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Pluralistic Ignorance and Inconsistency Between Private Attitudes and Public Behaviors

Dale T. Miller
Benoît Monin
Deborah A. Prentice
Princeton University

Psychologists have a longstanding interest in the utility of attitudes for predicting behavior, an interest that has been both frustrated and maintained by the ever accumulating evidence that their utility is mediocre at best. The many findings of attitude–behavior inconsistency have been viewed as discouraging for at least two reasons: First, most claims for the validity of attitudes as a social construct have rested on their ability to predict behavior, and second, practitioners have hoped to be able to use persuasion techniques to modify deleterious behaviors, a strategy that requires not just attitude–behavior consistency but also a causal link between the two. As a consequence, researchers have been motivated to find attitude–behavior consistency wherever it might live. They have found a number of successful approaches, including refining the measurement of attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), refining the measurement of behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974, 1975), changing the definition of *consistency* (Campbell, 1963), and identifying individual characteristics and social circumstances that promote consistency (Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Sherman & Fazio, 1983). These efforts have led to the development of models for predicting behavior from attitudes, many of which are described elsewhere in this volume.

In this chapter, we take a slightly different angle on the question of attitude–behavior consistency. In particular, our interest is not in predicting behavior from attitudes but rather in the reverse; we seek to understand the ways in which people use and misuse the data of observable behavior to draw inferences about other people’s private attitudes. This task is familiar to ordinary social perceivers who typically do not enjoy the kind of access to people’s private thoughts and feelings that research psychologists have. Instead, they must infer these private views from public statements and actions (Miller & Prentice, 1996). Because they have access to behaviors but not to attitudes, social perceivers are interested in a slightly different question than are research psychologists. Whereas psychologists tend to ask, “To what extent and under what circumstances will this person’s attitudes be expressed in his or her actions?”, social perceivers more often ask, “What can I learn about this person’s attitudes from the way he or she acts?”

Our focus on the prediction of private attitudes from public behaviors takes us away from definitional and methodological solutions to the quandary posed by attitude–behavior inconsistency, for these solutions are more useful for enhancing behavioral prediction and modification than for diagnosing private thoughts and feelings. Indeed, the fact that people exhibit more attitude–behavior consistency when researchers measure attitudes toward specific behaviors, use an aggregated behavioral index, or assess consistency in light of situational thresholds is of little interest to most social perceivers. For them, consistency is not a question; it is an assumption. They expect to find some degree of correspondence between an individual’s thoughts, words, and deeds, and this expectation, combined with its lack of validity in most social situations, lead them to social inferences that are seriously in error. We analyze this phenomenon, known as *pluralistic ignorance*, in the second part of this chapter. First, we consider the nature of public behavior and its implications for attitude–behavior consistency.

PUBLIC BEHAVIOR

Our analysis of public behavior draws on the insights of two strong theoretical traditions in social psychology, one focusing on self-presentation and the other on social identity. In the self-presentation tradition, we trace our ideas to Goffman (1959), who likened public behavior to a theatrical performance, in which the individual plays a part on a social stage with others who simultaneously serve as co-actors and as audience to his or her performance. This metaphor seems to us to capture very well the self-consciousness of behaving in the presence of others. Public behavior is enacted onstage with an eye to the impression that behavior creates in the minds of the audience. Because most public actors wish to be seen as good and appro-

appropriate members of their groups and societies, their behavior is guided by socially shared definitions of how people like them are supposed to act. These shared definitions, or social norms, vary in their generality: Some apply to nearly all social interactions (e.g., norms of politeness, turn-taking, or reciprocity); some are specific to particular situations (e.g., norms of orderliness in queues and crowds, and of exchange in commercial transactions); and some are specific to particular groups or types of people (e.g., norms of delinquency among gang members, of alcohol consumption among college students, of strictness among prison guards). By behaving in accordance with social norms, actors are able to communicate both their definition of the situation and their character or role within it.

As to the content of social norms, both self-presentation and social identity theories contribute insights. Goffman (1959), for example, pointed to the ways in which participants in an interaction behave to protect and defend the impressions that they and others project. Public behavior is part of a delicate negotiation in which participants converge on a joint definition of the situation and their respective roles in it. This negotiation defines the norms pertaining to that situation. Social identity and self-categorization theories trace norms to the prototypes of the groups with which individuals identify (Turner, 1991; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). According to this theoretical perspective, the behavior that is normative for group members is that which highlights what they all have in common and at the same time most distinguishes them from members of other groups (i.e., that which maximizes the metacontrast ratio; see Turner et al., 1987). Norms thus serve to maintain the integrity and boundaries of social categories.

It is clear from this discussion why social norms often produce public behavior that is inconsistent with individuals' private attitudes. Norms are properties of situations and of groups, not of individuals. They develop through processes that have only an indirect and partial connection to the characteristics and views of those who are influenced by them. Therefore, it is not surprising that the normative behavior that is exhibited in public settings is frequently counterattitudinal for some or even most of the people who are enacting it.

