Attitudes Are Alive and Well and Gainfully Employed in the Sphere of Action

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Gordon Allport began his classic paper on attitudes in the 1935 *Handbook of Social Psychology* with this statement: "The concept of attitude is probably the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary American social psychology." He described the term as

elastic enough to apply either to the dispositions of single, isolated individuals or to broad patterns of culture. Psychologists and sociologists therefore find in it a meeting point for discussion and research. This useful, one might almost say peaceful, concept has been so widely adopted that it has virtually established itself as the keystone in the edifice of American social psychology. In fact several writers . . . *define* social psychology as the scientific study of attitudes [p. 798].

In the years since publication of Allport's paper, attitudes have, if anything, become even more central in social psychology, largely because they have come to serve as *the* dependent variable par excellence for the major categories of social-psychological research: the sample survey, the questionnaire study, and the laboratory experiment.

In recent years, attitude research has increasingly been subjected to rather far-reaching criticism, often linked with broader critiques of the standard methodologies of social-psychological research. Within sociology, the excessive reliance on survey data has come under increasing attack, most vehemently from the ethnomethodologists. Within

experimental social psychology, there has been a strong movement toward field experimentation, partly motivated by the desire to replace assessment of attitudes in the laboratory with observations of behavior in natural settings.

In my own view of social behavior, attitude is a central concept, and I regard the study of attitudes as a legitimate pursuit in its own right and as a useful component of a multimethod research strategy. For example, studies of the structure and distribution of public attitudes on various social issues or of the determinants of attitude change can greatly contribute to our understanding of societal processes. In particular, attitude assessment combined with other research procedures—such as structural indexes in studies of organizational functioning or behavioral observations in studies of child-rearing practices—can add depth and perspective to the analysis of social phenomena. Too often, however, research has focused on attitudes, not so much because of a primary interest in attitudes per se or in their contribution to complex social processes, but because the assessment of attitudes was the easiest and most convenient way of obtaining data. It is obviously more convenient to distribute questionnaires in our classes, asking students how they would be likely to react in a variety of situations, than to observe their behavior in such situations, or to ask a sample of some population about the functioning of their organization, community, or society, than to make the detailed observations and develop the elaborate indexes needed to study a social system more directly. In many of our laboratory experiments too, after investing a great deal of energy and ingenuity in manipulating the independent variables, we have used attitudes as the cheapest and most painless dependent variable for assessing the effects of our manipulations.

Inappropriate and indiscriminate uses of attitude have raised serious questions about the validity and

usefulness of the concept. Allport, foreseeing such a possible development in his 1935 paper, wrote:

Whether the concept is being overworked to such an extent that it will be discarded along with the past shibboleths of social science remains to be seen. It seems more probable that the ever increasing number of critical and analytical studies will somehow succeed in refining and preserving it [p. 804].

Allport's vote of confidence has, in my view, proven justified. In the intervening years there has been a great deal of theoretical work, leading to considerable refinement and elaboration of the concept of attitude. One immediately thinks of the work of Katz, M. B. Smith, the Sherifs, Hovland, Doob, Peak, Campbell, Rokeach, Heider, Newcomb, Osgood and Tannenbaum, Triandis, Rosenberg, and Fishbein. These and other theorists have provided sophisticated analyses of the concept, have explored its complexities, and have pointed to the types of measurement procedures required to do justice to these complexities. The problem has been that these theoretical refinements have not always been reflected in studies utilizing attitudes. In many studies, attitudes have not only been largely irrelevant to the purposes of the research, but have also been assessed or interpreted in ways that ignore the traditional meaning of the concept and the elaborations it has undergone.

In short, social-psychological research has relied excessively on attitudes, to the neglect of other aspects of the social behavior of individuals and of the functioning of social systems. Attitudes have often been treated as the magical key to the study of social behavior and system functioning. As a result, they have been burdened with descriptive and predictive powers that they do not possess and have been used inappropriately and simplemindedly. There is clearly a need to broaden the conceptual and methodological repertoire of social-psychological research and to examine carefully the uses and misuses of the attitude concept. I do not feel, however, that these misuses discredit the concept of attitude as such. Attitude remains a viable and potentially powerful concept, as long as we place it firmly in a context of action.

I begin in this article by examining two lines of empirical research that have provided bases for questioning the validity and usefulness of the attitude concept and point out why I do not consider them decisive: studies of the consistency between attitudes and actions, and studies of the effects of counterattitudinal or attitude-discrepant action. I then proceed to present some notes toward a conception of attitudes as imbedded in an action context.

Studies of Attitude–Action Consistency

A series of studies have been designed to explore the relationship between attitudes and overt behavior. Two measures are obtained from each subject: an attitude measure, calling for some kind of verbal response vis-à-vis a particular object; and a behavioral measure, based on observation of the subject's overt response to the object. The prototype of this line of research is LaPiere's (1934) famous study, which found a lack of consistency between the negative responses of a number of hotels and restaurants to a mailed questionnaire, asking them whether they would serve Chinese guests, and the behavior of their personnel toward a Chinese couple that had actually been served at these same establishments a few months earlier. There are cogent reasons for questioning the relevance of the LaPiere study to the issue of attitude–action consistency (see Dillehay, 1973), including the fact that his verbal measure elicited policy statements rather than attitudes in the usual sense of the term. Most of the recent investigators, however, have used more standard procedures for assessing attitudes and have devised specially structured choice situations to obtain an index of overt behavior. The assumption behind this line of research is that if an attitude does indeed represent a predisposition to act toward the attitude object in a particular way, then it ought to be possible to predict responses on the behavioral measure from responses to the attitude questionnaire. However, in his thorough review of studies of the attitude–action relationship, Wicker (1969) concluded that "taken as a whole, these studies suggest that it is considerably more likely that attitudes will be unrelated or only slightly related to overt behaviors than that attitudes will be closely related to actions [p. 65]." He went on to say that his review "provides little evidence to support the postulated existence of stable, underlying attitudes within the individual which influence both his verbal expressions and his actions [p. 75]," although he did not reject the concept of attitude as such.

