Adolescent Attitude Towards Life: A Study

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Abstract:

An attitude is an expression of favour or disfavour towards a person, place, thing or event. Attitude as defined 1) Manner, disposition, feeling, position etc. with regard to a person or thing; tendency or orientation, especially of the mind. 2) Position or posture of the body appropriate to or expressive of an action, emotion, etc. a threatening attitude; a relaxed attitude. It is our mental response to people, places, things and events in our life. All people irrespective of status, intelligence or circumstance hold attitudes. Adolescent is the period where many changes will occur and pave way to attitudinal changes. The personality of a person is enormously depending on his/her attitude. In this transient stage, their attitude may be modified due to peer, media, surroundings, family environment etc., Most of the adults searching for perfect paragon to choose their attitude towards life. There are many factors which influence their attitude such as family, marriage, friends, career, socio-economic activities etc., Some attitudes are emerged as direct conclusions. Youngsters are pillars of our nation and their attitudes are considered as important aspect for their future.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the individual develops his cognition, feelings and action tendencies with respect to the various objects in his world become organized into enduring system called attitudes. Attitudes are directly influenced through questioning, personal experience and positive or negative reinforcement (Fossey, 1993; Sdorow, 1990, cited by Eby et al, 1998). Attitudes are indirectly influenced through social learning and observation or by learning through association (Fossey, 1993; Sdorow, 1990 cited by Eby et al, 1998).

In defining attitudes as systems, we emphasise the interrelatedness of the three attitude components. When incorporate in a system, these components become naturally interdependent. The cognitions of an individual about an object are influenced by his feelings and action tendencies toward that objects. And a change in his cognitions about the object will tend to produce changes in his feelings and action tendencies towards it. The superior predictive power of attitudes formed through direct experience is not necessarily a function of the amount of information about the attitude object available to the individual (Fazio et al, 1978 cited by Eby et al, 1998).

The object of an attitude may be anything that exists for the individual. Thus, an individual has a vast array of attitudes towards objects in the physical world that surrounds him. However, the number of any individual's attitudes is finite. He can have attitudes only with respect to those objects which exist in his psychological world.

II. THE COMPONENTS OF ATTITUDES

The cognitive component of an attitude consists of the beliefs of the individual about the object. The most critical cognitions incorporated in the attitude system are evaluative, beliefs which involve the attribution of favourable or unfavourable, desirable or undesirable, "good" or "bad" qualities to the objects.

The feeling component of an attitude refers to the emotions connected with the object. The object is felt to be pleasing or displeasing, it is liked or it is disliked. It is this emotional loading which gives attitudes their insistent stirred- up, motivating character.

If an individual holds a positive attitude towards a given object, he will be disposed to help or reward or support the object. If he holds negative attitude he will be disposed to harm or punish or destroy the object.

III. FORMATION OF ATTITUDES

Role of hearing (classical and instrumental conditioning and modelling) and direct experiences are the attitude formation factors. An individual acquires attitudes through learning processes in a passive fashion and also through direct experience in which the individual participates actively in the formation of his or her attitudes. Attitudes represent relatively stable attributes and, at the same time, they appear to be learned rather than innate (Zimbardo et al, 1969 cited by Eby et al, 1998). Current thinking favours a relationship between attitudes and behaviour and researchers no longer question if attitudes predict behaviours but under which circumstances do attitudes predict behaviours (Bentler et al, 1981; Cialdini et al, 1981 cited by Eby et al, 1998).

Fenwick et al. (1994.) describe the milestones in adolescent development. According to them, during early Adolescence (11-14 yrs), concern about appearance increases, independence from family becomes more important, rebellious/defiant behaviour is shown, importance of friends and peer group increases, ego dominates view of all issues.

