

Chapter 6: Attitudes, Behavior, and Rationalization

Predicting Behavior from Attitudes

- Attitudes Sometimes Conflict with Other Powerful Determinants of Behavior
- Attitudes Are Sometimes Inconsistent
- Attitudes Are Sometimes Based on Secondhand Information
- The Mismatch between General Attitudes and Specific Targets
- “Automatic” Behavior That Bypasses Conscious Attitudes

Predicting Attitudes from Behavior

- Cognitive Consistency Theories
- Experiencing and Reducing Dissonance
- When Does Inconsistency Produce Dissonance?
- Self-Affirmation and Dissonance
- Is Dissonance Universal?

Self-Perception Theory

- Inferring Attitudes
- Evidence of Self-Directed Inference
- Testing for Arousal
- Reconciling the Dissonance and Self-Perception Accounts

Beyond Cognitive Consistency to Broader Rationalization

- System Justification Theory
- Terror Management Theory

Attitudes

An attitude is a relatively stable evaluation of a person, object, situation or issue. This evaluation can be positive, negative, or ambivalent.

In the 1930's Richard LaPierre spent two years touring the United States with a young Chinese couple visiting numerous hotels, auto camps, restaurants and cafés. Although prejudice and discrimination against Chinese individuals were common at the time, LaPierre and the Chinese couple were only refused service by only one of the 250 establishments they visited ([page 199](#)).



Social Psychology, 2/e Unnumbered & p199
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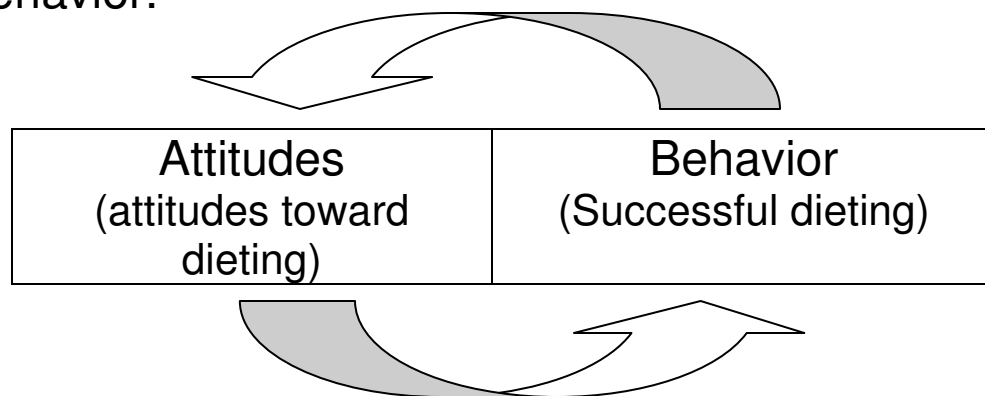
After the trip, LaPierre wrote to all of the establishments they visited and asked if their policy was to serve "Orientals". Of those who responded, 90% said they would not ([page 199](#)).

There appears to be an inconsistency between a behavior (serving Orientals) and an attitude (we don't serve Orientals). There are some difficulties and successes in predicting someone's behavior from their attitudes.

