

Implications of Behavioral Theory for Developing Persuasive Communications

Martin Fishbein

Annenberg Public Policy Center

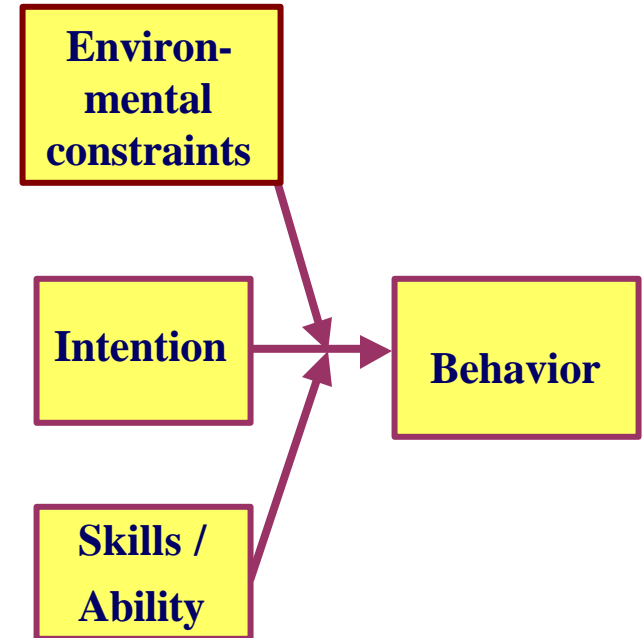
University of Pennsylvania

Despite rumors to the contrary, there is very good evidence that, when properly measured, intentions are very good predictors of behavior.

This is as true for intentions to smoke (or quit smoking) cigarettes or marijuana, as it is for intentions to take a screening test, to use a condom, or to exercise.

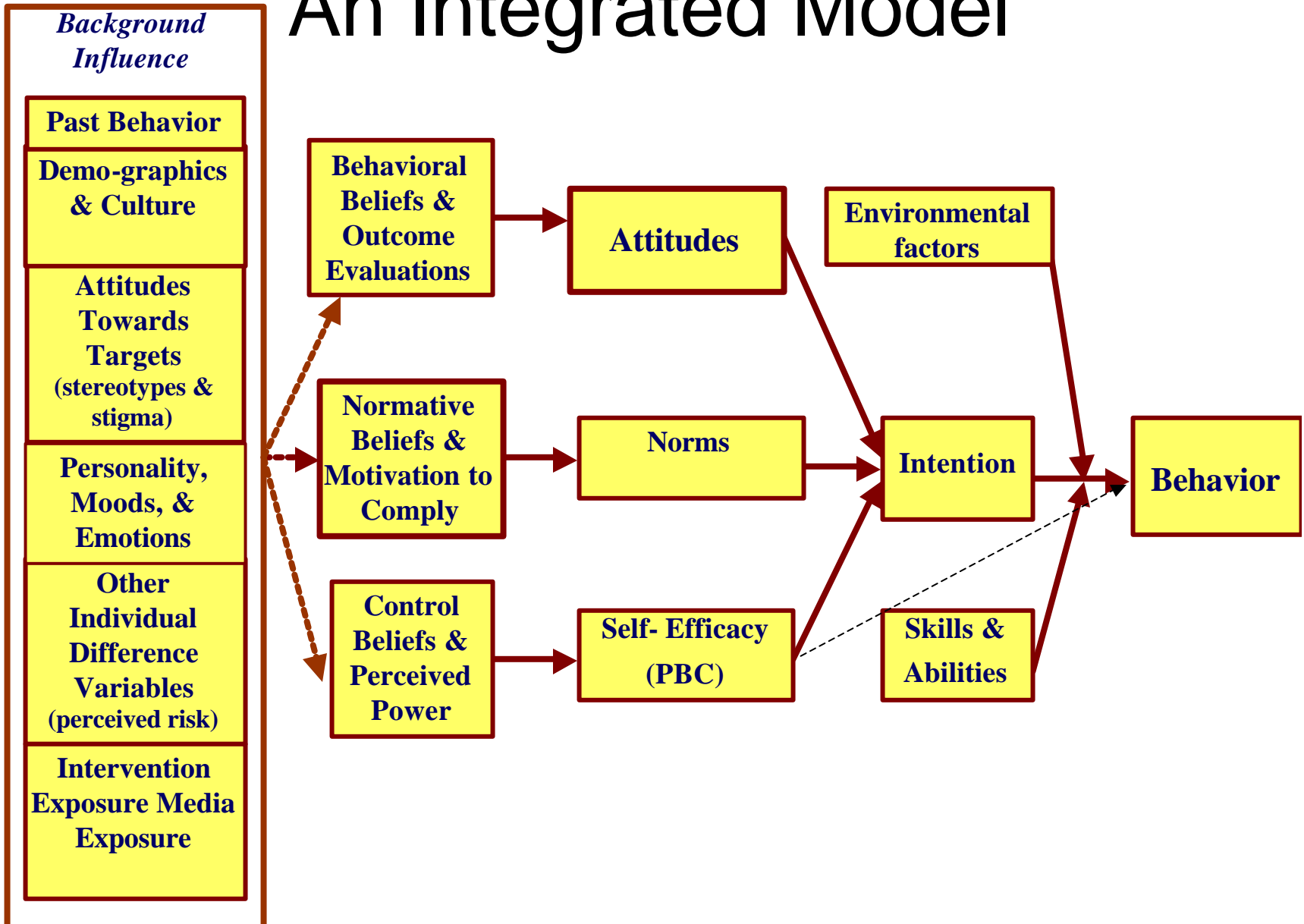
It's important to recognize however, that people do not, or can not, always act on their intentions.