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During Middle Adolescence (15-16 yrs), they become less self-absorbed, and start making own decisions, experimenting with self image, seeking new experiences, developing morals and values, making lasting relationships, and becoming sexually aware, In late Adolescence (17-18 yrs), they start viewing world idealistically, get involved in world outside home and school, start stabilizing relationships and will treat adults as equals, independence will be expected.
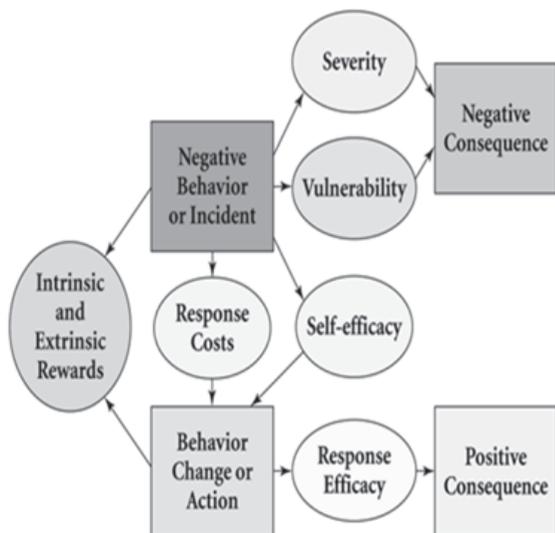
Clear gender differences exist in the effects of timing. Early maturing girls do not share the advantages of early maturing boys (Brooks-Gunn 1991). Many are self-conscious about their bodies, and lack the poise of late maturing girls.

IV. SOCIAL LEARNING (ACQUIRING ATTITUTES FROM OTHERS)

Learning attitudes is a large part of socialization. While attitudes can be thought of as internal individual processes, they link each person to a social world of other people, activities and issues, including people who are actively engaged in helping form or change attitudes (Eby et al 1998 citing Zimbardo, 1985). Thus, attitudes are part of a framework by which we interpret our social environment. Social learning is the process by which a newborn baby is transformed into a responsible and capable member of human society. Adult human social life is practically unthinkable without attitudes. Children get their attitudes from everywhere from parents and later from teachers. From the media, from friends and acquaintances, how children learn attitudes is little harder to answer. But psychologists have identified at least three main processes that play role in this regard classical conditioning, Instrumental conditioning and modelling. Social learning theory highlights the process of acquisition of knowledge and attitudes from important others, such as parents, teachers, peers, and media figures (Bandura, 1977).

Classical Conditioning:

Classical learning by associations, imagine an adult first encounter with "wobble" the adult doesn't know what wobble is so she asks her mother about it. Mother frowns or acts upset while answering. The mothers Negative emotions will be noticed by the child, she will then develop negative associations to wobble. As the child grows up, that negative attitude towards wobble may continue. This is especially likely if the association is strengthened by similar parental reactions on other occasions. Thus parental attitudes have the power of shaping adult's attitudes by classical conditioning.

Instrumental Conditioning:

Refers to learning in which responses that gives positive outcomes or eliminate negative ones are acquired or strengthened. A father who is religious may praise his son for claiming to be religious and may punish his son for expressing contrary views. Children want to be held the " right" views, and parents are able to have the final say about what the right views are at least before their youngsters reach adolescence. By rewarding and punishing their children parents can shape their attitudes on many issues.

Modelling:

Refers to learning by observation even when parents are not trying to influence their adult's attitudes directly, they may be setting examples, the child will imitate. For example, girls' career ambitions sometimes depend on their mothers examples. If the mother is employed outside the home, the daughter is more likely to want her own career than of the mother who is a full time home maker.

Parents are not the only ones to guide the passive formation of attitudes much learning of attitudes goes on in schools, religious places and elsewhere. Mass media also have a lot of power to shape attitudes. Attitudes are often defined in terms of mood, thought processes, behavioural tendencies and evaluation (Hernandez et al, 2000). Attitudes are relatively stable mental positions held toward ideas, objects or people (Gleitman 1991 cited by Eby et al, 1998) Attitudes are a combination of beliefs and feelings that predispose a person to behave a certain way (Noe, 2002, p 108 cited by Brostrand, 2006) Attitude is an idea charged with emotion which predisposes a class of actions in particular class of social situations (Antonak, 1988, p.109) An attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related (Allport, 1935) An attitude is an idea (cognitive component) charged with emotion (affective component) which predisposes a class of actions (behavioural component) to a particular class of social situations (Triandis et al, 1984, p. 21).

V. FORMING ATTITUTES BY DIRECT EXPERIENCES

People are also form attitudes as a result of their own experiences. They actively draw conclusions or make generalisation based on what has happened to them. Direct experience may affect the attitude formation process by altering the way in which available information is processed. Hewstone (2003) attempts to answer how direct contact between groups work in changing attitudes and diminishing or banishing prejudices. He cites Pettigrew (1998) who

proposes four major potential mechanisms: 1) learning about the other group, the "out group" 2) behaviour-driven attitude change e.g. forming more positive attitudes after cooperating in learning task 3) "in-group" reappraisal and 4) generating affective ties. It is generating affective ties, including the formation of close friendships that seems to be most effective in reducing prejudice.