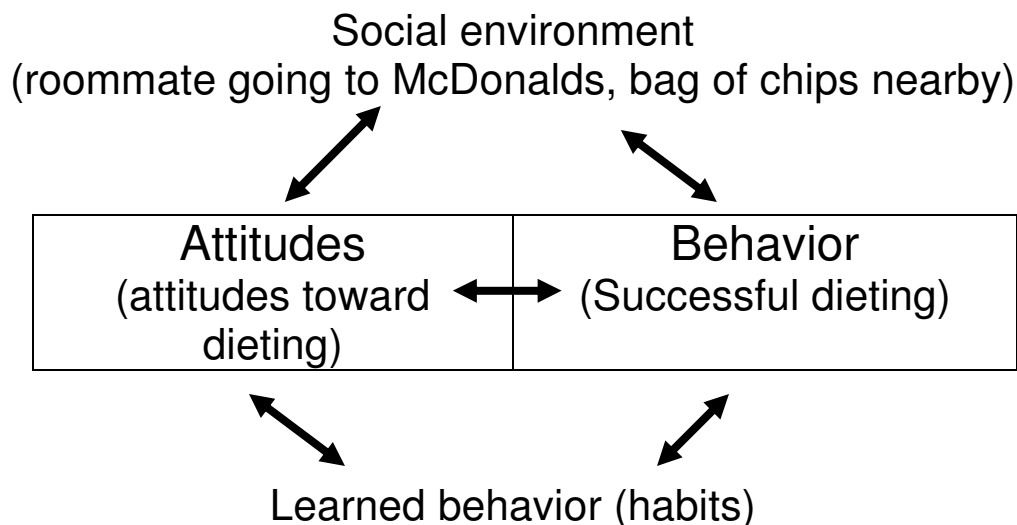
When do attitudes predict behavior?

Like traits, beliefs (the cognitive component of attitudes) have a hard time predicting behavior. There are many factors influencing your behavior other than your attitude. Some of these may be more salient than others at different times.

What we think about the relationship between attitudes and behavior.



In reality, it may be more like:



Why Attitudes don't Predict Behavior: Inconsistency Between What we Feel and What we Think

Attitudes have multiple components. Two components are feelings and thoughts about an object, person, public policy, etc. (In [chapter 9](#), we will introduce the behavioral component of attitudes)

Sometimes there is a rift between what we think and what we feel about objects, people, public policies, etc.

- We like Obama, but think he isn't a good President
- We like Romney, but think he won't make a good President

When there is an inconsistency between what we feel and what we think, behavior has is difficult to predict from our attitude.

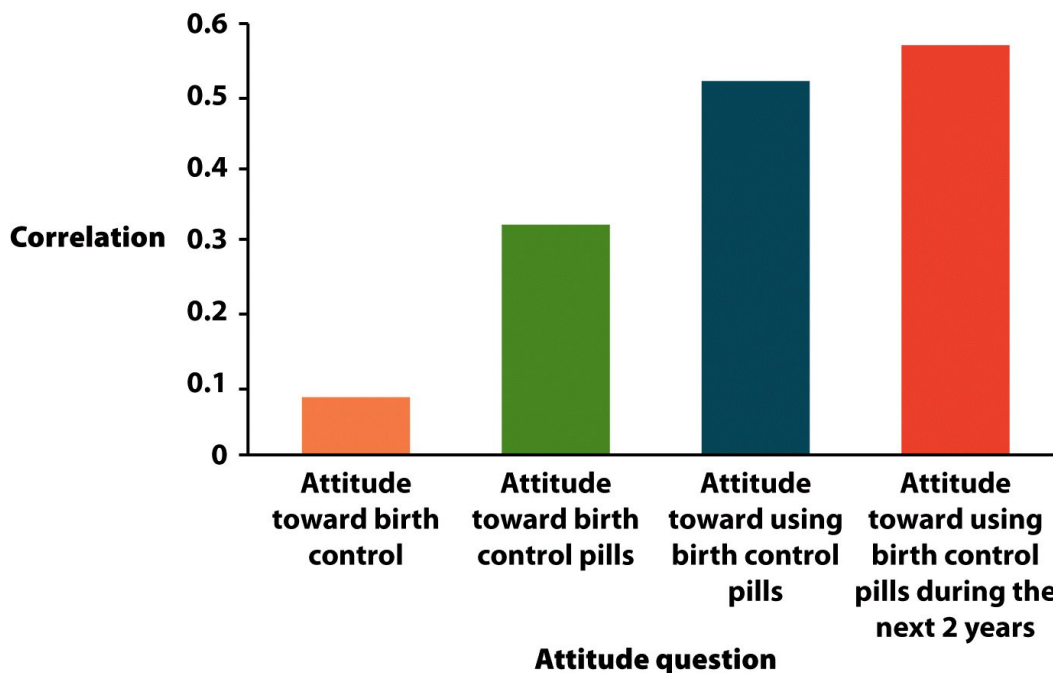
Conversely, when our emotional aspects and cognitive aspects of our attitudes are consistent, attitudes, in general can predict behavior.

