The Dynamics of Persuasion
Communication and Attitudes in the 21st Century
Second Edition
THE DYNAMICS OF PERSUASION
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Writing a second edition has different challenges and joys than preparing the first edition of a book. The second time around, one has the benefit of looking over the work one has done; a skeleton is in place. Initially, one also feels like an alter ego to one's self, worrying, wondering, and bemused, curious whether one's voice the second time around has changed, and daunted by the sheer volume of work that must be done.

In the end, though, it turned out to be very rewarding to write this book, as I realized that I had the opportunity to express the ideas that had been percolating in my mind since the first edition came out in 1993. I also had the chance to reflect, as best as I could, on changes that have occurred in the world and the academic study of persuasion since 1993. It was a challenging, stimulating opportunity, and I thank Lawrence Erlbaum Associates for giving me this shot at revising and modernizing The Dynamics of Persuasion.

Obviously, a great deal has happened in our world, from the events of September 11, 2001 to Bill Clinton's impeachment to O. J. Simpson. The Internet, not a force to be dealt with (persuasively speaking) in '93, is a major player in the media landscape today, as are multiple cultural and lifestyle changes that have implications for the study of persuasive communication. In academia, the major models that dominated the field in the early '90s are still dominant today. However, much research on attitudes, cognitive processing, fear appeals, advertising, and communication campaigns has been conducted, requiring a new book that incorporates the findings and their practical applications. I suppose I have changed as well. As one gets older, one is more attuned to the ways in which research fits into the giant trajectory of life—the big picture of society and human nature. Thus, the second edition places more emphasis on appreciating the role that theory and research play in persuasion as it occurs in American society, as well as on ethical implications of ideas and research.
The focus on theory, concepts, and basic research remains. The book is organized in generally the same way as the first edition. However, in an effort to modernize, reflect the field, and connect with readers, particularly students, I have done much rewriting—actually new writing. Although the format is similar and the skeleton of the '93 book remains, this is, in many ways, a new book, one that I hope will be useful and stimulating to students, professors, and other interested readers.

In an effort to incorporate the voluminous research on attitudes and persuasion that has been conducted over the past decade, I have expanded discussion of attitude structure, functions, and measurement. A chapter on attitude formation, which focused to a considerable degree on advertising, has been eliminated, and replaced with a chapter on advertising and persuasion (chapter 11). Social judgment theory, formerly discussed in an entire chapter, has been placed (more appropriately, I believe) in an early chapter on attitudes.

One of the most complex, but ultimately gratifying, tasks involved integrating theory with the everyday practice of persuasion. The first is heady, the second down-to-earth. Theory is abstract and full of possibilities; real life is limited, fraught with structures, institutions, and psychological systems that do not easily bend or wither in response to new ideas. Real life, which can be unforgiving, terribly sad, and cruel, can also be exhilarating and full of passion. It is ultimately the arena in which persuasion theories and research play out, and so I moved restlessly back and forth from theoretical abstractions to complex and messy everyday life. The new edition provides numerous examples of persuasion in action, ranging from the Clinton impeachment (chapter 2) to Nike's advertising (chapter 11) to ways to be a more effective persuader (chapters 5–7). It also emphasizes critical persuasion contexts, such as health and politics. As is my style, I discuss these issues in various chapters—not one place—as applications of theory and research.

The book emphasizes the basic simplicity and importance of persuasion, while also detailing its complex effects and multiple processes by which communications influence audiences. Thus, interactions among concepts and explanations as to why communications change attitudes receive a lot of discussion. Perhaps it would be nice if we could come up with simple answers to all persuasion's questions, but we cannot, and thus the job of a book writer is to summarize the complexities in an interesting way that intelligent people can appreciate. I hope I have succeeded in this goal.

Students will notice that I provide a lot of citations of others' research, using the conventional social science method (name, followed by the year the work was published). I have done this to give credit to scholars who pioneered ideas and conducted valuable research, and to provide a place for students to pursue ideas in more detail at a later point in time.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Usually, writing acknowledgments is an entirely positive and pleasant experience. Unfortunately, several sad events occurred as I wrote this book. Two people who helped me over the years passed away. Jack Matthews, a professor of speech communication at the University of Pittsburgh, had faith in me when I entered the Master’s program at Pitt in 1973. Jack was a friend who showed me that communication study could be a positive, intellectually interesting way to spend one’s professional life. Steve Chaffee, with whom I worked as a graduate student at Wisconsin, was an affirming force, someone who believed in me, showed me that research was an invigorating, curiosity-quenching activity, and who always looked at problems in an interesting way. Their support motivated me, and their presence is missed.

And there were the thousands lost on September 11, as well as the men and women in the U.S. military who died, fighting for their country’s beliefs, in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and elsewhere. As I finished the last chapters of the book in 2001 and 2002, I thought of them. News reports tell us that so many of those killed in the September attacks were pursuing individual dreams in their jobs that day, celebrating others’ accomplishments, or trying to save somebody else’s life. The values that underline their efforts—freedom, compassion, and tolerance—are the best values of persuasion. Thinking about September 11 and the ensuing war reminded me that persuasion, for all its shortcomings, deceptions, and rampant ethical abuses, remains, as Churchill might say, the worst form of social influence, except for all the others.

This having been said, I can now gratefully acknowledge many individuals. Thanks to the library staff at Cleveland State University. I also appreciate assistance provided by the people at John Carroll University’s Grasselli Library, as well as employees of the nearby Shaker Heights Arabica Coffee Shop, especially Michael Feher. The latter’s solicitude, coffee, and tea provided needed motivation on many mornings and afternoons. I also appreciate the capable and extraordinarily skillful word processing of Sharon J. Muskin, who did yeoman’s work in giving the chapters and figures a professional appearance.

I also want to thank Linda Bathgate, my editor from Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, whose faith and many warm comments sustained me throughout the writing of the book.

In addition, I am grateful to the many fine undergraduate and graduate students from my persuasion classes who have provided enjoyable and enriching class discussions.

A number of colleagues read over chapters and offered good ideas. I appreciate comments or assistance offered by Julie Andsager, Mike Allen,

Finally, as always, I thank my family for their abiding love and support.

—Richard M. Perloff
PART 1

Foundations
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Persuasion

When someone mentions persuasion, what comes to mind? Powerful, charismatic leaders? Subliminal ads? News? Lawyers? Presidential campaigns? Or the Internet perhaps, with those innumerable Web sites shamelessly promoting products and companies? That's persuasion, right? Powerful stuff—the kind of thing that has strong effects on society and spells profit for companies. But what about you? What does persuasion mean to you personally? Can you think of times when the media or attractive communicators changed your mind about something? Anything come to mind? Not really, you say. You've got the canny ability to see through what other people are trying to sell you.

Well, that's perhaps what we like to think. It's everyone else who's influenced, not me or my friends—well maybe my friends, but not me. But wait: What about those Tommy Hilfiger jeans, Gap sweaters, or Nike sneakers you bought? Advertising had to play a role in that decision somehow. And if you search your mind, you probably can think of times when you yielded to another's pushy persuasion, only to regret it later—the time you let yourself get talked into doing a car repair that turned out to be unnecessary or agreed to loan a friend some money, only to discover she had no intention of ever paying you back.

But that's all negative. What of the positive side? Have you ever been helped by a persuasive communication—an antismoking ad or a reminder that it's not cool or safe to drink when you drive? Have you ever had a conversation with a friend who opened your eyes to new ways of seeing the world or with a teacher who said you had potential you didn't know you had?

You see, this is persuasion too. Just about anything that involves molding or shaping attitudes involves persuasion. Now there's another term that may seem foreign at first: attitudes. Attitudes? There once was a rock group that called itself that. But we've got attitudes as surely as we
have arms, legs, cell phones, or personal computers. We have attitudes
toward college, and about music, money, sex, race, even God. We don’t
all share the same attitudes, and you may not care a whit about issues
that intrigue your acquaintances. But we have attitudes and they shape
our world in ways we don’t always recognize. Persuasion is the study of
attitudes and how to change them.

Persuasion calls to mind images of salespeople and con artists—selfish
strategists like Richard Hatch, the guy on Survivor everyone loved to
hate. But there is another side too: Persuasive communications have been
used by good people to implement change. Social activists have used
persuasion to change attitudes toward minorities and women. Consumer
advocates have tirelessly warned people about dishonest business prac-
tices. Health communicators have launched countless campaigns to
change people’s thinking about cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and unsafe sex.
Politicians (for example, American presidents) have relied on persuasion
when attempting to influence opinions toward policy issues, or when try-
ing to rally the country behind them during national crises. Some of our
greatest leaders have been expert persuaders—Thomas Jefferson, Martin
Luther King, and Franklin D. Roosevelt come immediately to mind—as
do the crop of current political persuaders, working in the thick of the
media age.

This book is about all these issues. It is about persuasive communica-
tion and the dynamics of attitudes communicators hope to change. The
text also examines applications of persuasion theories to a host of con-
texts, ranging from advertising to politics to physical health. On a more
personal note, I try to show how you can use persuasion insights to
become a more effective persuasive speaker and a more critical judge of
social influence attempts.

PERSUASION: CONSTANCIES AND CHANGES

The study and practice of persuasion are not new. Persuasion can be
found in the Old Testament—for example, in Jeremiah’s attempts to con-
vince his people to repent and establish a personal relationship with God.
We come across persuasion when we read about John the Baptist’s exhor-
tations for Christ. John traveled the countryside, acting as Christ’s ad-
ance man, preaching “Christ is coming, wait till you see him, when you
look in his eyes you’ll know that you’ve met Christ the Lord” (Whalen,

Long before professional persuaders hoped to turn a profit from books
on closing a deal, traveling educators known as the Sophists paraded
through ancient Greece, charging money for lectures on public speaking
and the art of political eloquence. Five centuries before political consultants advised presidential candidates how to package themselves on television, the Italian diplomat Niccolo Machiavelli rocked the Renaissance world with his how-to manual for political persuaders, entitled *The Prince*. Machiavelli believed in politics and respected crafty political leaders. He offered a litany of suggestions for how politicians could maintain power through cunning and deception.

In the United States, where persuasion has played such a large role in politics and society as a whole, we find that communication campaigns are as American as media-advertised apple pie. The first crusade to change health behavior did not occur in 1970 or 1870, but in 1820. Nineteenth-century reformers expressed concern about increases in binge drinking and pushed for abstinence from alcohol. A few years later, activists committed to clean living tried to persuade Americans to quit using tobacco, exercise more, and adopt a vegetarian diet that included wheat bread, grains, fruits, and vegetables (Engs, 2000).

As they say in France: Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose (the more things change, the more they remain the same). And yet, for all the similarities, there are important differences between our era of persuasion and those that preceded it. Each epoch has its own character, feeling, and rhythm. Contemporary persuasion differs from the past in these five ways:

1. **The sheer number of persuasive communications has grown exponentially.** Advertising, public service announcements, Internet banner ads, and those daily interruptions from telephone marketers are among the most salient indicators of this trend. Eons ago, prior to the development of broadcasting and the Internet, you could go through a day with preciously little exposure to impersonal persuasive messages. That is no longer true. And it’s not just Americans who are besieged by persuasion. The reach of mass persuasion extends to tiny villages thousands of miles away. A U.S. college student traveling in remote areas of China reported that, while stranded by winter weather, he came across a group of Tibetans. After sharing their food with the student, the Tibetans began to discuss an issue that touched on matters American. “Just how, one of the Tibetans asked the young American, was Michael Jordan doing?” (LaFeber, 1999, p. 14).

2. **Persuasive messages travel faster than ever before.** Advertisements “move blindingly fast,” one writer observes (Moore, 1993, p. B1). Ads quickly and seamlessly combine cultural celebrities (Michael Jordan), symbols (success, fame, and athletic prowess), and commodity signs (the Nike swoosh). With a mouse click, political and marketing campaign specialists can send a communique across the world. Case in point: MP3.com. The online music company launched an e-mail campaign to support legislation
that would allow people to store music digitally and access songs on the Internet from any location. Supporters simply had to locate MP3.com's Web site, click onto "Million Email March," type in their name and e-mail address, and punch the "Send" button. This instantly transmitted a message in support of the bill to members of Congress.

3. Persuasion has become institutionalized. No longer can a Thomas Jefferson dash off a Declaration of Independence. In the 21st century the Declaration would be edited by committees, test-marketed in typical American communities, and checked with standards departments to make sure it did not offend potential constituents.

Numerous companies are in the persuasion business. Advertising agencies, public relations firms, marketing conglomerates, lobbying groups, social activists, pollsters, speech writers, image consultants—companies big and small—are involved with various facets of persuasion. The list is long and continues to grow.

4. Persuasive communication has become more subtle and devious. We are long past the days in which brash salespeople knocked on your door to directly pitch encyclopedias or hawk Avon cosmetics. Nowadays, salespeople know all about flattery, empathy, nonverbal communication, and likability appeals. Walk into a Nordstrom clothing store and you see a fashionably dressed man playing a piano. Nordstrom wants you to feel like you're in a special, elite place, one that not so incidentally sells brands of clothing that jibe with this image.

Advertising no longer relies only on hard-sell, "hammer it home" appeals, but also on soft-sell messages that play on emotions. A few years back, the Benetton clothing company showed attention-grabbing pictures of a dying AIDS patient and a desperately poor Third World girl holding a White doll from a trash can. The pictures appeared with the tag line, "United Colors of Benetton." What do these images have to do with clothing? Nothing—and everything. Benetton was selling an image, not a product. It appealed to consumers' higher sensibilities, inviting them to recognize that "the world we live in is not neatly packaged and cleansed as most ads depict it . . . at Benetton we are not like others, we have vision." (Goldman & Papson, 1996, p. 52).

5. Persuasive communication is more complex than ever before. Once upon a time, persuaders knew their clients because everyone lived in the same small communities. When cities developed and industrialization spread, persuaders knew fewer of their customers, but could be reasonably confident they understood their clients because they all shared the same cultural and ethnic background. As the United States has become more culturally and racially diverse, persuaders and consumers frequently come from different sociological places. A marketer can't assume that her client thinks the same way she does or approaches a communication
encounter with the same assumptions. The intermingling of people from different cultural groups is a profoundly positive phenomenon, but it makes for more dicey and difficult interpersonal persuasion.

At the same time, attitudes—the stuff of persuasion—are ever more complex. Living in a media society in a time of globalization, we have attitudes toward more topics than before, including people and places we have never encountered directly. Few people have met Bill Gates, but many people have opinions about him. We may have attitudes toward global warming or capital punishment or how the news media covered these topics. Some of us may have strong opinions about the media itself, or about how the media changed the minds of people we have never met.

Persuasion is celebrated as a quintessential human activity, but here’s a subversive thought: Suppose we’re not the only ones who do it? What if our friends in the higher animal kingdom also use a little homespun social influence? Frans de Waal (1982) painstakingly observed chimpanzees in a Dutch zoo and chronicled his observations in a book aptly called *Chimpanzee Politics*. His conclusion: Chimps use all sorts of techniques to get their way with peers. They frequently resort to violence, but not always. Chimps form coalitions, bluff each other, and even show some awareness of social reciprocity, as they seem to recognize that favors should be rewarded and disobedience punished.

Does this mean that chimpanzees are capable of persuasion? Some scientists would answer “Yes” and cite as evidence chimps’ subtle techniques to secure power. Indeed, there is growing evidence that apes can form images and use symbols (Miles, 1993). To some scientists, the difference between human and animal persuasion is one of degree, not kind.

Wait a minute. Do we really think that chimpanzees persuade their peers? Perhaps they persuade in the *Godfather* sense of making people an offer they can’t refuse. However, this is not persuasion so much as coercion. As we will see, persuasion involves the persuader’s awareness that he or she is trying to influence someone else. It also requires that the persuadee make a conscious or unconscious decision to change his mind about something. With this definition in mind, chimpanzees’ behavior is better described as social influence or coercion than persuasion.

Okay, you animal lovers say, but let me tell you about my cat. “She sits sweetly in her favorite spot on my sofa when I return from school,” one feline-loving student suggested to me, “then curls up in my arms, and purrs softly until I go to the kitchen and fetch her some milk. Isn’t that persuasion?” Well—no. Your cat may be trying to curry your favor,
but she has not performed an act of persuasion. The cat is not cognizant that she is trying to "influence" you. What's more, she does not appreciate that you have a mental state—let alone a belief—that she wants to change.

Nonetheless, the fact that we can talk intelligently about feline (and particularly, chimpanzee) social influence points up the complexities of persuasion. Research on chimpanzee politics forces us to recognize that persuasion has probably evolved through natural selection and helped humans solve many practical dilemmas. Persuasion undoubtedly helped early homo sapiens solve adaptive problems such as pacifying potential enemies and enlisting help from friends. In short: Persuasion matters and strikes to the core of our lives as human beings. This means we must define what we mean by persuasion and differentiate it from related terms.

Defining Persuasion

Scholars have defined persuasion in different ways. I list the following major definitions to show you how different researchers approach the topic. Persuasion, according to communication scholars, is:

- a communication process in which the communicator seeks to elicit a desired response from his receiver (Andersen, 1971, p. 6);
- a conscious attempt by one individual to change the attitudes, beliefs, or behavior of another individual or group of individuals through the transmission of some message (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987, p. 3);
- a symbolic activity whose purpose is to effect the internalization or voluntary acceptance of new cognitive states or patterns of overt behavior through the exchange of messages (Smith, 1982, p. 7);
- a successful intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the persuadee has some measure of freedom (O'Keefe, 1990, p. 17).

All of these definitions have strengths. Boiling down the main components into one unified perspective (and adding a little of my own recipe), I define persuasion as a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice. There are five components of the definition.

1. Persuasion is a symbolic process. Contrary to popular opinion, persuasion does not happen with the flick of a switch. You don't just change people's minds, snap, crackle, and pop. On the contrary, persuasion takes time, consists of a number of steps, and actively involves the recipient of
the message. As Mark Twain quipped, "habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time" (cited in Prochaska et al., 1994, p. 47).

Many of us view persuasion in John Wayne, macho terms. Persuaders are seen as tough-talking salespeople, strongly stating their position, hitting people over the head with arguments, and pushing the deal to a close. But this oversimplifies matters. It assumes that persuasion is a boxing match, won by the fiercest competitor. In fact persuasion is different. It's more like teaching than boxing. Think of a persuader as a teacher, moving people step by step to a solution, helping them appreciate why the advocated position solves the problem best.

Persuasion also involves the use of symbols, with messages transmitted primarily through language with its rich, cultural meanings. Symbols include words like freedom, justice, and equality; nonverbal signs like the flag, Star of David, or Holy Cross; and images that are instantly recognized and processed like the Nike Swoosh or McDonald's Golden Arches. Symbols are persuaders' tools, harnessed to change attitudes and mold opinions.

2. Persuasion involves an attempt to influence. Persuasion does not automatically or inevitably succeed. Like companies that go out of business soon after they open, persuasive communications often fail to reach or influence their targets. However, persuasion does involve a deliberate attempt to influence another person. The persuader must intend to change another individual's attitude or behavior, and must be aware (at least at some level) that she is trying to accomplish this goal.

For this reason it does not make sense to say that chimpanzees persuade each other. As noted earlier, chimps, smart as they are, do not seem to possess high-level awareness that they are trying to change another primate, let alone modify a fellow chimp's mind.

In a similar fashion, it pushes the envelope to say that very young children are capable of persuasion. True, a mother responds to an infant's cry for milk by dashing to the refrigerator (or lending her breast, if that's her feeding preference). Yes, we have all shopped in toy stores and watched as 2-year-olds point to toys seen on television and scream "I want that." And we have been witness to the pitiful sight of parents, who pride themselves on being competent professionals, helplessly yielding to prevent any further embarrassment.

Yet the baby's cry for milk and the toddler's demand for toys do not qualify as persuasion. These youngsters have not reached the point where they are aware that they are trying to change another person's mental state. Their actions are better described as coercive social influence than persuasion. In order for children to practice persuasion, they must understand that other people can have desires and beliefs, recognize that the
persuadee has a mental state that is susceptible to change, demonstrate a primitive awareness that they intend to influence another person, and realize that the persuadee has a different perspective than they do, even if they cannot put all this into words (Bartsch & London, 2000). As children grow, they appreciate these things, rely less on coercive social influence attempts than on persuasion, and develop the ability to persuade others more effectively (Kline & Clinton, 1998).

The main point here is that persuasion represents a conscious attempt to influence the other party, along with an accompanying awareness that the persuadee has a mental state that is susceptible to change. It is a type of social influence. Social influence is the broad process in which the behavior of one person alters the thoughts or actions of another. Social influence can occur when receivers act on cues or messages that were not necessarily intended for their consumption (Dudczak, 2001). Persuasion occurs within a context of intentional messages that are initiated by a communicator in hopes of influencing the recipient. This is pretty heady stuff, but it is important because if you include every possible influence attempt under the persuasion heading, you count every communication as persuasion. That would make for a very long book.

3. People persuade themselves. One of the great myths of persuasion is that persuaders convince us to do things we really don’t want to do. They supposedly overwhelm us with so many arguments or such verbal ammunition that we acquiesce. They force us to give in.

This overlooks an important point: People persuade themselves to change attitudes or behavior. Communicators provide the arguments. They set up the bait. We make the change, or refuse to yield. As D. Joel Whalen (1996) puts it:

You can’t force people to be persuaded—you can only activate their desire and show them the logic behind your ideas. You can’t move a string by pushing it, you have to pull it. People are the same. Their devotion and total commitment to an idea come only when they fully understand and buy in with their total being. (p. 5)

You can understand the power of self-persuasion by considering an activity that does not at first blush seem to involve persuasive communication: therapy. Therapists undoubtedly help people make changes in their lives. But have you ever heard someone say, “My therapist persuaded me”? On the contrary, people who seek psychological help look into themselves, consider what ails them, and decide how best to cope. The therapist offers suggestions and provides an environment in which healing can take place (Kassan, 1999). But if progress occurs, it is the client who makes the change—and it is the client who is responsible for
making sure that she does not revert back to the old ways of doing things.

Of course, not every self-persuasion is therapeutic. Self-persuasion can be benevolent or malevolent. An ethical communicator will plant the seeds for healthy self-influence. A dishonest, evil persuader convinces a person to change her mind in a way that is personally or socially destructive.

Note also that persuasion typically involves change. It does not focus on forming attitudes, but on inducing people to alter attitudes they already possess. This can involve shaping, molding, or reinforcing attitudes, as is discussed later in the chapter.

4. **Persuasion involves the transmission of a message.** The message may be verbal or nonverbal. It can be relayed interpersonally, through mass media, or via the Internet. It may be reasonable or unreasonable, factual or emotional. The message can consist of arguments or simple cues, like music in an advertisement that brings pleasant memories to mind.

Persuasion is a communicative activity; thus, there must be a message for persuasion, as opposed to other forms of social influence, to occur.

Life is packed with messages that change or influence attitudes. In addition to the usual contexts that come to mind when you think of persuasion—advertising, political campaigns, and interpersonal sales—there are other domains that contain attitude-altering messages. News unquestionably shapes attitudes and beliefs (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002). Talk to older Americans who watched TV coverage of White policemen beating up Blacks in the South or chat with people who viewed television coverage of the Vietnam War, and you will gain first-hand evidence of how television news can shake up people’s world views. News of more recent events—the Challenger disaster, the Clinton impeachment, and, of course, September 11—has left indelible impressions on people’s views of politics and America.

Art—books, movies, plays, and songs—also has a strong influence on how we think and feel about life. Artistic portrayals can transport people into different realities, changing the way they see life (Green & Brock, 2000). If you think for a moment, I’m sure you can call to mind books, movies, and songs that shook you up and pushed you to rethink your assumptions. Dostoyevsky’s discussions of the human condition, a Picasso painting, Spike Lee’s portrayals of race in *Do the Right Thing*, *The Simpsons* television show, a folk melody or rap song—these all can influence and change people’s worldviews.

Yet although news and art contain messages that change attitudes, they are not pure exemplars of persuasion. Recall that persuasion is defined as an attempt to convince others to change their attitudes or behavior. In many cases, journalists are not trying to change people’s attitudes toward a topic. They are describing events to provide people
1. INTRODUCTION TO PERSUASION

with information, to offer new perspectives, or entice viewers to watch their programs. In the same fashion, most artists do not create art to change the world. They write, paint, or compose songs to express important personal concerns, articulate vexing problems of life, or to soothe, uplift, or agitate people. In a sense, it demeans art to claim that artists attempt only to change our attitudes. Thus, art and news are best viewed as borderline cases of persuasion. Their messages can powerfully influence our worldviews, but because the intent of these communicators is broader and more complex than attitude change, news and art are best viewed as lying along the border of persuasion and the large domain of social influence.

5. **Persuasion requires free choice.** If, as noted earlier, self-persuasion is the key to successful influence, then an individual must be free to alter his own behavior or to do what he wishes in a communication setting. But what does it mean to be free? Philosophers have debated this question for centuries, and if you took a philosophy course, you may recall those famous debates about free will versus determinism.

There are more than 200 definitions of freedom, and, as we will see, it’s hard to say precisely when coercion ends and persuasion begins. I suggest that a person is free when he has the ability to act otherwise—to do other than what the persuader suggests—or to reflect critically on his choices in a situation (Smythe, 1999).

I have defined persuasion and identified its main features. But this tells us only half the story. To appreciate persuasion, you have to understand what it is not—that is, how it differs from related ideas.

**Persuasion Versus Coercion**

How does persuasion differ from coercion? The answer may seem simple at first. Persuasion deals with reason and verbal appeals, while coercion employs force, you suggest. It’s not a bad start, but there are subtle relationships between the terms—fascinating overlaps—that you might not ordinarily think of. Consider these scenarios:

- Tom works for a social service agency that receives some of its funding from United Way. At the end of each year, United Way asks employees to contribute to the charity. Tom would like to donate, but he needs every penny of his salary to support his family. One year, his boss, Anne, sends out a memo strongly urging employees to give to United Way. Anne doesn’t threaten, but the implicit message is: I expect you to donate, and I’ll know who did and who didn’t. Tom opts to contribute money to United Way. Was he coerced or persuaded?
• Debbie, a college senior, makes an appointment with her favorite English professor, Dr. Stanley Hayes, to get advice on where to apply for graduate school. Hayes compliments Debbie on her writing style, tells her she is one of the best students he has had in 20 years of teaching, and reflects back on his own experiences as a youthful graduate student in American literature. The two chat for a bit, and Hayes asks if she wouldn’t mind dropping by his house for dessert and coffee to discuss this further. “Evening’s best for me,” Hayes adds. Debbie respects Professor Hayes and knows she needs his recommendation for graduate school, but she wonders about his intentions. She accepts the offer. Was she persuaded or coerced?

• Elizabeth, a high school junior, has been a football fan since grade school and throughout middle school. Waiting eagerly for the homecoming game to start, she glances at the field, catching a glimpse of the senior class president as he strides out to the 50-yard line. Much to her surprise, the class president asks the crowd to stand and join him in prayer. Elizabeth is squeamish. She is not religious and suspects she’s an atheist. She notices that everyone around her is standing, nodding their heads, and reciting the Lord’s Prayer. She glances to her left and sees four popular girls shooting nasty looks at her and shaking their heads. Without thinking, Elizabeth rises and nervously begins to speak the words herself. Was she coerced or persuaded?

Before we can answer these questions, we must know what is meant by coercion. Philosophers define coercion as a technique for forcing people to act as the coercer wants them to act, and presumably contrary to their preferences. It usually employs a threat of some dire consequence if the actor does not do what the coercer demands (Feinberg, 1998, p. 387). Tom’s boss, Debbie’s professor, and Elizabeth’s classmates pushed them to act in ways that were contrary to their preferences. The communicators employed a direct or veiled threat. It appears that they employed coercion.

Things get murkier when you look at scholarly definitions that compare coercion with persuasion. Mary J. Smith (1982) takes a relativist perspective, emphasizing the role of perception. According to this view, it’s all a matter of how people perceive things. Smith argues that when people believe that they are free to reject the communicator’s position, as a practical matter they are free, and the influence attempt falls under the persuasion umbrella. When individuals perceive that they have no choice but to comply, the influence attempt is better viewed as coercive.

Assume now that Tom, Debbie, and Elizabeth are all confident, strong-minded individuals. Tom feels that he can say no to his employer. Debbie, undaunted by Professor Hayes’s flirtatiousness, believes she is capable of rejecting his overtures. Elizabeth feels she is free to do as she pleases at
the football game. In this case, we would say that the influence agents persuaded the students to comply.

On the other hand, suppose Tom, Debbie, and Elizabeth lack confidence in themselves and don’t believe that they can resist these communicators. In this case, we might say that these individuals perceived that they had little choice but to comply. We would conclude that coercion, not persuasion, had occurred.

You see how difficult it is to differentiate persuasion and coercion. Scholars differ on where they draw the line between the two terms. Some would say that the three influence agents used a little bit of both. (My own view is that the first case is the clearest instance of coercion. The communicator employed a veiled threat. What’s more, Tom’s boss wielded power over him, leading to the reasonable perception that Tom had little choice but to comply. The other two scenarios are more ambiguous, arguably more persuasion because most people would probably assume they could resist communicators’ appeals; in addition, no direct threats of any kind were employed in these cases.) More generally, the point to remember here is that persuasion and coercion are not polar opposites, but overlapping concepts. (See Fig. 1.1 and Box 1–1: The Cult of Persuasion.)

Underscoring this point, there are instances in which coercive acts have changed attitudes, and persuasive communications have influenced coercive institutions. The terrible—unquestionably coercive—attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001 produced major shifts in public attitudes. Americans suddenly became much more supportive of drastic military action to prevent terrorism, even tolerating restrictions in personal freedoms to keep the country safe from terrorists (Berke & Elder, 2001). The attacks also changed attitudes toward airport safety, induced mistrust of strangers encountered in public places, and led some to reassess their entire perspective on life.

At the same time, persuasive communications—such as radio communications attempting to rally the Afghan people against terrorist Osama bin Laden in 2001 or the old Radio Free Europe anticommunist messages of the 1950s through ‘80s—can help influence or bring down coercive

Coercion
Persuasion

Nature of Psychological Threat
Ability to Do Otherwise
Perception of Free Choice

Coercion and persuasion are not polar opposites. They are better viewed as lying along a continuum of social influence.

FIG. 1.1 Coercion and persuasion.
The story broke in late March 1997. By then it was too late to save any of the 39 desperate souls who committed suicide. All one could do was to ask why 39 intelligent, committed men and women—stalwart members of the Heaven's Gate cult—willingly took their own lives, joyfully announcing their decision in a farewell videotape and statement on their Web site. The suicide was timed to coincide with the arrival of the Hale-Bopp comet. Believing that a flying saucer was traveling behind the comet, members chose to leave their bodies behind to gain redemption in a Kingdom of Heaven (Robinson, 1998).

To many people, this provided yet another example of the powerful, but mysterious, technique called brainwashing. The cult leader, Marshall Applewhite, known to his followers as “Do,” supposedly brainwashed cult members into committing mass suicide in their home in Rancho Santa Fe, California. Although Heaven’s Gate was the first Internet cult tragedy, one that drove millions of curiosity seekers to the group’s Web site, it was only the most recent in a series of bizarre cult occurrences that observers could describe only as brainwashing. In one of the most famous of these tragic tales, over 900 members of the People’s Temple followed leader Jim Jones’ directive to drink cyanide-spiked Kool-Aid at the cult’s home in Guyana, South America back in 1978. Other cases, including the violent story of David Koresh’s Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas (circa 1993), continue to fascinate and disturb. Searching for a simple answer, people assume that charismatic leaders brainwash followers into submission.

Famous though it may be, brainwashing is not a satisfactory explanation for what happens in cults. It does not tell us why ordinary people choose to join and actively participate in cults. It does not explain how leaders wield influence or are able to induce followers to engage in self-destructive behavior. Instead, the brainwashing term condemns people and points fingers.

How can we explain the cult phenomenon? First, we need to define a cult. A cult is a group of individuals who are: (a) excessively devoted to a particular leader or system of beliefs, (b) effectively isolated from the rest of the world, and (c) denied access to alternative points of view. To appreciate how cults influence individuals, we need to consider the dynamics of persuasion and coercion. As an example, consider the case of one young person who fell into the Heaven’s Gate cult and, by crook or the hook of social influence, could not get out. Her name was Gail Maeder, and she was one of the unlucky 39 who ended her life on that unhappy March day.

Gail, a soft-hearted soul, adored animals. The lanky 27-year-old also loved trees, so much so that she tried not to use much paper. Searching for something—maybe adventure, possibly herself—she left suburban New York for California. Traveling again, this time in the Southwest, she met...
some friendly folks in a van—members of Heaven's Gate, it turns out. Gail joined the group and told her parents not to worry. She was very happy.

If you look at Gail's picture in People, taken when she was 14, you see a bubbly All-American girl with braces, smiling as her brother touches her affectionately (Hewitt et al., 1997). Your heart breaks when you see the photo, knowing what will happen when she becomes an adult.

People join cults—or sects, the less pejorative term—for many reasons. They are lonely and confused, and the cult provides a loving home. Simple religious answers beckon and offer a reason for living. Isolated from parents and friends, young people come to depend more on the cult for social rewards. The cult leader is charismatic and claims to have supernatural powers. He gains followers' trust and devotion. Purposelessness is relieved; order replaces chaos. The more people participate in the group's activities, the better they feel; the better they feel, the more committed they become; and the more committed they are, the more difficult it is to leave.

Initially, cult leaders employ persuasive appeals. Over time they rely increasingly on coercive techniques. Heaven's Gate leaders told followers that they must learn to deny their desires and defer to the group. At Heaven's Gate, it was considered an infraction if members put themselves first, expressed too much curiosity, showed sexual attraction, trusted their own judgment, or had private thoughts. Everyone woke at the same time to pray, ate the same food, wore short haircuts and nondescript clothing, and sported identical wedding rings on their fingers to symbolize marriage to each other. Individual identity was replaced by group identity. Autonomy gave way, slowly replaced by the peacefulness of groupthink (Goodstein, 1997).

Once this happens—and it occurs slowly—cult members no longer have free choice; they are psychologically unable to say no to leaders' demands. Coercion replaces persuasion. Conformity overtakes dissent. Persuasion and coercion coexist, shading into one another. Simple demarcations are hard to make.

Gail Maeder wasn't street smart, her father said. "She just got sucked in and couldn't get out" (Hewitt et al., p. 47).

Events like Heaven's Gate are deeply troubling. It is comforting to affix blame on charismatic cult leaders like Applewhite. It is easy to say that they brainwashed people into submission. But this ignores the powerful role that coercive social influence and persuasive communication play in cults. And it tragically underplays the psychological needs of people like Gail, folks who persuaded themselves that a doomsday cult provided the answer to their problems.

It would be a happy ending if Heaven's Gate were the last cult that exploited individuals' vulnerabilities. However, in recent years, we have witnessed the growth of a more violent sect: an international terrorist cult
composed of men who are zealous devotees of Osama bin Laden, and are convinced that America is the enemy of Islam and are willing to kill innocent people, particularly Americans and Jews, if directed by bin Laden or their maulanas, or masters (Goldberg, 2000). It is tempting to view these individuals as victims of terrorist brainwashing—automatons directed into action by receipt of an e-mail message. Once again, the brainwashing metaphor simplifies and distorts. These individuals have frequently joined Muslim religious schools out of their own volition. Bereft of meaning and purpose in a changing world, unable to see that their own nation-states have failed to provide them with a decent set of values, desperately grasping for a way to find an outlet to express decades-long simmering hate, they join terrorist cells, and are groomed, influenced, even coerced by “teachers” and assorted leaders of an international political-religious cult (Zakaria, 2001).

“These are poor and impressionable boys kept entirely ignorant of the world and, for that matter, largely ignorant of all but one interpretation of Islam,” notes reporter Jeffrey Goldberg (2000, p. 71). “They are the perfect jihad machines.”

regimes, such as Afghanistan or the old Soviet Union. These examples, emotion-packed as they are, speak to the powerful influences both persuasion and coercion have in everyday life, and the complex relationships between persuasion and coercive social influence (see Fig. 1.2).

The Bad Boy of Persuasion

One other term frequently comes up when persuasion is discussed—propaganda. Propaganda overlaps with persuasion, as both are invoked to describe powerful instances of social influence. However, there are three differences between the terms.

First, propaganda is typically invoked to describe mass influence through mass media. Persuasion, by contrast, occurs in mediated settings, but also in interpersonal and organizational contexts. Second, propaganda refers to instances in which a group has total control over the transmission of information, as with Hitler in Nazi Germany, the Chinese Communists during the Chinese Revolution, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and in violent religious cults. Persuasion can be slanted and one-sided, but it ordinarily allows for a free flow of information; in persuasion situations, people can ordinarily question the persuader or offer contrasting opinions.

A third difference lies in the connotation or meaning of the terms. Propaganda has a negative connotation; it is associated with bad things or evil forces. Persuasion, by contrast, is viewed as a more positive force, one that can produce beneficial outcomes. Subjectively, we use the term
FIG. 1.2. Understanding persuasion, coercion, and borderline cases of persuasion. Note that coercion can be negative or positive (as in smoking bans and enforcement of seat belt laws). Borderline cases focus on persuasion rather than coercion. They lie just outside the boundary of persuasion because the intent of the communicator is not to explicitly change an individual's attitude toward the issue, but is, instead, broader and more complex (see also Gass & Seiter, 1999).

propaganda to refer to a persuasive communication with which one disagrees and to which the individual attributes hostile intent. Liberals claim that the news is unadulterated propaganda for Republicans; conservatives contend that the news is propaganda for the Left. Both use the propaganda term to disparage the news.

When you hear people call a persuasive communication propaganda, beware. The speakers are using language to denounce a message with which they disagree.

Understanding Persuasive Communication Effects

The discussion thus far has emphasized the differences between persuasion and related terms. However, there are different kinds of persuasive communications, and they have different types of effects. Some messages dramatically influence attitudes; others exert smaller or more subtle
impacts. Taking note of this, Miller (1980) proposed that communications exert three different persuasive effects: shaping, reinforcing, and changing responses.

**Shaping.** Today everyone has heard of the Nike Swoosh. You’ve seen it on hundreds of ads and on the clothing of celebrity athletes. It’s a symbol that resonates and has helped make Nike a leader in the athletic shoe business. The now-classic ad campaigns featuring Michael Jordan and Bo Jackson helped mold attitudes toward Nike by linking Nike with movement, speed, and superhuman athletic achievement.

A nastier example is cigarette marketing. Tobacco companies spend millions to shape people’s attitudes toward cigarettes, hoping they can entice young people to take a pleasurable, but deadly, puff. Marketers shape attitudes by associating cigarettes with beautiful women and virile men. They appeal to teenage girls searching for a way to rebel against boyfriends or parents by suggesting that smoking can make them appear defiant and strong willed. (“I always take the driver’s seat. That way I’m never taken for a ride,” says one Virginia Slims ad.)

**Reinforcing.** Contrary to popular opinion, many persuasive communications are not designed to convert people, but to reinforce a position they already hold. As discussed in chapter 2, people have strong attitudes toward a variety of topics, and these attitudes are hard to change. Thus, persuaders try to join ‘em, not beat ‘em.

In political campaigns, candidates try to bolster party supporters’ commitment to their cause. Democratic standard-bearers like Al Gore have made late-campaign appeals to African American voters, the overwhelming majority of whom are registered Democrats. Messages offer additional reasons why these voters should expend the effort to vote Democratic on Election Day. Republican candidates do the same, using media to remind their key supporters that they should vote Republican on the first Tuesday in November.

In a similar fashion, health education experts attempt to strengthen people’s resolve to maintain their decision to quit smoking or to abstain from drinking in excess. Persuaders recognize that people can easily relapse under stress, and they design messages to help individuals maintain their commitment to give up unhealthy substances.

**Changing.** This is perhaps the most important persuasive impact and the one that comes most frequently to mind when we think of persuasion. Communications can and do change attitudes. Just think how far this country has come in the last 50 years on the subject of race. In the 1950s and ’60s, Blacks were lynched for being in the wrong place at the
wrong time, many southerners openly opposed school desegregation, and northern Whites steered clear of socializing with Black friends or colleagues. This changed as civil rights campaigns, heart-rending media stories, and increased dialogue between Blacks and Whites led Whites to rethink their prejudiced attitudes toward African Americans (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997). Attitudes have changed on other topics too—sex roles, the environment, fatty fast food, and exercise. Persuasive communications have had strong and desirable effects. They can influence attitudes and social behavior.

**HISTORICAL REVIEW OF PERSUASION SCHOLARSHIP**

It is now time to put persuasion scholarship in perspective. It’s not a new field—not by a long shot. The area has a long, distinguished history, dating back to ancient Greece. This section reviews the history of persuasion scholarship, offering an overview of major trends and the distinctive features of contemporary research on persuasion.

You may wonder why I review ancient history. There are many reasons, but here are two. Historical overviews help us appreciate the origins of ideas. They remind us that we are not the first to ponder persuasion, nor the first to wrestle with persuasion dilemmas. Second, an historical approach helps us see continuities from present to past to future. It helps us take note of what is unique about our era—and how today’s scholarship builds on the shoulders of giants.

**Ancient Greece: “It’s All Sophos to Me”**

“If any one group of people could be said to have invented rhetoric,” James L. Golden and his colleagues note, “it would be the ancient Greeks” (Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 2000, p. 1). The Greeks loved public speech. Trophies were awarded for skill in oratory. Citizens frequently acted as prosecutor and defense attorney in lawsuits that were daily occurrences in the Athenian city-state (Golden et al., 2000). Before long, citizens expressed interest in obtaining training in rhetoric (the art of public persuasion).

To meet the demand, a group of teachers decided to offer courses in rhetoric, as well as other academic areas. The teachers were called Sophists, after the Greek word *sophos* for knowledge. The Sophists traveled from city to city, pedaling their intellectual wares—for a fee.

The Sophists were dedicated to their craft but needed to make a living. Several of the traveling teachers—Gorgias and Isocrates—taught classes on oratory, placing considerable emphasis on style.
The Sophists attracted a following, but not everyone who followed them liked what he saw. Plato, the great Greek philosopher, denounced their work in his dialogues. To Plato, truth was a supreme value. Yet the Sophists sacrificed truth at the altar of persuasion, in Plato’s view. Thus, he lamented that “he who would be an orator has nothing to do with true justice, but only that which is likely to be approved by the many who sit in judgment” (Golden et al., p. 19). The Sophists, he charged, were not interested in discovering truth or advancing rational, “laborious, painstaking” arguments, but in “the quick, neat, and stylish argument that wins immediate approval—even if this argument has some hidden flaw” (Chappell, 1998, p. 516). To Plato, rhetoric was like cosmetics or flattery—not philosophy and therefore not deserving of respect.

The Sophists, for their part, saw persuasion differently. They surely believed that they were rocking the foundations of the educational establishment by giving people practical knowledge rather than “highfalutin” truth. They also were democrats, willing to teach any citizen who could afford their tuition.

Why do we care about the differences of opinion between Plato and the Sophists some 2,500 years later? We care because the same issues be-devil us today. Plato is the friend of all those who hate advertisements because they “lie” or stretch the truth. He is on the side of everyone who turns off the television during elections to stop the flow of “political-speak,” or candidates making any argument they can to win election. The Sophists address those practical persuaders—advertisers, politicians, salespeople—who have to make a living, need practical knowledge to promote their products, and are suspicious of “shadowy” abstract concepts like truth (Kennedy, 1963). The Sophists and Plato offer divergent, dueling perspectives on persuasive communication. Indeed, one of the themes of this book is that there are dual approaches to thinking about persuasion: one that emphasizes Platonic thinking and cogent arguments, the other focusing on style, oratory, and simpler persuasive appeals that date back to some of the Sophist writers.

The First Scientist of Persuasion

Plato’s greatest contribution to persuasion—or rhetoric as it was then called—may not have been the works he created, but the intellectual offspring he procreated. His best student—a Renaissance person before there was a Renaissance, a theorist before “theories” gained adherents—was Aristotle. Aristotle lived in the 4th century B.C. and wrote 170 works, including books on rhetoric. His treatise, Rhetoric, is regarded as “the most significant work on persuasion ever written” (Golden et al., p. 2).
Aristotle’s great insight was that both Plato and the Sophists had a point. Plato was right about truth being important, and the Sophists were correct that persuasive communication is a very useful tool. Aristotle, to some degree, took the best from both schools of thought, arguing that rhetoric is not designed to persuade people but to *discover* scientific principles of persuasion. Aristotle’s great contribution was to recognize that rhetoric could be viewed in scientific terms—as a phenomenon that could be described with precise concepts and by invoking probabilities (Golden et al., 2000; McCroskey, 1997). Drawing on his training in biology, Aristotle developed the first scientific approach to persuasion.

Rather than dismissing persuasion, as did Plato, the more practical Aristotle embraced it. “Aristotle said the goal of rhetoric wasn’t so much finding the truth of a matter as convincing an audience to make the best decision about that matter,” note Martha D. Cooper and William L. Nothstine (1998, p. 25). Aristotle proceeded to articulate a host of specific concepts on the nature of argumentation and the role of style in persuasion. He proposed methods by which persuasion occurred, described contexts in which it operated, and made ethics a centerpiece of his approach. During an era in which Plato was railing against the Sophists’ pseudo-oratory, teachers were running around Greece offering short courses on rhetoric, and great orators made fortunes by serving as ghostwriters for the wealthy, Aristotle toiled tirelessly on the scientific front, developing the first scientific perspective on persuasion.

Aristotle proposed that persuasion had three main ingredients: *ethos* (the nature of the communicator), *pathos* (emotional state of the audience) and *logos* (message arguments). Aristotle was also an early student of psychology, recognizing that speakers had to adapt to their audiences by considering in their speeches those factors that were most persuasive to an audience member.

Aristotle’s Greece was a mecca for the study and practice of persuasion. Yet it was not always pretty or just. Women were assumed to be innately unfit for engaging in persuasive public speaking; they were denied citizenship and excluded from the teaching professions (Waggenspack, 2000).

When Greek civilization gave way to Rome, the messengers were lost, but not the message. The practical Romans preserved much of Athenian civilization, adapting classic rhetorical works to Roman culture.

**A Breezy Tour of Rome and the Centuries that Followed**

Roman rhetorical theorists Cicero and Quintilian wrote treatises on the art of oratory. Cicero refined Greek theories of rhetoric, emphasizing the power of emotional appeals. Quintilian developed recommendations for
the ideal orator. Their work reminds us that concerns with public persuasion and inclusion of emotional arguments date back to early Rome, and probably earlier if you consider the Sophists.

With the decline of Roman civilization, rhetoric became a less important feature of European society. Earth-shattering events occurred over the ensuing centuries: growth of Christianity, Italian Renaissance, Black Death, European wars. Nonetheless, Aristotle's and Cicero's works survived, and influenced the thinking of rhetorical theorists of their times. Some of these writers' works made their way west, to the intellectual vineyards of the New World.

Rhetorical Developments in the United States

Like Athens, colonial and 18th-century America were a persuader's paradise, with merchants, lawyers, politicians, and newspaper editors crafting arguments to influence people and mold public opinion. Great rhetorical works emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, including the Declaration of Independence and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Yet like ancient Greece, the public paradise was closed to slaves and women. But, unlike Greece, legal limits did not stifle protest voices. Frederick Douglass and, later, W. E. B. DuBois became eloquent spokesmen for disenfranchised African Americans. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony used rhetorical strategies derived from Cicero in their efforts to gain equality for women (Waggenspack, 2000).

Over the course of the 20th century, numerous rhetoricians have written insightful books. Richard Weaver (1953) argued that all language contains values. Kenneth Burke (1950), calling on philosophy and psychoanalysis, showed how good and evil communicators persuade people by identifying their views with the audience. Marshall McLuhan (1967), using the catchy title "The medium is the message," startled, then captivated people by alerting them to the ways in which the medium—television, radio, print—was more important than the content of a communicator's speech. Subsequently, radical scholars argued that the field of rhetoric could itself be studied and critiqued. Michel Foucault questioned the notion that there is such a thing as true knowledge. Instead, he claimed, knowledge and truth are interwoven with power; those who rule a society define what is true and what counts as knowledge (Golden et al., 2000). Feminist critics like Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1989) pointed out that rhetorical history has been dominated by men and that women were barred from speaking in many supposedly great eras of rhetorical eloquence.

Rhetorical theorists continue to enlighten us with their work. However, their mission has been supplemented and to some degree replaced by
legions of social scientists. The social science approach to persuasion now dominates academia. The history of this perspective is summarized next.

**Origins of the Social Scientific Approach**

Social scientific studies of persuasion began in the 1930s with research on attitudes (Allport, 1935). Scholarship got a boost in World War II when the U.S. War Department commissioned a group of researchers to explore the effects of a series of documentary films. The movies were designed to educate Allied soldiers on the Nazi threat and to boost morale. The War Department asked Frank Capra, who had previously directed such classics as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, to direct the films. They were called simply *Why We Fight*.

As asked to evaluate the effects of the wartime documentaries, the social scientists got the added benefit of working, albeit indirectly, with Capra. It must have been a heady experience, assessing the effects of a Hollywood director’s films on beliefs and attitudes. The studies offered some of the first hard evidence that communications influenced attitudes, albeit complexly (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949). The experiments showed that persuasion research could be harnessed by government for its own ends—in this case, beneficial ones, but certainly not value-neutral objectives.

Several of the researchers working on the *Why We Fight* research went on to do important research in the fields of psychology and communication. One of them, Carl Hovland, seized the moment, brilliantly combining experimental research methodology with the ideas of an old persuasion sage, the first scientist of persuasion, the A-man: Aristotle. Working in a university setting, Hovland painstakingly conducted a series of experiments on persuasive communication effects. He and his colleagues took concepts invented by Aristotle—ethos, pathos, logos—and systematically examined their effects, using newly refined techniques of scientific experimentation (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). What the researchers discovered—for example, that credible sources influenced attitudes—was less important than how they went about their investigations. Hovland and colleagues devised hypotheses, developed elaborate procedures to test predictions, employed statistical procedures to determine if predictions held true, and reported findings in scientific journals that could be scrutinized by critical observers.

Hovland died young, but his scientific approach to persuasion survived and proved to be an enduring legacy. A host of other social scientists, armed with theories, predictions, and questionnaires, began to follow suit. These included psychologists William J. McGuire and Milton Rokeach, and communication scholar Gerald R. Miller. The list of persuasion pioneers...
also includes Gordon Allport, the luminary psychologist who did so much to define and elaborate on the concept of attitude.

From an historical perspective, the distinctive element of the persuasion approach that began in the mid-20th century and continues today is its empirical foundation. Knowledge is gleaned from observation and evidence rather than armchair philosophizing. Researchers devise scientific theories, tease out hypotheses, and dream up ways of testing them in real-world settings. No one—not the Greeks, Romans, or 20th-century Western rhetorical theorists—had taken this approach. Capitalizing on the development of a scientific approach to behavior, new techniques for measuring attitudes, advances in statistics, and American pragmatism, early researchers were able to forge ahead, asking new questions, finding answers.

Scholarly activity continued apace from the 1960s onward, producing a wealth of persuasion concepts, far surpassing those put forth by Aristotle and classical rhetoricians. These terms include attitude, belief, cognitive processing, cognitive dissonance, social judgments, and interpersonal compliance. We also have a body of knowledge—thousands of studies, books, and review pieces on persuasion. More articles and books on persuasion have been published over the past 50 years than in the previous 2,500.

What once was a small field that broke off from philosophy has blossomed into a multidisciplinary field of study. Different scholars carve out different parts of the pie. Social psychologists focus on the individual, exploring people’s attitudes and susceptibility to persuasion. Communication scholars cast a broader net, looking at persuasion in two-person units, called dyads, and examining influences of media on health and politics. Marketing scholars examine consumer attitudes and influences of advertising on buying behavior. If you look up persuasion under PsycINFO or in Communication Abstracts, you will find thousands of studies, journal articles, and books.

What’s more, research plays a critical role in everyday persuasion activities. Advertising agencies spend millions on research. When Nike plans campaigns geared to young people (with ads resembling music videos), company executives plug in facts gleaned from marketing research. Antismoking campaigns hire academic researchers to probe teenagers’ attitudes toward smoking. Campaigners want to understand why kids smoke and which significant others are most apt to endorse smoking in order to design messages that change teens’ attitudes. In the political sphere, the White House launched a worldwide marketing campaign after September 11 in an effort to change Muslims’ negative perceptions of the United States.

Plato, the purist, would be horrified by these developments. Aristotle, the practical theorist, might worry about ethics, but would be generally
pleased. Both would be amazed by the sheer volume of persuasion research and its numerous applications to everyday life. Who knows? Maybe they’ll be talking about our age 500 years from now! So, sit back and enjoy. You’re about to embark on an exciting intellectual journey.

**THE CONTEMPORARY STUDY OF PERSUASION**

Contemporary scholars approach persuasion from a social science point of view. This may seem strange. After all, you may think of persuasion as an art. When someone mentions the word “persuasion,” you may think of such things as “the gift of gab,” “manipulation,” or “subliminal seduction.” You may feel that by approaching persuasion from the vantage point of contemporary social science, we are reducing the area to something antiseptic. However, this is far from the truth. Social scientists are curious about the same phenomena as everybody else is: for example, what makes a person persuasive, what types of persuasive messages are most effective, and why people go along with the recommendations put forth by powerful persuaders. The difference between the scientist’s approach and that of the layperson is that the scientist formulates theories about attitudes and persuasion, derives hypotheses from these theories, and puts the hypotheses to empirical test. By empirical test, I mean that hypotheses are evaluated on the basis of evidence and data collected from the real world.

Theory plays a major role in the social scientific enterprise. A theory is a large, umbrella conceptualization of a phenomenon that contains hypotheses, proposes linkages between variables, explains events, and offers predictions. It may seem strange to study something as dynamic as persuasion by focusing on abstract theories. But theories contain ideas that yield insights about communication effects. These ideas provide the impetus for change. They are the pen that is mightier than the sword.

In fact, we all have theories about human nature and of persuasion (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997a; Stiff, 1994). We may believe that people are basically good, parents have a major impact on kids’ personalities, or men are more competitive than women. We also have theories about persuasion. Consider these propositions:

1. *Advertising manipulates people.*
2. *You can’t persuade people by scaring them.*
3. *The key to being persuasive is physical appeal.*

At some level these are theoretical statements, propositions that contain interesting, testable ideas about persuasive communication. But there are problems with the statements, from a scientific perspective. They are not bona fide theories of persuasion.
The first statement is problematic because it uses a value-laden term, manipulate. To most people, manipulation evokes negative images. Perhaps advertising doesn't manipulate so much as guide consumers toward outcomes they sincerely want. The first rule of good theorizing is to state propositions in value-free language.

The second statement—you can't persuade people by merely scaring them—sounds reasonable until you start thinking about it from another point of view. One could argue that giving people a jolt of fear is just what is needed to get them to rethink dangerous behaviors like drug abuse or binge drinking. You could suggest that fear appeals motivate people to take steps to protect themselves against dangerous outcomes.

The third statement—physical appeal is the key to persuasion—can also be viewed with a critical eye. Perhaps attractive speakers turn audiences off because people resent their good looks or assume they made it because of their bodies, not their brains. I am sure you can think of communicators who are trustworthy and credible, but aren't so physically attractive.

Yet at first blush, the three statements made sense. They could even be called intuitive "theories" of persuasion. But intuitive theories—our homegrown notions of what makes persuasion tick—are problematic. They lack objectivity. They are inextricably linked with our own biases of human nature (Stiff, 1994). What's more, they can't be scientifically tested or disconfirmed. By contrast, scientific theories are stated with sufficient precision that they can be empirically tested (through real-world research). They also contain formal explanations, hypotheses, and corollaries.

Researchers take formal theories, derive hypotheses, and test them in real-world experiments or surveys. If the hypotheses are supported over and over again, to a point of absolute confidence, we no longer call them theories, but laws of human behavior. We have previously few of these in social science. (Darwinian evolution counts as a theory whose hypotheses have been proven to the point we can call it a law.) At the same time, there are many useful social science theories that can forecast behavior, shed light on people's actions, and suggest strategies for social change.

The beauty of research is that it provides us with a yardstick for evaluating the truth value of ideas that at first blush seem intuitively correct. It lets us know whether our gut feelings about persuasion—for example, regarding fear or good looks—amount to a hill of beans in the real world. Moreover, research provides a mechanism for determining which notions of persuasion hold water, which ones leak water (are no good), and, in general, which ideas about persuasive communication are most accurate, compelling, and predictive of human action in everyday life.

Researchers study persuasion in primarily two ways. They conduct experiments, or controlled studies that take place in artificial settings.
Experiments provide convincing evidence that one variable causes changes in another. Because experiments typically are conducted in university settings and primarily involve college students, they don't tell us about persuasion that occurs in everyday life among diverse population groups. For this reason, researchers conduct surveys. Surveys are questionnaire studies that examine the relationship between one factor (for example, exposure to a media antismoking campaign) and another (reduced smoking). Surveys do not provide unequivocal evidence of causation. In the example above, it is possible that people may reduce smoking shortly after a media campaign, but the effects may have nothing to do with the campaign. Smokers may have decided to quit because friends bugged them or they wanted to save money on cigarette costs.

Most studies of persuasive communication effects are experiments. Research on attitudes and applications of persuasion are more likely to be surveys. Both experiments and surveys are useful, although they make different contributions (Hovland, 1959).

Research, the focus of this book, is important because it clarifies concepts, builds knowledge, and helps solve practical problems. One must not lose sight of the big picture—the role persuasion plays in society and the fundamental ethics of persuasive communication. The final section of the chapter, building on the preceding discussion, examines these broader concerns. The next portion provides an overall perspective on the strengths and contributions persuasion makes to contemporary life. The final portion examines ethics.

**SEEING THE BIG PICTURE**

Persuasion is so pervasive that we often don’t ask the question: What sort of world would it be if there were no persuasive communications? It would be a quieter world, that’s for sure, one with less buzz, especially around dinnertime when telemarketers phone! But without persuasion, people would have to resort to different ways to get their way. Many would resort to verbal abuse, threats, and coercion to accomplish personal and political goals. Argument would be devalued or nonexistent. Force—either physical or psychological—would carry the day.

Persuasion, by contrast, is a profoundly civilizing influence. It says that disagreements between people can be resolved through logical arguments, emotional appeals, and faith placed in the speaker’s credibility. Persuasion provides us with a constructive mechanism for advancing our claims and trying to change institutions. It offers a way for disgruntled and disenfranchised people to influence society. Persuasion provides a
mechanism for everybody—from kids trading Pokemon cards to Wall
Street brokers selling stocks—to advance in life and achieve their goals.

Persuasion is not always pretty. It can be mean, vociferous, and ugly.
Persuasion, as Winston Churchill might say, is the worst way to exert in-
fluence—except for all the others. (Were there no persuasion, George W.
Bush and Al Gore would not have settled their dispute about the 2000
election vote in the courtroom, but on the battlefield.)

Persuasion is not analogous to truth. As Aristotle recognized, persuasive
communications are designed to influence, not uncover universal truths
(Cooper & Nothstine, 1998). In fact, persuaders sometimes hide truth, mis-
lead, or lie outright in the service of their aims or clients. The field of ethics
is concerned with determining when it is morally appropriate to deviate
from truth and when such deviations are ethically indefensible. Persuasion
researchers do not pretend to know the answers to these questions. Instead,
like everyone else, we do the best we can, seeking guidance from philoso-
phers, wise people, and theologians. Hopefully, reading this book will give
you insight into your own values, and will help you develop rules of
thumb for what constitute ethical, and unethical, social influence attempts.

Persuasion assumes without question that people have free choice—
that they can do other than what the persuader suggests. This has an
important consequence. It means that people are responsible for the deci-
sions they make in response to persuasive messages. Naturally, people
can’t foresee every possible consequence of choices that they make. They
cannot be held accountable for outcomes that could not reasonably have
been foreseen. But one of the essential aspects of life is choice—necessar-
ily based on incomplete, and sometimes inaccurate, information.

Persuaders also make choices. They must decide how best to appeal to
audiences. They necessarily must choose between ethical and unethical
modes of persuasion. Persuaders who advance their claims in ethical
ways deserve our respect. Those who employ unethical persuasion ploys
should be held accountable for their choices. This raises an important
question: Just what do we mean by ethical and unethical persuasion? The
final portion of the chapter addresses this issue.

**Persuasion and Ethics**

Is persuasion ethical? This simple question has engaged scholars and
practitioners alike. Aristotle and Plato discussed it. Machiavelli touched
on it. So have contemporary communication scholars and social psychol-
ogists. And you can bet that practitioners—Tommy Hilfiger, Phil Knight,
Donna Karan, even Michael Jordan—have given it a passing thought, no
doubt on the way to the bank.
Yet persuasion ethics demand consideration. As human beings we want to be treated with respect, and we value communications that treat others as an ends, not a means, to use Immanuel Kant's famous phrase. At the same time, we are practical creatures, who want to achieve our goals, whether they be financial, social, emotional, or spiritual. The attainment of goals—money, prestige, love, or religious fulfillment—requires that we influence others in some fashion somewhere along the way. Is the need to influence incompatible with the ethical treatment of human beings?

Some scholars would say it invariably is. Plato, who regarded truth as "the only reality in life," was offended by persuasive communication (Golden et al., 2000, p. 17). As noted earlier, he regarded rhetoric as a form of flattery that appealed to people's worst instincts. Although Plato did believe in an ideal rhetoric admirably composed of truth and morality, he did not think that ordinary persuasion measured up to this standard.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant would view persuasion as immoral for a different reason: In his view, it uses people, treating them as means to the persuader's end, not as valued ends in themselves (Borchert & Stewart, 1986). This violates Kant's ethical principles. In a similar fashion, Thomas Nilsen (1974) has argued that persuasion is immoral because a communicator is trying to induce someone to do something that is in the communicator's best interest, but not necessarily in the best interest of the individual receiving the message.

As thoughtful as these perspectives are, they set up a rather high bar for human communication to reach. What's more, these authors tend to lump all persuasive communication together. Some communications are indeed false, designed to manipulate people by appealing to base emotions, or are in the interest of the sender and not the receiver. But others are not. Some messages make very intelligent appeals, based on logic and evidence. In addition, not all persuaders treat people as a means. Therapists and health professionals ordinarily accord clients a great deal of respect. The best counselors treat each person as unique, a mysterious treasure to be deciphered and understood. Many people who do volunteer work—such as those who counsel teens in trouble or AIDS victims—do not receive great financial benefit from their work. Their communications can be very much in the best interest of those receiving the message.

