



The self and attitudes

Chapter 3

Learning Objectives

Compare the way we manage ourselves in different social situations to how others perceive us

Explain how we arrive at an understanding of our own selves

Understand how different identities affect our behavior

Determine the factors that impact self-esteem

Analyze how prejudice and trying to conceal our identity impacts well-being

Identify the learning processes through which our attitudes are formed

Examine the link between attitudes and behavior and the factors that affect their relationship

Explain the two processes through which attitudes guide behavior

Examine the methods that help people resist skilled attempts to persuade us

Evaluate how people form and use stereotypes

Recall the factors leading to prejudice against specific groups

Explain how subtle forms of discrimination are the manifestations of prejudice



Will you post this photo on Facebook?

How will you react if your friend posts this photo on Facebook?

Social media platforms like Facebook influence how people manage their self-image and privacy.

Others can post or tag photos that may harm the image a user wants to present.



How do you interact with your friend on **Facebook**?

How do you talk to your friend when **you meet in person**?

*Generally, people tend to portray themselves in **social environments** a little more positively than they are in reality. Most people are concerned with how they are perceived by others, whether in social media interactions or face to face.*

The self

Self-presentation

Self-knowledge

Self-identity

Self-esteem

*"Knowing yourself is the
beginning of all wisdom."*

~Aristotle



Self-presentation

It implies **Managing the Self in Different Social Contexts**

How we think or feel about ourselves

How others see or think about us

Whether all our aspects/attributes are equally available in any context- online, in social settings, in personal space

Do we know ourselves better than others



Self-presentation: [Who Is More Accurate About Our Behavior: Self or Others?](#)

All of us are faced with the task of presenting ourselves to a variety of audiences, and we may play different roles (be different selves) in different plays (in different contexts).

Each of us has access to our internal mental states (e.g., feelings, thoughts, aspirations, and intentions), which others do not- so we know us best, but is it true?

Maybe not- having access to **our intentions**, which observers do not have, **is one reason why we are sometimes inaccurate about ourselves**.

Maria describes herself as a careful spender. She says she “always budgets carefully” and “rarely makes impulsive purchases.” This is her behavioral self-report — how she perceives and intends to behave. **This is behavioral self reporting. But is the prediction correct?**

However, Maria’s close friend notices that whenever she feels stressed or has a bad day, she tends to buy unnecessary things online, later regretting the expense. Over time, her bank statements show frequent small purchases she forgot about.

Self-presentation: Who Is More Accurate About Our Behavior: Self or Others?

Sometimes the participants' own ratings were more strongly related to the frequency of their actual behavior (listening to music, watching TV).

However, sometimes others' ratings of the participants were more strongly related to actual behavior (at work, on the computer, socializing).

So, at times, other people do seem to “know” us better than we know ourselves.

Behavior	Self	Aggregated Informants	Single Informant
With other people	.14	.36**	.30**
On the phone	.37**	.40**	.32**
Talking one-on-one	-.06	.25*	.22*
Talking in a group	.25*	.20*	.25*
Talking to same sex	.34**	.25*	.13
Talking to opposite sex	.31**	.32**	.18
Laughing	.23*	.25*	.13
Singing	.34**	.29**	.34**
Crying	.18	.16	.19
Arguing	.28**	-.05	.09
Listening to music	.40**	.34**	.26*
Watching TV	.55**	.39**	.36**
On the computer	.29**	.31**	.20
At work	.25*	.35**	.22*
Attending class	.07	.33**	.26*
Socializing	.18	.30**	.27*
Indoors	.16	.16	.20
Outdoors	.11	.05	.10
Commuting	.27**	.16	.14
At a coffee shop/bar/restaurant	.27**	.15	.24*

Self-presentation: Tactics

Self-promotion: If we say we're really good at something, people will often believe us. Self-verification perspective—the processes we use to lead others to agree with our own self-views—suggests that negotiation occurs in attempts to get others to agree with our self-claims.

Aisha, the founder of a small eco-friendly apparel startup, posts on LinkedIn:

“Proud to share that our sustainable fashion line just reached its first \$1 million in sales this quarter! Our commitment to ethical sourcing and circular design is proving that sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand. Excited to keep leading the change toward a greener economy.”

Self-deceptive: Discrepancy between our ideal and actual selves (e.g., how do you select your DP)

Ravi, the owner of a small restaurant, notices a steady decline in customers over several months. Instead of recognizing that customer feedback points to slow service and inconsistent food quality, he convinces himself that the drop is due solely to the new café that opened nearby.