This series of studies have been very useful in pointing to the complexities of attitudes and in challenging the naive assumption that attitudes are direct indicators of overt responses and that assessment of attitudes can thus serve as a cheap substitute for more elaborate studies of social be-

havior. Of particular value are those studies that go beyond the question of whether attitudes and actions are consistent, and explore some of the conditions that make for greater or lesser consistency. For several reasons, however, the low correlations between attitude and action found by many of the studies in this genre, though pointing to the limitations of the attitude concept, do not demonstrate its invalidity.

1. First, we must look at these studies in the perspective of other empirical information—based mostly on survey research—that does show systematic relationships between attitudes and actions. In the area of intergroup relations, for example, studies have shown attitudes toward particular racial, religious, or national groups to be systematically related to personal associations or to voting behavior. Studies of political action have often shown consistent differences in attitude between participants and nonparticipants in certain protest movements or political organizations. In many of these studies, it is impossible to establish the causal direction of the relationship. A notable exception is a recent study by Brannon et al. (1973). Attitudes toward open housing were elicited in the course of a larger survey and actions were assessed by way of a field experiment carried out three months later, in which the original survey respondents served as subjects. The study found substantial relationships between survey responses and willingness to sign and publicize petitions favoring or opposing open housing.

The finding of greater *consistency* between attitudes and actions in studies based on survey designs than in those reviewed by Wicker (1969), which mostly involve experimental designs, brings to mind Hovland's (1959) discussion of the greater *stability* of attitudes in the face of persuasive communications shown in survey as compared to experimental studies. The effect of attitudes on actions may be exaggerated in survey-type studies, which generally use correlational designs, because of the ambiguity of the causal relationships involved. On the other hand, survey studies typically focus on actions more or less freely chosen by the subject—how he votes, with whom he associates, what groups he joins—whereas experimental studies present the subject with a structured situation in which he has to take some kind of action. It may be that in such a structured context situational constraints play a larger role and thus tend to attenuate the effect of attitudinal differences. Attitude–action

consistency may be further attenuated in some experimental studies by the use of attitudes that are less well formed and by their assessment in a classroom context (Brannon et al., 1973). In any event, the sometimes conflicting results of survey and experimental studies must be taken into account in any effort to determine the validity of the attitude concept.

2. Attitude theory does not propose that a person's underlying attitude to an object is the sole determinant of his behavior when interacting with that object. This is even more obvious when the attitude refers to a class of objects and the action refers to a specific member of that class. Major determinants of action are the social constraints under which the person operates, including immediate interpersonal demands, as well as normative expectations—conveyed by relevant reference groups—that govern behavior in the situation (Schofield, 1972). Thus, a person may well act in ways inconsistent with his attitude if consistency would require violating a generally accepted norm of interpersonal conduct (e.g., the rules of common courtesy) or deviating obviously and publicly from reference group expectations.

The assessment of attitudes also elicits behavior in a real situation, subject to various social constraints. Such constraints are obvious in LaPiere's (1934) original study, in which the measure of "attitude" was based on a public letter stating hotel or restaurant policy, but they also operate in more traditional attitude assessment situations. Even when responding anonymously, subjects are often inclined to express attitudes that conform to the views normatively prescribed within their milieus. Situational determinants are particularly likely to influence response to attitude measures in the area of race relations, where the attitude questionnaire tends to evoke the tolerance value inculcated by the society—"especially in a college population where verbal adherence to the value of tolerance is likely to be very high [Weitz, 1972, p. 15]." In the action context, on the other hand, the "situational threshold" (Campbell, 1963) for expressing tolerance may be higher. Thus, subjects conforming to the norm of tolerance on the questionnaire may deviate from their expressed attitudes when they find themselves in a concrete interaction situation. This line of analysis suggests that discrepancies between attitude and action are likely to arise in those domains in which people are subject to cross-pressures and internal conflicts,

for example, racial attitudes in white America. As Weitz (1972) pointed out, "Myrdal's 'American dilemma' is largely the societal disjunction between attitudes and behavior, with a tolerant value system conflicting with discriminatory normative patterns [p. 15]."

In sum, inconsistencies, or apparent inconsistencies, between attitudes and behavior often arise because the studies have not taken account of the social constraints that govern the situations in which the action is observed and the attitudes are assessed. When these social constraints are taken into account in interpreting some of the studies showing weak relationships between attitudes and actions (e.g., DeFleur & Westie, 1958; Linn, 1965), the findings fall neatly into place. Studies that have built social constraint deliberately into their designs as an intervening variable (e.g., Schofield, 1972; Warner & DeFleur, 1969) have produced the expected pattern of relationships between attitudes and actions. Situational constraints can also be taken into account in the types of measurement devices used. It is possible not only to use indirect or unobtrusive attitude measures to circumvent normative expectations but also to develop behavioral indexes that are relatively unaffected by situational pressures (Weitz, 1972).

3. Attitude theorists, including Allport as early as 1935, have pointed out that many attitudes and other intrapersonal factors are aroused in any given action situation, which jointly determine the person's behavior. Most studies of the attitude–action relationship have measured general attitudes toward a particular object and related these to behavior in a situation in which the subject interacts with that object or, more typically, with a specific member of that class of objects. To predict *action* toward a *specific* object in a particular *situation*, however, it would be helpful to assess the other attitudinal inputs that, along with general attitudes toward the object, determine behavior.

These include, first of all, attitudes toward the specific object with which the person is interacting. In a situation of interaction with a particular Italian, for example, attitudes toward that Italian or toward the subset of Italians to which be belongs probably account for much more of the variance in behavior than attitudes toward Italy and Italians in general. Second, attitude toward the action itself is an important factor to be considered. Fishbein (1967) has proposed a model in which the person's attitude toward the act—that is, toward performing a particular act in a given situation with

respect to a given object—and his normative beliefs about the act are the two proximate predictors of behavior (or, more precisely, of behavioral intention). Attitude toward the object, according to this model, affects behavior insofar as it affects attitude toward the act and normative beliefs. In one experimental test of this model, Ajzen and Fishbein (1970) have found attitudes toward the act to be systematically related to behavior in a Prisoner's Dilemma game.[2] A third type of attitude that must be considered is attitude toward the situation. Rokeach (1969) has argued that prediction of behavior toward an object requires a systematic analysis of the interaction between attitudes toward the object and attitudes toward the situation in which the object is encountered.