On the other extreme are philosophers who argue that persuasion is fundamentally moral. Noting that people are free to accept or reject a communicator's message, conservative thinkers tend to embrace persuasion. Believing that people are sufficiently rational to distinguish between truth and falsehood, libertarian scholars argue that society is best served by diverse persuasive communications that run the gamut from entirely truthful to totally fallacious (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm,
1956). Persuasion, they say, is better than coercion, and people are in any event free to accept or reject the communicator's message.

There is some wisdom in this perspective. However, to say that persuasion is inherently moral is an extreme, absolute statement. To assume that people are capable of maturely rejecting manipulative communicators' messages naively neglects cases in which trusted but evil people exploit others' vulnerability. What of men who trick or seduce women and then take advantage of their dependence to demand additional sexual and emotional favors? Perhaps we would argue that the women chose to get involved with the men—they're persuaded, not coerced—but it would be heartless to suggest that such persuasion is moral.

Consider also those nasty car salespeople who stretch the truth or lie outright to make a sale (Robin Williams skillfully played one of these some years back in the movie *Cadillac Man*). Throw in the tobacco companies, which waged campaigns to hook people into smoking even though they knew that smoking was addictive. Don't forget history's legions of con men—the snake oil salesmen of the 19th century who promised that new nutritional cures would work magic on those who purchased them, and their modern counterparts, the hosts of infomercials who tell you that vitamin supplements will boost sales and sex.

It defies credulity to argue that persuasion is inherently ethical.

That brings up a third viewpoint, which comes closest to truth. This approach emphasizes that persuasion is amoral—neither inherently good nor bad, but ethically neutral. Aristotle endorsed this view. He argued that persuasion could be used by anyone: "by a good person or a bad person, by a person seeking worthy ends or unworthy ends" (McCroskey, 1997, p. 9). Thus, charisma can be employed by a Hitler or a Martin Luther King, by a Stalin or Ghandi. Step-by-step persuasion techniques that begin with a small request and hook the person into larger and larger commitments have been used by North Korean captors of American soldiers during the Korean War and by religious cult leaders—but also by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Persuasion does have an amoral quality. There is scholarly consensus on this point. This book endorses the view that persuasive communication strategies are not inherently moral or immoral, but good or bad, depending on other factors. Useful as this approach is, it leaves questions unanswered. What determines whether a particular persuasive act is ethical or unethical? How do we decide if a communicator has behaved in a moral or immoral fashion? In order to answer these questions, we must turn to moral philosophy. Philosophers have offered many perspectives on these issues, beginning with Plato and continuing to the present day.

One prominent view emphasizes the consequences of an action. Called utilitarianism, it suggests that actions should be judged based on whether they produce more good than evil. If a message leads to positive
ends, helping more people than it hurts, it is good; if it produces primarily negative consequences, it is bad. For example, an antismoking campaign is good if it convinces many young people to quit. It is bad if it boomerangs, leading more people to take up the habit.

Deontological philosophers, who emphasize duty and obligation, object to this view. They argue that a successful antismoking campaign sponsored by the tobacco industry is not as morally good as an equally successful program produced by activists committed to helping young people preserve their health (Frankena, 1963). These philosophers frequently emphasize intentions, or the motives of the persuader. James C. McCroskey (1972) is a proponent of intention-based morality. He argues that:

If the communicator seeks to improve the well-being of his audience through his act of communication, he is committing a moral act. If he seeks to produce harm for his audience, the communicator is guilty of an immoral act. (p. 270)

Yet even those who agree that morality should be based on intentions acknowledge that it is difficult to arrive at objective criteria for judging another's intention.

Still other approaches to ethics have been proposed. Feminist theorists advocate an ethics of caring, empathy, and mutual respect (Jaggar, 2000). Persuasion is viewed not as something one does to another, but with another (Reardon, 1991). Another useful approach is existentialism, which emphasizes freedom and responsibility. People are free to choose what they want in life, but are responsible for their choices. “There are no excuses, for there is no one to blame for our actions but ourselves,” existentialists argue (Fox & DeMarco, 1990, p. 159).

One choice people have is not to be ethical at all, to pursue self-interest at any cost. Philosophers cannot persuade people to make ethical judgments; they cannot convince unsavory characters to behave in humane ways or to use morally acceptable strategies to influence others. One can give many arguments in behalf of ethical persuasion, from the Golden Rule to moral duty to “You’ll be more effective if you’re honest,” which originated with Aristotle. The best argument is that ethical persuasion is one of the requirements of being a decent and beneficent human being. Perhaps as you read this book and think about persuasion ethics, you will discover more reasons to practice ethical persuasive communication.

THE PRESENT APPROACH

There are thousands of books on persuasion, hundreds of thousands of articles, probably more. “How to persuade” books, audios, and Web sites
THE PRESENT APPROACH

proliferate. No surprise here: A search for the keys to persuasion is surely among the most basic of human desires. Who among us has not entertained the thought that somewhere out there lies the secret to persuasion? Who has not dreamed that he or she might, with luck or perseverance, find the simple trick or magic elixir that contains the formula for social influence?

We may yet find the secret to persuasion or, failing that, we may someday understand perfectly why people need to believe that simple solutions exist. But you won't find a simple formula here. Instead, you will discover intriguing theories, bundles of evidence, creative methodologies, and rich applications of research to everyday life. This book, focusing on academic scholarship on persuasion, attempts to increase your knowledge of attitudes and persuasion. Specifically, I hope that the book will provide you with:

1. greater understanding of persuasion theory and research;
2. increased insight into your own persuasion styles, strengths, and biases;
3. more tolerance of others' attitudes and persuasive techniques;
4. greater skill in resisting unwanted influence attempts;
5. deeper insight into persuasion as it occurs in 21st-century society; and
6. new insights on how to be a more effective and ethical persuader.

The book is divided into three sections. The first part examines the foundations of persuasion: basic terminology, attitude definitions and structure, attitude functions, consistency, and measurement (chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4). The second portion focuses on persuasion theory and communication effects, beginning with an exploration of contemporary cognitive approaches in chapter 5. Chapter 6 examines the communicator in persuasion, discussing such factors as credibility and attractiveness. Chapter 7 focuses on the message, particularly emotional appeals and language. Chapter 8 explores personality and whether certain people are more susceptible to persuasion than others. Chapter 9 discusses the granddaddy of attitude and persuasion approaches: cognitive dissonance theory. Chapter 10 explores interpersonal persuasion and compliance. The third section, focusing on persuasion in American society, examines advertising (chapter 11) and communication campaigns (chapter 12).

Certain themes predominate and run through the book—the central role persuasion plays in contemporary life (from mass marketing to interpersonal politicking); the need to dissect persuasive communication effects carefully; the critical role that people's thinking and cognitive processing play in persuasion effects; the ability of persuasion to manipulate
but also soothe and comfort people; the fact that we persuade ourselves and are responsible for outcomes that occur; and the incredible complexity of human behavior, a fact that makes the study of persuasion fascinating, and never ending.

CONCLUSIONS

Persuasion is a ubiquitous part of contemporary life. If you search the term on the Web, you find hundreds of topics, ranging from “Brainwashing Controversies” to “Marketing” to “How to Get People to Like You.” The Internet is a persuader’s paradise, with Web sites promoting millions of products and services. However, persuasion has more personal components. We can all think of times when we yielded to other people’s influence attempts, tried to persuade friends to go along with us, or scratched our heads to figure out ways we could have done a better job of getting a colleague to buy our plan.

Persuasion is an ancient art. It dates back to the Bible and ancient Greece. Yet there are important aspects of contemporary persuasion that are unique to this era. They include the volume, speed, subtlety, and complexity of modern messages.

Persuasion is defined as a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice. A key aspect of persuasion is self-persuasion. Communicators do not change people’s minds; people decide to alter their own attitudes or to resist persuasion. There is something liberating about self-persuasion. It says that we are free to change our lives in any way that we wish. We have the power to become what we want to become—to stop smoking, lose weight, modify dysfunctional behavior patterns, change career paths, or discover how to become a dynamic public speaker. Obviously, we can’t do everything; There are limits set by both our cognitive skills and society. But in saying that people ultimately persuade themselves, I suggest that we are partly responsible if we let ourselves get connived by dishonest persuaders. I argue that people are capable of throwing off the shackles of dangerous messages and finding positive ways to live their lives.

Of course, this is not always easy. The tools of self-persuasion can be harnessed by both beneficent and malevolent communicators. It is not always easy for people to tell the difference.

Social influence can be viewed as a continuum, with coercion lying on one end and persuasion at the other. There are not always black-and-white differences between persuasion and coercion. They can overlap, as in religious cults.
Persuasion, so much a part of everyday life, has been studied for thousands of years, beginning with the early Greeks. Plato criticized the Sophists' rhetoric, and Aristotle developed the first scientific approach to persuasion. Since then, numerous rhetorical books have been written, spanning oratory, language, identification, and mass media.

A persistent theme in persuasion scholarship—from Plato to the present era—is ethics. The rub is that persuasive communication can be used by both moral and immoral persuaders, and unfortunately has been successfully exploited by fascist dictators. What makes a particular persuasive encounter ethical or unethical? Philosophers emphasize the consequences of the communication and the communicator's intentions. They have also identified many reasons why individuals should engage in ethical persuasive activities. Persuasion in and of itself is neither all good nor all bad. As students and practitioners of persuasion, we can study its use and become more sensitive to the techniques persuaders employ, as well as the impact they have on individuals and society. By gaining a greater appreciation for persuasion processes and effects, as well as its ethical foundations, we can hopefully wield this powerful instrument in more influential and beneficent ways.
Chapter 2

Attitudes: Definition and Structure

Click onto a Web site for, say, religion, capital punishment, animal rights, poverty, or crime. Or if you prefer cultural venues, check out sites for hip hop music, body piercing, tattoos, sports, or cars. If you prefer the older, traditional media, you can peruse books or letters to the editor, or you can tune into a radio talk show. You will find them there.

What you will locate are attitudes—strong, deeply felt attitudes, as well as ambivalent, complex ones. You see, even today, when we communicate through cell phones, laptops, and palm pilots, attitudes are ubiquitous. To appreciate the pervasiveness, depth, and strength of attitudes, I invite you to read over these comments written in the wake of the traumatic events of September 11:

- It is time for America to abandon its candy-colored views of what is right and what is wrong. We are dealing with extremists who recognize no restraints, and we as a country should deal with them at their own level to destroy them. . . . Morality is not the question here. This is war, and who will win it is now the question. If the terrorists want to play on their own terms, then we should play at their level. That is the only way in which they will be defeated. (David Richmond, The New York Times, September 17, 2001)

- We hate the people who did this, and we want to torture them for what they’ve done. But that is wrong. Similar feelings of hatred resulted in these devastating attacks. When does the circle of violence stop? We react. Terrorists then respond to our reaction, and we react again. Rather than hatred, this situation should be about change—a new direction that promotes love for your fellow man. . . . As a nation, let’s say a prayer and bond together to get through this. (Clifford J. Fazzolari, USA Today, September 12, 2001)

- I would like to take this time to ask all Americans to embrace the Arab-American communities in this country and not blame them for last
Tuesday’s terrorist attacks. We all need to pull together to get through this trying time, and it would be a shame to hold a large group of decent, law-abiding citizens responsible for the actions of a few ignorant radicals. If we blame the Arab-American community for being responsible for the actions of terrorists, then we are no better than the people who are attacking us simply because we are Americans. (Jack Norton, USA Today, September 18, 2001)

- It would be easier to grasp if there were a shred of reason behind it—reason in the sense of logic, rationality, coherence. But this was just about hate. There are people who hate us.... What we have here is an unfortunate fact of our planet: Its dominant species combines extreme cleverness with an unreliable morality and a persistent streak of insanity. Thus, it has ever been; thus it shall ever be. (Joel Achenbach, The Washington Post Weekly Edition, September 17–23, 2001)

- The act of war against select targets throughout this country happened because we are America. . . . I am proud at this moment to be an American because the very fiber of our nation’s principles is such an affront to our enemies that they attempted to break our foundation and failed. It is because of what we are and what we represent that we suffered this tragedy. . . . America cannot be contained within the boundary of 50 states and a few frail buildings. Rather, America is a spirit that inspires the repressed of the world over. In the coming days, let us continue to live, walk and be Americans. (Kristian Dyer, USA Today, September 19, 2001)

Attitudes—not always this strong or vitriolic, but an indispensable part of our psychological makeup—are the subject of this chapter and the one that follows. Attitudes, and their close cousins (beliefs and values), have been the focus of much research over the past 50 years. They are the stuff of persuasion—materials persuaders try to change, possessions we cling to tenaciously, badges that define us, categories that organize us, constructs that marketers want to measure and manipulate, and in the final analysis rich textured pieces of our personae that we call on to give life its meaning and depth. The first portion of the chapter defines attitude and discusses its main components. The second section focuses on the structure of attitude, ambivalence, and how people cope with inconsistency. The third portion of the chapter examines the psychology of strong, deeply held attitudes.

THE CONCEPT OF ATTITUDE

“She’s got an attitude problem,” someone says, telegraphing familiarity with the term, attitude. But being familiar with a term does not mean one can necessarily articulate a clear, comprehensive definition. This is a task
that we look to scholars to perform, and social scientists have offered a litany of definitions of attitude, dating back to the 19th century. Darwin regarded attitude as a motor concept (a scowling face signifies a “hostile attitude”) (see Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981a). Freud, by contrast, “endowed (attitudes) with vitality, identifying them with longing, hatred and love, with passion and prejudice” (Allport, 1935, p. 801). Early 20th-century sociologists Thomas and Znaniecki placed attitude in a social context, defining it as a “state of mind of the individual toward a value” (Allport, 1935).

Their view resonated with a growing belief that the social environment influenced individuals, but then-contemporary terms like custom and social force were too vague and impersonal to capture the complex dynamics by which this occurred. Attitude, which referred to a force or quality of mind, seemed much more appropriate. By the 1930s, as researchers began to study the development of racial stereotypes, Gordon Allport (1935) declared that attitude was the most indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology.

Attitude is a psychological construct. It is a mental and emotional entity that inheres in, or characterizes, the person. It has also been called a “hypothetical construct,” a concept that cannot be observed directly but can only be inferred from people’s actions. An exemplar of this approach is the Michigan psychology professor who ran through the halls of his department shouting (in jest) that “I found it. I found it. I found the attitude.” His comment illustrates that attitudes are different from the raw materials that other scientific disciplines examine—materials that can be touched or clearly seen, such as a rock, plant cell, or an organ in the human body.

Although in some sense we do infer a person’s attitude from what he or she says or does, it would be a mistake to assume that for this reason attitudes are not real or are “mere mental constructs.” This is a fallacy of behaviorism, the scientific theory that argues that all human activity can be reduced to behavioral units. Contemporary scholars reject this notion. They note that people have thoughts, cognitive structures, and a variety of emotions, all of which lose their essential qualities when viewed exclusively as behaviors. Moreover, they argue that an entity that is mental or emotional is no less real than a physical behavior. As Allport (1935) noted perceptively:

Attitudes are never directly observed, but, unless, they are admitted, through inference, as real and substantial ingredients in human nature, it becomes impossible to account satisfactorily either for the consistency of any individual’s behavior, or for the stability of any society (p. 839).
Over the past century, numerous definitions of attitude have been proposed. The following views of attitude are representative of the population of definitions. According to scholars, an attitude is:

- an association between a given object and a given evaluation (Fazio, 1989, p. 155);
- a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6);
- enduring systems of positive or negative evaluations, emotional feelings, and pro or con action tendencies with respect to social objects (Krech, Crutchfield, & Ballachey, 1962, p. 139);
- a more or less permanently enduring state of readiness of mental organization which predisposes an individual to react in a characteristic way to any object or situation with which it is related (Cantril, quoted in Allport, 1935, p. 804).

Combining these definitions and emphasizing commonalities, one arrives at the following definition of attitude: a learned, global evaluation of an object (person, place, or issue) that influences thought and action. I review the components of the definition below.

**Characteristics of Attitudes**

1. **Attitudes are learned.** People are not born with attitudes. They acquire attitudes over the course of socialization in childhood and adolescence. This has important implications. It means, first, that no one is born prejudiced. Children don’t naturally discriminate against kids with different skin color or religious preferences. Over time, kids acquire prejudiced attitudes. Or to be more blunt, they learn to hate.

   Fortunately, not all attitudes are so negative. Think about the rush you get when “The Star-Spangled Banner” is played after a U.S. victory at the Olympics. People have positive sentiments toward all sorts of things—hometown sports teams, teachers who lift our spirits, children, pets, cool cars; you get the drift.

   Given the powerful role attitudes play in our lives, some researchers have speculated that attitudes contain a genetic component. Tesser (1993) acknowledged that there is not “a gene for attitudes toward jazz in the same way as there is a gene for eye color” (p. 139). But he argued that inherited physical differences in taste and hearing might influence attitudes toward food and loud rock music. Perhaps those who are born with higher activity levels gravitate to vigorous exercise or sports.
These are reasonable, very interesting, claims. In light of growing evidence that genes can influence behavior, it is certainly possible that we may someday discover that people’s genetic makeup predisposes them to approach certain activities and avoid others. At present, though, there is little evidence that attitudes have a genetic foundation. Moreover, even if Tesser’s claims turned out to be true, it would not mean that genes cause certain attitudes to develop. The environment will always have a large impact in shaping our responses and modes of seeing the world. For example, a person might be genetically predisposed to like pineapple, but if pineapple is not available (or affordable), she cannot develop a positive attitude toward the fruit. In addition, if the first time she tastes pineapple she develops a rash or gets bitten by a dog, she is bound to evaluate pineapple negatively.

Thus, even if attitudes have genetic antecedents, these inherited preferences are not equivalent to attitudes. Attitudes develop through encounters with social objects. “Individuals do not have an attitude until they first encounter the attitude object (or information about it) and respond evaluatively to it,” Alice H. Eagly and Shelly Chaiken (1998, p. 270) declare.

2. Attitudes are global, typically emotional, evaluations. Attitudes are, first and foremost, evaluations. Having an attitude means that you have categorized something and made a judgment of its net value or worth. It means that you are no longer neutral about the topic. That doesn’t mean you can’t have mixed feelings, but your view on the issue is no longer bland or without color.


Affect usually plays an important part in how attitudes are formed or experienced. I say “usually” because some attitudes may develop more intellectually, by absorbing information, while others are acquired through reward and punishment of previous behavior (Dillard, 1993; Zanna & Rempel, 1988). Attitudes are complex. They have different components and are formed in different ways. A classic tripartite model emphasizes that attitudes can be expressed through thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Breckler, 1984). Our attitudes are not always internally consistent, and you may have contradictory attitudes toward the same issue.

Attitudes can be regarded as large summary evaluations of issues and people. (They are global or macro, not micro.) Your attitude toward men’s and women’s roles is a large, complex entity composed of beliefs, affect, and perhaps intentions to behave one way or another. For this reason, researchers speak of “attitude systems” that consist of several
subcomponents. Attitudes encompass beliefs, feelings, intentions to behave, and behavior itself.

3. **Attitudes influence thought and action.** Attitudes (and values) organize our social world. They allow us to quickly categorize people, places, and events and to figure out what's going on. They're like notebook dividers or labels you use to categorize your CD collection. Attitudes shape perceptions and influence judgments. If you're a Republican, you probably evaluate Republican presidents like Ronald Reagan favorably, and have a negative, gut-level reaction to Democratic leaders like former president Clinton. And vice versa if you're a Democrat. On the other hand, if you hate politics and distrust politicians, you filter the political world through this skeptical set of lenses.

Attitudes also influence behavior. They guide our actions and steer us in the direction of doing what we believe. In our society, consistency between attitude and behavior is valued, so people try hard to “practice what they preach.” As will be discussed, people usually translate attitudes into behavior, but not always.

Attitudes come in different shapes and sizes. Some attitudes are strong, others are weaker and susceptible to influence. Still others contain inconsistent elements. Some attitudes exert a stronger impact on thought and behavior than others.

In sum: Attitudes are complex, dynamic entities—like people. Persuasion scholar Muzafer Sherif put it best:

> When we talk about attitudes, we are talking about what a person has learned in the process of becoming a member of a family, a member of a group, and of society that makes him react to his social world in a consistent and characteristic way, instead of a transitory and haphazard way. We are talking about the fact that he is no longer neutral in sizing up the world around him; he is attracted or repelled, for or against, favorable or unfavorable. (Sherif, 1967, p. 2)

**Values and Beliefs**

What do you value? What do you believe about life and society? To answer these questions, it helps to clearly define value and belief. Both concepts play an important role in persuasion. Like attitudes, values and beliefs are learned and shape the ways we interpret information.

**Values** are ideals, “guiding principles in one’s life,” or overarching goals that people strive to obtain (Maio & Olson, 1998). They are our “conceptions of the desirable means and ends of action” (Kluckhohn, 1951). Values can either transcend or celebrate selfish concerns. Freedom,
equality, and a world of beauty are universal values that extend beyond individual interests (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1996). Self-fulfillment, excitement, and recognition express strong desires to enrich our own lives. Warm relationships with others and a sense of belonging emphasize love and security (Kahle, 1996).

Values conflict and collide. “Difficult choices are unavoidable,” observe Philip E. Tetlock and his colleagues (Tetlock, Peterson, & Lerner, 1996, p. 25; see Box 2–1).

### BOX 2–1

**VALUE COMPLEXITIES**

The following is a list of things that some people look for or want out of life. Please study the list carefully and then rate each thing on how important it is in your daily life, where 1 = important to me, and 9 = extremely important to me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important to Me</th>
<th>Most Important to Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sense of belonging (to be accepted and needed by our family, friends, and community)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Excitement (to experience stimulation and thrills)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Warm relationships with others (to have close companionships and intimate friendships)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-fulfillment (to find peace of mind and to make the best use of your talents)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Being well respected (to be admired by others and to receive recognition)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Kahle (1996)

This is one way that psychologists measure people's values. Lynn Kahle (1996), who developed the above scale, has found that there are countless individual differences in values. For example, fashion leaders value fun and enjoyment in life more than other people. Women favor a sense of belonging and warm relationships with others more than men.

Values may also predict whether people stay together. Perhaps couples who share values when they are forging a relationship, as when both want stimulation and excitement, break up when their values diverge. Having
satiated the need for excitement, one partner wants self-fulfillment, while the other still craves ever-more exciting encounters.

People face intrapersonal, as well as interpersonal, value conflicts. When a choice pits two cherished, universal values against one another, individuals weigh each option carefully, realizing that neither alternative will make them totally happy. Such gut-wrenching decisions are common in government, where policymakers must adjudicate between values of diverse constituent groups. Tetlock discusses this in his value–pluralism model, which looks at how people wrestle with difficult ideological choices (Tetlock et al., 1996).

Consider, for example, that a decision to regulate Internet pornography upholds the value of preventing harm to others, but undermines freedom of choice. Former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s policy of stopping and frisking suspicious people violated civil liberties, but reduced crime. Affirmative action presents a choice between two “good” values: promoting diversity and allocating rewards based on merit. The issue is so complicated that philosophers do not agree on what constitutes a fair or just policy.

Abortion is even more daunting. It pits the value of sanctity of life against freedom of choice. Partisans see these issues very differently. Conservative opponents of abortion cannot comprehend how liberals, who are pro-choice, can at the same time oppose capital punishment. In the conservative’s view, liberals favor murder of a fetus but oppose execution of a hardened criminal. Liberals wonder how people who oppose abortion can favor capital punishment. How, they wonder, could someone who views abortion as killing babies favor the death penalty (Seligman & Katz, 1996, p. 53)?

George Lakoff, a cognitive linguist sensitive to the meaning of words and power of conceptual systems, wrote a book that explores such apparent contradictions in belief systems. To Lakoff (1996), a liberal does not experience a contradiction in taking a pro-choice position and opposing capital punishment, and a conservative is equally comfortable opposing abortion but favoring the death penalty. Here’s why:

A strict conservative has an absolute view of right and wrong. Aborting a baby is morally wrong (of course, the choice of the word “baby” to describe abortion is critical, an issue taken up in chapter 7). A conservative, adhering to a value of self-discipline and responsibility, puts the onus on (for example) the unmarried teenage girl who consented to sex in the first place. She engaged in immoral behavior and should at least have the guts to take responsibility for her actions. Capital punishment fits into a somewhat different cognitive category. Believing that morality involves retribution (punishment for sins committed), conservatives feel strongly that capital punishment is an acceptable method to punish crime.

A pure liberal, by contrast, puts considerable value on protecting rights, and extending compassion to those in need. Arguing that abortion does not involve a human life, but destruction of an embryo or fetus, liberals

Continued
gravitate to protecting the freedom of the pregnant woman to choose whether or not to have a baby. In addition, guided by values of compassion and nurturance, liberals look with empathy at the teenage girl’s predicament. She made a mistake, they acknowledge, but is not old enough to be a mother; forcing her to have a child when she is not psychologically ready to be a mom will only hurt her child in the long run. When it comes to capital punishment, liberals note that “nurturance itself implies a reverence for life,” but “the death penalty denies such a reverence for life” and so is inconsistent with liberal values (Lakoff, pp. 208–209).

There is merit in both liberal and conservative values. Both are grounded in deep commitments to morality, yet liberals and conservatives view morality in different ways. Unfortunately, many people react to labels in knee-jerk ways when someone from the other camp discusses an issue. “You’re just a bleeding heart liberal,” a conservative shrieks. “He’s a real conservative,” a liberal moans as if “conservative” were an obscenity.

Values are more global and abstract than attitudes. For example, the value of freedom encompasses attitudes toward censorship, entrepreneurship, political correctness, and smoking in public. People have hundreds of attitudes, but dozens of values (e.g., Rokeach, 1973). Values, even more than attitudes, strike to the core of our self-concepts.

In contrast, beliefs are more specific and cognitive. Beliefs number in the hundreds, perhaps thousands. These are typical:

- Girls talk more about relationships than do guys.
- Maintaining a vegetarian diet improves your state of mind.
- Rap has transformed music.
- College students drink too much.
- Global warming threatens the planet.

Beliefs are more cognitive than values or attitudes. Beliefs are cognitions about the world—subjective probabilities that an object has a particular attribute, or an action will lead to a particular outcome (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

People frequently confuse beliefs with facts. Just because we fervently believe something to be true does not make it so. Stereotypes can contain kernels of truth about ethnic groups, but are typically gross generalizations that are filled with inaccurate perceptions. (Archie Bunker comes to
Beliefs can be patently and unequivocally false. A Taliban leader from Afghanistan believes that in America, parents do not show love to their children and the only good thing to come out of the United States is candy (Goldberg, 2000). Unfortunately, beliefs like these are tenaciously held and highly resistant to change.

On a more general level, beliefs can be viewed as core components of attitudes. Attitudes are complex components of beliefs and affect.

Beliefs can also be categorized into different subtypes. Descriptive beliefs, such as those previously discussed, are perceptions or hypotheses about the world that people carry around in their heads. Prescriptive beliefs are “ought” or “should” statements that express conceptions of preferred end-states. Prescriptive beliefs, such as “People should vote in every election” or “The minimum wage should be increased,” cannot be tested by empirical research. They are part of people’s worldviews. Some scholars regard prescriptive beliefs as components of values.

Beliefs and values are fascinating, yet have received less scholarly attention than attitudes. This is because the attitude concept helped bridge behaviorist and cognitive approaches to psychology. It explained how people could be influenced by society, yet also internalize what they learned. It articulated a process by which social forces could affect behavior, and not merely stamp their response on the organism.

Suppose we could glimpse an attitude up close. Let’s say we could handle it, feel its shape and texture, and then inspect it carefully. What would we see?

We cannot observe attitudes with the same exactitude that scientists employ when examining molecules under electron microscopes. We lack the attitudinal equivalent to the human genome, the long strand of DNA that contains our 23 critical chromosome pairs. Instead, we infer attitudes from what people do or say, and what they report on carefully constructed survey instruments. This does not make attitudes any less real than chemicals on the Periodic Table, the 30,000 human genes, rocks, plants, or any other material that scientists scrutinize. It simply makes our job of uncovering their basic content more challenging and perhaps more subject to human fallibility.

Just as the human genome and physical substances have structure, attitudes also possess a certain organization. How are attitudes organized? What are their major components? Social scientists have proposed several models to help answer these questions.
Expectancy–Value Approach

The expectancy–value perspective asserts that attitudes have two components: cognition and affect, (or head and heart). Your attitude is a combination what you believe or expect of a certain object, and how you feel about (evaluate) these expectations. The theory was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1975 and is still going strong today! According to Fishbein and Ajzen, attitude is a multiplicative combination of: (a) strength of beliefs that an object has certain attributes and (b) evaluations of these attributes (see Fig. 2.1). The prediction is represented by the following mathematical formula:

\[ A = \sum b(i) \times e(i) \]

where \( b(i) = \) each belief and \( e(i) = \) each evaluation.

Formulas like these are helpful because they allow for more precise tests of hypotheses. There is abundant evidence that attitudes can be accurately estimated by combining beliefs and evaluations. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) showed that beliefs (particularly personally important ones) and evaluations accurately estimate attitudes toward a host of topics, ranging from politics to sex roles. Beliefs are the centerpiece of attitude, and have provided researchers with rich insights into the dynamics of attitudes and behaviors.

Diane M. Morrison and her colleagues (1996) systematically examined beliefs about smoking in an elaborate study of elementary school children’s decisions to smoke cigarettes. They measured beliefs about smoking by asking kids whether they thought that smoking cigarettes will:

- hurt your lungs
- give you bad breath

![FIG. 2.1 Expectancy–value approach to attitudes.](image-url)
• make your friends like you better
• make you feel more grown up
• taste good

The researchers assessed **evaluations** by asking children if they felt that these attributes (e.g., hurting your lungs, making your friends like you better) were good or bad. An evaluation was measured in this general fashion:

Do you think that making your friends like you better is:

*very good, good, not good or bad, bad, or very bad?*

Morrison and her colleagues gained rich insights into the dynamics of children's attitudes toward smoking. Had they just measured attitude, they would have only discovered how kids evaluated cigarette smoking. By focusing on beliefs, they identified specific reasons why some children felt positively toward smoking. By assessing evaluations, the researchers tapped into the affect associated with these attributes. Their analysis indicated that two children could hold different attitudes about smoking because they had different beliefs about smoking's consequences or because they held the same beliefs but evaluated the consequences differently.

Morrison et al.'s findings shed light on the underpinnings of attitudes toward smoking. Some children evaluate smoking favorably because they believe that their friends will like them better if they smoke, or that smoking makes them feel grown up. Kids who value these outcomes may be particularly inclined to start smoking before they hit adolescence. This information is clearly useful to health educators who design anti-smoking information campaigns.

**Affect, Symbols, and Ideologies**

A second perspective on attitude structure places emotion and symbols at center stage. According to the symbolic approach, attitudes—particularly political ones—are characterized by emotional reactions, sweeping sentiments, and powerful prejudices. These, rather than molecular beliefs, are believed to lie at the core of people's evaluations of social issues.

Consider racism, sexism, or attitudes toward abortion. These evaluations are rife with symbols and charged with affect. According to David O. Sears, people acquire affective responses to symbols early in life from parents, peers, and mass media (Sears & Funk, 1991). Symbols include the flag, religious ornaments, and code words associated with minority groups. As a result of early learning experiences, people develop strong attitudes toward their country, as well as religious values, ethnic loyalties, and racial prejudices. These "symbolic predispositions," as they are called, lie
at the core of people's attitudes toward social issues. Two examples may be helpful here.

During the 1970s, many Whites opposed school busing to achieve racial integration. Some observers suggested that one reason Whites reacted this way was because they were personally affected by busing. Their kids would have to be bused, perhaps taking the bus for a considerable distance. But this turned out not to be the case. In fact, the best predictor of Whites' opposition to busing was racial prejudice, a symbolic predisposition (Sears et al., 1980; Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000).

A more recent example involves AIDS. Although Americans have become more empathic toward the plight of AIDS victims in recent years, many still harbor prejudice toward those who have contracted the AIDS virus. John Pryor and Glenn Reeder (1993) offer the following explanation:

HIV/AIDS may have acquired a symbolic meaning in our culture. As a symbol or a metaphor, it represents things like homosexual promiscuity, moral decadence, and the wrath of God for moral transgressions. . . . So, when people react negatively to someone with AIDS (or HIV), they may be expressing their feelings about the symbol. This analysis could explain why those strongly opposed to homosexuality react negatively to nonhomosexuals with HIV. Even the infected child bears the symbol of homosexual promiscuity. (p. 279)

Pryor and Reeder argue that we cognitively represent people and ideas in certain ways. A person with AIDS (called a person node) is not a neutral entity, but is connected with all sorts of other ideas and emotions that come to mind when we think about AIDS. AIDS (or HIV) may be associated in an individual's mind with homosexuals, drug users, minorities, promiscuous sex, even death. All of these entities are charged with emotion or affect. These emotions become powerfully associated with a person with AIDS (see Fig. 2.2).

The symbolic attitude perspective goes a long way toward helping us deconstruct people's views on contemporary issues. It calls attention to the role that associations play in attitude structure (as well as the effect of more elaborated beliefs; Sears et al., 2000). In fairness, although the model has done much to clarify the dynamics of racially prejudiced and homophobic attitudes, it has not been applied to the study of other equally strong attitudes, such as those held by militant minority group activists or religious extremists. Presumably, symbolic predispositions are at the foundation of a variety of affect-based social and political attitudes that we encounter in everyday life.

The Role of Ideology. A third view of attitude organization emphasizes ideology, or worldview. Some people's attitudes are guided by broad
ideological principles. These individuals typically forge stronger connections among diverse political attitudes than those who don’t think much about ideology. For example, conservatives, whose worldviews emphasize self-reliance, responsibility, and reward for hard work, typically oppose welfare because it gives money to those who don’t hold down jobs. Conservatives support across-the-board tax cuts because they reward with tax refunds those who have earned the most money (Lakoff, 1996). Attitudes toward welfare and taxes, flowing from a conservative ideology, are therefore interrelated.

By contrast, liberals—who value nurturance, fairness, and compassion for the disadvantaged—favor welfare because it helps indigent individuals who have been left behind by society. Liberal thinkers also oppose across-the-board tax cuts because (in their view) they favor the rich; liberals prefer targeted tax cuts that redistribute money to low- and middle-income people. Attitude toward welfare and tax cuts go together—are correlated—in liberals’ minds (see Fig. 2.3).

As a general rule, ideologues view social and political issues differently than ordinary citizens. Unlike many people, who respond to issues primarily on the basis of simple symbolic predispositions, ideologues’
begin with an ideology, and their attitudes flow from this (see Lavine, Thomsen, & Gonzales, 1997).

The ideological approach to attitudes asserts that attitudes are organized “top-down.” That is, attitudes flow from the hierarchy of principles (or predispositions) that individuals have acquired and developed.

A shortcoming with this approach is that it assumes people operate on the basis of one set of ideological beliefs. In fact, individuals frequently call on a variety of prescriptive beliefs when thinking about social issues (Conover & Feldman, 1984). For instance, a student might be a social liberal, believing affirmative action is needed to redress societal wrongs. She could also be an economic conservative, believing that government should not excessively regulate private companies. The student might also have strong religious convictions and a deep belief in a Supreme Being. Her social attitudes are thus structured by a variety of belief systems, sometimes called schema, rather than by one singular ideological set of principles.

ARE ATTITUDES INTERNALLY CONSISTENT?

Expectations, affect, symbolic predispositions, and ideology all influence the nature of attitudes. This raises a new question. Given that attitudes are complex macromolecules with so many different components, one wonders whether they are in harmony or in disarray. Are attitudes at peace or ready to ignite due to the combustible combination of cognitions, affect, and behavior? In other words, when we have an attitude toward an issue, are we all of one mind, consistent in our thoughts and feelings, or are we divided and ambivalent? These are questions that many of us have probably asked in one way or another. We have heard people say, “Intellectually, I agree, but emotionally I don’t,” or “You’re a hypocrite; you say one thing and do another.”

Social scientists have explored these issues, guided by theories and empirical methods. This section examines internal consistency of attitudes, and the next chapter focuses on the larger issue of attitude and behavior congruency.
Intra-Attitudinal Consistency

It’s pleasant when we are all of one mind on an issue—when our general attitude is in sync with specific beliefs about the topic, or has the same “electrical charge” as our feelings. However, life does not always grant us this pleasure. We are ambivalent about many issues. Ambivalence occurs when we feel both positively and negatively about a person or issue (Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). Ambivalence is characterized by uncertainty or conflict between attitude elements.

One type of ambivalence occurs when we hold seemingly incompatible beliefs. Many people evaluate their own doctor positively, but view the health system negatively. They believe their family is healthy, but American families are in trouble. And they frequently have kind things to say about their own representative to Congress, but disparage “the bums in Washington” (Perloff, 1996). One source for this discrepancy is mass media, which typically focus on the seamy side of political life. An effect is an ambivalence about the issue in question.

People are also ambivalent when they have strikingly different feelings about an issue. Some (though not all) Americans experienced this after the O. J. Simpson verdict. They were elated that Simpson had been acquitted, noting that “the court system has been biased against Blacks for years; justice was done, this is a victory for Black people.” At the same time, they felt very sad, believing that “the victims and their families must have suffered a lot” (Mendoza-Denton et al., 1997, p. 577).

Perhaps the most common type of ambivalence is the head versus heart variety—our cognitions take us one way, but our feelings pull us somewhere else. Expectancy–value theory deals with this when it stipulates that people can have strong beliefs about two or more outcomes, but evaluate the outcomes very differently. For example, a student may believe that her professor taught her a lot about physiology, but at the same time kept her waiting in his office. She evaluates knowledge gain positively, but time misspent negatively. A more dramatic example involves the ambivalent attitudes many young women harbor toward safer sex. For example, many women (correctly) believe that using condoms can prevent AIDS, and they evaluate AIDS prevention positively. They also believe that requesting condoms will upset their boyfriends, and place a negative value on this outcome. “My boyfriend hates them,” one young woman said, adding, “Frankly, I can’t blame him. For me it certainly puts a crimp on what I would like to do to satisfy him,” she noted (Perloff, 2001, p. 13). Persuaders face a challenge in cases like this one. To change this woman’s attitude toward safer sex, they must help her rethink her fear of offending her boyfriend.

Sex roles is unquestionably an area in which many people feel a great deal of ambivalence. Some of this stems from conflict between early
socialization and later experiences, in which individuals realize that some of the attitudes learned as children don't fit reality. As children, girls traditionally learn that they should get married, have children, and center their lives around caring for others. Boys develop an orientation toward careers, viewing women as trophies to acquire along the way. When girls grow up and come to value independence of mind, and boys view women in a more egalitarian light, they realize that their symbolic upbringing is at odds with their newly acquired beliefs. But old ideas die hard, and the result is conflict between childhood affect and grown-up cognition.

Ambivalence can frequently be found among young women who love the power and responsibility that comes with high-powered corporate jobs, yet also worry that their commitment to career will compromise their chances of raising a family when they reach their 30s. Writer Peggy Orenstein (2000) documented this, interviewing scores of women across the country, asking them to share their feelings about careers, relationships, and future plans to become a mom and raise a family. Some of the 20-something women Orenstein interviewed worried that “having a child ‘too soon’ would be a disaster: it would cut short their quest for identity and destroy their career prospects” (pp. 33-34). At the same time, these women felt pressure not to have kids too late, noting that women have more difficulty conceiving a child when they reach their late 30s. On the other side of the career track, educated women who “mommy-tracked” their aspirations to raise families also experienced mixed feelings. These women found enormous gratification in being a mom, yet at the same time lamented, as one woman put it, that “I don’t really have a career and I feel crummy about that” (p. 224). “Ambivalence may be the only sane response to motherhood at this juncture in history, to the schism it creates in women’s lives,” Orenstein concluded (p. 141).

Two researchers, finding themselves fascinated by sex-role ambivalence, approached the issue from a different vantage point. Noting that contemporary society could be described as a patriarchy, yet at the same time reveres women as wives and mothers, Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske (1996) argued that people can have hostile and benevolent beliefs about women. They called this mixture ambivalent sexism, and developed a scale to measure it. Their instrument has two components. The first, hostile sexism, is characterized by agreement with statements like “Women exaggerate problems at work” and “When women lose fairly, they claim discrimination.” The second component, more positive to women, is called benevolent sexism. It reflects agreement with statements like “Women should be cherished and protected by men,” “Women have a superior moral sensibility,” and “Every man ought to have a woman he adores.” Although some readers may reasonably wonder why the latter
three statements are sexist, Glick and Fiske argue that they demean women and make stereotyped, frequently inaccurate assumptions about them.

The investigators reported that numerous men and women could be characterized as ambivalent sexists. These individuals harbored both hostile and benevolent beliefs about women. Sex role attitudes, like men and women themselves, are complex and not always in harmony.

Balancing Things Out

Ambivalence drives some people crazy. They will do anything to resolve it. More generally, psychologists argue that individuals dislike inconsistency among cognitive elements and are motivated to reconfigure things mentally so as to achieve a harmonious state of mind. Fritz Heider (1958) proposed an algebraic model of attitudes, called balance theory. Heider's model involves a triad of relationships: a person or perceiver (P), another person (O), and an issue (X). Heider argued that people prefer a balanced relationship among P, O, and X.

Borrowing from chemistry, Heider suggested that cognitive elements have a positive or negative valence (or charge). A positive relationship, in which P likes O or X, is symbolized with a plus sign. A negative relationship, in which P dislikes O or X, is assigned a minus sign. A visual thinker, Heider diagrammed his model with a series of triangles. Each of the three relationships (P,O, P,X, and O,X) is assigned a plus or minus. Attitudes are in harmony when the signs multiplied together yield a plus. If you remember your elementary arithmetic, you recall that a plus times a plus is a plus, a minus times a minus is a plus, and a plus times a minus yields a minus. Let's see how this works in real life to understand how people cope with inconsistency among attitudinal elements.

Consider for a moment the quandary of a liberal Democrat who learned in 1998 that President Bill Clinton had an adulterous affair with Monica Lewinsky. Let's say the Democrat liked Clinton (this relation is symbolized by a + in the model). Our Democrat also perceived that Clinton approved of his relationship with Lewinsky (+), but disapproved of the Lewinsky affair herself (−). Multiplying the three terms, one gets a minus, suggesting the person's attitude is imbalanced, or not entirely consistent (see Fig. 2.4a).

Presumably, the Democrat would find the inconsistency uncomfort-able and would feel impelled to restore mental harmony. Balance theory says she has several options. She could change her attitude toward Clinton, deciding that she really does not think highly of him anymore. This would yield a positive relationship (Fig. 2.4b). Or she could change her mind about Clinton's adultery and decide it was not so bad. This would also produce cognitive balance (Fig. 2.4c).
Balance theory helps us understand many situations in which people face cognitive inconsistency. For example, one antiabortion activist told a researcher that she could not be a friend with somebody who disagreed with her on abortion (Granberg, 1993). Unfortunately, balance theory does not describe many subtleties in people's judgments. It also fails to describe those situations in which people manage to like people with whom they disagree (Milburn, 1991). For example, during the Clinton impeachment, many Democrats did not reduce their liking of Clinton after they found out about his affair. Nor did they change their negative attitude toward his relationship with Lewinsky. Most Democrats continued to give high marks to Clinton's performance as president, while disapproving of his liaison with Lewinsky. This is not entirely consistent with balance theory. Thus, we need another approach to explain how people grapple with inconsistency. A model proposed by Robert P. Abelson
Drugs. Abortion. Teen pregnancy. Gun control. These are what typically come to mind when we think of attitudes. As suggested earlier, not all attitudes are this strong, nor based as exclusively in affect. However, strong attitudes like these seem to have profound influences on thoughts and behavior. From the French Revolution to violence perpetrated against doctors who perform abortion, “the incidents that attract our attention are often those associated with strong sentiments,” Jon A. Krosnick and Richard E. Petty (1995) note (p. 1). Intrigued by the dynamics of such attitudes, social psychologists have embarked on a series of studies exploring strong attitude characteristics and effects (see Fig. 2.5).

This might all seem obvious at first blush. People with strong attitudes have lots of passion and care a lot; isn’t that what one would expect?
Yes—but remember persuasion scholars take a scientific approach. They want to understand what a strong attitude looks like, what it means psychologically to feel deeply about an issue, how strong attitudes differ from weaker or more ambivalent ones, and the effects of such attitudes on behavior. Remember also that people have done terrible things in the name of strong attitudes. They have killed innocent people and destroyed themselves. The more we can understand such attitudes, the more likely it is that we can devise ways to convince troubled or violent people to rethink their approaches to life.

Attitudes by definition influence thought and action. But strong attitudes are particularly likely to: (a) persist over time, (b) affect judgments, (c) guide behavior, and (d) prove resistant to change (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). Why is this so? Why are strong attitudes stable? According to Maureen Wang Erber and her colleagues (1995):

First, strong attitudes are probably anchored by other beliefs and values, making them more resistant to change. If people were to change their basic religious beliefs, for example, many other attitudes and values linked to these beliefs would have to be changed as well. Second, people are likely to know more about issues they feel strongly about, making them more resistant to
counterarguments. Third, people are likely to associate with others who feel similarly on important issues, and these people help maintain and support these attitudes. Fourth, strong attitudes are often more elaborated and accessible, making it more likely that they will be at the tip of the tongue when people are asked how they feel on different occasions. Fifth, people with strong attitudes are likely to attend to and seek out information relevant to the topic, arming them with still more arguments with which to resist attempts to change their minds. (Wang Erber, Hodges, & Wilson, pp. 437–438)

Think for a moment about something you feel strongly about. Your attitude might be one of those we have discussed in the book—politics, race, sex roles, abortion. Or it could be something quite different—a vegetarian diet, jogging, cigarette smoking, or downloading music. Now think of something you feel less strongly or personally about. How does the first attitude differ from the second?

Social psychologists who have pondered this issue note that there is not just one way that a strong attitude differs from a weaker one. Attitude strength is a multifaceted concept. Thus, there are a variety of elements that differentiate strong from weak attitudes (Krosnick et al., 1993). Strong attitudes are characterized by:

- importance (we care deeply about the issue);
- ego-involvement (the attitude is linked to core values or the self);
- extremity (the attitude deviates significantly from neutrality);
- certainty (we are convinced that our attitude is correct);
- accessibility (the attitude comes quickly to mind);
- knowledge (we are highly informed about the topic); and
- hierarchical organization (the attitude is internally consistent and embedded in an elaborate attitudinal structure).

Note that a particular strong attitude may not possess all of these characteristics. You could regard an attitude as important, but not link it up to your self-concept (Boninger et al., 1995). You could know a lot about an issue, but not be certain that your knowledge is correct. An attitude could come quickly to mind, but it might not be embedded in an extensive internal structure. The upshot of all this is that certain attitudes may be strong, but they are not likely to be simple.

ATTITUDES AND INFORMATION PROCESSING

Strong attitudes influence message evaluations and judgments of communications. Two theories shed light on how this occurs. They are social judgment theory and the attitude accessibility approach.
Social Judgment Theory

- On the eve of a Subway Series between the New York Yankees and New York Mets a few years back, a reporter filed this tongue-in-cheek report on how Yankee and Met fans saw each other, based on interviews with New York baseball fans:
  “Yankee fans are much more highly educated (Allen Sherman, a Yankee fan) said...." We have to be. It’s harder to spell Yankees than Mets. And we can curse in so many different languages. We earn more, so when we throw a beer can it’s those high-priced beer cans. . . .” Fred Sayed, 26, a technical support manager from Queens and a Met fan, was able to be pretty explicit himself in defining Yankee fans: “All Yankee fans are just flat-out stupid.” (Kleinfield, October 19, 2000, p. 1)

- Ask a baseball pitcher why so many home runs are hit these days and you will hear an impassioned speech from a member of an oppressed minority. You will hear how umpires are calling a fist-size strike zone (They’re sticking it to us!), . . . the mounds are lower (They won’t give us any edge!) and, of course, the baseball is different . . . (We’re throwing golf balls out there!). Ask an infielder, an outfielder or any player except a pitcher about the inordinate increase in home runs and a royal smirk often precedes the response. (The answers are pretty obvious, aren’t they?) You are informed the hitters are stronger than they used to be . . . , train daily (I am a machine!) and capitalize on modern technology (We study videotape between at-bats and recognize the weaknesses in all pitchers). (Olney, 2000, p. 38)

These anecdotes show that some people have very strong attitudes toward baseball. But they tell more than that. They speak to the biases individuals have when they harbor strong feelings about a topic, and in this way illustrate the social judgment approach to attitudes. Pioneered by Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn Sherif (1967), social judgment theory emphasizes that people evaluate issues based on where they stand on the topic. As Sherif and Sherif noted:

The basic information for predicting a person’s reaction to a communication is where he places its position and the communicator relative to himself. The way that a person appraises a communication and perceives its position relative to his own stand affects his reaction to it and what he will do as a result. (p. 129)

Thus, social judgment theory emphasizes that receivers do not evaluate a message purely on the merits of the arguments. Instead, the theory stipulates that people compare the advocated position with their attitude and then determine whether they should accept the position advocated in the message. Like Narcissus preoccupied with his reflection in the water, receivers are consumed with their own attitudes toward the topic. They can never escape their own points of view (see Fig. 2.6).
FIG. 2.6 This painting, "Hand with Reflecting Globe," by the artist Maurits Escher illustrates a central principle of social judgment theory. It highlights the notion that people are consumed by their own attitudes toward a topic. They cannot escape their own perspectives on the issue.
Social judgment theory, so named because it emphasizes people's subjective judgments about social issues, articulates several core concepts. These are: (a) latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment; (b) assimilation and contrast; and (c) ego-involvement.

**Latitudes.** Attitudes consist of a continuum of evaluations—a range of acceptable and unacceptable positions, as well as positions toward which the individual has no strong commitment. The *latitude of acceptance* consists of all those positions on an issue that an individual finds acceptable, including the most acceptable position. The *latitude of rejection* includes those positions that the individual finds objectionable, including the most objectionable position. Lying between these two regions is the *latitude of noncommitment*, which consists of those positions on which the individual has preferred to remain noncommittal. This is the arena of the "don't know," "not sure," and "haven't made up my mind" responses (see Fig. 2.7).

Early research focused on the relationship between extreme attitudes and size of the latitudes. Studies indicated that extremity of position influenced the size of the latitudes of rejection and acceptance (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). Individuals with strong—in particular, extreme—views on a topic have large latitudes of rejection. They reject nearly all opposing arguments and accept only statements that are adjacent to their own stands on the issue. This is one reason why it is hard to change these folks' minds.

**Assimilation/Contrast.** One way to appreciate these terms is to focus on an entirely different issue for a moment: the weather. For example, if the weather is unseasonably warm in Chicago one December (say, 60 degrees), people will yak on and on about how hot it is. Expecting the temperature to register 30 degrees, they are pleasantly surprised. This is a

![Diagram](a) 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
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**FIG. 2.7** Latitude of rejection (LOR), latitude of noncommitment (LON), and latitude of acceptance (LOA) of individuals with strong and moderate attitudes on an issue. Panel a illustrates latitudes of individual with a strong attitude. Panel b shows latitudes of individual with a moderate attitude. Hypothetical scale goes from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates a position in total agreement with persuasive message and 0 a position in total disagreement.
**contrast** effect, in which we focus on how different reality is from expectation. On the other hand, if the thermometer reads 38 in December, people think nothing of it. Expecting the temperature to be in the 30s, they are hardly surprised. They **assimilate** the temperature to what they expected, neglecting the fact that 38 degrees is somewhat warmer than average.

Assimilation and contrast are perceptual mistakes, distortions that result from the tendency to perceive phenomena from the standpoint of a personal reference point or **anchor**. People judge message positions not objectively, but subjectively. Their initial attitude serves as the reference point. In assimilation, people pull a somewhat congenial message toward their own attitude, assuming the message is more similar to their attitude than it really is. They overestimate the similarity between a speaker's attitude and their own. In the case of contrast, individuals push a somewhat disagreeable message away from their attitude, assuming it is more different than it really is. They overestimate the difference between the communicator's attitude and their own (Granberg, 1993).

Assimilation and contrast are part of everyday life. We assimilate our friends' attitudes toward our own, assuming their views are more similar to ours than they really are. This is one reason why people who fall in love are so shocked at their first disagreement. At the same time, we contrast our foes, exaggerating the degree to which their attitudes are different from ours. "You mean, we actually agree," we jokingly say to an opponent at the office.

Assimilation and contrast effects show up frequently in politics. This makes sense when you consider two important facts: (a) politicians frequently make ambiguous statements so that they will not offend key constituents, and (b) social judgment theory says that assimilation/contrast will only occur when communications are ambiguous (Granberg, 1993). (When a message is clear cut, no one has any doubt as to where the communicator stands on the issue.) Thus, American voters end up doing a lot of assimilating and contrasting in presidential elections. Not being that interested in politics to begin with, many just **assume** that their favored candidate shares their position on education or health care, and tell themselves that the person they're not voting for takes sharply different positions from their own. After the election, voters are sometimes surprised to discover that the candidate for whom they voted does not share all their viewpoints, and that the opposing candidate was not as different as they feared.

**Ego-Involvement.** If you had to say which concept from social judgment theory exerted the greatest influence on research, it would be involvement. Social scientists have found involvement fascinating because it seems to have such a strong impact on latitudes and assimilation/contrast.
Practitioners have been intrigued because of its many implications for intractable conflict on social and political issues.

Ego-involvement is "the arousal, singly or in combination, of the individual's commitments or stands in the context of appropriate situations" (Sherif et al., 1965, p. 65). People are ego-involved when they perceive that the issue touches on their self-concepts or core values. Highly involved individuals differ from less involved persons in three ways. First, when people are involved in, or care deeply about, a social issue, they have larger latitudes of rejection relative to their latitudes of acceptance and noncommitment. This means they reject just about any position that is not in sync with their own. Second, and in a related vein, they contrast mildly disagreeable messages from their attitudes more frequently than folks who aren't as invested in the issue. Third, when concerned deeply about an issue, people are apt to assimilate ambiguous messages only when the arguments are generally consistent with their preconceived attitudes (Sherif et al., 1965). Individuals with ego-involved stands are hard to persuade: They are stubborn or resilient, depending on your point of view (see Fig. 2.7).

There has been much research exploring the psychology of ego-involved attitudes. Studies have shown that when individuals are ego-involved in an issue (as people frequently are with the environment, religion, or animal rights), they engage in what is known as selective perception. They perceive events so that they fit their preconceived beliefs and attitudes. Two 1950s-era studies documented this tendency. The research was distinctive because the investigators tested hypotheses by locating people with strong views on an issue and then asking them to indicate their perceptions of a message.

Hovland, Harvey, and Sherif (1957), focusing on repeal of a law prohibiting sale of alcoholic beverages in Oklahoma, found that both those opposed to alcoholic beverages and those in favor of drinking thought that a message that by and large agreed with their point of view was fair, but one that disputed it was biased. Hastorf and Cantril (1954) asked Princeton and Dartmouth students to view a film of a football game between their colleges that featured lots of rough play and rule infractions. Students interpreted the game in light of their biases: Princeton and Dartmouth students each saw a game in which their squad was "the good guys" and the other team the "bad guys."

Thus, where we "stand" on an issue depends on where we "sit" psychologically. Flashback to the baseball examples that introduced this section. Yankee and Met fans' strong attitudes colored their views of the other team. Ball players' explanations of increases in home runs differed, depending on whether they were pitchers or hitters.

Recent research, flowing out of the "oldy but goody" tradition of Sherif and Hastorf, has documented that people with strong, ego-involved
attitudes still perceive messages in biased ways (Edwards & Smith, 1996; Miller et al., 1993; Newman et al., 1997; Thompson, 1995; see Box 2–2). An intriguing study by Charles Lord and his colleagues (1979) provides a snapshot on current thinking on this issue. The study was conducted over two decades ago, but is regarded as a classic in the field.

**BOX 2–2**

**WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING?**

You may have heard of Spike Lee’s movie *Do the Right Thing*. It’s a disturbing, controversial portrait of relationships among Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics in the New York City neighborhood of Bedford–Stuyvesant. But did you know that Black and White viewers sometimes react to the movie in diametrically opposite ways? That, at least, is the conclusion reached by Brenda Cooper (1998), who studied the ways that White and African American students interpreted the film. Her study provides additional evidence that ego-involvement influences social judgments. Psychologists have made this point for years, but now comes evidence that the same processes operate when people watch blockbuster movies.

The film is set in New York City on a hot summer day. The movie examines the experiences of Black and Hispanic residents and their tense relationship with Sal, an Italian American owner of the neighborhood pizza joint. Mookie, the main Black character, earns $250 a week delivering Sal’s pizzas to neighborhood residents. The film edges toward the climax when:

Buggin’ Out, one of Mookie’s friends, complains to Sal that all of the pictures on the pizzeria’s “Wall of Fame” are of Italian Americans, yet most of his customers are Blacks . . . Buggin’ Out enlists another Black man, Radio Raheem, in his boycott of Sal’s pizzeria to protest the absence of pictures of African Americans on the “Wall of Fame.” The two men confront Sal, and when Radio Raheem refuses to lower the volume of his boom box, Sal smashes his radio with a baseball bat, calls his customers “niggers,” and a brawl begins. (Cooper, pp. 205–206)

Subsequently, the police arrive, Radio Raheem is killed, Mookie hurls a garbage can through the window, and the pizzeria goes up in flames. Researcher Cooper, noting that people interpret mass media differently depending on their cultural experiences, predicted that Blacks and Whites would experience the film in dramatically different ways. She asked a group of predominately White and Black students to describe their reactions to the movie. As social judgment theory would predict, the perceptions of Whites differed considerably from those of Blacks. Here is how Whites perceived the film:

“Sal’s character was a loving, hardworking man and he treated Mookie like one of his own sons. . . . Sal was not racist and I believe he tried to do what

Continued
BOX 2–2
(CONTINUED)

was right. . . . Sal, despite his hard-hitting attitude, genuinely cared for the people of the community. . . . If a Black man would have owned that pizzeria, and had pictures of just Black men, none of this would have started. I also don't think that a White man would ever ask a Black person who owned something, to put up pictures of some White guy who Blacks neither like nor know what that person did. . . . The guys who came in breaking Sal's rules incited Sal to react negatively. . . . Even though the Black boy with the radio was killed by the White cops, I do not believe that justifies the cruel act of destroying a man's business.” (pp. 212, 214)

African American respondents saw things differently:

“Sal's interactions with the different characters were strictly business. He considered himself to be king of the block and the African Americans were his servants. . . . I saw his (Buggin' Out's) point when he made the statement that if 99% of your business comes from Blacks, then why aren't there any Blacks on the wall? . . . In my community I see exactly what Spike filmed—Whites operate their businesses in Black neighborhoods and yet they do not live in that neighborhood. . . . Sal destroyed his radio—which meant that Sal destroyed a part of Raheem. . . . We received a clear picture of brutality when one of Mookie's friends is killed by the White police. This incident showed us that a Black man was convicted before he was tried. . . . Mookie did the right thing by throwing the garbage can through Sal's window . . . It helped everyone to channel their anger on Sal's property rather than to allow the crowd to continue to attack Sal in revenge for Radio's death.” (pp. 212, 215)

Social judgment theorists could find plenty of examples in these comments of assimilation, contrast, and selective perception. On a general level, there is a similarity between predictions made by social judgment theory, a social psychological account, and qualitative, “postmodern” perspectives cited by Cooper. If there is a moral in these approaches and Cooper's findings, it is that we should appreciate that what we “see” in messages reflects our own cultural perspective. Someday historians may discover that our “view” was indeed correct. But until that time, tolerance and understanding seem like useful prescriptions to follow.

Focusing on attitudes toward capital punishment, the investigators followed the Sherif and Hastorf tradition of locating individuals with strong views on an issue. They focused on two groups of students. One group favored the death penalty, believing it to be an effective deterrent against crime. The second group opposed it, maintaining that capital punishment was inhumane or an ineffective deterrent. Individuals from each group read brief descriptions of two purported investigations of the
death penalty's deterrent effects. One study always reported evidence that the death penalty was effective (e.g., "in 11 of the 14 states, murder rates were lower after adoption of the death penalty"). The other study used similar statistics to make the opposite point—that the death penalty was an ineffective deterrent against crime (in 8 of the 10 states, "murder rates were higher in the state with capital punishment").

Students evaluated the studies and indicated whether they had changed their attitude toward capital punishment. Thus, students read one study that supported, and one study that opposed, their position on the death penalty. The evidence in support of the death penalty's deterrent effect was virtually the same as the evidence that questioned its impact. Now if people were objective and fair, they would acknowledge that the evidence for both sides was equally strong. But that is not how these ego-involved partisans responded.

Proponents of capital punishment found the pro-death-penalty study more convincing, and opponents found the anti-death-penalty study more persuasive. For example, a supporter of capital punishment said this about a study favoring the death penalty:

The experiment was well thought out, the data collected was valid, and they were able to come up with responses to all criticisms.

The same person reacted to the anti-capital-punishment study by remarking that:

There were too many flaws in the picking of the states and too many variables involved in the experiment as a whole to change my opinion.

An opponent of capital punishment said this of a study opposing capital punishment:

The states were chosen at random, so the results show the average effect capital punishment has across the nation. The fact that 8 out of 10 states show a rise in murders stands as good evidence.

The opponent reacted in this way to the pro-capital-punishment study:

The study was taken only 1 year before and 1 year after capital punishment was reinstated. To be a more effective study they should have taken data from at least 10 years before and as many years as possible after. (Lord et al., 1979, p. 2103)

Individuals processed information very selectively, exhibiting what the authors called biased assimilation. They assimilated ambiguous information
to their point of view, believing that it was consistent with their position on capital punishment. What’s more, proponents and opponents managed to feel even more strongly about the issue by the study’s conclusion. Proponents reported that they were more in favor of the death penalty than they had been at the study’s start. Opponents indicated that they were more opposed than they had been at the beginning of the experiment. Reading the arguments did not reduce biased perceptions; it caused partisans to become even more polarized, more convinced that they were right.

Fascinated by the cognitive underpinnings of such perceptions, social psychologists have tried to piece together what happens inside an individual’s mind when he or she is faced with conflicting evidence on an issue. They have suggested that people with strong attitudes have no intention of mentally searching for information that might prove their position wrong. On the contrary, they engage in a “biased memory search” at the get-go; convinced that their position is correct, they search memory for facts that support their view of the world, conveniently overlooking or rejecting evidence on the other side that might call their ideas into question (Edwards & Smith, 1996).

