Attitudes

Attitudes

- Evaluations of the social world
- So important that in the early 1900's, the field of social psychology was *defined* as the study of attitudes
- Often, attitudes are not simple evaluations like “Good” or “Bad”
  - Complex and ambivalent attitudes are very common
  - Any combination of high and low positive and negative reactions can occur

Attitudes

- Affectively, behaviourally, and cognitively-based attitudes
  - Inconsistencies are common between these factors
  - Attitudes are sometimes primarily based on one of these factors
- Affective – I feel happy when I think about my computer; I feel distrustful when I think about that political leader
- Behavioural – I tend to avoid that restaurant; I smile when I am near that person
- Cognitive – I believe that people from that group are better than people from that other group; I have positive expectations of this course

Attitude formation

- We have attitudes towards hundreds of issues, topics, people, situations, etc
- The study of how those attitudes develop and change is of major importance
  - Politics
  - Advertising/marketing (Brakus et al, 2009)
  - Justice system
  - Interpersonal interactions

Attitude formation

- Attitudes are mostly learned:
- Classical conditioning
  - Repeated pairing of a neutral stimulus with a positive or negative stimulus causes the neutral stimulus to acquire ability to evoke reaction
- Operant (Instrumental) conditioning
  - Behaviours that are rewarded are more likely to occur again
  - Behaviours that are punished are less likely to occur again

Attitude formation

- Vicarious (Observational) learning
  - Learning by watching parents, media, friends
- Social comparison
  - Compare our own attitudes to others, in order to determine if our attitudes are correct
  - Particularly powerful when comparing self to people you value or identify with

Attitude formation

- Attitudes are mostly based on learning, but there is some evidence emerging that genetic factors play a role as well
  - Attitudes towards factors such as new experiences, risk taking, altruism are partly genetically based
  - What information we seek out is determined in part by past experience, personality (genetics), etc
  - Much research in this area focuses on political attitudes (eg: Hatemi et al, 2010)

Attitude formation

- Four main domains of cultural values that affect attitude formation:
  - Individualism/collectivism
  - Power distance (acceptance of unequal power within the population)
  - Uncertainty avoidance
  - Masculinity/Femininity (highly differentiated vs overlapping)

Attitude formation

- Mere exposure effect
  - Previous exposure to something leads to a more favourable impression of that stimulus
  - Applies even when we do not remember the first time seeing the stimulus
  - However, individual differences exist and with repeated over-exposure the opposite can occur (Hunter et al, 2011)

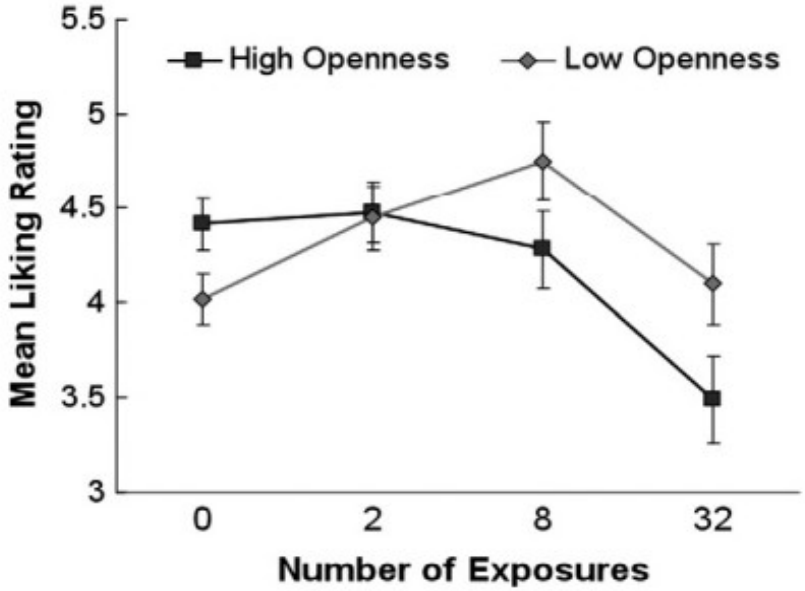


Fig. 2. Liking for music excerpts as a function of number of exposures and whethe participants were high or low on Openness-to-Experience. Error bars are standar errors.

Attitude functions

- Knowledge function
  - Attitudes as schemas
  - Help us evaluate and organize new information about the world quickly and (relatively) efficiently
- Identity function
  - Attitudes can communicate who we are and what we value
- Self-esteem
  - Expressing and acting on our attitudes can make us feel good (especially when the attitudes have a moral component)