Assessment of these diverse attitudes may well improve our ability to predict action. There is some evidence that predictive power is indeed enhanced when a variety of attitudes and related intrapersonal factors are taken into account (Wicker, 1971).

A further complication arises from the fact that the particular attitude object in which the investigator is interested is not the only object toward which the subject is reacting in the situation, and it may not be the most important one. The investigator may define the experimental situation as one of interracial contact, for example, and thus expect behavior to be highly correlated with racial attitudes. The subject, however, may define the situation primarily in terms of its authority structure or its task requirements, and his behavior may be most influenced by his attitude toward authority or toward the task, rather than his attitude toward his laboratory partner. We may, therefore, find only weak or even inverse relationships between racial attitudes and behavior in this situation. The low correlations between attitude and action found in many studies may thus be due to the investigators' failure to explore the entire range of attitudes that operate in the situation and to determine which of these are most relevant to the behavior observed.

The joint operation of this congeries of attitudinal factors means that attitude toward a particular object does not have as much predictive power as some optimists have hoped it would have. It is one more reason for concluding, however, that the low correlations obtained in many studies of attitude–action consistency do not necessarily invalidate the attitude concept as such. They merely confirm the view that the use of attitude in the prediction of action requires a refined and detailed assessment of attitudes, as well as a thorough analysis of the action situation to which we hope to predict, including the social constraints that govern that situation and the variety of attitudes that are aroused within it.

Studies of the Effects of Counterattitudinal Action

The second line of empirical research that has raised questions about the attitude concept is research on the effects of counterattitudinal action. The theory of cognitive dissonance (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Festinger, 1957) and Bem's (1967) reformulation of dissonance phenomena in terms of processes of self-perception have generated many experiments demonstrating attitude changes following upon discrepant action. These formulations have been very useful in calling our attention to a number of intriguing phenomena and providing handles for interpreting certain behavioral anomalies. Above all, they have stimulated thinking and research on a central issue in the study of social behavior: the emergence of attitudes out of an action context. They can be used, however, to support a rather narrow view of the action–attitude link, underestimating the dynamic quality of attitudes.

Within the dissonance and particularly within the self-perception framework, attitudes can readily be viewed as epiphenomenal—as cognitive adjustments the person makes after he finds himself acting in a certain way, designed to restore cognitive consistency or to label his action appropriately to himself and to others. Attitudes, in this view, do not perform a directive and dynamic function in behavior but are basically a form of self-indulgence. The experiments on counterattitudinal action, derived from these two traditions, could be used to challenge the concept of attitude as a predisposition to behavior on the grounds that observed relationships between attitudes and actions reflect the effects of action on attitude rather than the

reverse. For several reasons, however, I feel that these studies do not warrant the conclusion that attitudes are epiphenomenal and lack explanatory power.

1. The studies of counterattitudinal action must be seen in the perspective of other empirical information—developed outside of a dissonance or self-perception framework—about attitude changes following upon action. A variety of studies of role playing (cf. Elms & Janis, 1965; Janis & Gilmore, 1965; Janis & King, 1954; Kelman, 1953) have shown some of the conditions under which advocacy of a counterattitudinal position in a role-playing context leads to attitude changes. Studies of the effects of role enactment in real life, such as the well-known study by Lieberman (1956), have demonstrated systematic changes in attitude as the person changed his role. Studies of intergroup contact, such as the Deutsch and Collins (1951) study of interracial housing projects, have shown that under the proper circumstances, such personal contacts may lead to attitude change. There is also some indirect evidence that the introduction of a new policy as a *fait accompli* may produce not only behavioral acceptance, but in its wake also attitude change (cf. Allport, 1954; Saenger, 1953).

In all of these studies, attitude change following upon action can be understood in terms of the usual processes by which, according to the various attitude theories, attitudes are formed and modified. That is, the nature and the consequences of the action bring to the fore challenging insights, role expectations, social supports, or direct experiences, which are the stuff out of which attitudes emerge. The data could, of course, be reinterpreted in dissonance or attribution terms, but they do not *need* to be explained in these terms. There is nothing anomalous about them from the point of view of attitude theory. Certainly they do not suggest a view of attitudes as epiphenomena and as mere cognitive adjustments. Thus, the recent experiments on counterattitudinal action represent only a limited range of the situations in which actions produce attitude change, and hence they provide an insufficient basis for generalizations about the nature of attitudes.

2. Dissonance theory is concerned with the person's reactions after he has engaged in a discrepant action. His reasons for engaging in the action are of interest to the theory only insofar as they affect the degree of justification for the action (as perceived by the actor), and hence the amount of dissonance aroused. The theory and the experi-

ments flowing from it have not been concerned with the specific motives, expectations, and situational forces—in a qualitative sense—that lead to the action. From a functional point of view, which my colleagues and I have taken in a series of experiments on counterattitudinal behavior (Kelman, Baron, Sheposh, & Lubalin, in press), the initial reasons for engaging in the action determine the kind of dilemma the person confronts and the way he proceeds to resolve it. Systematic attention to these reasons should thus allow us to make more refined predictions of the probability and nature of attitude change, as well as of other reactions, following upon discrepant action.

Most importantly, for the present purposes, an analysis of the person's reasons for engaging in the action may reveal that there were indeed some meaningful relationships between his initial attitudes and the action he has taken. It may well be that the impression, conveyed by the literature on counterattitudinal behavior, of a disjuncture between attitude and action—of attitude as merely a post hoc adjustment to action—derives from the design of studies in this genre, which deliberately separates the induced action from the motives behind it. Kelley's (1967) analysis of the way in which the typical dissonance experiment creates the illusion of freedom in the subject is very helpful in showing how this separation occurs. In view of their special character, these studies cannot provide a sufficient basis for concluding that attitudes do not determine action but merely follow upon it.