An Integrated Model



Clearly, very different communications (or interventions) are necessary for people who have formed the appropriate intention but are not acting upon it, than for people who do not hold the intention.

An Integrated Model



**Figure 3 - An integrative model predicting intentions to use marijuana:
Findings from an adolescent sample of ever users**

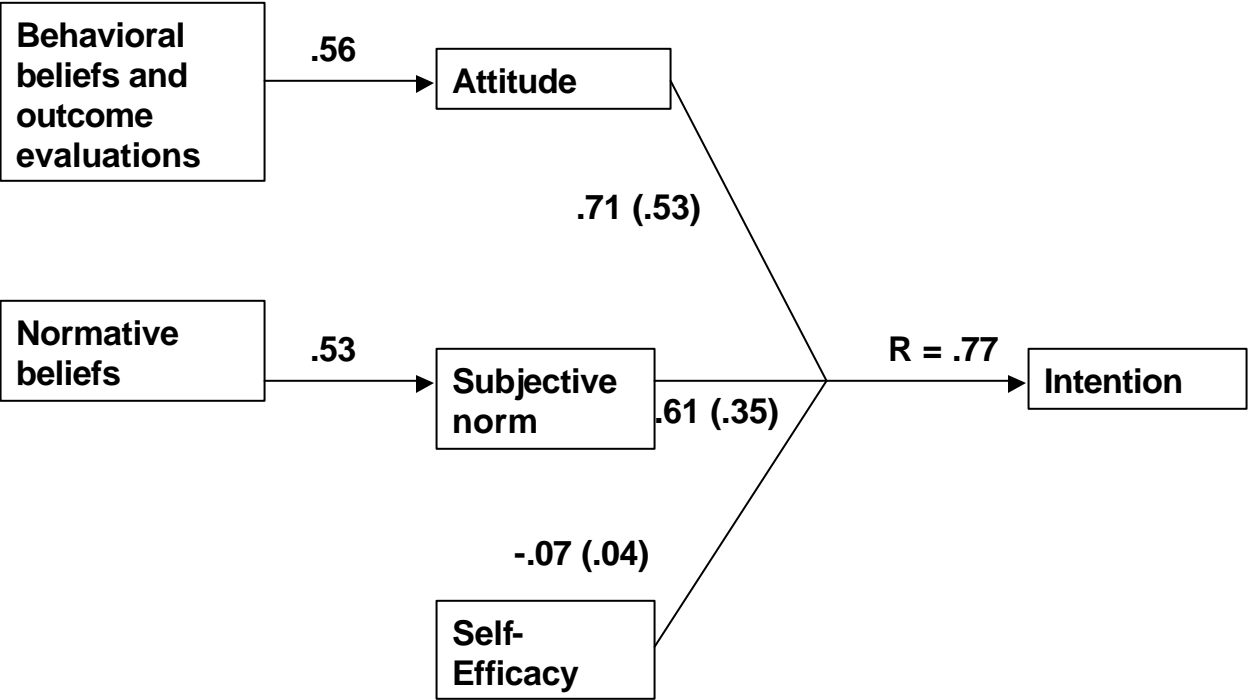


Figure 24 - Correlations between Outcome beliefs and the intention to use marijuana almost every month with mean scores for intenders and non-intenders