Another factor that plays into all this is the way that involved observers visualize the problem. When thinking about welfare, conservatives see a lazy, fat mother thumbing her nose at those who want her to work. Liberals envision a needy, frail person, marginalized by society, doing her best to raise her kids on her own. On the issue of capital punishment, those who favor the death penalty think first about the victims of the murderer’s horrific act. Or, when thinking of the killer, they call to mind a depraved, sadistic person who kills for sheer pleasure. Death penalty opponents visualize the sadistic execution of a human being, turned from a person to charred human remains. These cognitive representations powerfully influence thinking, and help explain why involved individuals on different sides of the political fence process the same information so differently (Lord et al., 1994).

Interestingly, ego-involved partisans are not necessarily uninformed about the positions advocated by their opponents. In some cases they know their foes’ arguments excruciatingly well, probably better than neutral observers (Pratkanis, 1989). Early social judgment research probably oversimplified the dynamics of social attitudes, suggesting that people shun or quickly forget information that disputes their point of view. Recent studies show that people do not deliberately avoid information that is inconsistent with their viewpoint. Nor do they remember facts congenial with their point of view better than those that are inconsistent with their preexisting attitude (Eagly et al., 1999). On the contrary, when people are ego-involved in an issue, they sometimes scrutinize
facts from the other side carefully, and remember them remarkably well, even though they are not persuaded in the least by the position advocated in the message (Eagly et al., 2001). Individuals with strong viewpoints may find it useful to know arguments from the other side, perhaps to develop stronger counterarguments, or they may be intrigued by the entire issue and therefore motivated to find out as much as they can about both sides. Whatever the reasons, it is fair to say that ego-involved partisans have more complex attitude structures than nonpartisans. Unfortunately, this does not make them more objective or open to considering alternative points of view.

Attitude Accessibility

On September 11, 2001, Americans received a massive, tragic jolt from their quiescence. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon had an enormous impact on the country. A particularly noteworthy, and surprising, effect was the outpouring of patriotism that the events unleashed. Flags flew everywhere. They could be seen on houses, cars, clothing, book bags, even tattoos. People sang the national anthem and “America the Beautiful” proudly and with feeling, not mumbling the words in private embarrassment. Feelings of patriotism, long moribund, came out in waves, as Americans came to appreciate how deeply they felt about the nation’s basic values—indipendence, freedom, liberty, and equality—and how much they loved their country.

Tragically, the events of September 11 accessed attitudes toward America. They thus provide a poignant introduction to the concept of attitude accessibility, a second approach to attitude dynamics developed by Russell H. Fazio. Fazio (1995) views attitude as an association between an object (person, place, or issue) and an evaluation. It’s a linkage between a country (U.S.A.) and a great feeling; an ethnic identity (Black, Hispanic, Asian) and feelings of pride; or a product (Nike tennis shoes) and exhilaration. Prejudiced attitudes, by contrast, are associations between the object and feelings of disgust or hatred.

Attitudes vary along a continuum of strength. Weak attitudes are characterized by a familiarity with the object, but a lukewarm evaluation of its net worth. Your attitudes toward Denmark, Eskimos, and an infrequently advertised brand of sneakers probably fall under the weak label. You have heard of the entities, but don’t have particularly positive or negative feelings toward them. You can retrieve your attitude toward these objects, but not automatically or without effort. Strong attitudes—toward country, an ethnic group, a celebrity, or favorite product—are characterized by well-learned associations between the object and your evaluation. These attitudes are so strong and enduring that we can
activate them automatically from memory. Simply reading the name of the object in print will trigger the association and call the attitude to mind. (Thought experiment: Look at the word Denmark and observe what comes to mind. Now try U.S.A. What thoughts leap to mind? What emotions do you feel? According to accessibility theory, a global feeling about America should come to mind when you see the word on the page; see Fig. 2.8).

The key constructs of the theory are accessibility and association. Accessibility means the degree to which attitude is automatically activated from memory. If you want a simple colloquial phrase, think of accessibility as "getting in touch with your feelings." Associations are links among different components of the attitude. The stronger the linkages, the stronger the attitude. Accessibility theory calls on a cognitive model of associative networks to explain attitude strength. It's a complex model, so an example may help you appreciate the associative notion.

Consider attitude toward America, mentioned above. Imagine the attitude is located somewhere in your mind, with "pathways" or "roads" connecting different components of the attitude. Each component is linked with a positive or negative evaluation. Fourth of July is associated with positive affect, which radiates out (in red, white, and blue) to fireworks and hot dogs, also evaluated positively. Other components of the America concept could be freedom of speech, Thomas Jefferson, "the Star-Spangled Banner," baseball, land of opportunity, and rock 'n' roll. Many people have good feelings about these concepts. The stronger the association between the overall concept, America, and a positive evaluation, the more likely it is that a strong favorable attitude will come quickly to mind when people see the word America.

Needless to say, not everyone loves America. Some Americans have a negative attitude toward their country. Racial prejudice, school violence, and poverty might be images of the U.S.A. that these individuals have conjured up many times. Having learned to strongly associate America with negative feelings, they have a strong unfavorable attitude that would come automatically to mind when they encounter the name of their country (see Fig. 2.9).

You see how powerful accessing can be. Associations among ideas and feelings, learned early in childhood, can form the bulwark of our attitudes. Strong attitudes can be accessed at the drop of a hat—or powerful symbol, triggering a variety of mental and behavioral reactions. (In this sense, accessibility theory resembles the symbolic attitude approach discussed on pp. 47-48.)

Stimulated by the accessibility notion, researchers have conducted numerous experiments over the past decade. They have examined factors that make it more likely that we are "in touch with" our attitudes. They also have explored the influence of accessibility on processing information...
FIG. 2.8 The American flag evokes strong sentiments, typically pride and reverence for country. What comes to mind when you see these flags? (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)
2. ATTITUDES: DEFINITION AND STRUCTURE

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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Fourth of July</td>
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<td>Land of Opportunity</td>
<td>Corporate America</td>
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**FIG. 2.9** Associations and accessibility. An associative network for individual with positive attitude (left) and negative attitude (right) toward America. When attitudes are strong, they can be accessed immediately—in this case, as soon as individuals see the word America.

(Fazio, 1990, 2000; Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997b; Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002). In order to measure this deep-seated construct, researchers have used reaction time procedures. Participants in the study view the name or picture of an attitude object (e.g., O. J. Simpson) on a computer screen and indicate whether they like or dislike the object. The speed with which they push a button on the computer indexes accessibility. The quicker their response time, the more accessible the attitude. Guided by this and related procedures, psychologists have learned a great deal about attitude accessibility. Key findings include:

1. The more frequently people mentally rehearse the association between an object and evaluation, the stronger the connection. Thus, prejudice, on the negative side, and love, on the positive side, are strong attitudes. People have come over time to associate the object of prejudice or love with bad or good feelings. These attitudes come quickly to mind and can influence our behavior, sometimes without our being aware of it. The same
processes occur with attitudes toward country, as in the example of America previously discussed.

2. **Objects toward which we have accessible attitudes are more likely to capture attention** (Roskos-Ewoldsen & Fazio, 1992). Objects that are strongly associated in memory with good or bad feelings are more likely to get noticed. This has interesting implications for advertising, as is discussed in chapter 11.

3. **Accessible attitudes serve as filters for processing information.** People are more likely to process issues in a biased manner if they can access their attitudes from memory (or call them to mind in a situation). An attitude cannot influence thinking if people cannot call it to mind, and attitudes based on strong linkages between the issue and feelings are more apt to be activated when people encounter the issue in real life. An individual may have an extreme position on an issue, but unless he is in touch with his feelings on the topic, it will not influence his judgments.

Attitude accessibility, pioneered over 20 years ago, has become such a popular staple in social psychology that it has generated criticism, as well as praise. Although intrigued by the concept, some researchers question whether accessibility has the strong effects Fazio attributes to it (Doll & Ajzen, 1992). Others have suggested that accessibility is less important than other aspects of attitude strength, such as the ways in which attitudes are mentally structured (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995). These are complex issues. Some researchers, like Fazio, believe that accessibility is the key aspect of attitude strength. Other researchers maintain that personal importance of the attitude is what differentiates strong from weak attitudes, while still other scholars believe that ego-involvement is critical. (And you thought strong attitudes were simple!) Despite their differences, social psychologists agree that accessibility is an intriguing construct, with fascinating implications for information processing and persuasion. We access more of these applications in chapter 3.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Attitudes, fascinating and controversial parts of the human psyche, have been the focus of much research over the past century. They continue to intrigue scholars. Attitudes are centerpieces of persuasion, for they are the entities that communicators wish to shape, mold, or reinforce. An attitude is defined as a learned, global evaluation of an object (person, place, or issue) that influences thought and action.

Attitudes dovetail with values, defined as conceptions of desirable means and ends, and beliefs, which are defined as cognitions about the world. Beliefs can theoretically be tested to determine if they are true,
although people frequently assume their beliefs are equivalent to facts. (They’re not.)

One of the interesting questions about attitudes concerns their structure or organization. Expectancy–value theory says that attitudes are composed of expectations (beliefs) and evaluations of these beliefs. It emphasizes the role that salient, or psychologically relevant, beliefs play in shaping attitudes. Expectancy–value theory helps break down the macro concept of attitude into component parts, yielding rich information about the human mind. The symbolic attitude approach argues that symbolic predispositions, like prejudice and deep-seated values, lie at the heart of attitudes. It calls attention to the many affective attributes that are associated with the attitude object. An ideological perspective contends that attitudes are organized around ideological principles, like liberalism–conservatism.

People being complex, attitudes are not always internally consistent. Individuals frequently experience ambivalence, feeling both positively and negatively about a person or issue. Preferring harmony to discord, people strive to reduce inconsistency among cognitive elements. Balance theory and other cognitive consistency models describe ways that individuals can restore mental harmony. We don’t always succeed in this endeavor, and inconsistency is inevitably a fact of life.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of attitudes is their strength. Strong attitudes are characterized by personal importance, accessibility, and hierarchical organization. Social judgment theory provides many insights into the nature of strong attitudes, calling attention to ways that ego-involved partisans assimilate and contrast messages so as to maintain their original perspective on the issue.

Another factor that influences message processing is attitude accessibility. Strong attitudes are typically more accessible than weaker ones, characterized as they are by strong associations between feelings and the object (person, place, or political issue). Attitudes that come readily to mind—and are steeped in powerful emotional associations—are likely to lead to biased thinking about persuasive messages.

Theory and research on strong attitudes help us understand why partisans disagree so vehemently about social problems. They size up the problem differently, perceive matters in a biased manner, and tend to be resistant to persuasive communication. Ethicists suggest that if we could just supply people with the facts, they would put aside opinions and act rationally (Frankena, 1963). Unfortunately, there are no such things as pure facts. Partisans come to the table with different interpretations of the facts. Just bringing people from different sides together cannot guarantee that they will reach agreement. This is why negotiations—on issues ranging from labor-management disputes to the Middle East—frequently fail.
Leslie Maltz regards herself as a California housewife, "virtually a byword for conventionality," as a magazine reporter put it (Adler, 1999, p. 76). But she recently did something a little different. She had her navel pierced and put "a diamond-studded horseshoe through it." As a result, she no longer regards herself as a housewife. "I feel like a sex symbol," she says (Adler, p. 76).

Leslie's bodacious decision illustrates a theme of this chapter: Attitudes serve functions for people, and people must decide whether and how to translate attitudes into behavior. As we will see, the issues of attitude functions and attitude–behavior consistency are intricate, complicated, and filled with implications for persuasion. This chapter continues the exploration of attitudes launched in chapter 2, focusing first on attitude function theory and research. The second section examines the venerable issue of attitude–behavior consistency, more colloquially expressed as: Do people practice what they preach?

FUNCTIONS OF ATTITUDES

Overview

Functional theories of attitude examine why people hold the attitudes they do. These approaches explore the needs attitudes fulfill and motives they serve. Functional approaches turn attitudes on their head. Instead of taking attitudes as a given and looking at their structure, they ask: Just what benefits do attitudes provide? What if people did not have attitudes? What then? Bombarded by numerous stimuli and faced with countless choices about issues and products, individuals would be forced to painstakingly assess the costs and benefits of each particular choice in
each of hundreds of daily decisions (Fazio, 2000). Deprived of general attitudes to help structure the environment and position individuals in certain directions, human beings would find daily life arduous. Noting that this is not the case, theorists conclude that attitudes help people manage and cope with life. In a word, attitudes are functional.

The beauty of functional theory is that it helps us understand why people hold attitudes. This is not only interesting to theorists, but appeals to the people watcher in us all. Ever wonder why certain people are driven to dedicate their lives to helping others, why other individuals buy fancy sports cars at the zenith of their midlives, or why younger folks, in a carefree moment, decide to get themselves tattooed? Attitude function theories shed light on these decisions.

Researchers have catalogued the main functions of attitudes or the primary benefits that attitudes provide (Katz, 1960; Maio & Olson, 2000a; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). These include:

**Knowledge.** Attitudes help people make sense of the world and explain baffling events. They provide an overarching framework, one that assists individuals in cognitively coming to terms with the array of ambiguous and sometimes scary stimuli they face in everyday life. Religious attitudes fulfill this function for many people, particularly those who have experienced personal tragedies. For example, relatives of people who were killed in the September 11 attacks found comfort in “religious certainty of a hereafter. ‘A plan of exultation, a plan of salvation: they both are in a better place,’” said Margaret Wahlstrom, whose mother-in-law died at the World Trade Center (Clines, 2001, p. B8). In a similar fashion, the Kennedy family, which has experienced great highs but also crushing lows, has found solace in the Catholic religion. Religion seems to offer comfort to family members who experienced inexplicably tragic events, ranging from the assassinations of John and Bobby to the deaths of John Jr. in a plane crash and Michael in a skiing accident.

**Utilitarian.** On a more material level, attitudes help people obtain rewards and avoid punishments. Smart, but mathematically challenged, students say that it is functional to develop a positive attitude toward statistics courses. They figure that if they show enthusiasm, the professor will like them more. They also recognize that if they look on the bright side of the course, they can more easily muster the motivation to study. On the other hand, if they decide at the outset to blow off the course because it’s too hard, they will deprive themselves of the chance to prove themselves up to the task. In a similar vein, athletes find it functional to develop a positive—rather than hostile—attitude toward a tough coach. A positive attitude can help them get along with the “drill
sergeant type,” thereby minimizing the chances they will earn the coach’s wrath.

**Social Adjustive.** We all like to be accepted by others. Attitudes help us “adjust to” reference groups. People sometimes adopt attitudes not because they truly agree with the advocated position, but because they believe they will be more accepted by others if they take this side. For example, a student who wants to get along with a musically hip group of friends may find it functional to adopt a more favorable attitude toward new hip-hop bands.

During the 1960s and early ’70s, political attitudes served a social adjustive function for some students. Although many young people marched in rallies to express strong attitudes (e.g., opposition to the Vietnam War), not all participated for this reason. Some students attended rallies for social adjustive purposes—to prove to others or themselves that they were “with it,” or meshed with the prevailing groove of the time. One 1970 rally in Michigan seemed to have served this function for students, as the following account from a student newspaper of the era suggests:

> Grab your coat, you’ll need it tonight. Get your gloves, find a hat; take out the contacts—tear gas can be dangerous. All right, it’s 8:30, let’s go. All these people, are they headed for (campus)? They are. They’re laughing, chanting. . . . Can’t miss any of the action. . . . What are we fighting? The system, I suppose, yeah, we’re battling the system. . . . The march is a free for all, it doesn’t matter what you protest, just as long as you’re here. Got to protest, just got to protest. Gotta be here, man, gotta be here. . . . We’re at the dorms now. “Join us, join us,” someone’s got music, let’s dance, in the streets. What’d he say? “Everybody must get stoned.” Yeah, march and get stoned. Outtasight! (Perloff, 1971, p. 24)

Although the pressures of the protest years may have pushed some students into adopting attitudes for social adjustive reasons, there is no reason to believe that the need to belong does not operate equally strongly in today’s era, with its own tensions and undercurrents.

**Social Identity.** People hold attitudes to communicate who they are and what that they aspire to be (Shavitt & Nelson, 2000). This is one reason people buy certain products; they hope that by displaying the product in their homes (or on their bodies), they will communicate something special about themselves. Women wear perfumes like Obsession, and men don Polo cologne to communicate that they have money and brains (Twitchell, 1999). Others buy T-shirts with the names of brand name stores (Hard Rock Café) or dates of rock band tours to tell passersby something of their identity (“I’m not just an ordinary student; I’m with the band. See my shirt?”).
Products other than perfumes, colognes, and T-shirts can fulfill psychological functions. High-tech gadgets can do this too. One study found that men use cell phones "to advertise to females their worth, status and desirability" (Angier, 2000a, p. D5). On our campus I have observed women holding cell phones like they are prized possessions, objects that lift these students from the pedestrian realm of test taking to the lofty arena of transacting deals or settling interpersonal dilemmas. For some men and women, attitudes toward cell phones serve a social identity function.

**Value-Expressive.** An important reason people hold attitudes is to express core values and cherished beliefs. Some individuals "claim that they favor capital punishment because they value law and order; they support affirmative action programs as a means of promoting equality; they support recycling programs because they value the environment . . . and they frown on cheating because it is dishonest" (Maio & Olson, 2000b, p. 249).

The value-expressive function is pervasive. Some young people pierce their nose, tongue, belly button . . . or, well, other body parts to express a variety of values, including autonomy and independence from parents. Parents might have merely pierced a left earlobe in an age when that showcased rebelliousness. Today, ear pierces are viewed as sooo . . . boring by some avant-garde teens (see Fig. 3.1).

**Ego-Defensive.** Attitudes can serve as a "defense" against unpleasant emotions people do not want to consciously acknowledge. People adopt attitudes to shield them from psychologically uncomfortable truths. Let's say a young woman decides to break up with her boyfriend, deciding that the relationship is not going anywhere and fearing he will dump her when they go their separate ways after college. She still has feelings for her soon-to-be-ex, but to defend against these feelings and to make her position known to him clearly and with conviction, she declares in no uncertain terms that their relationship is over, kaput. Adopting a hostile attitude toward her boyfriend is functional because it helps her muster the strength she needs to call off the romance.

**Attitudes and Persuasion**

A central principle of functional theory is that the same attitudes can serve different functions for different people. In other words, different people can hold the same attitude toward a person, product, or issue; however, they may harbor this view for very different reasons.

Consider attitudes toward shopping. Some people shop for utilitarian reasons. They trek to the mall to happily purchase presents for loved
Body piercing is popular among young people. It does different things for different people, or fulfills diverse psychological functions. (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)
ones and go home once the presents are paid for. Others shop for ego-
defensive reasons, to help them forget about their problems or relieve stress. Recent immigrants to America sometimes shop to satisfy value-
expressive needs. To these folks, America symbolizes the freedom to do as you wish. For those who grew up in economically and socially impov-
erished dictatorships, the notion that you can "buy what you want when and where you want it" is one of the great appeals of the United States (Twitchell, 1999, p. 23).

For native-born American teenagers, shopping fulfills entirely differ-
ent functions. Some teens shop to reinforce a social identity. Stores like Gap, Limited, and Record Town are like "countries for the young." They offer teens a territory in which they are king and queen and can rule the roost. Malls provide adolescents with space to strut about and to shop for products that define them as distinctive and important. (Of course, critics view this somewhat differently. James B. Twitchell says that "the mall approaches a totalitarian Eden into which the innocent and the oppressed enter eagerly, lured by the dream of riches"; p. 299.)

It's not just attitudes toward products that serve diverse psychological functions. People can be deeply religious for different reasons, become active in politics to satisfy different needs, even pursue identical career paths for vastly different motivations. It's fascinating to discover just how different individuals can be once you peel away the superficial at-
ttribute of attitude similarity. Such an insight emerges with particular clarity in Mark Snyder's research on the psychology of volunteerism.

Millions of Americans—as many as 89 million—annually volunteer their time and services to help sick, needy, homeless, and psychologically troubled individuals (Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000). They work in soup kitchens on weekends, participate in AIDS walkathons, offer counseling to depressed youth, aid victims of disasters, and try mightily to cheer the spirits of kids who have incurable cancer. A functional theorist, moved by people's willingness to help others in need, asks why. Why do people give so generously of themselves? Do different people have different motives? Snyder and his colleagues found that people volunteer for very different reasons. Their reasons include:

1. expressing values related to altruistic and humanitarian concern for others;
2. satisfying intellectual curiosity about the world, learning about people different from oneself;
3. coping with inner conflicts (reducing guilt about being more fortunate than other people);
4. providing opportunities to participate in activities valued by im-
portant others; and
5. providing career-related benefits, such as new skills and professional contacts. (Snyder et al., 2000, pp. 370-371)

These functions are intriguing. They also suggest ideas for how to promote pro-volunteering attitudes and behavior. Functional theory suggests that a persuasive message is most likely to change an individual’s attitude when the message is directed at the underlying function the attitude serves. Messages that match the function served by an attitude should be more compelling than those that are not relevant to the function addressed by the attitude. The more that a persuasive appeal can explain how the advocated position satisfies needs important to the individual, the greater its impact.

Thus, if you want to recruit volunteers or persuade people to continue engaging in volunteer activities, you must appreciate why individuals chose to volunteer in the first place. One message will not fit all. The message must match the motivational function served by volunteering.

E. Gil Clary, Mark Snyder, and their colleagues (1994) dreamed up a study to test this hypothesis. They asked students to rate the importance of a series of reasons for volunteering. Reasons or functions included knowledge (“I can learn useful skills”), utilitarian (“I can gain prestige at school or work”), value expressive (“I believe someone would help me if I were ever in a similar situation”), and ego-defensive (“Good things happen to people who do good deeds”) (Clary et al., p. 1133). The researchers then computed each student’s responses to identify the volunteering function that was most and least important to him or her. Armed with this information, Clary and colleagues assigned individuals to watch a videotaped message that recommended involvement in volunteer activities. The message targeted a student’s most important volunteer function (matched condition) or his or her least important function (mismatched condition). Each student watched either a matched or mismatched videotape.

For example, if a student said that volunteering mostly served a utilitarian function, he would watch a matched videotape that contained a utilitarian appeal: “You know, what I really like about all this is that I can make myself more marketable to employers and be a volunteer at the same time.” If another student indicated that volunteering primarily fulfilled a value-expressive need, she would view a matched value-expressive video that noted that: “By volunteering I get to turn my concerns into actions and make a difference in someone else’s life” (Clary et al., pp. 1147-1148). Other students received mismatched videos (e.g., a student who volunteered for value-expressive reasons watched the utilitarian video).

Students then rated the effectiveness of the videotape. The results showed that matched messages were more persuasive than mismatched ones. Videotapes that targeted students’ most important volunteering functions were more appealing than those that were directed at less important
3. ATTITUDES: FUNCTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

functions (see Fig. 3.2). The implications are intriguing: They suggest that if we know the motives volunteering fulfills, we can promote positive attitudes toward helping others. For example, if a person volunteers to reduce guilt or escape her problems, it will do no good to appeal to knowledge or utilitarian needs. Instead, the message should explain how volunteering can alleviate personal problems and help people feel good about themselves.

Attitude Dysfunctions. There is, unfortunately, a dark side to attitude functions. An attitude that helps an individual satisfy certain needs can be detrimental in another respect. An attitude can assist the person in coping with one problem, while exerting a more harmful or dysfunctional effect in another area of the person’s life.

Consider, for example, the teenager who “hangs” at the mall, shops constantly with friends, and gains self-identity from shopping. Nothing wrong with shopping—it’s an American pastime. But if the teen neglects studying or athletics, we could say that shopping is dysfunctional, producing negative effects on grades or performance in sports.

Consider attitudes toward body piercing. The New York Times reported the story of a 15-year-old named David, who had his tongue pierced over the objections of his father (Brody, 2000). The tongue pierce may have fulfilled a value-expressive function for David, a way to stake out his autonomy from his dad. But the stud in the tongue quickly became dysfunctional when David found that “for more than a week, he could hardly talk and could eat little other than mush.” David now warns: “Think of the consequences and things that might happen afterward. When one says that the

![Fig. 3.2](Image)
first five or six days is close to hell, you won't fully understand it until you get a tongue-pierce” (Brody, p. D8).

Complicating matters, attitudes can be functional for one individual, but dysfunctional for others. Talking on a cell phone can serve social identity needs for a phone buff, but try listening to someone rant and rave over the phone while you wait in line at the drugstore! Harboring prejudiced attitudes may serve an ego-defensive function for a bigot (“It’s not my fault. It’s them—those blankety blank others”). However, prejudice is not exactly functional for those at the other end of the hate monger’s stick.

The foregoing discussion alerts us to several problems with the functional approach. It is hard to know whether an attitude is primarily functional or dysfunctional. If it helps the individual satisfy a need, do we call it functional, even if it leads to negative consequences? How do we weigh the benefits the attitude provides the individual with negative consequences on others? It can also be difficult to clearly identify the function an attitude serves. People may not know why they hold an attitude or may not want to admit the truth. However, no theory is perfect, and on balance the functional approach is more functional than dysfunctional for persuasion scholarship! It contains hypotheses for study and generates useful insights for everyday life. These include the following nuggets:

- People are deep and complicated creatures. We often do things that appear inexplicable or strange, until you probe deeper and understand the needs they satisfy.
- We should extend tolerance to others. People have many reasons for holding an attitude. These may not be our motivations, but they can be subjectively important to the person him- or herself.
- Persuaders must be acutely sensitive to the functions attitude serve. “What warms one ego, chills another,” Gordon Allport (1945) observed (p. 127). A message can only change attitudes if it connects with people’s needs. One may totally disagree with a person’s attitude, believing it to be immoral. However, condemning the other may be less useful than probing why the individual feels the way he or she does and gently nudging the individual toward change.

ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

- Kelly has strong values, but you wouldn’t guess this by observing her in everyday situations. She is charming, likable, and adept at getting along with different kinds of people. Her friends sometimes call her a chameleon. Yet Kelly has strong views on certain issues, notably the environment and protecting endangered species. At a
party, conversation turns to politics and several people advocate
drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Will Kelly take
issue with their position?

• Susan is an agnostic, a skeptic who has doubts about the existence of
God, and believes religion is of little use in today’s society. She is a
strong believer in Darwinian evolution, a forceful critic of creationist
philosophy. At the same time, Susan has a soft spot for religion be-
cause it means a lot to her dad. An old friend of her dad calls one
day. He’s been teaching Sunday school, but will be out of town next
week when the class is scheduled to discuss the beauty of God’s cre-
ation of the universe. Would Susan mind filling in for him just this
once, he asks? Will Susan agree?

What’s your best guess? Do these anecdotes remind you of people you
know or conflicts you’ve experienced? The two examples above are ficti-
tious, but are based on factors studied in actual psychological experiments.
They also focus on a central issue in attitude research—the connection be-
tween attitudes and behavior. The question is of theoretical and practical
importance.

Theoretically, attitudes are assumed to predispose people to behave in
certain ways. For example, suppose we found that attitudes had no im-
 pact on behavior. There would be less reason to study attitudes in depth.
We would be better advised to spend our time exploring behavior. From
a practitioner’s perspective, attitudes are important only if they predict
behavior. Who cares what consumers think about fast food or fast cars if
their attitudes don’t forecast what they buy? On the other hand, if atti-
tudes do forecast behavior, it becomes useful for marketers to under-
stand people’s attitudes toward commercial products. Then there’s us.
The people watcher—intuitive psychologist—in us all is intrigued by the
attitude–behavior relationship. We can all think of times when we didn’t
quite practice what we preached. You probably know people who
frequently say one thing and do another. The research discussed in this
section sheds light on these issues.

The discussion that follows examines conditions under which people
are likely to display attitude–behavior consistency. A subsequent section
introduces theories of the attitude–behavior relationship. The final part
of the chapter views consistency in a larger perspective.

Historical Background

It’s morning in America, 1933. President Roosevelt is hard at work in
Washington, DC, trying to harness the forces of government to get the
country moving again. It’s a daunting task. Depression and frustration
ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

are adrift in the land. People are unemployed, and some take out their anger on minorities. A psychologist, Richard LaPiere, is aware of the prejudice that one ethnic group, located in his home state of California, faces. He decides to examine the relationship between behavior and attitudes toward the Chinese.

Accompanied by a personable Chinese couple, LaPiere stops at restaurants and hotels across America. Much to his surprise, the group is served at all but one of the restaurants or hotels. But when they send out questionnaires asking if owners would accept members of the Chinese race as guests in their establishments, over 91% of those surveyed reply “No” (LaPiere, 1934).

The findings surprise LaPiere and attract the attention of scholars. It appears as if behavior (serving the Chinese) is out of whack with attitude (questionnaire responses). For years, LaPiere’s findings dominate the field. Researchers conclude that attitudes do not predict behavior, and some researchers recommend that we discard the term attitude entirely (Wicker, 1969).

But hold the cell phone! It turns out that LaPiere’s study had a number of problems. First, different people waited on the Chinese couple than filled out the questionnaires. Second, the survey probed intention to serve a Chinese couple, but the behavioral measure involved serving a personable Chinese couple accompanied by an educated Caucasian man. What is more, when researchers systematically examined the relationship between attitude and behavior over the ensuing decades, they found that LaPiere’s study was an anomaly. Most surveys reported significant correlations between attitudes and behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Kim & Hunter, 1993).

But give the early scholars their due. They correctly observed that attitudes do not always predict behavior. They called attention to the fact that attitudes do not forecast action nearly as well as one might assume on the basis of common sense. But they threw out the attitudinal baby with the dirty behavioral bath water! Sure, attitudes don’t always predict what we will do. But that doesn’t mean they aren’t useful guides or aren’t reasonable predictors, given the incredible complexity of everyday life. The consensus of opinion today is that attitudes do influence action; they predispose people toward certain behavioral choices, but not all the time. Under some conditions, attitudes forecast behavior; in other circumstances they do not. The relationship between attitude and behavior is exquisitely complex.

Now here’s the good news: We can identify the factors that moderate the attitude–behavior relationship. Key variables are (a) aspects of the situation, (b) characteristics of the person, and (c) qualities of the attitude (Fazio & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1994; Zanna & Fazio, 1982).
The context—the situation we’re in—exerts a powerful impact on behavior. We are not always aware of how our behavior is subtly constrained by norms, roles, and a desire to do the socially correct thing. A norm is an individual’s belief about the appropriate behavior in a situation. Roles are parts we perform in everyday life, socially prescribed functions like professor, student, parent, child, and friend.

Norms and Roles. Individuals may hold an attitude, but choose not to express the attitude because it would violate a social norm. You may not like an acquaintance at work, but realize that it violates conventional norms to criticize the person to his face. Someone may harbor prejudice toward coworkers, but be savvy enough to know that she had better hold her tongue lest she get in trouble on the job (Kiesler, Collins, & Miller, 1969).

Norms vary across cultures. In traditional Middle Eastern societies, friendly, outgoing behavior is held in low repute. Gregarious behavior that is regarded positively in the United States (“Hey, how ya’ doin?’”) is viewed negatively in Middle Eastern countries. Instead, the norm is to be serious, even somber in public (Yousef, 1982). Thus, a person may hide her affection for a colleague when seeing him at work. Attitude fails to predict behavior because the public display of attitude runs counter to cultural norms.

Roles also influence the attitude–behavior relationship. When people take on professional roles, they have to act the part, putting their biases aside. This helps explain why reporters, who have strong political beliefs, rarely display biases in their professional activity at newspapers or television stations. For example, many Washington reporters are liberal Democrats, but their news stories go right down the middle, offering criticism of Democrat and Republican politicians (Perloff, 1998). One of the requirements of news is that it show no favoritism to either side—that it be perceived as fair and objective. Journalists know that if they write biased news stories, they will quickly lose their jobs or will be viewed as unprofessional by colleagues. Thus, liberal political attitudes do not reliably predict reporters’ public behavior.

Scripts. To illustrate the concept of script, I ask that you imagine you face a term paper deadline and are hard at work at your word processor. A phone rings; it’s a telemarketer, the 10th to call this week. She’s asking for money for injured war veterans, a cause you normally support because a relative got hurt while serving in the Persian Gulf War. Not thinking and mindlessly putting on your “I’m busy, leave me alone” hat,
you cut the volunteer off, telling her in no uncertain terms that you have work to do. Trying to be cute, you use the line from a recent TV quiz show: “You’re the weakest link; goodbye.”

Your attitude obviously didn’t come into play here. If it had, you would have promised a donation. Instead, you invoked a script: an “organized bundle of expectations about an event sequence” or an activity (Abelson, 1982, p. 134). Like an actor who has memorized his lines and says them on cue, you call on well-learned rules about how to handle pushy telemarketers interrupting your day. Your expectations of how the transaction with the telemarketer is going to proceed—the overly pleasant intro, follow-up for money, plea to keep you on the phone—set the tone for the conversation, and you mindlessly follow the script rather than taking the time to consult your attitude toward veterans.

Characteristics of the Person

Individuals differ in the extent to which they display consistency between attitudes and behavior. Some people are remarkably consistent, others are more variable. Social psychological research has helped pinpoint the ways in which personal factors moderate the attitude–behavior relationship. Two moderating factors are self-monitoring and direct experience.

Self-Monitoring. Social psychologist Mark Snyder, whose research we glimpsed before, confidently believes people can be divided into two categories. A first group consists of individuals who are concerned with displaying appropriate behavior in social situations. Adept at reading situational cues and figuring out the expected behavior at a given place and time, these individuals adjust their behavior to fit the situation. When filling out Snyder’s (1974) scale, they agree that “in different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.” These individuals are called high self-monitors because they “monitor the public appearances of self they display in social situations” (Snyder, 1987, pp. 4–5).

A second group is less concerned with fitting into a situation or displaying socially correct behavior. Rather than looking to the situation to figure out how to behave, they consult their inner feelings and attitudes. “My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs,” they proudly declare, strongly agreeing with this item in the self-monitoring scale. These individuals are called low self-monitors.

High and low self-monitors differ in plenty of ways (see chapter 8). One relevant difference is that high self-monitors exhibit less attitude–behavior consistency than do low self-monitors (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982; Snyder & Tanke, 1976). High self-monitors look to the situation to decide how to act; as “actor types” who enjoy doing the socially correct
thing, they don’t view each and every situation in life as a test of character. If a situation requires that they put their attitudes aside for a moment, they happily do so. Low self-monitors strongly disagree. Living by the credo, “To thine own self be true,” low self-monitors place value on practicing what they preach and maintaining congruence between attitude and behavior. Not to do so would violate a personal canon for low self-monitors.

In the example given earlier, Kelly—the outgoing, chameleon-like young woman who has strong attitudes toward wildlife preservation—would be in a pickle if acquaintances at a party began taking an anti-environmental stand. Her personality description suggests she is a high self-monitor. If so, she would be unlikely to challenge her acquaintances. Instead, she might smile sweetly, nod her head, and resolve to talk up the environmental issue in situations where she could make a difference. Needless to say, a low self-monitor who shared Kelly’s values would be foaming at the mouth when her friends began saying that we should drill for oil in the National Wildlife Refuge. She probably wouldn’t hesitate to tell them how she felt.

**Direct Experience.** Experience also moderates the attitude–behavior relationship. Some of our attitudes are based on direct experience with an issue; we have encountered the problem in real life, it has evoked strong feelings, or led us to think through the implications of behaving in a certain way. Other attitudes are formed indirectly—from listening to parents or peers, reading books, watching television, or partaking in Internet chat rooms. Attitudes formed through direct experience “are more clearly defined, held with greater certainty, more stable over time, and more resistant to counter influence” than attitudes formed through indirect experience (Fazio & Zanna, 1981, p. 185; see also Millar & Millar, 1996). Attitudes produced by direct experience also come more quickly to mind than attitudes acquired through indirect experiences. For these reasons, people are more apt to translate attitude into behavior when the attitude has been formed through direct experiences in real-world situations (Fazio & Zanna, 1978).

Consider a contemporary issue, but one most people don’t like to talk about much: safe sex. Two teenagers may both have positive attitudes toward safer sex practices. However, one may have formed her attitude through unpleasant experiences—trying to convince a boyfriend to put on a condom, only to find him intransigent, getting scared and then resolving to assert herself more forcefully next time around. Another young woman may have read articles about safer sex in *Cosmopolitan*, and heard the condom rap from parents on different occasions. Comes time to decide whether to put the attitude into practice: A relationship blossoms, spring is in the air, passions lead to sex, then the excitement is broken by an awkward silence.
Can you see why the teenager who developed a positive attitude toward safe sex from direct (albeit unpleasant) experience would be more likely to broach the topic of condoms than the second young woman? In the first case, the attitude would be more clearly defined and, therefore, would be easier to call to mind at the moment of decision.

Sex is by no means the only arena in which experience moderates attitude–behavior consistency. Consider any issue about which people feel strongly, but differ in their experience: politics, education, cigarette smoking, drug use. You will invariably find that those with direct experience on an issue will be more likely to behave in accord with their attitudes. Those with less experience are apt to look to other factors to help them decide what to do. They may, therefore, be particularly likely to yield to persuasive communicators, some of whom are adept at manipulating inexperienced young people.

Characteristics of the Attitude

As noted in chapter 2, attitudes differ in their structure and strength. The nature of an attitude moderates the relationship between attitudes and behavior.

*General Versus Specific Attitudes*. Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) distinguished between general and highly specific attitudes. A general attitude, the focus of discussion up to this point, is the global evaluation that cuts across different situations. A specific attitude, called attitude toward a behavior, is evaluation of a single act, or specific behavior that takes place in a particular context at a particular time. For example, consider the issue of predicting religious behavior from religious attitudes. The general attitude is the individual's attitude toward religion. This is the sum total of the person's evaluations of many religious behaviors, such as praying, attending religious services, partaking in holiday rituals, talking about religion in everyday life, and donating money to religious causes. The specific attitude is the attitude toward one of these behaviors at a particular place and time.

A general attitude, sometimes called attitude toward the object, will not predict each and every religious behavior. A Ph.D. student who is deeply religious may attend only a handful of religious services over the course of 6 months—not because he has abandoned religion, but because he is immersed in doctoral comprehensive exams and realizes he must forsake this part of his religious identity for a time. (To compensate, the student regularly may devote time to reading inspirational portions of the Bible.) The student harbors a favorable attitude toward religion, but rarely, it seems, translates attitude into behavior.
But here’s the rub: If you include the dozens of other religious behaviors in which the student could (and does) partake (from praying to Bible reading), and include them in your equation, you will discover that attitude predicts behavior rather handsomely.

This is the conclusion that Fishbein and Ajzen reached in an exhaustive review of this topic. In a 1974 study—old but still good—the investigators asked people to indicate their general religious attitude, as well as how frequently they participated in each of 100 specific religious behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974). The correlation, or association, between general attitude toward religion and any specific action was .15. This is a very small correlation; it means that attitude toward religion is not closely related to a particular behavior in a given situation. But when Fishbein and Ajzen looked at the overall behavior pattern, focusing not at one situation but at the sum total, they discovered that the relationship between attitude toward religion and religious behavior was substantial. The correlation was .71, approaching 1 (the latter a perfect correlation).

Other researchers, focusing on different behaviors, have obtained similar findings. For example, Weigel and Newman (1976) found that individuals who had favorable attitudes toward environmental preservation were more likely than those with less positive attitudes to participate in a variety of environmental protection projects. The projects included signing petitions opposing construction of nuclear power plants, distributing petitions to family members and friends, and partaking in a roadside litter pickup. The more positive individuals’ environmental attitudes, the more likely they were to engage in a broad range of pro-environmental activities.

However, harboring a positive attitude toward the environment did not lead people to participate in each and every environmental cause. For example, one woman who scored high on the environmental attitude scale declined to participate in a litter pickup project. Her husband asked her not to do so. Apparently, the man was also an environmentalist, and as luck would have it, planned to organize a local Boy Scout troop in a similar project. He feared that his wife’s litter pickup project might interfere with his plans. His wife, either because she agreed with him or chose to be deferent, opted not to participate in the recycling project.

Again, it was not that the woman had displayed marked inconsistency between attitude and behavior, for she apparently translated her environmental attitude into action across most other domains (signing petitions, distributing them, and so forth). It was that, as often happens in life, something else came up. If you wished to predict the woman’s behavior in particular circumstances, you would be better advised, Fishbein and Ajzen say, to consider her specific attitude toward participating in the environmental project in question.
These ideas are an outgrowth of what Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) call the compatibility principle. A strong relationship between attitude and behavior is possible only if the attitudinal predictor corresponds with the behavioral criteria. “Corresponds with” means that the attitudinal and behavioral entities are measured at the same level of specificity. Thus, specific attitudes toward a behavior predict highly specific acts. General attitudes predict broad classes of behavior that cut across different situations (see Fig. 3.3).

**Attitude Strength.** Another moderator of the attitude–behavior relationship is the strength of the individual's attitude. Strong attitudes are particularly likely to forecast behavior (Lord, Lepper, & Mackie, 1984). This makes sense psychologically and resonates with ordinary experience. Those with strong convictions on issues ranging from abortion to gay rights are the ones who are out there on the picket lines or are lobbying Congress to pass legislation favorable to their groups.

It gets more complicated when you consider those instances when we're ambivalent about issues. When people have strong feelings on both sides of an issue or are torn between head and heart, they are less apt to translate attitude into behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2000; Lavine et al., 1998). Different feelings push people in different behavioral directions. Alternatively, the affective aspect of an attitude (feelings) can propel people toward one choice, while the cognitive dimension (beliefs) can push them in a different direction. Faced with these cross-pressures, individuals may behave in accord with their attitude in one situation, but not so much in another.

Consider the case of Susan, the agnostic who believes strongly in evolution, but has a soft spot for religion because it means a lot to her dad. Asked to teach a Sunday school class in which she has to take a creationist position on evolution, Susan is likely to have mixed feelings. Her negative views toward religion should propel her to reject the request. (Fishbein and Ajzen's model suggests that her specific negative evaluation of teaching creationism should also push her in that direction.) However, cognition clashes with affect: Susan's relationship with her dad means a lot, and the call from an old friend of her father evokes fond

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<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
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<td>General</td>
<td>Aggregate (Across Situations)</td>
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<td>Specific</td>
<td>Specific (Particular Time and Place)</td>
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**FIG. 3.3** Compatibility principle. Arrows denote strong relationships between attitude and behavior. General attitude will not predict specific behavior, and a specific attitude will not forecast behavior in the aggregate.
memories. If heart governs head, and feelings overpower thoughts, she is likely to agree to teach the class. If she opts to base her decision on logic, she will politely decline. Much depends on what information comes to mind at the moment of decision, and how she goes about deciding which course to take (Wang Erber et al., 1995).

MODELS OF ATTITUDE–BEHAVIOR RELATIONS

People are complex. They can be consistent, practicing what they preach, or they can surprise you, doing things that you would not expect based on their attitudes. Research sheds light on these phenomena. We know that attitudes frequently guide behavior, though under some circumstances, for some individuals, and with some attitudes more than others. The studies offer a patchwork—a pastiche—of conditions under which attitudes are more or less likely to influence action. Social scientists prefer more organized frameworks, such as models that explain and predict behavior. Three models of attitude–behavior relations have been proposed: the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behavior, and the accessibility model.

Theory of Reasoned Action

Fishbein and Ajzen, who brought you the precision of the compatibility principle, also formulated a major model of attitude–behavior consistency: the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The model assumes that people rationally calculate the costs and benefits of engaging in a particular action and think carefully about how important others will view the behavior under consideration. The hallmark of the model is its emphasis on conscious deliberation.

There are four components of the theory. The first is attitude toward the behavior ("the person's judgment that performing the behavior is good or bad"); the second is subjective norm ("the person's perceptions of the social pressures put on him to perform or not perform the behavior in question") (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 6). The third component is behavioral intention, the intent or plan to perform the behavior. The final aspect is behavior itself—action in a particular situation (see Fig. 3.4). Although the terms in the model are abstract, the theory has many practical applications.

Consider this example: After you graduate, you land a job with the American Cancer Society. Your task is to explore why some young people succeed in quitting smoking and why others fail. You recall that the theory of reasoned action is a major model of attitude–behavior relations and focus your empirical efforts on the reasoned action approach.
It's a smart choice. The theory offers precise strategies for assessing attitudes and has an excellent track record in forecasting actual behavior (Sutton, 1998). Let's examine the model and its applications to smoking in detail below.

_Atitude._ Attitude toward the behavior is a highly specific attitude. It consists of two subcomponents: behavioral beliefs (beliefs about consequences of the behavior) and outcome evaluations (evaluations of the consequences). These two elements are combined, as they were in the simple expectancy-value model described in chapter 2. Each behavioral belief is multiplied by the corresponding evaluation, and results are summed across items. Beliefs and evaluations regarding quitting smoking could be measured in the following way:

__Behavioral Beliefs__

1. Quitting smoking will increase my physical endurance.  
   Likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unlikely
2. Quitting smoking will cause me to gain weight.  
   Likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unlikely
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Outcome Evaluations

1. Increasing my physical endurance is:
   Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bad
2. Gaining weight is:
   Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bad

Subjective Norm. This factor also consists of two components: normative beliefs ("the person’s beliefs that specific individuals or groups think he should or should not perform the behavior") and motivation to comply (the individual’s motivation to go along with these significant others) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Subjective norms are calculated by multiplying the normative belief score by the corresponding motivation to comply and then summing across all items.

Normative Beliefs

1. My mom thinks that I:
   Definitely should 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely should not quit smoking
2. My girlfriend/boyfriend thinks that I:
   Definitely should 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely should not quit smoking

Motivation to Comply

In general, how much do you care about what each of the following thinks you should do:

1. My mom:
   Care very much 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Do not care at all
2. My girlfriend/boyfriend:
   Care very much 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Do not care at all

Behavioral Intention. As the name suggests, behavioral intention is the intention to perform a particular behavior, a plan to put behavior into effect. Intention to quit smoking, measured as specifically as possible, could be assessed in this way:

I intend to quit smoking tomorrow.
Likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unlikely

Intention is a function of attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm. For example, if I have a strong, favorable attitude toward quitting
and everyone around me wants me to quit, I am apt to say that I will give quitting a try. I am likely to formulate a plan to quit smoking cigarettes.

The model uses a mathematical formula to combine attitude and norm. It relies on empirically derived criteria that take into account the particular situation in which the behavior occurs.

**Behavior.** Fishbein and Ajzen argue that most social behavior is under the individual's control. Thus, intention to perform a particular behavior should predict the actual performance of the act. However, intention is most likely to predict behavior when it corresponds with—is identical to—the behavior in key ways. If you want to predict whether teenagers will quit smoking high-tar cigarettes tomorrow, you should ask them if they intend to quit smoking such cigarettes tomorrow. Asking them if they plan to stop smoking or stop engaging in risky behavior is too general and would not predict this specific behavior.

**Predicting Behavior from Attitude.** The theory of reasoned action allows us to specify the precise impact that attitudes exert on behavior. In the present case, young people who strongly believe that quitting smoking will lead to positive outcomes should be especially likely to intend to quit smoking. In the same fashion, teenagers who find smoking satisfying—those who hold a negative attitude toward quitting—should not plan to quit smoking. These individuals may believe that if they quit smoking, they will gain weight—a highly undesirable outcome. In either case, attitude predicts behavior.

In some cases, though, attitude will not forecast action. An adolescent might positively evaluate smoking, but decide to quit because significant others keep bugging her to give up the habit. In this case, attitude is less important than subjective norm. Social pressures trump attitude.

Thus, the theory offers a framework for predicting behavior from attitudes. While earlier researchers might have thrown up their hands when they discovered attitudes do not always predict action, concluding that behavior is ultimately not predictable, Fishbein and Ajzen offer a calmer, more reasoned approach. They caution that behavior can be predicted, but you need to consider both likes and dislikes (attitudes) and people's natural propensity to want to please others (norms).

The theory has an excellent track record in predicting behavior. Numerous studies have tested its propositions. They have found that attitudes and subjective norms forecast intentions, and intentions help predict behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Hale, Householder, & Greene, 2002; Sheeran, Abraham, & Orbell, 1999; Sutton, 1998). For example, attitudes and subjective norms forecast:

- intentions to eat meals in fast-food restaurants (Brinberg & Durand, 1983);
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- women’s occupational orientations (Sperber, Fishbein, & Ajzen, 1980);
- condom use among high-risk heterosexual adults (Morrison, Gilmore, & Baker, 1995); and
- breast-feeding or bottle-feeding infants (Manstead, Proffitt, & Smart, 1983).

Shortcomings. Although it has a good batting average for predicting behavior, and particularly intention, the theory (like all approaches) has limitations. Some scholars protest that attitude and behavioral intention measures are virtually the same, making predictions obvious and not so interesting. Others note that contrary to the assumption that the impact of attitudes on behavior is mediated by intentions, attitudes exert a direct impact on behavior (Bentler & Speckhart, 1979; Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989). The main shortcoming of the model, though, is that it assumes that people have control over their behavior—in other words, that they are psychologically capable of acting on their attitude or carrying out their intentions. In some cases, this assumption is not tenable. What happens when people lack control or perceive that they can’t control their behavior? For example, what of the person who wants to lose weight, but can’t muster the psychological strength; the individual who wants to stop binge drinking but can’t; or the woman who wants to say no to unsafe sex, but in the heat of the moment, finds herself psychologically unable to reject her boyfriend’s advances? In such cases, the theory of reasoned action breaks down: People don’t act on attitude or norm. They do not do what they intend.

Noting the problem, Icek Ajzen, one of the architects of the reasoned action model, proposed an alternative approach. Like a rock star who drops out of a big band to sing songs solo, Ajzen had his own message to impart. While clearly showing respect for the Fishbein–Ajzen model, Ajzen argued that another theory might do a better job of forecasting behavior.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen (1991) developed a theory of planned behavior that adds another component to the reasoned action model: perceived behavioral control. Ajzen argues that behavioral intention is determined by three factors: attitude, subjective norm, and perceptions of behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control is the individual’s perception of how much control he or she has over the behavior; it is a subjective estimate of how easy or difficult it will be to perform the behavior. The more I perceive that I can perform the action, the more successful I should be in translating intention into behavior (see Fig. 3.5).
Like the reasoned action approach, the theory of planned behavior has an excellent track record in predicting behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Sutton, 1998). If you want to predict whether someone is going to quit smoking, you would definitely want to consider the planned behavior model. If you’ve smoked and tried unsuccessfully to quit, you can appreciate the important role that personal control plays in your efforts to break the habit. Perceived behavioral control could be measured in the following way:

Now this is just a “what if” question, but if you decided you were going to quit smoking tomorrow, how sure are you that you could?

Extremely sure 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely sure
I could not I could

Summary. Despite their differences, planned behavior and reasoned action theories both emphasize that attitudes can predict behavior under certain circumstances. They also acknowledge that attitudes will not predict behavior when subjective norms apply, or when people lack the psychological ability to translate attitude into action.

Accessibility Theory

It’s a humid summer day, and you feel like a cold one. Glancing over the usual suspects—Miller Lite, Coors, Michelob, Bud Lite—your mouth watering, you want to make a quick choice of which six-pack to buy at the convenience store. Suddenly, the word “Whazzup” from an advertisement of some years back leaps into your mind. You smile, and reach for the Budweiser.
According to Fazio's accessibility model (see chapter 2), your attitude toward Budweiser is accessible, or capable of being quickly activated from memory. Your favorable attitude toward Bud Lite predicts your purchase behavior. Now if we wanted, we could measure your behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, perceptions of behavioral control, and other variables from the models previously discussed. However, all this would be beside the point and far too laborious a process, according to accessibility theory. The core notion of accessibility theory is that attitudes will predict behavior if they can be activated from memory at the time of a decision. If a person is in touch with her attitudes, she will act on them. If not, she will be swayed by salient aspects of the situation.

This captures the gist of the model, but the core notions are more complicated. In reality, two things must transpire for an attitude to influence behavior. First, the attitude must come spontaneously to mind in a situation. That is, it must be activated from memory. Second, the attitude must influence perceptions of an issue or person, serving "as a filter through which the object is viewed" (Fazio & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1994, p. 85). These perceptions should then color the way people define the situation, pushing them to behave in sync with their attitude. (If people do not call up their attitude from memory, they will be susceptible to influence from other factors in the situation, such as norms or eye-catching stimuli; see Fig. 3.6).

In short: You can harbor an attitude toward a person or issue, but unless the attitude comes to mind when you encounter the other person or issue, you cannot act on the attitude in a particular situation. This is one reason why it's good to be in touch with your attitudes: You can act on them when important issues come up in life.

Accessibility theory complements the reasoned action/planned behavior approach. Fazio argues that under some conditions people behave like Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggest: They carefully consider the consequences of behaving in a particular fashion and deliberate about pros and cons of doing x or y. But when people lack the motivation or opportunity to

FIG. 3.6 Fazio's attitude-to-behavior process model (Reprinted with permission from Fazio © 1986 p. 212).
deliberate in this fashion, they act more spontaneously. In such situations, attitude can guide behavior if people automatically call up attitudes from memory.

Research supports these propositions (Kraus, 1995). One study found that individuals who were "in touch" with attitudes toward then-President Reagan were more likely to vote for Reagan than those who could not quickly access their favorable assessment of Reagan (Fazio & Williams, 1986; see also Bassili, 1995). In a similar vein, students who could immediately call to mind a favorable attitude toward food products were more inclined to select these products as a free gift than those with less accessible attitudes (Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989). Interestingly, two students might have equally favorable attitudes toward Snickers candy bar. The student who was more "in touch" with her feelings about Snickers—could say immediately that she loved Snickers—was more likely to select Snickers than a fellow student who had to think a little before recognizing how much she adored Snickers.

Implications for Persuasion

Research on attitude–behavior consistency tells us a great deal about attitudes. But what does it say about persuasion? Quite a bit, as it turns out. Ultimately, most persuaders want to change behavior, and they hope to do so by influencing attitudes. The more researchers know about when and how attitudes influence behavior, the more useful their recommendations are to real-life persuaders. Imagine that as a follow-up to your work for the American Cancer Society you are asked to devise a media campaign to convince teenagers to quit smoking. The three theories discussed suggest different types of campaign strategies. First, the theory of reasoned action suggests that as a campaign coordinator, you should:

1. Target relevant beliefs. You should probe teens' salient or relevant beliefs to discover what would induce them to give up smoking. Don't assume reasons that apply to you also apply to adolescents. Teenagers might tell you that they are least concerned with dying (they think they will live forever), but believe that smoking causes body odors or leads others to think smokers are uncool. Use this information to devise campaign messages.

2. Locate relevant reference groups. Teens may be more influenced by peers than by the Surgeon General, but the particular peers will differ depending on the subculture.

Planned behavior theory, by contrast, suggests that you:

Convince young people that they are psychologically capable of quitting. Messages could remind young people that they, not their parents or friends,
are the ones lighting up cigarettes, and that they have the power to quit (Parker, Stradling, & Manstead, 1996).

Accessibility theory takes a different tack. It suggests that campaign planners:

Put teenagers in touch with their desire to quit smoking. Teens might draw a self-portrait of what they look and feel like when they smoked too many cigarettes. They could carry the picture in their wallets and look at it whenever they are tempted to take a puff. This might remind them of their commitment to give up smoking.

JUDGING CONSISTENCY

Hypocrite.

This term frequently gets bandied about when people observe inconsistencies between attitudes and behavior. It reflects an ethical concern, the belief that an individual is not living up to prescribed standards. Now that you have an appreciation for the complex underpinnings of attitude–behavior consistency, we can proceed to this more controversial aspect of the consistency issue.

Every day, it seems, we hear of famous men or women behaving badly and subsequently earning the wrath of observers, who call them hypocrites. A celebrated case occurred some years back and involved a president of the United States: Bill Clinton. During his first term and while running for reelection in 1996, Clinton championed family values, telegraphing what appeared to be a positive attitude toward marriage and monogamy. Yet he behaved quite differently, cheating on his wife and engaging in a long, sordid affair with Monica Lewinsky. Critics pointed to the blatant contradictions between Clinton’s words and actions (Bennett, 1998).

Others viewed the situation differently. We should be wary of “judging a complex being by a simple standard,” one psychoanalyst said of the Clinton quandary. “To equate consistency with moral (and political) virtue, and then to demand consistency of people,” wrote Adam Phillips (1998), “can only cultivate people’s sense of personal failure” (p. A27). In other words, we should not ask people to be consistent. To do so is to set people up for failure, as none of us is perfect in this regard.

Consider the case of Reverend Jesse Jackson, who preached religious values, commitment to Biblical commandments like “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” and counseled President Clinton regarding his sexual sins. In early 2001, the public learned that Jackson fathered a child out of wedlock. Was Jackson a hypocrite? He would seem to be, if one consults
Webster’s dictionary definition. A hypocrite, the dictionary tells us, is one who pretends to be what he or she is not, or harbors principles or beliefs that he or she does not have. However, critic Michael Eric Dyson, taking a different view of hypocrisy, viewed Jackson differently. Dyson argued that:

It is not hypocritical to fail to achieve the moral standards that one believes are correct. Hypocrisy comes when leaders conjure moral standards that they refuse to apply to themselves and when they do not accept the same consequences they imagine for others who offend moral standards. (p. A23)

Noting that Jackson accepted responsibility for his behavior, Dyson said he was not a hypocrite.

Thus, the term “hypocrite” is subject to different readings and different points of view. In trying to decide if someone behaved in a hypocritical fashion, a variety of issues emerge. What criteria do we use to say that someone is a hypocrite? Is it enough for the individual to display one inconsistency between attitude and behavior? Or is that too harsh a criterion? How many inconsistencies must the person commit before the hypocrite label fits? Do certain inconsistencies get more weight than others? Does a blatant violation of an individual’s deeply held values cut more to the heart of hypocrisy than other inconsistencies? Are certain kinds of attitude–behavior inconsistencies (e.g., violations of marital oaths) more ethically problematic, and therefore more deserving of the hypocrite label than others? Is hypocrisy culturally relative, with certain kinds of inconsistencies more apt to be regarded as hypocritical in one culture than in another? Does application of the label “hypocrite” tell us more about the observer than the person being judged?

There are no absolute answers to these questions. Like other issues in the psychology of persuasion, they are complex, controversial, and shaded in gray rather than black or white.

CONCLUSIONS

Attitude research sheds light on the reasons people hold the attitudes they do and the degree to which attitudes predict behavior.

Functional theory stipulates that people would not hold attitudes unless they satisfied core human needs. Attitudes help people cope, serving knowledge, utilitarian, social adjustive, social identity, value-expressive, and ego-defense functions. Two people can hold the same attitude for different reasons, and an attitude that is functional for one person may be dysfunctional for someone else. An attitude can help a person function
nicely in one part of his or her life, while leading to negative consequences in another domain. Attitude function research also suggests strategies for attitude change. It emphasizes that persuaders should probe the function a particular attitude serves for an individual and design the message so it matches this need.

The bottom-line question for attitude researchers is whether attitudes forecast behavior. Decades of research have made it abundantly clear that attitudes do not always predict behavior and people are not entirely consistent. People are especially unlikely to translate attitude into behavior when norms and scripts operate, they are ambivalent about the issue, or regard themselves as high self-monitors. Under a variety of other conditions, attitudes predict behavior handsomely. When attitudes and behavior are measured at the same level of specificity, attitudes forecast behavior. Attitudes guide and influence behavior, just not in every life situation.

Three models of attitude–behavior consistency—theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior, and accessibility—offer rich insights into attitude–behavior relations. The models tell us that under some conditions people will deliberate on attitudes, thoughtfully considering their implications for behavior, while in other circumstances individuals spontaneously use their feelings as a guide for action. These models and empirical research help us understand when and why people are consistent.

A final issue concerns judgments of those who do not translate attitude into behavior. We frequently call such individuals hypocrites. Sometimes they are. However, it is important to understand that use of the term “hypocrite” reflects a series of assumptions about what counts as an inconsistency, the weight attached to the particular inconsistency in question, and the observer’s value judgments.
Attitude Measurement

Pollsters do it with precision. Theorists do it with conceptual flair. Survey researchers do it for a living. "It," of course, is designing questionnaires to measure attitudes!

Puns and double entendres aside, attitude measurement plays a critical role in the study and practice of persuasion. It is the practical side of the field, the down-to-earth domain that provides the instrumentation to test hypotheses and to track changes in attitudes and beliefs. If there were no reliable scientific techniques to measure attitudes, we would not know how people evaluated social and political issues. We would not know the impact that persuasive communications had on people's feelings and thoughts. Documenting the effects of large-scale media campaigns would permanently elude us.

This chapter explores the main themes in attitude measurement. It describes scales used to tap attitudes, as well as the pitfalls and challenges researchers face when trying to empirically assess attitudes. After reading this chapter, you should know more about how to write good attitude questions and how to locate valid surveys that measure specific attitudes.

OVERVIEW

Attitude questionnaires date back to 1928. It was in this year that psychologist Louis Thurstone published an article titled "Attitudes Can Be Measured." Thurstone proposed an elaborate procedure to assess people's views on social issues. Although measurement techniques have been streamlined over the years, Thurstone "started the fire." We now have established methodologies for assessing attitudes. What's more,
thousands of questionnaires have been developed to tap beliefs and attitudes on countless issues.

Are you interested in attitudes toward race or racial issues? You can find dozens of surveys, such as those developed by McConahay (1986) and Sniderman and Piazza (1993). Are you concerned about capital punishment? If so, you can check out surveys described in Ellsworth and Gross (1994)? Does censorship of media unnerve you? If so, you can find a valid measure in Hense and Wright (1992). There are questionnaires tapping attitudes on hundreds of issues, including religion, abortion, environmental pollution, homophobia, prejudice against fat people, adulation of thin models, sex, sex roles, basking in the glory of sports teams, political activism, even cloning human beings.

It is not easy to write good attitude questions. You can appreciate this if you ever tried to dream up questions assessing views on one or another issue. Administering your survey to others, you may have found respondents scratching their heads and asking, "What do you mean by this question?" Devising reliable attitude items is not as easy as it looks. There are people who do this for a living—folks who are so proficient at devising questions that they work for professional research centers or advertising firms. There is a science to writing attitude questions, one that calls on principles of measurement, statistics, and cognitive psychology (Hippler, Schwarz, & Sudman, 1987; Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). It all flows from an underlying belief—core assumption—that one can measure phenomena by assigning numbers to objects on the basis of rules or guidelines (Stevens, 1950; see Fig. 4.1).

Perhaps the simplest way to assess attitudes is to ask people if they like or dislike the attitude object. Gallup polls tap Americans' attitudes toward the president by asking if they approve or disapprove of the way the chief executive is handling the job of president. However, there are two problems with this procedure. First, the agree—disagree scale offers people only two choices. It does not allow for shades of gray. Second, it measures attitudes with only one item. This puts all the researcher's eggs in one basket. If the item is ambiguous or the respondent misunderstands the question, then all hope of accurately measuring the attitude goes out the window. In addition, by relying on only one item, the researcher misses the opportunity to tap complex, even contradictory, components of the attitude.