3. The internal logic of research on counterattitudinal behavior forces the view that attitudes, though cognitively adjustable, are indeed "real" and play a directive role in behavior. Most dissonance theorists would, I believe, concur with this conclusion. According to dissonance theory, a person changes his attitude because he has behaved in a way that did not "follow from" his original attitude. There is thus the presumption that the person normally expects his behavior to follow from his attitudes and perhaps even feels that it ought to follow from his attitudes (although dissonance theory does not spell out this part of the phenomenology), and that much of the time a person's behavior in fact does follow from his attitudes. Furthermore, attitude change reduces dissonance because it provides the person with an attitude from which his earlier behavior follows retroactively. The new attitude can fulfill that function only insofar as it is "real," and, if it is real, it should have a directive effect on subsequent be-

havior. That is, unless the counterattitudinal action was of the one-shot variety with no implications for the future (which, of course, it often is in dissonance experiments), the new attitude should, at least for some time to come, predispose the person to behavior that follows from it. If attitudes appear ephemeral in many dissonance experiments, it may be because the objects to which they refer and the behavior to which they are linked are ephemeral. However, when applied to real-life situations, dissonance theory does assume that attitudes are real and have implications for behavior.

This reasoning does not apply as clearly to a Bemian type of attribution analysis because, in Bem's view, attitudes in the sense of internal states are by definition not "real." Insofar as any attitudelike phenomenon can be real for a radical behaviorist, however, the attitude statements following counterattitudinal action are real in Bem's scheme; they certainly must be viewed as directive with respect to subsequent behavior. In Bem's analysis, these statements reflect self-perceptions, which he regards as functionally similar to the perceptions of others. Just as our perceptions of others clearly influence our behavior, so should our self-perceptions, according to the internal logic of Bem's scheme. If I see myself as liking brown bread, to use Bem's favorite example, I am more likely to buy brown bread, to serve it to my friends, and so on. In other words, when a person makes an attitude statement following upon counterattitudinal action, he is not merely labeling his behavior for the benefit of others or for his own amusement; his self-descriptions constitute relatively stable determinants of his subsequent behavior.

In short, I have argued that the logic of the research on counterattitudinal action requires a view of attitude as something more than an epiphenomenon and a cognitive adjustment, even though it does follow upon behavior. If one accepts the dissonance or attribution interpretations of the findings, one cannot at the same time cite these findings as evidence of the bankruptcy of the attitude concept.

Toward a Conception of Attitude as an Integral Part of Action

I have come to the defense of the attitude concept, not only because I have a vested interest in it, but because I consider some such concept as attitude to be essential for social-psychological analysis.

It is very difficult to imagine a social psychology without a construct designed to capture the conceptions of social objects and events that people bring to their interactions with each other and with their social institutions and that they share, to varying degrees, with other members of their diverse groups, organizations, and communities. To reject the construct on the basis of the current evidence would be to abandon prematurely a major conceptual tool. Nor does it seem fruitful to argue whether or not attitudes exist; the question is whether they can be conceptualized in ways that yield useful analyses and insightful conclusions about social behavior.

The priority need at this point is for more refined conceptualizations of attitudes, particularly—in view of the challenges presented by the two lines of research discussed above—of their linkage to action. In the remainder of this article I offer some notes toward such a conceptualization. Much of what I have to say has been stimulated by the research on attitude-discrepant behavior—both the work of others, carried out mostly in a dissonance or attribution framework, and the work that my colleagues and I have done within a functional framework—and attempts to put that work into a broader context in which the dynamic connections between attitude and action become more apparent.

Attitude, in my view, and in the view of most attitude theorists, is not an index of action, but a determinant, component, and consequent of it. Furthermore, it is not an entity that can be separated—functionally or temporally—from the flow of action, but is an integral part of action. Attitude and action are linked in a continuing reciprocal process, each generating the other in an endless chain. Action is the ground on which attitudes are formed, tested, modified, and abandoned.

From its very origin, an attitude is embedded in an action situation. A person's attitudes toward a particular object are formed in the course of his interaction with that object, or his interaction with other persons or with communication media transmitting information about the object. These interactions may yield information (a) about the object itself, obtained through observation, hearsay, or some combination of these; (b) about the attitudes of others and the prevailing group norms vis-à-vis the object; or (c) about the person's own relationship to the object, particularly in the form of feedback from his own actions toward it. The way in which the information is processed is a function of the motivational and cognitive contexts in which

the interaction occurs. That is, the attitude the person forms is grounded in the particular functional significance that the situation has for him—the goals he is pursuing, the values he is hoping to maximize, the coping processes in which he is engaged (cf. Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Similarly, the attitude he forms is linked to the particular cognitive framework within which the interaction occurs—the values defining the situation, the issues under consideration, the other objects involved. The motivational and cognitive contexts in which the attitude is formed determine the nature of the resulting attitude—that is, the motivational basis of the attitude and the attitude system of which it becomes a part—and hence the conditions under which the person is likely to act on this attitude in one or another way, as well as the conditions under which the attitude is likely to change.

This dynamic view of the functioning of attitudes implies that attitude formation and change is a continually ongoing process. Attitudes develop out of the person's interaction with an object in a particular motivational and cognitive context. As he continues to interact with the object (directly or indirectly), the attitudes are tested, exposed to new information, sometimes filled out and shored up, and sometimes changed. In principle, attitudes should be developing and changing whenever a person is exposed to new experiences and information. In practice, changes are usually quite slow and gradual, because attitudes, once established, help to shape the experiences the person has with the attitude object. They affect the kind of information to which the person will be exposed, the way in which he will organize that information, and often (as in interpersonal attitudes) the way in which the attitude object itself will behave. Thus, an attitude by its very functioning (quite apart from any special motivations to maintain that attitude) tends to create the conditions for its own confirmation and to minimize the opportunities for its disconfirmation.

As a person interacts with an object toward which he has established an attitude, he is subject, then, to two competing sets of forces. On the one hand, the new information to which he is exposed produces forces toward change. On the other hand, the existing attitude creates forces toward stability—not only in the form of motivated resistances to change (stemming from the functional significance the attitude has for the person), but also and primarily in the form of confirmatory

experiences inherent in the day-to-day functioning of attitudes. Which of these two sets of forces will prevail on any given occasion—or what balance between them is achieved—depends on the nature of the existing attitude, of the new information to which the person is exposed, and of the situation in which the interaction occurs. In general, however, it can be said that both stability and change are parts of the essential nature of attitudes.

