

Social behaviour

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1. Attitudes and attitude scales
2. Social cognition, person perception, stereotypes and prejudice

1 Attitudes and attitude scales

An attitude is a learnt, fairly lasting state of mind towards an object, person, group or idea, made of feelings (A), action tendencies (B) and beliefs (C); attitudes form through association, reward, modelling and group norms, change through balance, dissonance and persuasion, predict behaviour only under some conditions, and are measured by scales such as Thurstone (1929), Likert (1932), Bogardus (1925), Guttman (1944) and the semantic differential (1957).

Core facts

- **Attitude:** a state of mind, a set of views or thoughts about some topic (the **attitude object**), with an evaluative feature (positive, negative or neutral) and a readiness to act. It is **learnt**, not inherited.
- **ABC components:**
 - **A, Affective:** the emotional part (like, dislike);
 - **B, Behavioural (conative):** the tendency to act in a certain way;
 - **C, Cognitive:** beliefs and thoughts about the object.
- Attitude vs **belief** (only the cognitive part) vs **value** (an attitude or belief with a "should / ought" element, wider and more central).
- **Features of attitudes (NCERT):**
 - **Valence:** positive or negative direction;
 - **Extremeness:** how strongly positive or negative;
 - **Simplicity / complexity (multiplexity):** how many attitudes sit inside one broad attitude (e.g. "health");
 - **Centrality:** how central it is in the person's attitude system.
- **How attitudes are learnt:** association (classical conditioning), rewards and punishment (operant), **modelling** (observing others), **group or cultural norms**, and **exposure to information** (including media).
- **Sources:** family and school, reference groups, personal experience, mass media.
- **Change theories:**
 - **Balance theory: Fritz Heider** (first stated 1946; book 1958); the **P-O-X triangle** (person, other person, object); imbalance (odd number of negative sides) pushes attitude change.
 - **Cognitive dissonance: Leon Festinger (1957);** two cognitions that clash create discomfort, which we reduce by changing one of them.
 - **Two-step concept:** Indian psychologist **S.M. Mohsin**; the target first **identifies** with the source, then the source shows a change of attitude and the target follows.
- **Factors in attitude change:** features of the existing attitude, the **source** (credibility, attractiveness), the **message** (rational vs emotional, one-sided vs two-sided, amount of information) and the **target** (persuasibility, self-esteem, intelligence, prejudices).
- **Attitude-behaviour gap: Richard LaPiere (1934)** travelled the USA with a Chinese couple; almost every hotel and restaurant served them, yet most later wrote that they would not serve

Chinese guests.

- **Attitude scales (who, when, type):**

- **Thurstone:** method of **equal-appearing intervals, 1928-29** (with **Chave**, attitude towards the **church / religion**); judges sort statements into 11 piles.
- **Likert:** method of **summated ratings, 1932**; items chosen by **item analysis**; 5-point agree-disagree.
- **Bogardus: social distance scale, 1925**; how close a relationship a person accepts with members of another group; a **cumulative** scale.
- **Guttman: scalogram analysis, 1944** (published 1944-50); **cumulative**, unidimensional.
- **Semantic differential: Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum, 1957**; bipolar adjective pairs on a 7-point scale; three factors **Evaluation, Potency, Activity**.

Explained

1. The ABC model with one example. Attitude towards protecting the environment:

- Cognitive: "Plastic harms rivers and animals."
- Affective: "I feel upset when I see plastic in a lake."
- Behavioural: "I carry a cloth bag and refuse plastic covers."

The three usually agree, but not always: a person may believe and feel strongly yet not act (the attitude-behaviour gap).

2. Features in practice

Feature	Question it answers	Example
Valence	for or against?	positive attitude to yoga
Extremeness	how strongly?	"strongly agree" vs "agree"
Simplicity / complexity	one attitude or many inside it?	"health" covers diet, exercise, doctors
Centrality	how much it steers other attitudes?	religion central for some people

3. How attitudes are formed (NCERT's four processes plus information)

- **Association:** a student likes a subject because of a loved teacher.
- **Rewards and punishments:** praised for eating healthy food, the child comes to like it.
- **Modelling:** a child copies a parent's respect for elders.
- **Group / cultural norms:** offering prayers at a place of worship because the group does so; repeated, it becomes an attitude.
- **Exposure to information:** books, media, the internet; positive or negative.

4. Balance theory (Heider). Take P (a student), O (her friend) and X (a political party). P likes O (+), O supports X (+), P dislikes X (-). One negative sign (an odd number) means **imbalance**, felt as tension. P may change her view of X, of O, or decide O "does not really" support X. Balanced triangles have **zero or two** negative sides.

