

AP Psychology

Interactive Exhibit: Attitudes and Social-Cognitive Theories

Study Guide

Extension of the Presentation

Changing Attitudes: The Importance of the Communicator and the Message

As you've already learned, attitudes can be changed through methods of the elaboration likelihood model and the compliance model. With either model, the **communicator** of the persuasive message plays a key role in whether or not people will change their attitude. People are more willing to listen to a message delivered by a communicator whom they admire, consider physically attractive, or view as an expert.

The **message** itself is also important. If you are speaking to a group whose attitudes are similar to your own, you should give arguments that reinforce those attitudes. However, when you're speaking to a group whose attitudes are different than your own, it's best to give both the pros and cons of the issue. Begin with the arguments for the **audience's** position and then shift to your own. When you use this strategy, audiences tend to give your ideas more credibility.

Emotional appeals are also a valuable tool in persuading an audience to your point of view. Some of the "scare" movies in driver's ed (with graphic depictions of accident victims) certainly catch people's attention. There seems to be an inverted "U" relationship between fear and effectiveness: low fear appeals aren't taken seriously enough (and aren't processed carefully) and high fear leaves the person too frightened to process the message. A moderate level of fear and information about how to avoid the fearful situation seems to be the most effective combination for changing attitudes.

Attribution Theory

According to Kelley's **attribution theory**, as observers of others' behaviors, we need three kinds of information: consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus. In his studies, Kelley manipulated the levels of consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus in scenarios and asked people to make attributions. He found that his predictions were generally correct. One point he had to clarify, however, was that people pay less attention to consensus information than to consistency and distinctiveness information.

Behaviors can have four types of attributions, and each has a combination of consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness as shown in this chart:

Type of Attribution	Consensus	Consistency	Distinctiveness
Person - Stable	Low	Low	High
Situation - Stable	High	High	High
Person - Unstable	Low	Low	Low
Situation - Unstable	High	High	Low

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Aggressive Behavior

Aggression is defined as a physical or verbal behavior intended to cause harm or pain to another. **Hostile aggression** is aggression driven by anger and performed as an end in itself. **Instrumental aggression** is aggression that is a means to some other end. The debate over whether aggression is an innate or learned behavior is similar to the debate over altruism.

Ethologist Konrad Lorenz believes we are born with aggressive tendencies for survival. Albert Bandura's social learning theory proclaims that instrumentally aggressive behaviors are learned through direct experience or through observation. We learn not only how to behave aggressively, but who are appropriate targets, what behaviors "justify" aggressive retaliation, and in what situations aggression is appropriate.

The **frustration-aggression hypothesis** is an attempt to explain hostile aggression. It states that frustration causes aggression and that **catharsis** is the reduction in the aggressive drive following an aggressive act. Frustration (interference with goal-directed behavior) arouses a drive whose primary goal is that of harming a person or object—usually the perceived cause of the frustration.

Critics say that frustration doesn't always lead to aggression and that aggression isn't always the result of frustration. Cognitive theorists say that aggression is only the result of frustration when the victim perceives the event as a result of malicious intent. This helps explain why unexpected, illegitimate, or unjustified frustration tends to produce stronger aggression. Presumably it produces more negative emotions than frustration that is expected or viewed as justified.

Additional Key Terms

The following terms and concepts are closely related to what's taught in this presentation and may be included on the Exam. If you aren't familiar with any of these, look them up in a textbook or another available resource.

Actor-observer hypothesis
Authoritarian personality
Collectivist cultures
Companionate love/friendship
Consummate love—passion, intimacy and commitment
Impression management theory
Individualist cultures
Just-world hypothesis
Minority influence
Passionate/romantic love
Personal space studies
Role-playing
Self-disclosure
Social exchange theory
Sternberg's triangular theory of love

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Additional Studies

Jane Elliot's Brown Eye/Blue Eye Prejudice Study
Latane & Darley's Diffusion of Responsibility Study
Philip Zimbardo's Stanford University Prison Study