Attitude change processes are most likely to be set into motion if the person is sharply confronted with a discrepancy between his attitude and some item of new information. The discrepant information must be sufficiently strong and challenging to overcome the competing forces toward stability, and even then, as we well know, there are many ways of neutralizing the discrepancy short of attitude change. Three major types of discrepancy conducive to attitude change can be identified, corresponding to the three types of information about an attitude object mentioned above: (a) discrepancy between the attitude and information about reality (e.g., about the characteristics of the object or the implications of the policy to which the attitude refers); (b) discrepancy between the attitude and the attitudes of significant others; and (c) discrepancy between the attitude and one's own actions—which is the focus of the present analysis.

Discrepant Action and Attitude Change

Perhaps the most significant contribution of dissonance theory is that it has focused our attention on *discrepant action*, which constitutes a major arena for attitude change. Discrepant action, as used here, refers to any action toward an object that is out of keeping, from the actor's own point of view, with his attitude toward that object. We usually apply the term to actions that in some way "fall short" of the attitude—that is, fail to live up to the level of commitment that the attitude represents. Such failure may occur because actions in line with the attitude appear too costly and difficult, because they are inhibited by situational pressures, because their anticipated consequences are too negative, or because competing motives impel the person to follow a different course. Discrepant actions, however, may also take the form of actions that "exceed" the person's attitude—that are at a higher level of commitment than that implied by his attitude. Situational pressures or social facilitation may induce him to act in ways that are more

TABLE 1

The Conduciveness of Action to Attitude Change

Components of action	Processes generated by action	
	Motivational	Informational
Context of the action	Meeting task and situational demands	Coding information about object and social expectations
Contemplation of the action	Justification of action	Definition of object and of self vis-à-vis object
Consequences of the action	Anticipation and fulfillment of new role requirements	Integration of new experiences

generous, more courageous, or more tolerant than his attitude requires.

Commitment to a discrepant action may create the conditions for reassessment and revision of related attitudes and thus set a process of attitude change into motion. Attitude change, in the present view, is not a reaction to the discrepancy as such, aimed at removing the inconsistency between action and attitude, but rather an outcome of various motivational and informational processes that are generated by the action. Table 1 presents a classification of six such processes, all of which are likely to come into play, at some level of intensity, in any action situation. Attitude change may be mediated —under the appropriate circumstances—by any one of these processes or any combination of them.

The columns of the table refer to motivational and informational processes, respectively. The rows refer to three components of the action, each of which generates both motivational and informational processes that are potentially conducive to attitude change. The first row refers to the processes generated by the context of the action—the situation in which the person decides to act and carries out the action. The second row refers to processes generated by the contemplation of the action—the person's backward look at the action he has taken and its implications. The third row refers to processes generated by the consequences of the action—the actual and anticipated events that the action brings in its wake. For any given unit of action, the three rows correspond to a focus on the present, on the past, and on the future, respectively. Proceeding row by row, I shall describe the motivational and informational processes that may come into play.

1. *Context of the action.* Let us assume, for illustrative purposes, that a student is urged by his friends to participate in preparing and signing a statement to the university administration protest-

ing against classified research—an action that does not flow spontaneously from his current attitudes. To the extent that he is motivated to meet the demands of this particular situation, this request sets a decision-making process into motion. He assesses the options available to him and their respective consequences; he decides whether or not to engage in the action; and, if his decision is positive, he determines the nature and extent of his participation and previews the content of what he will be doing. In the course of the decision making, he is likely to think through the issues raised by the action, to consider appropriate information, and to review relevant arguments. These efforts, in turn, may involve him in an active process of reevaluating his position—of reconsidering the implications of his original attitudes for his own values and for his relationship to important reference groups. The process of reexamination may provide attitudinal support for the action he has been asked to take and may thus lead to attitude change, in the form of internalization or identification or some combination of the two (Kelman, 1961). In other words, attitude change may emerge out of the process of reexamining his attitudes motivated by the situational context of the action.[3]

A high degree of choice about the induced action is particularly conducive to attitude change (Kelman, 1962). If the person is undecided as to whether to carry out the action, then the higher his degree of choice, the more likely he is—in the process of arriving at the necessary decision and firming it up—to reexamine his attitudes and to marshal forces in support of the action that he finally selects. He may, of course, decide against taking the induced action, and this negative decision would now have considerable attitudinal support. But if he does take the action, it is likely to be accompanied by attitude change. A high degree of choice may facilitate attitude change even in the absence of indecision, that is, even if the situational forces are so strong that the person is automatically inclined to take the induced action. The fact that he is given the choice may force him

to engage in a process of active self-persuasion to find attitudinal support for the action he has already decided to take.

Once the decision to act has been made, the person's motivation to meet the demands of the task in which he has agreed to participate may bring a further process of reexamination of attitudes into play—depending, of course, on the specific nature of the action. In the example cited before, preparation of the protest statement requires review of the issues and development of appropriate arguments. If the task is to be carried out effectively, the person has to think of supporting arguments and to present them in a convincing way. In the course of engaging in this process, he may become aware of nuances and implications of the issues that he had not considered before and may thus succeed in persuading himself. This is one reason for the potential effectiveness of role playing—even though it may be a mere exercise demanding no commitment from the actor—in producing attitude change, particularly if it requires improvisation (cf. King & Janis, 1956). In reverse role play among conflicting parties, for example, each player, if he is to perform his task successfully, must consider and present the other party's position from the other's point of view. He may thus gain insights into the other's position which were not previously available to him, and modify his own view accordingly.

The motivational processes generated in the action situation are accompanied by informational processes that are similarly conducive to attitude change. In the course of deciding to act and carrying out the action, the person processes various items of information that have attitudinal relevance. Some of this information is conveyed by the context of the action; some is deliberately sought out by the person to enable him to decide and to act; some is generated by the action itself. He may thus acquire data about the characteristics of the object, about the value implications of various policies, about the distribution of opinions on the issue, and about the expectations held by relevant reference groups. These are the kinds of information that typically enter into the formation of attitudes. Exposure to new information of this variety, under the appropriate motivational circumstances, provides the raw material for attitude change.