Item Name	Correlation With Intention	Non- Intenders	Intenders
Get away from my problems	.178	-0.87	-0.47#
Become more creative	.263	-0.86	0.27
Be like other teens my age	.148	-0.30	0.20#
Have good time with friends	.437	-0.67	1.27
Damage my brain	-.071	1.35	1.33#
Damage my lungs	-.178	1.45	0.80
Become forgetful	-.214	0.97	0.13
Feel tired	-.130	1.00	0.60#
Upset Parents	-.102	1.46	1.27#
Lose motivation	-.248	1.01	-0.00
Start avoiding problems	-.132	0.53	-0.00#
Be a loser	-.365	0.58	-1.20
Lose friends respect	-.334	0.74	-0.80
Start using stronger drugs	-.276	0.28	-0.93
Lose ambition	-.257	0.75	-0.20
Decrease judgment	-.274	0.99	-0.13

= no significant difference between means.

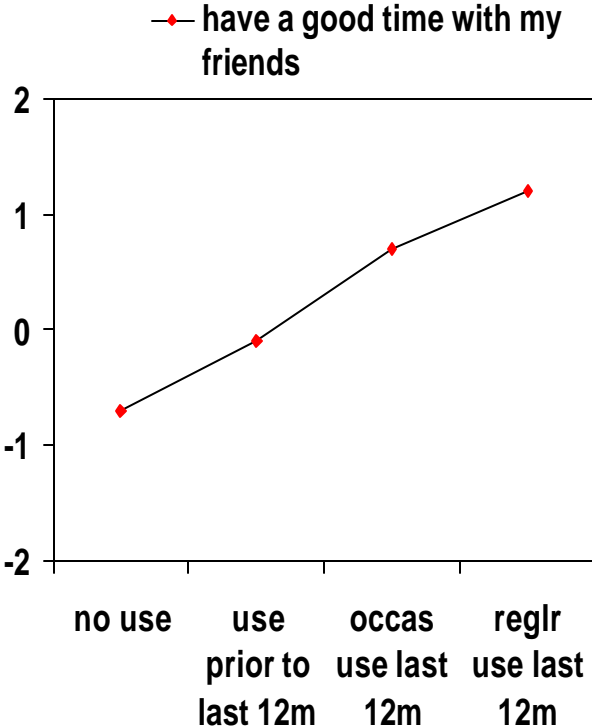
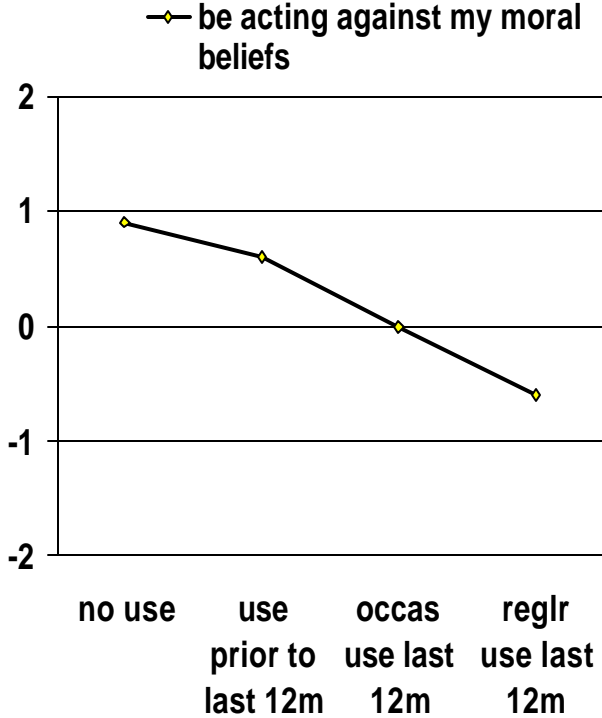
Figure 28 - Correlations between the Normative Belief Scale (and the items comprising the scale) with the intention to use marijuana almost every month and the mean scale and individual item scores for both intenders and non-intenders

Scale or Item Name	Alpha	Correlation With Intention	Non- Intenders	Intenders
NORMATIVE BELIEFS	.79	.581	-1.53	-0.32
Friends		.469	-1.37	0.39
Parents/Caregivers		.387	-1.88	-1.23
Girl/Boyfriend		.564	-1.43	0.77
Grandparents		.389	-1.87	-0.92
Teachers		.393	-1.84	-1.15
People your age		.312	-0.76	0.23