Attitude functions

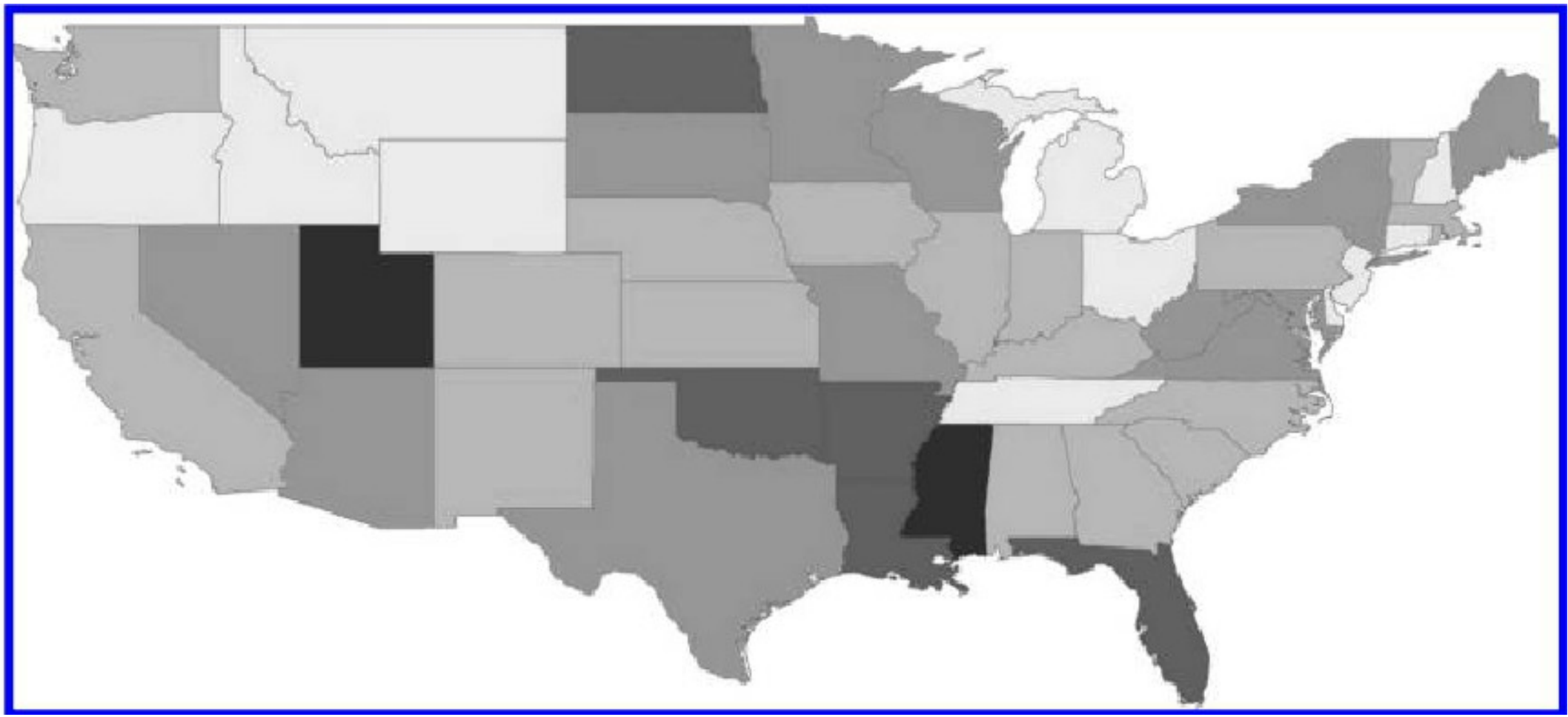
- Ego-defensive function
  - Claim a certain attitude to protect self from unwanted information or traits
  - Similar to the Freudian concept of “reaction formation”
- Impression management function
  - Express attitudes to alter other people's impressions of us

Effects of attitude on behaviour

- To what extent to we actually behave in accordance with our attitudes?
- There are specific circumstances in which our behaviour is and is not influenced by our attitudes
- LaPiere's classic study of attitudes and behaviour (1934)

Effects of attitudes on behaviour

- Edelman, 2009



Effects of attitudes on behaviour

- Situational constraints
  - Our expression of attitudes, and the degree to which our behaviour is consistent with our attitudes, depends on our perception of how prevalent the attitude is among others
  - Importantly, this is based on *perceived*, not actual, attitudes of others
  - What is it like to express a very different opinion from the group?