For these reasons, researchers prefer to include many survey items and to assess attitudes along a numerical continuum. Questionnaires that employ these procedures are called scales. There are three standard attitude scales: (a) Likert, (b) Guttman, and (c) the semantic differential.
Panel A: Stair-Step Scale

**Question:** What is your attitude toward the Democratic Party?

**Instructions:** Place a check mark on the stair step that best describes your attitude.

Unfavorable ———— Favorable

Panel B: Opinion Thermometer

**Question:** How do you feel about former president Bill Clinton?

**Instructions:** Circle the number on the thermometer scale that best describes your feelings.

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0

**Warm** ———— **Cold**

FIG. 4.1 Two different types of numerical attitude scales (From Sharon Shavitt & Timothy C. Brock, *Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives*, © 1994 by Allyn & Bacon. Reprinted/adapted by permission).

**Likert Scale**

The nice thing about being the first to do something is they name it after you.

A psychologist named Rensis Likert refined Thurstone’s procedures in 1932. Likert recommended that researchers devise a series of opinion statements and ask individuals to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement along a numerical scale. A Likert scale assumes
that each item taps the same underlying attitude and there are significant interrelationships among items. It also presumes that there are equal intervals between categories. For example, on a 5-point (Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree) scale, researchers assume that the psychological difference between Strongly Agree and Somewhat Agree is the same as between Strongly Disagree and Somewhat Disagree.

Likert scales are commonplace today. No doubt you’ve completed dozens of these strongly agree–strongly disagree surveys. An example is the course evaluation questionnaire students complete on the last day of class (you know, the day your professor acts oh-so-nice to you and bakes those fudge brownies!). Students indicate how much they agree or disagree with statements regarding the prof’s teaching abilities and the course content.

Likert scales can proceed from 1 to 5, as noted above. They can also go from 1 to 7, 1 to 9, or 1 to 100. Most researchers prefer 5- or 7-point scales because they allow respondents to indicate shades of gray in their opinions, but do not provide so many categories that people feel overwhelmed by choices. A sample Likert scale, measuring attitudes toward sex roles, appears in Table 4.1. You might enjoy completing it to see how you feel about this issue.

**Guttman Scale**

Sometimes it seems that the person with the strongest attitude toward a topic is the one willing to take the most difficult stands, those that require the greatest gumption. One may not agree with these positions, but one is hard pressed to deny that these are difficult positions to endorse. A Guttman scale (named after Louis Guttman) takes this approach to measuring attitudes (Guttman, 1944).

The scale progresses from items easiest to accept to those most difficult to endorse. Those who get a high score on a Guttman scale agree with all items. Those with moderate attitudes agree with the easy- and moderately difficult-to-endorse questions, and those with mildly positive attitudes agree with only the easy-to-accept items. A Guttman scale for sex roles appears in Table 4.2.

Guttman scales are hard to construct. They are not as easy to administer as Likert scales. However, they can be useful in tapping attitudes on sensitive topics like prejudice. People might be willing to take liberal stands on such easy-to-accept items as favoring enforcement of fair housing laws, supporting school integration, and philosophically backing interracial marriage. However, prejudice might surface on more difficult-to-accept items such as encouraging one’s own child to date someone from
### TABLE 4.1

**Likert Scale for Sex Role Attitudes**

Please indicate whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), are Neutral (N), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD) with each of these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Women are more emotional than men.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than of a man.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When two people go out on a date, the man should be the one to pay the check.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When a couple is going somewhere by car, it's better for the man to do most of the driving.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If both husband and wife work full time, her career should be just as important as his in determining where the family lives.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Items 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8 can be regarded as descriptive beliefs; Statements 3, 4, 5, and 9 are prescriptive beliefs.

Statement 2 is from Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp (1973); Statements 4 and 5 are from Peplau, Hill, & Rubin (1993); Items 6, 8, and 9 are from Glick and Fiske (1996); and Statement 7 is from Swim et al. (1995).

### TABLE 4.2

**Guttman Scale for Sex Roles**

**Least Difficult to Accept**

1. Fathers should spend some of their leisure time helping to care for the children.
2. Fathers should share in infant care responsibilities, such as getting up when the baby cries at night and changing diapers.
3. If both parents work, the father and mother should divide equally the task of staying at home when children get sick.

**Most Difficult to Accept**

4. If both parents work, the father and mother should divide equally the task of raising the children.
another race, or supporting without argument your own child’s decision to marry someone from a different racial or ethnic group.

**Semantic Differential**

Charles Osgood and his colleagues never got a scale named for them, but they developed one of the most frequently used scales in the attitude business. Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) chose not to assess beliefs or agreement with opinion statements. Instead, they explored the meanings that people attach to social objects, focusing on the emotional aspect of attitude. The term *semantic* is used because their instrument asks people to indicate feelings about an object on a pair of bipolar, adjective scales. The term *differential* comes from the fact that the scale assesses the different meanings people ascribe to a person or issue.

Participants rate a concept using bipolar adjectives: One adjective lies at one end of the scale; its opposite is at the other end. Osgood and his colleagues have discovered that people typically employ three dimensions to rate concepts: *evaluation* (is it good or bad for me?), *potency* (is it strong or weak?), and *activity* (is it active or passive?) (Osgood, 1974). A semantic differential scale for sex roles appears in Table 4.3. You could also use this scale to tap attitudes toward female politicians, corporate leaders, or media stars. Any come to mind?

**Pitfalls in Attitude Measurement**

There is no perfect attitude scale. Even the best scales can fail to measure attitudes accurately. Inaccuracies result from such factors as: (a) respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.3: Semantic Differential for Sex Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feminism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good - - - - - - Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant - - - - - Unpleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong - - - - - Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy - - - - - Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active - - - - - Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesome - - - - - Unhealthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuable - - - - - Worthless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Numbers do not appear underneath the dashes. For each item, a response is assigned a score from +3 to −3, with a +3 assigned to the blank closest to the positive pole and a −3 to the blank nearest the negative pole.
carelessness in answering the questions, (b) people's desire to say the socially appropriate thing rather than what they truly believe, and (c) a tendency to agree with items regardless of their content (Dawes & Smith, 1985). Although these problems can be reduced through adroit survey measurement techniques (see next section), some inaccuracy in responses to attitude scales is inevitable.

A particularly gnawing problem in survey research involves the format and wording of questions. The way the researcher words the question and designs the questionnaire can elicit from the respondent answers that may not reflect the individual's true attitude (Schuman & Presser, 1981; Schwarz, 1999). The manner in which the question is asked can influence the response that the researcher receives. It reminds one of the statement that writer Gertrude Stein reportedly said on her death bed. With death near, a friend in search of the guiding principle of life asked Stein, "What is the answer?" To which she famously replied, "What is the question?"

Two key survey design factors that can influence—or bias—attitude responses are survey context and wording.

Context. Survey questions appear one after another on a piece of paper, computer screen, or in an interview administered over the telephone. Questions occurring early in the survey can influence responses to later questions. This is because thoughts triggered by earlier questions can shape subsequent responses. The answers that individuals supply may thus be artifacts of the "context" of the survey instrument rather than reflections of their actual attitudes.

For instance, voters asked to evaluate the sexual morality of politicians might respond differently if they heard Bill Clinton's name at the beginning rather than at the end of a list (Schwarz & Bless, 1992). With Clinton as an anchor or standard of comparison, they might give other politicians' high ratings, thinking "none of them was as bad as he was!" But if Clinton's name did not appear until the end, voters would not be so likely to base evaluations of other politicians on opinions of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. As a result, other political leaders might not look so good by comparison.

Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser (1981) documented question order effects in a classic study of Americans' attitudes toward abortion. Naturally, abortion attitudes were complex, but a majority supported legalized abortion. When asked, "Do you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if she is married and does not want any more children?" over 60% said "Yes." However, support dropped when the following question was asked first:

*Do you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?*
In this case, only 48% agreed that a married woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion if she did not want any more children. To be sure, these attitudes are controversial and would outrage those who oppose abortion in all instances. But the point here is methodological, not ideological. The order of questions influenced evaluations of abortion. Something of a contrast effect appears to have emerged.

When asked to consider the question of legal abortion for married women, pro-choice respondents had no anchor other than their support for a woman’s right to choose. A substantial majority came out in favor of abortion in this case. But after considering the gut-wrenching issue of aborting a fetus with a medical defect and deciding in favor of this option, a second group of respondents now mulled over the question of abortion for married women who did not want any more children. In comparison to the birth defect choice, this seemed relatively unsubstantial, perhaps trivial. Using the birth defect case as the standard for comparison, the idea that a woman should get a legal abortion if she did not want any more children seemed not to measure up to these individuals’ moral criterion for abortion. Not surprisingly, fewer individuals supported abortion in this case.

It is also possible that, in light of the ambivalence many pro-choice supporters feel toward abortion, those who supported abortion in the case of a serious defect in the baby felt guilty. To reduce guilt, some may have shifted their position on abortion for married women, saying they opposed abortion in this less taxing situation. Whatever the explanation, it seems clear that the order in which the questions appeared influenced respondents’ reports of their attitudes.

Wording. As writers have long known, language is full of meaning, capable of conveying powerful sentiments. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the way a question is worded can influence respondents’ evaluations of the issue.

This has become abundantly clear on the topic of affirmative action (Kinder & Sanders, 1990). A New York Times/CBS News poll probed Americans’ attitudes toward racial diversity, using a variety of questions to tap beliefs. When asked their opinion of programs that “give preferential treatment to racial minorities,” just 26% of respondents indicated they would favor such programs. But when asked their views of programs that “make special efforts to help minorities get ahead,” significantly more Americans (55%) expressed approval of such programs (Verhovek, 1997).

Perhaps the most striking example of wording effects came from polls probing an even more emotional issue: Americans’ belief that the Holocaust actually occurred.
With some anti-Semitic groups arguing that the Holocaust had never happened and was a figment of Jews' imagination, the Roper polling organization launched a national survey to see how many Americans actually bought into this false belief. In 1992, Roper probed Americans' attitudes toward the Holocaust, tapping beliefs with this key question:

*The term Holocaust usually refers to the killing of millions of Jews in Nazi death camps during World War II. Does it seem possible or does it seem impossible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened?*

Amazingly, 22% of respondents said it was "possible" that the mass executions never happened, about 12% claimed they "didn't know," while 65% said it was "impossible" that the event had not happened. "The fact that nearly one fourth of U.S. adults denied that the Holocaust had happened . . . raised serious questions about the quality of knowledge about recent history," observed Carroll J. Glynn and her colleagues (1999, p. 76). It also raised the possibility that large numbers of Americans consciously or unconsciously subscribed to an anti-Semitic ideology.

Public opinion researchers suspected the problem, once again, was not ideological, but methodological. They suggested that the Roper question was misleading and the double negative had confused people. Several polling organizations, including Roper, conducted new surveys, this time with clearer questions like:

*Does it seem possible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened, or do you feel certain that it happened?*

This time, 91% said they were certain it happened. Just 1% of the public said it was possible the Holocaust never happened, and 8% did not know (Smith, 1995).

The results restored faith in the public's knowledge and good sense. It also revealed the strong effect that question wording has on reports of attitudes.

**Implications.** Wording and context effects have aroused much concern among survey researchers. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that the reason that questionnaire format exerts such strong effects is that people don't have full-blown attitudes at all. Instead, these researchers suggest, individuals construct their attitudes on the spot, based on what happens to be on their minds at the time, or on thoughts triggered by survey questions (Wilson, LaFleur, & Anderson, 1996; Zaller, 1992). In support of this position, research has found that large numbers
of people volunteer opinions on fictitious issues, those that the pollster has invented for purposes of the survey. For example, over 50% of respondents gave their opinion of the Monetary Control Bill, legislation dreamed up by survey researchers (Bishop, Tuchfarber, & Oldendick, 1986)!

People do construct attitudes on the spot, in response to pollsters' questions. We should not assume that this is the norm, however. It probably pushes the envelope to argue that people lack attitudes on many topics, particularly those that hit close to home, are the product of socialization, or touch on values. Still, there is no denying that weakly held attitudes can be susceptible to influence by pollsters' questions, a fact that has not been lost on savvy practitioners hoping to manipulate public opinion (see Box 4–1).

**BOX 4–1**

**SKEWING THE SURVEY RESULTS**

You've probably heard television advertisements that claim that "a majority of people interviewed in a major survey" said such-and-such about the product. The results make it sound like a scientific study proved that people prefer Crest to Colgate, Coke to Pepsi, Burger King to McDonald's, or Yahoo! to every other search engine. As you listened, you no doubt thought to yourself, Is this research real, or what?

"Or what" is the appropriate answer. Some of the research that companies cite in their behalf is based on questionable methods. It is a powerful example of how marketing researchers can cook the data to fit the client, or design surveys that assure that companies will receive the answers they desire. Reporter Cynthia Crossen (1991) discussed this trend in *The Wall Street Journal*. She reported that:

- When Levi Strauss & Co. asked students which clothes would be most popular this year, 90% said Levi's 501 jeans. They were the only jeans on the list.
- A survey for Black Flag said: "A roach disk ... poisons a roach slowly. The dying roach returns to the nest and after it dies is eaten by other roaches. In turn these roaches become poisoned and die. How effective do you think this type of product would be in killing roaches?" Not surprisingly, 79% said effective.
- (A) Chrysler study showing its cars were preferred to Toyota's included just 100 people in each of two tests. But more important, none of the people surveyed owned a foreign car, so they may well have been predisposed to U.S.-made vehicles. (pp. A1, A7)
Summarizing her report on the use of marketing research, Crossen acknowledged that some studies use valid measurement techniques. But many surveys are filled with loaded questions and are designed to prove a point rather than investigate one. "There's been a slow sliding in ethics," said Eric Miller, who reviewed thousands of marketing studies as editor of a research newsletter. "The scary part is, people make decisions based on this stuff. It may be an invisible crime, but it's not a victimless one" (Crossen, p. A1).

**ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS**

As long as surveys are constructed by human beings and administered to human beings, we will never totally eliminate order or wording effects. You have to put your questions in a certain order and use particular words to communicate meaning. These are bound to influence respondents. Nonetheless, we can minimize the impact of context factors by taking precautions when designing the survey. More generally, there are many things researchers can do to improve the quality of attitude questions (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). Next time you are asked to develop a self-report survey, you might consider these suggestions:

1. Use words that all respondents can comprehend.
2. Write specific and unambiguous items.
3. Avoid double negatives.
4. Pretest items to make sure people understand your questions.
5. If you think order of questions will influence respondents, ask questions in different sequences to check out order effects.
6. Avoid politically correct phrases that encourage socially desirable responses.
7. Write items so they take both the positive and negative sides of an issue (to reduce respondents' tendency to always agree).
8. Consider whether your questions deal with sensitive, threatening issues (sex, drugs, antisocial behavior). If so, ask these questions at the end of the survey, once trust has been established.
9. Allow people to say "I don't know." This will eliminate responses based on guesses or desire to please the interviewer.
10. Include many questions to tap different aspects of the attitude.

You can also save yourself some time—and improve the quality of your questionnaire—by turning to established attitude scales. You don't
have to reinvent the wheel if someone else has developed a scale on the topic you’re researching. To paraphrase the lyrics of an old folk song, “You can get anything you want at Alice’s Restaurant,” you can get pretty much any scale you want, if you do a thorough search! There are many standardized scales out there that tap attitudes very effectively. The advantage of using someone else’s scale (other than that it frees you up to relax!) is that the scale has passed scientific muster—it is reliable, valid, and is comprehensible to respondents. You can find scales from computerized databases, such as PsycINFO, Health and Psychosocial Instruments, and Communication Abstracts, or in specialized books (for example, Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1999; Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994). Of course, if you’re researching a new issue or want to cook up your own questions, you will have to devise your own questionnaire. Just remember as you construct your survey that people are complex, and you will need good questions to tap their attitudes.

Open-Ended Measures

The main advantage of attitude scales—they offer an efficient way to accurately measure social attitudes—is their main drawback. Scales do not always shed light on the underlying dynamics of attitudes—the rich underbelly of cognitions and emotions. These components can be measured through more open-ended, free-form techniques. Open-ended measures complement the structured attitude scales that have been discussed thus far. They are like essay questions.

One open-ended technique involves assessing cognitive responses to communications (Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981b). Individuals typically read or view a message and list their cognitive reactions (i.e., thoughts). For example, if you wanted to measure people’s cognitive responses regarding sex roles, you might have them view a sexist advertisement and ask them to write down the first ideas that come to mind. These responses could be subsequently categorized by researchers according to specific criteria (Cacioppo, Harkins, & Petty, 1981).

Affect can also be assessed in an open-ended way. People can be asked to write down 10 emotions that they ordinarily feel toward members of a group, organization, or nation (Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1994; see also Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994).

Combining open-ended measures with traditional attitude scales increases the odds that researchers will tap attitudes accurately and completely. Of course, this does not guarantee success. Even the best survey researchers err. Some years ago pollster Richard Morin (1997) listed “the worst of the worst”—the most terrible questions ever asked in a poll.
One of them appeared in a 1953 Gallup Poll and is listed below:

*If you were taking a new job and had your choice of a boss, would you prefer to work under a man or a woman?* (Morin, 1997, p. 35)

**INDIRECT METHODS TO MEASURE ATTITUDES**

In light of such doozies (the question just cited) and the methodological problems noted earlier, some researchers recommend measuring attitude through ways other than questionnaires. They advocate the use of a variety of indirect techniques to assess attitudes, such as the following:

**Unobtrusive Measures.** Researchers can observe individuals unobtrusively or without their knowledge. Behavior is used as a surrogate for attitude. Unobtrusive measures can be useful in cases where it is not possible to administer self-report scales or one fears individuals will not accurately report attitudes (Webb et al., 1966). For example, if investigators wanted to assess attitudes toward American music in a dictatorship like Iraq, they might examine the amount of wear and tear on rock and roll CDs or check out the number of hits on hip-hop musicians’ Web sites. Useful as these techniques could be, the obvious problem is that they might not tap liking of the music so much as interest or idle curiosity.

**Physiological Measurements.** Did you ever sweat a little when you asked someone out for a date? Do you know anyone whose pupils seem to get bigger when they are talking about something they really care about? Have you ever noticed how some people’s facial muscles—eyebrows and cheeks—can telegraph what they are feeling? If so, you are intimately aware of the physiology of attitudes. Physiological measures can provide useful indirect assessments of attitudes.

A physiological approach to attitudes has gained adherents in recent years as researchers have recognized that attitudes have a motor or bodily component (Cacioppo, Priester, & Berntson, 1993). There are a host of ways of tapping attitudes through physiological techniques. These include (a) *galvanic skin response*, a change in the electrical resistance of the skin (e.g., measurements of sweating); (b) *pupil dilation* (precise assessments of expansion of the pupils); and (c) *facial electromyographic (EMG) techniques* that tap movements of facial muscles, particularly in the brow, cheek, and eye regions. The latter can provide a particularly sensitive reading of attitudes. In one study, students imagined they were reading an editorial with which they agreed or disagreed. Findings showed
that students displayed more EMG activity over the brow region when imagining they were reading an article they disliked than one they liked (Cacioppo, Petty, & Marshall-Goodell, 1984).

Physiological measures can be useful in tapping feelings people are not aware they have, or which they might choose to disguise on a questionnaire. Marketing firms have used galvanic skin response measures to test advertising copy (LaBarbera & Tucciarone, 1995). Advertising researchers have found that facial electromyographic techniques can provide a more sensitive measure of emotional responses to ads than self-reports (Hazlett & Hazlett, 1999). Pupil dilation measures can shed light on abnormal sexual attitudes (Atwood & Howell, 1971).

Useful as these devices are, they can unfortunately tap responses other than attitudes. Sweating, pupil dilation, and facial muscle activity can occur because people are interested in, or perplexed about, the attitude object. Physiological reactions do not always provide a sensitive indication of the directionality (pro vs. con) of people's feelings. It is also frequently impractical or expensive to use physiological techniques. In addition, wide use of physiological measurements has been hampered by the jargon-based language that is frequently used to communicate physiological findings.

Response Time. These measures assess the latency or length of time it takes people to indicate if they agree or disagree with a statement. For example, individuals may sit before a computer screen and read a question (e.g., "Do you favor capital punishment?"). They are instructed to hit a button to indicate whether they do or don't favor capital punishment. Researchers do not focus on whether individuals are pro or con, or favorable or unfavorable to the attitude object. Their primary interest is in how long it takes individuals to make their selection (Fazio, 1995). The assumption is that the longer it takes people to access their attitude, the less well developed or strong the attitude is. Conversely, the quicker people punch a button to indicate their attitude, the stronger the attitude is presumed to be.

Response time measures can provide an indication of the accessibility of attitudes. Such measures can be useful in tapping a variety of attitudes, including prejudices that people might not care to admit (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992). They also provide a more honest way to assess bigoted attitudes than earlier techniques, some of which duped individuals into thinking that a machine shed true light on their prejudices (Jones & Sigall, 1971).

An advantage of response time is that it can be readily assessed through new technologies, such as laptop computers. However, it too is susceptible to human error, as when people become careless, tired, or annoyed with the research procedure.
Attitude measurement plays a critical role in persuasion research. Persuasion is a science, as well as an art, and we need valid instruments to assess attitudes. Three venerable scales are typically employed: Likert, Guttman, and the semantic differential. Likert is used most frequently because it taps beliefs and can be constructed easily. Open-ended measures, such as cognitive responses, can supplement closed-ended, structured scales.

There are a variety of problems in measuring attitudes through self-reports, including survey context and wording effects. To minimize these problems, researchers have devised strategies to improve questionnaire quality that focus on asking questions clearly and thoughtfully. Supplementing self-report surveys are several indirect techniques to assess attitudes, such as unobtrusive, physiological, and response time measures. Indirect techniques do not yield as sensitive information about the directionality and complexity of attitudes, which is why self-report measures, for all their shortcomings, will probably continue to dominate the field.
PART 2

Changing Attitudes and Behavior
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CHAPTER 5

Processing Persuasive Communications

Kate and Ben, recently married, delightfully employed, and happy to be on their own after four long years of college, are embarking on a major decision—a happy one, but an important one. They're buying a car. They have some money saved up from the wedding and have decided that, the way the stock market has been going, they'd be better off spending it than losing cash on some risky Internet investment.

Sitting in their living room one Thursday night watching TV, they find that they are tuning in more closely to the car commercials than the sitcoms. "That's a sign we're an old married couple," Kate jokes. Ben nods in agreement.

The next day after work, at Kate's request they click onto the Consumer Reports Web site and print out information about compact cars. On Saturday they brave the car dealerships, get the lowdown from car salesmen, and take spins in the cars. Kate, armed with her incredible memory for detail and ten 3 × 5 cards, hurls questions at the car salesmen, while Ben, shirt hanging out, eyes glazed, looks dreamily at the sports cars he knows he can't afford.

By early the next week, they have narrowed down the choices to a Honda Civic and a Saturn SC. Her desk covered with papers, printouts, and stacks of warranties and brochures from the dealerships, Kate is thinking at a feverish pace; she pauses, then shares her conclusions with her husband.

"Okay, this is it. The Honda gets more miles per gallon and handles great on the highway. But Consumer Reports gives the new Saturn better ratings on safety on account of their four-wheel antilock brakes, and traction control, which is important. The Saturn also has a better repair record than the Civic. But the big thing is we get a stronger warranty with the Saturn dealer and, Ben—the Saturn is a thousand bucks cheaper. Soooo . . . what do you think?"
Ben looks up. "Well, you know, I'm not into all this technical stuff like you are. I say if the Saturn gets better ratings from Consumer Reports, go for it. I also think the Saturn salesman made a lot of good points—real nice guy. The Honda guy basically blew us off when he found out we couldn't get an Accord."

"There's also the other thing," says Kate, sporting a grin.

"What?"

"The name."

"It's true," says Ben a bit sheepishly. "The name Saturn is cool. I like it."

"What am I going to do with you?" Kate asks, with a smile and a deliberately exaggerated sigh.

"How about, take me to the Saturn dealer, so we can buy our new car?" Ben says, gently running his hands through the 3 X 5 cards as he walks out the front door.

The story is fiction—but perhaps not too far from everyday experience. It is based on interviews with consumers and observations of people buying cars. The example illustrates two very different styles of processing information: careful consideration of message arguments (Kate), and superficial examination of information and a focus on simple cues (Ben). These two ways of processing information are the main elements of contemporary theories of persuasion and form the centerpiece of the present chapter.

This chapter launches the second part of the book, which examines theory and research on the effects of persuasive communication. The chapter describes guiding models of attitude and behavior change—approaches that underlie much of the research and applications that follow. The cornerstone of these theoretical approaches is a focus on process. Scholars believe that if they can understand how people cognitively process messages, they can better explicate the impact that communications have on attitudes. They believe that the better they comprehend individuals' modes of processing information, the more accurately they can explain the diverse effects messages have on attitudes. This is what scholars mean when they say you cannot understand the effects of communications on people without knowing how people process the message.

Contemporary models evolved from earlier perspectives on persuasion—notably Hovland's pathbreaking work, and research conducted in the 1960s. It is important to describe these programs of research because they contributed helpful insights and also laid the groundwork for current theorizing. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of these approaches. The second portion of the chapter describes a major cognitive processing model of persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, along with evidence that backs it up. Subsequent sections focus on real-life
applications, fine points of the model, intellectual criticisms, and the model's contributions to persuasion.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

As noted in chapter 1, Carl Hovland and his colleagues at Yale University conducted the first detailed, empirical research on the effects of persuasive communications. The Yale Attitude Change Approach was distinctive because it provided facts about the effects on attitudes of the communicator's credibility, message appeals, and audience members' personality traits. Convinced by theory and their generation's experience with World War II persuasion campaigns that communications had strong effects on attitudes, the researchers set out to examine who says what to whom with what effect (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Smith, Lasswell, & Casey, 1946).

Although Hovland and his colleagues' findings were interesting, it was their theory-driven approach and commitment to testing hypotheses that proved enduring. The Yale researchers were also interested in understanding why messages changed attitudes. Working in an era dominated by reward-based learning theories and research on rats' mastery of mazes, Hovland naturally gravitated to explanations that focused on learning and motivation. Hovland emphasized that persuasion entailed learning message arguments and noted that attitude change occurred in a series of steps. To be persuaded, individuals had to attend to, comprehend, learn, accept, and retain the message (see Fig. 5.1).

It sounds logical enough. Indeed there is considerable evidence that learning is a component of persuasion—the more people learn and comprehend message arguments, the more likely they are to accept the advocated positions (Chaiken, Wood, & Eagly, 1996). However, the thesis misses

\[
\text{Communication} \rightarrow \text{Message Learning} \rightarrow \text{Attitude Change}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Attention} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Comprehension} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Learning} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Acceptance} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Retention}
\end{align*}
\]

**FIG. 5.1** The Hovland/Yale Model of Persuasion.
the mark in an important respect. It assumes that people are sponglike creatures who passively take in information they receive. In fact, as Leon Festinger and Nathan Maccoby (1964) noted, an audience member does not sit there listening and absorbing what is said without any counteraction on his part. Indeed, it is more likely that under such circumstances, while he is listening to the persuasive communication, he is very actively, inside his own mind, counterarguing, derogating the points the communicator makes and derogating the communicator himself. (p. 360)

Think of how you react to a persuasive message. Do you sit there, taking in everything the speaker says? Are you so mesmerized by the communicator that you stifle any thoughts or mental arguments? Hardly. You actively think about the speaker, message, or persuasion context. You may remember message arguments, yet probably recall with greater accuracy your own criticisms of the speaker's point of view. This view of persuasion developed in the years that followed the publication of Hovland's research and is known as the Cognitive Response Approach to Persuasion. The approach asserts that people's own mental reactions to a message play a critical role in the persuasion process, typically a more important role than the message itself (Brock, 1967; Greenwald, 1968; Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981b). Cognitive responses include thoughts that are favorable to the position advocated in the message (proarguments) and those that criticize the message (counterarguments). Persuasion occurs if the communicator induces the audience member to generate favorable cognitive responses regarding the communicator or message.

The cognitive response view says that people play an active role in the persuasion process. It emphasizes that people's own thoughts about a message are more important factors in persuasion than memory of message arguments (Perloff & Brock, 1980; see Fig. 5.2). There is a good deal of evidence to substantiate this view. In fact, it may seem obvious that thoughts matter in persuasion. But remember that what is obvious at one

**FIG. 5.2** The Cognitive Response Model of Persuasion.
point in time is not always apparent in an earlier era. During the 1950s and early '60s, animal learning models of human behavior dominated psychology, and, on a broader level, Americans were assumed to follow lock, stock, and barrel the dictates of government and free enterprise capitalism. It only seemed natural to theorize that persuasion was primarily a passive process of learning and reinforcement.

With the advent of the 1960s, all this changed. Cognitive models emphasizing active thought processes gained adherents. It became clear that older views, while useful, needed to be supplemented by approaches that afforded more respect to the individual and assigned more emphasis to dynamics of the gray matter inside the brain.

"Feed your head," the rock group Jefferson Airplane belted out during this decade. The cognitive response approach echoed the refrain. It stimulated research, bottled old scholarly wine in new explanations, and helped pave the way for new theories of attitude change. By calling attention to the role thoughts play in persuasion, the cognitive response approach illuminated scholarly understanding of persuasion. Consider these examples.

The first involves forewarning. Forewarning occurs when a persuader warns people that they will soon be exposed to a persuasive communication. This is a common occurrence in life, and research has explored what happens when people are warned that they are going to receive a message with which they staunchly disagree. Cognitive response studies have clarified just what happens inside people's minds when this occurs. Individuals generate a large number of counterarguments, strengthening their opposition to the advocated position (Petty & Cacioppo, 1977). An old expression, "Forewarned is forearmed," describes this phenomena, but sheds no light on why it occurs. Cognitive response analysis helps us understand it better. When a close friend marches out of the house in the middle of an argument, vowing "We'll talk about this when I get home," you are likely to intensify your resolve not to give in. Generating arguments in your behalf and persuading yourself that you are right, you arm yourself with a battering ram of justifications that you invoke when your friend returns. In fact, as cognitive response research predicts, forewarning someone in this general fashion significantly reduces the likelihood that a subsequent persuasive communication will succeed. "Forewarning an audience to expect a persuasive message tends to make that message less persuasive," William L. Benoit (1998) concludes after studying this issue (p. 146).

Cognitive responses also help explain an off-beat persuasion effect called distraction. Sometimes people are distracted from paying attention to a communication with which they disagree. Other people may be talking, or music may be blaring at a party at precisely the moment when
someone chooses to explain why she disagrees with a position one holds on an issue. In other cases, communicators intentionally distract receivers from paying attention to a message. Advertisers do this all the time, using humor, music, and sex to take people's attention away from the message. In such circumstances, people can be highly susceptible to persuasion.

The distraction hypothesis holds that distraction facilitates persuasion by blocking the dominant cognitive response to a message (Petty, Wells, & Brock, 1976). If I listen to a message with which I disagree, my normal response is probably to counterargue with the communicator in my head. But if my mind is elsewhere—I'm grooving to the music or am laughing at a joke—I am not able to formulate arguments against the message. I, therefore, have fewer mental objections to the advocated position. As a result, I end up moving somewhat closer to the communicator's point of view than I would have, had I not been distracted in this way.

Notice what is going on here. It's not the distraction from the message that counts, it's the distraction from our own arguments regarding the message (Osterhouse & Brock, 1970). Recognizing that people are primed to contest advertisements in their own minds, advertisers resort to all sorts of clever distractions (see chapter 11). Sometimes they even seem to be aware that we mentally take issue with ads that appear on television, as they try to tease us into not taking the ad so seriously. This too can be distracting and can facilitate persuasion. Mind you—distraction does not always succeed, and it does not always work by inhibiting counterargument production. Indeed, David B. Buller and John R. Hall (1998) present an array of evidence that challenges the counterargument disruption thesis. However, the distraction research caught researchers' eye by raising the possibility that cognitive responses could influence attitude change. This in turn stimulated scholarship and suggested new ideas for everyday persuasion (see, for example, Boxes 5-1 and 5-2).

**BOX 5-1
INOCULATION THEORY**

Persuasion not only involves changing attitudes. It also centers on convincing people not to fall prey to unethical or undesirable influence attempts. Communicators frequently attempt to persuade individuals to resist social and political messages that are regarded as unhealthy or unwise. For example, health campaigns urge young people to "say no" to drugs, smoking, drinking when driving, and unsafe sex. In the political domain, candidates attempt to persuade wavering voters to resist the temptation to bolt their party and vote for the opposing party candidate or a third-party contender.
A variety of techniques have been developed to strengthen resistance to persuasion. The techniques work by triggering counterarguments which, along with other factors, help individuals resist persuasive appeals. One of the most famous strategies evolved from a biological analogy and is known as inoculation theory. The theory is an ingenious effort to draw a comparison between the body’s mechanisms to ward off disease and the mind’s ways of defending itself against verbal onslaughts. In his statement of the theory, William McGuire noted that doctors increase resistance to disease by injecting the person with a small dose of the attacking virus, as in a flu shot (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961). Preexposure to the virus in a weakened form stimulates the body’s defenses: It leads to production of antibodies, which help the body fight off disease. In the same fashion, exposure to a weak dose of opposition arguments, “strong enough to stimulate his defenses, but not strong enough to overwhelm him,” should produce the mental equivalent of antibodies—counterarguments (McGuire, 1970, p. 37). Counterarguing the oppositional message in one’s own mind should lead to strengthening of initial attitude and increased resistance to persuasion.

One of the hallmarks of inoculation research is the creativity with which it has been tested. McGuire and his colleagues chose to expose people to attacks against attitudes that had been rarely if ever criticized: cultural truisms, or beliefs individuals learn through socialization. Cultural truisms include: “You should brush your teeth three times a day” and “People should get a yearly checkup.” In essence, participants in the experiments received either a supportive defense—arguments defending the truism—or an inoculation defense (for example, arguments against the notion that you should brush your teeth three times a day, along with refutation of these arguments). Individuals who received the inoculation defense were more likely to resist subsequent attacks on a brush-your-teeth-three-times-a-day type truism than those who just received supportive arguments (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961). Presumably, the attack and refutation stimulated individuals to formulate arguments why the truism was indeed correct. They were apparently more motivated than those who heard the usual “rah-rah, it’s true” supportive arguments.

These findings provided the first support for inoculation theory. The theory fundamentally stipulates that resistance to persuasion can be induced by exposing individuals to a small dose of arguments against a particular idea, coupled with appropriate criticism of these arguments. In essence, inoculation works by introducing a threat to a person’s belief system and then providing a way for individuals to cope with the threat (that is, by refuting the counterattitudinal message). As Michael Pfau (1997) points out, “by motivating receivers, and then preemptively refuting one or more potential counterarguments, inoculation spreads a broad blanket of protection both against specific counterarguments raised in refutational preemption and against those counterarguments not raised” (pp. 137–138). Continued
Other research suggests that inoculation enhances persuasion by providing the persuader with an opportunity to reframe the arguments before the opposition gets to them (Williams & Dolnik, 2001). Although there is healthy debate about just which processes account best for inoculation effects, there is little doubt that inoculation provides a useful way to encourage resistance to persuasive communications (Benoit, 1991; Pfau, 1997; Szabo & Pfau, 2002).

Indeed, inoculation theory has stimulated considerable research over the years, usefully transcending its initial focus on cultural truisms, explored in exclusively laboratory settings. Communication scholars have taken the concept to the real world, examining its applications to commercial advertising, political campaigns, and health (Pfau, Van Bockern, & Kang, 1992; see chapter 12). A number of practical conclusions have emerged from this research. They include the following:

1. **Inoculation can be a potent weapon in politics.** Politicians can anticipate the opposition’s attacks, and preempt them by using inoculation techniques (Pfau & Kenski, 1990; Pfau & Burgoon, 1988). Bill Clinton used the technique in 1992 when accepting his party’s nomination for president. Anticipating that Republicans would attack his record as governor of Arkansas, he sought to preempt the attack at the outset by acknowledging that “there is no Arkansas miracle.” He then deflected the criticism by explaining his achievements as governor. Eight years later, Democratic nominee Al Gore borrowed the strategy from Clinton’s playbook. Acknowledging criticism that he was not the most exciting politician in America, Gore told a cheering crowd of Democrats that he was nonetheless dedicated and would work hard every day for Americans if elected president. Although Gore lost the election, he won the popular vote, perhaps in part due to strategies like this.

2. **In a world filled with unethical persuaders, inoculation offers a helpful technique to help people resist unwanted influence attempts.** The theory says that the best way to induce resistance to unethical persuasion is to provide people with a small dose of the dangerous information and then help them refute it. This offers a useful counterpoint to those who say that parents should shield children from the world’s evils or shelter them from unpleasant realities. As Pratkanis and Aronson (1992) note, “we cannot resist propaganda by burying our heads in the sand. The person who is easiest to persuade is the person whose beliefs are based on slogans that have never been seriously challenged” (p. 215).
"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."
—Shakespeare, Hamlet

Shakespeare may have been one of the earliest proponents of the cognitive response approach. Quite possibly, the London bard would also have endorsed the idea that thinking plays a critical role in mental and physical problems. There is much evidence to support the notion that thinking plays an important role in the self-persuasion process. Christopher D. Ratcliff and his colleagues (1999) demonstrated this in an intriguing study.

Noting that “the majority of couch potatoes admit that their health would benefit from greater exercise (and) the majority of students recognize that their grades and career chances would be enhanced if they spent more time studying,” Ratcliff and his associates argued that one way to help these individuals achieve their goals is to encourage them to think about the positive results of these activities (p. 994). Ratcliff and his colleagues asked students to think about actions that might make studying enjoyable. They found that compared to students in other experimental conditions, these students reported more positive intentions to spend time studying. Thinking of the benefits of studying may have strengthened attitudes toward studying, as well as perceptions that one could actually achieve this goal.

Thinking and positive cognitive responses also play a part in the well-known placebo effect—the tendency of patients to get better not because of the actual effects of a medical treatment, but due to a belief that the treatment will cure them. There is evidence from pain studies that placebos (dummy pills that do not actually control pain) are about 60% as effective as active medications like aspirin and codeine (Blakeslee, 1998). Patients suffering pain after getting a wisdom tooth extracted feel just as much relief from a fake ultrasound application as from a real one, provided both patient and doctor believe the ultrasound machine is on. Researchers have reported that they could successfully dilate asthmatics’ airways by simply telling them they were inhaling a bronchodilator, even though they actually were not (Talbot, 2000).

Naturally there are many reasons why placebos work, and of course they don’t work in each and every circumstance (Kolata, 2001). However, thinking you are going to get better and rehearsing these thoughts to yourself as the doctor gives you the treatment may actually help you to achieve the desired result.
These is little doubt that the cognitive response approach advanced knowledge of persuasion. It also provided a method to creatively measure cognitive aspects of attitudes. After a time, though, researchers realized that the approach had two limitations. First, it assumed that people think carefully about messages. Yet there are many times when people turn their minds off to persuasive communications, making decisions based on mental shortcuts. Second, the cognitive response approach failed to shed much light on the ways that messages influence people. It did not explain how we can utilize cognitive responses to devise messages to change attitudes or behavior. In order to rectify these problems, scholars proceeded to develop process-based models of persuasion.

Two models currently dominate the field. The first, devised by Shelly Chaiken and Alice H. Eagly, is called the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken, 2002; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). The second, formulated by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Both approaches emphasize that you cannot understand communication effects without appreciating the underlying processes by which messages influence attitudes. Both are dual-process models in that they claim that there are two different mechanisms by which communications affect attitudes. This chapter focuses on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) because it has generated more research on persuasive communication and offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding communication effects.

Main Principles

The first question students may have when reading about an elaboration likelihood model of persuasion is: “Just what does the term elaboration likelihood mean?” This is a reasonable question. Elaboration refers to the extent to which the individual thinks about or mentally modifies arguments contained in the communication. Likelihood, referring to the probability that an event will occur, is used to point up the fact that elaboration can be either likely or unlikely. Elaboration is assumed to fall along a continuum, with one end characterized by considerable rumination on the central merits of an issue, and the other by relatively little mental activity. The model tells us when people should be particularly likely to elaborate, or not elaborate, on persuasive messages.

The ELM stipulates that there are two distinct ways people process communications. These are called routes, suggesting that two different highways crisscross the mind, transporting thoughts and reactions
to messages. The term route is a metaphor: We do not know for sure that these routes exist (anymore than we know with absolute certainty that any mental construct exists in precisely the way theorists use it). Social scientists employ terms like processing route (or attitude) to describe complex cognitive and behavioral phenomena. As with attitude, the term processing route makes eminent sense and is supported by a great deal of empirical evidence. The ELM refers to the two routes to persuasion as the central and peripheral routes, or central and peripheral processes.

The central route is characterized by considerable cognitive elaboration. It occurs when individuals focus in depth on the central features of the issue, person, or message. When people process information centrally, they carefully evaluate message arguments, ponder implications of the communicator’s ideas, and relate information to their own knowledge and values. This is the thinking person’s route to persuasion.

The peripheral route is entirely different. Rather than examining issue-relevant arguments, people examine the message quickly or focus on simple cues to help them decide whether to accept the position advocated in the message. Factors that are peripheral to message arguments carry the day. These can include a communicator’s physical appeal, glib speaking style, or pleasant association between the message and music playing in the background. When processing peripherally, people invariably rely on simple decision-making rules or heuristics. For example, an individual may invoke the heuristic that “Experts are to be believed,” and for this reason (and this reason only) accept the speaker’s recommendation.

Thus, the ELM says that people can be simple information processors—“cognitive misers” as they are sometimes called (Taylor, 1981)—or deep, detailed thinkers. Under some conditions (when processing superperipherally), they are susceptible to slick persuaders—and can be thus characterized by the saying attributed to P. T. Barnum: “There’s a sucker born every minute!” In other circumstances (when processing centrally), individuals are akin to Plato’s ideal students—seeking truth and dutifully considering logical arguments—or to Aristotelian thinkers, persuaded only by cogent arguments (logos). The model says people are neither suckers nor deep thinkers. Complex creatures that we are, we are both peripheral and central, heuristic and systematic, processors. The critical questions are when people process centrally, when they prefer the peripheral pathway, and the implications for persuasion. The nifty thing about the ELM is that it answers these questions, laying out conditions under which central or peripheral processing is most likely, and the effects of such processing on attitude change.

The key factors that determine processing strategy are motivation and ability. When people are motivated to seriously consider the message, they process centrally. They also pursue the central route when they are...
cognitively able to ponder message arguments. Situations can limit or enhance people's ability to process centrally; so too can personal characteristics. On the other hand, when people lack the motivation or ability to carefully process a message, they opt for a simpler strategy. They process superficially.

It is frequently neither possible nor functional to process every message carefully. "Just imagine if you thought carefully about every television or radio commercial you heard or ad you came across in newspapers or magazines," note Richard Petty and his colleagues (1994). "If you ever made it out of the house in the morning, you probably would be too mentally exhausted to do anything else!" (p. 118). Contemporary society, with its multiple stimuli, unfathomably complex issues, and relentless social change, makes it inevitable that people will rely on mental shortcuts much of the time.

In addition to spelling out factors that make peripheral processing most likely, the ELM contains hypotheses about the impact that such processing exerts on persuasion. Different persuasive appeals are effective, depending on the processing route. These appeals also differ in their long-term effects on attitudes (see Fig. 5.3).

**Motivation to Process**

*Involvement.* Can you think of an issue that has important implications for your own life? Perhaps it is a university proposal to raise tuition, a plan to change requirements in your major, or even a proposal to ban drinking in fraternities and sororities. Now think of an issue that has little impact on your day-to-day routines. This could be a proposal to strengthen the graduation requirements at local high schools or a plan to use a different weed spray in farming communities. You will certainly process the first issues differently than the second. Different persuasive appeals are likely to be effective in these two circumstances as well.

The topics just cited differ in their level of personal involvement, or the degree to which they are perceived to be personally relevant to individuals. *Individuals are high in involvement when they perceive that an issue is personally relevant or bears directly on their own lives. They are low in involvement when they believe that an issue has little or no impact on their own lives.*

The ELM stipulates that when individuals are high in involvement, they will be motivated to engage in issue-relevant thinking. They will recognize that it is in their best interest to carefully consider the arguments in the message. Even if they oppose the position advocated in the message, they may change their attitudes if the arguments are sufficiently compelling to persuade them that they will benefit by adopting the advocated position. Under high involvement, people should process messages through the central route, systematically scrutinizing message arguments.
FIG. 5.3 The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (Reprinted and adapted with permission from Petty and Wegener, 1999).

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By contrast, under low involvement, people have little motivation to focus on message arguments. The issue is of little personal consequence; consequently, it doesn’t pay to spend much time thinking about the message. As a result, people look for mental shortcuts to help them decide whether to accept the communicator’s position. They process the message peripherally, unconcerned with the substance of the communication.

These predictions are intriguing, but how do we know if they hold water in the real world? In order to discover if hypotheses are correct, researchers test them empirically. Petty, Cacioppo, and Goldman (1981) examined these hypotheses in a now-classic study. To help you appreciate the procedures, I ask that you imagine that the experiment was being conducted again today using equivalent methods and materials. Here is how it would work:

You first enter a small room in a university building, take a seat, and wait for the experimenter. When the experimenter arrives, she tells you that the university is currently reevaluating its academic programs and is soliciting feedback about possible changes in policy. One proposal concerns a requirement that seniors take a comprehensive exam in their major area of study.

If randomly assigned to the high-involvement condition, you would be told that the comprehensive exam requirement could begin next year. That’s clearly involving as it bears directly on your educational plans. How would you feel if you learned that you might have to take a big exam in your major—communication, psychology, marketing, or whatever it happened to be? You would probably feel nervous, angry, worried, or curious. Whichever emotion you felt, you clearly would be concerned about the issue.

If, on the other hand, you had been assigned to the low-involvement condition, you would be told that the exam requirement would not take effect for 10 years. That clearly is low involvement. Even if you’re on the laid-back, two-classes-a-semester plan, you do not envision being in college 10 years from now! Realizing the message is of little personal consequence, you would gently switch gears from high energy to autopilot.

Regardless of involvement level, you would be asked now to listen to one of two messages delivered by one of two communicators. The particular message and source would be determined by lot, or random assignment.

You would listen to either strong or weak arguments on behalf of the exam. Strong arguments employ statistics and evidence (“Institution of the exams had led to a reversal in the declining scores on standardized achievement tests at other universities”). They offer cogent arguments in behalf of the exam requirement. Weak arguments are shoddy and unpersuasive (for example, “A friend of the author’s had to take a comprehensive exam and now has a prestigious academic position”).
Lastly, you would be led to believe that the comprehensive exam proposal had been prepared by either a communicator high or low in expertise. If assigned to the high-expertise group, you would be told that the report had been developed by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, which had been chaired by an education professor at Princeton University. If randomly assigned to the low-expertise communicator, you would be informed that the proposal had been prepared by a class at a local high school. You would then indicate your overall evaluation of the exam.

This constituted the basic design of the study. In formal terms, there were three conditions: involvement (high or low), argument quality (strong or weak), and expertise (high or low). Petty and his colleagues found that the impact of arguments and expertise depended to a considerable degree on level of involvement.

Under high involvement, argument quality exerted a significant impact on attitudes toward the comprehensive exam. Regardless of whether a high school class or Princeton professor was the source of the message, strong arguments led to more attitude change than did weak arguments. Under low involvement, the opposite pattern of results emerged. A highly expert source induced more attitude change than did a low-expert source, regardless of whether the arguments were strong or weak (see Fig. 5.4).

The ELM provides a parsimonious explanation of the findings. Under high involvement, students believed that the senior exam would affect them directly. This heightened motivation to pay careful attention to the quality of the arguments. Processing the arguments carefully through the central route, students naturally were more swayed by strong than by weak arguments. Imagine how you would react if you had been in this condition. Although you would hardly be overjoyed at the prospect of an exam in your major area of study, the idea would grab your attention, and you would think carefully about the arguments. After reading them, you would not be 100% in favor of the comprehensive exam—but having thought through the ideas and noted the benefits the exam provided, you might be more sympathetic to the idea than you would have been at the outset, and certainly more favorable than if you had listened to weak arguments in behalf of the exam.

Now imagine you had been assigned to the low-involvement–high-expertise group. You’d be on autopilot because the exam would not take place until long after you graduated. Blase about the whole thing, feeling little motivation to think carefully about the issue, you would understandably have little incentive to pay close attention to the quality of arguments. You would focus on one salient cue—a factor that might help you decide what to do about this issue so you could complete the assignment and get on with your day. The fact that the communicator was from Princeton might capture your attention and offer a compelling reason to go along with the message. “If this Princeton prof thinks it’s a good idea,
it's fine with me," you might think. Click-whirr, just like that, you would go along with the message (Cialdini, 2001).

As we will see, these findings have intriguing implications for everyday persuasion.

Looking back on the study findings, it may seem as if the main principle is that under high involvement, "what is said" is most important, and under low involvement, "who says it" is the key. There is some truth to this, but it greatly oversimplifies matters. The key point is not that message appeals are more effective under high involvement and communicator appeals are more compelling under low involvement. Instead, the core issue is that people engage in issue-relevant thinking under high involvement, but...
under low involvement focus on simple cues that are peripheral to the main issues. In fact, there are times when a peripheral aspect of the message can carry the day under low involvement.

Case in point: Number of message arguments. This attribute is absolutely irrelevant, or peripheral, to the quality of the message. A speaker can have nine shoddy arguments or one extremely cogent appeal. However, number of arguments can signify quality of argumentation in the minds of perceivers. If people would rather not think too deeply about an issue, they may fall into the trap of assuming that the more arguments a message has, the more convincing it is. This is exactly what Petty and Cacioppo (1984) discovered. When students were evaluating a proposal to institute senior comprehensive exams at their own school 10 years in the future, they were more influenced by a message that had nine arguments. It didn't matter if all of them were weak. However, when contemplating a senior exam policy that would take place next year, they were naturally more motivated to devote energy to thinking about the issue. They processed arguments centrally, seeing through the shoddy ones and accepting the message only if arguments were strong.

Other Motivational Factors. Critical as it is, personal involvement is not the only factor that influences message processing. If you expect to deliver a message to an audience, you should be highly motivated to expend cognitive effort processing the message (Boninger et al., 1990). If you are concerned with making a good impression on others when giving your pitch, you should also be motivated to systematically scrutinize the arguments you are going to discuss (see Leippe & Elkin, 1987; Nienhuis, Manstead, & Spears, 2001).

There is one other motivational factor that influences processing, and it is a particularly interesting one. It is a personality characteristic: the need for cognition. The need for cognition is a need to understand the world and to employ thinking to accomplish this goal. People who score high in need for cognition "prefer complex to simple problems" and "enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems" (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982, pp. 120–121). These individuals tend to prefer central to peripheral processing. Different types of persuasive appeals work on people high in need for cognition than on those low in cognitive needs. These issues are taken up in chapter 8.

Ability

A second determinant of processing strategy (besides motivation) is the person's ability to process the message. Situations can enhance or hamper individuals' ability to process a message. For example, people are less able to process a message when they are distracted, resulting in persuasive
effects discussed earlier. More interestingly, we centrally or peripherally process messages depending on our cognitive ability, or knowledge.

Knowledge is a particularly important factor. When people know a lot about an issue, they process information carefully and skillfully. They are better able to separate the rhetorical wheat from the chaff than those with little knowledge of the issue. They are more capable of evaluating the cogency of information and are adept at identifying shortcomings in message arguments (Wood, Rhodes, & Biek, 1995). It doesn’t matter what the issue is: It could be nuclear physics, baseball, or roof repair. Knowledgeable people process information centrally and are ordinarily tough nuts for persuaders to crack (Wood et al., 1995). By contrast, people with minimal knowledge on a topic lack the background to differentiate strong from weak arguments. They also may lack confidence in their opinions. They are the peripheral processors, more susceptible to persuasion in most situations.

As an example, think of an issue you know a lot about—let’s say, contemporary movies. Now conjure up a topic about which you know little—let’s say, computer scanners. The ELM says that you will process persuasive messages on these topics very differently, and that persuaders should use different techniques to change your mind on these topics. Given your expertise on modern films (you know all about different film techniques and the strengths and weaknesses of famous directors), there is every reason to believe you would centrally process a message that claims 1960s movies are superior to those of today. The message would grab your attention and could change your attitudes—provided it contained strong, compelling arguments.

A “rational” approach like this would be stunningly ineffective on the subject of scanners that digitize photos and convert words on a printed page into word-processing files. Given your ignorance of scanners, you would have difficulty processing technical arguments about optical character recognition, driver software, or high-resolution scans. On the other hand, the salesperson who used a peripheral approach might be highly effective. A salesperson who said she had been in the business 10 years or who furnished 10 arguments why Canon was superior to Epson might easily connect with you, perhaps changing your attitude or inducing you to buy a Canon scanner. Consistent with this logic, Wood and her colleagues (1985) found that argument quality had a stronger impact on attitudes among individuals with a great deal of knowledge on an issue, but message length exerted a stronger influence on those with little knowledge of the issue.

PERIPHERAL PROCESSING IN REAL LIFE

There is nothing as practical as a good theory, Kurt Lewin famously said. This is abundantly apparent in the case of the ELM. Once you appreciate
the model, you begin to find all sorts of examples of how it is employed in everyday life. Three examples of peripheral processing follow, and in the next section implications of central processes are discussed.

1. The Oprah Book Club Effect

Some 13 million Americans watch Oprah's Book Club, a monthly segment of The Oprah Winfrey Show that features engaging discussions of recently published novels. Book Club shows involve a discussion among Winfrey, the author, and several viewers, who discuss the book and its relationship to their own lives. "The show receives as many as 10,000 letters each month from people eager to participate," a reporter relates. "By the time the segment appears, 500,000 viewers have read at least part of the novel. Nearly as many buy the book in the weeks that follow... Oprah's Book Club has been responsible for 28 consecutive best sellers. It has sold more than 20 million books and made many of its authors millionaires" (Max, 1999, pp. 36-37).

The Book Club is a great thing for books and publishing. It is also an example of peripheral processing in action. What convinces hundreds of thousands of people to buy these novels? What persuades them to purchase Wally Lamb's She's Come Undone, the story of an intelligent—overweight—woman who overcomes problems stemming from sexual abuse, rather than an equally compelling novel about abuse and redemption? The answer, in a word, is Oprah. Her credibility, warmth, and celebrity status suggest to viewers that the book is worth a try. It's not that audience members are meticulously comparing one book to another and integrate Oprah's advice with their literary assessments of the plot and character development. They lack motivation and perhaps ability. So, they rely on Oprah's advice and purchase the book, much to the delight of the publishing house and struggling novelist.

2. The Electoral Road Show

To many Americans, politics is like a traveling road show, a circus that the media cover every four years, complete with clowns, midgets, and daredevils who will do just about anything to win the crowd's approval. Politics does not affect them personally—or so many believe. About half of the electorate votes in presidential elections, and many are cynical about the political process (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999). "We have no control over what's going on," one disconnected citizen told researchers Jack Doppelt and Ellen Shearer (1999). Another said that "I don't really think any of the candidates are interested in the issues that I am" (p. 16).

Feeling cynical about politics and blasé about their participation, large numbers of voters put little mental energy into the vote decision.
Instead, they process politics peripherally, if at all. When it comes time to cast their vote, low-involved voters consider such peripheral cues as:

- **Candidate appearance.** Although people hate to admit it, they are influenced by candidates’ physical appeal (Budesheim & DePaola, 1994; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987). Voters look at a physically attractive candidate, feel positively, and connect their positive affect with the candidate when it comes time to cast their vote.

- **Endorsements.** Political ads frequently contain long lists of endorsements. Names of well-known groups—for example, the American Bar Association, Fraternal Order of Police, and National Organization for Women—as well as not-so-famous organizations, appear on a television screen, while the voice-over praises the candidate. The list serves as a peripheral cue, inviting the inference that “If all these groups endorse that candidate, he’s got to be qualified.”

- **Names.** In low-involving elections, the name of the candidate can make a difference. Voters prefer candidates whose names they have heard many times, in part because such names have positive associations (Grush, McKeough, & Ahlering, 1978). In an Illinois primary election, two candidates with relatively smooth-sounding names (Fairchild and Hart) defeated candidates with less euphonious names (Sangmeister and Pucinksi). Many voters were probably shocked to discover that Mark Fairchild and Janice Hart were followers of the extremist and unconventional political candidate, Lyndon LaRouche (O'Sullivan et al., 1988)!

Candidates are not exactly oblivious to these points. They appreciate the psychology of low-involvement voting, and they develop persuasive messages to reach these voters. They hire image consultants, who advise them on what to wear and how to present themselves positively in public. Some years back, during the 2000 election, Al Gore was counseled to take on a more macho appearance by releasing his “inner-alpha-male” (Bellafante, 2000). In one political debate, he showed up wearing a three-button suit, a French blue shirt, and a horizontally striped tie. Although he looked more like a movie producer than a candidate, he hoped this would resonate with Democrats dissatisfied with his personae.

At other times, candidates rely on slogans. Candidates who use catchwords that resonate with voters—“social justice” for Democrats, “family values” for Republicans—can elicit positive perceptions from individuals who lack motivation to consider issue positions (Garst & Bodenhausen, 1996). Hearing the “right” words may be all it takes to convince these individuals to cast their vote for the candidate.
What do attractiveness, slogans, endorsements, and name sound have to do with a candidate’s qualifications for office? Not too much: They are peripheral to the main issues of the campaign. Yet low-involved voters often rely on these cues and can be swayed by superficial appeals.

3. Jargon

Has this ever happened to you? Your car engine is on the blink; you take the auto to the mechanic; he (they’re usually guys) looks at you with an expression that says “You’re clueless about cars, aren’t you?” then puts his hands to his hips and begins to talk in tongues—invoking the most complicated car jargon you have ever heard. Impressed by the verbiage and afraid to admit you don’t know much about cars, you acquiesce to his appeal.

Tom and Ray Magliozzi, hosts of the National Public Radio show Car Talk, echoed this point in a humorous, but telling, article. Asked by an interviewer how someone could fake being a car mechanic, they recommend a heavy use of jargon (Nitze, 2001). Use words like “the torque wrench and torquing,” Tom says. Ray replies, “Torquing always sounds good.” Tom adds:

I’ll bet you, you could walk into some party and mention the expression “negative torque,” there would be nobody who would have the guts to ask you what that meant. A pro included. (p. 38)

This fits right in with the ELM. Individuals with little knowledge about car mechanics have trouble following explanations involving torque or car computer systems. When a mechanic begins using the jargon, they invoke the heuristic, “Mechanics who talk this way know their stuff; if they say this, it must be so.” And, just like that, the mechanic persuades these customers to make the purchase. (A similar example comes from the movie My Cousin Vinny, when the character played by Marisa Tomei wows a judge and jury, using jargon comprehensible only to car experts to prove that a getaway car could not possibly have been driven by the two men accused of the crime.)
thoughtful consideration of message arguments. As discussed earlier, when people are motivated or able to process messages, they don’t rely exclusively on peripheral cues, nor necessarily fall for persuader’s ploys. Instead, they attend closely to the communicator’s arguments. In these situations, persuasion flows through the central route, and appeals are necessarily crafted at a higher intellectual level.

Thus, when people typically buy big-ticket items like stereo systems, computers, and, of course, houses, they respond to cogent arguments in support of the particular product in question. In politics, when voters are out of work or concerned about the economy, they listen closely to candidates’ plans to revitalize the nation’s finances. For example, in 1980, with the country reeling from double-digit inflation, Ronald Reagan made the economy a centerpiece of his campaign against then-president Jimmy Carter. “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” he asked Americans in a presidential debate. Reagan went on to suggest that many folks were worse off than they had been prior to Carter taking office. In posing the question this way, Reagan induced people to think seriously about their own economic situations and at the same time to give his challenge to an incumbent president dutiful consideration. His appeals apparently worked, for Reagan handily defeated Carter in the November election (Ritter & Henry, 1994).

Arguments, however, do not always carry the day in persuasion. Cogent arguments can fall on deaf ears when they run counter to an individual’s strong attitudes or values. Recall the discussion in chapter 2 of how passionate supporters and opponents of the death penalty reacted to evidence that questioned their position. They did not alter their attitudes. On the contrary, they criticized data that disputed their point of view, praised evidence that supported their position, and emerged with renewed confidence that their view on capital punishment was correct. How could this be, one wonders, if people are supposed to rationally consider arguments when they are interested in the issue in question?

The answer points to a complexity in the ELM. All central-route processing is not rational and free of bias. Human beings are not objective thinkers. The key is the degree to which the issue touches on an individual’s strong attitudes, values, or ego-entrenched positions. It is useful to distinguish between issues that are of interest because they bear on important outcomes in the individual’s life—comprehensive exams, tuition increases, the economy—and those that bear on values or deep-seated attitudes. When the message focuses on a personally relevant outcome, people process information in a relatively unbiased way, focusing on the merits of issue arguments. However, when the issue touches on core values or ego-involved schemas, individuals can be highly biased and selective in how they think about the entire matter. Make no mistake: In both
cases, they process centrally, engaging in considerable thinking and evaluating the basic ideas contained in the message. However, when thinking about outcomes (a comprehensive exam) they are open to cogent arguments. When considering a message that touches on core values (capital punishment, abortion), they attend to the opponent's arguments, but usually reject them (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Wood, Rhodes, & Biek, 1995). Highly knowledgeable people with strong attitudes will muster all sorts of sophisticated reasons why the opponent's plan is a bad one. They will impress you with their ability to remember the other side's arguments, but in the end they will prove to be just as biased as anyone else.

In these situations, people behave like ostriches, stubbornly rejecting ideas that are inconsistent with their attitude, and sticking only with communications that fall into the latitude of acceptance. How do communicators persuade people in such situations? With great difficulty and care, to be sure. Social judgment theory (see chapter 2) suggests that when trying to persuade people about issues that touch on core values, persuaders must strive to do two things. First, they should encourage individuals to assimilate the issue, or candidate, to their position. That is, they want people—or voters, applying this to a political context—to perceive that the candidate shares their position on the issue. The goal is not to change the voter's position on abortion, defense spending, the environment, or affirmative action. Instead, the idea is to convince voters that the candidate shares their positions on the issue and is sympathetic with their concerns (Schwartz, 1973).