As an illustration of the power of social norms to shape public behavior in a direction contrary to private attitudes, consider the classic demonstration of attitude-behavior inconsistency by LaPiere (1934). Over a 2-year period, LaPiere and a young married Chinese couple visited 184 restaurants and 67 hotels, auto camps, and tourist camps. Sometimes all three of them went into the establishment, sometimes the Chinese couple went in first. The couple was refused service only once, at an autocamp. Clearly, the actual practices of the businesses showed no evidence of anti-Chinese prejudice. Neither did the interpersonal treatment the couple received. LaPiere coded

the reception accorded the couple as *hesitant, normal, or better than normal* and found that the couple received treatment that was normal or better than normal more than 90% of the time.

Of course, LaPiere found a very different picture when he sent a questionnaire to these and other establishments, asking (among other questions), "Will you accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment?" Of the 256 establishments that returned the questionnaire (128 of which he and the couple visited previously), only 2 declared that they would accept Chinese guests unconditionally, and 18 said they might, depending on the circumstances. Thus, whereas more than 99% of the first sample accepted Chinese guests, more than 93% of the second sample (which included members of the first sample as well as new individuals) declared in writing that they would not do so.

Why did the desk clerks observed by LaPiere admit a Chinese couple to their establishments when they said they would not? Based on LaPiere's observations, it appears that behavior was directed by general norms pertaining to social interaction—to what Goffman (1959) called the etiquette of social life. According to Goffman, there exists a powerful norm not to violate the self-definition of others. In Goffman's words: "When an individual projects a definition of the situation and then makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand on others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of this kind have a right to expect" (p. 185). From LaPiere's account, this dynamic was responsible for the fact that his respondents offered accommodation to members of a group toward which they held negative attitudes. LaPiere pointed to the important role played by the "air of self-confidence" that the couple exuded as they made their request. This projected self-image and the normative obligation it incurred proved much more powerful than the desk clerk's attitudes. In LaPiere's words, "A supercilious desk clerk could not refuse his master's hospitality to people who appeared to take their request as a perfectly normal and conventional thing" (p. 232). In effect, although refusing accommodation to a Chinese couple might not have constituted a social impropriety, refusing accommodation to a couple (Chinese or otherwise) who clearly defined themselves as deserving of it did.

It is instructive here to consider an alternative reading of LaPiere's results. Campbell (1963) argued that the attitude-behavior mismatch observed in LaPiere's and many similar studies do not provide demonstrations of inconsistency, but instead are artifacts of situational thresholds. Because the threshold ("hurdle," as he calls it) for actually refusing accommodation is higher than for expressing a generalized intention to refuse, we should not take the behavioral frequency data as evidence of inconsistency. The mea-

sure is too insensitive. Given the difference in thresholds, the only way respondents could be inconsistent, in Campbell's view, would be to say they would accept Chinese guests and then not accept them, an attitude-behavior pattern that LaPiere did not observe.

Raden (1977) translated this position into a systematic model. According to Raden, if one uses discrete measures of attitudes (+ or -) and behavior (+ or -), there are four possible relationships between a person's attitudes and behaviors: The person could possess an attitude and act on it (+ +), the person could possess an attitude but not act on it (+-), the person could act as if he/she possessed an attitude although he/she does not (-+), or the person could neither possess an attitude nor act upon it (- -). Raden argues that because hurdles are lower for attitude expression than for behavior display, only the "-+" cell, not the "+-" cell, should be considered to reflect attitude-behavior inconsistency. When he re-examined the extant research on the attitude-behavior link using this revised index of inconsistency, Raden found very high levels of attitude-behavior consistency (generally greater than .95).

In our view, this attempt to redefine attitude-behavior consistency by introducing the concept of a hurdle or threshold is misguided. True, the threshold for acting on one's attitude in the face of a counterattitudinal norm is quite high, but norm-congruent behavior in these circumstances is still counterattitudinal. Nor is it useful to characterize behavioral measures such as that used by LaPiere as insensitive. The measure he used was, in fact, quite sensitive, although to social norms rather than to respondents' attitudes. Such a measure may be of little use to researchers interested in dispositional prediction, but it would be highly prized by those interested in social influence.

Role of Norms in Theories of Attitude-Behavior Relations

We are by no means the first to argue for the importance of taking social norms into account in analyses of attitude-behavior consistency. Perhaps the best-known formulation of the role of norms vis-à-vis attitudes in predicting behavior was provided by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) in their theory of reasoned action. They proposed that attitudes and norms exert independent and additive effects on behavioral intentions, which, in turn, influence overt behavior. The effective norm for a given individual is assessed by weighting that individual's perceptions of the expectations of reference others by his or her motivation to comply with their expectations. Thus, subjective norms, like attitudes, vary across individuals, as a function of whose expectations matter and what those expectations are. In Ajzen's (1991) more recent theory of planned behavior, the assessment of norms

and their role in the prediction of behavior has remained largely the same as in the earlier theory.

