

APA AWARD

Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions: Richard E. Petty



Citation

“For outstanding contributions to understanding attitudes and social influence, especially the development of the *elaboration likelihood model* (ELM) which identified relatively thoughtful and nonthoughtful routes to persuasion along with the different antecedents (e.g., personal relevance; need for cognition) and consequences (e.g., attitude stability, prediction of behavior) of the two paths. The ELM presaged many issues that became prominent in other dual-process and system theories. Richard E. Petty’s notable contributions also extend to work on embodied cognition, attitude strength, metacognition (especially bias correction and self-validation processes), research methods, and the training of many graduate students and postdocs who have gone on to prominent careers.”

Biography

Richard E. Petty was born in New York City into a modest and loving military family as the oldest of three siblings, who are among the best people he knows. As an Air Force “brat,” he never lived in the same city for more than 4 years during the first 26 years of his life. His career has focused on examining attitudes and persuasion, an interest fostered as a high school debater in Yorktown, Virginia. In that role, he learned that which sources you can quote were often more important (to the judges, at least) than the merit of the arguments. That

takeaway did not help him win any “debates” with his father who agreed that the source mattered most, as in “just do it because I said so.” Nor did that insight help him to win arguments with his grad school housemate and best friend John Cacioppo (a prior recipient of this award who passed away much too early). Cacioppo had the opposite philosophy: “Who needs sources when you have the facts and can reason it out for yourself.” The notion that for effective persuasion, sometimes it mattered who said it but at other times what was said mattered more became a research theme.

Following high school, Petty attended the University of Virginia where he earned his BA in political science and psychology, the first in his family to earn a college degree. At the University of Virginia, two life-changing events occurred. First, he met his phenomenal wife, Lynn, who has supported him continuously despite his idiosyncratic work habits. Notably, she collaborated with him on his most consequential project—producing and raising two incredible twin daughters, Annette and Dianna, one of whom when asked in kindergarten what her father did for work replied, “just type, type, type.”

A second critical event came his junior year when he joined a graduate course on attitudes taught by an assistant professor and University of Michigan’s PhD James Lubalin. He subsequently recommended that Petty attend arch football rival, Ohio State University (OSU), for graduate work because that was where the most current research on attitudes was being conducted. Following that recommendation, Petty arrived in Columbus only to discover that the three famous OSU attitudes faculty (Timothy Brock, Anthony Greenwald, and Thomas Ostrom) had become largely disinterested in the topic, having moved on to what they considered more promising issues. Nonetheless, Petty profited from their sage advice (as well as that of John Harvey and Bibb Latané), but he was especially lucky to be assigned to visiting faculty member and future National Academy of Sciences inductee Robert Cialdini as his first-year mentor. Cialdini was near the beginning of his illustrious career in social influence and has remained a friend and supporter ever since.

OSU provided an immensely stimulating intellectual environment then (and now). Yes, the faculty were wonderful, but the graduate students were out of this world. The most important member of the class (for Petty) was the aforementioned Cacioppo with whom he developed two of his most

influential contributions, the *elaboration likelihood model* of persuasion which began in Petty's dissertation but then was extended into a broader theory (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the *need for cognition scale* (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). The freshman class at OSU also included Gary Wells (a subsequent Association for Psychological Science Cattell Fellow), with whom Petty collaborated on several articles. One introduced a manipulation of argument quality as a tool for assessing the extent of information processing (Petty et al., 1976), and another reported an early study on embodied cognition (Wells & Petty, 1980). With two such inspirational members in one's cohort, there was no excuse not to do good work. While at OSU, Petty was also fortunate to work with amazing grad students and postdocs from other labs (especially Kipling Williams and Stephen Harkins).

After graduating from OSU in 1977, Petty took a position at the University of Missouri where he enjoyed 9 fulfilling years. At Mizzou, his impressive social psychology colleagues included Robert Arkin, Harris Cooper, and Russell Geen. His first doctoral advisee, Martin Heesacker, earned his degree in counseling psychology and reinforced how important and generative bright graduate students could be in fostering excellent research. Other Missouri students who were tremendous collaborators and took academic paths were David Schumann, Curtis Haugtvedt, and Alan Strathman. Strathman moved from Missouri to Ohio State with Petty when he returned there in 1987 and became his first OSU PhD and lifelong friend.

