

This Week's Citation Classic

Wicker A W. Attitudes versus actions: the relationship of verbal and overt behavioral responses to attitude objects. *J. Soc. Issues* 25:41-78, 1969. [University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI]

This article reviewed the empirical research on the attitude-behavior relationship. The major conclusion was, 'It is considerably more likely that attitudes will be unrelated or only slightly related to overt behaviors than that attitudes will be closely related to actions.' [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI®) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*™ (SSCI™) indicate that this paper has been cited over 270 times since 1969.]

Allan W. Wicker
Faculty in Psychology
Claremont Graduate School
Claremont, CA 91711

July 27, 1979

"This article was, to a considerable extent, the result of a personal need I felt in the late 1960s to establish the social significance of the attitude concept and related research. I had completed in 1965 an MA thesis that compared the accuracy of prediction of two models of attitude change, and was somewhat disillusioned by the experience. Attitude changes of small magnitude were relatively easy to obtain from undergraduates in the laboratory, but I doubted that the changes had much enduring significance. I began to wonder whether people's attitudes were, in fact, influential guides to their everyday actions, as many social psychologists seemed to assume.

"I decided to explore the issue more systematically. One of the ten propositions that I formulated for my PhD oral examination asserted that the criteria routinely applied to measures of attitudes (such as sensitivity, reliability, and validity) ought also to be applied to overt behaviors.

"A research grant from the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where in 1967 I took my first faculty position, allowed me to pursue this interest further. With the help of two undergraduates, I searched the social science literature for studies in which individuals' attitudes and overt behaviors toward the same object had been measured on separate occasions. I excluded from the review studies in which self-reports were the sole behavioral measures. The criteria were rather stringent, but were in keeping with the prevailing assumption about attitudes.

"The manuscript was published in the second journal to which it was submitted. The editor of the leading psychological journal which published literature reviews rejected it on the advice of two reviewers.

"I can think of several possible reasons why the paper has been frequently cited: 1) Its major conclusion challenged an implicit assumption held by many social psychologists; 2) it provided the first systematic review of the literature in this area; and 3) shortly after it was published I mailed out several hundred unsolicited reprints to attitude researchers.

"Numerous articles have appeared on this topic since my 1969 review. Some writers have sought to defend the attitude concept; others have suggested theoretical refinements of the issue or have provided new empirical data. (An updated summary of the attitude-behavior literature is in preparation by Richard J. Hill, an early researcher in this area.¹) Shortly after my review appeared I published an empirical paper examining the influence of selected other variables on the attitude-behavior relationship,² and then turned to other (less frequently cited, but more promising) research interests."

1. Hill R J. The attitude-behavior relationship: a review. (Rosenberg M & Turner R, eds.) *Sociological perspectives on social psychology*. New York: Basic Books. In press.
2. Wicker A W. An examination of the "other variables" explanation of attitude-behavior inconsistency. *J. Personal. Soc. Psychol.* 19:18-30, 1971.