

Advance Course in Social Psychology

Lecture 14 : Attitudes- Part II

Hello friends, welcome back. Let us continue with our discussion. In our previous discussion, I discussed about attitudes, meaning, definition, types of attitudes and characteristics of attitude. In this discussion and lecture, I am going to talk about that how attitudes are formed and in what manner human behaviour is influenced by environment, by personal contact or human interactions that enables a person to have a specific attitude towards person, object or event. Suppose, I quote an example that what is your attitude or opinion when people have tattoos on their bodies or what you think when people talk on phone while driving. People have different opinions about these issues but how these opinions are being formed and in long run when they sustain and they within an individual thought process they become an attitude.

But how does it forms? Definitely, it comes through our experiences based on our observations, interaction with people in the environment or significant people in the environment and even through exposure through media. So, this is a very basic answer that I have quoted right now to these two issues that people who cover their bodies in tattoos or people who talk on their cell phones while driving. So, people have different attitudes about these issues but people form these attitudes based on certain factors that is observation, it can be interaction, it can be experience or exposure through via. The answer is simple but every time whenever we are forming any attitude every person has to go through a process.

It is not that we are exposed to an event or person or object and an attitude is formed. It has to be a process and may be a long term process and finally the person develop a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards that situation. So, whenever we are talking about formation of attitudes then it is something that we have a constant interaction with that person or situation and how likely we tend to develop an attitude towards that person or even likely to change our attitude towards that person. But it all depends on different factors. Now since we are talking about attitude formation then it is actually a process of social learning as well.

So, the first answer that how attitudes are formed, the first answer can be that attitude is formed through a process of social learning. In other words, many of our views are acquired in situations where we interact with others or simply observe their behavior. We tend to interact, we exchange information about each other, about a particular person or event or any object, we update our information, we weigh upon all the pros and cons of a particular information we acquire or we update our existing knowledge and then we learn about that person. That learning based on observation, based on interaction helps to form an attitude. So, this is an answer to the question that how attitudes are formed.

It is a basic process that attitudes are formed through social learning. Thus social learning is a process through which we acquire new information, forms of behavior or attitudes from other people. So, this is one way that how attitudes are formed. Another aspect can be social

comparison. We are learning so many things, we are acquiring so much of information and we tend to form new attitude or change the existing attitude towards any person, event, object or situation.

But at the same time, we also engage in another process of attitude formation that is social comparison, where we tend to hear other people's opinions, beliefs and ideas and we tend to compare their opinion with our which we already have and tend to maintain a stable or update information and form new attitude. So, this is a process of social comparison. So, why do people often adopt the attitudes that they hear others express or acquire the behaviors they observe in others? The answer is that we involve in the mechanism of social comparison. It is a process through which we compare ourselves to others to determine whether our view of social reality is correct or not. Sometimes we form a very negative attitude for any person based on the available knowledge, but when we are trying to interact with the other person, we tend to get new information of the same person and we realize that the information that we are having is wrong and the reality is something else.

We try to update that information and at the same time, we also try to change our attitude towards that person. So, at this point of interaction, we are also comparing our opinion with that of the others and how we try to identify whether the social reality or opinion we have for the social reality is correct or incorrect. So, this is the process of social comparison. Similarly, people often adjust their attitudes so as to hold views closer to those of others whom they value and identify with. We all are social animals.

We all require some sense of identification, sense of belongingness and this is human nature, a basic human nature. We tend to identify ourselves with a specific group to whom we can refer and we consider those groups as a very important group because we try to acquire lot of information from those groups and we try to compare our information with that of the reference groups and then we update our information and attitude. So, reference groups are a group of people with whom we identify and whose opinions we value. Thus, by observing an attitudes held by others whom we identify with, new attitudes can be formed. If any new information we receive from those reference groups, we tend to value those that information and form new attitudes.