Petty has remained at OSU throughout his career, where he is now distinguished university professor of psychology, only taking leave for short sabbaticals at Yale and Princeton. Since returning to OSU, he has had the privilege of working with a remarkable collection of insightful postdoctoral fellows (including David DeSteno, Daniel Rovenpor, Steve Smith, Paul White) and 33 extraordinarily talented graduate students. The importance of their input to their shared work cannot be overstated, and the pride Petty feels at their subsequent independent research activities is huge. Nearly all of these individuals have worked on persuasion topics, but each has also made other noteworthy contributions. Petty's research with his students has ranged from the development of new theories such as the *flexible correction model* (Duane Wegener; Wegener & Petty, 1997) and *self-validation theory* (Pablo Briñol; Briñol & Petty, 2022) to understanding various attitude strength constructs (Petty & Krosnick, 1995) such as *certainty* (George Bizer, Derek Rucker; Brittany Shoots-Reinhard, Zakary Tormala), *ambivalence* (Geoffrey Durso, Joseph Priester, Joseph Siev), *morality* (Andrew Luttrell, Jacob Teeny, Benjamin Wagner, Mengran Xu), *affective-cognitive bases* (Leandre Fabrigar, Ya Hui Michelle See), *social identity* (Monique Fleming), *elaboration* (Jamie Barden), *implicit-explicit discrepancies* (India Johnson, Patrick Vargas), and

links to the *self* (Ken DeMarree, Christian Wheeler). Working with these outstanding scientists (and cherished friends) has been the joy of his career.

In addition to the students just noted with flourishing academic careers, there are those who found great success in government or private industry (Sara Baker, Jennifer Belding, Lisa Evans, Lucas Hinsenkamp, Blair Jarvis, Brandon Kopp, Chris Loersch, Michael McCaslin, Nicholas Wright). Petty has also found it gratifying to co-author multiple articles with some mentees of his own students (i.e., academic grandchildren), including those of Briñol (Ana Cancela, Miguel Cárda, Bea Gandarillas, Margarita Gascó, Javier Horcajo, Gregorios Lamprinakos, Lorena Moreno, Borja Paredes, Maria Stavraki, Blanca Requero, David Santos), Fabrigar (Joshua Guyer, Thomas Vaughan-Johnston), Tormala (Joshua Clarkson), Wegener (Kevin Blankenship, Yi-Wen Chien, Jason Clark, Chung-Chiang Hsiao, Aviva Philipp-Muller, Vanessa Sawicki, Mark Susmann, Laura Wallace), and Wheeler (Kim Rios). Furthermore, he is delighted to have published with and learned from his stellar OSU faculty colleagues over the years including Marilyn Brewer, John Cacioppo, Patrick Carroll, William Cunningham, Jon Krosnick, Russell Fazio, William von Hippel, Gifford Weary, and Duane Wegener. Even OSU faculty with whom he has not written articles (Robert Arkin, Tanya Chartrand, Jennifer Crocker, Kentaro Fujita, Lisa Libby, Keith Payne, Philip Tetlock, Ellen Peters, Steven Spencer, Dylan Wagner, Baldwin Way) contributed to making the OSU program the most hospitable and invigorating environment possible. Finally, working with first-rate non-OSU faculty (Adam Duhachek, Teresa Garcia-Marques, Andy Geers, Ángel Gómez, Marie Krousel-Wood, Spike Lee, Tara MacDonald, Bernadette Park, Rebecca Reczek) also has been exciting.

The research that Petty and collaborators have done, funded largely by the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and currently the Templeton Foundation, fits within Bill McGuire's contextualist approach in that rather than finding "the" effect of variables or "the" process by which they operate, it aims to uncover the different moderating and mediating variables that produce social influence in different situations and for different people. This work has resulted in nine books and over 450 articles, which have amassed over 180,000 Google Scholar citations. Among the honors received for this output are election to fellow status in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association for Psychological Science, and five divisions of the American Psychological Association. Other honors include receiving the Scientific Impact Award from the Society of Experimental Social Psychology, the Ostrom Award for career contributions to social cognition from the Person Memory Interest Group, and Distinguished Scientific Career Contribution Awards from the Societies for Consumer Psychology, Personality and Social

Psychology, Experimental Social Psychology, and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology's Attitudes and Social Influence group.

His various service contributions to the field include stints as president of the Midwestern Psychological Association, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and the Foundation for Personality and Social Psychology. His editorial work includes terms as editor of the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, associate editor of *Emotion and Scientific Reports*, service on the editorial boards of 15 other outlets, and chairing the society committees that founded three journals: *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, and *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. He also participated as a consultant/panelist for various federal agencies including the National Academy of Sciences, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

Petty plans to retire one day, of course, but for now he appreciates working with his current graduate students (Darcy Acevedo-Torres, Brett Burton, Sydney Williams) and postdoc (James Hillman) and relishes the recent completion of an edited volume on personalized persuasion with two former students (Petty et al., in press).

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