2. *Contemplation of the action.* Once a person has taken action, the action itself becomes a datum with which he has to contend. Contemplation of

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[3] In the case described, attitude change actually occurs *before* the action, that is, in the course of deciding to act. The final action is thus consistent with the person's newly developed attitude, and strictly speaking, therefore, it is not a discrepant action. The total situation, however, can fairly be described as one of discrepant action because the decision to act cannot be sharply separated from the action itself.

what he has done may raise questions about the meaning of the action, about its implications for his self-image, and about the nature of his ongoing relationship to the object of the action. These musings may generate motivational and informational processes conducive to attitude change. This component of action, essentially, is the one on which both dissonance and attribution interpretations focus.

On the motivational side, the fact that a person has taken a particular discrepant action may have negative implications for his self-evaluation. Contemplation of the action may arouse guilt, shame, or some other negative affect, which in turn generates cognitive efforts to justify the action. The precise nature of the reaction depends on the form the action took, the norm that it violated, and the specific motivational system it has thrown out of balance. For example, my colleagues and I (Kelman, Baron, Sheposh, & Lubalin, in press) have distinguished between moral and hedonic dilemmas and proposed that discrepant actions arousing these different dilemmas will generate different resolution processes, often showing different patterns of relationship to the standard dissonance parameters. Efforts to justify the action, for whatever reason, may bring about attitude change, more or less along the lines proposed by dissonance theory. A morally dissonant act, for example, can be justified if the person can convince himself that the object he harmed or the cause he betrayed was not worthy of his loyalty; a hedonically dissonant act can be justified if he can convince himself that the discrepant behavior was really enjoyable and profitable.

Discrepant action is more likely to generate justification processes conducive to attitude change, the greater the individual's personal involvement in the action. Knowledge that he has acted in a certain way toward an object becomes an important datum in the person's self-evaluation and in his evaluation of the object if he regards the action as internally motivated and representative of the self. The sense of personal involvement—and hence the probability of attitude change—should be enhanced if the action is freely chosen, if it requires effort and initiative, and if "it represents a complex of interrelated role behaviors within some social system rather than a specific, isolated act [Kelman, 1962, p. 107]."

Contemplation of the action also provides new information—relevant to the definition of the object and to the person's self-definition—on which attitude change may be based. The title of the classic collection of children's definitions, *A Hole Is to Dig*, elegantly describes our tendency to define objects in terms of the way in which we characteristically act toward them. The action one takes toward an object tends to become a salient characteristic of that object. It influences subsequent interactions with the object and receptivity to further information about it and thus, eventually, evaluation of the object. For example, if a person has acted in support of a particular policy, he will be inclined to define it, in part, as "a policy that I have supported." This new definition, in turn, may contribute to a new evaluation of it as "a policy that is worthy of my support." Such an outcome can be derived from an analysis of the usual ways in which people process information, without invoking a special need for consistency.

The information provided by contemplation of one's action also has relevance for his self-definition. In line with a Bemian analysis, if a person acts toward an object in a certain way, he will (given the proper stimulus conditions) attribute to himself the corresponding attitude. Beyond that, if the action touches on central concerns, it will contribute to the person's more enduring definition of his self. Thus, repeated friendly association with another person will lead him to define himself as the other's friend; repeated participation in protests and demonstrations will lead him to define himself as an activist and radical. The person's conception of the kind of person he is, in turn, plays a major role in determining his future actions and interactions. Thus, by being integrated into the person's self-definition, the action-generated attitude gains stability and generality.

3. *Consequences of the action.* Most actions, at least outside the laboratory, have consequences beyond the immediate situation. When taking action, therefore, the person prepares himself psychologically for its anticipated consequences. For example, in preparation for the anticipated necessity of explaining and defending his action to others, he may review the issues involved in the action, rehearse the opposing arguments, and reassess his own attitudes toward the object of the action. Out of this process, attitude change may emerge, particularly since the person is motivated to find arguments supportive of the action he has taken. If he not only knows these arguments but actually believes them, his ability to offer a comfortable and convincing defense of his action is further enhanced.

The motivation to bring one's attitude into line with his action is especially strong if the action commits the person to continuing association or public identification with the object and hence, at least implicitly, to future action in support of it. Many simple acts, such as buying a product, making a pledge, or allowing one's name to be placed on a mailing list, have this consequence. Of special interest, however, are those actions that involve commitment to a new role, such as the act of joining an organization, moving into a new neighborhood, starting a new job, or entering a training program. These actions represent long-term commitments, which would be costly to break; they involve the person in an extensive set of role relationships; and they often become salient features of his public identity. Under these circumstances, the development and strengthening of appropriate attitudes in preparation for the new role becomes particularly crucial. The person is open to and actively searches for new information that lends attitudinal support to his action and thus makes his anticipated role performance more effective, more comfortable, and more rewarding. These preparatory processes are likely to facilitate attitude change in the direction of the action taken and of the future actions anticipated (cf. Kelman, 1962).

Not only the anticipated but also the actual consequences of action generate motivations for attitude change, particularly when the action takes the form of commitment to a new role. The requirements of the new role produce strong forces toward reexamining one's attitudes and making them congruent with the expected role performance. Thus, for example, if the worker in Lieberman's (1956) study who becomes a foreman is to be effective in making the choices and taking the actions required by his new status, he must develop the appropriate attitudes. If he is to be able to defend the position of management, he must know it and is likely to adopt it. Moreover, the tendency of others to cast him into the role of spokesman for management and expect him to take management-oriented positions has the self-fulfilling effect of binding him into the role so that he becomes what others expect him to be. To take another example, the white housewife in the Deutsch and Collins (1951) study who has moved into an interracial housing project is motivated to reexamine her racial attitudes because she is now involved in regular interaction with black neighbors, because she is called on to defend her decision to move into the

project, and because she is identified by others as a resident in interracial housing. In short, enactment of the new role in which the person finds himself as a consequence of action sets into motion various forces conducive to attitude change, not the least of which are the expectations conveyed by others and their tendency to attribute certain attitudes to him and to treat him accordingly.