The theories of reasoned action and planned behavior have proven quite successful at predicting behavior from behavioral intentions and behavioral intentions from attitudes, but their formulation of the role of subjective norms in predicting behavioral intentions has received little empirical support (see Ajzen, 1991 for a review). By way of explanation, its authors (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) argued that this apparent weakness in their theories reflects an unintentional bias in the particular behaviors and populations they have studied; had they chosen different types of behaviors or different populations of participants, they might well have seen a stronger influence of norms on intentions. Others have seen the weakness as more endemic. For example, Terry and Hogg (1996) argued for a reconceptualization of norms and their relation to attitudes in light of social identity and self-categorization theories. In particular, they proposed that subjective norms should predict behavioral intentions only for individuals who identify strongly with the reference others in question and that, for these individuals, norms should relate to attitudes as well. In two studies, they found empirical support for these emendations.

Although Terry and Hogg's proposed revisions of the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior seem to us quite sensible, the theories remain extremely limited in their abilities to account for normative influence. This limitation stems, in large part, from the cognitive and individualistic focuses of the theories. Both conceive of attitudes and norms within an expectancy-value framework, measure them at the level of individuals, and predict that they will affect intentions to behave, but not behavior itself. We might expect this kind of model to provide strong prediction of behaviors that are rational, planned, and enacted singly. But what of public behaviors, which are often symbolic, spontaneous, and negotiated between interacting parties? In the public domain, we would expect an entirely different set of relations between attitudes, norms, and behaviors, with important implications for the nature and magnitude of attitude-behavior consistency.

Norms and Behavioral Uniformity

To illustrate the influence of norms on public behavior, we return to the LaPiere (1934) study described earlier. Most analyses of that study highlight the remarkable degree of attitude-behavior inconsistency it demonstrates. But equally striking is the uniformity of participants' actions: Ninety-nine percent of those approached accepted the Chinese couple into their establishment. Clearly, the norms for social interaction dictated the same response in all cases. Moreover, these norms appear to have influenced

behavior directly, rather than influenced behavioral intentions: Ninety-three percent of an overlapping and comparable sample declared in writing their intentions to keep Chinese people out. Admittedly, this question about behavioral intentions was phrased quite generally. But would the proprietors have responded differently—would they have intuited the effects of normative pressure on their behavior—if they were asked about their behavioral intentions in that particular situation? We expect not. And what if LaPiere had asked them about the expectations of important reference others, others with whom they strongly identified? Would the views of those others have reflected the norms that ultimately influenced their behavior? Again, we expect not.

In short, we believe that LaPiere's findings illustrate the ways in which norms actually influence public behavior. In public contexts, norms reduce the variance in behavior across individuals and affect behavior directly, rather than through behavioral intentions. Indeed, the social influence literature contains numerous examples of laboratory and real-world situations that function similarly. Whether individuals are confronted with a confident Chinese couple asking for accommodation, an unyielding researcher in a learning experiment (Milgram, 1974), a crowd of unresponsive bystanders to an emergency (Latané & Darley, 1970), or a group of peers evaluating hypothetical decision dilemmas (Myers, 1982), their actions tend to become more similar to one another's, more norm-congruent, and more independent of their private attitudes and perceptions. In addition, dissonance researchers routinely engineer this type of behavior in the high choice condition of the induced compliance paradigm (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). The reason people agree to write an essay advocating a position contrary to their attitudes under conditions of high choice (low justification) is the same reason that LaPiere's respondents acted contrary to their attitudes—to do otherwise would violate another's definition of the situation. To induce participants to write a counterattitudinal essay under these conditions, the experimenter must project the impression that he or she considers this request reasonable, thereby defining the refusal to do so as a social impropriety.

The homogenizing effect of norms on public behavior has long been recognized by personality researchers interested in dispositional prediction. For example, Mischel (1977) noted that powerful situations, in which everyone construes events the same way, holds uniform expectancies regarding appropriate behavior, and is motivated to learn and enact that behavior, tend to induce behavioral uniformity. In a similar vein, Price and Bouffard (1974) found that situations that are high in constraint (i.e., those in which few behaviors are appropriate) are seen as potentially embarrassing, as requiring careful monitoring of one's behavior, and as demanding certain behaviors

rather than others (see also Snyder & Ickes, 1985, for a discussion of the effects of situational constraint). These are precisely the properties of the public situations that we have been describing.