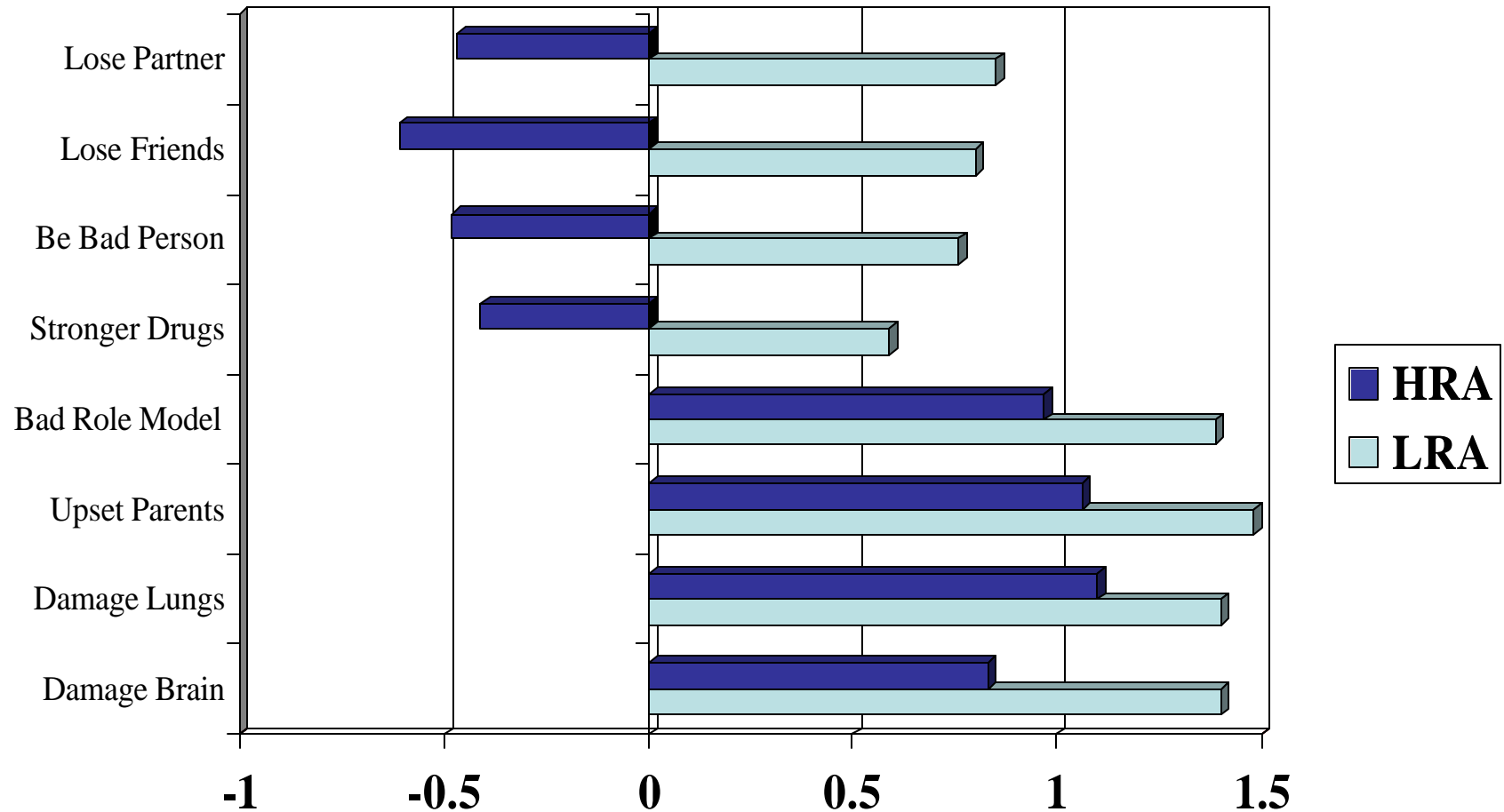
Figure 29 - Correlations between the Efficacy Beliefs Scale (and the items comprising the scale) with the intention to use marijuana almost every month and the mean scale and individual item scores for both intenders and non-intenders

Scale or Item Name	Alpha	Correlation With Intention	Non- Intenders	Intenders
SELF EFFICACY ITEMS	.91	-.380	1.44	0.41
Party where most use		-.328	1.22	0.37
Close friend suggests		-.352	1.38	0.20
Feel sad and bored		-.366	1.52	0.13
Offered on school property		-.218	1.70	1.00
Friends house w/o parents		-.288	1.36	0.33

Figure 10 -Beliefs about using marijuana nearly every month as a function of prior use



Negative Behavioral Beliefs from Unlikely (-2) to Likely (+2)



All HRA, LRA comparisons significantly different, $p < .05$

All correlate significantly with intention to use regularly

- Message content: Which belief is a target candidate?
 1. Strong correlation with intention/behavior
 2. Variance → enough people who do not hold the belief
 3. Amendable → can we craft a convincing message?