When discussing business performance with his staff, Ravi says, “Our food is great — people are just being drawn to that trendy new place. Once the hype fades, they’ll come back.”

Self-presentation: Tactics

Present yourself to others as someone who particularly values or respects them. In general, when we want to make a good impression on others, it can be useful to employ **ingratiation tactics**.

Before a client meeting, Tabana, a junior marketing associate, tells the client:

“I’ve been following your company’s recent campaigns, and I’m really impressed by the creativity and impact they’ve had. Your approach to customer engagement is something I genuinely admire and hope to learn from.”

Self-deprecating—imply that we are not as good as the other person, by communicating admiration or by simply lowering an audience’s expectations of our abilities.

During a farmers’ workshop on new irrigation techniques, Jerry, a young agricultural extension officer, begins his talk:

“I’ve been learning about solar irrigation for only a year, so if I get any of the details wrong, please correct me—I promise I’m still figuring out how not to overwater my own tomato plants!”

Self-knowledge

How do we analyze ourselves

Do we take an observer's perspective on the self



Self-knowledge: Introspection: Looking Inward to Discover the Causes of Our Own Behavior

Introspection—privately thinking about the factors that made us who we are—is a useful way to learn about the self. **The more we introspect—particularly the more we examine the reasons why we act as we do—the greater the self-understanding we will achieve.** Thinking about reasons for our actions can misdirect our quest for self-knowledge when our behavior is really driven by our feelings and when we have difficulty in predicting the future.

Example

Ella notices that she often buys organic products, even when they are more expensive. **She introspects and tells herself, “I must be someone who values health and sustainability above all else.”**

However, in reality, her purchasing behavior is also influenced by **short-term emotions**, like feeling guilty about skipping healthy meals earlier in the week, or by **peer influence**, such as seeing friends post about organic products on social media. Later, **she predicts she will continue buying only organic products consistently, but when she is busy or stressed, she opts for cheaper alternatives instead.**

Self-knowledge: The Self from the Observer's Standpoint

One way that we can attempt to **learn about ourselves is by taking an “observer” perspective on own past**- one way to gain self-insight is to try to see ourselves as others do, and consider the possibility that they are more right than we are!

Because actors and observers differ in their focus of attention, and observers are less likely to be swayed by knowing our intentions and so forth, they could potentially have greater insight into when we will behave as we have done in the past.

Example

Imran is a farm manager who often gets frustrated when his workers miss deadlines. When reflecting on his own performance, he thinks, “I try my best to be patient, so my team must just be careless.”

Taking an **observer perspective**, Imran asks a colleague who has worked closely with him to review his interactions with the team. The colleague points out, “Sometimes you give unclear instructions and change plans last minute, which makes it hard for the team to meet deadlines.”

By seeing himself through another's eyes, Imran realizes that part of the problem lies in his own **communication style**, not just the workers' performance.

Self-identity

we think of ourselves primarily as individuals- **personal identity**

we think of ourselves as members of specific social groups- **social identity**

what is salient and what is trifling

we define ourselves and behave differently in different situations



Self-identity

When our personal identity is salient and we think of ourselves as unique individuals, this results in self-descriptions that emphasize how we differ from other individuals- **intra-group comparison**. However, such personal identity description depends on comparative contexts.

Example: You could describe yourself as particularly liberal if you were comparing yourself to your parents, but if you were indicating how you are different from other college students you might say that you are rather conservative.

Perceiving ourselves as members of a group means we emphasize what we share with other group members. We describe ourselves in terms of the attributes that differentiate our group from another comparison group- **inter-group comparison**.

Example: if you are female and your gender is salient, you might perceive the attributes that you believe you share with other women (e.g., warm and caring) and that you perceive as differentiating women from men as self-descriptive. Likewise, if you are male, when gender is salient, you might think of yourself (i.e., self-stereotype) in terms of attributes that are believed to characterize men and that differentiate them from women (e.g., independent, strong).