Effects of attitudes on behaviour

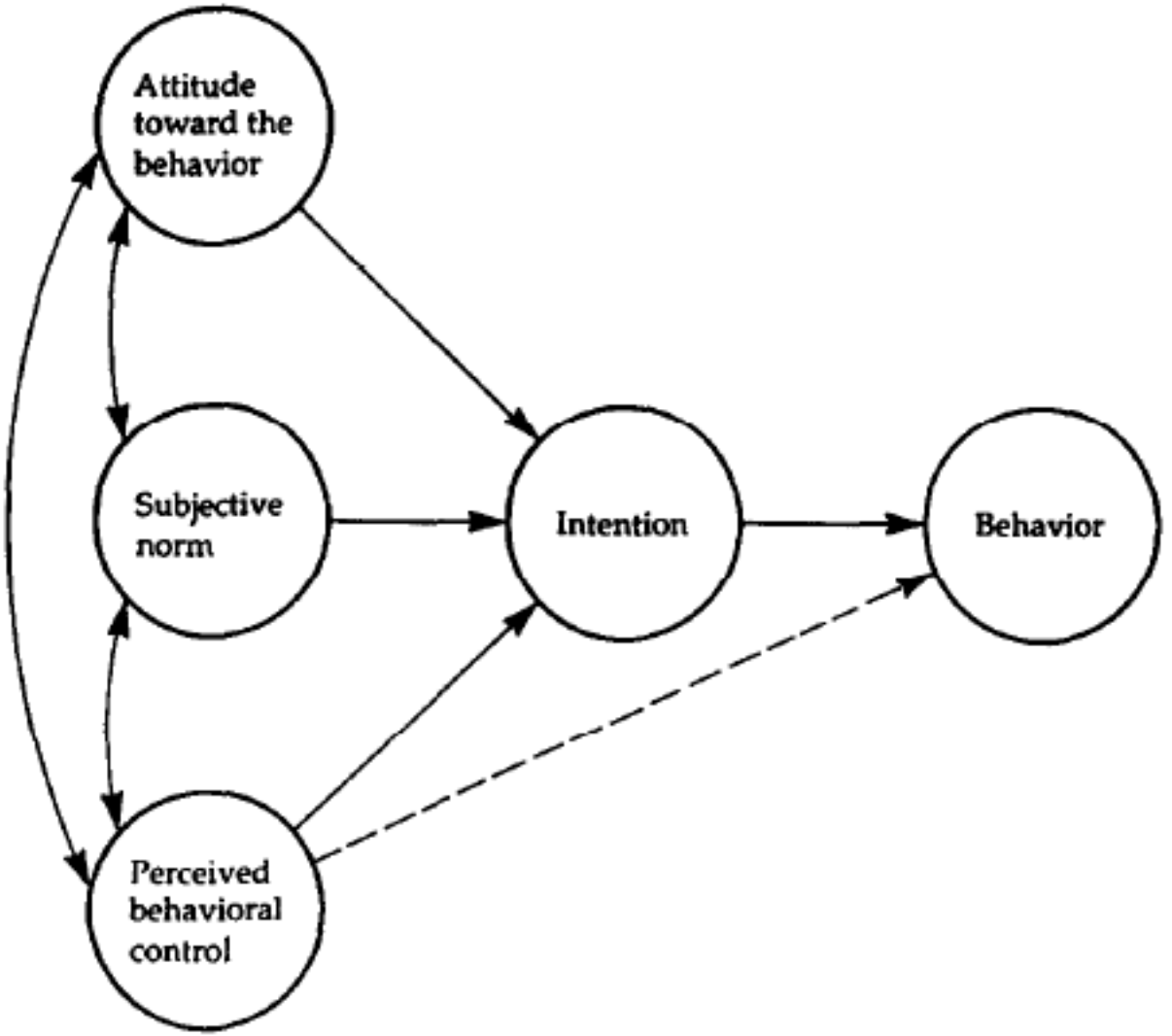
- Strength of attitudes
  - Behaviour is more likely to be based on strongly held attitudes than those that are more weakly held
- Attitude extremity
  - How strong of an emotional reaction is provoked by the object
- Personal experience
  - Attitudes based on personal experiences are more *available* than those learned indirectly

Effects of attitudes on behaviour

- The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen & Madden, 1985; Ajzen, 1991) provides an explanation of when and under what conditions attitudes and behaviours will be consistent
- Three factors affect behavioural intention:
  - Attitudes towards the behaviour (do I want to do the behaviour?)
  - Subjective norms (will others approve or disapprove?)
  - Perceived behavioural control (is it possible for me to actually do this behaviour?)
- Situational factors can then affect whether or not the intended behaviour is completed