So, when we are talking about social comparison, then we not only tend to compare our information or opinion with that of the others, but comparing our opinion with that of the reference groups also plays an important role in the process of formation of attitude. So, social learning and social comparison, both are the two process where we can say that this is how attitude is formed. Another important process is observational learning. It is a basic form of learning in which individuals acquire forms of behaviour as a result of observing others. No reinforcement is required at this point.

Only important or significant people in the environment which act as model, we try to refer or we try to have high opinion about those models or people in a social world and we try to become like those people only and that process involves strong observations. So, this is observational learning. This theory was coined by Bandura in the year 1971 where he has talked about that how people acquire attitudes towards different objects or events by exposure to those events or models. So, he has talked about that when we are exposed to a certain environment, then in that environment, there are people who influences us to a larger extent and we try to imitate the behaviours of those significant people in that particular situation and we try to imitate those behaviours in a way that we want to have the same attitude that he or she already has. So, based on the observations and the available information, we tend to form new attitudes.

For example, media. In media, when any child, any person who is exposed to media and that media is giving some strong and important information about the role, about his or her role model, then the person has high desire to behave and act or have opinion and attitudes like that only, that person only and we tend to imitate. So, this imitation is engaging a person in the process of observational learning and we tend to form new attitudes. This is how observational learning as a process helps in forming new attitudes. So, Bandura stressed the importance of observational learning because it helps people, especially children, who acquire new responses by observing others behaviour.

For instance, when a mother and a child goes to the market, so every time the child will observe that whenever my mother is going to a particular shop, she will give a very frowning expression to a particular shopkeeper or a salesperson in that shop and with the gradual process of observation of the child, maybe the child will also learn to give a frowning expression to that one particular salesperson in a shop. This is observation and the person and the child has also developed or formed a negative attitude for that person. There is no reinforcement but only a model with whom the child has related to himself like that of his mother and has learned that acquired that response, the negative response in terms of unfavourable attitude towards that salesperson. So, this is observational learning where the form of learning does not need reinforcement but it requires a model. So, children watch the behaviour of people around them and imitate what they see.

So, basically the idea is that when new attitudes are formed based on observational learning, then even a child who is very much close to his parents or significant others, maybe siblings or grandparents, then the child observes all the behaviours of the family members and develop different kind of attitudes. So, this is the idea about observational learning. Now the discussion about observational learning can also be extended based on Bandura's social cognitive learning where he has talked about that this observation engages a person in a process and coming out of the process will actually form a new attitude. So, he has talked about four stages involved in observational learning. The first is attention.

Observers cannot learn unless they pay attention to what is happening around them. This process is influenced by characteristics of the model such as how much one likes or identifies with the social model and the characteristics of the observer such as observer's expectations or level of emotional arousal. The model is there in the environment in the social situation to what extent the person is relating himself to that model emotionally, what are his expectations from the model that he has to acquire from that model and how and to what extent the person is paying attention to the available information. So, this is the first stage of observational learning that is attention. Once the person has started paying attention in the environment, the second stage is retention or memory.

That observer must not only recognize the observed behavior but also remember it in some later time. It is not just observing. Taking in all the observations one has made and the observer's ability to code or structure the information in a easily remembered form or to mentally or physically rehearse the model's actions. In coding all the information, all the characteristics of the role model in the situation and then coding, here memory plays important role. Remembering what information the person has collected, he is trying to structure the information in a very aligned manner or aligning the collected information and then performing it.

So, here it is observation, then trying to put it in his own memory to code or structure that information in his or her memory and how the model's actions and information can be used in future through his behavior. So, attention and retention are the second step of observational learning. The other is initiation. Observer must be physically and intellectually capable of producing the act. In many cases, the observer possesses the necessary responses but does not have that skill to imitate that action.

This is very important. We observe so many actions of the role models but when it comes to performing those behaviors or actions, the person finds a difficulty in performing because he does not have acquired those skills to perform in a similar fashion. So, this involves skill the observer has not yet acquired. It is one thing to watch a circus juggler carefully but it is another game to go home and repeat those acts. It is very much true in nature that we are trying to imitate the juggler in the circus but when we come back home and we try to perform, we are unable to do that because we have not required that skill. For that, it requires lot of practice.