5. Cognitive dissonance (Festinger). "Smoking causes cancer" and "I smoke" clash. To reduce the dissonance the person can quit, doubt the evidence ("not proven"), or add a cognition ("it relaxes me").

Festinger and Carlsmith (1959): students paid **\$1** to tell others a dull task was fun later rated the task as more enjoyable than those paid **\$20**; with too little reward to justify the lie, they changed their attitude.

6. Mohsin's two-step concept. Step 1: the target (a learner) **identifies** with the source (a respected doctor). Step 2: the source shows a change in attitude, by actually behaving in a new way (say, choosing millets); the target, liking the source, changes too.

7. Persuasion: the Yale (Hovland) findings

Element	What helps change
Source	high credibility (expertise, trustworthiness), attractiveness
Message	two-sided for an educated or opposed audience; one-sided for a friendly one; moderate fear with a clear remedy
Channel	face to face is more powerful than print
Target	low self-esteem, less strongly held or less central attitudes change more easily

Sleeper effect: a message from a low-credibility source gains influence over time as people forget the source.

8. When does attitude predict behaviour? (NCERT) Consistency is higher when the attitude is **strong and central**, the person is **aware** of it, there is **little external pressure** to behave otherwise, the behaviour is **not watched or judged** by others, and the person thinks the behaviour will have a **positive** result.

9. The five scales compared

Scale	Year	Technique	Type
Thurstone	1928-29	judges rate statements on 11 piles; equal-appearing intervals; respondent's score = median of scale values agreed	differential, interval-like
Likert	1932	5-point agree-disagree; item analysis keeps items that separate high and low scorers	summed (aggregate) rating
Bogardus	1925	7 levels of accepted closeness (marry into family → exclude from country)	social distance, cumulative
Guttman	1944	items ordered so agreeing with a stronger item implies agreeing with all weaker ones; coefficient of reproducibility ≥ 0.90	cumulative, unidimensional
Semantic differential	1957	concept rated on bipolar adjective pairs (good-bad, strong-weak, active-passive), 7 points	evaluation, potency, activity

10. Bogardus's levels of social distance (closest to farthest): admit to close kinship by marriage; to my club as personal friend; to my street as neighbour; to employment in my occupation; to citizenship in my country; as visitor only to my country; exclude from my country.

11. Confusable pairs

Pair	First	Second
Affective vs cognitive	feeling	belief
Behavioural vs conative	same thing (action tendency)	same thing
Thurstone vs Likert	judges, equal-appearing intervals	respondents, summated ratings
Bogardus vs Guttman	social distance, 1925	scalogram, 1944; both cumulative
Balance vs dissonance	Heider, P-O-X triangle	Festinger, clashing cognitions
Attitude vs value	evaluation of an object	"ought" principle, more central

Common traps

✗ "Attitude is inherited." ✓ Attitudes are **learnt** (association, reward, modelling, norms, information).

✗ "'Effective' is a component of attitude." ✓ The component is **affective** (feeling); the three are affective, behavioural (conative), cognitive.

✗ "Conative is not part of attitude." ✓ **Conative = behavioural** component; it is one of the ABC.

✗ "Likert used factor analysis (1932)." ✓ Likert used **item analysis**; method of **summated ratings**.

✗ "Thurstone measured attitudes to politics." ✓ Thurstone and Chave measured attitude towards the **church (religion)**.

✗ "Bogardus scale is a summated scale." ✓ It is a **social distance, cumulative** scale.

✗ "Guttman scale = semantic differential." ✓ Guttman = **scalogram (cumulative)**; semantic differential = **Osgood**, bipolar adjectives.

✗ "Cognitive dissonance was given by Heider." ✓ Dissonance = **Festinger (1957)**; balance (P-O-X) = **Heider**.

✗ "Balanced triangle has one negative side." ✓ Balanced = **zero or two** negatives; one or three = imbalance.

✗ "In Festinger and Carlsmith, those paid \$20 liked the task more." ✓ The **\$1** group liked it more.

Quick revision

- Attitude = learnt state of mind towards an object; ABC = affective, behavioural (conative), cognitive.
- Features: valence, extremeness, simplicity/complexity (multiplexity), centrality.
- Formation: association, reward/punishment, modelling, group norms, information.

- Change: Heider balance (P-O-X), Festinger dissonance (1957), Mohsin two-step (identify, then follow).
- Persuasion: source credibility, message sidedness, target self-esteem; sleeper effect.
- LaPiere 1934: attitudes said "no", behaviour said "yes".
- Thurstone 1928-29: equal-appearing intervals, attitude towards church.
- Likert 1932: summated ratings, item analysis, 5 points.
- Bogardus 1925: social distance, cumulative; Guttman 1944: scalogram, cumulative.
- Semantic differential: Osgood 1957, evaluation, potency, activity.