On the informational side, a frequent consequence of action is to provide the person with new experiences, which may expose him to new information. The experiences may be in the form of more extensive contact with the attitude object itself. Thus, the worker-turned-foreman in Lieberman's study has increased contact with management, which, given his openness to new information supportive of his new role, is quite likely to provide him with raw material for attitude change in the direction of management. The white housewife in the Deutsch and Collins study has new opportunities to interact with her black counterparts in daily activities and around common concerns, which, depending on what happens in the course of the interactions and on her motivation to receive favorable information, may produce favorable attitudes. The literature on intergroup contact suggests that contact at least provides the potential for new experiences conducive to attitude change. Favorable change is most likely if the contact involves equal-status interactions and if it is sanctioned by legitimate authorities—conditions that were met in the Deutsch and Collins study.

Action may also provide the person with new social experiences that indirectly yield new information about the object. His action in support of a particular group or policy, for example, may elicit praise from others, or at least fail to elicit the disapproval he had anticipated; or he may discover unexpected agreement, at least within his relevant reference groups, with the stand he has taken. These new items of information about group consensus and about the social acceptability of his action may contribute to attitude change via the process of identification. In short, as the person integrates new experiences consequent to the action, whether these involve direct contact with the object or contact with social norms about it, forces toward attitude change may well be set into motion.

To sum up, Table 1 presents a preliminary mapping of the processes generated by discrepant action. I have tried to analyze attitude change following upon action in terms of the variety of conditions, motivational and informational, that

govern the formation and functioning of attitudes. The analysis is intended to show that the action–attitude sequence can be understood if we conceive of attitude as an integral part of action. The need now is for more precise propositions about the determinants of attitude change within each of the six cells of Table 1. Such propositions can be derived from a variety of theoretical sources and integrated into a functional analysis. Each cell of the table, in fact, suggests a social-psychological theory that is particularly relevant as a source of propositions. I have in mind the theories of decisional conflict and information processing for the cells in the first row, dissonance and attribution theories for the cells in the second row, and role theory and contact theory for those in the third row.

Action as a Step in the Attitude Change Process

The discussion in the preceding section proceeded from the assumption that a discrepant action has occurred, and then explored the various ways in which this event may lead to attitude change. It is often true, however, that action—even discrepant action—does not merely precipitate attitude change, but is itself an integral part of an ongoing attitude change process.

When we examine a person's reasons for taking an apparently discrepant action, we may find that the action is not completely out of keeping with his attitudes. Though he may be responding to situational demands, to interpersonal pressures, to social facilitation, or to other extraneous influences, his response need not be entirely unwilling. The action may reflect an incipient attitude change, a movement toward a new attitude that has not yet been crystallized and to which he has not fully committed himself. Extraneous forces may thus precipitate an action for which the person was already partly prepared. The action in turn contributes to attitude change, in the sense that it provides an occasion for the person to sharpen the new attitude and commit himself to it. In short, attitude change in relation to discrepant action is not always an entirely *reactive* process, but may well be an *active* process in which action plays a catalytic role.

This process can be understood quite readily if we assume, as a number of attitude theorists do, that an attitude indicates a range, rather than just a point on a scale. Specifically, I propose that any given attitude represents a *range of commitment* to the attitude object. This notion clearly overlaps with the concept of latitude of acceptance (Sherif & Hovland, 1961), except that it refers to action potential—to the kinds of action the person is prepared to take—rather than to judgment. Within a person's range of commitment, one can identify a point representing his modal level of commitment (which is presumably the point to which a person's position on an attitude scale would correspond, if it were possible to devise situation-free attitude measures). A person's behavior vis-à-vis the attitude object fluctuates around that modal point. In some situations he may display a level of commitment closer to the upper end of his range; in others, a level closer to the lower end.

The notion of a range of commitment suggests not only fluctuations around a modal level, but also a readiness to shift one's modal level to another position within the range, given the proper circumstances. The degree of readiness for such a shift, the direction it would take, and the circumstances that might precipitate it depend on a variety of qualitative factors. The possibility of such a shift to a higher or lower level within the person's range may be entirely latent, or it may be actively entertained or even desired by the person. For example, a person may be willing or even eager to become more actively involved in an organization or a profession—to give more of his time to it or to take a leadership role—but the opportunities to do so have not presented themselves or other competing forces have kept him at his present level. Conversely, a person may feel ambivalent toward an organization or a social group to which he belongs, and be willing or even eager to withdaw from it, but the opportunity to do so gracefully in the face of competing considerations has not arisen.

Within this framework, one can see how an action can simultaneously flow from an attitude and mediate changes in that attitude. Table 2 sketches out some classes of situations in which this kind of process may occur. The first row describes the general characteristics of these situations: (a) A person (P) finds himself in a situation calling for action at a level higher or lower than his modal level of commitment, but still within his range. (b) For one or another reason, he decides to take this action, which thus involves him at least temporarily at a level of commitment higher or lower than his usual level. (c) Having taken the action, he becomes subject to the various action-generated forces conducive to attitude

TABLE 2

Action as a Step in an Ongoing Process of Attitude Change

Case	Preaction attitude	Nature of action	Impact of action
Generic case	Action called for is higher (lower) than P's modal level of commitment, but within his range of commitment.	P responds to opportunities, challenges, or internal forces to take action corresponding to a level of commitment higher (lower) than his modal level.	Action generates processes conducive to attitude change in form of higher (lower) modal level, and heightened (lowered) and/or narrowed (widened) range of commitment.
Case 1: Opportunity	P is prepared (e.g., through anticipatory socialization) for level of commitment higher (lower) than current modal level.	P utilizes opportunity to adopt previously anticipated role corresponding to a higher (lower) level of action commitment.	Role enactment generates experiences, task requirements, and social expectations that lead to higher (lower) level of commitment.
Case 2a: Social challenge	Level of commitment higher (lower) than current modal level is latent in P's attitude, but unexpressed because of cross-pressures or other competing forces.	P yields to social pressure to take action in line with expectations of one reference group.	Action generates motivational and informational processes that reinforce and facilitate movement to higher (lower) level of commitment.
Case 2b: Cognitive challenge	Level of commitment higher (lower) than current modal level is latent in P's attitude, but unexpressed because of failure to draw implications of own values.	P confronts implications of own values to take action in line with his revised self-expectations.	
Case 3: Self-mobilization	P wants to move to level of commitment higher (lower) than current level, but is kept back by cross-pressures or other competing forces.	P takes action as part of deliberate effort to mobilize internal and external support for movement to a new level.	Action places P in new psychological and social situation that requires and supports shift to higher (lower) level of commitment, and prevents backsliding.