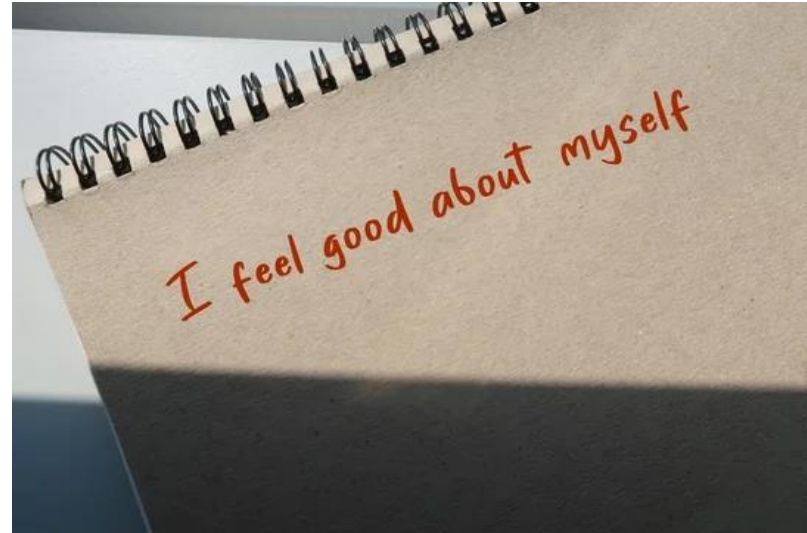
Self-esteem

What kind of attitude do you have toward yourself—is it positive or negative?

Do you think your attitude about yourself varies across time and settings?

Is your attitude about yourself stable?

Does it increase/change in response to life events?



Self-esteem: Measurements

The most common method of measuring personal self-esteem as an overall assessment of self-evaluation is with the 10-item Rosenberg (1965) scale. On this measure, people are asked to rate their own explicit attitude toward themselves.

However, self-esteem scores based on the Rosenberg scale could be biased by self-presentation concerns.

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.*
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.*
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.*
9. I certainly feel useless at times.*
10. At times I think I am no good at all.*

Self-esteem: [Measurements](#)

The Implicit Association Test (IAT), developed in 1995 by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald, measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report. The IAT may be especially interesting if it shows that you have an implicit attitude (hidden biases about gender, race, age, disability, sexuality and 90 other topics) that you did not know about.

Implicit bias generally results in a preference for dominant group members and creates privilege for people in those groups.



Self-esteem: Factors determining self-esteem

1. Situational / External Factors

Reflecting on achievements → increases self-esteem.

Focusing on failures → lowers self-esteem.

Negative feedback → lowers self-esteem, especially in those with low self-esteem.

Being excluded, or ignored → causes psychological pain and reduces self-esteem.

2. Internal / Personal Factors

Level of self-esteem (high vs. low) → affects how people respond to success or failure.

Positive self-talk → boosts confidence for high self-esteem individuals but may backfire for low self-esteem individuals.

3. Developmental / Foundational Factors

Early experiences with parents → shape implicit associations between the self and positive or negative traits.

Self-esteem: Migration

Recent research has addressed this question with Asian and European American students who moved from California to Hawaii. In their home state of California, European Americans are the numeric majority and Asian Americans the minority, while this is reversed in Hawaii with Asian Americans the numeric majority and European Americans the minority.

European Americans' self-esteem levels were lower after their first year in Hawaii where their ethnic group was a minority, suggesting that **the change from majority to minority may have challenged their views about themselves**. In contrast, for Asian Americans, although their ethnic identity became less salient by the move from a minority to majority context, their self-esteem was unchanged.

What happens to the self-esteem of refugees? This may lead to a considerable trauma.



The Self as a Target of Prejudice

- Some social identities are routinely subject to negative or prejudicial treatment.
- Individuals with these identities may choose to **hide or conceal** who they are to avoid discrimination.
- **Concealment** can protect from prejudice but often leads to **negative consequences** such as:
 - Loneliness, Reduced sense of connection with others, Poorer health and well-being
- Continuously deciding whether to reveal or conceal one's identity is **mentally and emotionally taxing**.
- People with **concealable stigmatized identities** (e.g., sexual orientation, illness) often show:
 - Lower self-esteem, Greater psychological distress
- In a study, participants who were **induced to hide** their stigmatized identity:
 - Felt **less authentic**
 - Were perceived by others as **less open and self-disclosing**
 - Left observers with a **less positive impression** of their social interactions
- Conversely, **revealing one's true identity** led to greater authenticity and more positive social evaluations.



Attitude formation

One important means by which our attitudes are formed is through the process of social learning. Many of our views are acquired by interacting with others, or simply observing their behavior. Such learning occurs through several processes:

- ❑ Classical Conditioning: Learning Based on Association
- ❑ Instrumental Conditioning: Rewards for the “Right” Views
- ❑ Observational Learning: Learning by Exposure to Others



Attitude formation: Classical Conditioning: Learning Based on Association

A stimulus that is capable of evoking a response—the unconditioned stimulus—regularly precedes another neutral stimulus, the one that occurs first can become a signal for the second—the conditioned stimulus. Stimuli can affect consciously or unconsciously.