Private Attitude–Public Behavior Consistency

What are the implications of this analysis for consistency between public behavior and private attitudes? In this connection, there are at least two types of consistency in which we might be interested: *correlational consistency* (are people ordered in the same way on both the attitude and behavior measures?) and *literal consistency* (do people do what they say they will do? See Schuman & Johnson, 1976, for a discussion of this distinction). Correlational consistency is indexed by the magnitude of the correlation coefficient relating a measure of attitude and a measure of behavior in a population—the higher the correlation, the greater the consistency. Literal consistency is indexed by the difference between the level of behavior implied by an individual's or group's attitudes and that exhibited by their overt behavior—the smaller the difference, the greater the consistency. These two forms of consistency are largely independent of one another: A particular sample of attitudes and behaviors can be high on both types of consistency (e.g., when attitudes are the primary or sole influence on behavior), high on correlational consistency and low on literal consistency (e.g., when attitudes are one of a number of properties of individuals that influence behavior), low on correlational consistency and high on literal consistency (e.g., when normative pressures produce attitude-consistent behavior), or low on both types of consistency (e.g., when normative pressures produce attitude-inconsistent behavior). LaPiere's study, for example, falls into this last category: His data showed no correlation between attitudes and behaviors and showed a sizeable gap between the implications of what establishment owners said and what they did.

As an aside, it is interesting to note the extent to which a correlational definition of consistency has come to dominate research on the attitude–behavior relation. We conducted an informal review of all the articles published since 1974 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (JPSP)* in which the phrase *attitude–behavior* appeared either in the title or in the abstract. After omitting 1 review article and 5 that included only a brief mention of the consistency issue in their discussions, we were left with 26 articles that used consistency as their main dependent measure. Of these, 16 used simple correlations, 7 used more elaborate covariance-based approaches like regression or structural equation modelling (still, for our purposes, a correlational measure), and 3 included some other conceptualization of the attitude–behavior relation. Thus, nearly 90% of the *JPSP* studies that examined attitude–behavior consistency over the last 23 years defined it in

correlational terms, often failing to provide measures of central tendency and dispersion for the attitude and behavior distributions in their reports.

We would expect norms to have a very predictable effect on correlational consistency between private attitudes and public behaviors: By restricting variation in behavior, normative pressure should reduce the attitude-behavior correlation (see Nunnally, 1978). Note that this effect is not well captured by most existing theories, which attempt to explain behavior as a function of a linear combination of dispositional and situational forces (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The effect of norms on literal consistency is less easy to predict. In some cases, when norms and attitudes prescribe the same behavior, normative influence has no effect on attitude-behavior consistency. For example, consider what LaPiere would have found had he examined attitudes and behaviors toward a well-to-do White couple. In this case, the respect and accommodation that norms of social interaction required would have coincided with respondents' private attitudes. Although their behavior would still have been driven by normative pressure, it would have been authentic. Therefore, no literal inconsistency between attitudes and behaviors would have been observed (and, we might note, the study would have generated no interest in the psychological community). However, in other cases, when norms and attitudes prescribe different behaviors, normative influence reduces literal consistency. It also produces pluralistic ignorance, a social psychological phenomenon to which we now turn attention.

PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE

Pluralistic ignorance is a form of erroneous social inference that is at once both a cause and a consequence of literal inconsistency between private attitudes and public behaviors. The term *pluralistic ignorance* was coined by Floyd Allport (1924) to describe the situation in which virtually all members of a group privately reject group norms yet believe that virtually all other group members accept them (see Miller & McFarland, 1991; Miller & Prentice, 1994; Prentice & Miller, 1996). Allport introduced this concept to account for an especially puzzling case of literal attitude-behavior inconsistency—widespread public conformity to social norms in the absence of widespread private support. By way of explanation, he argued that people do not act on attitudes unless they believe those attitudes are shared. Thus, in the extreme case, when everyone believes that everyone else holds an attitude that, in fact, no one holds, the result is a complete attitude-behavior disjunction.

The first two social psychology doctoral dissertations completed in America, both conducted under the supervision of Allport, demonstrated

the potential of pluralistic ignorance to produce attitude–behavior inconsistency. In the first, Katz (Katz & Allport, 1928) reported a number of instances of inconsistency in the private attitudes and public reactions of Syracuse University students. Katz found that the majority of fraternity members on campus claimed to have no personal objections to admitting students from certain groups to their fraternities and yet consistently voted to exclude these same students. As in the contemporaneous LaPiere study, then, participants' private attitudes and their public behaviors diverged, although in this case, the nature of the mismatch was the opposite to that found by LaPiere. Here, participants' attitudes reflected less, not more, prejudice than did their actions.

There was also a methodological difference between the two studies: Katz, unlike LaPiere, asked his participants about their peers' attitudes as well as their own. Their responses to these questions suggested an explanation for the particular attitude–behavior divergence Katz had observed. Participants expressed the belief that their fraternity brothers, unlike themselves, did hold negative attitudes toward certain groups (after all, why else would they have voted to exclude them?). Furthermore, participants indicated that it was because of the widespread negative attitudes of their peers that they themselves voted to exclude members of these groups from their fraternity. Their (mis)perception of the consensual attitude became the norm that guided their behavior.