2 Social cognition, person perception, stereotypes and prejudice

Social cognition is how we take in, store and use information about people, using schemas, prototypes and stereotypes; we form impressions (shaped by the perceiver, the target and the situation, and by implicit theories of which traits go together), explain behaviour through internal or external attributions with predictable errors, and prejudice (an attitude) can turn into discrimination (behaviour) unless reduced by education, contact, superordinate goals and a wider identity.

Core facts

- **Social cognition:** the mental processes by which we receive, interpret and remember information about the social world.
- **Schema:** an organised mental structure (a **cognitive unit**) that guides how we process information about a person, group or event.
- **Prototype:** a concept-based schema: the best or most typical example of a category.
- **Stereotype:** a **category-based schema about a group** of people ("all members of group X are ..."); the **cognitive** component of prejudice.
- **Prejudice:** an **attitude**, usually negative, towards a group, held without enough evidence.
- **Discrimination:** the **behaviour**: unfair treatment of members of a group. Prejudice can exist without discrimination, and the reverse.
- **Impression formation:** making inferences about a person's **personal qualities**. Three parts (NCERT): the **perceiver**, the **target** and the **situation**.
- **What shapes impressions:** the nature of the information, its **salience** (some traits stand out), the **setting**, and **familiarity** with the target.
- **Solomon Asch (1946): central traits.** Changing just "warm" to "cold" in a list of traits changed the whole impression; "polite / blunt" made little difference (peripheral traits).
- **Primacy effect:** information received **first** has more influence; **recency effect:** information received **last** has more.
- **Halo effect:** knowing one positive trait, we assume the person has other positive traits (**E.L. Thorndike, 1920**).
- **Implicit personality theory:** our own unstated beliefs about **which traits go together** ("kind people are honest"); **Bruner and Tagiuri (1954)**. It rests on personal experience, not on data, so it is often wrong.
- **Attribution:** explaining the cause of behaviour. **Fritz Heider (1958): internal (dispositional) vs external (situational) causes.**
- **Kelley's covariation model (1967): consensus, consistency, distinctiveness.**
- **Errors in attribution:**
 - **Fundamental attribution error:** overstressing **internal** causes for **others'** behaviour (also called correspondence bias);

- **Actor-observer effect:** we blame the situation for our own failures, the person for others'.
- **Self-serving bias:** success to ourselves, failure to circumstances.
- **Sources of prejudice (NCERT):** learning, a strong **social identity** with **ingroup bias**, **scapegoating**, the **kernel of truth** idea, and the **self-fulfilling prophecy**.
- **Reducing prejudice: education** and information (most often named as the best strategy), **intergroup contact** (**Gordon Allport, 1954**, contact hypothesis), **superordinate goals** (**Muzafer Sherif**, Robbers Cave experiment, **1954**), stressing **individual identity** over group identity, and stopping self-fulfilling prophecies.

Explained

1. Schema, prototype, stereotype

Term	What it is	Example
Schema	organised knowledge about anything social	how a court hearing goes
Prototype	the most typical member of a category	the picture "a typical police officer"
Stereotype	a schema about a group, applied to every member	"all old people are forgetful"

Schemas save effort but cause errors: we notice information that fits and miss information that does not.

2. Impression formation in three steps (NCERT)

- **Selection:** we take in only some of the information about the target;
- **Organisation:** we combine it in a systematic way;
- **Inference:** we draw a conclusion about the kind of person the target is.

3. Asch's warm-cold study. Two groups heard the same list (intelligent, skilful, industrious, **warm / cold**, determined, practical, cautious). With "warm" the person was seen as generous, happy and humorous; with "cold" as the opposite. Central traits act like a filter for the rest. A later field study (H.H. Kelley, 1950) found students rated a guest lecturer more favourably and took part more when told in advance he was "warm".

4. Implicit personality theory. If we are told a person is "intelligent", we may assume she is also "hard-working" and "responsible". These links come from **our own experience and person perception**, not from tests, which is why such theories are **often found incorrect** when checked. The **halo effect** is one form of it.

5. Attribution: Heider and Kelley

- **Internal:** "He failed because he is lazy." **External:** "He failed because the paper was unusually hard."
- Kelley's three questions:

Information	Question	If high it points to
Consensus	do others behave the same way here?	external
Consistency	does this person behave so every time here?	(needed for any stable cause)
Distinctiveness	does the person behave so only in this situation?	external

Low consensus + high consistency + low distinctiveness → **internal** cause. High consensus + high consistency + high distinctiveness → **external** cause.