Effects of attitudes on behaviour

- Ajzen, 1991



Effects of attitude on behaviour

- Nigg, Lippke & Maddock, 2009

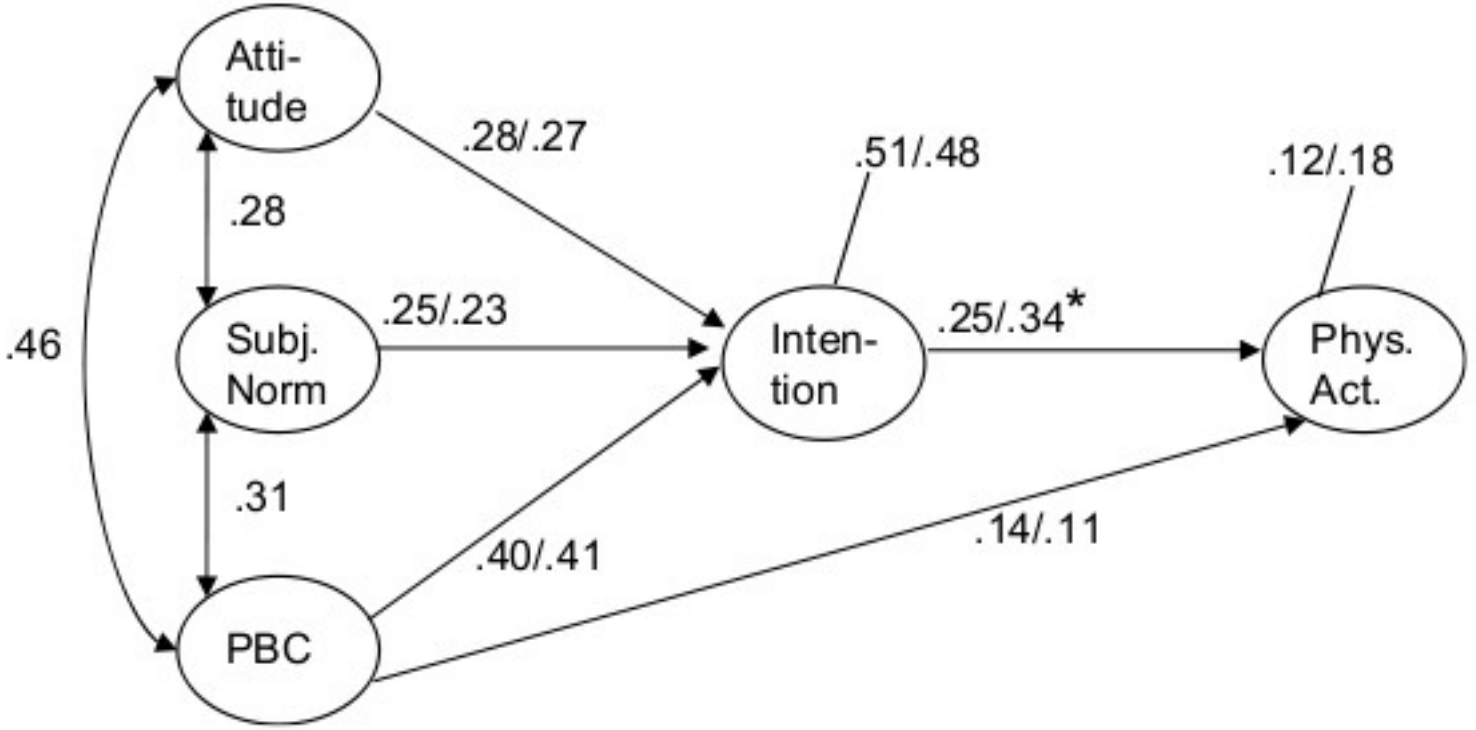


Fig. 1. Standardized coefficients for the measurement equivalence model across men and women. *Note*. Path coefficients are reported male/ female sub-group. Covariances were constrained to equal (only one path coefficient is reported). * Significant differences (CR < 1.96) of the path coefficients.

Effects of attitude on behaviour

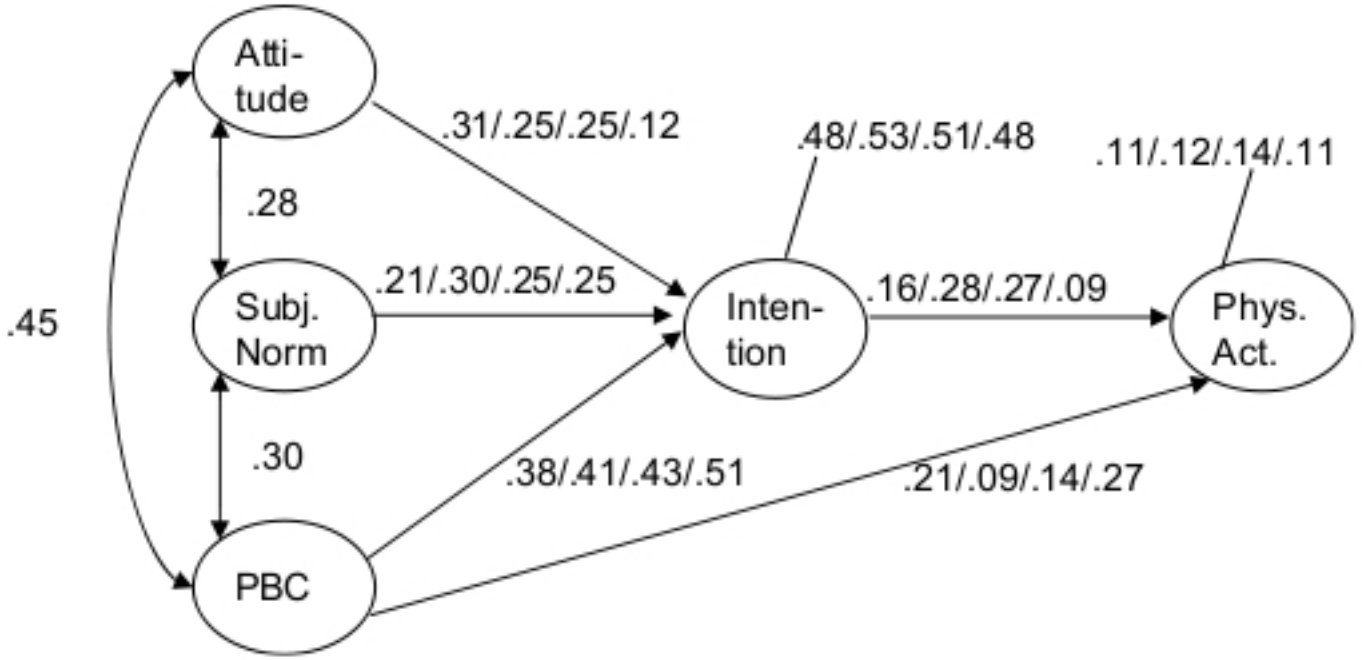


Fig. 3. Standardized coefficients for the measurement equivalence model across the four ethnicity sub-samples. *Note*. Path coefficients are reported for the White, Japanese, Hawaiian, and Filipino sub-groups. Covariances were constrained to equal (only one path coefficient is reported). Significant differences (CR $<$ 1.96) of the path coefficients are indicated by the truncated numbers. Significant differences across groups are reported in the text.