The second, and better known of the early demonstrations of pluralistic ignorance was provided by Schanck's (1932) dissertation on the social attitudes of the residents of the community of "Elm Hollow." The Methodist Church in Elm Hollow was very influential, and Schanck found that the community residents were nearly unanimous in stating their public support for the church's prohibitions against card playing, drinking alcohol, and smoking. Yet Schanck reported that, over his extended stay in the community, he himself had played cards, drunk hard cider, and smoked with many, if not most, residents (although always in the privacy of their homes). Consistent with his experience, Schanck's survey of people's private attitudes revealed little private support for the public norms. What his survey also revealed, however, was that residents assumed that their fellow community members actually believed in and closely followed the dictates of the church. Once again, then, we find both an attitude–behavior mismatch (people reporting private attitudes that were more liberal than their public actions) and a possible account for this mismatch (people acting consistently not with their own attitude, but with their mistaken perception of the consensual attitude of their peers).

Our own program of research on college students' private and public expressions of comfort with campus drinking practices has provided us with

the opportunity to investigate the phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance more systematically. Our initial investigations turned up strong evidence of pluralistic ignorance in student's attitudes toward alcohol use on campus (Prentice & Miller, 1993). Students indicated that their own comfort with students' drinking habits was less than that of the average student, of their friends, and of their same-gender peers. Moreover, this self-other difference was not driven by concerns with self-enhancement or self-presentation, for students reacted to their estimates of peer opinion as if they actually believed them. They tended to adjust their own attitudes to be closer to their estimates of peer attitudes over time and to experience alienation to the extent that they perceived their own views as deviant.

Having established that pluralistic ignorance existed in the attitudes of students, we next conducted a laboratory study (Prentice & Miller, 1996) to determine if this misperception of peer attitudes was driven by inauthentic public behavior in alcohol-related situations. We brought groups of female Princeton undergraduates into the laboratory to participate in group discussions of campus issues. They were first asked to indicate on a private questionnaire both their own comfort with the alcohol drinking habits of students at Princeton and the comfort of the average student of their gender. They were next asked to discuss with one another a series of general questions about the role of alcohol in campus life. Following the discussion, each student completed a second questionnaire in which she rated the comfort with alcohol of each of the other members of her discussion group, how comfortable the other members believed her to be, and how similar her opinions were to theirs.

Students' prediscussion ratings of their own comfort and the comfort of the average female student replicated the self-other discrepancy found in Prentice and Miller (1993), with students expressing less comfort than they attributed to the average student of their gender. More interesting to us was the relation of these prediscussion comfort ratings to the comfort they expressed in the group discussion. Participants' ratings of how other group members would describe them confirmed our expectation that they were expressing more comfort publicly than they felt privately. Following the discussions, students indicated that they expected the other group members to see them as significantly more comfortable with campus drinking habits than their own prediscussion ratings suggested. Indeed, their ratings of the comfort they conveyed in the discussions were closer to (and statistically indistinguishable from) the comfort they attributed to the average female student than to their own private views.

Our final study in this series focused on the effects of dispelling pluralistic ignorance. If, as we have been arguing, pluralistic ignorance is a cause of literal inconsistency between private attitudes and public behaviors, then dis-

pellling pluralistic ignorance should release the pressure to conform to others' views and render behavior more attitude-congruent. A quasi-experimental test of this proposition was provided by America's experience with the prohibition of alcohol during the early part of this century. Although strongly advocated and enforced by various constituencies in America, prohibition never had majority support. But because people were reluctant to express their widely shared antiprohibition sentiment, it did seem to have public support (Robinson, 1932). This all changed with the advent of public opinion polls, however, as these polls revealed the depth of private antiprohibition sentiment and thereby dispelled a national case of pluralistic ignorance. Prohibition, with its lack of majority support exposed, soon thereafter "collapsed like a punctured balloon" (Katz & Schanck, 1938, p. 175).

We conducted a more controlled test of the effects of dispelling pluralistic ignorance in the context of alcohol use on campus (Schroeder & Prentice, 1997). Entering Princeton students were randomly assigned to participate in one of two types of hour-long discussion sessions about alcohol use during their first week on campus. The two types of sessions were identical except for the content of a 20-minute discussion segment. In the norm-focused condition, the discussion centered on pluralistic ignorance and its implications. Students were presented with the data showing pluralistic ignorance regarding alcohol use on campus and were encouraged to talk about why these misperceptions might have developed. They were also asked to reflect on how misperceiving the norm for drinking might affect social life on campus. In the individual-focused condition, the discussion, following many existing programs designed to change drinking behavior, centered on how individual students can make responsible decisions about alcohol consumption. Students were encouraged to reflect on the types of situations in which they might encounter alcohol at the university, to explore their options in those situations, and to consider the personal and social consequences of various courses of action. Four to 6 months after the discussions, students in both conditions completed self-report measures of their alcohol consumption.

Did dispelling pluralistic ignorance reduce students' drinking behavior to a level more consistent with their attitudes? Apparently it did: Students in the norm-focused condition reported consuming almost 40% fewer drinks each week than did students in the individual-focused condition. From their responses to additional measures collected during the initial and follow-up sessions, it appears that dispelling pluralistic ignorance produced a change in drinking behavior by making students aware of the variability of their peers' attitudes. In other words, it was not the perception that students, on average, were comfortable with heavy drinking, but rather the perception

that everybody was comfortable with heavy drinking that was responsible for students' attitude-inconsistent behavior.

