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In Memoriam

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In Memoriam

Martin Fishbein

Martin Fishbein, responsible for one of the most important theoretical treatments of attitude structure, the relationship between attitude and behavior, and the design of behavioral interventions (particularly in reducing health risks such as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, AIDS), died November 27, 2009, while traveling with his wife, Deborah Fishbein, in London. He was 73 years old.

Marty joined the University of Illinois social psychology and Institute of Communications Research faculties in 1961, moving to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) in 1992, where he served as Acting Chief of the Behavioral Interventions and Research Branch of the division responsible for the prevention of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and STIs (sexually transmitted infections). Since 1997 he was the Harry C. Coles Jr. Distinguished Professor of Communication and Director of the Health Communication Program in the Public Policy Center of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

In the 1960s, his expectancy-value theory explained how cognitive associations about an object (i.e., beliefs) and the evaluative aspects of these associations become integrated into an attitude. This model became the dominant conceptual framework for thinking about attitude formation and change. Displaying a profound and career-long interest in how attitudes affected “real world” behavior, Marty was attracted to both voter and consumer behavior, the latter interest helping to forge a working relationship with Joel Cohen and some of his doctoral students (Rich Lutz, Olli Ahtola, Bob Burnkrant). Marty’s contributions to consumer behavior have been recognized through his election as President of the Society for Consumer Psychology and his receipt of that organization’s Distinguished Scientific Award as well as the American Marketing Association’s Paul D. Converse Award.

Together with his former student Icek Ajzen, Marty pursued his landmark work on the relationship between attitudes and behavior, publishing *Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research* in 1975 and formulating what became known as the theory of reasoned action (TRA). This theory has had a profound impact on basic attitude research as well as on the application of social psychology to the solution of social problems, often through behavior change interventions implied by the model.

The TRA assumes that human behavior, although not necessarily rational, follows reasonably from the information people have about a behavior of interest. The behavior’s perceived positive and negative consequences produce an attitude toward the behavior, and the perceived normative expectations of important others produce perceived social pressure, or a subjective norm, to engage or not engage in the behavior. Numerous studies have shown that, together, these attitudes and subjective norms predict intentions to engage in the behavior and that intentions are good predictors of actual behavior. A review of this work can be found in a just-published monograph by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, *Predicting and Changing Behavior: The Reasoned Action Approach* (New York: Psychology Press, 2010).

Starting in the 1980s, Marty’s interests and publications have focused largely on health promotion and media effects. Marty used the logic of the TRA to predict health behavior as well as to develop and test real-life interventions designed to produce safer sex and safer drug-use behaviors. He was one of the principal investigators of the CDC’s Community

Demonstration Projects that reached people at very high risk for HIV/AIDS. Using a quasi-experimental design, messages based on TRA principles made significant strides toward HIV/AIDS risk reduction, and changes of behavior were themselves predicted by changes in attitudes and intentions. TRA principles and methods also proved successful when applied to HIV counseling not only for self-reported behavior but also for actual infection rates. Following a careful analysis of media effects, Marty and his colleagues (writing in the *American Journal of Public Health*) identified PSA (public service announcements) factors with the potential to trigger boomerang effects of anti-drug campaigns, including lack of realism, low learning facilitation, and use of negative emotions. Marty also pursued extensive experimental work on the issue of sex-partner selection, observing that high-sensation seekers are attracted to the riskier available partners.

A recognized leader in HIV/AIDS prevention, Fishbein served on the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Mental Health AIDS Research Review Committee and on the NIMH AIDS Policy Subcommittee of the National Advisory Mental Health Council and was a special consultant on behavior and behavior change for the NIMH AIDS research program. At the CDC, Marty was honored by receiving the CDC's Charles C. Shepard Science Award for Scientific Excellence, and in 2003 he received the American Public Health Association's Mayhew Derryberry Award for outstanding contributions to health education, health promotion, and health communication research and theory.

Joel Cohen
Icek Ajzen
Dolores Albarracin