Many adolescent girls believe physical appearance is a major part of their self-esteem and their body is a major sense of self (American Association of University Women, 1991). The experience of body dissatisfaction can lead to poor health habits and low self-esteem. These negative feelings may contribute to a higher prevalence of depressive symptomatology and lower self-esteem among girls (Siegel et al., 1998) and can affect health behaviours associated with poor eating habits, dieting, depression and anxiety, and eating disorders. Adolescents are concerned about the appearance of their bodies (Elkind,1984). Some investigators have found that the adolescents' judgment of their physical appearance is the most important factor in their self-esteem (Simmons and Blyth 1987). At this time of rapid body changes, young people are most apt to be dissatisfied with their appearance (Koff 1990) . Many studies indicate that during adolescence, looks become more critical for girls than for boys.(Simmons and Blyth 1987).Girls are far more likely to believe themselves to be too fat, when in fact their weight is normal for their height. In general, boys have a more positive body image than girls. Girls tend to be critical of the way they look, believing themselves to be heavier than they are and wanting, to be thinner. Boys, on the other hand, are content with their appearance, wanting if anything, only to be somewhat more muscular. Girls' tendency to overestimate their weight declines after mid adolescence; however, their dissatisfaction with their bodies continue to increase through late adolescence (Healy et al.1993).

James (1988) identifies self evaluation or self esteem as an important dimension of the self. According to James, self esteem is related to the evaluation of the one's success in meeting set of goals. Harter (1990) presented two different theoretical views of self-esteem that both she and Rosenberg (1989) supported in their separate research. The first is from William James(1902) who viewed self-esteem as a ratio of a person's perceived success in a certain domain to the importance the person attaches to success in that domain. The second theoretical view is that of Cooley (1907) who considered self-esteem as originating with the person's perceptions of how significant others viewed the self. The relationships between self-esteem and other variables have been extensively researched. Low self-esteem has been correlated with low life satisfaction, loneliness, anxiety, resentment, irritability, and depression (Rosenberg, 1985). Blyth and Traeger (1988) found a correlation between high self-esteem and perceived intimacy with parents. High self-esteem has also been correlated with academic success in high school (O'Malley and Bachman, 1979), internal locus of control, higher family income, and positive sense of self-attractiveness (Griffore, Kallen, Popovich, and Powell, 1990). Individuals with high self-esteem in childhood are likely to be adolescents with high self-esteem. Many studies have demonstrated that during middle and late adolescence, and into early adulthood, self-esteem stabilizes or even increases (Savin Williams and Demo, 1983; Harter, 1990).

Preparing for marriage and family life is the last important developmental task of this stage. Each of these developmental tasks confronts adolescents with the larger task of achieving a continuous and stable sense of themselves (Duvall 1977).

The self undergoes changes right from childhood as the child keeps on growing right up to adolescent stage and takes proper shape after the adolescent stage. Several factors are responsible for such changes, which are physical, emotional, psychological & sociological. He/she may have negative or positive traits depending upon his heredity and environment, his upbringing, love and affection received from parents and siblings, and the atmosphere at school level. Peers also contribute greatly to the shaping of the child's personality. The following studies illustrate the various view points of eminent experts: Studies of boys by Cooper Smith (1967-68) investigated factors influencing self-acceptance.

VI. CONCLUSION

Why do we have attitudes in the first place? What are they good for? One major answer is that attitudes help us to make decision by reducing information overload. Attitudes help simply human social life which can be complicated and full of information. Saying that attitudes help reduce information overload is another way of saying that attitudes are heuristics, that is, cognitive strategies for processing information quickly and easily.

Silverman etal (1970) found that female college students were similar to male college students in the percentage of favourable adjectives they used in describing themselves. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) concluded that when sex differences in self-esteem do appear they are no more likely to favour one sex than the other. In a study by Crandall (1969), college students were asked to indicate the grades they expected to achieve in several courses. Their expected grade and actual grade were then compared. He found that the males tended to overestimate the grades they would receive, whereas females tended to underestimate their expected grades. Explicit attitudes are conscious beliefs that can guide decisions and behaviour. Implicit attitudes are unconscious beliefs that can still influence decisions and behaviour. Attitudes can include up to three components: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural.

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