SOURCES OF ATTITUDE-INCONSISTENT PUBLIC BEHAVIOR

In the foregoing discussion, we emphasized the ways in which pluralistic ignorance can create literal inconsistency between private attitudes and public behaviors, as individuals act according to their mistaken perceptions of what everybody else truly believes. But these mistaken perceptions on which they base their behaviors are themselves produced by observing the attitude-inconsistent behavior of their peers. What initiates this chain of events? How does the cycle of erroneous inferences and inauthentic behaviors get started?

In our discussion of the LaPiere (1934) study, we emphasized the role that social etiquette plays in producing attitude-inconsistent behavior. There, the proprietors were driven to accept the Chinese couple into their establishments because to refuse them would have violated the couple's self-presentation—it would have challenged their face. A similar dynamic may account for a number of cases of pluralistic ignorance, notably those described by Latané and Darley (1970) and Miller and McFarland (1987). It may also play a role in the drinking situation that we have been describing. However, there are many other circumstances under which individuals behave in counterattitudinal ways. Here, we consider the role of temporal factors and social identities in producing attitude-behavior disjunctions.

Temporal Decoupling of Attitudes and Behaviors

Attitudes and behaviors often follow quite different courses over time. Factors that change attitudes can produce little or no change in behavior; conversely, a rapid change in behavior can be followed by a much slower adjustment in attitudes. These differing temporal patterns often lead to the gradual or sudden development of attitude-behavior mismatches that are then sustained by pluralistic ignorance. Indeed, many of the documented cases of pluralistic ignorance may have arisen as attitudes and behaviors that were once in sync diverged over time. Here, we consider two possible means by which attitudes and behaviors can follow different temporal patterns and thereby produce pluralistic ignorance.

Shifting Attitudes and Stable Behaviors: Conservative Lags.

The most common case of attitude-behavior divergence occurs when attitude change is not accompanied by behavior change, thus leaving social

practices in place long after they have lost private support. Why might people continue to behave as they always have, despite a change in their attitudes? One possibility is that they fail to recognize that their attitude change has been shared by others (O'Gorman, 1986). The evolution of the attitudes of Whites toward the integration of Blacks in the United States provides a case in point. The civil rights movement, along with other social forces, produced a shift in the private attitudes of White Americans toward integration long before there was any corresponding shift in social norms and public behavior (Breed & Ktsanes, 1961; Fields & Schuman, 1976; O'Gorman, 1975; O'Gorman & Garry, 1976). One reason for this so-called *conservative lag* was that Whites believed that the changes in their own thinking were not shared by other Whites. Mistakenly assuming that the majority of their White peers continued to support segregation, they acquiesced to a status quo they no longer privately believed in (Fields & Schuman, 1976).

A similar analysis may also explain a result that Moscovici and his colleagues (Moscovici & Lage, 1976; Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969; Moscovici & Neve, 1972) found in their investigations of minority influence. These researchers have shown that even when the majority of a group's members have been influenced by a persistent minority (as assessed by private measures of attitude change), their public behavior tends to remain unchanged. One possible reason for this reluctance to yield publicly is that the converted majority members may mistakenly think that the other majority members remain unmoved.

We believe that many of the cases of pluralistic ignorance that we have described can be traced, at least in part, to a conservative lag. It seems quite likely, for instance, that Syracuse fraternity members once held prejudiced attitudes toward members of outgroups, that residents of Elm Hollow once privately supported the dictates of the Methodist Church, and that Princeton students were once comfortable with excessive drinking practices. Whatever factors were responsible for changes in these attitudes, their effects were never publicly acknowledged. As a result, public behavior went on as it always had, with pluralistic ignorance there to sustain it.

Stable Attitudes and Shifting Behaviors: Liberal Leaps. Although the tendency of behavior change to lag behind attitude change is a common feature of social life, occasionally the reverse can happen—behavioral change can speed ahead without a corresponding change in attitudes. Revolutions are one such circumstance. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville proposed that the private attitudes of the French toward the Church in the middle of the 18th century did not undergo nearly as abrupt a shift after the revolution as did the public support of the Church. De Tocqueville's ac-

count of this provides an eloquent description of pluralistic ignorance at work: "Those who retained their belief in the doctrines of the Church because of being alone in their allegiance and, dreading isolation more than error, professed to share the sentiments of the majority. So what was in reality the opinion of only a part . . . of the nation came to be regarded as the will of all and for this reason seemed irresistible, even to those who had given it this false appearance" (1955, p. 155).

A similar claim was made by Klassen, Williams, and Levitt (1989) in their analysis of the so-called sexual revolution in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. According to these researchers, people's attitudes during this period did not change nearly as much or as quickly as their public pronouncements and the rhetoric of the times would suggest. As occurred in the French Revolution, however, the doctrine of the new regime tended to go publicly unchallenged because of the mistaken assumption that it enjoyed the private support of the majority. Pluralistic ignorance, thus, seems to have accompanied (and possibly even aided and abetted) the sexual revolution.