Neutral stimulus →
Conditioned stimulus:
Pleasant music



Unconditioned stimulus:
Discounts/free samples →
Happiness

- **Conditioned response:**
*Feeling happy and motivated
to shop when hearing the
music*

Attitude formation: Classical Conditioning: Learning Based on Association

Classical conditioning can affect attitudes via two pathways: the direct and indirect route.

The **direct route**—can be seen in this advertisement. That is, positive stimuli (e.g., images of different models) are repeatedly paired with the product, with the aim being to directly transfer the effect felt about the model to the brand.



Attitude formation: Classical Conditioning: Learning Based on Association

Classical conditioning can affect attitudes via two pathways: the direct and indirect route.

However, by pairing a specific celebrity endorser who is already liked by the target audience with a brand, a memory link between the two can be established. With this **indirect route**, the idea is that by repeatedly presenting that specific celebrity with the product, then whenever that celebrity is thought of, the product too will come to mind.



Attitude formation: Classical Conditioning: Learning Based on Association



Attitude formation: Classical Conditioning: Learning Based on Association

Study (Walsh & Kiviniemi, 2014):

- Participants viewed **photos of apples and bananas** (target stimuli).
- At the same time, **other images** (positive, negative, or neutral) were shown **very briefly**—too fast for conscious awareness.

Positive images (e.g., baby animals) → created **pleasant associations** with the fruits.

Negative images (e.g., junk cars) or **neutral images** (e.g., baskets) → did **not** create such positive associations.

Participants exposed to **positive subliminal images** were **more likely to choose fruit as a snack** later.

This effect occurred **without conscious belief changes** about nutrition or health.

The pairing of fruit with positive images led to **affective (emotional) associations** that influenced behavior.

The study shows **subliminal conditioning**—classical conditioning that occurs **without conscious awareness** of the conditioning stimuli.

Attitude formation: Instrumental Conditioning: Rewards for the “Right” Views

People learn which attitudes are considered “**correct**” or **acceptable** within their social groups.

This learning happens through **instrumental conditioning** — attitudes are shaped by **rewards and punishments**.

Rewards may include: Social approval, smiles, praise, or hugs.

Punishments may include: Disapproval, angry looks, or social rejection.

The process can be **subtle**, involving **psychological acceptance** rather than material rewards.

Family and peers are primary sources of attitude formation through reinforcement.

As individuals grow, **new social networks** (e.g., school, workplace, online communities) also influence attitudes.

People often **adapt their attitudes** to fit the norms and expectations of **different social groups** they belong to.

Attitude formation: Instrumental Conditioning: Rewards for the “Right” Views

A student grows up in a **conservative family** where political involvement is **strongly disapproved of**.

As a child, when the student says things like “*Politics is bad*” or “*I’d never do active politics*,” parents and teachers **praise** and **approve** of them.

This repeated **reward and approval** reinforces a **negative attitude toward politics**.

Later, at **college**, the student joins a **new group of friends** who view politics as **normal or beneficial** (e.g., for leadership or networking).

In this new environment:

- Expressing **anti-politics views** may lead to **awkward reactions or mild social exclusion** (punishment).
- Showing **openness or acceptance** brings **social approval and inclusion** (reward).

Over time, the student begins to **soften or change** their earlier stance—not through persuasion, but through **changing patterns of social rewards and punishments**.

Summary: The student’s attitude toward politics **shifts** from rejection to acceptance as they move from one **social network (family)** that **rewards disapproval** to another (**college peers**) that **rewards acceptance**—demonstrating **instrumental conditioning** in action.

Attitude formation: Observational Learning: Learning by Exposure to Others

Observational learning occurs when individuals **acquire attitudes or behaviors by watching others**.

People form attitudes through **exposure to advertising**, especially when they see “**people like them**” reacting positively or negatively toward certain products or issues.

Social comparison is the process of **comparing our views with others** to judge whether our understanding of reality is correct.

- If others share our attitudes, we assume our views are **accurate and valid**.

Attitudes are also shaped by our **desire to be similar to people we like or value**.

- Example: If your best friend dislikes a certain person, group, or event, you may also begin to **dislike** it to align with them.

