

ATTITUDE (Part 6)

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Attitude Functions

We acquire attitude through learning and we retain them. Why do we have to retain them if it is not good to us? One answer is because attitude serves important functions to us (Michener et. al., 1986). Psychologists are particularly interested in the functions that attitudes play for the personality, as sources of motivation which permit adaptation to the environment. The “functional” approach to attitude is represented in the writing of Katz (Mann, 1969).

According to Katz (1960), there are several functions of attitude which served by the maintenance and modification of social attitudes. These functions are; knowledge function, instrumentality or adjustment function, ego defense function and value-expressiveness function.

The first function is knowledge function. This according to Smith et al (1956) in Vaughan & Hogg (1995) they say that an attitude saves energy, since we do not have to figure out from scratch how we should relate to the object in question. This is highly important because we already have a stored knowledge of a certain issue that we have encounter before in our lives. Therefore, we can react to it accordingly. The knowledge function is also based on the need to understand, make sense of, and give adequate structure to the universe. Attitudes are maintained when it adequately deal with situations and structure the experience meaningfully. Attitude that are inadequate for dealing with new and changing situations are discarded because they lead to contradictions and inconsistency. A very important aspect of the knowledge function is the need for meaningful cognitive organization and for cognitive consistency and clarity (Mann, 1969). The knowledge function in attitude can also be looked at how it provides people with meaningful and structured environment. Because the world is too complex too complex for us to understand, we group objects and events into categories and develop simplified (stereotyped) attitudes that allow us to treat individuals as members of the category. Our attitude towards that category (objects) will also provide people with meaning and with a basis for action toward the object (Michener et. al., 1986).

The second function of attitude is the instrumentality or adjustment function. In this function, the retaining of attitude leads to rewards or the avoidance of punishment. It has also been called the instrumental or utilitarian function. The individual or people strive to maximize rewards and minimize penalties. Therefore, they are motivated to adopt attitude which will gain for them the social approval and esteem of family, friends and colleagues. They will learn to hold opinions similar to those of the people around them such as their neighbours and friends on issues like sanctity of marriage, democracy and helping elderly crossing the streets. We will also develop favourable attitude towards objects which result in reward or the satisfaction of needs. On the other end, we will develop unfavourable attitude towards objects which intrinsically lead to punishment or the blocking of frustration of needs (Mann, 1969). This function can help people adjust and adapt to the surroundings by going with the flow of the situation. As long as the situation or objects do not contradict to their own belief, they can modify their belief on a certain issues in order to be accepted in the community.

The next function of attitude is the ego defense function or externalization function (Lemon, 1973). This function can serve as a protection against the acknowledgment of basic, unpleasant truth about vulnerability to disease and death, weaknesses, insecurities, and the harsh realities of the outside world such as illness, unemployment, crime and war (Mann, 1969). It also helps in protecting people from recognizing certain thoughts or feelings which may threaten the self-image or adjustment. An individual may experience feelings that are unacceptable to him, such as hostility towards his father. If he recognized this hostility, he would feel guilty, because we are thought to love our parents. So, instead of acknowledging that he hates his father, he may direct it toward members of a minority group, or authority figures such as policemen or teachers (Michener et al. 1986). The mechanism where the individual protects himself from the tension and anxieties associated with unacceptable motives and fear-arousing threats are known as ego-defense mechanism. Defensive reactions are often seen rationalized, distorted attitude on public health issues such as smoking and lung cancer, in harsh vindictive attitude towards deviant like homosexuals and drug addicts, and in apathy and resignation on political issues. Thinking about these social objects result in awareness of unpleasant truths and fear about vulnerability to disease, unacceptable impulses and real threat of world destruction. The opinions and beliefs developed to prevent and

protect from full recognition of these unpleasant truths serve as ego-defensive function (Mann, 1969).

The last function of attitude is the value-expressiveness function. In the value-expressiveness function, people derive satisfaction from expressing attitude appropriate to his personal values and his concept of themselves. These are integrated system of attitudes which are learned in childhood on the basis of identification with parents and other significant figures and are at the core of personality. Religious and patriotic beliefs and values are usually based on this function. Through attitude toward such matters as social works, care for the aged and international cooperation to prevent famines, people express personal values and realize their self-conception s humanitarian and decent human beings. This function of attitude can also serve as individual's basic values and reinforce self-image. By having a certain self-concepts towards certain issues such as illegal abortion or exploitation of children, the individual will develop an attitude towards that issue in showing their beliefs.