Social Identities

A final reason that individuals might act in ways that are inconsistent with their private attitudes is because they are conforming to the ideals, norms, or values of their social identities (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Turner, 1991; Turner et al., 1987). As Terry and Hogg (1996) stated: "When social identity is salient, depersonalization occurs, such that a person's feelings and actions are guided more by group prototypes and norms than by personal factors" (p. 790). Because a group prototype tends to embody those beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that minimize ingroup differences and maximize intergroup differences (Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Turner et al., 1987), intergroup contexts are especially likely to produce discrepancies between public behavior and private attitudes.

Highly structured social institutions, such as prisons or schools, are one context in which groups with different social identities commonly interact with one another. Studies of social life in such institutions frequently reveal that members of different roles (e.g., prisoners and guards, students and teachers) believe that their peers are more hostile to occupants of other roles than they themselves are (Akers, 1977; Benaquisto & Freed, 1996; Kauffman, 1981; Packard & Willower, 1972; Wheeler, 1961). For example, Klofas and Toch (1982) found that although only 37% of guards agreed with the position that "the best way to deal with inmates is to be firm," almost 70% believed that their fellow guards would agree with this statement. In explaining the tendency of role occupants to underestimate the most common of their private attitudes, researchers frequently point to the

disjunction between private attitudes and public behaviors that occurs in these contexts. As Toch and Klofas (1984) observed, the pressure to defend the ingroup's values results in prisoners' and guards' onstage behaviors being less sympathetic to the outgroup than their private views would dictate. Similarly, Benasquito and Freed (1996) noted that the views inmates expressed to their peers were less consistent with their private view than with "expectations of the code characterizing the inmate social system" (p. 504).

Social identities, of course, do not become salient only in formally structured intergroup contexts such as social institutions. Individuals are conscious of, and guided by, their social identities in virtually all intergroup contexts. An illustration of this fact and of the way it can lead to pluralistic ignorance is provided by the group conflict research of Ross and his colleagues (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995; Ross & Ward, 1996). For example, in one of their studies, the focal groups were college students who acknowledged having strong pro-choice versus pro-life views relevant to the ongoing abortion rights debates. These students were presented with a series of questions about abortion (e.g., what kind of abortion scenarios and considerations are common vs. uncommon; what positive consequences and what negative consequences would be likely to follow from a tightening of abortion restrictions, etc.) and were asked to give both their own responses to these questions and the responses they believed the average member of their group and the average member of the opposing group would give. The results indicated that the "pro-choice" and "pro-life" groups did differ from one another but not nearly as much as they assumed they did. Partisans tended to view not only members of the opposition but also the members of their own side as extremist and unduly influenced by ideology and bias. They perceived their own more moderate views as atypical vis-à-vis their group. The ingroup pluralistic ignorance and outgroup stereotyping that Robinson et al. (1995) observed may share a common source: The fact that partisans' public behavior reflected the sharply defined norms and positions of their social identity rather than their less-extreme positions of their private attitudes. Indeed, as the students told Robinson et al., "they rarely acknowledged to others the degree of ambivalence in their political beliefs—not in talking to their ideological allies and not in talking to their ideological adversaries (lest their concessions be exploited or misunderstood)" (Ross & Ward, 1996, p. 123).

Groups need not even have an explicit source of conflict, such as the legality of abortion, for there to be pressures on their members to differentiate themselves publicly from one another. The emergence of gender norms is a case in point. By the time children enter elementary school, they know what toys and activities are considered appropriate for each gender (Huston, 1983), the trait adjectives that typically describe girls and those that de-

scribe boys (Williams, Bennett, & Best, 1975), and the occupations that are traditionally held by men and those that are held by women (O'Keefe & Hyde, 1983). Moreover, they act on their knowledge of norms governing gender-appropriate behavior by, for example, preferring toys and activities considered appropriate for their gender and actively avoiding those considered appropriate for the opposite gender (Ruble, Balaban, & Cooper, 1981).

There may be little dispute that boys and girls have different social identities, but do these identities induce boys and girls to comply publicly with norms or ideals that they do not privately embrace? It appears that they do. Bacon and Lerner (1975) surveyed second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade girls about their mother's occupational status, their beliefs about women's employment opportunities, and their own occupational aspirations. They found that daughters of working mothers held quite egalitarian beliefs about the kinds of jobs men and women can do, and this egalitarianism increased with age. Yet, the girls uniformly indicated that they themselves would still choose traditional female occupations.

One of our own studies (Prentice, Girgus, & Miller, 1997) pursued the link between public conformity to prototypical gender norms and pluralistic ignorance among elementary school children. In this study, we asked fourth- and fifth-grade boys and girls to indicate their own beliefs about whether boys, girls, or both boys and girls like each of 30 toys and activities. Next, we asked them to indicate how they thought "other kids" would answer the same questions. Consistent with the prediction that children's beliefs would be characterized by pluralistic ignorance, we found that they expressed more egalitarian views when responding for themselves than for other children.