At the same time, a communicator wants to make sure that people do not come away from the persuasive encounter perceiving that they are in sharp disagreement with the communicator on the issue (Kaplowitz & Fink, 1997). If voters contrast their position from a politician's, and assume that the politician takes a very different position on a key issue, the candidate is in deep do-do, as former president George Bush liked to say. For these reasons, candidates are frequently careful not to take strong positions on hot-button issues like abortion, gun control, capital punishment, and racial quotas. They are fearful of alienating undecided voters—of pushing voters' contrast effect buttons. If this happens, these folks may vote for the opposing candidate or stay home. Thus, there is a practical reason why candidates take "fuzzy" positions on hot-button issues. Yet this points up a troubling ethical issue. Candidates must camouflage or moderate their positions to get elected (Granberg & Seidel, 1976). However, in so doing they risk compromising their integrity or turning off voters who suspect the worst in politicians. Yet if they admirably stick to their guns and take strong positions, they alienate middle-of-the-roaders, and end up being right—not president.

Central processing frequently leads to reinforcement, or strengthening of attitudes. (There are times when this is a good thing—for example, in
the case of solidifying a negative attitude toward cigarette smoking or drugs.) Nonetheless, there are cases in which central processing has produced profound changes in attitude—not just reinforcement. Americans radically changed their attitudes toward smoking, health, and exercise, in part due to central processes emphasized by the ELM. The ELM, in this way, explains how people modify their attitudes under high-involvement conditions. Individuals reconsider earlier positions, gradually alter their assessments of the issue, think deeply about the matter (sometimes through painful reassessment of themselves and their values), and over time link up the new attitude with other aspects of themselves. This leads to the attitude becoming a more permanent fixture of individuals’ self-systems. Attitudes changed through deep, central route thinking are more likely to persist over time than those formed through short-circuited thinking or peripheral cues (Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995). The hopeful side of this is that prejudice and dysfunctional attitudes can be changed. Once modified, such changes can also persist and lead to improvements in the person’s overall mental state.

COMPLICATIONS AND CRITICISMS

In the many years that have elapsed since the Elaboration Likelihood Model was first introduced, the theory has been discussed, criticized, clarified, extended, and, yes, elaborated on in a variety of ways. In this section, I review these intellectual developments, hoping to illuminate the fine points of cognitive theorizing about persuasion.

A key issue involves the ability of a particular variable to do different things or serve diverse functions. Consider physical attractiveness. If you had to describe the role physical attractiveness plays in persuasion based on the earlier discussion, you might suggest that it serves as a peripheral cue. You might speculate that when people do not care much about an issue or lack ability to process the message, they fall back on the physical appeal of the speaker. Opting not to process the message carefully, they let themselves get carried away a bit by the speaker’s good looks. The pleasant association of the communicator with the communication pushes individuals toward accepting the message. This analysis of attractiveness is indeed in sync with the ELM, as it has been discussed thus far. Attractiveness frequently has just this effect, serving as a cue for peripheral processing.

Unfortunately, matters become more complicated when we examine other persuasion settings. For example, suppose a young woman is looking for a beauty product, flips through the pages of Glamour magazine, and sees models promoting L’Oreal and Cover Girl lipcolors. The models’
good looks represent key selling points for the products. Isn’t a model’s attractiveness central to the decision regarding the product, not peripheral? Couldn’t the physical appeal of the model—the fact that she is beautiful and uses this product—serve as a compelling reason to purchase the particular facial cream, lipcolor, or makeup? The answer is “Yes.”

The ELM argues that theoretically a particular variable can serve in one of three capacities. It can function as: (a) a persuasive argument, (b) peripheral cue, or (c) factor that influences thinking about the person or issue. Thus, for someone trying to decide whether to purchase a beauty product or shampoo, the communicator’s attractiveness can serve as an argument for the product (Kahle & Homer, 1985). In another context—electoral politics—attractiveness can function as a peripheral cue, as when people decide to vote for candidates because they think they’re cute.

Now consider a third situation, this involving a different aspect of politics. Let’s say a person has mixed feelings on environmental and energy issues. She believes that the United States needs to locate alternative sources of fuel, but also feels it is important to preserve breathtakingly beautiful wildlife refuges. When an attractive source like actor Robert Redford (2001) criticizes policies to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, she may find herself devoting more cognitive energy to the communicator’s arguments. She may picture Redford in her mind, link up his attractive appearance with the beauty of the wilderness, and therefore give his arguments more thought than if a less attractive communicator had advanced these positions.

Or consider the complex question of cutting taxes. Liberals oppose massive tax cuts, saying they favor the rich or that money collected from taxes is needed to cover Social Security and Medicare. Conservatives disagree. They argue that the government has (or had!) a surplus and owes it to citizens to refund their money; besides, they say, tax cuts will stimulate the economy. Enter the chairman of the Federal Reserve. He enthusiastically endorses tax cuts, providing sound arguments. The Federal Reserve chairman is a very credible source. His opinion and arguments can influence people. What does the ELM say about the role played by credibility (peripheral cue) and arguments?

The model offers up a complicated prediction (Petty & Wegener, 1999). It says that the Fed chairman’s expertise can serve as a peripheral cue for people low in political involvement or economic knowledge. These folks may say to themselves, “Who knows what’s the right policy here? It’s beyond me. I’ll go with what the Fed chairman says. If he says this, it must be right.”

For those with a great deal of political motivation and economic knowledge, the chairman’s endorsement may actually function as an argument. They may think, “I know he has been cautious about cutting
taxes in the past. If he favors tax cuts now, it probably has some grounding in economic theory. Besides, given his power, the very fact that he endorses tax cuts may act as a stimulant to the economy.”

To other individuals, with moderate knowledge or involvement, the chairman’s endorsement of tax cuts may stimulate issue-relevant thinking. They may consider the issue more carefully now that a high-credibility-source has endorsed tax cuts. They may not change their minds, especially if they have strong views on the issue. However, the high-credible-source endorsement might catalyze their thinking, leading them to develop more detailed arguments on the issue.

In this way, a particular variable can serve multiple functions. Just as an attitude can serve different functions for different people, so too a persuasion factor can play different roles in different situations.

Criticisms and Reconciliations

Any persuasion model that stimulates research will generate criticism. This is as it should be: Theories are meant to be criticized and subjected to empirical scrutiny. Knowledge advances from the dueling of conflicting scholarly guns. New ideas emerge from the critical exchange of points of view.

The ELM has elicited its share of criticism, with bullets targeted at the multiple functions notion previously discussed. Critics have lamented the lack of clarity of this notion. They have argued that the ELM position permits it “to explain all possible outcomes,” making it impossible in principle to prove the model wrong (Stiff & Boster, 1987, p. 251). “A persuader can conduct a post mortem to find out what happened but cannot forecast the impact of a particular message,” Allen and Preiss (1997a) contend (pp. 117–118).

ELM proponents have thundered back, arguing that critics fail to appreciate the model’s strengths (Petty et al., 1987; Petty, Wegener et al., 1993). As a general rule, proponents note, individuals will be more likely to elaborate on messages when they are high in motivation or ability, and more inclined to focus on peripheral cues when they are lower in ability or motivation. What’s more, they say, if you understand the particular variable under investigation and the situation in which it operates, you can make clear predictions about the influences of persuasion factors on attitudes (Haugtvedt & Wegener, 1994; Petty & Wegener, 1998). Persuasion and human behavior are so complex, ELM proponents assert, that it is not possible to make precise predictions for every variable in each and every situation. On balance, they maintain, the ELM offers a highly useful framework for understanding how persuasion works in the panoply of situations in which it occurs in everyday life.
Both sides have a point. The multiple functions notion discussed earlier is intriguing, but it points to a problematic ambiguity in the model, making it so all-inclusive it is difficult to prove incorrect. At the same time, the ELM has many compensating virtues, as both critics and proponents acknowledge. It offers a comprehensive theory of cognitive processing. This is an important contribution, one that should not be minimized. Before the ELM (and Heuristic-Systematic Model: see Box 5-3) was invented, there were few in-depth approaches to understanding cognition and persuasive communication. There was a hodgepodge of results—findings about this type of communicator, that type of message, and this kind of message recipient. It was like a jigsaw puzzle that didn’t quite fit together. The ELM has helped provide us with a unified framework to understand the blooming, buzzing confusion of persuasion. For example, it helps explain why certain attitudes persist longer and predict behavior better than others (the former are elaborated on, accessed more, and linked up to a greater degree with other mental elements). To be sure, the model has imperfections (e.g., it can be difficult to derive message appeals for some real-world persuasion situations). However, it takes us from processes to effects and sheds enormous light on the variety of ways that persuasive communications achieve their effects. In the end, as several scholarly critics note, it would be difficult to overstate the model’s contribution to our knowledge of persuasive communication (Kruglanski, Thompson, & Spiegel, 1999, p. 294; see also Booth-Butterfield & Welbourne, 2002, and Slater, 2002).

**Box 5-3**

**Heuristic and Systematic Thinking**

The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) complements the ELM. It too has generated a great deal of research. No discussion on persuasion would be complete without discussing its main features.

Like the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the HSM emphasizes that there are two processes by which persuasion occurs. Instead of calling the routes central and peripheral, it speaks of systematic and heuristic processing. Systematic processing entails comprehensive examination of issue-relevant arguments. Heuristic processing, discussed earlier in this chapter, involves the use of cognitive shortcuts. People invoke heuristics, or simple rules of thumb that enable them to evaluate message arguments without much cognitive effort. For example, the notion that “Experts are always right” is a cognitive heuristic.

Continued
BOX 5–3
(CONTINUED)

There are subtle differences between central and systematic, and peripheral and heuristic, processing. However, they are by and large the same.

Like the ELM, the Heuristic–Systematic Model says that motivation and ability determine processing strategy. It emphasizes that people can be motivated by a need to hold accurate attitudes, defensive needs to maintain attitudes that bear on the self-concept, or desire to make a positive impression on others (Chen & Chaiken, 1999).

The HSM interestingly emphasizes that heuristic and systematic processes are not mutually exclusive. Instead, it says that, under certain circumstances, people could rely on heuristics and systematically process a message.

More than the ELM, the model says that people often prefer the short-circuited heuristic route than the detailed, systematic path. People are viewed as "minimalist information processors" who are unwilling to devote much effort to processing persuasive arguments (Stiff, 1994). They like their shortcuts and they use them frequently in everyday life.

CONCLUSIONS

We can trace dual-process models to ancient Greece. Plato’s ideal thinkers epitomized systematic, deep processing of persuasive messages; some of the Sophist writers (at least as depicted by Plato) embodied the colorful, stylistic appeals we associate with the peripheral route. Contemporary models, attempting to explain a very different world of persuasion than that which bedeviled the Greeks, hark back to the duality that preoccupied Plato in the 4th century B.C.

Contemporary models stipulate that there are two routes to persuasion—one thoughtful, focusing on the main arguments in the message, the other superficial and short-circuited, characterized by an attempt to make a quick choice, an easy fix. The ELM and Heuristic–Systematic Model, building on the Yale Attitude Change and Cognitive Response Approaches, offer insights about how people process messages in many situations. Motivation and ability determine processing strategy. Processing route, in turn, determines the type of message appeal that is maximally effective in a particular context, as well as the long-term effects of the message on attitudes. In other words, if you understand the factors impinging on someone and how he or she thinks about a persuasive message, you have a good chance of devising a message that will target the individual’s attitudes.
Complications arise when we consider that persuasion factors perform multiple functions. A given factor can serve as a cue, an argument, or catalyst to thought, depending on the person and situation. The multiple functions notion helps explain a variety of persuasion effects; however, its ambiguity can frustrate attempts to derive clear applications of the ELM to real-life situations. Taken as a whole, however, the model offers scholars a framework for understanding persuasion and provides practitioners with ideas for designing effective appeals (see Box 5–4). In essence, the model tells persuaders—in areas ranging from politics to health—to understand how their audiences approach and process messages. The ELM cautions against confrontation. Instead, it instructs communicators to build audience orientations into persuasive campaigns.

**BOX 5–4**

**PERSUASION TIPS**

One of the nifty things about the ELM is it contains practical, as well as theoretical, suggestions. Here are several suggestions for everyday persuasion, gleaned from the model:

1. Next time you are trying to convince someone of something, ask yourself: What is central, or most critical, to my attempt to change the other’s mind? What type of appeal will serve my goal best? For example, people are frequently scared of giving a public speech and assume that the most important thing is to look nice—buy fancy clothes, put on lots of makeup, and so forth. This can be an important aspect of persuasion, but it may be peripheral to the task. If you are trying to make a sale, you need compelling arguments that the purchase is in the client’s interest. If you are trying to convince people to get more exercise, you must show them that exercise can help them achieve their goals.

2. By the same token, remember that something that appears peripheral to you may be of considerable importance to the person you are trying to convince (Soldat, Sinclair, & Mark, 1997). You may spend a lot of time coming up with great arguments to convince neighbors to sign a petition against McDonalds’ building a new franchise near a beautiful park located down the block. But if your memo has a couple typos or your Web site containing the message is overloaded with information, people may think a little less of you. They may jump to the conclusion that your arguments are flawed. To you, the typos or abundance of information is of much less consequence than the cogency of your arguments. And you may be right. But what is peripheral to you can be central to someone else. Put yourself in the minds of those receiving your message, and consider how they will react to what you say and how you package your message.

*Continued*
When you are on the other end of the persuasion stick and are receiving the message, ask a couple of questions. First, is this something I really care about, or is it a low-involvement issue to me? Second, can I figure out what the persuader is promoting, or is this beyond me? If it is a high-involvement issue or you can understand where the persuader is coming from, you will probably scrutinize the message carefully and make a good decision. If you decide it's a low-involvement issue or you lack knowledge on the topic, you may find yourself turning to peripheral cues or relying on mental shortcuts. You may search for the easy way to make up your mind. There is nothing wrong with this, but it can lead you to place more trust in a persuader than perhaps you should. You could get snookered as a result!

To protect yourself, always ask yourself if you’re trying to go for the quick fix, either because you don’t care or don’t know much about the issue. If you recognize that you are relying on mental shortcuts, take the opposite tack. Spend more time than you ordinarily would on the decision. Think about the issue. You may find it’s more interesting or less difficult than you thought. The extra few minutes you spend thinking may help prevent you from making a costly or embarrassing mistake.

Ethically speaking, the model is value neutral. Reliance on peripheral or central cues can be functional or dysfunctional. Messages containing peripheral cues can take advantage of audiences’ lack of motivation to consider issues under low involvement; centrally processed arguments can be cogent, but deceptive. As a psychological theory of persuasion, the model is silent as to whether people’s motivation to carefully process issues under high involvement balances out their susceptibility to manipulation under low involvement. The most reasonable answer to these conundrums is that individuals are responsible for the persuasive decisions they make. It is our responsibility to recognize that we like to take mental shortcuts when we care or know little about an issue and that persuaders will try to take advantage of this tendency. In the short and long run, it is our responsibility to protect ourselves from being taken in by the peripheral persuaders of the world.
Charisma. It's a word that comes to mind frequently when people speak of persuasion. You probably think of great speakers, a certain magnetic quality, or perhaps people you know who seem to embody this trait. Charisma is also one of those "god-terms" in persuasion (Weaver, 1953)—concepts that have positive connotations, but have been used for good and evil purposes. We can glimpse this in the tumultuous events of the 20th century, events that were shaped in no small measure by the power of charismatic leaders. Consider the following examples:

On August 28, 1963, hundreds of thousands of people converged on Washington, DC, protesting racial prejudice and trying to put pressure on Congress to pass a Civil Rights Bill. Their inspirational leader was Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the apostle of nonviolence and eloquent spokesman for equality and social justice. The protesters marched from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial, listening to a litany of distinguished speakers, but waiting patiently for King to address the crowd. King had worked all night on his speech, a sermonic address that would prove to be among the most moving of all delivered on American soil. He alluded to Abraham Lincoln, called on Old Testament prophets, and presented "an entire inventory of patriotic themes and images typical of Fourth of July oratory," captivating the audience with his exclamation, repeated time and again, that "I Have a Dream" (Miller, 1992, p. 143). King's wife, Coretta Scott King, recalls the pantheon:

Two hundred and fifty thousand people applauded thunderously, and voiced in a sort of chant, Martin Luther King . . . He started out with the written speech, delivering it with great eloquence. . . . When he got to the rhythmic part of demanding freedom now, and wanting jobs now, the crowd caught the timing and shouted now in a cadence. Their response lifted Martin in a surge of emotion to new heights of inspiration. Abandoning his
written speech, forgetting time, he spoke from his heart, his voice soaring magnificently out over that great crowd and over to all the world. It seemed to all of us there that day that his words flowed from some higher place, through Martin, to the weary people before him. Yea—Heaven itself opened up and we all seemed transformed. (King, 1969, pp. 238-239)

Charisma also was in force some 60 years earlier, at a different place, during a different time. In cities like Nuremberg and Berlin, to audiences of Germans—young, old, educated, uneducated, cultured, and uncultured—Adolf Hitler spoke, using words and exploiting symbols, bringing audiences to their feet “with his overwhelming, hysterical passion, shouting the same message they had heard over and over again, that they had been done in by traitors, by conspirators . . ., by Communists, plutocrats, and Jews” (Davidson, 1977, p. 183). Like King, Hitler’s oratory moved people and appealed to their hopes and dreams. But his speeches malevolently twisted hope into some gnarled ghastly entity and appealed to Germans’ latent, darkest prejudices. Here is how a journalist, who carefully observed Hitler, described the Fuhrer’s charismatic skill:

With unerring sureness, Hitler expressed the speechless panic of the masses faced by an invisible enemy and gave the nameless specter a name. He was a pure fragment of the modern mass soul, unclouded by any personal qualities. One scarcely need ask with what arts he conquered the masses; he did not conquer them, he portrayed and represented them. His speeches are day-dreams of this mass soul; they are chaotic, full of contradictions, if their words are taken literally, often senseless as dreams are, and yet charged with deeper meaning. . . . The speeches always begin with deep pessimism, and end in overjoyed redemption, a triumphant, happy ending, often they can be refuted by reason, but they follow the far mightier logic of the subconscious, which no refutation can touch. Hitler has given speech to the speechless terror of the modern mass, and to the nameless fear he has given a name. That makes him the greatest mass orator of the mass age. (quoted in Burleigh, 2000, pp. 100-101)

Charisma—exploited for evil purposes by Hitler, used to lift human spirits by Martin Luther King—describes the power of so many forceful speakers, including (in the political realm) Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton; Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan in the domain of race and civil rights; Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem in the arena of women’s equality; and Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Ghandi in the international domain of human rights. Regrettably, it also describes a legion of cult leaders, who enchanted, then deceived, dozens, even hundreds of starry-eyed followers. The list of charismatic cult leaders includes Charles Manson; Jim Jones, who
induced 900 people to commit suicide in Guyana; David Koresh, leader of the ill-fated Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas; Marshall Applewhite, who led 38 members of the Heaven’s Gate cult to commit suicide in 1997; and most recently Osama bin Laden, who masterminded the September 11 attacks and, to many, is the personification of evil.

What is charisma? Coined over a century ago by German sociologist Max Weber (1968), charisma is “a certain quality of the individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers and qualities” (p. 241). Scholars who have studied charisma acknowledge the powerful influence it can have over ordinary people. Yet they also are quick to identify its limits. Charismatic individuals, after all, are not superhuman, but are seen in this light by their followers. Followers, for their part, influence the self-perception of leaders. As Ronald E. Riggio (1987) notes, “the charismatic leader inspires the crowd, but he also becomes charged by the emotions of the followers. Thus, there is an interplay between leader and followers that helps to build a strong union between them” (p. 76).

Charisma is also bound and bracketed by history. A person who has charisma in one era might not wield the same influences on audiences in another historical period. The chemistry between speaker and audience is a product of a particular set of circumstances, psychological needs, and social conditions. Martin Luther King might not be charismatic in today’s more complex multicultural era, which involves increased tolerance for racial diversity but also wariness of the costs of worthy social experiments like affirmative action. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a grand and majestic speaker on radio, might not move millions of television viewers, who would view a crippled president clutch his wheelchair for support.

Charisma, a powerful force in the 20th century, is not likely to disappear. People need to believe in the power of myth, and charismatic leaders feed—and can exploit—this motivation. Twenty-first-century charismatic leaders will exude different qualities than orators of previous eras. They will adapt their styles to the conditions and media of their times.

What more can be said of charisma? What role does it play in everyday persuasion? These questions are more difficult to answer. Charisma is an intriguing factor in persuasion, but an elusive one, to be sure. Granted, charisma involves a persuader’s ability to command and compel an audience, but what specific traits are involved? The communicator’s sociability? Attractiveness? Power? Or is it an attribute of the message: the words, metaphors, or nonverbal communication (hand motions and eye contact, for example)? Or does charisma have more to do with the audience—individuals’ own vulnerability and need to believe that a communicator has certain qualities they yearn for in life? These
questions point to the difficulty of defining charisma with sufficient precision that it can be studied in social scientific settings. There is no question that charisma exists and has been a powerful force in persuasion. On a practical level, it is difficult to study the concept and to determine just how it works and why.

Thus, those who wish to understand why the Martin Luther Kings and Hitlers of the world have profoundly affected audiences must take a different tack. They must either study political history or take a more finely tuned, social scientific approach to examining communicator effects. More generally, those of us who want to comprehend how persuaders persuade are advised to chip away at the question by examining the different pieces of the puzzle. A key piece of the puzzle—a core aspect of charisma—is the communicator. His or her qualities, and the ways in which these characteristics interact with the audience, can strongly influence attitudes. The chapters that follow explore other noteworthy aspects of this jigsaw puzzle of persuasive communication effects: the message (chapter 7) and the psychology of the audience (chapters 8 and 9).

The present chapter begins with an overview of communicator (or source) factors. It then discusses key factors in depth, applying them to contemporary life.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNICATOR

Just as there is not one type of charismatic leader (Ronald Reagan differed vastly from Jesse Jackson), there is not one defining characteristic of effective communicators. Communicators have different attributes and influence audiences through different processes. There are three fundamental communicator characteristics: authority, credibility, and social attractiveness. Authorities, credible communicators, and attractive ones produce attitude change through different mechanisms (Kelman, 1958).

Authorities frequently influence others through compliance. Individuals adopt a particular behavior not because they agree with its content, but because they expect "to gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishments or disapproval by conforming" (Kelman, 1958, p. 53). In other words, people go along with authority figures because they hope to obtain rewards or avoid punishment.

Credible communicators, by contrast, influence attitudes through internalization. We accept recommendations advanced by credible communicators because they are congruent with our values or attitudes.

Attractive communicators—likable and physically appealing ones—seem to achieve influence through more affective processes, such as identification. People go along with attractive speakers because they identify
with them, or want to establish a positive relationship with the communicators (Kelman, 1958).

Although Kelman’s analysis oversimplifies matters to some degree, it provides a useful framework for understanding communicator effects. The next sections examine the impact of authority, credibility, and attractiveness on persuasion.

**AUTHORITY**

It was an amazing study—unique in its time, bold, yet controversial, an attempt to create a laboratory analogue for the worst conformity in 20th-century history and one of the most graphic cases of criminal obedience in the history of humankind. Legendary psychologist Gordon W. Allport called the program of research “the Eichmann experiment” because it attempted to explain the subhuman behavior of Nazis like Adolf Eichmann, who after ordering the slaughter of 6 million Jews said “it was unthinkable that I would not follow orders” (Cohen, 1999, p. A1). More generally, the research was designed to shed light on the power that authorities hold over ordinary people, and how they are able to induce individuals to obey their directives, sometimes in ways that violate human decency.

You may have heard of the research program, called the Milgram experiments after psychologist Stanley Milgram who conceptualized and directed them. They are described in social psychology and social influence texts. A documentary film depicting the studies has been shown in thousands of college classrooms (you may have seen it). Milgram’s (1974) book, *Obedience to Authority*, has been translated into 11 languages. A rock musician of the 1980s, Peter Gabriel, called on the research in his song, “We Do What We’re Told—Milgram’s 37.”

**Experimental Procedures and Results**

Milgram conducted his research—it was actually not one study, but a series of experiments—from 1960 to 1963 at Yale University and nearby Bridgeport, Connecticut. The basic procedure follows:

Each individual receives $4.50 for participating in the experiment, billed as a study of memory and learning. At the laboratory, participants are joined by a man introduced as a fellow subject in the study, but who is actually working for the researcher.

At this point the participants are told that they will draw slips of paper to determine who will serve as the “teacher” and who will take the “learner” role. The drawing is rigged so that the naive subject is always selected to be the teacher.
The experimenter tells teacher and learner that the study concerns the effects of punishment on learning. The teacher watches as an experimenter escorts the learner to a room, seats him in a chair, straps his arms to prevent too much movement, and attaches an electrode to his wrist. The learner is told that he must learn a list of word pairs. When he makes a mistake, he will receive electric shocks, the intensity increasing with each error committed.

The teacher then is seated before a shock generator that contains a horizontal line of 30 switches varying from 15 to 450 volts and descriptions ranging from SLIGHT SHOCK to DANGER—SEVERE SHOCK. The experimenter instructs the teacher to read the word pairs to the learner, located in the next room. When the learner responds incorrectly, the teacher is to administer an electric shock, starting at the mildest level (15 volts) and increasing in 15-volt increments. After a series of shocks have been administered, the learner begins to express pain, grunting, complaining, screaming at 285 volts, and then remaining silent. Each time the teacher expresses misgivings about administering a shock, the experimenter orders him or her to continue, saying “it is absolutely essential that you continue.”

In reality, of course, the learner is not getting shocked. The experiment does not concern the effect of punishment on learning, but instead is designed to determine how far people will go in obeying an authority’s directives to inflict harm on a protesting victim (Milgram, 1974). Although the shocks are not real, they seem quite authentic to individuals participating in the study. Participants frequently experience considerable tension, torn between sympathy for a suffering compatriot and perceived duty to comply with authority. As Milgram (1963) notes:

I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. . . . At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: “Oh God, let’s stop it.” And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter, and obeyed to the end. (p. 377)

The businessman was the norm, not the exception. Although a group of psychiatrists predicted that only 1 in 1,000 individuals would administer the highest shock on the shock generator, as many as 65% went this far. Large numbers of individuals were perfectly content to go along with the experimenter’s orders.

The Milgram studies are one of many investigations of the effects of authority on behavior. There is an entire research literature on this topic (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). The Milgram research provides a useful
framework for understanding these effects—it is a window on the role authority plays in persuading individuals to comply with diverse requests.

Milgram's interest was in obedience, but not typical obedience in everyday life, like obeying traffic signs or laws prohibiting shoplifting. This obedience is not objectionable. Milgram's focus was obedience to malevolent authority, obedience that violates moral judgments, what Kelman and Hamilton call "crimes of obedience." Authority—the concept that preoccupied Milgram—is assumed to emanate not from personal qualities, "but from (the person's) perceived position in a social structure" (Milgram, 1974, p. 139). A legitimate authority is someone who is presumed to have "the right to prescribe behavior" for others (Milgram, pp. 142-143). In the experimental drama of the Milgram studies, the experimenter exploited his authority and led many people to administer shocks to a helpless victim.

Explanations

Why? Why would normal, upstanding human beings ignore their consciences and administer what they thought were electric shocks to a middle-aged learner? The explanation must lie in part with the power that situations can exert on human behavior, particularly the effects of the aura—or trappings—of authority. Interpretations of the Milgram findings include:

1. Early socialization. People are socialized to obey authority, and they get rewarded for doing so. Success in school, on sports teams, in corporate organizations, and even in Hollywood movies requires complying with the requests of authorities. "We learn to value obedience, even if what ensues in its name is unpleasant," Arthur G. Miller and his colleagues (1995) note. "We also trust the legitimacy of the many authorities in our lives," they remark (p. 9).

2. Trappings of authority. Various aspects of the experimental situation contributed to its majesty, or "aura of legitimacy" (Kelman and Hamilton, p. 151). These included: (a) status of the institution, Yale University; (b) complex, expensive scientific equipment in the room; (c) the experimenter's clothing (his lab coat served as a symbol of scientific expertise); and (d) the experimenter's gender—men are accorded more prestige "simply by virtue of being male" (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000, p. 1315). These trappings of authority could have served as peripheral cues, calling up the rule of thumb that "you do what authorities ask."

3. Binding forces. The experiment set in motion powerful psychological forces that "locked" participants into compliance. Participants did not want to harm the learner, and probably harbored doubts about the necessity of
administering severe electric shocks to advance scientific knowledge of memory. Still, they were reluctant to mention these concerns. Believing they lacked the knowledge or expertise to challenge the experimenter’s requests, afraid of what would happen if they confronted the experimenter, concerned that he might implicitly indict them for failing to serve the noble goals of science and Yale University, they knuckled under. “To refuse to go on meant to challenge the experimenter’s authority,” Kelman and Hamilton note (p. 153). While some people were willing to undertake this challenge, most did not. They did not perceive that they had the right or ability to question the experimenter, and thus opted to accept his view of the situation.

The Milgram experiments illustrate the powerful impact that social influence can exert on behavior. To some degree, the experiments straddle the line between coercion and persuasion. There is a coercive aspect to the studies in that the experimenter was pushing individuals to act contrary to their preferences, and participants may have experienced the authority’s directives as a threat. But the bottom line is that no one was holding a gun to participants’ heads; they were free to stop the shocks whenever they wanted, and some individuals did. The experimenter set up the bait, but individuals persuaded themselves to go along with his commands.

**Additional Issues**

Milgram conducted a variety of studies of obedience, varying aspects of the experimental situation. He found that obedience was more likely to occur under certain conditions than others. For example, substantially more individuals obeyed when the experimenter sat a few feet from the teacher than when he left the room and relayed orders by telephone. In one experiment, three individuals served as teachers. Unbeknownst to the subject, two worked for the experimenter. When the two individuals refused to shock the learner, obedience dropped sharply. This is the most hopeful aspect of the research. It suggests that authorities lose their grip if enough people resist.

Over the years, Milgram’s studies have generated considerable discussion in the academic community. It would be ironic if academics accepted Milgram’s findings lock, stock, and barrel—if they marched to Milgram’s music in unison, just as his subjects followed the experimenter’s order. I am happy to report that this is not what has occurred. Milgram’s studies have been endlessly debated, criticized, and praised (Miller, 1986; Orne & Holland, 1968).

Critics have pointed out that the study involved the use of archaic, physical violence; yet much violence involves verbal or psychological
abuse (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1986). Scholars have also suggested that individuals' obedience was not as nasty as Milgram suggested. "Subjects take it for granted that the experimenter is familiar with the shock generator and that he knows that the shocks are not fatal," two researchers contended (Meeus & Raaijmakers, p. 312). In response, Milgram has noted that research participants—the teachers—perceived that the experimental situation was very real—not a game. They believed that the shocks had inflicted pain.

Others have objected to the experiments on ethical grounds, arguing that Milgram had no right to play God. They suggest that it was immoral to leave participants with knowledge that they could be cruel, slavishly obedient creatures (Baumrind, 1964). The ethical critique has stimulated much discussion, with Milgram (1974) pointing out that participants in his studies had been debriefed, had not suffered harm, and actually viewed the experiment as enlightening. Yet even if one shares Milgram's positive assessment of the research, there is still something unsettling about deceiving people in the name of science.

So where does this leave us? The obedience experiments were conducted about a half century ago, in a profoundly different time. Perhaps, one might suggest, they only describe the behavior of men who served in the military during World War II or individuals reared during the conformist 1950s. Intrigued by this possibility, researchers conducted obedience studies modeled after Milgram's or developed new procedures to tap obedience. These more recent studies also reported disturbing evidence of obedience (Blass, 1992, 1999). For example, over 90% of subjects in one study followed the experimenter's orders to make 15 negative remarks to a test taker, even though they knew it would make the other person tense (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1986).

Applications

The Milgram experiments have emerged, in the words of one scholar, as "one of the most singular, most penetrating, and most disturbing inquiries into human conduct that modern psychology has produced" (quoted in Blass, 1999, p. 957). They provide an explanation—not the only one, but a powerful one—for the Holocaust of the Jews. They help us understand why American soldiers followed orders to slaughter women, children, and old men in Vietnam. The findings also shed light on phenomena other than wartime massacres.

They help us understand why White House aides have followed presidents' commands to cover up illegal acts, lie about them, or stonewall the press. Events such as these occurred during Watergate (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989), and to some degree during the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal.
Milgram studies also explain actions taken in health maintenance organizations (HMOs), as when doctors slavishly follow HMO authorities' orders to have special medical procedures performed only at the HMO. Some years back, a physician found that a patient's appendix was inflamed, but told her she would have to wait over a week to have an exam performed by the HMO staff. While waiting for her appointment, the patient's appendix burst, leading to a complicated medical situation (Greenhouse, 1999). Had the physician not followed orders, she might have found a way out of the logjam.

The Milgram study also sheds light on a much different problem: the distress professional secretaries experience when their bosses ask them to commit unethical acts. Eighty-eight percent of administrative professionals admitted they had told a "little white lie" for a supervisor (Romano, 1998). Some have done worse, like the secretary for a school district who routinely complied with her boss' requests to inflate grades of college-bound students. "What am I supposed to do?" the 48-year-old woman, a single mother of two children, said to reporter Lois Romano. "I have to put food on the table. I need the benefits and so I am forced to do things I know are not correct. I have nowhere to go" (Romano, p. 29).

The woman's comments illustrate the tension people feel when faced with having to carry out orders they know are wrong. The secretary is frank about her problem, but mistaken in one respect, I maintain. She says she has nowhere to go. Yet people always have places to go. There are always choices in life, and people can usually find a way to reconcile conscience with survival needs. The secretary may not have been able to quit her job, but she could have blown the whistle on the boss by asking a newspaper reporter to investigate the issue. Failing that, she could have kept a diary, and at a later time in life—when she could afford to leave the job or had retired—could reveal all. Or, realizing she had to put bread on the table, she might have thought through her predicament, redefined the situation as one in which her compliance was required but did not reflect her true personality, and resolved to do morally upstanding things in other aspects of her life.

The point is: There is always a way to respect conscience and resist exploitive authorities, in some way, shape, or form. If ever you are faced with a situation in which you must choose between your morals and the tempting desire to follow the crowd or a boss, remember the Milgram results. Ask yourself: What do I believe? Is this something I really want to do? How will I feel tomorrow when I realize I could have respected my own beliefs? If you ask these questions, you will be less likely to acquiesce to authority and more inclined to do something that will sit well with your inner convictions.
Take a deep breath. We’re about to shift gears now, moving from the transcendental moral issues of authority to everyday questions of credibility. Credibility is one of the “Big 3” communicator factors—along with authority and social attractiveness. It dates back to Aristotle, who coined the term *ethos* to describe qualities of the source that facilitated persuasion. Hovland explored it in his early research, communication researchers deconstructed credibility in the 1960s and ’70s, and the concept continues to fascinate scholars today. Of course, corporate managers, salespeople, and politicians are very interested in what makes someone credible. Nowadays, consultants offer pointers to clients who want to improve the credibility of their commercial Web sites. D. Joel Whalen (1996), in a book on persuasive business communication, says that credibility is “the single biggest variable under the speaker’s control during the presentation” (p. 97). Jay A. Conger (1998), writing about the role persuasion plays in business, observes that “credibility is the cornerstone of effective persuading; without it, a persuader won’t be given the time of day” (p. 90).

So, what is credibility? First, let’s say what it is not. It is not the same as authority, although the two are frequently confused. Authority emanates from a person’s position in a social structure. It involves the ability to dispense rewards and punishments. Credibility is a psychological or interpersonal communication construct. You can be an authority, but lack credibility. Parents can be authority figures to their kids, but have zero credibility in their children’s eyes due to their hypocrisy or indifference. In politics, a president is the nation’s commander-in-chief—the top political authority. However, a president can lack credibility in the nation’s eyes if he (or she) ignores the nation’s economic problems or gets embroiled in a scandal. Dictators like Saddam Hussein of Iraq can do as they please; they have total, supreme authority. But ask their citizens in private what they think of these men and you will quickly discover that authority does not translate into credibility.

Credibility is defined as “the attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a receiver” (McCroskey, 1997, p. 87). It is an audience member’s perceptions of the communicator’s qualities. Although we commonly think of credibility as something a communicator has, it is more complex. As Roderick Hart and his colleagues (1983) note:

Credibility is *not* a thing. It is not some sort of overcoat that we put on and take off at will. Rather, it is a perception of us that lies inside of the people to whom we talk. (Hart, Friedrich, & Brummett, p. 204)
Credibility is more than a psychological characteristic. It is also a communication variable. It is part of the two-way interaction between communicator and message recipients—a dynamic entity that emerges from the transaction between source and audience member. This means that communicators are not guaranteed credibility by virtue of who they are, their title, or academic pedigree. As Hart reminds us, credibility "is not something we can be assured of keeping once gotten. Credibility can only be earned by paying the price of effective communication" (pp. 204–205). There is something democratic about credibility. It says that communicators have to enter the rough-and-tumble realm of persuasion. They must meet and greet—either interpersonally or electronically—those they seek to influence. They must earn an audience's respect and win its credibility.

Core Characteristics

What are the main attributes of credibility? What does it mean to be a credible speaker?

Communication researchers have explored these time-honored questions, using empirical methodologies and survey research. Scholars asked people to evaluate the believability of famous people, giving speeches on various topics, and to rate friends or supervisors on semantic differential scales. They found that credibility is not a simple, unitary concept: It has more than one dimension, more than a single layer. Credible communicators are perceived as having expertise, trustworthiness, goodwill, dynamism, extroversion, sociability, and composure (e.g., Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969; McCroskey & Young, 1981).

By far the most important characteristics—the ones that have emerged in study after study or generated the greatest theoretical interest—are (a) expertise, (b) trustworthiness, and (c) goodwill.

Expertise and trustworthiness have emerged with greatest regularity, and goodwill has been uncovered in systematic research by James McCroskey (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Based on the studies as a whole, one can say that a credible communicator is one who is seen as an expert, regarded as trustworthy, and displays goodwill toward audience members. Each quality is important and deserves brief discussion.

**Expertise** is the knowledge or ability ascribed to the communicator. It is the belief that the communicator has special skills or know-how. You see experts used all the time in commercials. Lawyers pay for experts to testify for their side in courtroom trials. There is abundant evidence that experts are perceived as credible and can influence attitudes (Petty & Wegener, 1998). However, expertise has limits. For instance, if you are trying to reach inner city drug abusers, you might think twice about calling on the Surgeon General. True, he is a recognized expert on health, but
he also is seen as a member of the ruling class. It would be better to employ a former drug user who has seen the error of his or her ways and can communicate on the same wavelength as the inner city audience (Levine & Valle, 1975). The former drug user also inspires trust, which is an important attribute of credibility.

Trustworthiness, the next core credibility component, refers to the communicator's perceived honesty, character, and safety. A speaker may lack expertise, but can be seen as an individual of integrity and character. This can work wonders in persuasion. Some years ago, Ross Perot, the billionaire businessman-turned-politician, declared on a television talk show that he would be willing to run for president if citizens worked steadfastly in his behalf. His declaration stimulated a flood of support from ordinary Americans who liked his personae and plans to reduce the deficit. Within months he had an army of loyal campaign workers. Legions of reporters trailed him everywhere, and he became a major force in the '92 election campaign. Perot was no political expert; he had never held political office, although he was widely known to the public for his committed political stances. Many Americans perceived Perot as a man of integrity, someone who said what he meant and meant what he said. Finding this refreshing, they supported Perot—and he led the polls for a time, in mid-June (Abramson, Aldrich, & Rohde, 1994).

The final core communicator factor is goodwill, or perceived caring. Communicators who display goodwill convey that they have listeners' interests at heart, show understanding of others' ideas, and are empathic toward their audiences' problems (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). You can probably think of a doctor who knows her stuff, is honest, but seems preoccupied or uninterested in you when you complain about medical problems. The physician undoubtedly gets low marks on your credibility scale, and her advice probably has little impact on you.

On the positive side, communicators who show us they care can gain our trust and inspire us. Goodwill is an element of charisma, as embodied by leaders like Ghandi and Martin Luther King. It also is a quality that can help persuaders achieve practical goals. Salespeople who understand their clients' needs can tailor their appeals to suit their clients. This can help them achieve day-to-day success on the job (McBane, 1995).

Role of Context

Expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill are the primary attributes of credibility. Communicators who are credible have all or at least one of these qualities. There is a complicating factor, however: context. As anyone who has worked in telemarketing, politics, or community organizing can tell you, the situation you are in can potently influence persuasion.
This means that different facets of credibility will be influential in different social situations. This conclusion emerged from early academic studies of credibility, which found that results varied, depending on the ways in which researchers probed credibility and circumstances in which the speeches were delivered (Cronkhite & Liska, 1976). Critical situational factors include audience size, communicator role, and cultural dynamics.

**Audience Size.** Do you remember those big lecture classes where no one knows anyone else and you have to listen to a professor talk or present material via Power Point for an hour? It's hard to impart information in these contexts, and if I were in charge of American universities, I'd get rid of them immediately! Unfortunately, mass lectures are here to stay because they allow universities to educate thousands of students efficiently and at low cost. And, in fairness, some lecture classes can be pretty interesting, even entertaining. That brings me to the point. If a prof hopes to gain credibility in a large lecture, he or she must be dynamic and extroverted. These qualities are necessary to capture students' attention.

Now consider a small seminar. A professor who is bold and talkative, hams it up, and booms out lecture material in a loud voice may be perceived as insensitive or "in-credible" in a small seminar. In this context, students want a teacher to listen, share information, and help them relate personally to the course. A more empathic, caring style of communicating may be perceived as more credible in this situation.

**Communicator Role.** In a similar vein, the role a communicator plays—or functions he or she performs for the individual—can determine the particular aspect of credibility that is most important. In the case of a therapist, credibility involves composure, poise, character, and goodwill. Yet if a communicator is addressing cognitive aspects of attitudes—for example, beliefs about a far-reaching issue—he or she is better advised to dramatize a different aspect of credibility. A scientist speaking to an audience about global warming should convey expertise—that is, intelligence and knowledge of the technical aspects of this subject.

**Culture.** National and political culture can play an important role in credibility judgments. American students evaluate political leaders on the basis of competence and character, while Japanese students sometimes employ two additional attributes: consideration and appearance (King, Minami, & Samovar, 1985). What's more, the particular type of credibility that is important can depend on the particular time and political place. In some national elections, expertise can be the key attribute that Americans value in a president. A long time ago, in 1972, Richard Nixon emphasized his political experience. Realizing that he was not
a particularly likable guy but had vastly more expertise than his opponent, his consultants urged Nixon to stress his qualifications and experience. Nixon defeated George McGovern by a landslide in 1972.

What a difference four years makes! After Nixon’s blatant lies to the public during the Watergate affair, the nation yearned for a more honest political leader. Along came Jimmy Carter riding on a white horse, and striking many as a “John Boy Walton” character (after the popular television show of the 1970s). Carter promised he would never lie to the American people, thereby stressing trustworthiness and integrity. Carter defeated incumbent Gerald Ford in a close election.

Fast-forward to the 1990s, and you find candidate Bill Clinton exuding compassion and sensitivity, trying to distance himself from the incumbent president, George Bush. Many Americans perceived Bush as out of touch with their problems and insufficiently concerned with the economic recession (Denton, 1994). Showing goodwill and empathy toward the plight of ordinary Americans, Clinton gained in stature and credibility. This helped him defeat Bush in the 1992 election.

Trustworthiness was in vogue again in 2000, especially among voters displeased with Clinton’s sexual shenanigans and lies under oath during the Lewinsky scandal. Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican nominee George W. Bush tripped over themselves to show that they could be trusted not to violate family values Americans held dear. Thus, the lesson for persuasion students is that the particular brand of credibility communicators emphasize depends on the time and political place.

If there is an overarching lesson in this, it is that we need to adopt a flexible approach to credibility. If credibility were a key, it would have to be adapted to fit the particular persuasion door in question. If credibility were a recipe, chefs would have to take the main ingredients and season them to suit the tastes of the folks at the restaurant. Smart persuaders know how to adapt their traits to fit the situation. They apply persuasion knowledge to the context in question, selecting the particular style of expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill that best suits the audience and circumstances.

A Theoretical Account

As you know, social scientists like to develop theories to account for phenomena. In the case of credibility, researchers have devised a model that assumes people are canny, skeptical observers of persuaders. Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978) argue that people figure persuaders have their own motives for saying what they do. What’s more, audience members attribute persuaders’ statements to various factors. The attribution individuals make can exert an important influence on credibility judgments and persuasion.
Eagly and her colleagues point out that individuals make predictions—or develop expectations—about what a particular communicator will say, based on what they know about him or her, and the situation. For instance, if you were told that a member of the college track team was going to talk about exercise, you probably would assume he was going to explain why running is healthy. Or, to take a political example, if informed that a candidate was speaking to a pro-environmental group, you might assume he or she was going to sing the praises of conservation.

Expectations can be confirmed—it turns out you are correct—or disconfirmed—you end up being wrong. When a speaker disconfirms your expectation, you scratch your head and want to figure out why this occurred. In such cases, you may (as we will see) conclude that the communicator is a credible source. The underpinnings for this lie in two psychological concepts: knowledge bias and reporting bias.

**Knowledge Bias.** Suppose you were told that a young female professor was scheduled to give a lecture on affirmative action. If you ventured a prediction about what she was going to say, you might guess that, being young and a professor (and, therefore you assume, liberal), she would advocate affirmative action programs for women. If the speaker confirmed your prediction, you might conclude that she possessed what is called a knowledge bias. A knowledge bias is the presumption that a communicator has a biased view of an issue. It is an audience member’s belief that the speaker’s background—gender, ethnicity, religion, or age—has prevented him or her from looking objectively at the various sides of the issue. The audience member concludes that the communicator has a limited base of knowledge, produced by a need to view an issue in accord with the dominant views of her social group. “Oh, she’s a modern woman; of course she’d see things that way,” you might say, meaning no disrespect. Communicators who are perceived to harbor knowledge biases lack credibility and do not change attitudes (Eagly et al., 1978).

Now suppose that the speaker took the unexpected position and spoke out against affirmative action programs for women. The theory says that individuals might be taken aback by this and would feel a need to explain why the communicator defied expectation. Unable to attribute her position to gender or background, they would have to conclude that something else was operating. They might reasonably infer that the arguments against affirmative action were so compelling that they persuaded the young professor to go against the grain and take an unpopular stand. Or they might conclude that the communicator was a bit of an iconoclast, someone who defied the norm. Both these interpretations could enhance the speaker’s credibility and increase the odds that she would change
Communicator delivers message

Audience members form expectation of communicator’s position on issue

Expectation confirmed? Yes → Communicator position attributed to inner convictions (Knowledge bias violated)

Increase in credibility and attitude change

No → Communicator position attributed to background (age, race, sex) (Knowledge bias)

No increase in credibility or attitude change

FIG. 6.1a Knowledge bias.

audience attitudes. As a general rule, when communicators are perceived to violate the knowledge bias, they gain in credibility (see Fig. 6.1a).

Knowledge bias is admittedly a different way of looking at communicators and so it takes some getting used to. But once you appreciate the idea, it becomes an appealing way to explain seemingly paradoxical situations in everyday life. Consider the following examples:

- Some years back, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a group with many Jewish members, spoke out in favor of the right of American Nazis to hold a rally in Skokie, Illinois. Skokie had many Jewish residents, some of whom had survived the Holocaust, and for these individuals the rally was an odious reminder of the horrific past. One might expect that a group with Jewish leaders would oppose the rally. By defying expectation, the ACLU probably enhanced its credibility.

- African American lawyer David P. Baugh defended Barry E. Black, a White member of the Ku Klux Klan accused of burning a cross. The case was intriguing because of “the paradox of an African-American defending a white supremacist, who, if he had his way, would oppress his lawyer because of his race” (Holmes, 1998, p. A14). Arguing that the principle of free speech overwhelmed any discomfort he had about the defendant’s actions, the lawyer violated the knowledge bias and may have enhanced his credibility in the case.
• Long-time advocates of capital punishment with law and order credentials have increasingly raised questions about the ethics of the death penalty. For example, an Illinois governor who for years supported capital punishment imposed a moratorium on the death penalty, after discovering that the system was error-ridden and had come close to taking innocent lives (Johnson, 2000). When long-time death penalty proponents support a moratorium, it defies expectation and may therefore carry more weight than when liberals or pacifists take this position.

• Some of the country’s wealthiest Americans, including Warren Buffet and David Rockefeller Jr., urged Congress not to repeal federal taxes on estates. Although they would benefit from repeal of the tax, since they own lavish estates, Buffet, Rockefeller, and other billionaires said repealing the tax “would enrich the heirs of America’s millionaires and billionaires while hurting families who struggle to make ends meet” (Johnston, 2001, p. A1). This is not what you would expect these rich people to say and, for this reason, may enhance their credibility.

• Before Jerry Springer and the current hosts of “shock” TV there was Morton Downey Jr., a pioneer of “in your face” TV talk shows. Downey smoked five packs a day and died of lung cancer some years ago. While still alive and informed he had cancer, Downey changed his tune and became a passionate antismoking advocate. Violating the knowledge bias (you wouldn’t expect a chain smoker to become a leading advocate of nonsmoking), Downey attracted a following, gaining credibility for his position. Downey is an example of a convert communicator, an individual who has converted from one lifestyle or ideology to a totally opposite set of beliefs. Such communicators can be credible spokespersons for their causes (Levine & Valle, 1975). Other examples include former drug-using rock musicians (like the legendary David Crosby of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young) who lecture young people about the terrible effects of drugs. Converts are not always persuasive though. If audiences perceive that the convert has not freely changed his or her mind, credibility goes out the window. A Mafia hit man who testifies against the crime syndicate and lectures about the evils of crime may be “incredible” if people believe he is doing these things to get his sentence reduced. An ex-producer of pornographic Web sites who preaches about the healing power of Christ may not be credible if people believe he is doing this to pedal his latest book.

Reporting Bias. When judging communicators, audience members also examine the extent to which speakers are taking the position merely
to make points with the audience. If they believe the communicator is brownnosing the group, they assume that the speech reflects a situational pressure to say the socially correct thing. They conclude that the communicator has withheld—or chosen not to report—facts that would upset the group. This is the reporting bias, the perception that the communicator has opted not to report or disclose certain facts or points of view. When individuals believe that speakers are guilty of a reporting bias, they downgrade their credibility. For example, consider a political candidate who told an audience that held somewhat favorable attitudes toward the environment that she favored harsh penalties for polluters. “I figured she’d tell them that to get their votes,” an audience member might say. The politician would not be seen as particularly credible.

On the other hand, when audience members’ expectations are violated—the communicator says something that is inconsistent with group values—the speaker is seen as credible and convincing. Individuals figure that anyone who has the courage to go against the grain must truly believe what he or she is saying. They figure that the position must be so compelling and cogent that it led the speaker to ignore social conventions and adopt the position as her own. A communicator who told a moderately pro-environmental group that the United States needed to worry less about preserving the environment and more about finding alternative sources of energy would be perceived as credible, and (at least in theory) could influence observers’ attitudes (Eagly et al., 1978; see Fig. 6.1b).

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**FIG. 6.1b** Reporting bias.
The reporting bias helps us understand why voters greet maverick candidates like Ralph Nader, John McCain, and contemporary third-party contenders with enthusiasm. The candidates violate the reporting bias and are seen as having the guts to challenge the status quo. Unfortunately their positions do not resonate with the bulk of the public. Violating the reporting bias will not change attitudes if, as discussed in chapter 2, attitudes are deeply felt or strongly held.

SOCIAL ATTRACTION

Credibility is an important factor in persuasion. But it is not the only communicator characteristic that influences attitudes. Socially attractive communicators—those who are likable, similar to message recipients, and physically appealing—can also induce attitude change. Let's see how.

Likability

Do you know someone who is just so nice and appealing you can't reject what he says? This person may score high on likability. There is evidence that likable communicators can change attitudes (Rhoads & Cialdini, 2002; Sharma, 1999). There are several reasons for this. First, a likable person makes you feel good, and the positive feelings become transferred to the message. Second, a likable persuader puts you in a good mood, which helps you access positive thoughts about the product the persuader is pedaling. Third, a likable speaker may convey that she has your interest at heart, which communicates goodwill.

Sometimes we make persuasion too complicated. Just being likable can help a communicator achieve his or her goals. The likability effect operates in a variety of areas, including one that you might not think of initially: tipping waiters and waitresses.

Restaurant servers who are likable get bigger tips (e.g., Rind & Bordia, 1995). What's more, there are several techniques that waiters and waitresses can use to make themselves more likable, which, in turn, has been found to increase the amount of money customers leave on the table. If anyone reading this book is currently waiting tables, he or she may find these strategies lucrative, or at least useful! Research indicates that the following techniques increase tip size:

1. writing "Thank you" on the back of the check;
2. drawing a happy, smiling face on the back of checks before giving them to customers;
3. squatting down next to tables; and
4. touching the diner’s palm or shoulder (waitresses only; sorry, guys)

Similarity

Is a communicator who shares your values or perspective, or dresses like you do, more apt to change attitudes than one who does not? The answer is yes, but especially under some conditions.

Similarity between source and receiver can facilitate persuasion in business (Brock, 1965), on social issues (Berscheid, 1966), and for health problems. For example, research indicates that African American women are more likely to feel positively toward performing a breast self-exam and to getting tested for HIV when the message is delivered by an African American female (Anderson & McMillion, 1995; Kalichman & Coley, 1995).

Similarity works for some of the same reasons likability succeeds. It induces positive affect and promotes favorable cognitive responses. In addition, people compare themselves to similar others. I may infer that if someone who is similar to me endorses a position, it’s a good bet that the proposal will work for me as well.

Similarity is particularly likely to succeed if the similarity is relevant to the message (Berscheid, 1966). People selling DVDs and compact discs are more likely to make a sale if they emphasize that they share the customer’s taste in music than if they confess that they too like to play golf on Saturday afternoons. However, similarity may fail if it suggests to the receiver that the persuader is “just like I am” and is therefore no expert. In this case, the persuader is believed to lack expertise and the recommendation is rejected.

This raises the knotty question of when communicators should stress similarity and when they should emphasize expertise. There are no quick and easy answers. Research suggests that similarity is more effective when people must make personal and emotional decisions (Goethals & Nelson, 1973). In these cases we feel a kinship with the similar other and assume that the similar communicator is more apt to empathize with our concerns than a dissimilar speaker. By contrast, when the issue concerns factual matters, experts’ intellectual knowledge may carry the day.

The question of whether a communicator should emphasize expertise or similarity comes up in many real-life persuasion situations. Politicians, advertisers, and salespeople are often faced with deciding whether to emphasize their experience or the fact that they are “just plain folks.” Increasingly, it seems, companies are putting a premium on similarity, particularly similarity in appearance. Many businesses, finding that formal
attire can turn off clients dressed in jeans or simple pants suits, are telling employees to dress like their clients (Puente, 1999).

Steve Constanides, an owner of a computer graphics firm, exemplifies the trend. “When you went on a sales call, you definitely got a cooler reaction if you showed up in a nice suit, because the clients would see you as just a salesman,” Constanides related. “If I came in more casual attire, all of a sudden I’m like them. And it’s easier to get a project,” he said (Puente, p. 2D). However, if his computer graphics sales staff abandoned expertise entirely and talked just like the clients—saying “Hey, what’s up dude?” or “Man, that’s awesome”—they would probably not sell much high-tech equipment!

Physical Attractiveness

Flip through any issue of GQ magazine and you will come across advertisements featuring sensationally attractive male models sporting a fashionably tailored suit or sport coat. Turn on the TV and you will see beautiful female models promoting perfume or a new brand of clothing for women. Advertisers obviously believe that attractiveness sells products. So do most of us. We buy new clothes, get our hair done, and buy contact lenses to make a good impression in persuasive presentations.

Does attractiveness change attitudes? You could argue that it does because people are fascinated by beauty. Or you could say that it doesn’t because people resent extremely attractive people—or assume they’re dumb. To decide which of these is correct and how attractiveness plays out in persuasion, researchers conduct experiments and articulate theories.

Most studies find that attractiveness does change attitudes. In a nifty study, Chaiken (1979) recruited individuals who were high and low in physical appeal and instructed them to approach students on a university campus. Attractive and not-so-attractive communicators gave a spiel, advocating that the university stop serving meat at breakfast and lunch at the campus dining hall. Students who heard the message from the attractive speakers were more inclined to agree that meat should not be served than were students exposed to the less attractive communicators. The arguments that both sets of speakers gave were exactly the same; the only difference was that one group of communicators was nicer looking than the other. Yet this peripheral factor carried the day, inducing students to change their minds on the topic.

Why does attractiveness influence attitudes? First, people are more likely to pay attention to an attractive speaker, and this can increase the odds that they will remember message arguments. Second, attractiveness becomes associated with the message. The pleasant affect one feels when gazing at a pretty woman or handsome guy gets merged with the message,
resulting in an overall favorable evaluation of the topic. Third, people like and identify with attractive communicators. At some level, perhaps unconscious, we feel we can improve our own standing in life if we do what attractive people suggest. Fourth, attractive individuals may simply be better public speakers. According to this view, it is not their attractiveness per se that persuades people, but the fact that they are more fluent and confident (Chaiken, 1979).

Contextual Factors. A communicator's physical appeal can add sweetness and value to a product. Attractive communicators seem to be more effective than their less attractive counterparts, everything else being equal. But everything else is never totally equal. Attractiveness influences attitudes more under certain conditions than others.

First, attractiveness can help form attitudes. One reason people begin buying certain perfumes or toothpastes is that they link the product with attractive models, and develop a favorable attitude toward the product. Unfortunately, the same process can work with unhealthy products like cigarettes, which is one reason why cigarette advertisements feature attractive-looking smokers.

Second, attractiveness can be effective when the communicator's goal is to capture attention. This is one reason why advertisers use drop-dead gorgeous models. They want to break through the clutter and get people to notice the product. Once that is accomplished, they rely on other strategies to convince people to purchase the good or service.

Third, attractiveness can be effective under low involvement, as when people are trying to decide which of two advertised convenience store products to buy or for whom to vote in a low-level election. In these cases, physical appeal acts as a peripheral cue.

Fourth, on the other extreme, attractiveness can be a deciding factor when the communicator's physical appeal is relevant to the product. In cases of beauty products or expensive clothing lines, a model's or salesperson's good looks can swing the sale. Physical appeal serves as an argument for the product, as the Elaboration Likelihood Model suggests.

Fifth, attractiveness can influence opinions when it violates expectations. Consider the true story of Rebekka Armstrong, former Playboy Playmate who contracted HIV from intercourse with a male model. After years of suffering, denial, and drug abuse, Armstrong went public with her story, trying to teach young people the dangers of unprotected sex. She has spoken to capacity university crowds and has her own Web site (Perloff, 2001). Why might she be effective?

Your image—or schema—of a Playboy model does not include contracting HIV. This disconfirms your expectation, and you have to think about it to put things back together mentally. As one listens to an attractive
model like Armstrong talk, one discovers that she is arguing for these positions not because of a knowledge or reporting bias—but because she truly believes people must take precautions against AIDS. Thus, when attractive communicators say or do unexpected things that seem out of sync with their good looks, and these events can be attributed to inner convictions, these speakers can influence attitudes.

When doesn’t attractiveness make a difference?

Physical appeal cannot change deeply felt attitudes. Listening to an attractive speaker explain why abortion is necessary is not going to change the mind of a staunch pro-life advocate. Attractiveness is rarely enough to close a deal when the issue is personally consequential or stimulates considerable thinking.

Just as attractiveness can work when it positively violates expectations, it can fail when it negatively violates expectations of what is appropriate for a particular job or role (Burgoon, 1989). You would not expect your family doctor to be sensationally attractive; if the doctor is blessed with extremely good looks, the looks could interfere with processing the message or lead you to derogate the doctor (e.g., “I wonder if he hits on female patients when they’re in his office”).

Finally, attractiveness effects tend to be rather short-lived. As a primarily peripheral cue, it tends not to be integrated with the person’s overall attitude. The person may feel positively toward the communicator, but fail to do the cognitive work necessary to develop a strong, lasting attitude toward the issue.

Beauty, in sum, has always fascinated us. It always will. Attractiveness is commonly assumed to weave a magical spell on people. Its effects are more psychological than astrological, and are inevitably due to individuals letting themselves be bowled over by an attractive person or allowing themselves to fantasize about what will happen if they go along with the communicator’s recommendations. (See Box 6–1: Physical Attractiveness and Culture.)

**BOX 6–1**

**PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AND CULTURE**

Is attractiveness relative?

Is physical beauty culturally relative, or are standards of beauty universal phenomena? It’s an interesting question, with relevance for attractiveness effects in persuasion.

Some scholars argue that signs of youth—such as cleanliness, clear skin, and absence of disease—are universally perceived as attractive. They note
that there is consensus across cultures that symmetrical faces are attractive (Buss & Kenrick, 1998). Perhaps—but culture leaves its imprint in a host of other ways.

In the United States, thin is in. Lean, ever-skinnier female models define the culture’s standard for beauty in women. There has been a significant reduction in body measurements of *Playboy* centerfolds and beauty pageant contestants in recent years (see Harrison & Cantor, 1997). Yet thinness in women—propelled by the fashion industry, advertising, and young girls’ desire to emulate sometimes dangerously thin models—is a relatively new cultural invention. In earlier eras, voluptuous body shapes were regarded as sexy. “The concept of beauty has never been static,” researcher April Fallon (1990) reports (p. 84).

Going a long, long way back in time, one finds that between 1400 and 1700, “fat was considered both erotic and fashionable.... Women were desired for their procreative value and were often either pregnant or nursing. The beautiful woman was portrayed as a plump matron with full, nurturant breasts” (Fallon, p. 85). The art of Botticelli and Rubens reflected this ideal.

There are also subcultural variations in what is regarded as beautiful in the United States. Research that shows that African American women are less likely than White women to be preoccupied with body weight (Angier, 2000b). “It’s a cultural thing,” observed Roneice Weaver, a coauthor of *Slim Down Sister*, a weight loss book for Black women. She said that Black men don’t judge women’s physical appeal by their waist size (Angier, p. D2).

The attractiveness of other body features also varies with culture. In America breast size is linked with beauty, as indicated by the popularity of bras that pad and surgical breast implants. Yet in Brazil, large breasts are viewed as déclassé, “a libido killer,” and in Japan bosoms are less enchanting than the nape of the neck, which is seen as an erotic zone (Kaufman, 2000, p. 3). In Peru, big ears are considered beautiful, and Mexican women regard low foreheads as an indication of beauty (de Botton, 2000).