**Alternatively, one could try to
prime beliefs**

A comparison of media priming theory and theory of behavioral prediction: A hypothetical example of effects on attitude.

Condition	Predicted attitude	Association of belief A with attitude	Mean Strength of belief A	Association of belief B with Attitude	Mean strength of belief B
Baseline	-0.8	-.3	1	.5	-1
Intervention primes belief A	-1.0	-.5	1	.5	-1
Intervention changes mean belief A	-1.1	-.3	2	.5	-1
Intervention primes and changes mean of belief A	-1.5	-.5	2	.5	-1

Note. Beliefs measured on -2 (very unlikely) to +2 (very likely) scale.

Belief A: marijuana use damages your brains;

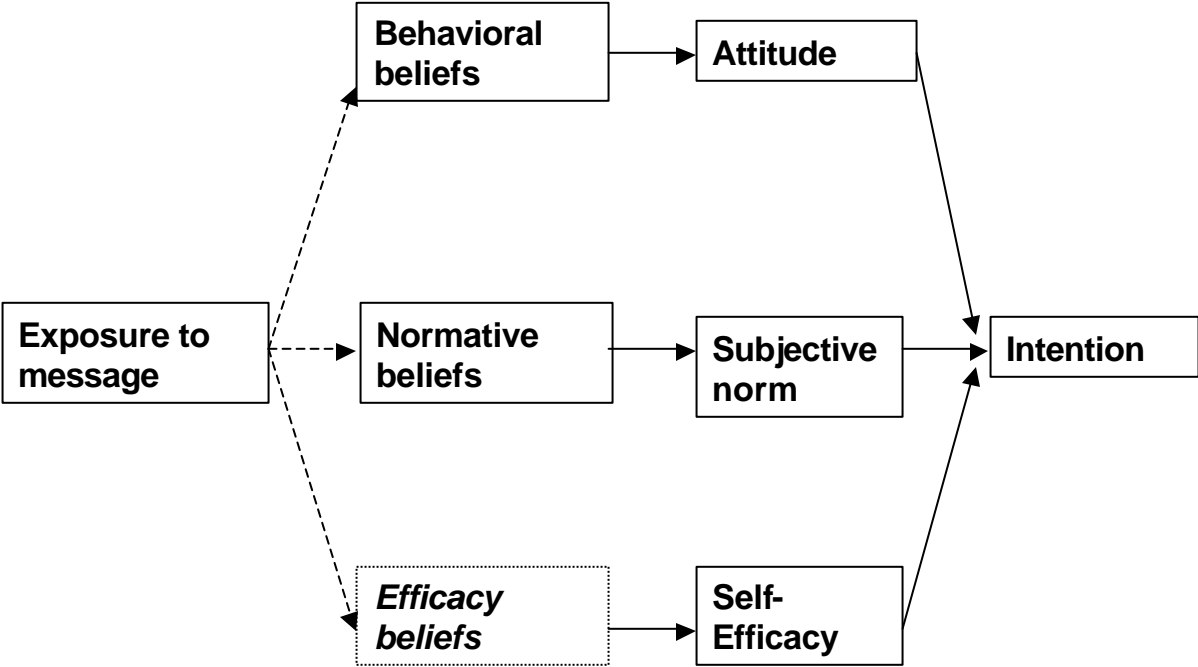
Belief B: marijuana use leads to acceptance by friends.

Predicted attitude = (regression weight of belief A * mean of belief A) +
(regression weight of belief B * mean of belief B)

Example adapted from Cappella et al. (2000).

Theories of behavioral prediction help us to identify the critical behavioral, normative or control beliefs that have to be addressed if one wishes to reinforce or change any given behavior. But they do not tell us how to reinforce or change those beliefs!!

Figure 2 - An integrative model



**After more than 60 years of research,
we still know very little about the
factors that determine whether a
person will or will not accept (and
yield to) a given piece of information!!!**

If we're going to understand the impact of communication on behavior, it is necessary to distinguish between reception, acceptance, yielding and impact.

Reception: The message said X is Y

Acceptance: I believe X is Y

Yielding: There has been a change in the belief that X is Y

Impact: There has been a change in other beliefs about X

Can we develop theories of acceptance of, and yielding to , the content of persuasive communication?

Can we develop theories of what does (or does not) make a message “effective”?