Finally, the mistaken impression that everyone supports the prototypical norms of a social category can arise even in the absence of widespread public conformity to those norms. It is often sufficient that those who do conform (even if the minority) receive disproportionate prominence. Indeed, the nature of group dynamics is such that those who embody a group's norms or ideals are given (or take) the spotlight and thus can provide a skewed view of the group. As an example, consider again the finding that prison inmates systematically underestimated the similarity of their attitudes to those of their peers, each assuming that his own position was more sympathetic toward the prison administration (Akers, 1977; Benaquisto & Freed, 1996; Kauffman, 1981; Toch & Klofas, 1984; Wheeler, 1961). Wheeler attributed this finding not to widespread public opposition to the prison authorities but to the fact that prison dynamics enabled a vocal minority of anti-administration prisoners to have a disproportionate degree of visibility within the prison. In his words, "much of the strength of the inmate culture may reside in the ability of anti-staff oriented inmates to attain positions of

high visibility within the inmate system, thereby generating and reinforcing the image of a culture marked in conflict with the values of the administration." (p. 291). In a similar vein, Klofas and Toch (1982) found that those guards and prisoners with the most hardline positions (subculture custodians, in their terms) were inclined to adopt self-appointed roles as spokesman for their respective constituencies. Packard and Willower (1972) also acknowledged that the pluralistic ignorance they observed among school teachers may have been triggered by witnessing custodial behavior in places of high visibility within the school.

The tendency of those who embody the norms of a group to find themselves in positions of high influence has been observed in less formal situations as well. For example, Newcomb, (1943) in his classic study of social life at Bennington College, noted that those students who espoused most vocally Bennington's tradition of liberalism tended to be popular and prominent in positions of leadership. Korte's (1972) study of social life at Vassar tied the greater prominence of cultural conformists to pluralistic ignorance more directly. Specifically, he attributed the finding that Vassar students perceived themselves to be less socially and politically liberal than the majority of their peers to the fact that those students who embodied the liberal values of the institutional norm tended to be particularly prominent and conspicuous on campus.

The mistaken perception of personal deviance among the majority may arise initially because of the high visibility of those minority members who best embody the prototypical group norms. It may be perpetuated, however, by the widespread public conformity it induces. The illusion of personal deviance that begins with the misinterpretation of the representativeness of a vocal minority is thus perpetuated by a misinterpretation of the conformity of a formerly silent majority.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, students of the relation between attitudes and behaviors have contributed significantly to our understanding of the nature and conditions of attitude-behavior consistency. In the process, they have made a number of choices regarding the kinds of situations and behaviors they would study and the kind of consistency they would try to predict. They have chosen to focus on correlational consistency between attitudes and reasoned or planned actions, a strategy that seems to us quite sensible if the goal is to improve models of behavioral prediction. At the same time, this strategy has left a wide range of behaviors and many interesting questions about attitude-behavior consistency unexplored.

Our purpose in this chapter has been to examine the relation of attitudes to a very different type of behavior—the behavior that is enacted in public settings. Public behavior is rarely reasoned or planned; instead it is spontaneous and negotiated. It is intended for public, rather than for private consumption and therefore is enacted always with an eye to how it will be viewed by others. As a result, public behavior is heavily influenced by social norms that dictate what is appropriate or inappropriate. These norms derive from the demands of social etiquette, the identities associated with social groups, or even just the behaviors enacted by peers. Their effect is to reduce variation in behavior across individuals and thereby to render private attitudes useless as behavioral predictors.

Given the many forces that pull public behaviors away from private attitudes, it might seem puzzling, or even perverse, that we have chosen to focus on the relation between the two. But, in fact, our choice has been dictated not by a desire to assess or increase the consistency of these thoughts and deeds, but instead by an interest in the psychological and social consequences of their disjunction. These consequences turn out to be considerable, for social perceivers are naive consistency theorists who assume that public actions offer a valid reflection of private views. When, as is often the case, they do not, the result is pluralistic ignorance, a self-perpetuating cycle of erroneous inference and social misunderstanding. We have analyzed a number of cases of pluralistic ignorance in an attempt to illustrate how it functions as both a cause and a consequence of literal inconsistency between private attitudes and public behaviors.

Despite our focus on attitude–behavior inconsistency, the implications of our analysis for efforts to improve behavioral prediction and modification are quite heartening. Cases of pluralistic ignorance provide a fundamental insight into the nature of social life: Its private and public components are largely disjointed. Private experiences frequently occur without public acknowledgment, and public actions often belie private views. As a result, attempts to change public behaviors by changing private attitudes will not be effective unless some effort is also made to bridge the boundary between the public and the private. Only when individuals' private conversions are brought into public awareness—only when they realize that their new attitudes are shared by their peers—will they feel at liberty to act on them.

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