Standards for male attractiveness also vary across cultures and historical periods. Macho guys like Humphrey Bogart and Marlon Brando have been replaced by softer-looking icons of attractiveness, like Leonardo DiCaprio, Ben Affleck, Tiger Woods, and music stars just breaking into the mainstream (Fitzpatrick, 2000).

To be sure, there are some universals in physical appeal. However, as Fallon notes, “culturally bound and consensually validated definitions of what is desirable and attractive play an important part in the development of body image” (p. 80). Our standards for what is beautiful are acquired and molded through culture, with the mass media playing an influential role in transmitting and shaping cultural norms. Over the course of socialization, we have acquired conceptions of a physically attractive communicator, and we apply these—consciously or unconsciously—in evaluating everyday persuaders.
This chapter has focused on the communicator—a key feature of persuasion. The concept of charisma comes to mind when we think about the communicator, and for good reason: Charismatic speakers have seemed to magnetize audiences, influencing attitudes in benevolent and malevolent ways. Charisma involves a host of characteristics, not well understood, and for this reason scholars have tried to break down the term into constituent parts. Preferring a scientific approach to this topic, researchers have focused painstakingly on three core communicator qualities: authority, credibility, and social attractiveness.

Authority, epitomized by the Milgram study of obedience, can influence behaviors through a process of compliance. Participants in the Milgram study obeyed a legitimate authority significantly more than experts predicted, a testament to the role of early socialization, authority's trappings, and binding psychological forces. Although Milgram's experiments raised serious questions about the ethics of deception in research, they nonetheless shed light on continuing crimes of obedience in society.

Credibility, a distant cousin of authority, is a critical communicator factor, the cornerstone of effective persuasion. Research suggests that expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill are the three core dimensions of credibility. (Expertise and trustworthiness have emerged with greatest regularity, and goodwill has been uncovered in more recent research.) Each of these factors is important in its own right, and can interact with contextual factors, such as audience size, communicator role, and historical epoch.

Major theoretical approaches to credibility include the ELM and an expectancy–violation model. The latter assumes that communicators gain in credibility to the degree that they take unexpected positions on issues, stands that audiences cannot attribute to their background or situation.

Social attractiveness consists of three elements: likability, similarity, and physical appeal. All three factors can influence attitudes under particular conditions and have intriguing implications for everyday persuasive communication (see Box 6–2: Communicator Tips).
BOX 6–2
COMMUNICATOR TIPS

Can research and theory offer practical suggestions on how to be a more effective communicator? You bet! Here are five ideas, gleaned from persuasion concepts and experiments:

1. If you are delivering a speech and have technical knowledge about the topic, you should let your audience know this at the outset. Don’t blow your horn too much or you will come off as obnoxious. Instead, discreetly note your credentials. If, on the other hand, you are new on the job and have not accumulated much technical knowledge, don’t mention this before you give the talk. This may needlessly reduce your credibility in the audience’s eyes (Greenberg & Miller, 1966). Instead, demonstrate your qualifications as you discuss your ideas (Whalen, 1996).

2. Show your audience you care about both the topic and your role as a persuader. Goodwill counts for a great deal in persuasion, as discussed earlier. People forgive a lot if they believe you have their interests at heart. You should be true to yourself here: Don’t fake deep caring if you don’t feel it. Instead, identify one or two areas that you are legitimately interested in imparting, and focus on these.

3. Try to get the audience to like you. Likability can enhance persuasion (Sharma, 1999), so you should find a feature of your personality that you are comfortable with and let this shine through during your talk. It may be your serenity, sensitivity, gregariousness, or sense of humor. Use this as a way to connect with the audience.

4. Find out as much as you can about your audience’s tastes, attitudes, and familiarity with the issues under discussion. The ELM emphasizes that persuasion works best when it is attuned to the processing style of the audience. If working in an organization, “you should make a concerted effort to meet one-on-one with all the key people you plan to persuade,” Conger (1998) advises (p. 89). This will provide you with the range of viewpoints on the issue and help you gear your presentation accordingly.

5. When it comes to attractiveness, keep in mind Aristotle’s emphasis on moderation and balance (Golden et al., 2000). You want to look nice because it can enhance persuasion, especially in some situations. What’s more, you may develop a positive view of yourself if you are well groomed and well dressed. This positive self-perception can lead you to feel better about yourself, which can increase your persuasive power. But unless you are working in the fashion industry, attractiveness is of limited value. Prior to a presentation, some people spend a lot of time worrying about their wardrobe or trying to make a smashing physical appearance. But what worked for Erin Brockovich or Julia Roberts in the movie of this name may not work for you. What’s more, if you look like you’re preoccupied with appearance, audience members may conclude you are not concerned with them, which can reduce your credibility. Better to spend that valuable prepresentation time honing your arguments and figuring out ways to present your ideas in a cogent, interesting fashion.
CHAPTER 7

Message Factors

The message has fascinated scholars for centuries. Aristotle emphasized that deductive syllogisms are the bases of rhetorical arguments. Twentieth-century rhetoricians, building on Aristotle's foundations, identified key components of valid, cogent arguments (Toulmin, 1958). Contemporary scholars, taking as a given that messages work in concert with audience members, have explored the influences of different message factors on audiences, trying to understand which components are most impactful and why. This chapter examines the time-honored factor of the persuasive message, a key component of persuasion and a critical consideration for communication practitioners.

UNDERSTANDING THE MESSAGE

It seems pretty obvious.

The message—what you say and how you say it—influences people. Uh-huh, an intelligent person impatient with intellectual theories might think; now can we move on? Persuasion scholars would like to move on too—they have books to write, students to teach, and families to feed. But they—and you too no doubt—recognize that the message construct is so big and unwieldy that it needs to be broken down, decomposed, and analyzed in terms of content and process. Contemporary scholars, taking note of this issue, have seized on a concept that fascinated ancient philosophers and deconstructed it. Their research offers us a wealth of insights about communication effects.

There are three types of message factors. The first concerns the structure of the message—how it is prepared and organized. The second is the content of the communication—its appeals and arguments. The third
MESSAGE STRUCTURE

TABLE 7.1
Key Message Factors

Message Structure
1. Message sidedness
2. Conclusion drawing
3. Order of presentation (primacy vs. recency)*

Message Content
1. Evidence
2. Fear
3. Framing

Language
1. Speed of speech
2. Powerless versus powerful language
3. Intense language

*Primacy occurs when an argument presented early in a message, or the first of two opposing messages, is most persuasive. Recency occurs when an argument presented later in a message, or the second of two opposing messages, is most compelling. There is no conclusive evidence in favor of either primacy or recency. Effects depend on situational factors, such as amount of time that elapses between messages, and audience involvement.

factor is language—how communicators use words and symbols to persuade an audience (see Table 7.1).

MESSAGE STRUCTURE

How should you package your message? What is the best way to organize your arguments? These are practical questions, ones that have attracted research interest since Hovland's pathbreaking studies of the 1950s. There are two particularly interesting issues here. The first concerns whether communicators should present both sides of the issue or just their own. The second focuses on the most persuasive way to conclude the message.

One or Two Sides?

A one-sided message presents one perspective on the issue. A two-sided communication offers arguments on behalf of both the persuader's position and the opposition. Which is more persuasive?

You might argue that it is best to ignore the other side and hammer home your perspective. After all, this lets you spend precious time detailing reasons why your side is correct. On the other hand, if you overlook opposition arguments with which everyone is familiar, you look like you
have something to hide. For example, let's say you staunchly oppose people talking on cell phones when they drive and have decided, after years of frustration, to take this issue to the city council. Should you present one or both sides of this issue to council members?

A review of message sidedness research provides an answer to this question. Two communication scholars conducted meta-analyses of research on one- and two-sided messages. A meta-analysis is a study of other studies. A researcher locates all the investigations of a phenomenon and uses statistical procedures to determine the strength of the findings. After exhaustively reviewing the many studies in this area, researchers Mike Allen (1998) and Daniel J. O'Keefe (1999) reached the same conclusion, something that does not always happen in social science research! Researchers O'Keefe and Allen concluded that two-sided messages influence attitudes more than one-sided messages, provided one very important condition is met: The message refutes opposition arguments. When the communication mentions, but not does demolish, an opponent's viewpoint, a two-sided message is actually less compelling than a one-sided message.

Refutational two-sided messages, as they are called, gain their persuasive advantage by (a) enhancing the credibility of the speaker (he or she is perceived as honest enough to discuss both sides of the coin), and (b) providing cogent reasons why opposing arguments are wrong.

This has obvious implications for your speech urging a ban on driving while talking on a cell phone. You should present arguments for your side (talking on a handheld cell phone while driving is a dangerous distracter) and the other position (there are other distractors, like putting a CD in the disc player or applying makeup, that should also be banned if government is going to restrict cell phone use). You should then refute the other side, citing evidence that talking on a cell phone while driving has caused large numbers of automobile accidents; cell phone use results in more serious accidents than other distractors; and talking on a cell phone is a prolonged, not temporary, distraction from the road.

On a more philosophical level, the sidedness research leaves us with a reassuring finding about human nature. It tells us that communicators can change attitudes when they are fair, mention both sides, and offer cogent arguments in support of their position. The results celebrate values most of us would affirm: honesty and intellectual rigor.

Conclusion Drawing

Should persuaders explicitly draw the conclusion? Should they wrap things up for listeners in an unambiguous, forceful fashion, making it 100% clear which path they want audience members to pursue? Or
should they be more circumspect and indirect, letting audience members put things together for themselves? These questions point to the question of explicit versus implicit conclusion drawing. Arguments can be made for both sides. Perhaps, since audience attention wanders, it is best to present a detailed and forceful conclusion. On the other hand, people might prefer if persuaders don’t explicitly tell them what to do, but instead allow them to believe they arrived at the conclusion on their own.

A meta-analysis of research provides us with an answer to this dilemma. O’Keefe (1997) found that messages clearly or explicitly articulating an overall conclusion are more persuasive than those that omit a conclusion. As McGuire (1969) bluntly observed: “In communication, it appears, it is not sufficient to lead the horse to the water; one must also push his head underneath to get him to drink” (p. 209). Making the conclusion explicit minimizes the chances that individuals will be confused about where the communicator stands. It also helps people comprehend the message, which in turn enhances source evaluations and persuasion (Cruz, 1998).

Continuing Issues

There is little doubt that message organization influences attitudes. Certain methods are more effective than others. But message organization does not work in a vacuum. Context and modality matter. For example, in politics, communicators organize messages around negative arguments. Negative advertising spots—featuring criticisms of the other candidate, sometimes with great gusto—are commonplace, and can be remarkably effective (West, 1997). Voters expect politicians to run negative campaigns, and to some degree people want to be told the shortcomings of opposing candidates. Try the same technique in an organizational setting—lambasting your office rival in a group discussion—and see how far it gets you. The requirements and expectations of organizational persuasion are much different than those of politics.

In the same fashion, messages delivered interpersonally should be structured differently than those relayed over television and via the Internet. The Web, with its nonlinear approach to communication, presents persuaders with opportunities and challenges. They can use graphics, links, and navigational aids to help organize message arguments. Advocacy Web pages do this all the time, and persuaders are becoming increasingly adept at effectively structuring Web-based communications (Alexander & Tate, 1999).

The remainder of the chapter focuses on other message factors: the content of the message (evidence, fear appeals, and framing) and language.
EVIDENCE

- Passive smoking is a major cause of lung cancer. A husband or wife who has never smoked has an approximately 16% increased chance of contracting lung cancer if he or she lives with a smoker.
- A United Nations panel of experts on climate change has concluded that global warming is occurring at a faster rate than previously believed. The UN-sponsored panel reported that the bulk of the warming observed over the past half century is attributable to human activities.
- Herbal medicines contain tonics that strengthen the nervous system, making it more resilient to everyday stressors. Studies show that these over-the-counter herbal products offer a regular supply of the neurotransmitters needed to ward off serious physical and mental ailments.
- Ballistic tests conducted by the Prosecutor’s Office prove that the bullet that killed Kenneth Lewis could not have been fired from the gun owned by the defendant.

These diverse arguments have one thing in common: They use evidence to substantiate their claims. Evidence is employed by persuaders working in a variety of settings, including advertising, health, and politics. Evidence, John C. Reinard (1991) notes, is a classic “building block of arguments,” or “information used as proof” (p. 102). Evidence is a broad term, McCroskey (1969) observes. He defined it as:

“factual statements originating from a source other than the speaker, objects not created by the speaker, and opinions of persons other than the speaker that are offered in support of the speaker’s claims” (McCroskey, 1969, p. 170)

Evidence consists of factual assertions, quantitative information (like statistics), eyewitness statements, narrative reports, and testimonials, or opinions advanced by others. We’re all familiar with evidence and have witnessed its use many times. Communication researchers, also intrigued by evidence, have conducted numerous studies over a 50-year period, probing the effects of evidence on attitudes. Does evidence change attitudes?
You bet.
“The use of evidence produces more attitude change than the use of no evidence,” Rodney A. Reynolds and J. Lynn Reynolds (2002) declare after reviewing the many studies in the area (p. 428). Reinard (1988) goes further, observing that “there actually may be more consistency in evidence research than can be found in almost any other area of persuasion. Evidence appears to produce general persuasive effects that appear surprisingly stable” (p. 46).
Evidence is especially persuasive when attributed to a highly credible source—an outgrowth of principles discussed in the previous two chapters. Evidence is also more apt to change attitudes, the more plausible and novel it is (Morley & Walker, 1987).

Persuaders must do more than simply mention evidence: Audience members must recognize that evidence has been offered in support of a proposition and perceive the evidence to be legitimate (Reynolds & Reynolds, 2002). If individuals are dozing off and don't hear the evidence, or dispute the legitimacy of the factual assertions, the evidence presented has less impact on attitudes.

Evidence, in short, must be processed. The Elaboration Likelihood Model reminds us that the ways in which evidence is elaborated determine its effect on persuasion. When people are highly involved in, or knowledgeable about, the issue, evidence will be processed centrally. Under these circumstances, quality of evidence matters. Cogent evidence can change people's minds. But remember: Even the most compelling evidence is unlikely to change strong attitudes—those that touch on the self-concept or core values.

Evidence can have striking effects under low involvement, but it works through different processes. When people lack motivation or ability to decipher the issue, they rely on peripheral cues. They may go along with arguments that sound impressive because the communicator cites many facts, uses highfalutin statistics, or throws in testimonial statements. The trappings of evidence are more important than the legal or statistical quality of the facts. Evidence operates more as a cue than an argument when people aren't motivated or knowledgeable about the issue. In such cases, communicators can use evidence truthfully, or they can lie with statistics (Huff, 1954).

Persuaders can also err by citing too much evidence. In ELM terms, they can use evidence as an argument rather than a cue, thereby failing to connect with low- or modestly involved audience members. Presidential candidates who have used too much evidence—trying to bowl over voters with numbers and mastery of facts—have tended to lose presidential debates (Levesseur & Dean, 1996). "Instead of appearing as a 'man with the facts,' a candidate is more likely to appear as one who creates confusion," two researchers concluded (Levesseur & Dean, 1996, p. 136).

The winning formula in political debates, and many other contexts in which audiences are modestly interested in the issue, is to use evidence in such a way that it enhances, rather than reduces, credibility. Evidence should be used to buttress arguments rather than distract audiences from the communicator or the message. John F. Kennedy succeeded in using evidence in this manner in the first 1960 debate, linking data with claims
and repeating phrases to hammer in his arguments ("I’m not satisfied to have 50 percent of our steel mill capacity unused. I’m not satisfied when the United States had last year the lowest rate of economic growth of any major industrialized society in the world"). By using evidence in this way, Kennedy achieved the goal that all persuaders wish to achieve: He appeared like a "farsighted leader" with vision rather than a boring policy wonk (Levasseur & Dean, 1996).

Types of Evidence: The Case of Case Histories

Has this ever happened to you? You are trying to decide whether to add a course at the beginning of the semester. You’re tempted to take the class because a variety of people you spoke with recommended it, and the class received positive ratings in course evaluation data posted on the student government Web site. The day before the drop–add deadline you ask a friend what she thinks and she says in no uncertain terms, without even flinching or hesitating, “The prof sucks. That was the worst class I’ve ever taken. You don’t want to take that course with him.” You don’t add the course.

This example illustrates the power that vivid case studies or narratives exert on persuasion. Your friend’s evidence was attention grabbing and emotional, the information from course evaluations pallid and abstract. Yet the course evaluation data was more representative of student opinion toward the course since it drew on a larger and more diverse cross-section of course enrollees. By contrast, your friend could be an outlier, someone whose views lay outside the distribution of student opinion, shaped perhaps by an idiosyncratic response to the professor.

Social psychologists argue that people are frequently more influenced by concrete, emotionally interesting information than by “dry, statistical data that are dear to the hearts of scientists and policy planners” (Nisbett et al., 1976, p. 132). Vivid case histories—personalized stories or narrative evidence—exert particularly strong effects on attitudes (Taylor & Thompson, 1982). What is meant by “vivid case histories” and “narrative evidence”? These are emotionally engaging stories of one particular person’s experiences with a problem in life. They are gripping anecdotes of how one or a handful of individuals have coped with an issue. These cases engage the imagination, but are not necessarily representative of the larger population.

The mass media are filled with stories about how one person battled cancer, another died tragically in a car crash when she was hit by a drunk driver, or others had their lives cut short by AIDS. Persuaders—running the gamut from attorneys to advocacy groups to health practitioners—frequently call on vivid anecdotes, hoping these will tug at our heartstrings and influence beliefs (see Box 7–1).
Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Students Against Drug Driving frequently rely on vivid anecdotes—narrative evidence—to convey their arguments. They undoubtedly regard these as more persuasive than gray statistics about the number of deaths caused by drunk drivers. Here is one particularly gripping example, supplied by a student. She read it during high school prom week, the narrative poem made an indelible impression, and she kept it over the years. As you read it over, ask yourself if you find this persuasive—and if so, why?

I went to a party, Mom, I remembered what you said.
You told me not to drink, Mom, so I drank a coke instead . . .
I know I did the right thing, Mom, I know you’re always right.
Now the party is finally ending, Mom, as everyone drives out of sight . . .
I started to drive away, Mom, but as I pulled onto the road,
The other car didn’t see me, Mom, it hit me like a load.
As I lay here on the pavement, Mom, I hear the policeman say
The other guy is drunk, Mom, and I’m the one who’ll pay.
I’m lying here dying, Mom, I wish you’d get here soon.
How come this happened to me, Mom?
My life burst like a balloon . . .
The guy who hit me, Mom, is walking.
I don’t think that’s fair.
I’m lying here dying, Mom, while all he can do is stare . . .
Someone should have told him, Mom, not to drink and drive.
If only they would have taken the time, Mom, I would still be alive.
My breath is getting shorter, Mom. I’m becoming very scared . . .
Please don’t cry for me Mom, because when I needed you, you were always there.
I have one last question, Mom, before I say goodbye,
I didn’t ever drink, Mom, so why am I to die?

Some scholars argue this is a stunningly effective strategy. They contend that, when it comes to persuasion, narrative evidence is more compelling than statistics. According to this view, vivid case histories evoke stronger mental images than abstractly presented information, are easier to access from memory, and are therefore more likely to influence attitudes when the individual is trying to decide whether to accept message recommendations (Rook, 1987). Narratives, are—let’s face it—more interesting than statistical evidence (Green & Brock, 2000). As stories, they engage the imagination and are “intuitively appealing to humans, as we are all essentially storytellers and avid story recipients’ (Kopfman et al., 1998, p. 281).
An alternative view, put forth by other scholars, is that vivid evidence can be so distracting that it interferes with reception of the message. When this occurs, people fail to process message arguments or neglect to connect the evidence with the position advocated in the communication (Frey & Eagly, 1993). According to this view, statistical evidence, dull though it may be, has the upper hand in persuasion. Statistics also can evoke heuristics like "An argument backed by numbers is probably correct."

With such strong logic on the sides of both narrative and statistical evidence, it should come as no surprise that both have been found to influence attitudes (Allen et al., 2000; Kazoleas, 1993). Some scholars believe that vivid narratives are more compelling; others contend that statistics are more persuasive than narratives (Allen & Preiss, 1997b; Baesler & Burgoon, 1994). Still other researchers say that it depends on the persuader's purpose: Narratives may be more effective when communicators are trying to shake up people who strongly disagree with the message; statistics carry more weight when persuaders are trying to influence cognitions or beliefs (Slater & Rouner, 1996; Kopfman et al., 1998).

**Summary**

Simple and prosaic as it sounds, evidence enhances persuasion. If you use evidence in your public or electronic presentations, you are apt to influence attitudes or at least to increase your credibility. Things quickly become more complex when we try to discover why evidence works (central and peripheral processes are important), and the types of evidence that are most influential in particular contexts (the issue of narratives vs. statistics surfaces). Evidence does not stamp its imprint on receivers, but must be recognized and processed to influence attitudes. What's more, evidence does not, as commonly assumed, automatically fall into the category of a rational message factor. Contrary to common beliefs, which suggest that certain factors like evidence are rational and others, like fear or guilt, are emotional, evidence can be viewed as rational or emotional. It is rational when people appreciate high-quality evidence in a message and change their attitudes because they recognize that the weight of evidence favors a certain option. But evidence can also be an emotional factor when individuals go along with evidence-based messages for affective reasons (as when they tell themselves that "Any argument with that many numbers has got to be right"), or feel terribly sad after reading statistics about the spread of AIDS in Africa and decide on the spot to donate $50 to AIDS research.

By the same token, factors that seem oh-so-emotional, like fear, have cognitive as well as affective aspects. Classifying message content factors as rational or emotional is a tempting way to differentiate message factors.
It turns out that messages and people are too complex to permit this simple dichotomy. Messages change attitudes because they stimulate thought, arouse affect, and mesh with receivers' motivations and needs. In the next section, I discuss another major message factor—fear, a concept rich in intellectual and practical content.

FEAR APPEALS

Several years back, Maureen Coyne, a college senior enrolled in a persuasion class, ruminated about a question her professor asked: Think of a time when you tried to change someone's attitude about an issue. How did you go about accomplishing this task? After thinking for a few moments, Maureen recalled a series of events from her childhood, salient incidents in which she mightily tried to influence loved ones' attitudes. "My entire life," she related, "I have been trying to persuade my lovely parents to quit smoking. It started with the smell of smoke," she said, recollecting that:

I would go to school and kids could smell it on me to the extent that they would ask me if my parents smoked. It was humiliating. Then the lessons began from the teachers. They vehemently expressed how unhealthy this habit was through videos, books, and even puppet shows. In my head, the case against smoking was building. From my perspective, smoking was hurting my parents, my younger brothers, and me. With this in mind, it is understandable that a young, energetic, opinionated child would try and do something to rid her life of this nasty habit. Well, try I did. I educated them constantly about the dangers of first and second-hand smoke, with help from class assignments. I would tell them about the cancers, carbon monoxide, etc., and remind them every time I saw something on TV or in the paper about smoking statistics. I begged and begged and begged (and then cried a little). I explained how much it hurt my brothers and me. I reminded them that they should practice what they preach (they told us not to smoke). (Coyne, 2000)

Although Maureen's valiant persuasive efforts ultimately failed (her parents disregarded her loving advice), she showed a knack for devising a compelling fear appeal to influence attitudes toward smoking. Maureen is hardly alone in trying to scare people into changing a dysfunctional attitude or behavior. Fear appeals are ubiquitous. Consider the following:

- Hoping to deter juvenile criminals from a life of crime, a New Jersey prison adopted a novel approach in the late 1970s. Teenagers who had been arrested for crimes like robbery were carted off to Rahway
State Prison to participate in a communication experiment. The teens were seated before a group of lifers, men who had been sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and armed robbery. The men, bruising, brawling criminals, intimidated the youngsters, swearing at them and threatening to hurt them. At the same time, they used obscene and intense language to scare the youngsters into changing their ways. The program, Scared Straight, was videotaped and broadcast on national television numerous times over the ensuing decades (Finckenauer, 1982).

- Public service announcements (PSAs) in magazines, on television, and on Web sites regularly arouse fear, in hopes of convincing young people to stop smoking, quit popping Ecstasy pills, or avoid binge-drinking episodes. Some PSAs have become world famous, like the Partnership for a Drug-Free America's "brain on drugs" ad ("This is your brain. This is drugs. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?").

- Advertisers, who exploited fears long before public health specialists devised health PSAs, continue to appeal to consumers' fears in television spots. Toothpaste and deodorant ads suggest if you don't buy their products, you will be shunned by friends who smell your bad breath or body odor. Liquid bleach commercials warn that a baby's clothing can breed germs that cause diaper rash or other skin irritations. To avoid these consequences—and the larger danger of being a bad parent—you only need plunk down some money to buy Clorox or another liquid bleach.

- Parents use fear, from the get-go, to discourage children from approaching dangerous objects and people. They warn toddlers that they can choke and die if they put small parts of toys in their mouths. School-age kids are warned what can happen if they don't buckle up safety belts or wear bicycle helmets, or if they play with firearms. When they reach adolescence, youngsters are told of the dangers of risqué Web sites, promiscuous peers, and unsafe sex.

Fear appeals evoke different reactions in people. They remind some individuals of the worst moments of adolescence, when parents warned them that every pleasurable activity would end up haunting them in later life. Others, noting that life is full of dangers, approve of and appreciate these communications. Still other observers wonder why we must resort to fear; why can't we just give people the facts?

Appealing to people's fears is, to a considerable degree, a negative communication strategy. The communicator must arouse a little pain in the individual, hoping it will produce gain. The persuader may have to go further than the facts of the situation warrant, raising specters and
scenarios that may be rather unlikely to occur even if the individual continues to engage in the dysfunctional behavior. In an ideal world, it would not be necessary to arouse fear. Communicators could simply present the facts, and logic would carry the day. But this is not an ideal world; people are emotional, as well as cognitive, creatures, and they do not always do what is best for them. People are tempted by all sorts of demons—objects, choices, and substances that seem appealing but actually can cause quite a bit of harm. Thus, fear appeals are a necessary persuasive strategy, useful in a variety of arenas of life.

The Psychology of Fear

Before discussing the role that fear plays in persuasion, it is instructive to define our terms. What is fear? What is a fear appeal? Social scientists define the terms in the following way:

Fear: an internal emotional reaction composed of psychological and physiological dimensions that may be aroused when a serious and personally relevant threat is perceived (Witte, Meyer, & Martell, 2001, p. 20)

Fear appeal: a persuasive communication that tries to scare people into changing their attitudes by conjuring up negative consequences that will occur if they do not comply with the message recommendations

Over the past half century, researchers have conducted numerous studies of fear-arousing messages. As a result of this research, we know a great deal about the psychology of fear and the impact of fear appeals on attitudes. The research has also done much to clarify common-sense notions—in some cases misconceptions—of fear message effects.

At first glance, it probably seems like it is very easy to scare people. According to popular belief, all persuaders need do is conjure up really terrible outcomes, get the person feeling jittery and anxious, and wait as fear drives the individual to follow the recommended action. There are two misconceptions here: first, that fear appeals invariably work, and second, that fear acts as a simple drive. Let's see how these notions oversimplify matters.

Contrary to what you may have heard, it is not easy to scare people successfully. Arousing fear does not always produce attitude change. After reviewing the research in this area, Franklin J. Boster and Paul Mongeau (1984) concluded that “manipulating fear does not appear to be an easy task. What appears to be a highly-arousing persuasive message to the experimenter may not induce much fear into the recipient of the persuasive message” (p. 375).
More generally, persuaders frequently assume that a message scares audience members. However, they may be surprised to discover that individuals either are not frightened or did not tune into the message because it was irrelevant to their needs. This has been a recurring problem with automobile safety videos—those designed to persuade people to wear seat belts or not drink when they drive. Message designers undoubtedly have the best of intentions, but their persuasive videos often are seen by audience members as hokey, far-fetched, or just plain silly (Robertson et al., 1974).

Not only can fear appeals fail because they arouse too little fear, they can also backfire if they scare individuals too much (Morris & Swann, 1996). Fear messages invariably suggest that bad things will happen if individuals continue engaging in dangerous behaviors, like smoking or drinking excessively. None of us like to admit that these outcomes will happen to us, so we deny or defensively distort the communicator’s message. There is considerable evidence that people perceive that bad things are less likely to happen to them than to others (Weinstein, 1980, 1993). In a classic study, Neil D. Weinstein (1980) asked college students to estimate how much their own chances of experiencing negative life events differed from the chances of their peers. Students perceived that they were significantly less likely than others to experience a host of outcomes, including:

- dropping out of college,
- getting divorced a few years after getting married,
- being fired from a job,
- having a drinking problem,
- getting lung cancer, and
- contracting venereal disease.

The belief that one is less likely to experience negative life events than others is known as unrealistic optimism or the illusion of invulnerability. People harbor such illusions for several reasons. They do not want to admit that life's misfortunes can befall them. They also carry around in their heads a stereotype of the typical victim of negative events, and blithely maintain that they do not fit the mold. For example, in the case of cigarette smoking, they may assume that the typical smoker who gets lung cancer is a thin, nervous, jittery, middle-aged man who smokes like a chimney. Noting that they smoke but do not fit the prototype, individuals conclude they are not at risk. This overlooks the fact that few of those who get cancer from smoking actually match the stereotype (see Box 7–2).
“I never thought I needed to worry about AIDS,” confessed Jana Brent. “I thought it only happened to big-city people, not people like me who are tucked away in the Midwest. But 18 months ago, I was diagnosed with the virus that causes AIDS. Now I live in fear of this deadly illness every single day of my life,” Jana told a writer from *Cosmopolitan* (Ziv, 1998).

Born in Great Bend, Kansas, Jana had an unhappy childhood: broken home, deadbeat dad, life in foster homes. After moving to Kansas City and completing vocational training, Jana met Sean, a good-looking 22-year-old, who flattered her with compliments, told her he loved her, and seemed like the answer to her prayers. They soon became sexually intimate. “We had sex, on average, four times a week,” Jana recalled. “We didn’t talk about using condoms or getting tested, and I wasn’t worried about using protection. We used condoms only when we had any lying around.” Fearing Jana might get pregnant, Sean coaxed her into having anal sex, which they performed 10 times, never with a condom.

One day in July, Jana decided to get an AIDS test. The test confirmed her worst fears: She was HIV-positive and had been infected by Sean. He had tested positive years earlier, but never bothered to tell Jana. Although she knew the dangers of unprotected sex, Jana felt invulnerable. “I was one of those girls who thought, AIDS won’t happen to me,” Jana said (p. 241).

What crosses your mind when you read this story? That it’s sad and tragic? That Jana took risks, ones your friends or you wouldn’t take? That she’s not like you, with her checkered past and desperate need for companionship?

Perhaps you didn’t have such thoughts at all—but if you did, if you tried to psychologically distance yourself from Jana or told yourself her situation is much different from yours or silently whispered “this couldn’t happen to me because . . . ,” you’ve revealed something important. You’ve shown yourself a mite susceptible to what psychologists call the illusion of invulnerability.

How forcefully the illusion of invulnerability operates in the arena of HIV-AIDS! The rate of HIV infection has risen sharply among young people (DiClemente, 1992). Sexually transmitted diseases are common among adolescents (about one in every seven reports an STD), and the presence of STDs increases susceptibility to HIV. Yet college students perceive they are less susceptible to HIV infection than are other persons; they underestimate their own susceptibility to HIV, while overestimating other students’ risk. What’s more, although students know that condom use helps prevent HIV, they frequently engage in unprotected sex. Sexually active college students report that they used condoms less than 50% of the time when they had sex over the past year (Thompson et al., 1996).
BOX 7–2
(CONTINUED)

But wait a minute. The overwhelming number of AIDS cases in America are found among gay men and injecting drug users. “Heterosexual AIDS in North America and Europe is, and will remain, rare,” Robert Root-Bernstein (1993) notes, observing that “the chances that a healthy, drug-free heterosexual will contract AIDS from another heterosexual are so small they are hardly worth worrying about” (pp. 312–313). Experts across the scientific and political spectrum agree with this analysis.

And yet, bad things do happen to innocent people: Healthy individuals like you and me get cancer or contract viruses we never heard of (the odds of this happening are one in a million, but I bet you can think of someone, one person, you know personally who suddenly got very sick or died young). Although middle-class, heterosexual American high school and college students are not primarily at risk for HIV infection, handfuls of young people from these backgrounds will fall prey to HIV in the coming years. Sexually transmitted diseases like chlamydia and herpes are spreading at alarming rates, particularly among adolescents (Stolberg, 1998). STDs produce lesions, which offer the HIV convenient access to an individual’s bloodstream. Although sexually transmitted infections don’t cause HIV infection, they can increase the odds that a person will contract the AIDS virus. (Adapted from Perloff, 2001.)

The illusion of invulnerability is a major barrier to fear appeals’ success. If I don’t believe or don’t want to believe that I am susceptible to danger, then I am unlikely to accept the persuader’s advice.

The second misconception of fear appeals follows from this tendency. Fear is commonly thought to be a simple drive that propels people to do as the persuader requests. According to this notion (popularized by early theorists), fear is an unpleasant psychological state, one that people are motivated to reduce. Supposedly, when the message provides recommendations that alleviate fear, people accept the recommendations and change their behavior (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). To be sure, fear is an unpleasant emotional state, but contrary to early theorists, people do not behave in a simple, animal-like manner to rid themselves of painful sensations. Fear is more complicated.

A message can scare someone, but fail to change attitudes because it does not connect with the person’s beliefs about the problem, or neglects to provide a solution to the difficulty that ails the individual. The drive model puts a premium on fear. It says that if you scare someone and then reassure them, you can change a dysfunctional behavior. However, we
now know that persuaders must do more than arouse fear to change an individual's attitude or behavior. They must convince message recipients that they are susceptible to negative outcomes and that the recommended response will alleviate threat. Messages must work on a cognitive, as well as affective, level. They must help individuals appreciate the problem and, through the power of words and suggestions, encourage people to come to grips with the danger at hand.

A Theory of Fear Appeals

Devising an effective fear appeal is, to some extent, an art, but it's an art that requires a scientist's appreciation for the intricacies of human behavior. For this reason, theoretical approaches to fear messages are particularly important to develop, and there have been no shortage of these over the years (Dillard, 1994; Rogers, 1975). The most comprehensive is Kim Witte's Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM). As the name suggests, the model extends previous work on fear appeals, synthesizing different research strands and sharpening predictions. It also emphasizes two parallel processes, or two different mechanisms by which fear appeals can influence attitudes. Like the ELM, the EPPM is a process model, one that calls attention to the ways in which people think and feel about persuasive messages. Reasoning that fear is a complex emotion, Witte (1998) invokes specific terms. She talks about fear, but recognizes that we need to consider other subtle aspects of fear-arousing messages if we are to understand their effects on attitudes.

A fear-arousing message contains two basic elements: threat and efficacy information, or a problem and solution. A message must first threaten the individual, convincing him or her that dangers lurk in the environment. To do this, a message must contain the following elements:

1. Severity information: information about the seriousness or magnitude of the threat (“Consumption of fatty food can lead to heart disease”)
2. Susceptibility information: information about the likelihood that the threatening outcomes will occur (“People who eat a junk-food diet put themselves at risk for getting a heart attack before the age of 40”)

After threatening or scaring the person, the message must provide a recommended response—a way the individual can avert the threat. It must contain efficacy information or facts about effective ways to cope with the danger at hand. Efficacy consists of two components, which result in two additional elements of a fear appeal:

3. Response efficacy: information about the effectiveness of the recommended action (“Maintaining a diet high in fruits and vegetables, but low in saturated fat, can reduce the incidence of heart disease”)


4. **Self-efficacy information**: arguments that the individual is capable of performing the recommended action ("You can change your diet. Millions have.")

Each of these message components theoretically triggers a cognitive reaction in the person. Severity and susceptibility information should convince the individual that the threat is serious and likely to occur, provided no change is made in the problematic behavior. Response efficacy and self-efficacy information should persuade the individual that these outcomes can be avoided if the recommended actions are taken to heart.

The operative word is *should*. There is no guarantee a fear appeal will work in exactly this way. Much depends on which of the two parallel processes the message unleashes. The two cognitive processes at the core of the model are *danger control* and *fear control* (see Fig. 7.1). Danger control occurs when people perceive that they are capable of averting the threat by undertaking the recommended action. They turn their attention outward, appraise the external danger, and adopt strategies to cope with the problem. Fear control occurs when people face a serious threat, but focus inwardly on the fear, rather than the problem at hand. They concentrate on ways of containing their fear, keeping it at bay, rather than on developing strategies to ward off the danger. Witte, Meyer, and Martell (2001) invite us to consider how the processes might work:

Think of a situation in which you were faced with a grave threat. Sometimes, you may have tried to control the danger by thinking about your risk of experiencing the threat and ways to avoid it. If you did this, you engaged in the danger control process. Now, think of times when your fear was so overwhelming that you didn’t even think of the threat. Instead, you focused on ways to calm down your racing heart, your sweaty palms, and your nervousness. You may have taken some deep breaths, drunk some water, or smoked a cigarette. These all are fear control strategies. You were controlling your fear, but without any thought of the actual danger facing you. (pp. 14–15)

In essence, a fear appeal works if it nudges the person into danger control. It fails if it pushes the individual into fear control. If the message convinces people that they can cope, it can change attitudes. If people are bowled over by their fear and paralyzed by the severity of the threat, the message backfires.

Witte and her colleagues, attempting to develop a more precise formulation to help theorists and practitioners, emphasize that if perceived efficacy exceeds perceived threat, individuals engage in danger control, and adopt recommendations to avert the danger. They feel motivated to
FEAR APPEALS

FIG. 7.1 The Extended Parallel Process Model (from Witte, 1998, p. 432).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Stimuli</th>
<th>Message Processing (1st &amp; 2nd Appraisals)</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Process</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>MESSAGE COMPONENTS</td>
<td>PERCEIVED EFFICACY (Self-Efficacy, Response Efficacy)</td>
<td>Protection Motivation</td>
<td>Danger Control Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PERCEIVED THREAT (Susceptibility, Severity)</td>
<td>Message Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Threat perceived (No Response)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Differences</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

protect themselves from danger (protection motivation in the model), and take necessary steps to deal with the problem at hand. However, if perceived threat exceeds perceived efficacy, people shift into fear control mode, obsess about the fear, defensively process the message, and do nothing to alter their behavior. For example, an antismoking campaign succeeds if it convinces the person that the risk of cancer can be averted if he quits smoking now and begins chewing Nicorette gum instead of smoking Camels. The campaign fails if it gets the individual so worried he will get cancer that he begins smoking cigarettes just to calm down!

What role does fear play in all this? Fear is probably a necessary condition for messages to succeed. People have to be scared, and messages that arouse high levels of fear can produce significant attitude change (Boster & Mongeau, 1984; Mongeau, 1998). But fear is not enough. In order to change attitudes, a message must harness fear and channel it into a constructive (danger control) direction. This entails “pushing all the right buttons,” or more precisely, convincing people that the threat is severe and real, but that there is something they can do to ward off the danger (see Fig. 7.2).

Applying Theory to the Real World

Fear appeal theories like Witte’s have generated many studies, mostly experiments. Researchers have randomly assigned one group of subjects to a video that contains a very threatening message. They have exposed an equivalent group to a message that raises milder threats. Experimenters have also varied other aspects of the message, such as the effectiveness of
FIG. 7.2 One way to convince smokers to quit is to scare the heck out of them. However, fear is a dicey weapon in the persuasion arsenal and works only if it is used deftly and sensitively. (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)

the recommended response or self-efficacy. A variety of studies support the thrust of Witte’s model. For example, in one study smokers who were led to believe that there was a high probability that smoking causes cancer indicated an intention to quit only if they believed that the recommended practice (quitting smoking) was highly effective (Rogers & Mewborn, 1976).

Naturally, not all the research supports the model to a tee. And there remain questions about precisely what happens psychologically when perceived threat exceeds perceived efficacy. Nonetheless, the model can accommodate a variety of concepts and helps explain diverse findings on fear appeals (Witte & Allen, 2000). It offers a framework for discussing fear appeal effects, an important contribution given the large number of situations in which it is necessary to scare people into making life changes. As human beings, we take risks, underestimate our vulnerability to misfortune, do stupid things, deny we’re at risk, and bury our heads in the sand when it comes time to do something to rectify the situation. We need fear appeals. Theories such as the Extended Parallel Process
FEAR APPEALS

Model offer general guidelines for designing health risk communications. The following are four practical suggestions that emerge from theory and research:

1. **Communicators must scare the heck out of recipients.** We are frequently tempted to go easy on others, trying not to hurt their feelings. Research suggests that fear enhances persuasion and that high-fear appeals are more effective than low-fear appeals (Boster & Mongeau, 1984). “Adding additional fear-arousing content to a persuasive message is likely to generate greater levels of persuasion,” Paul A. Mongeau (1998) concluded after reviewing the research in the area (p. 64). As an example, consider binge drinking, a pervasive problem on college campuses. If you want to convince people to quit abusing alcohol, you should tell them straight out what the dangers are and how susceptible they are to harm. Don’t beat around the bush.

2. **Persuaders must discuss solutions, as well as problems.** Communicators must offer hope, telling individuals that they can avert the dangers graphically laid out earlier in the message. Witte (1997) notes that “after you scare someone about terrible outcomes and make them feel vulnerable to negative consequences, you must tell them clearly and explicitly how to prevent this outcome from occurring” (p. 151). Communications must “get ’em well” after they “get ’em sick.” They must teach, as well as scare.

3. **Efficacy recommendations should emphasize costs of not taking precautionary actions, as well as benefits of undertaking the activity.** Persuaders frequently must decide how to frame, or position, the message. They must decide whether to emphasize benefits of adopting a behavior (“A diet high in fruits and vegetables, but low in fat, can keep you healthy”), or costs of not performing the requested action (“A diet low in fruits and vegetables, but high in fat, can lead to cancer”) (Salovey & Wegener, 2002). Messages that emphasize benefits of adopting a behavior are gain-framed; those that present the costs of not adopting the behavior are loss-framed.

Fear messages have usually been couched in terms of gain, but they also can be framed on the basis of losses. It may seem strange to emphasize what people lose from not performing a behavior until you consider that negative information—losses linked with inaction—can be more memorable than benefits associated with action. Beth E. Meyerowitz and Shelly Chaiken (1987) demonstrated this in a study of persuasive communication and breast self-examination, a simple behavior that can help diagnose breast cancer but is performed by remarkably few women. Some undergraduate female subjects in the study read gain-framed arguments (“By doing breast self-examination now, you can learn what your
normal, healthy breasts feel like so that you will be better prepared to notice any small, abnormal changes that might occur as you get older”). Others read loss-oriented arguments (“By not doing breast self-examination now, you will not learn what your normal, healthy breasts feel like so that you will be ill prepared to notice any small, abnormal changes that might occur as you get older”) (Meyerowitz & Chaiken, p. 506). Women who read the loss-framed arguments held more positive attitudes toward breast self-exams and were more likely than gain-oriented subjects to report performing this behavior at a 4-month followup.

Behavior being complex, there are also cases in which gain-framed arguments are more compelling. Alexander J. Rothman and his colleagues (1993) compared the effects of gain- and loss-framed pamphlets regarding skin cancer prevention. The gain-framed message emphasized benefits rather than costs, and focused on positive aspects of displaying concern about skin cancer (“Regular use of sunscreen products can protect you against the sun’s harmful rays”). The loss-framed message stressed risks, rather than benefits (“If you don’t use sunscreen products regularly, you won’t be protected against the sun’s harmful rays”). Seventy-one percent of those who read the positive, gain-framed message requested sunscreen with an appropriate sun protection factor. Only 46% of those who read the loss-framed pamphlet asked for sunscreen with an appropriate sun protection level. Researchers now believe that gain-framed messages are more effective in promoting prevention behaviors (sunscreen use, physical exercise, and use of infant car restraints). However, loss-framed messages are more effective in influencing early detection behaviors, such as obtaining a mammogram, performing monthly breast self-exams, and getting tested for HIV (Salovey, Schneider, & Apanovitch, 2002).

4. Threats and recommendations should be salient—or relevant—to the target audience. You cannot assume that what scares you also terrifies your target audience. Different fears are salient to different groups. If you want to scare middle-class high school girls into practicing safer sex, you should stress that they might get pregnant. These teens don’t want to have a baby; pregnancy represents a serious threat. However, if your target audience is poor ethnic women, you should rethink this appeal. To many poor ethnic women, pregnancy is not a negative, but a positive, consequence of sexual intercourse. It produces a human being who depends on them and loves them to bits; it also, at least in the best of worlds, shows that they have a loving, trusting, relationship with a man, which provides status and emotional fulfillment (Sobo, 1995; Witte et al., 2001).

Surprisingly perhaps, the main drawback of getting pregnant, in the view of inner-city teenage girls, is that you get fat and lose your friends
(Witte et al., 2001). Thus, a campaign to promote abstinence or safer sex among inner-city teenagers should emphasize how much weight you gain when you’re pregnant. It should also explain that you can lose your friends if you have to spend time taking care of a baby rather than hanging with them (Witte et al., 2001). As is discussed in chapter 12, campaign specialists must carefully consider the needs and values of the target audience before developing their communications.

Summary

Fear appeals are among the diciest weapons in the persuader’s arsenal. This is because they evoke fear, a strong emotion with physiological correlates, touch on ego-involved issues, and attempt to change dysfunctional behaviors that are difficult to extinguish. To succeed, fear-arousing messages must trigger the right emotional reaction, lest they push the message recipient into fear control mode. Kathryn A. Morris and William B. Swann (1996) aptly observed that health risk communications must “walk the whisker-thin line between too little and too much—between making targets of persuasive communications care enough to attend to the message but not dismiss the message through denial processes” (p. 70). The campaign communication floor is littered with examples of fear appeals that failed because they did not maintain the proper balance between fear and danger, or threat and efficacy. Yet for all their problems, fear appeals that take context into account, put theoretical factors into play, and are of high-aesthetic quality can influence attitudes. It’s tough to scare people effectively, but it can be done. Although one would rather not resort to fear, given its negative and volatile qualities, it can’t be ignored in a risky world where people don’t always do as they should and often put themselves and loved ones in harm’s way.

LANGUAGE

Great persuaders have long known that how you say it can be as important as what you say. Persuasion scholars and speakers alike recognize that the words persuaders choose can influence attitudes. But just what impact does language have? How can we get beyond the generalities to hone in on the specific features of language that matter most? Can language backfire and cause audience members to reject a communicator’s message, possibly because it is too strident or obscene? How can you use language more effectively yourself in your efforts to convince people to go along with what you recommend?
These are social scientific questions—specific inquiries that allow us to explore theories and see how they play out in everyday life. They aren't the big, gigantic questions that people frequently ask about language and persuasion—queries like “What sorts of language make someone charismatic?” and “Do cult leaders like Charles Manson brainwash people with language?” These are difficult questions to answer, in some cases impossible because the terminology (e.g., brainwashing) obfuscates and defies clear explication. However, the queries mentioned in the preceding paragraph have intrigued persuasion scholars and generated interesting insights about language and attitude change.

**Speed of Speech**

Ever since America mythologized the fast-talking salesman, people have assumed that fast speakers are more compelling than slow ones. The character Harold Hill in the American classic, *The Music Man*, epitomizes our stereotype of the fast-talking peddler of wares. Since then, movies, videos, and songs have rhapsodized about the supposed persuasive effects of fast-talking persuaders. (The ’60s song, *Fast-Talking Guy*, comes to mind.)

Leave it to social scientists to study the phenomenon! Does speed of speech enhance persuasion? Early studies suggested it did (Miller et al., 1976; Street & Brady, 1982). However, more recent studies have cast doubt on this glib conclusion. Researchers have discovered that speech rate does not inevitably change attitudes, and under some conditions may not exert a particularly strong impact on attitudes or beliefs (Buller et al., 1992). Just as you can hypothesize that faster speech should be persuasive because it acts as a credibility cue, you can also reason that it should reduce persuasion if it interferes with message processing or annoys the audience (“Don’t y’all know we don’t speak as fast as you Yankees down here in ol’ Alabama?”).

Thus, there are both theoretical and practical reasons to argue that speech rate does not have a uniformly positive or negative effect on persuasion. Instead, the most reasonable conclusion is that effects depend on the context. Several contextual factors are important.

Speech rate enhances persuasion when the goal of the persuader is to capture attention or to be perceived as competent. Speaking quickly can suggest that the communicator is credible, knowledgeable, or possesses expertise. Moderately fast and fast speakers are seen as more intelligent, confident, and effective than their slower-speaking counterparts. These effects are particularly likely when audience members are low in involvement (Smith & Shaffer, 1995). Under low involvement, speech rate can
serve as a peripheral cue. Invoking the heuristic or cultural stereotype that "fast talkers know their stuff," audience members may go along with fast speakers because they assume they are credible or correct. Fast speech may be a facade, employed to disguise a lack of knowledge, but by the time message recipients discover this, they may have already plunked down their money to purchase the product.

Speech rate can also enhance persuasion when it is relevant to the message topic. A now-famous advertisement for Federal Express depicted a harried businessman, facing an urgent deadline. The man barked out orders to two subordinates and spoke in a staccato voice at lightning-quick speed:

Businessman: You did a bang up job. I'm putting you in charge of Pittsburgh.
Employee: Pittsburgh's perfect.
Businessman: I know it's perfect, Peter. That's why I picked Pittsburgh.
Pittsburgh's perfect, Peter. Can I call you Pete?
Employee: Call me Pete.

The ear-catching ad helped make FedEx a household name. Its success was due in part to the nice symmetry between the theme of the ad—speed of speech—and the product being sold, a mail delivery service that promised to be there "absolutely, positively, overnight."

Under other conditions, fast speech is not so likely to enhance credibility or persuasion. When the message concerns sensitive or intimate issues, a faster speaker may communicate insensitivity or coldness (Giles & Street, 1994; Ray, Ray, & Zahn, 1991). When a message focuses on medical problems, safer sex, or a personal dilemma, slow speech may be preferable. In these situations, slow speech may convey communicator concern, empathy, and goodwill.

This plays out on a national political level as well. When citizens are experiencing a national crisis, they may respond more positively to a slower speaker, whose slower pace conveys calm and reassurance. During the 1930s and 1940s, when America faced the Depression and World War II, they found solace in the slow speech—and melodious voice—of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Winfield, 1994). Had FDR spoken quickly, he might have made people nervous; his pace might have reminded them of the succession of problems that faced them on a daily basis.

Thus, one of the intriguing lessons of speech rate research is that faster speech is not inherently more effective than slow speech. Instead, persuaders must appreciate context, and the audience's motivation and ability to process the message. It would be nice if we could offer a simple prescription, like one your doctor gives the pharmacist. The reality is that
speech rate effects are more complex. This also makes them a lot more interesting and challenging to explore.

**Powerless Versus Powerful Speech**

Has this ever happened to you? You're sitting in class when a student raises his hand and says, “I know this sounds like a stupid question, but...” and proceeds to ask the professor his question. You cringe as you hear him introduce his query in this manner; you feel embarrassed for your classmate and bothered that someone is about to waste your time with a dumb question. Something interesting has just happened. The student has deliberately undercut his own credibility by suggesting to the class that a query that may be perfectly intelligent is somehow less than adequate. The words preceding the question—not the question itself—have produced these effects, another example of the subtle role language plays in communication.

The linguistic form at work here is **powerless speech**. It is a constellation of characteristics that may suggest to a message receiver that the communicator is less than powerful or is not so confident. In contrast, **powerful speech** is marked by the conspicuous absence of these features. The primary components of powerless speech are:

- **Hesitation forms.** “Uh” and “well, you know” communicate lack of certainty or confidence.
- **Hedges.** “Sort of,” “kinda,” and “I guess” are phrases that reduce the definitiveness of a persuader’s assertion.
- **Tag questions.** The communicator “tags” a declarative statement with a question, as in “That plan will cost us too much, don’t you think?” A tag is “a declarative statement without the assumption that the statement will be believed by the receiver” (Bradley, 1981, p. 77).
- **Disclaimers.** “This may sound a little out of the ordinary, but” or “I’m no expert, of course” are introductory expressions that ask the listener to show understanding or to make allowances.

Researchers have examined the effects of powerless and powerful speech on persuasion. Studies overwhelmingly show that powerless speech is perceived as less persuasive and credible than powerful speech (Burrell & Koper, 1998; Hosman, 2002). Communicators who use powerless speech are perceived to be less competent, dynamic, and attractive than those who speak in a powerful fashion (e.g., Adkins & Brashers, 1995; Erickson et al., 1978; Haleta, 1996; Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999; Hosman, 1989). There are several reasons why powerless communicators are downgraded. Their use of hedges, hesitations, and qualifiers communicates
uncertainty or lack of confidence. Powerless speech may also serve as a low-credibility cue, a culturally learned heuristic that suggests the speaker is not intelligent or knowledgeable. In addition, powerless speech distracts audience members, which reduces their ability to attend to message arguments.

This research has abundant practical applications. It suggests that, when giving a talk or preparing a written address, you should speak concisely and directly. Avoid qualifiers, hedges, tag questions, and hesitations. If you are nervous or uncertain, think through the reasons why you feel that way and try to enhance your confidence. You may feel better by sharing your uncertainty with your audience, but the powerlessness you convey will reduce your persuasiveness.

Another application of powerless speech research has been to courtroom presentations. Two experts in the psychology of law argue, based on research evidence, that “the attorney should, whenever possible, come directly to the point and not hedge his points with extensive qualifications” (Linz & Penrod, 1984, pp. 44–45). Witnesses, they add, should be encouraged to answer attorneys’ questions as directly and with as few hesitations and qualifiers as possible.

In some instances, attorneys or consultants may work with witnesses to help them project confidence. Take Monica Lewinsky, the woman who had “sexual relations” with President Clinton in 1995 and became the focal point of the impeachment scandal of 1998. When she first graced the nation’s airwaves, she seemed naive and vulnerable, and in her conversations with people at the Clinton White House, tentative and girlish. But when Lewinsky addressed the Senate impeachment trial of Clinton in 1999, “her appearance, voice and vocabulary said she was all grown up” (Henneberger, 1999, p. 1). “Ms. Lewinsky was well-spoken, used no slang and showed only trace evidence of the Valley Girl of her taped phone conversations with Linda R. Tripp. Even her voice seemed different now, more modulated, less high-pitched and breathy,” a reporter noted (Henneberger, p. 1). It is likely that Lewinsky was extensively coached for her Senate performance. Her use of powerful speech seems to have enhanced her credibility, perhaps leading some in the audience to place more trust in her story and others to feel more positively toward her version of events.

Although powerful speech is usually more persuasive than powerless language, there is one context in which powerless speech can be effective. When communicators wish to generate goodwill rather than project expertise, certain types of unassertive speech can work to their advantage. Let's say that an authority figure wants to humanize herself and appear more down-to-earth in message recipients' eyes. She may find it useful to end some statements with a question. Physicians and therapists
frequently use tags to gain rapport with clients. Tag questions—such as “You’ve been here before, haven’t you?”; “That’s the last straw, isn’t it?”; and “That must have made you feel angry, right?”—can show empathy with patients’ concerns (Harres, 1998). As researcher Annette Harres observed, after studying physicians’ use of language devices, “affective tag questions were a very effective way of showing that the doctor was genuinely concerned about the patient’s physical and psychological well-being. . . . They can indicate to patients that their concerns are taken seriously” (pp. 122–123).

Language Intensity

This is the aspect of language that most people think of when they free-associate about language effects. Language intensity includes metaphors, strong and vivid language, and emotionally charged words. It is the province of political rhetoric, social activism, hate speech, and eloquent public address. You can read intense language if you click onto Web sites for pro-life and pro-choice abortion groups, supporters and opponents of cloning human embryos, animal rights activists, environmentalists, and the National Rifle Association, among others. You can hear intense language in the speeches of charismatic leaders, political activists, and presidents of the United States.

One prominent feature of language intensity is metaphor. A metaphor is “a linguistic phrase of the form ‘A is B,’ such that a comparison is suggested between the two terms leading to a transfer of attributes associated with B to A” (Sopory & Dillard, 2002, p. 407). For example, former president Ronald Reagan liked to describe America as “a torch shedding light to all the hopeless of the world.” The metaphor consists of two parts: A (America) and B (“torch shedding light to all the hopeless of the world”). It suggests a comparison between A and B, such that the properties associated with a torch shedding light to the world’s hopeless are transferred to America. There are many other metaphors. Civil rights activists were fond of using “eyes on the prize” to symbolize Blacks’ quest for success in America. Opponents of nuclear weapons use terms like “holocaust,” “nuclear winter,” and “republic of insects and grass” to describe the consequences of global nuclear war (Schell, 1982). Abortion opponents liken abortion to the bloody killing of innocent human beings. More benignly, political partisans of all stripes and colors are fond of using gridlock on the roadways as a metaphor for political gridlock, or the inability of Congress to bridge differences and pass legislation.

Persuaders in all walks of life employ metaphor as a technique to alter attitudes. Do they have this effect? Researchers Pradeep Sopory and
James P. Dillard (2002) conducted a meta-analytic review of the empirical research on metaphor and persuasion. They concluded that messages containing metaphors produce somewhat greater attitude change than do communications without metaphors. They proposed several explanations for this effect:

Metaphorical language creates greater interest in a message than does literal language, thereby increasing motivation to more systematically process the message. . . . A metaphor helps to better structure and organize the arguments of a persuasive message relative to literal language. A metaphor evokes a greater number of semantic associations, and the different arguments, when consistent with the metaphor, get connected together more coherently via the many available semantic pathways. In addition, the links to the metaphor “highlight” the arguments making them more salient. (p. 417)

Powerful as metaphors are, they are not the only component of intense language (Bowers, 1964; Hamilton & Hunter, 1998; Hosman, 2002). Intense language includes specific, graphic language. It also encompasses emotion-laden words like “freedom” and “beauty,” as well as “suffering” and “death.” Intense language can also reflect the extremity of the communicator’s issue position. A communicator who describes efforts to clone human beings as “disgusting” is using more intense language than one who calls such research “inappropriate.” The first speaker’s language also points up a more extreme position on the cloning issue.

What impact does such language have on attitudes? Should persuaders deploy vivid, graphic terms? The answer depends on the persuader’s goal, his or her credibility, and the audience’s involvement in the issue. If the goal is to enhance your dynamism—to convince the audience you are a dynamic speaker—intense language can help you achieve this goal. But intense language will not change the minds of audience members who oppose your position and are ego-involved in the issue (Hamilton & Hunter, 1998; Hosman, 2002). They are too stuck in their ways, too committed to the position for mere word choice to change their minds. By contrast, if the audience disagrees with your position, but is less personally involved in the issue, it is likely to respond to intense language. The only hitch is that you need to be perceived as credible by those who hear or read your speech. Intense language can goad an audience into changing its attitude toward an issue, provided it is not terribly ego-involved in the matter and the communicator possesses considerable credibility. Under these conditions, graphic, emotional language can cause people to pay more attention to the message, which in turn can produce more favorable
evaluations of the persuader's position (see also Hamilton & Hunter, 1998, for more complex discussions of these issues).

Unfortunately, this all may seem abstract or removed from everyday life. In fact these research findings have intriguing applications to real-life situations. Social activists are adept at choosing metaphors that can galvanize support for their cause. They recognize that the way they frame the issue—and the linguistic terms they select—can strongly influence attitudes. Language intensity may have particularly strong effects when people do not have well-developed attitudes on the issue, are low in involvement, and are exposed to appeals from credible spokespersons. Case in point: the appeals made by opponents and supporters of abortion.

Abortion foes chose the metaphor "pro-life" to describe their heartfelt opposition to abortion in the United States. Just about everyone loves life. By linking a fetus with life, activists succeeded in making a powerful symbolic statement. It placed those who did not believe that a fetus constituted a full, living human being on the defensive. What's more, pro-life activists deployed vivid visual metaphors to make their case. They developed brochures and movies that depicted powerful images—for example, "a fetus floating in amniotic fluid, tiny fetal feet dangled by a pair of adult hands, (and) a mutilated, bloodied, aborted fetus with a misshapen head and a missing arm" (Lavin, 2001, p. 144). These visual images became the centerpiece of a national antiabortion campaign that began in the 1960s and 1970s. As Celeste Condit (1990) recalled:

Thousands of picture packets were distributed, and television ads as well as billboards focused on the human-like features of the physical appearance of the fetus. Most Americans had no idea what a fetus looked like at any stage of development. . . . Thus, visual display and supporting scientific argument worked together to characterize the fetus as a human being. (p. 61)

Over the ensuing decades, the language became more intense, the rhetoric fiercer. Pro-life activists spent much linguistic energy condemning a specific late-term abortion procedure, called partial-birth abortion. The procedure is unpleasant and controversial, and pro-life supporters have gained rhetorical punch by promoting the name "partial-birth abortion" rather than employing duller medical terms.

On the other side of the abortion divide, women's groups that favor abortion have also exploited the symbolic power of language and pictures. They used a coat hanger dripping blood as a metaphor for "the horrid means and consequences of the illegal abortions that occur when
legal abortion is banned” (Condit, p. 92). They argued that the fetus should be characterized as a lump of tissues rather than a baby. They went to lengths to stress that they did not so much favor abortion as a woman’s right to choose. One popular pro-choice pamphlet presented the Statue of Liberty, with the line “There are no pictures in this pamphlet, because you can’t take a picture of liberty.” Condit notes that “the statue—as a woman, a symbol of the downtrodden, and a symbol of Freedom, Liberty, and home—embodied the ideal American representation of Choice or Reproductive Freedom” (pp. 93–94).

Pro-choice activists’ intense language hardly changed the minds of abortion foes. Nor did the strident imagery of pro-life Web sites alter attitudes of women committed to choice. But language intensity research suggests that the language influenced those who were less ego-involved in the issue, particularly when communications were delivered by credible spokespersons. Many citizens fall into this category—they have opinions on abortion, but are not emotionally invested in the issue or are profoundly ambivalent. The ways that pro-life and pro-choice persuaders framed the issue undoubtedly had an impact on these individuals’ views on abortion, in some cases producing major shifts in public sentiments (Condit, 1990).

Although pro-choice appeals to values like freedom helped to shift the focus of the abortion debate, it did not eliminate the rhetorical power of visual images, like mangled fetuses. The coat hanger packs less rhetorical punch than a bloody fetus, and the choice metaphor loses out in the language intensity war when pit against graphic images of “aborted babies.” As one abortion advocate conceded, “When someone holds up a model of a six-month-old fetus and a pair of surgical scissors, we say ‘choice,’ and we lose.” (Klusendorf, 2001). One can acknowledge that some pro-life activists have nothing but pure motives in using this imagery, while also lamenting that it has led to a “visualization of the abortion debate” that has polarized both sides, made compromise more difficult, and in some cases sparked violent and deadly confrontation (Lavin, 2001).