Effects of attitudes on behaviour

- Povey, Wellens & Connor (2001) compared attitudes towards various types of diets among meat eaters, vegetarians, and vegans
- Not suprisingly, attitude, PBC, subjective norms, and intention corresponded to the person's diet

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of scores for all of the dependent variables for each dietary behaviour split by dietary group of the respondent. *SD* scores are shown in brackets

Type of diet	Dietary group of respondent											
	Meat eaters ($N=25$)			Meat avoiders ($N=26$)			Vegetarians ($N=34$)			Vegans ($N=26$)		
	Meat	*Veg.*[a]	*Vegan*	*Meat*	*Veg.*[a]	*Vegan*	*Meat*	*Veg.*[a]	*Vegan*	*Meat*	*Veg.*[a]	*Vegan*
Intention	1·60 (1·92)	−0·18 (2·20)	−2·82 (0·50)	−1·67 (1·46)	1·80 (1·32)	−1·25 (1·94)	−2·75 (1·08)	2·91 (0·38)	−0·30 (1·67)	−3·00 (0·00)	−0·16 (2·67)	2·81 (0·49)
Attitude	1·60 (1·04)	1·11 (1·54)	−1·17 (1·27)	−0·76 (1·76)	2·27 (0·94)	0·05 (1·42)	−1·50 (1·28)	2·29 (1·04)	0·68 (1·16)	−2·16 (1·28)	1·82 (1·40)	2·50 (0·78)
Subjective norm	18·70 (8·67)	12·90 (6·78)	5·97 (4·37)	11·30 (6·30)	14·70 (6·92)	5·90 (4·57)	7·66 (3·93)	16·30 (9·75)	7·82 (6·09)	7·02 (5·39)	13·20 (7·13)	12·50 (7·38)
Perceived behavioural control	4·95 (1·52)	3·95 (1·54)	0·95 (0·95)	2·67 (1·66)	5·03 (0·72)	2·81 (1·46)	1·64 (1·66)	5·50 (0·50)	2·87 (1·41)	2·37 (1·64)	5·06 (1·29)	5·19 (0·77)
Attitudinal ambivalence	2·00 (3·46)	1·28 (3·95)	−2·38 (3·49)	−2·38 (4·20)	−1·90 (3·44)	−0·25 (2·52)	−3·25 (4·47)	−1·63 (3·82)	0·74 (2·65)	−5·27 (3·99)	−0·23 (2·60)	−3·06 (3·64)

SD scores we shown in brackets.

Persuasion

- The use of messages to change the beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours of others
  - Advertising and marketing
  - Protesting
  - Debating
  - Evidence for or against a theory

Persuasion

- Four main factors are involved in persuasive attitude change
- Source of the message
  - Greater persuasion if the speaker is credible, attractive, and confident (and speaks quickly?)
- Message itself
  - Two-sided (best when audience disagrees) vs one-sided approach (best when audience already agrees)
  - Messages that are not obvious in their attempt to change attitudes (remember impression formation?)

