

Department of Psychology Distinguished Speaker



Dr. Duane T. Wegener (Ohio State University)

Attitude strength and weakness: Metacognitive focus and motivational influences

ABSTRACT

Much research has indicated that people act in ways that are consistent with “strong” attitudes. That is, attitudes that are held with confidence, that are accessible in memory, or that are based on high levels of elaboration often last longer over time, better resist change, or impact related thinking and behavior. Across a number of settings, however, I and my colleagues have identified instances of more attitude-consistent thinking and behavior when existing attitudes would appear relatively weak rather than strong.

In particular, this talk will focus on attitudes held with ambivalence or with doubt. Ambivalence and doubt are associated with motivations to reduce the discomfort associated with the precarious nature of the attitude. In varied contexts including persuasive message processing, selective exposure to information, and attraction to attitudinally similar others, ambivalent or doubtful attitudes can lead to more attitude-consistent thinking and action.

Such effects appear most likely in contexts where one engages in meta-cognitive reflection about the implications of the social target for one’s own attitude. Implications for attitude strength and attitude-behavior consistency will be discussed.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Wegener received his PhD from Ohio State in 1994. After serving as Assistant Professor of Psychology at Yale University for three years, he joined Purdue University in 1997 as an Associate Professor and was promoted to Professor in 2003. He joined the Ohio State Social Psychology faculty starting in the summer of 2010. Wegener’s research focuses on attitudes and persuasion, especially influences on the amount and nature of information processing and the consequences of the resulting attitudes for later thinking and behavior. His research also extends theories of attitudes and persuasion to related domains, such as stereotyping, impression formation, and judgment and decision making. In 2001, he received the American Psychological Association (APA) Early Career Award for distinguished contributions to the science of social psychology. Wegener is a Section Editor for the *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, and has been an Associate Editor for *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* and the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. He is also on the Editorial Boards of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

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