Note. P = person.

change, which were discussed earlier; as a result he may manifest change by raising or lowering his modal level and his entire range, as well as by narrowing or widening the range. This generic case merely describes what happens, but does not explain why the person decided to take action discrepant from his modal level in the first place. For this, let me turn to the more specific cases.

Case 1 can be exemplified by the workers in Lieberman's study. The fact that a given worker was asked to be a foreman or a steward was probably not a mere coincidence. The chances are that he was available for this level of commitment to management or the union, that he had been moving in that direction for some time, that he had been building relevant attitudes in preparation for it—in short, that he had been undergoing a process of anticipatory socialization. The invitation to become a foreman or a steward thus represented an opportunity for him to adopt a role for which he was already prepared. It must be noted that al-

though he was clearly ready for attitude change, his attitudes were not yet at the level of a functioning foreman or steward. It took the action commitment and all the forces that it generated to bring a new attitude—at a higher level of commitment—into sharp focus, to reorganize it, and to stabilize it.

Another example of Case 1 would be the person who joins a social movement. The point of joining represents a clearly identifiable, highly committing action step. The decision to take the leap and to define himself as a member is a critical one, and major changes in attitude are likely to follow from it. Yet, the action was obviously not unrelated to these new attitudes. The changes were no doubt already taking place, slowly, perhaps imperceptibly, prior to the action. The act of joining the movement helped to speed up the rate of change and to sharpen and crystallize the new attitudes. Similar considerations apply when a person decides to leave a movement. Typically, his commitment to the

movement has been becoming weaker for some time, but he has not quite reached the point of changing his modal position. When a turning-point in his own life or in the life of the movement finally precipitates his decision to quit—for which he had been gradually preparing himself—his attitudes change sharply and rapidly.

Case 2a might be exemplified by the student from a fairly conservative background whose political views and commitments have been moving in a new direction. He has settled into a generally liberal position, marked by support for various causes but not a high level of personal involvement in them. The possibility of a deeper commitment to some of these causes is within his attitudinal range, but he is not quite ready for it because he is not willing to break entirely with his family and home community, or because he is not prepared to pay the price of higher commitment, or because he has not fully sorted out his ideas on the matter. As often happens, this individual may find himself in a situation in which social facilitation or social pressure from his current associates induces him to participate in political action that exceeds his modal level of commitment, and this action in turn generates further attitude change. Although situational forces played a major role in inducing the action, he was at least partly ready for it. In fact, he may have had a latent interest in trying out this higher level of commitment but needed the extra push that social pressure provided. Other examples of Case 2a are the conscience-stricken anti-integrationist who welcomes external pressures, in the form of laws or *faits accomplis*, that constrain him to go along with integration (Allport, 1954); and the "latent liberal" in the South who is racially prejudiced for reasons of conformity but quite ready to change once the social norms point in the direction of greater tolerance (Pettigrew, 1961).

Case 2b is structurally similar to 2a, except that movement to a different level of commitment is inhibited, not by the existence of cross-pressures, but by the person's failure to make certain cognitive connections. For example, a young man may have serious moral compunctions about war and thus be a latent conscientious objector. He may never have considered taking this position, however, because he was unaware of the existence of this social category and because it never occurred to him that response to the draft law was within a person's domain of moral choice. Once confronted with the possibility of taking this action, he may

acquire a new perspective on the problem and recognize himself as someone who has been a conscientious objector all along without ever knowing it. This example and others of this type usually represent some mixture of social facilitation and cognitive challenge.

Case 3 represents the most interesting illustration of action as a step in an ongoing process of attitude change. It refers to a person who really wants—with at least some degree of consciousness—to move to a different level of commitment, but who, for various reasons, is not quite ready to do so. Examples would be the political activist who wants to engage in more militant action but is reluctant to pay the price it would entail; the religious seeker who would like to make a complete commitment but lacks the faith to take the final leap; or the graduate student who is profoundly interested in the field of his choice but hesitates to make a lifelong commitment to it. In such a situation, the person may deliberately take an action that is beyond his current level of commitment. The political activist may decide to engage in an act of civil disobedience; the religious seeker may decide to spend a summer with the sect he is attracted to; the graduate student may accept a research assistantship in an area he knows he will find engrossing. These actions do not represent a total commitment, but they do represent identifiable steps in that direction.

To some extent, the person may take this step in order to test his level of commitment, on the assumption that true commitment implies a readiness to take actions of this kind. The action thus provides him an opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to himself (as well as to others)—or perhaps to determine, once and for all, that he really lacks the commitment. Even more intriguing is the possibility that such actions are taken to bring about a deeper level of commitment. The person is at least vaguely aware that by taking this action he places himself in a situation in which he will gradually be propelled into increasing commitment. The action creates some irreversible consequences. For example, by committing an act of civil disobedience, the political activist risks jail, which in turn may greatly limit his future opportunities. Furthermore, the person's action creates expectations in others—both those who share the action and those who witness it—who will then treat him as one who is fully committed to the cause. By setting up these expectations in others,

he makes it more difficult for himself to withdraw, for both practical and psychological reasons. In short, by taking the action, he is not only testing and mobilizing his own commitment but also mobilizing external forces to support a strengthened commitment and to prevent him from backsliding. The array of forces generated by the action thus helps him to shift to a new level of commitment and to jell an attitude that was not yet fully formed prior to the action.

In Case 3, as in the other cases summarized in Table 2, action creates commitment and generates attitude change. Yet, at the same time, the person's readiness for such change is partly responsible for his original decision to take the action. Case 3 is of particular interest since it represents a person's deliberate attempt to use a partially discrepant action as a vehicle for attitude change. It demonstrates the potential interactions, both between deliberate choice and external constraints, and between action and attitude change. It shows most clearly the engagement of attitude and action in a continuing, reciprocal, circular process. Not only is attitude an integral part of action, but action is an integral part of the development, testing, and crystallization of attitudes.

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