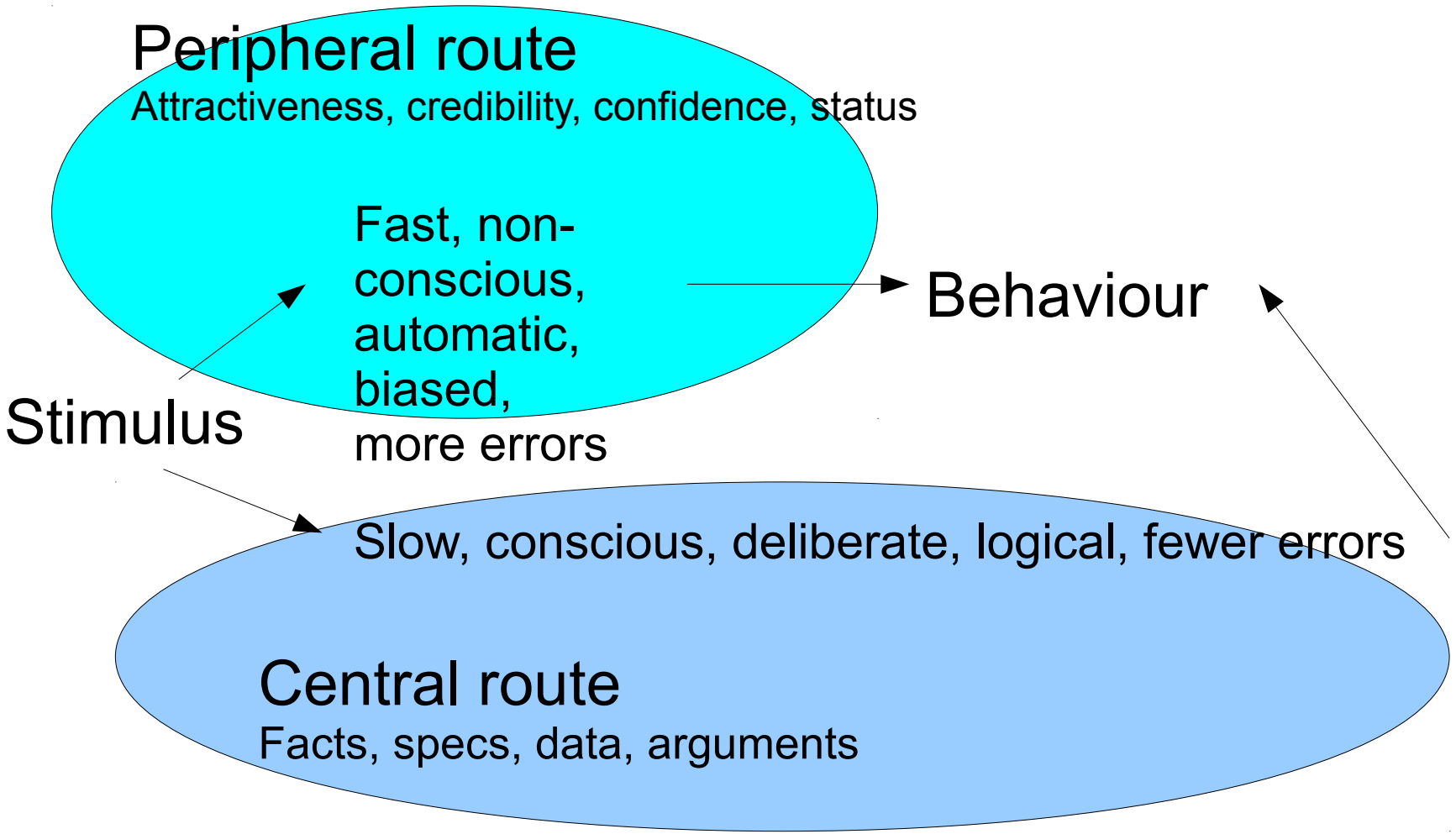
Persuasion

- Target audience
  - With older age we become less able to be persuaded
  - Higher intelligence in the audience leads to less persuasion
- There are cultural differences in what aspects of the speaker as most influential
  - Source credibility is more important in Asian cultures
  - But most aspects of persuasion are similar (youth, beauty, money, etc)
- Method of communication
  - Complex messages are more persuasive when read, simple messages are more persuasive when heard

Cognition and persuasion

- Systematic versus heuristic processing
- Central route to persuasion – careful, deliberate consideration of the information and ideas contained in the message
- Peripheral route to persuasion – use of automatic processing (heuristics) off information in the message
  - Often based on credibility, status, attractiveness, etc of the person delivering the message