Why Attitudes don't Predict Behavior: The Mismatch between General Attitudes and Specific Targets

Sometimes our attitudes are about a general class of things—the environment, pushy people, French cooking, etc. (page 203). However, the behavior we are trying to predict is rather specific—donating to Greenpeace, reacting to a specific pushy person, ordering escargot, etc.

The ability to predict behavior from attitudes improves when we ask about specific attitudes, rather than general attitudes.

For example, researchers varied the specificity of an attitude measured toward birth control to see how well it predicted birth control usage.



Why is knowing when attitudes predicts behavior?

If you are a

- manager predicting who is going to participate in the safety procedures,
- doing market research to see who buys a new Ipad,
- finding out who is voting for Obama/Romney?

Predicting Attitudes from Behavior

Cognitive Consistency Theories: Balance Theory

Balance Theory: People try to maintain balance among their beliefs, cognitions and sentiments ([page 207](#)).

When there is an imbalance, we feel compelled to restore balance

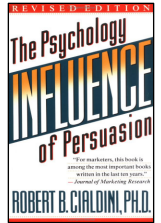
Balance Relationships	Imbalanced Relationships
<p>England</p>	<p>US</p>
<p>Cuba</p>	<p>US (1970s)</p>

+ = good relationships

- = bad relationships

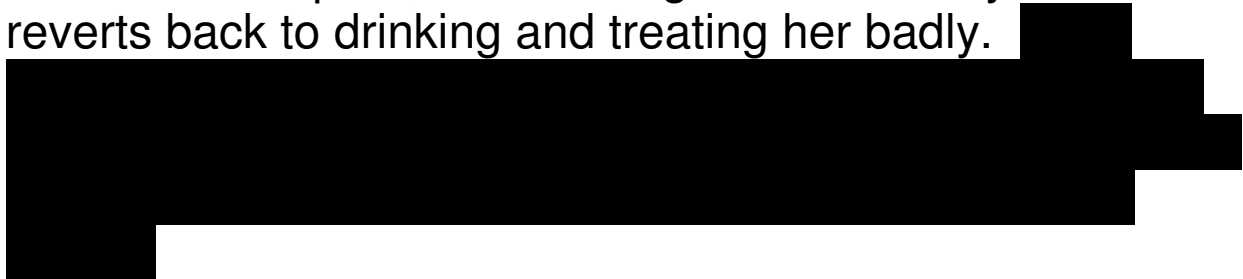
Cognitive Dissonance

In the book Influence: Science and Practice, by Robert Cialdini (1985) describes a good example of cognitive dissonance that helps students realize that cognitive dissonance influences their lives.



The story is about a young woman who is involved in an unsatisfying relationship. Her boyfriend doesn't treat her well; he drinks too much, and he is unwilling to hold a steady job. Finally, she manages to break off the relationship with this man, and shortly thereafter, she meets a new fellow and falls deeply in love. This second relationship flourishes nicely and culminates in wedding plans; the date is set, the hall reserved, the invitations sent, and everything looks like it is turning up daisies for her until she receives a phone call from a repenting first boyfriend. At first the woman is unwilling to talk with him; after all, she is engaged to another man. But gradually her resolve weakens and she listens as he pleads for a second chance and promises her that he will change. To everyone's disappointment, she finally breaks off the engagement and goes back to her first boyfriend.

At first, things go well for the woman, but as all of the students anticipate, it is not long before the boyfriend reverts back to drinking and treating her badly.



In Miami-Dade county, the use of phosphate based laundry detergents was outlawed. When something becomes less available (the scarcity principle), our subjective value of it increases.

Residents of Miami-Dade county traveled to the neighboring county, purchased phosphate based and brought them back. Even though there is no measurable difference between phosphate and non-phosphate based soap, these “soap smugglers” reported that their clothes were cleaner and smelled fresher.

Why?