change. Attitude refers to the beliefs, behaviors, and emotions towards people or things such as homosexuality. They are often the result of one's upbringing and experiences which largely influence their behavior. Karlinger (1973) expresses that "attitude is an integral part of the personality to think, to feel, and perceive to behave towards a referent and cognitive object." It enables humans to perceive things in either a positive or negative way or may even have mixed ideas about others or an object.

Attitudes form as a result of experience. This can be due to many reasons including media (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003), prejudice, and religion which can be from direct personal experience or as a result of observation. Social norms and roles have a strong influence on attitudes. Social norms are a set of rules that society imposes upon people whereas social roles are almost a guideline for how people are expected to behave in society. Attitudes can both be shown explicitly and implicitly. Explicit being attitudes that are consciously formed, eg. Pupils dilating out of love/fear. Implicit attitudes are less visible and are felt unconsciously eg. Thinking negative thoughts such as death. They are learned by observing people around them, for example, teachers and family members. When someone you look up to has an attitude you want to instill in yourself, there is a high chance of you developing the same beliefs. Young children spend a lot of time observing the attitudes of their parents and peers and usually develop their mannerisms.

The cognitive component of an attitude refers to one's attitude and belief associated with an object. Attitude stems from Pavlov's study of classical and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning is learning by association. This is shown through Pavlov's dog experiment conducted in the 20th century. He used an unconditioned stimulus of food which naturally caused the dog to salivate. Following this, he put a tuning fork in front of the dog which gave no response. Finally, when the tuning fork and food were brought out together, the dog salivated again eventually salivating at the sight of the tuning fork since it associated the tuning fork with food. This shows the direct link between both theories; although Pavlov experimented on animals, the outcome is the same with humans. For example, women watching commercials about hair dye. If they associate hair dye with beautiful women, they are more inclined to buy the product.

Secondly, the behavioral component consists of one's tendencies to behave in a particular way towards something. Skinner's box theory emphasizes this theory through the use of rats. Mcleod (2015) demonstrated that Skinner used operant conditioning to condition the rat to press the lever to release food. Operant conditioning introduces the idea of positive and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is the idea of doing more of something, to get a reward at the end whereas negative reinforcement is the idea of doing more of something to avoid negative consequences. For example, a man starts smoking, but if he hears people make remarks or get disgusted by this, he may feel obliged to quit smoking.

Classical conditioning is a great way to create positive emotions towards an object. With the media being a prominent feature in everyone's day-to-day lives, it has almost become a norm

to edit your photos online to look more “pretty”. (Barr, 2019)’s article on Serena Williams not retouching her magazine cover picture is a great example of creating positive emotions towards others. (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003)’s journal expresses that especially in “western societies, the mass media are typically regarded as the single strongest transmitter of unrealistic beauty ideals and are often held responsible for the high proportion of women and girls who are dissatisfied with their bodies” (Levine and Smolak, 1996). Whilst this one instance wouldn’t automatically change everyone’s attitude, it will make a lot of people embrace their natural body and imperfections. Operant conditioning can be used to improve existing attitudes and reduce attitudes that are seen as undesirable. For example, racism has come a long way since the slave trade, it isn’t perfect but there has been progressing. This is shown through the work of (Salter, Adams & Perez, 2017) who found that “the racist realities that people inhabit (and inherit from previous generations) arise and persist through everyday action as people selectively reproduce some features of the social context and fail to reproduce others.” They also go on to say that “representations of race, ethnicity, and nationality have never been just reflections of neutral categories; rather, they are historically derived ideas about superiority and inferiority”. Black men such as Martin Luther King and Barack Obama changed the lives of people for the better by being strong, outstanding role models. Although Martin Luther King was murdered, his legacy still lives on, changing the mindset of some otherwise conservative people in society.

The affective component is the emotional or feeling of an attitude that affects another person.

A person’s attitude takes place with their behavior change. The cognitive dissonance theory facilitates the change of attitude through behavioral reinforcement. Cognitions are thoughts or states of awareness of behavior. (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014) uses the example that is if a woman believes in monogamy, yet commits infidelity and has an affair, she may have a sense of guilt. This is the dissonance due to its conflicting beliefs. A theory developed by Leon Festinger (1957), explores the idea that because humans want their attitudes and behavior to be harmonious, they change their behavior to reduce the tension.