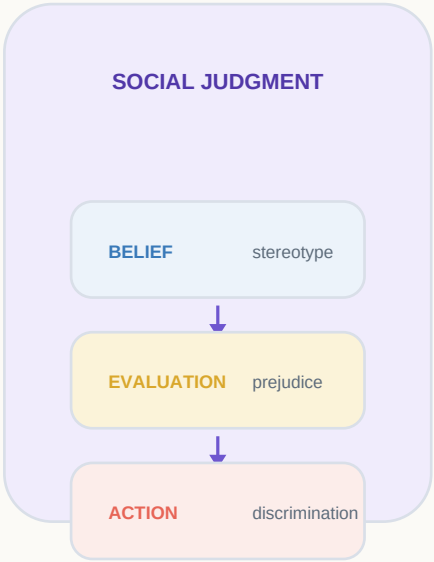
AP PSYCHOLOGY | UNIT 4

TOPIC 4.2

Attitude Formation and Attitude Change

Attitudes shape social judgment, but beliefs, feelings, and actions are distinct - and each can persist or change for different reasons.



HOW ATTITUDES CAN FORM

EXPERIENCE	OBSERVATION	GROUPS	ASSOCIATIONS
direct encounters	social learning	identity and norms	implicit links

BY THE END, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

1. Separate stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and implicit attitudes.
2. Recognize just-world, out-group homogeneity, in-group, and ethnocentric bias.
3. Explain belief perseverance, confirmation bias, and cognitive dissonance.

BIG IDEA

Do not treat belief, attitude, and behavior as synonyms. A person may hold a stereotype, feel prejudice, act with discrimination, or show more than one at once.

1 From generalized belief to social behavior

Classify the evidence: what someone believes, feels, does, or processes without full awareness.

FOUR DISTINCT CONCEPTS

STEREOTYPE

GENERALIZED BELIEF

A broad belief is applied to members of a group; it may simplify judgment but distort perception.

PREJUDICE

EVALUATIVE ATTITUDE

A positive or negative feeling or evaluation is directed toward a group.

DISCRIMINATION

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOR

A person is treated differently because of group membership.

IMPLICIT ATTITUDE

LIMITED AWARENESS

An automatic social association influences judgment without full awareness or acknowledgment.

GROUP-BASED BIASES

JUST-WORLD

People get what they deserve.

OUT-GROUP HOMOGENEITY

They are all alike.

IN-GROUP BIAS

Favor our group over others.

ETHNOCENTRISM

Judge another culture by one's own standards.

CHECK THE CLAIM A stereotype is a shortcut, not proof. Strong judgments use individual evidence and avoid assuming a group label predicts every person.

2 Why beliefs persist - and how attitudes change

Separate evidence selection from belief persistence, then trace how attitude-behavior conflict is reduced.

BELIEF PERSEVERANCE VS CONFIRMATION BIAS

BELIEF PERSEVERANCE

The belief remains even after its original evidence is discredited or strong contrary evidence appears.

clue: belief persists

CONFIRMATION BIAS

The person seeks, notices, remembers, or favors information that supports an existing belief.

clue: evidence is filtered

Both can happen together: selective evidence protects a belief that resists correction.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Mental discomfort from conflict between attitudes and actions.

ATTITUDE
honesty matters

→

ACTION
makes a dishonest claim

→

CONFLICT
inconsistency feels uncomfortable

→

RESPONSE
restore consistency

THREE WAYS TO REDUCE DISSONANCE

CHANGE BEHAVIOR

Stop the conflicting action.

CHANGE ATTITUDE

Revise the belief or evaluation.

ADD JUSTIFICATION

Explain the action to reduce conflict.

Name the conflict + identify the reduction strategy + explain how consistency increases.