Individuals often adjust their attitudes to **match those of their “reference groups”**—the people or groups they **identify with or look up to**.

Example: People were more likely to develop **positive attitudes toward wearing sunscreen** when they **identified with the group** that promoted sunscreen use.

Overall, **observational learning and social comparison** both play major roles in **shaping and reinforcing attitudes** through identification and imitation.

Attitude formation: Observational Learning: Learning by Exposure to Others



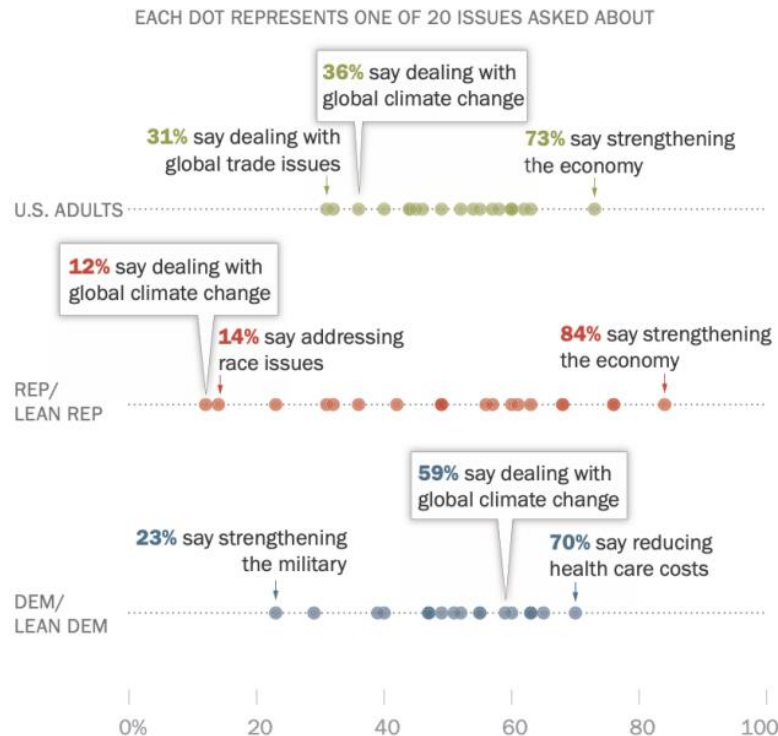
You are not actually a dessert lover. But you ordered an ice-cream because your friend ordered one. Thus, you are modeling your friend's eating (**social modeling**).

Attitude formation

*Who are more convincing-
scientists or politicians to you
regarding your perception of
climate change and your
responsible attitude and actions?*

Republicans rank climate change at the bottom of their priorities for the president and Congress in 2024

% of U.S. adults who describe each of the 20 issues asked about as a **top priority** for the president and Congress



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 16-21, 2024.

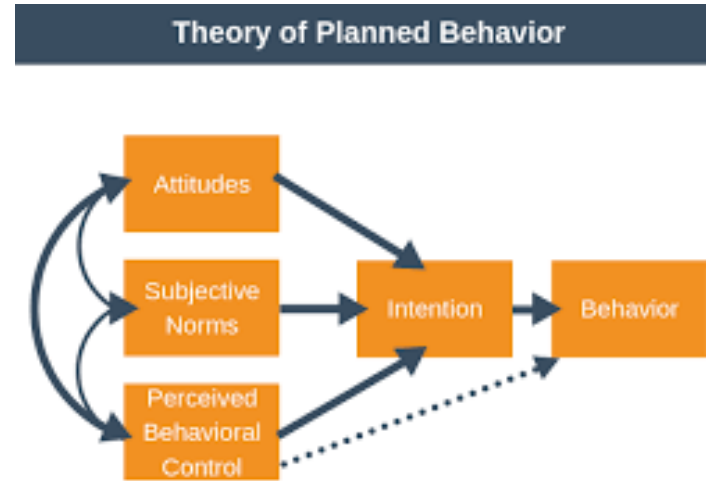
Attitude guiding behavior: TRA or TPB

In some situations we give careful, deliberate thought to our attitudes and their implications for our behavior. Insight into the nature of this process is provided by the **theory of reasoned action (TRA)**, which was later refined and termed the **theory of planned behavior (TPB)** (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980)

The notion: decision to engage in a particular behavior is the result of a rational process.

Various behavioral options are considered, the consequences or outcomes of each are evaluated, and a decision is reached to act or not to act.