So, when we are talking about initiation, it is about imitating or producing a similar act like that of the role model along acquiring the skills, carefully performing it and then we can say that we have formed a new attitude. And the last stage is motivation. Coaches also give pep talks recognizing the importance of motivational process to learning. At the same time, when observation has been made, observation has been made, the behavior or information has been acquired and retained in the memory, it has been imitated successfully while developing those skills. And one has to be motivated enough to perform those behaviors.

For that, a person requires lot of motivation. So, different coaches are there who tend to develop a very positive attitude in performing new skills and task and that requires a particular training as well where motivation process is there to encourage or foster more learning within the person so that new attitudes are being formed. Now, this new attitude can be in form of behavior. It can be about the new skill that one has learned or acquired. So, this is how observational learning engages.

Four steps as mentioned by Bandura, it is attention, retention, initiation and motivation. The next comes cognitive dissonance theory. Till now, we have discussed that how attitudes are formed based on social learning, based on observation, based on comparison. Now, think about situations where we have an attitude, but there are some conflicting attitudes within us about some information, conflicting information. We are uncomfortable and at the same time, we have a desire to maintain a symmetry or harmony in our thought process.

For that, an individual also has to engage in a process of changing his or her attitude. So, Festinger has coined the cognitive dissonance theory when he talks about attitude formation. So, this theory postulates that we are motivated to maintain consistency among our cognitive elements. Now, here cognitive elements means bits of knowledge and belief we have for ourselves and others and we try to arrange those bits of knowledge and information beliefs about oneself and others in a very structured manner. That is the ultimate aim of a person to have an attitude.

Now, these cognitive elements are simply beliefs and bits of knowledge and we tend to develop these elements or acquire these elements based on individual's cognition. That is perception of one's own attitudes, beliefs and opinions and beliefs. So, without I have attitude for the other person or for myself, we tend to arrange it in a very structured manner. There is alignment in our thought process, in our perceptions, beliefs and ideas and there are cognitive elements which are arranged and it is something that we are comfortable. So, we have our own compartment of our thoughts and beliefs which are full of elements, cognitive elements.

So, this is cognition of a person. For instance, it is raining today, I like chocolate or New York is an exciting place. New York is an exciting place, I have an attitude that New York is an exciting place based on certain characteristics of that place. It has better job opportunities, the weather is good, geographical location is good, people are good there, every person is approachable, my office is very close to my residence. there can be so many factors where we have a very specific attitude that why New York is an exciting place.

This constitutes your cognitive element. Now if this cognitive elements get disorganized, then definitely there is a feeling of discomfort within a person and the person tries to create that harmony among those elements and for that creation of harmony, the person has to engage in a process of changing one's own attitude. This is cognitive dissonance theory. So, cognitive

dissonance is the discomfort a person feels when their behavior does not align with their attitude or beliefs. I am saying New York is an exciting place, but if we tend to update our knowledge, we will come to know that there are some drawbacks also while staying in New York. As soon as we are getting new information, then there is some dissonance or discomfort in our belief system and there is a sense of disharmony in our thought process.

This is cognitive dissonance and it only occurs when a person holds two contradictory beliefs at the same time. This leads to cognitive dissonance. At one point New York is an exciting place, but at the same time you have come to know that these are the disadvantages if I stay in New York. This is a contradictory belief system and the person is experiencing disharmony. According to this theory, this produces a feeling of discomfort leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to reduce the discomfort and restore the balance.

So, how the person will make a decision whether to stay in New York or not? The person tries to create that harmony while changing his attitude and identifying the pros and cons of staying in New York and immediately the person tries to bank upon to decide that based on the pros or based on the cons and then finally decision is made. But that decision is only made when there is some alteration in the attitude or the belief system of the person. Another example can be that when people smoke, that is the disposition. It is a behavioral component that you are addicted to smoke and they know that smoking causes cancer.