Intense language has also been a persuasive weapon in the ongoing debates over cloning and embryonic stem cell research. Ever since University of Wisconsin researchers isolated stem cells from human embryos, the stem cell issue has become a scientific and political cause célèbre. Stem cells, once extracted from embryos, have the potential to grow into human tissues, which can be used to replace damaged cells that cause such diseases as Alzheimer’s, diabetes, and cancer (Stolberg, 2001). Nothing comes without a price, however. Extracting stem cells results in the destruction of the embryo, a centerpiece of human life. This deeply offends religious conservatives, who have likened
embryonic stem cell research to murder. Proponents of stem cell research use different language. They couch the discussion in terms of "the dawning of a medical revolution," and the ability of research to save lives. Borrowing from abortion opponents' strategic playbook, research proponents argue that "there is more than one way to be pro-life" (President Bush Waffles, 2001).

Proponents and opponents are battling for public opinion. They are trying to change people's attitudes. This is a complex issue. There are many facets, angles, scientific layers, and moral perspectives. As you read about this topic over the coming years, you should take note of the ways in which activists frame the issue. Listen to the words they use. Be cognizant of the words you select to describe the issue to others. Words matter. They can subtly influence the way we think about social issues.

CONCLUSIONS

Scholarship on the persuasive message dates back to Aristotle and the early Sophist writers. Contemporary research builds on the shoulders of giants. We ask the same questions as our forefathers and foremothers: Which types of appeals are most effective? Is logic more persuasive than emotion? How far should persuaders go in arousing the audience's emotions before the message backfires, producing effects opposite to those intended? There are no simple answers to these questions. Contemporary scholarship has offered more specific answers than earlier work, yielding more clarity. But it has not eliminated complexity or ambiguity.

We can divide the message into three components: structure, content, and language appeals. With regard to structure, we know that: (a) two-sided messages are more persuasive than one-sided messages, provided they refute the opposing side; and (b) it is typically better to draw the conclusion explicitly than implicitly. The content domain—evidence, fear, and framing—has generated numerous theoretical and practical insights. Evidence enhances persuasion, with different types of evidence effective under different psychological conditions. If you want to persuade someone, you are usually better off citing evidence; in some situations, providing narrative evidence (telling stories, offering gripping anecdotes) can be remarkably effective. (Evidence can also have an increased effect with the passage of time; see Box 7–3 for a discussion.)
Box 7-3
The Sleeper Effect

McDonald's hamburgers have ground worms.
Girl Scout cookies have been mixed with hashish.
A subliminal message is embedded on the pack of Camel cigarettes.
AIDS is a conspiracy by the U.S. government to wipe out the African American population.

These statements have been bandied about for years, and some people (more than you would think) assume they are true (Perloff, 2001; Reinard, 1991). But these assertions are false. How do people come to develop false beliefs? There are many explanations, but one, relevant to this chapter, is this: These messages were relayed by communicators who initially inspired little trust or respect. As time elapsed, people forgot the source of the message, but continued to remember—and believe—the message itself.

This illustrates the sleeper effect, the notion that the effects of a persuasive communication increase with the passage of time. As Allen and Stiff (1998) note, “the term sleeper derives from an expectation that the long-term effect is larger than the short-term effect in some manner (the effect is asleep but awakes to be effective later)” (p. 176).

The core thesis is that a message initially discounted by message receivers comes to be accepted over time. The message is initially accompanied by a discounting cue that leads individuals to question or reject the advocated position. At Time 1, individuals recognize that the message is persuasive, but are bowled over by the discounting cue, such as information that the source is not an expert (Gruder et al., 1978). They, therefore, reject the message. Over time the cue (low-credibility source) becomes disassociated from the message. Individuals forget the source of the message, but remember the message arguments, perhaps because the arguments are more extensively processed and more accessible in memory than the source cue (Hannah & Sternthal, 1984).

A vexing part of the sleeper effect is that a message delivered by a highly credible source becomes less persuasive over time, while the same message, transmitted by a low-creditable source, becomes more convincing. How can this be? What may occur is that message recipients agree with the message initially because the source is credible. The credibility of the source sells them on the message. Over time, source and message become disassociated, and people forget the key selling proposition—the source's credibility. Because this was what sold them on the message, its disappearance from memory reduces the persuasiveness of the message. By contrast, a message delivered by a low-creditable communicator can gain in acceptance over time, having never been accepted exclusively on the basis of the credibility of the source.

Continued
Box 7-3
(CONtinued)

Keep in mind that sleeper effects are not the norm in persuasion. Highly credible sources are invariably more effective, particularly in the short term. It is certainly better for persuaders to strive to have high rather than low credibility. Nonetheless, there are cases in which sleeper effects occur, and they have intriguing implications for politics and marketing, applications that have not been lost on unsavory marketing specialists.

False messages disseminated by low-credible communicators can come to be viewed as true over time, particularly if they are memorable. Dishonest and opportunistic political consultants exploit the sleeper effect when they try to implant misleading or negative information about their opponents into the public mind. They attempt to do this through push-polls, or telephone surveys in which an interviewer working for a political candidate (Candidate A) slips false and negative information about Candidate B into the poll, and asks respondents whether that would change their opinion of Candidate B. The questions are designed to push voters away from one candidate and pull them toward the candidate financing the poll (Sabato & Simpson, 1996).

In some cases, pollsters have deliberately exploited voter prejudices, hoping this would push individuals away from their preferred candidates. Interviewers have fabricated information, in one case claiming that an Alaska Democrat supported gay marriage when he had never endorsed marriage between homosexuals. In another case, an unmarried Democratic Congressman from Ohio kept receiving reports about push-polls that would ask his supporters, “Would you still vote for him if you knew he was gay?” The candidate noted that he was not gay, but acknowledged the tactic placed him in a catch-22. “What do you do?” he asked. Do you hold a press conference and say, ‘I’m not gay!’?” (Sabato & Simpson, p. 265).

The candidate did not hold a press conference. He also did not get re-elected to Congress.

The sleeper effect provides one explanation for those outcomes. The push-pollsters’ negative messages about opposing candidates were persuasive, encouraging cognitive elaboration (Priester et al., 1999). The pollster was a low-credible source, a discounting cue. Over time, the cue became disassociated from the message. The message was deeply processed and memorable. At a later point in time, the message awoke and influenced attitudes toward the candidates.

One of the most intriguing areas of message research has centered on fear—whether you should scare someone and if so, how you should go about it. Fear appeals are common in everyday life, from toothpaste commercials to drunk driving PSAs to warnings about sexual exploitation on
the Internet. Social scientists have advanced knowledge of fear messages by devising theories of fear arousal and testing hypotheses. The Extended Parallel Process Model stipulates that fear appeals must contain threat and efficacy components, and are most likely to work if they convince the person that he or she is capable of undertaking a protective action that will avert the threat. The "magic point" at which efficacy exceeds threat is not easy to reach. Consequently, fear appeals can fail to change attitudes. However, sounding a more optimistic note, fear messages derived from theory and research have exerted substantial effects in communication campaigns (see chapter 12).

Language appeals, among the most interesting of all message factors, emphasize speech rate, powerful speech, and language intensity. Speaking quickly, powerfully, and with intensity can increase a communicator's credibility, and this in turn can enhance persuasion. But it is difficult to tick off specific rules that tell you which factor to use in a given situation. This is because context and audience expectations of a speaker exert important effects on persuasion (Burgoon, Denning, & Roberts, 2002; see Box 7–4). Intelligent speakers take the audience's expectations into account—"Do they expect me to wow them with big words? Will they be offended if I throw in a four-letter word?"—when they deliver persuasive messages.

Box 7–4
LANGUAGE TIPS

How can you use language to spruce up your persuasive communications? Here are several suggestions, based on research and theory:

1. Avoid "uh," "um," and other noninfluences.
2. Don't use disclaimers ("I'm no expert, but . . . "). Just make your point.
3. Vary your pitch as much as possible. Avoid the boring monotone.
4. Accommodate your speech to listeners' language style. If your audience speaks quickly (and your talk does not concern intimate issues), speak at a faster clip.
5. Accommodate to audience language style, but don't pander. One African American student related a story of a White speaker who addressed her high school class. Trying to be hip, he infused his talk with Black lingo (using phrases of the "yo, what's poppin'?" variety). The students laughed, seeing through his insincere attempt to appeal to them.
6. Be careful about using intense, obscene speech. Intense language can work, particularly when the communicator is credible and the topic
Box 7-4 (Continued)

is of low ego-involvement. Obscenities can be effective, if listeners ex-pect the speaker to use four-letter words. Radio DJ Howard Stern’s fans expect him to use obscene speech, and when he uses it, he may positively influence attitudes. Obscenity can be the norm in certain neighborhoods; thus, if speakers don’t swear, they will be disregarded. But in most instances, obscene speech is risky; it violates audience expect-ations of what is appropriate and can offend key constituents.

7. Be aware of your nonverbal expressions. About 65% of the meaning in an interpersonal interaction is communicated nonverbally (Burgoon, 1994). Thus, you may know your stuff, but if you look like you’re not happy to be speaking—because you’re frowning or clenching your fists—you can trump the positive effects of expertise. Use facial expressions and a posture that you’re comfortable with. And unless you’re communicating bad news, smile.

The message is a centerpiece of persuasion, and a complex, fascinating one, to be sure. It revolves around arguments, but arguments are diverse entities. They can be logical, statistical, anecdotal, or highly emotional (as in the case of the fetus-as-baby metaphor). People do respond to emo-tional arguments, and there is debate about whether these are as legitimate as “purely logical” ones. There is also debate about the time-honored issue of whether you should accommodate or confront your audience. It is fre-quently best to accommodate your audience—using evidence that audi-ence members find persuasive, devising appeals that mesh with cultural norms, speaking quickly if the audience speaks at a rapid clip (Giles & Street, 1994). On the other hand, if persuaders accommodate their audi-ences too much, they can be accused of pandering, or being so in need of audience approval that they don’t raise ethically important issues. More-over, in some cases, it is necessary to confront audience members—by scaring them or using intense language—so that they consider problem-atic personal or social issues.

The message remains a work in progress—a critical persuasion factor, one about which we know a lot, but one that changes as new ideas, tech-nologies, and norms diffuse through society. Next time you hear a persu-asive message, you might examine whether it contains the key features discussed in this chapter. And when you are on the other side of the persuasion ledger, you should ask yourself if you have done all you can to build the most compelling aspects of the message into your persuasive communication.
Are certain people more gullible than others? What differentiates the gullible from the canny? Should communicators take personality into account when devising messages?

These questions are the ones typically asked when we think about the role personality plays in persuasion. It is commonly believed that certain people are more susceptible to persuaders' wiles than others. When you read about schemes to defraud the elderly, Internet credit card hoaxes, and religious cults' success in attracting new recruits, you may suspect that certain people are more vulnerable to persuasion than others. This issue has intrigued researchers and is the focus of this chapter. As has been true of other topics, the myths surrounding the issue of personality and persuasion are plentiful. The first section of the chapter reviews, then debunks, simplistic notions of personality and susceptibility to persuasion. Subsequent sections focus on personality factors—stable aspects of an individual's character—that influence persuasibility, or susceptibility to persuasive communications.

**THE MYTH OF THE VULNERABLE OTHER**

We commonly assume there is a certain class of people who is most susceptible to persuasive communications. Researchers have tried mightily to discover just who these people are. Initially, researchers speculated that people low in self-esteem might be especially inclined to acquiesce to persuasive communicators. They argued, in essence, that if individuals were "down on themselves" or doubted their abilities, they should be highly likely to yield to others, particularly experts. However, this hypothesis has not received much empirical support. Individuals with low self-esteem are not invariably more suggestible than those high in self-regard.
At first blush, this seems surprising. Wouldn’t individuals with a poor self-image be particularly likely to succumb to others’ suggestions? It seems like only common sense, right?

Well, what seems to be “only common sense” has a way of turning out to be far more complicated than initially assumed. After carefully considering the issue, McGuire (1968) concluded that there are good reasons to doubt that low-self-esteem individuals will inevitably follow persuaders’ recommendations. McGuire noted that persuasion consists of a series of steps, including attending to a message, comprehending it, and yielding to the communicator. Individuals low in self-esteem are preoccupied with their own problems and worried about themselves. Dwelling on their own predicaments, they do not pay attention to, or comprehend, the message. As a result, cogent message arguments never get through; they’re not processed by low-self-esteem individuals.

It works just the opposite for individuals who are high in self-esteem, McGuire argued. They tune into the message, directing attention outward (to the communication) rather than inward (toward their own thoughts and feelings). A cogent, well-reasoned series of arguments is processed and comprehended by high-self-esteem individuals. However, precisely because they are high in self-esteem, they are not so easily swayed. They understand the communicator’s arguments, but refuse to yield. When low- and high-self-esteem individuals’ responses are lumped together, something unusual happens. They cancel each other out. At the low end of the self-esteem scale, individuals do not process the message, so they can’t be influenced; at the high end, individuals don’t yield, so their attitudes can’t change either. The result? Those most susceptible to persuasion are those in the middle—individuals with moderate self-esteem (Rhodes & Wood, 1992). But this is a large, heterogeneous group, so big and diverse that it is difficult to identify a specific type of person who is most vulnerable to persuasion.

Another factor that could help us classify people is intelligence. We don’t like to say it publicly, but perhaps individuals with less innate cognitive ability are the ones most susceptible to persuasion. Some researchers make precisely this case (Rhodes & Wood, 1992). The problem is that intelligence is not a simple, one-dimensional concept. Gardner (1993) has argued that there are different types of intelligence, including verbal skills, mathematical abilities, body-kinesthetic skills, musical skills, and interpersonal skills. Someone high in verbal intelligence might be more skeptical of written arguments than others. However, this individual might be highly susceptible to interpersonal manipulation. Thus, it is difficult to make blanket statements about the effects of intelligence on persuasion.

A final factor that has been bandied about is gender. In bygone eras when sexism reigned and women were relegated to housework, researchers
suspected that females would be more susceptible to persuasion than males. Women, 1950s-style scholars gently suspected, were the weaker sex. Others argued that it wasn’t nature, but nurture. The female role emphasizes submissiveness and passivity, Middlebrook (1974) observed; thus, girls learn that they are expected to yield to persuaders’ requests. However, this hypothesis is not supported by the facts. There are few strong sex differences in persuasibility (Eagly & Carli, 1981). When Eagly and Carli performed a meta-analysis of the gender and persuasion research, they discovered that only 1% of the variability in influenceability was accounted for by gender. There are more differences within the same gender than between men and women.

And yet, one intriguing piece of evidence did emerge that suggested the sex differences idea should not be totally discarded. When the investigators looked at research on group pressure situations—in which people are faced with the task of deciding whether to go along with a position advocated by members of a group—they found that women were more likely than men to yield to the advocated viewpoint. When subjects had to decide whether to yield to the group position, and believed that other group members would see or hear their responses, women were more likely than men to acquiesce. One possibility is that women are more insecure about their opinions in group settings than men. However, it is also possible that women yield not because they are bowled over by group opinion, but because “they are especially concerned with maintaining social harmony and insuring smooth interpersonal relations” (Eagly, 1978, p. 103). Yielding helps the conversation proceed and ensures that the group can continue with its business. Men perhaps are more concerned with showing independence, women with showing that they are helpful (Tannen, 1990).

Thus, although the final chapter on sex differences in persuasion has not been written—and never will be, as gender roles are in a state of flux—the once-common myth that women are more gullible than men is not supported by research. Like most things, gender effects on persuasibility are more complex than commonly assumed.

Summary

Someday perhaps, as psychological studies and genetic research advance, we will discover the prototypical gullible human being. More likely, given the complexity of human behavior, we will continue to discover that no personality trait is reliably associated with susceptibility to persuasion. Individuals may be more open to influence—by benign and (I’m afraid) manipulative persuaders—at certain times in their life, perhaps when they are young and lack experience with the issue (Fazio & Zanna, 1978).
Contemporary scholars emphasize that personality influences persuasibility, but not in the way ordinarily assumed. Individuals with a particular personality trait are not necessarily more gullible than others with a different trait. Instead, individuals with different personal characteristics are apt to be influenced by rather different persuasive appeals. To illustrate, I discuss three intriguing personality characteristics: need for cognition, self-monitoring, and dogmatism.

NEED FOR COGNITION

Do you enjoy thinking? Or do you only think as hard as you have to? Do you prefer complex to simple problems? Or do you gravitate to tasks that are important, but don’t require much thought?

These questions focus on the need for cognition, a personality characteristic studied by Cohen et al. (1955) and later by Cacioppo and his associates. Need for cognition (NFC) is “a stable individual difference in people’s tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity” (Cacioppo et al., 1996, p. 198). People high in need for cognition enjoy thinking abstractly. Those low in NFC say thinking is not their idea of fun, and they only think as hard as they have to (see Box 8–1).

**Box 8–1**

**NEED FOR COGNITION SCALE**

1. I would prefer complex to simple problems.
2. I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.
3. Thinking is not my idea of fun.
4. I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my cognitive abilities.
5. I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance I will have to think in depth about something.
6. I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.
7. I only think as hard as I have to.
8. I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones.
9. I like tasks that require little thought once I’ve learned them.
10. The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me.
11. I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.
12. Learning new ways to think doesn’t excite me very much.
13. I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.
14. The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me.
15. I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.
16. I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that required a lot of mental effort.
17. It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.
18. I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.

Note. Individuals indicate the extent to which each statement is characteristic of them on a 5-point scale: 1 means the item is extremely uncharacteristic of oneself, 5 that it is extremely characteristic. High-NFC individuals agree with items 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 18, but disagree with items 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16 and 17.

Short form of the need for cognition scale; see Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao (1984); (see also Cacioppo & Petty, 1982, for a report on the original NFC scale).

Need for cognition is not the same as intelligence. The two are related: You have to be somewhat intelligent to enjoy contemplating issues; thus, there is a modest relationship between verbal intelligence and need for cognition. However, two people could score high on verbal intelligence tests, yet one individual could find abstract thinking appealing, while the other could find it monotonous. Need for cognition is a motive, not an ability.

What does need for cognition have to do with persuasion? Plenty. Individuals high in need for cognition recall more message arguments, generate a greater number of issue-relevant thoughts, and seek more information about complex issues than those low in NFC (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Given that people high in need for cognition like to think, they should be more influenced by quality of message arguments than those low in NFC. And in fact cogent issue arguments do carry more weight with high-NFC individuals. By contrast, those low in NFC are more influenced by cues that save them from effortful thought. They are generally swayed more by such simple cues as source credibility, communicator attractiveness, and celebrity endorsements (Cacioppo et al., 1996; Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992). Of course, there are times when individuals who are low in need for cognition will pay close attention to the message. For example, when the issue bears on their personal lives, low-NFC folks will process arguments centrally.

These findings have interesting practical implications. They suggest that if persuaders are targeting messages to individuals they know are
high in need for cognition, they should make certain they employ strong arguments or make cogent appeals to respondents' values. If, on the other hand, the message is directed at low-NFC respondents, persuaders should develop appeals that don't tax these folks' mental capacities. Simple, clear appeals—the simpler, the better—are probably advisable. For example, Bakker (1999), in a study of AIDS prevention messages geared to low-NFC individuals, found that simple, visual safer sex messages were highly effective.

One cautionary note: It is easy to breeze through this and (on a personal level) conclude that it is better to be high than low in need for cognition. That is not necessarily so. You can be high in NFC, enjoy thinking abstractly, but puzzle so long about a simple issue that you lose the forest for the trees. One could be low in need for cognition and get straight to the heart of the issue, without getting bogged down in excessive detail. The key for persuaders is to accept individuals for what and who they are. Communicators are more apt to be successful if they match messages to individuals' personality styles. Individuals who enjoy thinking are more likely to change their minds when they receive cogent messages that stimulate central processing. By contrast, people who make decisions based on intuition and gut feelings may be more swayed by messages that sketch a vision or tug at the heartstrings (Aune & Reynolds, 1994; Smith, 1993).

**SELF-MONITORING**

Self-monitoring, a fascinating personality variable discussed in chapter 3, has intriguing implications for persuasion. As noted earlier, high self-monitors put a premium on displaying appropriate behavior in social situations. Adept at reading situational cues and figuring out the expected behavior in a given place and time, they adjust their behavior to fit the situation. By contrast, low self-monitors are less concerned with playing a role or displaying socially appropriate behavior. They prefer to "be themselves," and consequently they look to their inner attitudes and feelings when trying to decide how to behave. Attitudes are more likely to predict behavior for low than for high self-monitors.

What implications does self-monitoring have for persuasion? You might guess that high self-monitors are more susceptible to persuasion because they want to impress people or are nervous about how they come across with others. One might also speculate that low self-monitors are resistant to persuasion because they stubbornly insist on being themselves. It turns out that both high and low self-monitors are susceptible to influence, but are swayed by different psychological appeals.
The core notion is attitude function. Chapter 3 describes the different functions that attitudes perform for people, including helping people fit into social situations (social-adjustive) and aiding them in expressing key values (value-expressive function). Theorists argue that attitudes are more apt to serve a social-adjustive function for high self-monitors, concerned as they are with doing the socially appropriate thing. In the case of low self-monitors, attitudes should serve a value-expressive function, as they help these individuals fulfill the all-important need of being themselves (DeBono, 1987).

Kenneth G. DeBono tested this hypothesis in a study of attitudes toward treating the mentally ill in state hospitals and institutions. Tests conducted prior to the experiment revealed that most students opposed institutionalizing the mentally ill. Thus, the stage was set for determining whether social-adjustive and value-expressive appeals on this issue had different effects on high and low self-monitors.

High and low self-monitors listened to a social-adjustive or value-expressive argument in favor of institutionalizing the mentally ill. The social-adjustive message emphasized that the majority of students polled favored treating the mentally ill in hospitals and institutions, thereby providing information on the “socially correct” thing to do. The value-expressive communication stressed that the values of responsibility and loving (values that most students had previously rated as important) underlined favorable attitudes toward institutionalizing the mentally ill.

High self-monitors became more favorable toward institutionalizing the mentally ill after hearing the social-adjustive message. Low self-monitors were more influenced by the value-expressive appeal. Appeals that matched the individual’s personality style—or meshed with the appropriate attitude function—were more likely to influence individuals’ attitudes on the topic.

Interesting as these findings are, we need to be careful not to overgeneralize from the results of one study. The topic was modestly involving at best. It did not touch on deep personal concerns; nor did it bear directly on issues in individuals’ personal lives. It is likely that if we picked an issue that was deeply important to high self-monitors, they would be influenced by value-based arguments. Similarly, if the issue were one in which even low self-monitors felt concerned about being ostracized, we could sway them by appealing to social norms. Yet there are numerous issues that are of only modest or low interest to people, and in these situations, social-conformity appeals are apt to carry greater weight with high self-monitors, while value-expressive messages should exert a greater influence on low self-monitors.

Different sources can also have different effects on high and low self-monitors. High self-monitors, concerned as they are with social
appearances, devote a great deal of cognitive energy to processing a message when it is delivered by a prestigious, attractive, and popular source. By contrast, low self-monitors, focused as they are on "bottom-line values," are highly attentive when the message comes from an expert (DeBono & Harnish, 1988).

There is much we need to learn about self-monitoring and persuasion. Self-monitoring is a fascinating concept, a complex one too (see Briggs & Cheek, 1988). Undoubtedly, self-monitoring has different effects on attitudes in different situations, an issue worthy of future research. The self-monitoring scale (see Box 8–2) has been employed in hundreds of communication experiments, and you will glimpse its relevance to the world of advertising in chapter 11.

**BOX 8–2**

**THE SELF-MONITORING SCALE**

1. I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people.
2. My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs.
3. At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like.
4. I can only argue for ideas which I already believe.
5. I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information.
6. I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people.
7. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues.
8. I would probably make a good actor.
9. I rarely seek advice of my friends to choose movies, books, or music.
10. I sometimes appear to others to be experiencing deeper emotions than I actually am.
11. I laugh more when I watch a comedy with others than when alone.
12. In a group of people I am rarely the center of attention.
13. In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.
14. I am not particularly good at making other people like me.
15. Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend to be having a good time.
16. I'm not always the person I appear to be.
17. I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favor.
18. I have considered being an entertainer.
19. In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else.
20. I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting.
21. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.
22. At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going.
23. I feel a bit awkward in company and do not show up quite so well as I should.
24. I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end).
25. I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them.

Note. You answer each question True or False. High self-monitors would answer questions in this way: 1 (F); 2 (F); 3 (F); 4 (F); 5 (T); 6 (T); 7 (T); 8 (T); 9 (F); 10 (T); 11 (T); 12 (F); 13 (T); 14 (F); 15 (T); 16 (T); 17 (F); 18 (T); 19 (T); 20 (F); 21 (F); 22 (F); 23 (F); 24 (T); 25 (T). Low self-monitors would give the opposite response to each question.

From Snyder (1987)

**DOGMATISM**

A final personality variable that influences persuasion focuses on people's tendency to close off their minds to new ideas and accept only the opinions of conventional, established authorities. Highly dogmatic individuals fit this mold (Rokeach, 1960). Low-dogmatic individuals, by contrast, are open-minded, receptive to new ideas, and willing to consider good arguments on behalf of a position. Highly dogmatic individuals agree with statements like "Of all the different philosophies that exist in the world, there is probably only one which is correct," and "In this complicated world of ours the only way we can know what's going on is to rely on leaders or experts who can be trusted" (Rokeach, 1960). Low-dogmatic individuals naturally disagree with these items.

Individuals high in dogmatism find it difficult to come up with evidence that contradicts their beliefs (Davies, 1998). They also are willing to accept the views of an expert, even when he or she uses weak arguments to support the position (DeBono & Klein, 1993). Highly dogmatic individuals tend to be defensive and insecure; accepting the views of a recognized expert provides them with confidence and a sense of superiority.

Low-dogmatic individuals, feeling more motivated by a need to know than a desire to conform, are more willing to acknowledge shortcomings in their arguments. Strong arguments carry more weight with them than does the status of the communicator (DeBono & Klein, 1993).
It is hard to convince high-dogmatic individuals of anything. But you can make some headway if the communicator is a recognized expert. Low-dogmatic individuals are more open to persuasion, particularly from strong arguments. This points up a point made earlier in the book: There are cases in which receptivity to communication is a good thing, the mark of a healthy, flexible person.

CONCLUSIONS

Most of us assume that there is a type of person who is gullible and susceptible to manipulation. It turns out that the relationship between personality and persuasibility is more complex than this. The usual (and old-fashioned) suspects—low-self-esteem individuals, people low in intelligence, and women—turn out to be innocent of the charge that they are gullible. Adopting a more focused approach to the message and the person, researchers have found that need for cognition and self-monitoring are important personality variables. Appeals that match an individual's cognitive needs and self-monitoring tendency are more apt to be successful than those that are not in sync with the individual's cognitive motivation or self-monitoring orientation. The greater the degree that a communicator can fulfill an individual's psychological needs, the more likely it is that the message will change attitudes (see Fig. 8.1).

We don't know as much about personality traits that stiffen resistance to persuasion, although some speculate that argumentativeness has this effect (Infante & Rancer, 1996). We also lack knowledge about the particular situations in which personality traits such as self-monitoring and

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**FIG. 8.1** Personality, psychology, and attitude change.
need for cognition are most likely to influence persuasibility. Personality traits may have predictable influences on behavior, but they are apt to have stronger effects in certain contexts than others.

Although most research has examined the effect of personality on vulnerability to persuasion, personality can also influence techniques individuals use when they are working the other side of the street—that is, when they are trying to change audience members’ minds. People who enjoy arguing and regard it as an intellectual challenge are perceived as credible communicators and experience success in social influence (see Box 8–3). Arguing gets a bad reputation, but in reality this ancient art has personal and professional benefits.

**Box 8–3**

PERSONALITY AND ARGUMENTATION


The art of argumentation, long prized in communication, has fallen on hard times. Debate classes are no longer required. Students receive preciously little training in developing cogent, logical arguments. The term “argument” has a negative connotation, calling to mind obstinate, unpleasant, even aggressive individuals. Yet skill in arguing is an important ability to cultivate. It can sharpen the mind and help people appreciate the value of sound, logical thinking. Skill in argumentation can also lead to professional success, as arguments and discussions are a critical aspect of just about any job you can think of. Argumentative skill can also help negotiators defuse interpersonal and ethnic conflicts.

Argumentativeness is defined as “a generally stable trait which predisposes individuals in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people hold on these issues” (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 72). Infante and Rancer (1982) developed a reliable, valid 20-item scale to tap argumentativeness. If you are an argumentative person (which can be viewed as a positive trait), you would agree with items like these:

- I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue.
- I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument.
- I consider an argument an exciting intellectual challenge.
- I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.

Continued
Research shows that contrary to stereotype, argumentativeness confers social benefits. Individuals high in argumentativeness are viewed as more credible persuaders than those low in this trait, and are more inclined to employ a greater range of influence strategies. They also encourage others to give their opinions on controversial matters and are judged as more capable communicators (Infante & Rancer, 1996; Rancer, 1998). Interestingly, argumentative individuals are less apt to use their power to goad others into accepting their positions.

Argumentative individuals are not necessarily verbally aggressive, a point scholars emphasize. "When individuals engage in argumentativeness, they attack the positions that others take or hold on controversial issues," Rancer (1998) notes. "When individuals engage in verbal aggressiveness they attack the self-concept of the other," he adds (p. 152). Verbal aggressiveness includes insults, ridicule, and the universal put-down. It can be the province of the desperate communicator, the one who runs out of arguments and resorts to personal attacks. Do you know people who are verbally aggressive? They would be likely to agree with statements like these:

- When individuals are very stubborn, I use insults to soften the stubbornness.
- When I am not able to refute others' positions, I try to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.
- If individuals I am trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character.
- When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance I lose my temper and say rather strong things to them (Infante & Wigley, 1986).

Verbal aggressiveness reduces the persuader's credibility and overall communication effectiveness (Infante & Rancer, 1996; Wigley, 1998). It produces destructive, rather than constructive, outcomes. Rather than helping or convincing people, one ends up hurting their feelings or feeling guilty oneself.

Scholars are quick to point out that both argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness are more likely to be activated in certain situations than others, such as when the message concerns ego-involving issues. Noting the negative effects of verbal aggressiveness and the virtues of argumentativeness, researchers have developed training programs to teach individuals to argue constructively and to avoid getting enmeshed in destructive communication spirals (Rancer et al., 1997).
Edward Yourdon was nothing if not prepared. Fully expecting computers, cash machines, and VCRs to fail on January 1, 2000, the 55-year-old computer programmer took elaborate precautions. He relied on a backup computer to log onto the Internet. He stocked tuna fish and rice in a New Mexico home he built partly due to Y2K concerns, dividing his time between Taos and an apartment in New York. When the much-ballyhooed electronic problems failed to materialize on New Year’s Day, few would have been surprised if Mr. Yourdon expressed shame or embarrassment. Instead, the bulky computer programmer stuck by his predictions. “There is going to be another opportunity for bugs (on January 3),” he insisted. “It is possible that bugs will manifest themselves in coming days and weeks,” he said, apparently undaunted by reports that Y2K had arrived without serious incident. (Brooke, 2000)

When Litesa Wallace packed her bags for college at Western Illinois University some years back, she never harbored any doubt that she would pledge a sorority. The initiation rites for Delta Sigma Theta turned out to be a tad more severe than Litesa expected: doing 3,000 sit-ups, drinking hot sauce and vinegar, and swallowing her own vomit. While some might have quit at this point, Litesa endured the hardship. “She wanted to be in the sorority very badly. It’s very prestigious, and she believed that it would be beneficial to her life,” her attorney explained. Attorney? That’s right: Ms. Wallace sued the sorority for hazing after she was hospitalized for injuries sustained during the initiation period. Yet even as she awaited the outcome of her suit, Litesa remained a Delta, apparently feeling considerable loyalty to the sorority. (Pharnor, 1999)

The following conversation, from the 1982 movie The Big Chill, sheds light on a phenomenon with which we are all familiar:

_Sam:_ Why is it what you just said strikes me as a mass of rationalizations?
_Michael:_ Don’t knock rationalizations. Where would we be without it? I don’t know anyone who could get through the day without two or three juicy rationalizations. They’re more important than sex.
Sam: Ah, come on. Nothin's more important than sex.
Michael: Oh yeah? You ever gone a week without a rationalization?
(Steele, 1988)

What do these different examples have in common? They illustrate the powerful role that a phenomenon called cognitive dissonance plays in everyday life. You may have heard the term, cognitive dissonance. No surprise: It has become part of the popular lexicon. Writers, politicians, therapists, and ordinary folks use the words to describe conflict or negative feelings about issues. But what exactly does dissonance mean? Why did one psychologist call it the greatest achievement of social psychology (see Aron & Aron, 1989)? What did all those weird, but classic, dissonance experiments actually find? And how can dissonance principles be harnessed in the service of persuasion? This chapter examines these issues.

FOUNDATIONS

Cognitive dissonance is a bona fide theory, one of the oldies but goodies. It contains definitions, hypotheses, explanations, and theoretical statements. It has generated numerous studies, as well as disagreements among scholars as to just why a particular finding has emerged. It is a psychological theory, one of a wave of 1950s-style approaches that assumed people have an overarching need for cognitive consistency or balance. Leon Festinger developed the theory in 1957, conducted some of the major experiments on dissonance effects, and then departed from the social psychology scene to pursue studies of human perception. That was dissonant—or inconsistent—with what you would expect an established, successful theorist to do. But in a way it was typical of dissonance theory—a counterintuitive "reverse psychology" sort of approach that turned ideas on their head, but in a fashion that stimulated and intrigued scholars across the world.

So what do we mean by cognitive dissonance? Dissonance means discord, incongruity, or strife. Thus, cognitive dissonance means incongruity among thoughts or mental elements. Two cognitions are in a dissonant relationship when the opposite of one cognitive element follows from the other. For example, the idea that "eating junk food is bad for your heart" is ordinarily dissonant with the cognition that "I love junk food." The cognition "I just plunked down $20,000 for a car" is dissonant with the observation that "I just found out you can't accelerate past 60 on the highway in this piece of junk." The cognitions, "My boyfriend gets abusive when he's mad" and "I love him and want to stay
with him always,” are also dissonant. Finally, and most gravely, the cognition “The world is a beautiful and wonderful place” is dissonant with the realization that “evil people can kill thousands of innocent people in a single day.”

Dissonance, as these examples suggest, cuts across contexts. It is specifically and formally defined as a negative, unpleasant state that occurs whenever a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent (Aronson, 1968, p. 6). Notice that I say psychologically inconsistent. Two thoughts can be psychologically—but not logically—inconsistent. The cognition “I love junk food” is not logically inconsistent with the belief that “eating junk food is bad for your heart.” Knowing that a junk-food diet increases the risk of heart disease does not make it illogical to eat burgers, fries, and nuggets. However, the two cognitions arouse dissonance because psychologically it does not make sense—at least for most people—to engage in a behavior that increases the risk of disease.

Dissonance is a complex theory with many hypotheses. It has been refined many times over the years. Its core components remain the following:

1. Dissonance is psychologically uncomfortable, physiologically arousing, and drives individuals to take steps to reduce it.
2. Dissonance occurs when an individual: (a) holds two clearly incongruent thoughts, (b) freely performs a behavior that is inconsistent with an attitude, (c) makes a decision that rules out a desirable alternative, (d) expends effort to participate in what turns out to be a less-than-ideal activity, or (e) in general is unable to find sufficient psychological justification for an attitude or behavior he or she adopts.
3. The magnitude of dissonance depends on a host of factors, including the number of dissonant elements and the importance of the issue.
4. People are motivated to take steps to reduce dissonance, including changing their attitude in response to a persuasive message.
5. Different people employ different strategies to reduce dissonance. Some people are better at coping with dissonance than others.
6. People may not always succeed in alleviating dissonance, but they are motivated to try.

Dissonance theory is intriguing in an important respect. The theories discussed up to this point have emphasized that changes in attitude lead to changes in behavior. Dissonance theory suggests that the opposite can occur—changes in behavior can produce changes in attitude (Cooper & Scher, 1994). For this to happen, a critical requirement of persuasion must be satisfied: People must persuade themselves to adopt a new attitude on
Dissonance theory, as one would expect from a theory of persuasion, assigns central importance to the power of self-persuasion.

**Dissonance and Decision Making**

Life is filled with decisions, and decisions (as a general rule) arouse dissonance. For example, suppose you had to decide whether to accept a job in a stunningly beautiful area of the country, or turn down the job so you could be near friends and family. Either way, you would experience dissonance. If you took the job, you would miss loved ones; if you turned down the job, you would pine for the breathtaking mountains, luscious waterfalls, and great evening sunsets. Both alternatives have their good and bad points. The rub is that making a decision cuts off the possibility that you can enjoy the advantages of the unchosen alternative. It also ensures that you must accept the negative elements of the choice you make.

When trying to make up their minds, people frequently experience difficulty, confusion, and conflict. It's only after the decision is made that they experience the particular stress known as dissonance (Aronson, 1968). At this point, they truly are faced with two incompatible cognitions: I chose Alternative A; but this means I must forego the benefits of Alternative B (or C or D, for that matter). We don't experience dissonance after each and every decision. It's the ones that are the most important and least amenable to change that seem to trigger the greatest amount of cognitive dissonance (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). Thus, choosing between two equally desirable paper towels should ordinarily produce less dissonance than selecting between two attractive and similarly priced apartments. In addition, if you can revise your decision—take it back, so to speak—you should have less dissonance than if you have signed the deal on the dotted line and cannot revisit your choice, except with considerable psychological or financial pain. If you suddenly discover, after you signed your lease, that the apartment you're renting is located in a dwelling built with asbestos, you're apt to experience a good deal of cognitive dissonance.

Just how this would feel would depend on you and how you deal with decisional stress. But there is little doubt that it wouldn't feel good! Scholars have actually studied how dissonance "feels," and they conclude it's a complex amalgamation of physiological arousal, negative affect, and mental anguish (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Elkin & Leippe, 1986; Elliot & Devine, 1994).
So how do people cope with this discomfort we call dissonance? Theorists argue they employ a variety of different techniques. To illustrate, consider this example: You invite a close friend to a movie that has garnered favorable reviews. The movie, obligatory popcorn, and soft drinks are expensive, so you hope the film will pan out. It doesn't; the movie turns out to be a real loser, and you find yourself sitting there, hoping it will get better. Hope springs eternal; the movie stinks.

You're in a state of cognitive dissonance. The cognition "I spent a lot of money on this movie" is dissonant with the knowledge that the movie is no good. Or, the thought that "I'm personally responsible for ruining my friend's evening" is dissonant with your positive self-concept, or your desire to look good in your friend's eyes. How can you reduce dissonance? Research suggests you will try one or several of these techniques:

1. **Change your attitude.** Convince yourself it's a great flick on balance—this may be hard if the movie is really bad.
2. **Add consonant cognitions.** Note how cool the cinematography is or decide that one of the actors delivered an especially convincing portrayal.
3. **Derogate the unchosen alternative.** Tell yourself that going to a movie beats sitting at home listening to CDs.
4. **Spread apart the alternatives.** Let's assume that before you made the choice, you felt just as positively about going to a movie as you did about spending the evening at home. In effect, the two choices were "tied" at 4 on a 5-point scale in your mind. You would spread apart the alternatives by figuratively pushing the movie up to a 4.5 and dropping staying at home to a 3. This would work until it became clear the movie was a disappointment.
5. **Alter the importance of the cognitive elements.** Trivialize the decision by telling yourself it's only a movie, just two hours of your life.
6. **Suppress thoughts.** Deny the problem and just try to get into the movie as much as you can.
7. **Communicate.** Talk up the movie with your friend, using the conversation to convince yourself it was a good decision.
8. **Alter the behavior.** Leave.

It's amazing how few people seem to avail themselves of the last option. Don't we frequently sit through a bad movie, spending our valuable cognitive energy justifying and rationalizing instead of saving ourselves the hardship by walking out? Yet this is consistent with dissonance theory. Dissonance theorists emphasize that people prefer easier to harder
ways of changing cognitive elements (Simon et al., 1995). It's hard to alter behavior. Behavior is well learned and can be costly to modify. Walking out could be embarrassing. You might also be wrong; the movie might turn out to be really good at precisely the moment you left. Of course, sticking through a lemon of a movie is not necessarily rational; it's an example of what psychologists call a sunk cost (Garland, 1990). You are not going to get the money back, no matter how much you convince yourself that it was a great film. However, as dissonance theorists are fond of reminding us, human beings are not rational animals, but rationalizing animals, seeking "to appear rational, both to others and (themselves)" (Aronson, 1968, p. 6).

How apt a description of human decision making! Immediately after people make up their minds to embark on one course rather than another, they bear an uncanny resemblance to the proverbial ostrich, sticking their heads in the sand to avoid perspectives that might conflict with the option they chose, doing all they can to reaffirm the wisdom of their decision. If you chose the Saturn instead of the Honda (chapter 5), and suddenly learned that the Saturn's engine is not as well constructed as the Honda's, your first impulse might be to deny this, then perhaps to counterargue it, or to focus on areas in which the Saturn is clearly superior to the Honda. Or, to take another example, let's say a friend of yours smokes a pack a day. If you asked her why she smokes, you would hear a long list of rationalizations speaking to the power of dissonance reduction. Her reasons might include: "I know I should quit, but I've got too much stress right now to go through quitting again"; "I guess I'd rather smoke than pig out and end up looking like a blimp"; and "Hey, we're all going to die anyway. I'd rather do what I enjoy." All these reasons make great sense to your friend; they help restore consonance, but they prevent her from taking the steps needed to preserve her health. Such is the power of cognitive dissonance.

**DISSONANCE AND EXPENDITURE OF EFFORT**

Have you ever wondered why fraternity pledges come to like a fraternity more after they have undergone a severe initiation procedure? Ever been curious why law students who have survived the torturous experience of being asked to cite legal precedent before a class of hundreds come to think positively of their law school professors? Or why medical interns who work 30-hour shifts, with barely any sleep, vigorously defend the system, sometimes viewing it as a grand way to learn the practice of medicine (Kleinfield, 1999). An explanation of these phenomena can be found in the application of dissonance theory to the expenditure of effort.
The core notion here is quite simple. Aronson and Mills (1959) explained that:

No matter how attractive a group is to a person it is rarely completely positive; i.e., usually there are some aspects of the group that the individual does not like. If he has undergone an unpleasant initiation to gain admission to the group, his cognition that he has gone through an unpleasant experience for the sake of membership is dissonant with the cognition that there are things about the group that he does not like. (p. 177)

One way to reduce dissonance is to convince oneself that the group has many positive characteristics that justify the expenditure of effort.

Elliot Aronson and Judson Mills tested this hypothesis long ago—in 1959. Yet their findings have been replicated by other experimenters, and continue to shed light on events occurring today. Like many researchers of their era, they preferred to set up a contrived procedure to study dissonance and effort. Believing that they needed to provide a pure test of the hypothesis, they devised an experiment in which female college students were told they would be participating in several group discussions on the psychology of sex. Informed that the group had been meeting for several weeks and they would be replacing a woman who dropped out due to scheduling conflicts, women in the experimental condition were told they would be screened before gaining formal admission to the group. (The experimenters deliberately chose women, perhaps because they felt that the sexual words they would ask women to read would have a stronger effect on these 1950s coeds than on male students. Researchers conducting the study in today's savvy college environment would no doubt employ a different procedure.)

Students assigned to the severe initiation condition read aloud 12 obscene words and 2 graphic descriptions of sexual activity from contemporary novels. Women in the mild initiation condition read 5 sex-related words that were not obscene. Subjects in both conditions were then informed they had performed satisfactorily and had been admitted into the group. All the women subsequently listened to a tape-recorded discussion of a group meeting. The discussion was made to seem dull and banal, with group members speaking dryly and contradicting each other. The discussion was set up this way to arouse dissonance. Female participants in the study had to confront the fact that they had undergone a humiliating experience, reading sexual words in front of some guy they had never met, for the sake of membership in a group that seemed boring and dull.

You might think that women in the severe initiation condition would dislike the group. Indeed, simple learning models would suggest that the
unpleasant experience these women underwent would increase antipathy to the group. However, dissonance theory made the opposite prediction. It predicted that women in the severe initiation treatment would evaluate the group most positively. They had the most dissonance, and one way to reduce it would be to rationalize the unpleasant initiation by convincing themselves that the group discussion was not as bad as it seemed and was, in some sense, worth the pain they endured. This is what happened: Women in the severe initiation condition gave the group discussion higher ratings than other subjects.

Although Aronson and Mills' study was intriguing, it did not convince all researchers. Some suggested that perhaps the severe initiation procedure did not embarrass the women at all, but aroused them sexually! If this were true, women in the severe initiation condition would have liked the group more because they associated the pleasant arousal with the group experience (Chapanis & Chapanis, 1964). To rule out this and other alternative explanations, researchers conducted a different test of the effort justification hypothesis, one that involved not a sexual embarrassment test but, rather, different initiation procedures. Using these operationalizations, experimenters found additional support for the Aronson and Mills findings (Cooper & Axsom, 1982; Gerard & Mathewson, 1966).

Applications

We must be careful not to glibly apply these findings to the real world. People do not always rationalize effort by changing their attitude toward the group; they may reduce dissonance in other ways—for example, by trivializing the initiation rite. In some cases, the effort expended is so enormous and the initiation ceremony so humiliating that people cannot convince themselves that the group is worth it. This helps explain why Litesa Wallace, the young woman mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, sued her sorority (while still remaining a Delta). (In response to such egregious cases, antihazing Web sites have cropped up; see www.stop.hazing.org.)

And yet, the effort justification notion sheds light on numerous real-life situations. It helps explain why fraternities and sororities still demand that pledges undergo stressful initiation ceremonies. Seniors who underwent the initiation procedure as freshmen rationalize the effort expended, develop a favorable attitude to the group, and derive gratification from passing on this tradition to new recruits (Marklein, 2000; see Fig. 9.1).

Effort justification also can be harnessed for positive purposes. Jewish children spend countless Saturdays and Sundays learning Hebrew and
FIG. 9.1 Why do fraternities like this one frequently require their pledges to undergo challenging—even stressful—initiation ceremonies? Dissonance theory offers a compelling explanation. (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)
reciting the Torah in preparation for their Bar and Bas Mitzvahs. The time spent is dissonant with the knowledge they could be having more fun doing other things, but in the end the need to reduce dissonance pushes them to evaluate the experience positively. This enables the ritual—and religion—to get passed on to future generations.

**INDUCED COMPLIANCE**

What happens if a person is coaxed to publicly argue for a position he or she does not privately accept? Further, what if the individual is paid a paltry sum to take this position? Suppose you gave a speech that advocated banning cell phone use in cars, although you privately disagreed with this position? Let’s say someone paid you a dollar to take this stand. Dissonance theory makes the unusual prediction that under these circumstances, you would actually come to evaluate the proposal favorably.

This prediction is part of a phenomenon known as *induced compliance*. The name comes from the fact that a person has been induced—gently persuaded—to comply with a persuader’s request. The person freely chooses to perform an action that is inconsistent with his or her beliefs or attitude. Such actions are called counterattitudinal. When individuals perform a counterattitudinal behavior and cannot rationalize the act—as they could if they had received a large reward—they are in a state of dissonance. One way to reduce dissonance is to change one’s attitude so that it is consistent with the behavior—that is, convince oneself that one really agrees with the discrepant message.

This hypothesis was elegantly tested and supported by Leon Festinger and J. Merrill Carlsmith in 1959. Students were asked to perform two tasks that were phenomenally boring: (1) placing spools on a tray, emptying the tray, and refilling it with spools; and (2) turning each of 48 pegs on a peg board a quarter turn clockwise, then another quarter turn, and so on for half an hour. In what could have been an episode from the TV show, *Spy TV*, the experimenter then asked students to do him a favor: to tell the next participant in the study that this monotonous experiment had been enjoyable, exciting, and a lot of fun. You see, the experimenter suggested, the person who usually does this couldn’t do it today, and we’re looking for someone we could hire to do it for us. The whole thing was a ruse: There was no other person who usually performed the task. The intent was to induce students to say that a boring task was enjoyable—a dissonant act. There was also a twist.

Some students were paid $20 for telling the lie, others were paid $1, and those in a control condition didn’t tell a lie at all. Participants then rated the enjoyableness of the tasks. As it turned out, those paid $1 said
TABLE 9.1
Results of Festinger and Carlsmith Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>$1</th>
<th>$20</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How enjoyable were tasks? (rated from $-5$ to $+5$)</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Scientific importance of tasks (rated from 0 to 10)</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Willingness to partake in similar experiments (rated from $-5$ to $+5$)</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Festinger and Carlsmith (1959)

they liked the tasks more and displayed greater willingness to participate in similar experiments in the future than did other students (see Table 9.1).

How can we explain the findings? According to theory, the cognition that “the spool-removing and peg-turning tasks were really boring” was dissonant with the cognition that “I just told someone it was lots of fun.” The $20 provided students with external justification for telling the lie. It helped them justify why they said one thing (the tasks were exciting), yet believed another (they were really boring). They received $20; that helped them feel good about the whole thing, and they had no need to change their attitude to restore consonance. Like a stiff drink that helps people forget their sorrows, the $20 helped erase the dissonance, or sufficiently so that students didn’t feel any need to change their attitude toward the tasks.

For students paid $1, it was a different matter. Lacking a sufficient external justification for the inconsistency, they had to turn inward to get one. They needed to bring their private attitude in line with their public behavior. One way to do this was to change their attitude toward the tasks. By convincing themselves that “the thing with the spools wasn’t so bad, it gave me a chance to do something, perfect my hand-eye coordination, yeah, that’s the ticket,” they could comfortably believe that the statement they made to fellow students (“I had a lot of fun”) actually reflected their inner feelings. Dissonance was thus resolved; they had restored cognitive harmony.

Note that these findings are exactly the opposite of what you might expect based on common sense and classic learning theory. Both would suggest that people paid more money would like something more. Reward leads to liking, right? Not according to dissonance theory. Indeed, the negative relationship between reward and liking, consistent with cognitive dissonance theory, has held up in other studies conceptually replicating the Festinger and Carlsmith experiment (Harmon-Jones, 2002; Preiss & Allen, 1998).
The early research had exciting theoretical implications. As researcher Elliot Aronson observed:

As a community we have yet to recover from the impact of this research—fortunately! . . . Because the finding departed from the general orientation accepted either tacitly or explicitly by most social psychologists in the 1950s: (that) high reward—never low reward—is accompanied by greater learning, greater conformity, greater performance, greater satisfaction, greater persuasion. . . . (But in Festinger and Carlsmith,) either reward theory made no prediction at all or the opposite prediction. These results represented a striking and convincing act of liberation from the dominance of a general reward-reinforcement theory. (Aron & Aron, 1989, p. 116)

More generally, the results of this strange—but elegantly conducted—experiment suggested that people could not be counted on to slavishly do as experts predicted. They were not mere automatons whose thoughts could be controlled by behavioral engineering or psychologists' rewards. Like Dostoyevsky's underground man, who celebrated his emotion and spontaneity, dissonance researchers rejoiced in the study's findings, for they spoke to the subjectivity and inner-directedness of human beings.

Applications

The great contribution of induced compliance research is theoretical, in suggesting new ways to think about human attitudes and persuasion. However, the research does have practical applications. The negative incentive effect—paying people less changes their attitudes more—can be applied to the problem of motivating individuals to engage in positive, healthy acts they would rather not perform. For example, consider the case of a parent who wants to convince a couch-potato child to exercise more. Should the parent pay the kid each time she or he jogs, plays tennis, or swims laps? Dissonance theory says no. It stipulates that children frequently face dissonance after engaging in vigorous physical exercise—for example, "I just ran a mile, but, geez, did that hurt"; I just ran five laps, but I could have been watching a DVD." By paying sons or daughters money for exercising, parents remove children's motivation to change their attitudes. The money provides strong external justification, erasing the dissonance: The child no longer feels a need to change an antiexercise attitude so that it is compatible with behavior (jogging a mile a day). Instead, the money bridges thought and action, and becomes the main thing the child gets out of the event. Thus, the same old negative attitude toward exercise persists.

By contrast, if parents don't pay their children a hefty sum (or give them only a paltry reward), children must reduce the dissonance on their own.
To be sure, kids may not restore consonance by developing a positive attitude toward exercise (they could blame their parents for "forcing" them to jog, or just complain about how sore their bodies feel). But it is entirely possible—and I've seen examples of this with parents in my neighborhood, to say nothing of research that backs it up (Deci, 1975)—children will change their attitude to fit their behavior. They develop a positive attitude toward exercise to justify their behavior. And once this happens, their attitude "grows legs" (Cialdini, 2001). Exercise becomes a positive, not a negative, force in their lives; it becomes associated with pleasant activities; and the attitude motivates, then triggers behavior. The child begins to exercise spontaneously, on his or her own, without parental prodding.

EXPLANATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES

When a theory is developed, researchers test it to determine if it holds water. If hypotheses generated from the theory are empirically supported, researchers are elated: They have come upon a concept that yields new insights, and they have landed a way to publish studies that enhance their professional reputations. But once all this happens, the question "What have you done for me lately?" comes to mind. The ideas become rather familiar. What's more, scholars begin wondering just why the theory works and come to recognize that it may hold only under particular conditions. These new questions lead to revisions of the theory and advance science. They also help to "keep the theory young" by forcing tests in new eras, with new generations of scholars and different social values.

Dissonance theory fits this trajectory. After the studies of the 1950s and 1960s were completed (yes, they were conducted that long ago!), scholars began asking deeper questions about dissonance theory. They began to wonder just why dissonance leads to attitude change and whether there weren't other reasons why individuals seek to restore dissonance than those Festinger posited. Many theorists proposed alternative accounts of dissonance and tested their ideas. These studies were published from the 1970s through the 1990s, and they continue to fill journals and books today (Harmon-Jones, 2002; Mills, 1999).

The catalyst for this research was the Festinger and Carlsmith boring-task study previously discussed. Like a Rorschach projection test, it has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars. Their research suggests that when people engage in counterattitudinal behavior, there is more going on than you might think. Four explanations of the study have been advanced. Each offers a different perspective on human nature and
persuasion. Yet all four agree on one point: Festinger’s thesis—people are driven by an overarching need to reduce inconsistency—is not the only psychological engine that leads to dissonance reduction. Students in the boring-task study may have been bothered by the inconsistency between attitude toward the task and behavior (telling others it was enjoyable). However, there were other reasons why they changed their attitude than the mere discomfort inconsistency causes. Let’s review these four perspectives on cognitive dissonance.

1. Unpleasant Consequences + Responsibility = Dissonance

What really bothered students in Festinger and Carlsmith’s experiment, researcher Joel Cooper has suggested, is that they might be personally responsible for having caused unpleasant consequences (Scher & Cooper, 1989). By leading an innocent person to believe that a monotonous study was enjoyable, they had arguably caused a fellow student to develop an expectation that would not be met by reality. This realization caused them discomfort. To alleviate the pain, they convinced themselves that the task was really interesting. Thus, it was not inconsistency per se, but “the desire to avoid feeling personally responsible for producing the aversive consequence of having harmed the other participant” that motivated attitude change (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999, p. 14).

2. Dissonance Occurs When You Are Concerned You Look Bad in Front of Others

This view emphasizes people’s need to manage impressions or present themselves positively in front of other people (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971). Theorists argue that students in Festinger and Carlsmith’s study did not really change their attitudes, but only marked down on the questionnaire that they liked the task to avoid being viewed negatively by the experimenter. Concerned that the experimenter would look down on them for being willing to breach their ethics for the reward of $1, students in the $1 condition strategically changed their attitude so it looked as if they really liked the task. Thus, they could not be accused of selling their souls for a trivial sum of money (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). In addition, students in the $1 condition may not have wanted to appear inconsistent in the experimenter’s eyes (i.e., of telling a fellow student the tasks were fun and then marking down on the survey that they were boring). Perceiving that people think more favorably of you when you are consistent, they indicated on the survey that they liked the task, thus giving the impression they exhibited consistency between attitude and behavior.
3. Dissonance Involves a Threat to Self-Esteem

The self-concept is at the center of this interpretation. In Aronson's (1968) view, students in Festinger and Carlsmith's study experienced dissonance between the cognition "I am a good and moral person" and the knowledge that "I just lied to someone, and I won't have a chance to 'set him straight because I probably won't see him again'" (p. 24). Students were not bothered by the mere inconsistency between thoughts, but by the fact that their behavior was inconsistent with—or violated—their positive self-concept. Of course, lying is not dissonant to a pathological liar; yet it was assumed that for most people, telling a fib would be moderately dissonant with their views of themselves as honest individuals. The self-concept is at the center of other contemporary views of dissonance reduction, such as Steele's (1988) theory, which takes a slightly different approach to the issue.

4. It's Not Dissonance, but Self-Perception

Daryl J. Bem (1970) argued that effects observed in experiments like Festinger and Carlsmith's had nothing to do with cognitive dissonance, but were due to an entirely different psychological process. Unlike the three explanations just discussed, Bem dismisses dissonance entirely. Arguing that people aren't so much neurotic rationalizers as dispassionate, cool observers of their own behavior, Bem suggests that people look to their own behavior when they want to understand their attitudes. Behavior leads to attitude, Bem (1972) argues, but not because people want to bring attitude in line with behavior to gain consistency. Instead, behavior causes attitude because people infer their attitudes from observing their behavior. For example, according to Bem, a young woman forms her attitude toward vegetarian food by observing her behavior: "I'm always eating noodles and pasta—I never order meat from restaurants anymore. I must really like veggie food." Or a guy decides he likes a girl, not on the basis of his positive thoughts, but because he observes that "I'm always calling her on the phone and am excited when she calls. I must really like her."

Applying this analysis to Festinger and Carlsmith's classic experiment, Bem argued that students paid $20 to say a boring task was interesting quickly looked to the situation, asked themselves why they would do this, and observed that they had just been paid $20 to make the statement. "Oh, I must have done it for the money," they concluded. Having reached this judgment, there was not the slightest reason for them to assume that their behavior reflected an attitude.

Subjects paid $1 looked dispassionately at their behavior to help decide why they told the other student the task was fun. Noting they had
received only a buck to lie, they concluded, "I sure didn’t do this for the money." Seeking to further understand why they behaved as they did, the $1 subjects then asked themselves, "Now why would I have told the experimenter the tasks were interesting? I didn’t get any big external reward for saying this." Then came the explanation, obvious and plausible: "I must have really liked those tasks. Why else would I have agreed to make the statements?" These inferences—rather than rationalizations—led to the $1 students’ forming a favorable attitude toward the tasks.

The Dissonance Debate: Intellectual Issues

Who’s right? Who’s wrong? Which view has the most support or the most adherents? What’s the right answer?

These questions probably occur to you as you read the different views of dissonance. However, there is usually not one correct interpretation of a complex phenomenon, but many. Thus, there are various reasons why low rewards or counterattitudinal advocacy leads to attitude change. Inconsistency between cognitions, feeling responsible for producing negative consequences, discomfort at looking bad in front of others, perceiving that one has engaged in behavior that is incongruent with one’s sense of self, and subsequent self-perceptions all motivate individuals to change attitudes to fit behavior. Theorists continue to debate which theory does the best job of explaining the research on cognitive dissonance.

There is currently an intellectual tug-of-war going on between those who believe dissonance occurs when one feels responsible for having caused aversive consequences (the first interpretation discussed earlier), and others who believe dissonance is a broader phenomenon, one that occurs even when counterattitudinal behavior does not lead to especially negative outcomes (Harmon-Jones et al., 1996). The second interpretation, impression management, remains viable, but has been undercut to some degree by evidence that dissonance reduction occurs in private settings, in which impressing others is less salient (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). Skipping to the fourth view, self-perception, I note that Bem’s theory has stimulated much discussion and has many interesting implications for persuasion (see chapter 10). However, research shows that self-perception can’t explain away all dissonance phenomena. Individuals aren’t always dispassionate observers of their own behavior, but are motivated to rationalize, justify, and persuade themselves, particularly after they have committed actions that bother them greatly (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). Contrary to Bem, we don’t just sit back and observe our behavior like neutral spectators. We’re concerned when our behavior has adverse personal or social consequences, and we are motivated to redress the cognitive dissonance.
The third interpretation, focusing on the self-concept, continues to intrigue researchers, probably because it centers on that quintessential human attribute: the ego (Mailer, 1999).

Researchers disagree on several technical points. For example, some scholars emphasize that people are bothered when they perform an action that is inconsistent with their self-concepts (Aronson, 1999). Others from the self-concept school argue that people are less concerned with maintaining consistency between self and behavior than in engaging in actions that affirm their global sense of self (J. Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1999; Steele, 1988). According to this view, individuals can reduce dissonance that arises from taking a counterattitudinal position by performing an action that restores global self-integrity, even if it is not related to the issue in question (see Box 9–1). The self-concept approach to the self is intriguing and continues to generate intellectual dialogue among researchers (Stone et al., 1997).

**BOX 9–1**

**DISSONANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH**

One of the great things about dissonance theory is that nearly half a century after it was formulated, it continues to contain enlightening ideas about everyday life. Some of these ideas have interesting implications for mental health. Here are five suggestions, culled from theory and research, for how to harness dissonance in the service of a happier, healthier life:

1. *Expect to experience dissonance after a decision.* Don’t expect life to be clean and free of stress. If you choose one product or side of the issue instead of another and the selection was difficult, there is bound to be discomfort.

2. *Don’t feel you have to eliminate the dissonance immediately.* Some people, uncomfortable with dissonance, mentally decree that no unpleasant thoughts about the decision should enter their mind. But sometimes the more we try to suppress something, the more apt it is to return to consciousness (Wegner et al., 1987). Dissonance can present us with a learning experience; it can help us come to grips with aspects of decisions we didn’t like or positions that have more of a gray area than we believed at the outset. The thinking that dissonance stimulates can help us make better decisions, or deliver more compelling persuasive communication next time around. Of course, it is perfectly natural to want to reduce dissonance that follows a decision or performance of a behavior. However, we should also be open to the possibility that dissonance can be a teaching tool, as well as an annoyance—a phenomenon that can deepen our understanding of human experience.

*Continued*
3. Don't feel bound to each and every commitment you make. Dissonance research indicates that once people make a public commitment, they are loath to change their minds, for fear of looking bad or having to confront the fact that they made a mistake, and so on. But there are times—such as undergoing a cruel initiation rite to join a sorority—when backing out of a commitment may be the healthy thing to do. Naturally, we should try to honor our commitments as much as possible, but we also should not feel obligated to do something unhealthy or unethical just because we sunk a lot of time into the project.

