

# Attitudes: Shaping and Forming Our Behavior

Emma Evans

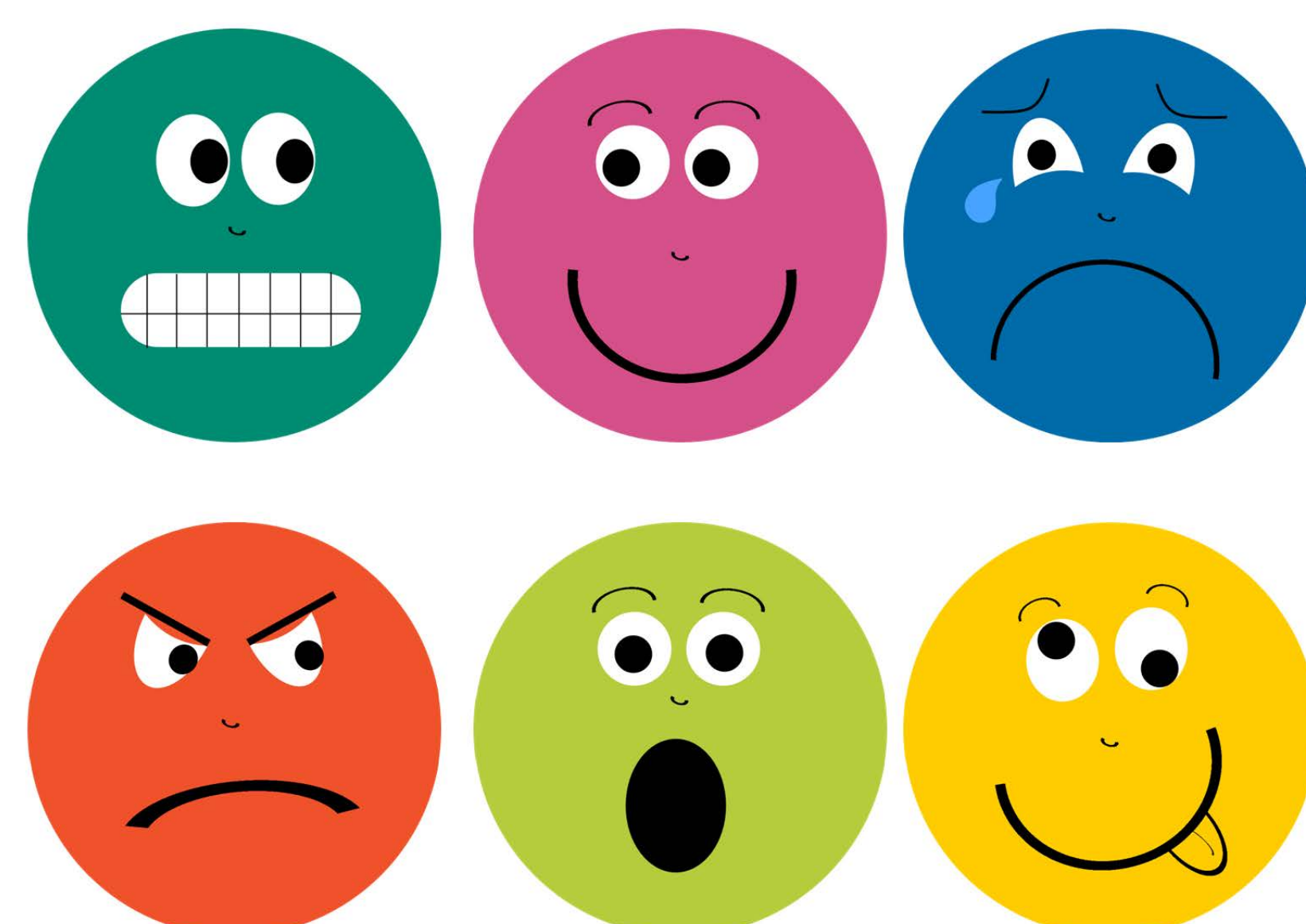
Melisa Naylor Psychology 100

## What is an Attitude?

An attitude can be defined as one's way of expressing an underlying or an outward emotion. More specifically, however, an attitude is a set or series of thoughts, emotions and beliefs that are externally projected about a specific subject or topic (Bilz & Nadler, 2014).

In psychological terms, it is a learned practice that is used by people to assess and react to different scenarios in a particular way.

These can include our assessment of people, groups, issues and other culturally significant topics. These assessments are generally either positive or negative. However, sometimes, it is a mixture of both positive or negative feelings.



## The Three Components

Cognitive:  
thoughts  
& beliefs

Affective: how the thoughts  
and beliefs make you feel

Behavioral: how the attitude influences  
your behavior

## Implicit vs. Explicit

Explicit=we know we  
have them and show them

Implicit=we do not we  
have them nor show them

An implicit attitude can still  
affect our behavior towards  
others, even though we are  
unaware of them

We know that our  
explicit attitudes affect  
our behaviors and  
beliefs, it is an *outward*  
reflection

## The Formation

### 1. Experience

Personal Experience

Observation

### 2. Social Factors

*Social Roles*: how  
people are expected to  
behave in a certain  
situation

*Social Norms*: societal  
rules for what is  
appropriate

### 3. Learning

Classical Conditioning:  
biological stimulus is  
paired with neutral  
stimulus (i.e. Pavlov)

Operant Conditioning:  
behavior is modified by  
punishment or reward

## Overall Impact on Behavior

Sometimes, our behavior and our attitudes are not directly aligned. We have the ability to alter our attitudes to parallel our behaviors.

Cognitive Dissonance: when there is psychological distress due to conflict of thoughts and beliefs.

Overall however, attitudes play a major role in our behavior. Depending on what your attitude is toward gun-control, it will affect your behavior around guns. You may be more weary of them if you are for gun-control or you can be more comfortable around them if you are against it.

## It Shapes The World!

Attitudes shape the world in many ways, more ways than we could imagine. The structure of a school can impact a child's attitude and therefore, his/her behavior (Frerichs et al., 2015). Moreover, a group's attitude will affect behavior on an individualistic level (Meeus et al., 2009).

In public school systems, it is also common in pre-adolescent children, that their attitude toward bullying will affect, project and influence their behavior (Nesdale & Scarlett, 2004).

In the mental health field it is said that our attitudes, as a society, are directly influential on those who suffer from a mental health disorder (Martin et al., 2000).