So, this is a contradictory belief. Person is addicted to smoking, but at the same time the person knows that it causes cancer. Knowing the fact and the person is experiencing discomfort, this is cognitive dissonance. You have your own knowledge belief system, knowing it, still we are in the state of contradiction. This is cognitive dissonance theory. So, according to Festinger, cognitive dissonance theory suggests that we have an inner drive to hold all our attitudes and beliefs in harmony and avoid disharmony or dissonance.

This is how. Now, this avoidance of disharmony will only happen when the person is ready to acquire new information and alter his attitude so that that harmony or balance is being easily maintained. This is the idea of cognitive dissonance theory. Further, Festinger has also identified three elements of cognitive dissonance theory that how dissonance takes place. The first is the consonant relationship, irrelevant relationship and dissonant relationship. Consonant relationship, two actions which are consistent with each other.

There is no clash. I do not want to be intoxicated tonight and for that I will order only water. There is clear cut message in an individual's action that to avoid any and toward accident or incident, the person has taken the right action. So, this is a consonant relationship where they are at parity that for example, not wanting to get intoxicated while out, then ordering water instead of alcohol or I exercise regularly and exercise is good for my health. So, the thought process are in alignment, there is no contradiction.

So, this is consonant relationship. The other is irrelevant relationship which also exhibits that the person is not clear about his thought process or attitude. Two cognitions or actions that are unrelated to one another. For example, not wanting to get intoxicated while out and then tying your shoes. Now in this example, there is no relation about not getting intoxicated and tying your shoes. So, it is simple that the person does not understand that how that this harmony can be converted into harmony or balance.

This is irrelevant relationship because what the person is thinking about his cognitions and his actions are in not concert. There is no coherent relationship in what the person thinks and what the person is doing. Under such circumstances also dissonance is experienced. And the other is dissonant relationship which is clear with an through an individual's action that two cognitions or actions that are inconsistent with each other. Not wanting to get intoxicated while out, then consuming six tequila shots.

Knowing what is right and wrong, but doing what is wrong. It is completely dissonant. There is no relation rather there is a complete clash between individual's action and thought process. So, this is how dissonance is being experienced. But yes, if there is a consonant relationship in the environment, this leads to harmony. Whereas in irrelevant relationship, there is neither harmony nor disharmony because there is no understanding of one's own cognitions and actions.

And last dissonant relationship, the relationship is absolutely negative. That what person is thinking and how the person is avoiding the right thought process. Not getting intoxicated, but the person has already ordered six tequila or consumed six tequila shots. So, this is dissonant where disharmony can easily be observed in the behaviour. So, this is how cognitive dissonance theory works in a particular situation.

At the same time, Festinger has also postulated that because of the motivating effects of dissonance, people actively engage in some selective exposure and seek information. Every time it is not possible to maintain that harmony and getting into harmony, one has to align with the situation, one has to align with the event or the person in the situation. To have that harmony, there has to be certain motivation. Now, this motivation generally comes from being selective in the information that the person will select only that information which is very much in tune with one's own cognitions. That is consonant with their beliefs, attitudes and past behaviours.

Whereas, they will actively avoid information that is dissonant or inconsistent with their beliefs, attitudes and past behaviours. So, maybe the person can also think about not attending the party so that there will be no question of altering the attitude for not consuming six tequila shots. This information can be collected that if I do not attend the meeting or the party, maybe

I will be able to maintain a harmony in my cognitions and actions that I am not going there and I will not consume tequila shots. So, this is about engaging in selective exposure and seek information. That how you are exposing yourself to a particular situation where we only think about favourable elements in the situation and trying to align with that situation only or information.

Now this information can be very motivating through one's own actions that either you do not attend the party or it can be that how you are avoiding consuming tequila shots by engaging in some fruitful talks with your friends and relatives. So, this is how dissonance can be maintained by being motivated to align with only the relevant information in the environment. But how dissonance occurs? What happens when dissonance occurs? There is consonant, there is dissonant and there is irrelevant relationship between the person and the environment and based on that the person changes his or her attitude. But what is the source of dissonance? It is not that suddenly it has occurred but there are some sources that creates a situation of dissonance.