6. Errors in attribution, side by side

Error	What happens	Example
Fundamental attribution error	others' behaviour put down to their character	"the accused is simply a bad person"
Actor-observer effect	own behaviour to situation, others' to character	"I was late due to traffic; he is careless"
Self-serving bias	success inside, failure outside	"I topped because I worked; I failed because of bad teaching"
Belief in a just world	victims "deserve" what happens	blaming victims of crime

Culture: NCERT notes that Indians tend to make more **external** (situational) attributions than Americans, so the fundamental attribution error is weaker in collectivist cultures (J.G. Miller, 1984).

7. Prejudice, stereotype, discrimination: ABC again

Component	Name	Example
Cognitive	stereotype	"group X is dishonest"
Affective	prejudice (dislike)	feeling uneasy around group X
Behavioural	discrimination	not renting a house to group X

8. Sources of prejudice (NCERT)

- **Learning:** from family, reference groups, personal experience and media.
- **Strong social identity and ingroup bias:** favouring "us" over "them" (Henri Tajfel's social identity theory).
- **Scapegoating:** a frustrated majority blames a weaker minority for its problems.
- **Kernel of truth:** a stereotype is defended because a few members fit it.
- **Self-fulfilling prophecy:** the target group, expected to behave in some way, comes to behave that way, which seems to "confirm" the prejudice.

9. Strategies to reduce prejudice

Strategy	How it works	Name to remember
Education and information	corrects stereotypes, teaches about other groups	NCERT; best long-term strategy
Intergroup contact	meeting under equal status, common goals, cooperation, support from authorities	Allport, 1954
Superordinate goals	a goal both groups need and can reach only together	Sherif, Robbers Cave, 1954

Strategy	How it works	Name to remember
Cooperative learning	each student holds one piece of the lesson	Aronson, jigsaw classroom, 1971
Individual over group identity	people seen as persons, not as members	NCERT

10. Confusable pairs

Pair	First	Second
Prejudice vs discrimination	attitude	behaviour
Stereotype vs prejudice	belief (cognitive)	feeling (affective)
Schema vs stereotype	any organised knowledge	schema about a group
Primacy vs recency	first information wins	last information wins
Halo effect vs implicit personality theory	one good trait spreads	general belief about trait links
Fundamental error vs actor-observer	others: too internal	self external, others internal
Allport vs Sherif	contact hypothesis	superordinate goals

Common traps

✗ "Category-based schemas about groups are called prototypes." ✓ They are **stereotypes**; a prototype is the most typical example of a concept.

✗ "Prejudice and discrimination are the same." ✓ Prejudice is an **attitude**; discrimination is **behaviour**.

✗ "Impression formation is inference about a person's social influence." ✓ It is inference about a person's **personal qualities** (traits), drawn from limited information about the target.

✗ "Implicit personality theories rest on factor analysis." ✓ They rest on **personal experience and person perception**, so they are often wrong.

✗ "Asch's central traits were 'polite / blunt.'" ✓ The central traits were **warm / cold**.

✗ "Fundamental attribution error: too much weight on the situation." ✓ Too much weight on **internal (dispositional)** causes of others' behaviour.

✗ "Superordinate goals: Allport." ✓ Superordinate goals = **Sherif** (Robbers Cave); contact hypothesis = **Allport**.

✗ "Any contact reduces prejudice." ✓ Contact works under **equal status, cooperation and common goals**.

X "Kelley: high consensus points to an internal cause." ✓ High consensus points to an **external** cause.

X "Halo effect was named by Asch." ✓ Halo effect = **Thorndike (1920)**.

Quick revision

- Social cognition = processing information about people; schemas are cognitive units.
- Prototype = typical example; stereotype = schema about a group.
- Impression formation: perceiver, target, situation; selection, organisation, inference.
- Asch 1946: warm / cold central traits; primacy beats recency in first impressions.
- Halo effect (Thorndike 1920); implicit personality theory (Bruner and Tagiuri 1954), based on experience.
- Heider 1958: internal vs external attribution; Kelley: consensus, consistency, distinctiveness.
- Errors: fundamental attribution error, actor-observer effect, self-serving bias.
- Prejudice = attitude, stereotype = belief, discrimination = behaviour.
- Sources: learning, ingroup bias, scapegoating, kernel of truth, self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Reduce: education (best), contact (Allport 1954), superordinate goals (Sherif 1954), jigsaw (Aronson).