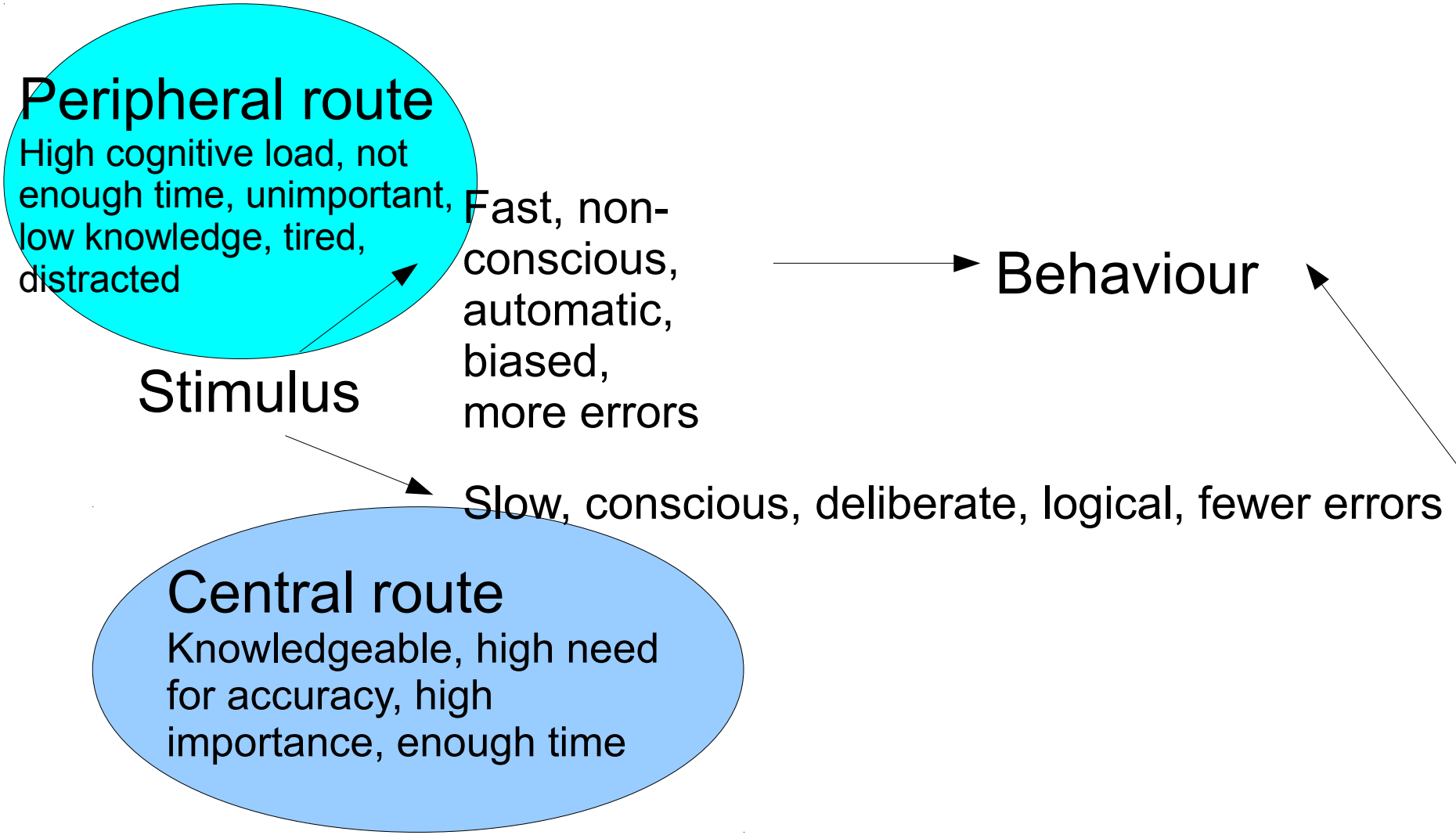
Cognition and persuasion

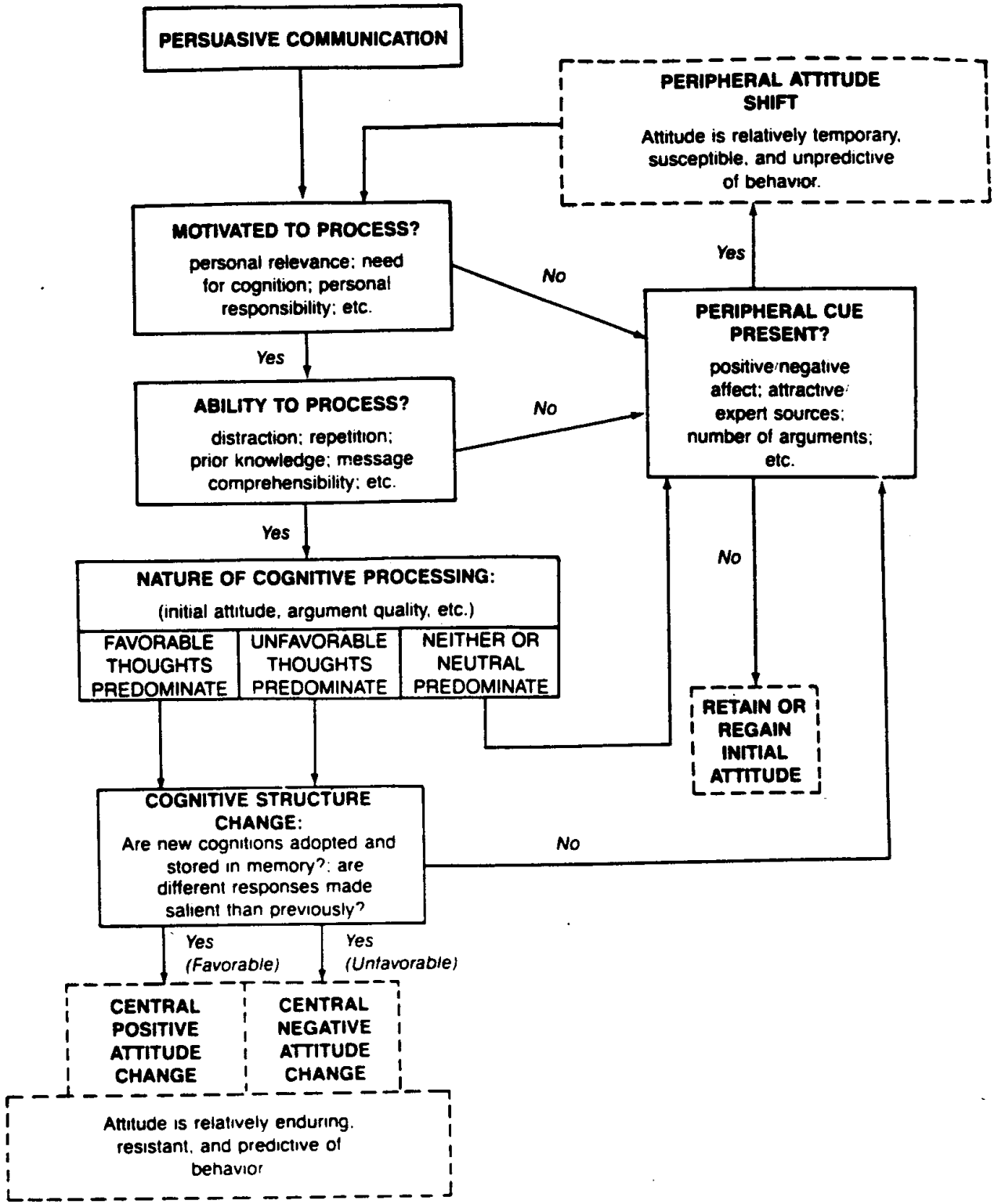


Cognition and persuasion

- Elaboration-likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)
  - The likelihood that we engage in systematic processing (elaboration) instead of heuristic processing depends on the situation
  - If we have lots of knowledge, feel a high need to form an accurate opinion, the issues is important to us, and we have enough time, we will process the information deliberately
  - Somewhat easier to change attitudes with the peripheral route
  - People are generally more persuadable when they are distracted