That decision is then reflected in **behavioral intentions**, which are often good predictors of whether we will act on our attitudes in a given situation- **intention-behavior relationship**.



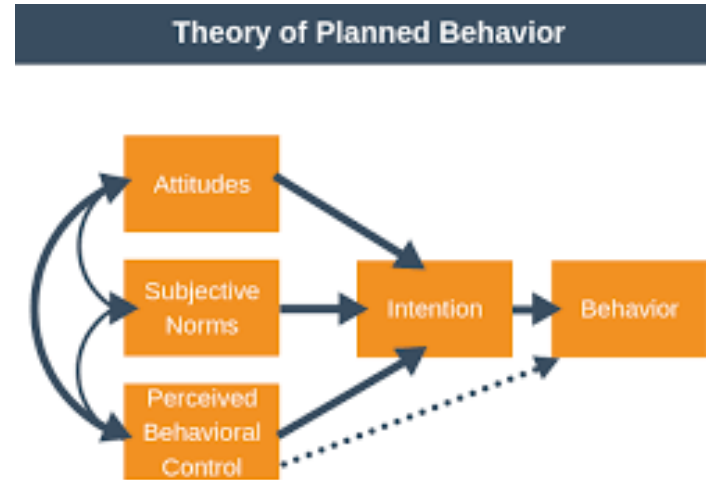
Attitude guiding behavior: TRA or TPB

How do you form an intention to change some aspect of your **behavior**?

Intentions are determined by two factors: **Attitudes** toward the behavior—people's positive or negative evaluations of performing the behavior (whether they think it will yield positive or negative consequences)

Subjective norms—people's perceptions of whether others will approve or disapprove of this behavior.

Perceived behavioral control—people's appraisals of their ability to perform the behavior—was subsequently added to the theory.



Attitude guiding behavior: TRA or TPB

Suppose an adolescent male is considering joining Facebook. Will he actually take action, and go through the process of joining up on the website?

Behavior: Signing up on Facebook

Intention: his intentions to carry out this action may be quite strong.

Attitude: Positive attitude towards Facebook (he feels that this will make him look sociable)

Subjective norms: He believes that people whose opinions he values will approve of this action.

Perceived behavioral control: Access to phone, less parental restrictions, knowledge about Facebook operations



Reactance

People can be **persuaded to change attitudes or behavior** through two main routes:

- **Systematic (central) route:** Careful thinking about a **compelling message**.
- **Peripheral route:** Being influenced by **surface cues** (e.g., attractiveness, tone, repetition).

Sometimes, persuasion involves **direct pressure** from others—publicly or privately—to change one's opinion.

Such pressure can feel like a **threat to personal freedom** or autonomy.

When people sense that their freedom to decide for themselves is being restricted, they often feel **annoyed or resentful**.

This leads to **reactance** — a **negative reaction** against attempts to control or influence one's beliefs or actions.

Reactance response: Instead of agreeing, individuals may:

- **Resist persuasion efforts**, and
- **Adopt the opposite attitude** of what the persuader wants.

Reason for reactance:

- People value their **freedom and independence**.
- When they perceive persuasive attempts as **threats to that freedom**, they become **motivated to restore it** by rejecting or opposing the message.

Stereotype, prejudice and discrimination

Stereotypes are considered the cognitive component of attitudes toward a social group—specifically, **beliefs** about what a particular group is like. Traits thought to distinguish between one group and another can be either positive or negative; they can be accurate or inaccurate, and may be either agreed with or rejected by members of the stereotyped group. Stereotypes act as theories, guiding what we attend to, and exerting strong effects on how we process social information.

Example: Believing that **entrepreneurs from a certain country (e.g., “Americans are natural risk-takers and business-minded”)** are more likely to succeed in business, while entrepreneurs from another country (e.g., “Italians are less organized and poor at managing finances”) are less capable.

Prejudice is considered the affective component, or the **feelings** we have about a particular group. Threats to self-esteem and resource scarcity/competition are the sources of prejudice.

Example: A hiring manager feels **uneasy or distrustful toward job applicants from a certain country** (e.g., assuming they are less competent or reliable in finance) simply because of their nationality, even though there is **no actual evidence** to support this belief.

Discrimination concerns the behavioral component, or **differential actions** taken toward members of specific social groups. It is actually prejudice in action.

Example: A qualified job applicant from a particular country or ethnic group is **denied a position in a finance firm** because the hiring manager favors candidates from a different country or ethnic background, even though the applicant is fully qualified.