The first is informational inconsistency. An individual receives information that contradicts what we already know or believe. For example, suppose you believe Tom did not know about the crime but Smith testified that he was the mastermind behind it. You were having a very clear picture about Tom but later on it was clarified that Tom was the mastermind in that crime that has happened in the city. That is informational inconsistency which leads to dissonance because we were not having the correct information and attitude has to be changed immediately while acquiring new information.

The other is disconfirmed expectations. When we have this expectation that nothing wrong will happen and something opposite happens to us. People prepare themselves for an event that never occurred but an event opposite to it occurs. For example, you expect to do well on an exam and you do not. This is a day to day life example that whenever we are performing any action or performing any skill, we expect that nothing would happen and we expect that whatever we will perform, it will be as per the available information to me. But something unexpectedly happens which is beyond your information you have acquired and it leads to dissonance or it becomes a source of dissonance because there is disharmony.

And the other is post decision dissonance. Again a very day to day life behavioral process that we engage in. For example, we buy a TV which was extremely expensive. Later on we come to know that the same quality TV is also there with another brand and at a lower price. This is post decision dissonance where we realize that we have taken the wrong decision and later on there is a sense of dissonance or disharmony.

That is post decision dissonance. After every decision we feel dissonance because you have rejected some good things and accepted some bad. So, bad is purchasing an expensive

television although cheaper television was available with a different brand. And we have to accept that we have taken the wrong decision. So, we have rejected the right thing and we are accepting the bad thing.

So, such we tend to make such certain decisions afterwards. That is the realization is afterwards. That realization that what wrong we have done or what wrong decision we have taken it becomes a source of dissonance. Such as making a large purchase people often rate the item they choose as more desirable and the item they did not choose is less desirable. So, how you will convince yourself? We have to maintain that harmony also.

So, this is how we do it. Later on we tend to evaluate our own decision that may be that television was of high quality and high resolution and may be finally we are resorting to the best item. So, this is how that harmony is being maintained. The next is that how cognitive dissonance can be reduced or eliminated. If we are talking about the sources then how we have to eliminate the sources also.

The first is adding new cognitions. That means acquiring new information so that the cognitive process is being enhanced, it is improved. That is justify behavior of cognition by adding new cognitions. You are not losing weight. For months and months you are doing rigorous exercises but still you perceive yourself to be there. Our belief system says based on following this diet plan definitely I will reduce weight.

But after sometime you realize that we are not losing the weight. Then immediately we tend to add new cognitions by while enhancing our diet plan and giving more time to the gym. This is how harmony is being maintained. So, this is adding new cognitions. And the other is changing existing ones. That is an individual can change his or her mind and decide that she was wrong or we may seek new information that can restore consonance or else try to discredit the source of dissonance in some ways either by making up information or seeking counter evidence.

Either getting new information, updating the available information, accepting the fault the mystic one has committed or discarding old information and bringing in new information will help to reduce or eliminate dissonance and maintain harmony. Thus individuals can just can adjust their attitudes or actions in various ways. These examples are daily life examples. We purchase an expensive thing while being ignorant that some cheaper product is also available. Another is we know we have committed a mistake based on a wrong decision because information was not optimum to take any decision and we tend to improve our decision by having more information and then rectifying those errors.

So, based on these examples we can say that every end now in fact in our daily life there are certain so many instances where we can identify ourselves, where we encounter dissonance in our behaviour, in our thought process, in our cognitions and when we alter those decisions then definitely there has to be a formation of new attitude. So, this is how attitudes are formed based on social learning, based on observation, based on cognitive dissonance and observations and social learnings. So, we are done with this discussion about how attitudes are formed. Some more theories I will discuss that how new attitudes are formed which are one of the classic theories to discuss about. So, but I will continue in the next lecture. Thank you so much. Thank you.