Cognition and persuasion




PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION
PERIPHERAL ATTITUDE SHIFT
Attitude is relatively temporary, susceptible, and unpredictive of behavior.
MOTIVATED TO PROCESS?
personal relevance; need for cognition; personal responsibility; etc.
Yes
No
Yes
PERIPHERAL CUE PRESENT?
positive/negative affect; attractive/ expert sources; number of arguments; etc.
ABILITY TO PROCESS?
distraction; repetition; prior knowledge; message comprehensibility; etc.
No
Yes
NATURE OF COGNITIVE PROCESSING:
(initial attitude, argument quality, etc.)
FAVORABLE THOUGHTS PREDOMINATE
UNFAVORABLE THOUGHTS PREDOMINATE
NEITHER OR NEUTRAL PREDOMINATE
No
RETAIN OR REGAIN INITIAL ATTITUDE
COGNITIVE STRUCTURE CHANGE:
Are new cognitions adopted and stored in memory?; are different responses made salient than previously?
No
Yes (Favorable)
Yes (Unfavorable)
CENTRAL POSITIVE ATTITUDE CHANGE
CENTRAL NEGATIVE ATTITUDE CHANGE
Attitude is relatively enduring, resistant, and predictive of behavior

Resisting persuasion

- Reactance – negative reaction to the feeling that someone is trying to change our behaviour
  - Persuasion can be perceived as an attempt to limit our freedom to choose other behaviours
  - Often results in negative attitude change
- Knowledge of persuasive attempt
  - When we know that a persuasion attempt is coming, we think of counterarguments ahead of time
  - In fact, expecting a persuasion attempt actually moves our attitudes in the opposite direction

Resisting persuasion

- Selective avoidance and biased assimilation
  - We preferentially seek out, pay attention to, believe, and remember information that is consistent with our existing attitudes
  - Closely related to the Confirmation Bias
- Active defense of existing attitudes
  - Consciously thinking of counterarguments
- Attitude inoculation
  - Observe an attitude that is different from your own, then a counterargument

Cognitive Dissonance

- An uncomfortable state resulting from inconsistency among attitudes or between attitudes and behaviour
  - Praising a meal that you did not actually like in order to not upset the cook
  - Believing that a political decision was correct, but recognizing it as hypocritical
  - Going to work
  - Choice to use or not use public transportation
- Sometimes leads to a change in attitude to reduce the dissonance

Cognitive Dissonance

- Festinger & Carlsmith (1959)
- Participants completed boring task for one hour, then were told that the research assistant was not present and they needed to “fill in” for her by convincing waiting participants that the task was enjoyable
- Some participants were paid 1$ to act as the RA, and some were paid 20$
- They were then asked their own opinion about the task

Cognitive Dissonance

- In the 20$ group, the money provided the justification for the behaviour
- While in the 1$ group, attitudes had to change to account for the behaviour

TABLE 1

AVERAGE RATINGS ON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EACH CONDITION

Question on Interview	Experimental Condition		
	Control (N = 20)	One Dollar (N = 20)	Twenty Dollars (N = 20)
How enjoyable tasks were (rated from −5 to +5)	−.45	+1.35	−.05
How much they learned (rated from 0 to 10)	3.08	2.80	3.15
Scientific importance (rated from 0 to 10)	5.60	6.45	5.18
Participate in similar exp. (rated from −5 to +5)	−.62	+1.20	−.25

Cognitive Dissonance

- Ways to reduce dissonance:
  - Change attitude or behaviour
  - Acquire new information to support the behaviour or attitude (ie: thinking about benefits of smoking)
  - Trivialize the inconsistency
  - Minimizing the emotional discomfort through self-afirmations

Cognitive Dissonance

- Insufficient justification effect – More dissonance (and more attitude change) when we do not have a good reason for engaging in a particular behaviour
  - Recall the Festinger study
- Factors that provide justification and reduce dissonance:
  - Strong coercion
  - Large rewards/benefits
  - Perception of being bribed

Cognitive Dissonance

- Cognitive dissonance can be used for positive behaviour change (safe sex, responsible drinking, exercising, etc)
- Make hypocrisy salient (easily available) by encouraging expression of attitudes that are inconsistent with behaviour
- Then think about past behaviour and provide method of changing future behaviour
- Motivational interviewing is based in part on these concepts, and is used to promote healthy behaviours and reduce unwanted ones (Miller & Rollnick, 1991)