4. Recognize that some people need consistency more than others. Robert B. Cialdini and his colleagues (1995) report that there are intriguing individual differences in preference for consistency. Some people are more apt than others to agree with statements like: “I get uncomfortable when I find my behavior contradicts my beliefs,” “I make an effort to appear consistent to others,” and “I’m uncomfortable holding two beliefs that are inconsistent” (p. 328). We're not all cut from the same consistency cloth, and we're apt to have more pleasant interactions with others if we accept that they may need more or less consistency than we do.

5. Be creative in your attempts to reduce dissonance. You may not be able to reduce all the dissonance that results from a decision or performance of behavior. A young woman who smokes, quits for a while, and then starts up again is apt to feel dissonance. A deadbeat dad may finally feel guilt or discomfort after years of leaving and neglecting his kids. According to Claude M. Steele and his colleagues, these individuals feel dissonant because they have performed actions that call into question their self-worth or sense of themselves as competent, good people (J. Aronson et al., 1999; Steele, 1988). Given that this is the root of dissonance, these folks can alleviate dissonance by doing things that help them look good in their own eyes, Steele argues. Although the smoker can’t reduce all the dissonance aroused by her failure to quit, she might restore a sense of self-competence by completing important projects at work or doing other things that show she can follow up on personal promises she makes. Realistically, the deadbeat dad may have alienated his kids so much he can’t do much to regain their trust. However, he might be able to restore a positive sense of self by at least celebrating their major accomplishments, or by taking the radically different step of spending time with other children in need.

The same processes can work at the national level. Millions of Americans felt waves of pain and dissonance after the September 11 attacks. (The dissonance was complex, an outgrowth of a realization that America was now vulnerable, as well as recognition that the belief in a good and just world had been shattered more deeply than before.) Knowing they could not bring these beliefs back to life (anymore than
they could bring back the lives of the people killed that September morn-
ing), they sought to restore consonance by volunteering—sending money and food to victims, giving blood, even helping rescue workers at the World Trade Center. Collectively, these actions may have restored pride in America and reaffirmed a strong belief in the fundamental decency of human beings.

Summary

If you can think of a time you performed a behavior that caused harm to someone else, violated your self-concept, embarrassed you, or was just plain inconsistent with what you believe, you can appreciate the power of cognitive dissonance. About half a century after Festinger invented the concept, the idea is still going strong; it continues to stimulate dialogue among scholars. There is no question that dissonance produces genuine, abiding changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. It has particularly powerful effects when the issue is important to the individual and touches on the self-concept. What’s more, the person must have freely chosen to perform the advocated behavior. Dissonance does not produce attitude change when behavior is coerced; in such situations, the person feels no internal need to rationalize the behavior. Dissonance, like persuasion, occurs under situations of free choice.

This brings us to the final issue in this chapter, an important one for this book—implications of dissonance theory for attitude change. The next section explores ways in which communication experts can use dissonance theory to influence attitudes in a variety of real-life settings.

Dissonance theorists take a decidedly different approach to persuasion than approaches reviewed in earlier chapters. Rather than trying to accommodate the other person’s thinking or speech style, like the ELM or speech accommodation, dissonance theory is confrontational. It suggests that persuaders deliberately arouse cognitive dissonance and then let psychology do its work. Once dissonance is evoked, individuals should be motivated to reduce the discomfort. One way they can do this is to change their attitude in the direction the persuader recommends.

Calling on the major implications of the approaches previously discussed, we can suggest several concrete ways that persuaders can use dissonance theory to change attitudes.
1. **Encourage people to publicly advocate a position with which they disagree.**

If someone who harbors a prejudiced attitude toward minorities or gays can be coaxed into making a tolerant statement in public, she may feel cognitive dissonance. She privately harbors a negative attitude, but has now made an accepting speech in public. This may heighten the dissonance and, in some instances, motivate the individual to bring her attitude in line with public behavior. In a study that tested this hypothesis, Michael R. Leippe and Donna Eisenstadt (1994) gave White students an opportunity to write essays endorsing a scholarship policy that would significantly increase money available to Blacks, presumably at the expense of Whites. White students who believed their essays could be made public became more favorable toward both the policy and African Americans.

Interestingly, a judge used a variant of this procedure on a bigot who burned a Black doll and a cross in Black residents' yards. In addition to using coercive punishments—such as sentencing him to jail—the judge ordered the man to go to the library to research the impact of cross burnings (Martin, 2001). Studying the issue in a public setting might lead the man to think through and come to grips with his racist attitudes, perhaps inducing attitude change.

2. **Confront people with their own hypocrisy.**

Jeff Stone and his colleagues employed this procedure in a 1994 study of safer sex. Recognizing that most students believe they should use condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS, but do not always practice what they preach, Stone et al. reasoned that if they reminded individuals of this fact, "the resulting inconsistency between (students') public commitment and the increased awareness of their current risky sexual behavior should cause dissonance" (p. 117). To alleviate dissonance, students might begin to practice safer sex.

Participants in the study were led to believe they were helping design an AIDS prevention program for use at the high school level. Experimental group subjects wrote a persuasive speech about safer sex and delivered it in front of a video camera. Some students read about circumstances that made it difficult for people to use condoms. They also made a list of reasons why they had not used condoms in the past. This was designed to provoke inconsistency or induce hypocrisy. (Control group subjects did not list these reasons or make the safer sex speech before a video camera.) All students were given an opportunity to buy condoms, using the $4 they had earned for participating in the study.

As predicted, more students in the hypocrisy condition purchased condoms and bought more condoms than students in the control condition. Their behavior was apparently motivated by the discomfort and guilt they experienced when they recognized they did not always practice what they preached (O'Keefe, 2000).
As intriguing as Stone and his colleagues’ findings are, we need to be cautious about glibly endorsing hypocrisy induction as a method for safer sex induction. First, making people feel hypocritical may make them angry, and that may cause the treatment to boomerang. Second, safer sex requests in real-world situations meet up against a variety of roadblocks, including the pleasures of sex, reluctance to offend a partner by proposing condom use, and even anxiety about being physically assaulted if one suggests using a condom. Hypocrisy induction may change attitudes in the short term, but may not influence behavior that occurs in such high-pressure sexual situations. Still, it’s an important start. More generally, letting people know that a behavior they perform, or position they endorse, is incompatible with an important component of their self-concepts can make them feel uncomfortable. It may provide just the right psychological medicine to goad them into changing their attitudes (see Box 9–2).

**BOX 9–2**

**90210 DISSONANCE**

This story is about a father and teenage son who live in the 90210 zip code region of the United States 90210. You know where that is: Beverly Hills. All too ordinary in some respects, the story concerns a high school student who was heavily dependent on drugs, and a dad who found out and tried to do something about it. The story, originally broadcast on the National Public Radio program *This American Life* on January 16, 1998, would not be relevant to this chapter except for one small but important fact: The father used dissonance theory to try to convince his son to quit doing drugs. His dad probably had never heard of cognitive dissonance, but his persuasive effort is a moving testament to the ways that dissonance can be used in family crisis situations. Here is what happened:

Joshua, a student at plush Beverly Hills High School, got involved with drugs in a big way. “I failed English. I failed P.E. even, which is difficult to do, unless, you’re, you know, running off getting stoned whenever you’re supposed to be running around the track. And I just, you know, I just did whatever I wanted to do whenever I wanted to do it,” he told an interviewer. He stole money from his parents regularly to finance his drug habit.

Joshua had no reason to suspect his parents knew. But strange things began to happen. His dad started to punish him, grounding him on the eve of a weekend he planned to do LSD, offering no reason for the punishment. Claiming there was going to be a drug bust at Beverly Hills High, Josh’s dad revealed the names of students who were doing drugs. How could his father know this? Josh wondered.

*Continued*
About a month later, Josh and a buddy were hanging out in his backyard. The night before, there had been a big windstorm. It ripped off a panel from the side of the house. He and his friend were smoking a joint, like they did every day after school, when his buddy, noticing the downed panel, suddenly said, “Dude, what is this? Come here, dude. Come here, dude. Look at this.” Josh saw only a strange piece of machinery inside a wall when his buddy shocked him. “Dude, your parents are taping your calls.”

Suddenly, Josh understood. That explained his dad’s punishments and knowledge of the high school drug group. At this point, the radio program switched to Josh’s dad, who revealed what had happened. He said he became upset when Josh’s grades plunged and his son “started acting like a complete fool.” Concerned and noticing that Josh spent a lot of time on the phone, he decided to tape-record Josh’s phone calls. The ethical aspects of this appeared not to bother the father.

Aware his dad was taping him, Josh made a decision. He would not quit drugs—that was too great a change—but would tell his friends that he was going straight when they talked on the phone. This worked for a while until Josh felt guilty about lying to his father. He valued his relationship with his dad and decided to talk to him. He cornered his dad at a party and told him that he knew he had been taping his phone calls.

In a dramatic admission, his father conceded he had been tape-recording Josh’s conversations and said he was not going to do it anymore. He then told his son that there was something he didn’t know yet, and perhaps would not understand. “Josh”, he said, “you think that because I’m your father and I am in this role of the disciplinarian, that it’s between you and me. What you haven’t realized yet is that your actions have far more impact on your own life than they will on mine.” He told Josh that he was going to take out the tape recorder the following day. At this point, Josh was waiting for a punishment—a severe punitive action, he assumed, perhaps military school. “I’ll take the tape recorder out tomorrow,” his dad said, “and there is only one thing I want you to do. I have about 40 tapes. I am going to give them to you, and I want you to listen to them, and that’s all I ask.”

With this statement, Josh’s dad hoped to unleash cognitive dissonance in his son. He wanted Josh to hear how he sounded on the tapes—his redundant, frequently incoherent conversations, non sequiturs, his treatment of other people. Clearly, his dad wanted to provoke an inconsistency between Josh’s self-concept and his behavior on the tapes. And this was exactly what occurred. Josh was embarrassed—appalled—by the conversations that he heard. He listened to a call from his girlfriend, upset that he had ignored her, and that he treated her coldly and with indifference. He showed the same indifference with his friends.
"I had no idea what I sounded like and I didn't like what I sounded like at all," Josh said. "I was very self-centered and egotistical and uncaring of other people. It was about me. I was the star of my own stage and everybody else could basically, you know, go to hell as far as I was concerned. I had never realized that aspect of my personality. I didn't know how mean in that sense I had gotten."

After listening to the tapes over time, Josh changed his attitudes toward drugs, stopped lying, and altered his life's course. His father—who instigated the radical plan—was amazed. "He understood the entire thing that he was doing," he said proudly.

Cognitive dissonance remains an important, intriguing psychological theory with numerous implications for persuasion. Dissonance is an uncomfortable state that arises when individuals hold psychologically inconsistent cognitions. Dissonance, as revised and reconceptualized over the years, also refers to feeling personally responsible for unpleasant consequences, and experiencing stress over actions that reflect negatively on the self. There are different views of dissonance, and diverse explanations as to why it exerts the impact it does on attitudes.

There is little doubt that dissonance influences attitudes and cognitions. Its effects fan out to influence decision making, justification of effort, compliance under low reward, and advocating a position with which one disagrees. The theory also helps us understand why people commit themselves to causes—both good and bad ones. It offers suggestions for how to help people remain committed to good causes and how to aid individuals in quitting dysfunctional groups. The theory also has intriguing implications for persuasion. Departing from conventional strategies that emphasize accommodating people or meeting them halfway, dissonance theory recommends that persuaders provoke inconsistencies in individuals. Dissonance then serves as the engine that motivates attitude change. In this sense, dissonance is a powerful theory of persuasive communication, emphasizing, as it does, the central role that self-persuasion plays in attitude change.
Bernae Gunderson, a paralegal specialist from St. Paul, has no difficulty deciphering the fine print of legal documents. Still, she was puzzled by materials she received from her mortgage company. They didn’t jibe with the home equity loan she and her husband had been promised. Mrs. Gunderson called the company, First Alliance Corporation, asked questions about monthly payments and fees, and was promptly reassured that her understanding of the loan was indeed correct. What Mrs. Gunderson was not told—but soon would discover—was that First Alliance had tacked on $13,000 in fees to the loan, and the interest rate rose a full percentage point every six months. (Henriques & Bergman, 2000)

First Alliance, it turned out, used deceptive sales procedures to promote its services. Sued by regulators in five states, the company recruited unsuspecting borrowers using a high-level con game and elaborate sales pitch that was designed to snooker people into paying higher fees and interest rates than was justified by market factors. The company’s loan officers were required to memorize a 27-page selling routine that included the following gambits:

- Establish rapport and a common bond. Initiate a conversation about jobs, children, or pets. Say something funny to get them laughing.
- To soften the financial blow, when talking about dollar amounts, say “merely,” “simply,” or “only.”
- If the customer asks questions about fees, just reply, “May I ignore your concern about the rate and costs if I can show you that these are minor issues in a loan?”
- If all else fails and the sale appears to be lost, say, “I want to apologize for being so inept a loan officer. I want you to know that it’s all my fault, and I’m truly sorry. Just so I don’t make the same mistake again, would you mind telling me what I did that was wrong? Didn’t I cover that? (And get right back into it.) (Henriques & Bergman, 2000, p. C12)

There is nothing wrong with using persuasion techniques to make a sale. The problem is that First Alliance trained its loan officers to deceive
FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR customers about its services. They lied about the terms of home equity loans and refused to come clean when people like Bernae Gunderson raised questions. They were experts in using strategies of interpersonal persuasion. Unfortunately, they exploited their knowledge, manipulating individuals into signing off on deals that were unduly expensive and unfair.

Interpersonal persuasion, the centerpiece of First Alliance’s promotional campaign and subject of this chapter, offers a glimpse into a realm of persuasion that is somewhat different from those discussed so far in the book. Unlike purely psychological approaches, it focuses on the dyad, or two-person unit (persuader and persuadee). In contrast to attitude-based research, it centers on changing behavior—on inducing people to comply with the persuader’s requests. Unlike message-oriented persuasion research, which focuses on modifying views about political or social issues, it explores techniques people employ to accomplish interpersonal objectives—for example, how they “sell themselves” to others.

Drawing on the fields of interpersonal communication, social psychology, and marketing, interpersonal persuasion research examines the strategies people use to gain compliance. It looks at how individuals try to get their way with others (something we all want to do). It examines techniques businesses use to convince customers to sign on the dotted line, strategies charities employ to gain donations, and methods that health practitioners use to convince people to take better care of their health. To gain insight into these practical issues, interpersonal persuasion scholars develop theories and conduct empirical studies—both experiments and surveys. In some ways this is the most practical, down-to-earth chapter in the book, in other ways the most complicated because it calls on taxonomies and cognitive concepts applied to the dynamic dance of interpersonal communication.

The first portion of the chapter looks at a variety of techniques that have amusing sales pitch names like foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face. These persuasive tactics are known as sequential influence techniques. Influence in such cases “often proceeds in stages, each of which establishes the foundation for further changes in beliefs or behavior. Individuals slowly come to embrace new opinions, and actors often induce others to gradually comply with target requests” (Seibold, Cantrill, & Meyers, 1994, p. 560). The second section of the chapter focuses more directly on the communication aspect of interpersonal persuasion. It looks at the strategies that people—you, me, our friends, and parents—use to gain compliance, how researchers study this, and the many factors that influence compliance-gaining.

FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR

This classic persuasion strategy dates back to the days when salespeople knocked on doors and plied all tricks of the trade to maneuver their way
into residents' homes. If they could just overcome initial resistance—get a "foot in the door" of the domicile—they felt they could surmount subsequent obstacles and make the sale of an Avon perfume, a vacuum cleaner, or a set of encyclopedias. Going door-to-door is out-of-date, but starting small and moving to a larger request is still in vogue. The foot-in-the-door technique stipulates that an individual is more likely to comply with a second, larger request if he or she has agreed to perform a small initial request.

Many studies have found support for the foot-in-the-door (FITD) procedure. Researchers typically ask individuals in an experimental group to perform a small favor, one to which most everyone agrees. Experimenters next ask these folks to comply with a second, larger request, the one in which the experimenter is actually interested. Participants in the control condition receive only the second request. Experimental group participants are typically more likely than control subjects to comply with the second request. For example:

- In a classic study, Freedman and Fraser (1966) arranged for experimenters working for a local traffic safety committee to ask California residents if they would mind putting a 3-inch "Be a safe driver" sign in their cars. Two weeks later, residents were asked if they would place a large, unattractive "Drive Carefully" sign on their front lawns. Homeowners in a control condition were asked only the second request. Seventeen percent of control group residents agreed to put the large sign on their lawns. However, 76% of those who agreed to the initial request or had been approached the first time complied with the second request.
- Participants were more willing to volunteer to construct a hiking trail if they had agreed to address envelopes for an environmental group than if they had not acceded to the initial request (Dillard, 1990a).
- Individuals were more likely to volunteer a large amount of time for a children's social skill project if they had initially assisted a child with a small request—helping an 8-year-old get candy from a candy machine (Rittle, 1981).

Emboldened by results like these, researchers have conducted over 100 studies of the FITD strategy. Meta-analytic, statistically based reviews of the research show that the effect is reliable and occurs more frequently than would be expected by chance (e.g., Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984). Given its utility, professional persuaders—ranging from telemarketers to university alumni fund-raisers—frequently employ FITD.
Why Does It Work?

There are several reasons why the foot-in-the-door technique produces compliance (Burger, 1999). The first explanation calls on Bem’s self-perception theory, described in chapter 9. According to this view, individuals who perform a small favor for someone look at their behavior and infer that they are helpful, cooperative people. They become, in their own eyes, the kind of people who do these sorts of things, go along with requests made by strangers, and cooperate with worthwhile causes (Freedman & Fraser, 1966, p. 201). Having formed this self-perception, they naturally accede to the second, larger request.

A second interpretation emphasizes consistency needs. Recalling that they agreed to the first request, individuals find it dissonant to reject the second, target request. Perhaps having formed the perception that they are helpful people, they feel motivated to behave in a way that is consistent with their newly formed view of themselves. In a sense, they may feel more committed to the requester or to the goal of helping others.

A third explanation places emphasis on social norms. “Being asked to perform an initial small request makes people more aware of the norm of social responsibility, a norm that prescribes that one should help those who are in need,” William DeJong (1979) explains (p. 2236).

When Does It Work?

The FITD technique does not always produce compliance. It is particularly likely to work when the request concerns a pro-social issue, such as asking for a donation to charity or requesting favors from strangers. Self-perceptions, consistency needs, and social norms are likely to kick in under these circumstances. Foot-in-the-door is also more apt to succeed when the second query is “a continuation,” or logical outgrowth, of the initial request, and when people actually perform the requested behavior (Burger, 1999; Dillard et al., 1984).

FITD is not so likely to succeed if the same persuader asks for a second favor immediately after having hit up people for a first request. The bang-bang, request-upon-request approach may create resentment, leading people to say “No” just to reassert their independence (Chartrand, Pinckert, & Burger, 1999).

Next time you do a favor for someone and are tempted to accede to a second, larger request, check to see if the facilitating factors operating in the situation match those just described. If they do, you may be more apt to go along with the request, and it may be one that you would rather decline.
DOOR-IN-THE-FACE

This technique undoubtedly gets the award for the most memorable name in the Persuasion Tactics Hall of Fame. It occurs when a persuader makes a large request that is almost certain to be denied. After being turned down, the persuader returns with a smaller request, the target request the communicator had in mind at the beginning. Door-in-the-face (DITF) is exactly the opposite of foot-in-the-door. Foot-in-the-door starts with a small request and moves to a larger one. DITF begins with a large request and scales down to an appropriately modest request. Researchers study the technique by asking experimental group participants to comply with a large request, one certain to be denied. When they refuse, participants are asked if they would mind going along with a smaller, second request. Control group subjects receive only the second request.

The DITF technique has been tested in dozens of studies. It emerges reliably and dependably, meta-analytic studies tell us (O'Keefe & Hale, 1998). Consider the following supportive findings:

- A volunteer, supposedly working for a local blood services organization, asked students if they would donate a unit of blood once every 2 months for a period of at least 3 years. Everyone declined this outlandish request. The volunteer then asked experimental group subjects if they would donate just one unit of blood between 8:00 A.M. and 3:30 P.M. the next day. Control group participants were asked the same question. Forty-nine percent of those who rejected the first request agreed to donate blood, compared with 32% of those in the control group (Cialdini & Ascani, 1976).

- An experimenter working with a boys and girls club asked students if they would mind spending about 15 hours a week tutoring children. When this request was declined, the experimenter asked if students would be willing to spend an afternoon taking kids to a museum or the movies. Students who turned down the initial request were more likely to agree to spend an afternoon with children than those who only heard the second request (O'Keefe & Figgé, 1999).

- An individual claiming to represent a California company asked respondents if they would be willing to spend 2 hours answering survey questions on home or dorm safety. After the request was declined, the experimenter asked if individuals would mind taking 15 minutes to complete a small portion of the survey. Control group participants were asked only the second request. Forty-four percent of those who refused the first request agreed to partake in the shorter survey. By contrast, only 25% of control group subjects complied with the second request (Mowen & Cialdini, 1980).
Why Does It Work?

Several rather interesting explanations for the DITF strategy have been advanced. One view emphasizes a powerful psychological factor akin to dissonance but more emotion-packed: guilt. Individuals feel guilty about turning down the first request. To reduce guilt, an unpleasant feeling, they go along with the second request (O'Keefe & Figgé, 1999). There is some evidence that guilt helps explain DITF effects.

Another view emphasizes reciprocal concessions. As a persuader (deliberately) scales down his request, he is seen as having made a concession. This leads the persuadee to invoke the social rule that “you should make concessions to those who make concessions to you” or “you should meet the other fellow halfway.” As a result, the persuadee yields and goes along with the second request (Cialdini et al., 1975; Rhoads & Cialdini, 2002).

It is also possible that social judgment processes operate in the DITF situation. The extreme first request functions as an anchor against which the second request is compared. After having heard the outrageous initial request, the second offer seems less costly and severe. However, control group participants who are asked to comply only with the smaller request do not have this anchor available to them. Thus, experimental group participants are more apt than control group subjects to go along with the target request.

Self-presentation concerns may also intervene. People fear that the persuader will evaluate them negatively for turning down the first request. Not realizing that the whole gambit has been staged, they accede to the second request to make themselves look good in the persuader’s eyes.

When Does It Work?

Like other persuasion factors discussed, the door-in-the-face technique is sensitive to contextual factors (Fern, Monroe, & Avila, 1986; O'Keefe & Hale, 1998). DITF works particularly well when the request concerns prosocial issues. People may feel guilty about turning down a charitable organization’s request for a large donation or time expenditure. They can make things right by agreeing to the second request.

Door-in-the-face effects also emerge when the same individual makes both requests. People may feel an obligation to reciprocate a concession if they note that the person who asked for too much is scaling down her request. If two different people make the requests, the feeling that “you should make concessions to those who make concessions to you” may not kick in.

The DITF strategy is also more apt to work if there is only a short delay between the first and second requests. If too long a time passes between
requests, the persuadee's guilt might possibly dissipate. In addition, the more time that passes between requests, the less salient is the contrast between the extreme first request and the seemingly more reasonable second request.

APPLICATIONS

The foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face techniques are regularly used by compliance professionals. Noting that you gave $25 to a charity last year, a volunteer asks if you might increase your gift to $50. The local newspaper calls and asks if you would like to take out a daily subscription. When you tell her you don't have time to read the paper every day, she asks, "How about Sunday?" Or the bank loan officer wonders if you can afford a $100 monthly payment on your student loan. When you decline, he asks if you can pay $50 each month, exactly the amount he had in mind from the beginning.

FITD and DITF, like all persuasion techniques, can be used for unethical, as well as morally acceptable, purposes. Unsavory telemarketers or front organizations posing as charities can manipulate people into donating money through adroit use of these tactics. At the same time, pro-social groups can employ these techniques to achieve worthwhile goals. For example, a volunteer from MADD might use foot-in-the-door to induce bar patrons to sign a petition against drunk driving. Sometime later in the evening, the volunteer could ask patrons if they would agree to let a taxi take them home (Taylor & Booth-Butterfield, 1993). In the same fashion, charitable organizations such as the Red Cross or Purple Heart might employ door-in-the-face to gently arouse guilt that inevitably follows refusal of the initial request.

OTHER COMPLIANCE TECHNIQUES

The foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face strategies have generated the most research, and we know the most about when they work and why. Several other compliance tactics have been explored, and reviewing them offers insights into the canny ways that persuaders use communication to achieve their goals.

The first technique is low-balling. This gets its name from the observation that persuaders—typically car salespeople—try to secure compliance by "throwing the customer a low ball." In persuasion scholarship, low-balling has a precise meaning. It occurs when a persuader induces someone to comply with a request and then "ups the ante" by increasing the
cost of compliance. Having made the initial decision to comply, individuals experience dissonance at the thought that they may have to back away from their commitment. Once individuals have committed themselves to a decision, they are loathe to change their minds, even when the cost of a decision is raised significantly and unfairly (Cialdini et al., 1978).

Low-balling is similar to foot-in-the-door in that the persuader begins with a small request and follows it up with a more grandiose alternative. In low-balling, though, the action initially requested is the target behavior; what changes is the cost associated with performing the target action. In the case of FITD, the behavior that the persuader asks the person to initially perform is a setup to induce the individual to comply with the larger, critical request.

Robert B. Cialdini and his colleagues (1978) have conducted experiments demonstrating that low-balling can increase compliance. Their findings shed light on sales practices in the ever colorful, always controversial business of selling cars. As the authors explain:

The critical component of the procedure is for the salesperson to induce the customer to make an active decision to buy one of the dealership's cars by offering an extremely good price, perhaps as much as $300 below competitors' prices. Once the customer has made the decision for a specific car (and has even begun completing the appropriate forms), the salesperson removes the price advantage in one of a variety of ways. For example, the customer may be told that the originally cited price did not include an expensive option that the customer had assumed was part of the offer. More frequently, however, the initial price offer is rescinded when the salesperson "checks with the boss," who does not allow the deal because "we'd be losing money." . . . In each instance, the result is the same: The reason that the customer made a favorable purchase decision is removed, and the performance of the target behavior (i.e., buying that specific automobile) is rendered more costly. The increased cost is such that the final price is equivalent to, or sometimes slightly above, that of the dealer's competitors. Yet, car dealership lore has it that more customers will remain with their decision to purchase the automobile, even at the adjusted figure, than would have bought it had the full price been revealed before a purchase decision had been obtained. (Cialdini et al., 1978, p. 464; see Fig. 10.1.)

Another tactic that borrows from persuasion practitioners is the "that's-not-all" technique. You have probably heard TV announcers make claims like "And that's not all—if you call now and place an order for this one-time only collection of sixties oldies, we'll throw in an extra rock and roll CD—so call right away!" Researcher Jerry M. Burger capitalized on such real-life observations. He conceptualized and tested the
INTERPERSONAL PERSUASION

FIG 10.1 Car salesmen have been known to use low-balling and a host of other interpersonal gambits to make a sale. (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)

effectiveness of the that's-not-all technique. In theory, Burger (1986), explained:

The salesperson presents a product and a price but does not allow the buyer to respond immediately. Instead, after a few seconds of mulling over the price, the buyer is told “that’s not all”; that is, there is an additional small product that goes along with the larger item, or that “just for you” or perhaps “today only” the price is lower than that originally cited. The
seller, of course, had planned to sell the items together or at the lower price all along but allows the buyer to think about the possibility of buying the single item or the higher priced item first. Supposedly, this approach is more effective than presenting the eventual deal to the customer in the beginning. (p. 277)

Burger demonstrated that the that's-not-all tactic can influence compliance. In one experiment, two researchers sat at tables that had a sign promoting the university psychology club’s bake sale. Cupcakes were featured at the table. Individuals who wandered by sometimes expressed interest in the cupcakes, curious how much they cost. Those assigned to the experimental group were told that cupcakes cost 75¢ each. After listening to a seemingly impromptu conversation between the two experimenters, these individuals were told that the price included two medium-sized cookies. By contrast, subjects in the control group were shown the cookies when they inquired about the cost of the cupcakes. They were told that the package cost 75¢. Even though people got the same products for the identical cost in both conditions, more experimental group subjects purchased sweets (73%) than did control group subjects (40%).

Like door-in-the-face, that’s-not-all works in part because of the reciprocity norm. We learn from an early age that when someone does a favor for us, we should do one in return. Participants in Burger’s experimental group naively assumed the persuader had done them a favor by throwing in two cookies. Not knowing that this was part of the gambit, they acquiesced.

Yet another sequential influence tactic that is sometimes used is called fear-then-relief. This is somewhat different from the other techniques in that, in this case, the persuader deliberately places the recipient in a state of fear. Suddenly and abruptly, the persuader eliminates the threat, replaces fear with kind words, and asks the recipient to comply with a request. The ensuing relief pushes the persuadee to acquiesce.

Dolinski and Nawrat (1998) demonstrated fear-then-relief in several clever experiments. In one study, they arranged for jaywalking pedestrians to hear a policeman’s whistle (actually produced by an experimenter hidden from view). People glanced nervously and walked quickly, fearing they had done something wrong. Twenty seconds later, they were approached by an experimenter who asked them if they would spend 10 minutes filling out a survey. These individuals were more likely to comply than those who did not hear the whistle. In another experiment, the researchers placed a piece of paper that resembled a parking ticket behind a car’s windshield wiper. When drivers arrived at their cars, they experienced the telltale feeling of fear on noticing what looked to be a parking ticket. In fact, the paper was a leaflet that contained an appeal for
blood donations. As drivers' anxiety was replaced with reassurance, an experimenter asked them if they would mind taking 15 minutes to complete a questionnaire. Sixty-eight percent of experimental group subjects complied with the request, compared with 36% of control group participants.

Fear-then-relief works for two reasons. First, the relief experienced when the threat is removed is reinforcing. It becomes associated with the second request, leading to more compliance. Second, the ensuing relief places people in a state of "temporary mindlessness." Preoccupied with the danger they nearly fell into and their own supposed carelessness, individuals are distracted. They are less attentive and more susceptible to the persuader's request.

The technique has interesting implications for a powerful domain of persuasion, yet one infrequently discussed—interrogation of prisoners. We often think that compliance with captors results from the induction of terror and fear. Fear-then-relief suggests that a more subtle, self-persuasion dynamic is in operation. Captors initially scream at a prisoner, threaten him or her with torture, and begin to physically hurt the prisoner. Suddenly, the abuse ends and is replaced by a softer tone and a nice voice. In some cases, "the sudden withdrawal of the source of anxiety intensifies compliance" (Dolinski & Nawrat, p. 27; Schein, 1961).

Fear-then-relief is used in peacetime situations too—by parents, teachers, and other authority figures who replace the stick quickly with a carrot. Like other tactics (e.g., Aune & Basil, 1994) it capitalizes on the element of surprise, which succeeds in disrupting people's normal defenses. Surprise is the key in an additional technique that psychologists have studied, one no doubt used by compliance professionals. Known as the pique technique, it involves "making the request in an unusual and atypical manner so that the target's interest is piqued, the refusal script is disrupted, and the target is induced to think positively about compliance" (Santos, Leve, & Pratkanis, 1994, p. 756). In an experimental demonstration of the technique, Santos and his colleagues reported that students posing as panhandlers received more money from passersby when they asked "Can you spare 17¢ (or 37¢)?" than when they asked if the people could spare a quarter or any change. When was the last time that a panhandler asked you for 37¢? Never happened, right? Therein lies the ingenuity—and potential lure—of the pique technique.

The pique procedure works because it disrupts our normal routine. It engages and consumes the conscious mind, thereby diverting it from the resistance that typically follows a persuader's request. Disruption of conscious modes of thought plays a critical role in acquiescence to persuasion, in the view of psychologist Eric S. Knowles and his colleagues (2001). Knowles emphasizes that persuaders succeed when they devise clever, subtle ways to break down our resistance (see Box 10–1). He and
BOX 10–1
RESISTANCE AND COMPLIANCE

This chapter has focused on how communicators convince other people to comply with their requests. Another way of looking at this is to ask: How can communicators overcome others’ resistance to their persuasive requests? Knowles and his colleagues argue that resistance plays a key role in persuasion (Knowles et al., 2001). They point out that most interpersonal persuasion research has focused on devising ways to make a message more appealing rather than on the obverse: figuring out how best to overcome people’s resistance to persuasive messages. By understanding why individuals resist messages, researchers can do a better job of formulating strategies to increase compliance.

Scholarly research suggests that persuaders can neutralize resistance in several ways, including: (a) framing the message to minimize resistance, (b) acknowledging and confronting resistance head-on, (c) reframing the message, and (d) disrupting resistance to the message (Knowles & Linn, 2004). These ideas have practical applications. Consider once again the case of an adolescent who wants to practice safer sex, but is afraid to request it, for fear the suggestion will spark resistance from his or her partner. A resistance-based approach suggests the following strategies and appeals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Safer Sex Appeal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Framing the message to minimize resistance</td>
<td>“Please do this for me. I’d feel more comfortable and secure if we’d use condoms tonight.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging and confronting resistance</td>
<td>“You say you don’t want to talk about condoms. But we’ve always valued talking and being open about how we feel. Let’s talk about this.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing the message</td>
<td>“You say using condoms turns you off. But think how free and unrestrained we’ll feel with no worries about sex or pregnancy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupting and distracting resistance (through humor)</td>
<td>“I have these condoms that a friend of mine sent me from Tijuana that have those Goodyear radial ribs on them that will drive you wild.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Comments adapted from Adelman, 1992, p. 82, and Kelly, 1995, p. 99)

his colleagues have shown that persuaders can disrupt resistance by subtly changing the wording of requests. Employing what they call the disrupt-then-reframe technique, Knowles and his colleagues have shown that they can dramatically increase compliance by first mildly disrupting “the ongoing script of a persuasive request,” and then reframing...
the request, or encouraging the listener to "understand the issue in a new way" (Knowles, Butler, & Linn, 2001, p. 50).

In the bold tradition of interpersonal persuasion research, the researchers went door-to-door selling Christmas cards. They explained that money from the sales would go—as indeed it did—to a nonprofit center that helps developmentally disabled children and adults. The experimenters told some residents that the price of a Christmas card package was $3. They informed others that the price was $3 and then added, "It's a bargain." In the key disrupt-then-reframe condition, the experimenter stated, "This package of cards sells for 300 pennies" (thereby shaking up the normal script for a door-to-door request). She then added after pausing, "That's $3. It's a bargain" (reframe). Sixty-five percent of respondents purchased cards in the disrupt-then-reframe treatment, compared to 35% in the other groups. Other experiments obtained similar findings, demonstrating that a small, but subtle, variation in a persuasive request can produce dramatic differences in compliance (Davis & Knowles, 1999).

Summary

All the techniques discussed in this section play on what Freedman and Fraser called "compliance without pressure." They are soft-sell, not hard-ball, tactics that worm their way through consumers' defenses, capitalizing on social norms, emotions, and sly disruption of ordinary routines. Used adroitly by canny professionals, they can be remarkably effective. Just ask anyone who is still kicking him- or herself for yielding to a series of requests that sounded innocent at the time, but ended up costing the person a pretty penny.

COMPLIANCE-GAINING

You want to dine out with someone, but you disagree about which restaurant it is going to be; someone in the department must do an unpleasant job, but you want to make sure that in any case it will not be you; you want to make new work arrangements, but you are afraid your boss will not agree; you want to get your partner to come with you to that tedious family party, but you suspect that he or she does not want to come along. (van Knippenberg et al., 1999, p. 806)

Add to these more serious requests for compliance: an effort to convince a close friend to return to school after having dropped out for a couple of years, a doctor's attempt to persuade a seriously overweight patient to pursue an exercise regimen, a lover's effort to persuade a partner to
practice safe sex. Such requests, initiatives, and serious attempts to influence behavior are pervasive in everyday life. They speak to the strong interest human beings have in getting their way—that is, in persuading others to comply with their requests and pleas. This section of the chapter moves from an exploration of how professional persuaders achieve their goals to an examination of us—how we try to gain compliance in everyday life. The area of research is appropriately called compliance-gaining.

Compliance-gaining is defined as a “communicative behavior in which an agent engages so as to elicit from a target some agent-selected behavior” (Wheeless, Barraclough, & Stewart, 1983, p. 111). Interpersonal communication scholars, who have pioneered research in this area, have sought to understand how people go about trying to gain compliance in everyday life. What strategies do they use? Can compliance-gaining tactics be categorized in meaningful ways? How do techniques differ as a function of the situation and the person? These are some of the questions scholars pose.

One of the daunting issues researchers face is how to empirically study so broad an area as compliance-gaining. They could devise experiments, of the sort conducted by psychologists researching foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face. Although these would allow researchers to test hypotheses, they would not tell them how compliance-gaining works in the real world that lies outside the experimenter’s laboratory. Scholars could observe people trying to gain compliance—on the job, at school, or in social settings like bars (that might be fun!). However, this would provide an endless amount of data, too much to meaningfully code. Dissatisfied with these methodologies, scholars hit on the idea of conducting surveys that ask people how they would gain compliance, either in situations suggested by the researcher or in an open-ended manner, in the individuals’ own words.

The first survey method is closed-ended in that it provides individuals with hypothetical situations and asks them to choose among various strategies for compliance. For example, researchers have asked participants to imagine they have been carrying on a close relationship with a person of the opposite sex for two years. Unexpectedly, an old acquaintance happens to be in town one evening. Desirous of getting together with their old friend, but mindful that their current boyfriend or girlfriend is counting on getting together that night, respondents are asked to indicate how they would try to convince their current steady to let them visit their former acquaintance (Miller et al., 1977). Subjects have also been asked to imagine that their neighbors, whom they do not know very well, own a dog, who barks almost all night. This in turn incites the other local canines to do the same. How, students are asked, would they attempt to convince the neighbors to curb their dog’s nighttime antics (Cody, McLaughlin, & Jordan, 1980)? Individuals are provided with a list of strategies, such as friendly appeals, moral arguments, manipulative
tactics, and threats. They are asked to indicate on a Likert scale how likely they would be to use these techniques.

A second method is open-ended. Subjects are asked to write a short essay on how they get their way. Invited to be frank and honest, they describe in their own words how they try to gain compliance from others (Falbo, 1977).

Each technique has benefits and drawbacks. The closed-ended selection technique provides an efficient way to gather information. It also provides insights on how people try to gain compliance in representative life situations. Its drawback is that people frequently give socially desirable responses to closed-ended surveys. They are reluctant to admit that they sometimes use brutish, socially inappropriate tactics to get their way (Burleson et al., 1988).

The strength of the open-ended method is that it allows people to indicate, in their own words, how they get compliance; there is no speculation about hypothetical behavior in artificial situations. A drawback is that researchers must make sense of—and categorize—subjects’ responses. This can be difficult and time-consuming. Scholars may not fully capture or appreciate the individuals’ thought processes.

Despite their limitations, when taken together, open- and closed-ended questionnaires have provided useful insights about compliance-gaining. Researchers, using both types of procedures, have devised a variety of typologies to map out the techniques people use to gain compliance. These typologies have yielded insights about the major strategies individuals (at least on American college campuses) use to influence others. Strategies can be classified according to whether they are:

1. **Direct versus indirect.** Direct techniques include assertion (voicing one’s wishes loudly) and persistence (reiterating one’s point). Indirect tactics include “emotion-target” (putting the other person in a good mood) and thought manipulation (trying to get your way by making the other person feel it is his idea) (Falbo, 1977; see also Dillard et al., 1996).

2. **Rational versus nonrational.** Rational techniques include reason (arguing logically) and exchange of favors (for a detailed discussion, see Cialdini, 2001). Nonrational tactics include deceit (fast talking and lying) and threat (telling her I will never speak to her again if she doesn’t do what I want) (Falbo, 1977).

3. **Hard versus soft.** Hard tactics include yelling, demanding, and verbal aggression. Soft techniques include kindness, flattery, and flirting (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1996).

4. **External versus internal.** Tactics can be externally focused, such as rewards or punishments. To motivate a child to study, a parent could
use a carrot like promise ("I'll raise your allowance if you study more") or a stick like aversive stimulation ("You're banned from driving until you hit the books"). Techniques can also be internally focused—that is, self-persuasion-type appeals directed at the message recipient's psyche. These include positive self-feeling ("You'll feel good about yourself if you study a lot") and negative self-feeling ("You'll be disappointed with yourself in the long run if you don't study more") (see Marwell & Schmitt, 1967; Miller & Parks, 1982).

Notice that the same techniques can be categorized in several ways. Threat could be direct, nonrational, hard, and external. Positive self-feeling could be indirect, rational, and soft, as well as internal. This cross-categorization occurs because there is not one but a variety of compliance-gaining taxonomies, constructed by different scholars, for different purposes. Nonetheless, these four sets of labels provide a useful way of categorizing compliance-gaining behavior.

**Contextual Influences**

People are complex creatures. They use different techniques to gain compliance, depending on the situation. In one situation, a person may use reason, in another she may scream and yell, employing verbal aggression. We are, to some extent and in varying degrees, chameleons. Which situations are the most critical determinants of compliance-gaining? Scholars have studied this issue, delineating a host of important contextual influences on strategy selection. The following factors are especially important:

**Intimacy.** Contexts differ in the degree to which they involve intimate associations between persuader and persuadee. As you move along the continuum from stranger to acquaintance to friend to lover or family member, you find that the same individual can behave very differently, depending on which of these "others" the person is trying to influence. In an old but still engaging study, Fitzpatrick and Winke (1979) reported that level of intimacy predicted use of conflict-reducing strategies. Focusing on people casually involved in romantic relationships, those in serious relationships, and married partners, the investigators found that married persons were especially likely to employ emotional appeals or personal rejections ("withholding affection and acting cold until he or she gives in") to resolve differences.

"You always hurt the one you love," Fitzpatrick and Winke observed. They explained that:

Individuals in a more committed relationship generally have less concern about the strengths of the relational bonds. Consequently, they employ
more spontaneous and emotionally toned strategies in their relational conflicts. . . . In the less committed relationships, the cohesiveness of the partners is still being negotiated. . . . Undoubtedly, it would be too risky for them to employ the more open conflict strategies of the firmly committed. (p. 10)

This is not to say that everyone uses more emotional or highly manipulative tactics in intimate settings than in everyday interpersonal encounters. These findings emerged from one study, conducted at one point in time. However, research indicates that intimacy exerts an important impact on compliance-gaining behavior (Cody & McLaughlin, 1980).

Dependency. We use different strategies to gain compliance, depending on whether we are dependent on the person we are trying to influence. People are more reluctant to use hard tactics when the other has control over important outcomes in their lives (van Knippenberg et al., 1999). Graduate teaching assistants who say they “dominate arguments” and “argue insistently” with disgruntled undergraduate students acknowledge that they prefer to use nonconfrontational techniques, even sidestepping disagreements, when discussing job-related conflicts with the professor (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). It is only natural to be more careful when trying to gain compliance from those who have control over important outcomes in your life. Thus, when people lack power, they are more likely to employ rational and indirect tactics “because no other power base is available to them” (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985).

Rights. People employ different tactics to get their way, depending on whether they believe they have the right to pursue a particular option. If they do not feel they have the moral right to make a request, they may use soft tactics. However, if they believe they have the right to make a request, or if they feel they have been treated unfairly, they are more apt to employ hard than soft techniques (van Knippenberg et al., 1999). Consider the marked change in tactics employed by people trying to convince smokers to quit smoking in public places. Decades ago, individuals who objected to smokers polluting public space said little, afraid they would offend smokers. Nowadays, nonsmokers, redefining the meaning of public space and feeling they have the right to insist that smokers not puff in public, frequently use uncompromising, even nonrational, tactics to induce smokers to put out a cigarette. This change in compliance-gaining strategies resulted from years of social protest against smoking. Protests against problematic social norms, and subsequent changes in the law, can empower ordinary people, encouraging them to use feistier techniques to get their way.
Other Situational Factors. Situations also vary in the degree to which (a) the compliance benefits the persuader, (b) the influence attempt has consequences for the relationship between persuader and persuadee, and (c) the target resists the influence attempt (Cody & McLaughlin, 1980). Resistance is particularly important, as people frequently reject persuaders' appeals. Persuaders must adjust their strategy to take resistance into account, although inexperienced communicators are often flummoxed by the recipient's refusal to go along with their request.

Individual Differences

In addition to situations, personality and individual difference factors influence compliance-gaining. Individuals differ dramatically in how they go about trying to get their way. Some people are direct, others are shy. Some individuals worry a great deal about hurting others' feelings; other individuals care not a whit. Some people respect social conventions; other people disregard them. Consider, for example, how sharply people differ on the rather pedestrian matter of inducing someone to repay a loan. Min-Sun Kim and Steven R. Wilson (1994), in a theoretical study of interpersonal persuasion, listed ways that different individuals might formulate this request. They include:

- I have run out of cash.
- I could use the money I loaned you.
- Can I ask you to repay the loan?
- Would you mind repaying the loan?
- You'll repay the loan, won't you?
- I'd like you to repay the loan.
- You must repay the loan.
- Repay the loan. (Kim & Wilson, pp. 214–215)

If individuals differ in their compliance-gaining strategies, can research elucidate or specify the differences? You bet! Scholars have focused on several individual difference factors, including gender and a factor familiar to readers of this book: self-monitoring.

Largely due to socialization and enculturation, women are more likely than men to use polite tactics and to employ powerless speech (Baxter, 1984; Timmerman, 2002). As noted in chapter 7, these can reduce persuasive effectiveness. What's more, as Linda L. Carli (1999) notes, "female leaders are evaluated more harshly when they exhibit a more directive style of leadership, whereas male leaders have a greater latitude to use a variety of leadership styles" (p. 94). This may be changing, however, as more women assume leadership posts in society and people change their
attitudes to fit the new reality. At the same time, men's own socialization
can do them a disservice: Trained to emphasize competence rather than
likability, male persuaders may get downgraded on the warmth dimen-
sion. Socialized to be direct and to-the-point, men may send messages
that trample on people's feelings.

Another factor that influences compliance-gaining is the personality
factor, self-monitoring. High self-monitors, attuned as they are to the re-
quirements of the situation, tend to adapt their strategy to fit the person
they are trying to influence (Caldwell & Burger, 1997). Low self-monitors
are more apt to use the same technique with different people. High self-
monitors are more likely to develop elaborate strategic plans prior to the
actual influence attempt (Jordan & Roloff, 1997). In keeping with their con-
cern with image management, high self-monitors are more apt than low
self-monitors to include in their plans a consideration of how they could
manipulate their personal impression to achieve their goals.

Complications

The roles that situational and individual difference factors play in
compliance-gaining are interesting and complex. People have multiple,
sometimes conflicting, goals they want to accomplish in a particular situ-
ation (Dillard, 1990b). What's more, people are always balancing various
aspects of the intrapersonal and interpersonal context: They want to
maintain their autonomy, yet need approval from others (Brown &
Levinson, 1987). They want to get their way, but recognize that this can
threaten another's image, autonomy, or "face" (Wilson, Aleman, &
Leatham, 1998). They don't want to hurt the other's feelings, but recog-
nize that if they are too nice they may kill the clarity of their request with
politeness and ambiguity.

Scholars have studied how people process these matters and go about
balancing conflicting needs. Their models emphasize that people have
elaborate cognitive structures regarding compliance-gaining and ways to
achieve their goals (Wilson, 1999). This is fascinating because we all go
about the business of trying to get our way, but rarely give any thought
to how we think about trying to gain compliance or how we process, in
our own minds, "all that stuff going on in the situation." Interpersonal
communication models and research shed light on such issues.

For example, researchers find that when people possess incompatible
goals—such as trying to convince a target to do something she most defi-
nitely does not want to do, while at the same time not hurting her feel-
ings in the slightest—they pause more and don't communicate as
effectively (Greene et al., 1993). The incongruity of goals puts stress on
the mental system.
Research also suggests ways that we can become more effective interpersonal persuaders. Studies show that successful influence agents are apt to have greater knowledge of the strategies that are most likely to produce compliance, and are also capable of quickly adjusting their behavior to accommodate the changing needs of others (Jordan & Roloff, 1997). They also plan their strategies in advance, consider the obstacles they may face, and figure out how they can overcome them. Taking a chapter from high self-monitors' playbook, they even visualize the personal impressions they want to convey to their audience.

Summary and Applications

Compliance-gaining is a fascinating domain. Research has shed light on the generic strategies people use to get their way, the role situations play, and the individual differences in compliance-gaining. Like any academic area, compliance-gaining studies can be criticized on various grounds. To their credit, interpersonal communication scholars have been particularly assertive in pointing out limitations in this research. They have lamented that compliance-gaining strategies are frequently defined ambiguously, inconsistently, or so specifically that it is difficult to know what the strategies mean (Kellermann & Cole, 1994). In addition, critics have noted that so much of the research is conducted in America, among primarily middle-class young people, that it is inappropriate to generalize findings to different cultures. All true—and yet one would not want to throw out the (maturing) compliance-gaining baby with the dirty methodological bathwater!

This line of research has provided a needed corrective to social psychological experiments that focus on persuasion practitioners. Compliance-gaining studies delightfully and importantly center on how ordinary people gain compliance in everyday life. They also focus on the interpersonal unit rather than solely on the individual or the cognitions of the individual persuader. Compliance-gaining research has also generated insights on a variety of intriguing or socially significant problems. These run the gamut from understanding the amusing ways individuals try to convince police not to give them traffic tickets (see Box 10–2) to helping doctors improve their style of communicating medical information (Burgoon et al., 1989) to assisting young people in securing compliance in the dicey realm of safer sex.

The latter domain is particularly relevant in the wake of evidence that many otherwise cautious young people are reluctant to use condoms (Perloff, 2001). College students admit that once a relationship gets serious, condom use seems to drop off. Young people incorrectly believe that a monogamous relationship is safe, and are concerned that initiating
You’re driving home one evening, speeding a little because you’ve got to get ready for a party later that night. The radio’s blaring and you’re feeling good as you tap your fingers and sing the words of a song you’ve heard many times before. Out of the corner of your eye you see a couple of lights, but ignore them until you see them again—the telltale flashing light of a police car. Your heart skips a beat as you realize the police car is following you. The siren is sounding now and you get that terrible sinking feeling and agonizing fear that something bad is going to happen.

At this point, many of us faced with the impending possibility of a speeding ticket search our minds ferociously for an excuse, an extenuating reason, a white or black lie, a rhetorical rabbit we can pull out of the hat to convince the officer not to give us a ticket. Of course, in an ideal world, if one ran afoul of the law, he or she would admit it and graciously take responsibility for the mistake. But this is not an ideal world, and most of us are probably more willing to shade the truth a little than to come clean and suffer the indemnity of a fine and points on our record. Thus, many people try to persuade the police officer not to ticket them, relying on a variety of compliance-gaining techniques.

How do people try to secure compliance from a police officer when they are stopped for traffic violations? Jennifer Preisler and Todd Pinetti, students in a communication class some years back, explored this issue by talking with many young people who had found themselves in this predicament. Their research, along with my own explorations, uncovered some interesting findings, including the following responses from young people regarding how they have tried to persuade a police officer not to ticket them:

• “I will be extra nice and respectful to the officer. I will apologize for my negligence and error. I tell them about the police officers I know.”
• “I flirt my way out of it, smile a lot. (Or I say,) ‘My speedometer is broken. Honestly, it hasn’t worked since August.’”
• “When I am stopped for speeding, I usually do not try to persuade the officer to not give me a ticket. He has the proof that I was speeding, so I don’t try to insult his intelligence by making up some stupid excuse. I do try to look very pathetic and innocent, hoping maybe he will feel bad for me and not give me a ticket.”
• “I turn on the dome light and turn off the ignition, roll down the window no matter how cold it is outside. I put my keys, driver’s license, and proof of insurance on the dashboard, and put my hands at 10 and 2 on the wheel. I do all this before the officer gets to the window. I am honest and hope for the best. I have tried three times and all three were successful.”
• “The officer said, ‘I’ve been waiting for an idiot like you (who he could pull over for speeding) all night.’ I told him, ‘Yeah, I got here as fast as I could.’ He laughed for about two minutes straight and let us go.”
• "I gain compliance by smiling (big) and saying, 'Officer, what seems to be the problem? I'm on my way to church.'"
• "The line that I have used to get out of a ticket is 'My wife's in labor.'"
• "My technique is when I am getting pulled over, I reach into my glove compartment and spray a dab of hair spray onto my finger. Then I put it in my eyes and I start to cry. I have gotten pulled over about 15 to 20 times and I have only gotten one ticket."

Many people suspect that sex intervenes—that is, male police officers are more forgiving of females than of males who violate a traffic law. Research bears this out. Male police officers issued a greater percentage of citations to male drivers than did female police officers. In a similar fashion, female police officers issued a greater percentage of their traffic citations to female drivers than did male officers (Koehler & Willis, 1994). Police officers may be more lenient with opposite-sex than same-sex offenders; they may find the arguments provided by opposite-sex individuals to be more persuasive because they are attracted sexually to the drivers. Or they may be less apt to believe excuses offered by members of their own gender.

safer sex behavior might threaten trust or intimacy. Women are sometimes reluctant to propose condom use because they fear it will reduce their attractiveness or trigger angry responses from guys. Men fear that broaching the condom topic will make them seem less "macho" in women's eyes or will give women a chance to reject their sexual advances (Bryan, Aiken, & West, 1999).

Research offers some clues about how to help young people better navigate the arousing, yet treacherous, domain of safer sex. One intriguing study of students' condom use concluded that "all one needs to do is to bring up the topic of AIDS or condoms in order to get a partner to use a condom" (Reel & Thompson, 1994, p. 137; see also Motley & Reeder, 1995). Other researchers—noting that for many women unsafe sex allows them to enjoy a myth that theirs will always be a faithful, monogamous relationship—suggest that "condoms could be represented as symbolic of the true and loving relationships that many women strive for rather than as necessary armor to protect against partners who will surely cheat" (Sobo, 1995, p. 185).

ETHICAL ISSUES

"Communication is founded on a presumption of truth," two scholars aptly note (Buller & Burgoon, 1996, p. 203). Yet persuasion commonly involves some shading of truth, a tinting that is rationalized by persuaders
and lamented by message receivers. Interpersonal persuasion—from the sequential influence techniques discussed earlier in the chapter to the endless variety of compliance-gaining tactics just described—sometimes seems to put a premium on distorting communication in the service of social influence. Distorting communication in the service of social influence? A blunter, more accurate way to describe this is lying.

Lying is remarkably common in everyday life. In two diary studies, college students reported that they told two lies a day. They admitted they lied in one of every three of their social interactions (DePaulo et al., 1996). To be sure, some of these lies were told to protect other people from embarrassment, loss of face, or having their feelings hurt. However, other lies were told to enhance the psychological state of the liars—for example, to make the liars appear better than they were, to protect them from looking bad, or to protect their privacy. Many of these were white lies that we have told ourselves; others were darker distortions, outright falsehoods (DePaulo et al., 1996).

Persuasion—from sequential influence tactics to compliance-gaining—is fraught with lies. Even flattery involves a certain amount of shading of truth, a convention that many people admittedly enjoy and cherish (Stengel, 2000). All this has stimulated considerable debate among philosophers over the years. As discussed in chapter 1, utilitarians argue that a lie must be evaluated in terms of its consequences: Did it produce more negative than positive consequences? Or, more generally, does the institution of lying generate more costs than benefits for society? Deontological thinkers tend to disapprove of lies in principle because they distort truth. Related approaches emphasize that what matters is the motivation of the liar—a lie told for a good, virtuous end may be permissible under some circumstances (Gass & Seiter, 1999).

We cannot resolve this debate. In my view, social discourse—and the warp and woof of social influence—contains much truth, shading of truth, and lies. It also contains certain corrective mechanisms. Those who lie habitually run the risk of earning others’ disapproval, or finding that even their truthful statements are disbelieved. Social norms operate to discourage chronic lying. So too do psychodynamic mechanisms that have evolved over human history. Guilt and internalized ethical rules help regulate people’s desire to regularly stretch the truth. However, a certain amount of lying is inevitable, indeed permissible in everyday interpersonal communication. Social influence—and persuasive communication—are human endeavors, part of the drama of everyday life, in which people are free to pursue their own ends, restrained by internalized moral values and social conventions (Scheibe, 2000). Democratic, civilized society enshrines people’s freedom to pursue their own interests and celebrates those who can exert influence over others. The “downside” of this is that some
people will abuse their freedom and seek to manipulate others, distorting truth and using deceitful tactics. Human evolution has not yet evolved to the point that ethics totally trumps (or at least restrains) self-interest, and perhaps it never will. The best hope is education: increased self-understanding, development of humane values, and (trite as it may sound) application of the time-honored, but always relevant, Golden Rule.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined interpersonal persuasion—the many techniques individuals use to influence one another in dyadic or one-on-one interactions. Social psychological research has documented that gambits like foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face can be especially effective in securing compliance. Make no mistake: These tactics do not always work, and many consumers have learned to resist them. However, they are used regularly in sales and pro-social charity work, and under certain conditions, for various psychological reasons, they can work handily. Other tactics employed by professional persuaders—low-balling, that's-not-all, fear-then-relief, pique, and disrupt-then-reframe—can also influence compliance.

In everyday life, we employ a variety of tactics to get our way. Interpersonal communication scholars have developed typologies to categorize these techniques. Strategies vary in their directness, rationality, and emphasis on self-persuasion. Different strategies are used in different situations, and the same person may use a direct approach in one setting and a cautious, indirect technique in another. There are also individual differences in compliance-gaining: gender and self-monitoring have emerged as important factors predicting tactics people will use.

Interpersonal persuasion is complex and dynamic. People's cognitions about appropriate and effective compliance-gaining techniques, their goals, and their affect toward the other person influence strategy selection. One-on-one persuasive communication includes many different elements—concern about the relationship, desire to accomplish a goal, and concern about preserving face. These elements intersect and interact complexly and emotionally.

Given the central role interpersonal persuasion plays in everyday life and in socio-economic transactions, it behooves us to understand and master it. One way to do this is to study approaches employed by highly effective persuaders. Successful persuaders recognize that persuasion requires give-and-take, flexibility, and ability to see things from the other party's point of view (Cody & Seiter, 2001; Delia, Kline, & Burleson, 1979; Waldron & Applegate, 1998). "Effective persuaders have a strong and
accurate sense of their audience’s emotional state, and they adjust the
tone of their arguments accordingly,” says Jay A. Conger (1998, p. 93). They plan arguments and self-presentational strategies in advance, and “they enter the persuasion process prepared to adjust their viewpoints and incorporate others’ ideas. That approach to persuasion is, interestingly, highly persuasive in itself,” Conger notes (p. 87).
PART 3

Persuasion in American Society
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You’ve seen it in hundreds of commercials and on all types of clothing—shirts, jackets, and hats. It’s an oversized check mark, a smoker’s pipe that juts outward, a “curvy, speedy-looking blur” (Hartley, 2000). Take a look below. It’s the Nike Swoosh, the symbol of Nike products, promoted by celebrity athletes from Michael Jordan to Tiger Woods, an emblem of Nike’s television advertising campaigns, and, to many, the embodiment of speed, grace, mobility, and cool. It’s a major reason why Nike is the major player in the sneaker market, and a testament to the success of commercial advertising (Goldman & Papson, 1996).

Advertising. That’s a topic we know something about, though if you asked, we would probably politely suggest that it’s everyone else who’s influenced. Yet if each of us is immune to advertising’s impact, how come so many people can correctly match these slogans with the advertised products?

- Whassup?
- Less filling, tastes great.
- Obey your thirst.
- Good to the last drop.
- We love to see you smile.
- Where’s the beef?
- Like a rock.
- Do the Dew.

Answers: Budweiser; Miller Lite; Sprite; Maxwell House coffee; McDonald’s; Wendy’s; Chevy truck; Mountain Dew.
Advertising—the genre we love to hate, the ultimate symbol of American society, a representation of some of the best, and most manipulative, aspects of United States culture—is showcased every day on television and each time we log onto Internet Web sites and catch banner spots. It's on buses and billboards, in ballparks and elementary school classrooms. It's the most real of communications, for it promotes tangible objects—things, stuff, and goods. It's also the most surrealistic, most unreal of mass communications. It shows us "a world where normal social and physical arrangements simply do not hold," critic Sut Jhally (1998) observes. "A simple shampoo brings intense sexual pleasure, nerdy young men on the beach, through the wonders of video rewind, can constantly call up beautiful women walking by, old women become magically young offering both sex and beer to young men," he notes.

Advertising has been universally praised and condemned. It has been cheered by those who view it as emblematic of the American Dream—the notion that anyone with money and moxie can promote a product to masses of consumers, along with the promise, cherished by immigrants, that an escape from brutal poverty can be found through purchase of products and services not available in more oppressive economies. Advertising has been roundly condemned by those who despise its attack on our senses, its appropriation of language for use in a misty world located somewhere between truth and falsehood, and its relentless, shameless exploitation of cultural icons and values to sell goods and services (Cross, 1996, p. 2; Schudson, 1986).

Advertising, the focus of this chapter, is a complex, colorful arena that encompasses television commercials, billboards, and posters placed strategically behind home plate in baseball stadiums. It is paid materialist speech—messages for which companies pay to shape, reinforce, and change attitudes. Advertising operates on a micro level, subtly influencing consumer behavior. It also works on the macro level, serving as the vehicle by which capitalist society communicates and promotes goods to masses of consumers. To appreciate advertising's effects, we need to look at both microlevel effects on individuals and macrolevel cultural issues. This chapter and the one that follows build on previous chapters by looking at how commercial and pro-social communication campaigns influence individuals and society.

This chapter covers a lot of territory. I begin by debunking a common myth of advertising; move on to discuss the key psychological effects of advertising on attitudes, applying theories described earlier in the book; and conclude with a look at the complex ethical conundrums of contemporary advertising.
It began, appropriately enough, in the 1950s, a decade in which post-World War II Americans were bewildered by all manner of things, ranging from reports of flying saucers to the successful Soviet launching of a space satellite. In 1957, the same year the Soviets sent up Sputnik, an enterprising marketer named James Vicary reported an equally jarring set of facts. He arranged for a drive-in movie theater in Fort Lee, New Jersey, a suburb of New York City, to beam the words “Drink Coca-Cola” and “Eat Popcorn” for less than a millisecond during the romantic movie, *Picnic*. Vicary immediately proclaimed success. He claimed an 18% rise in Coke sales and a 58% increase in popcorn purchases, compared to an earlier period.

The nation’s media were shocked, shocked. Minds have been “broken and entered,” *The New Yorker* (September 21, 1957) declared. The National Association of Broadcasters forbade its members from using subliminal ads. One writer, convinced that subliminal messages had dangerous effects, wrote several best-selling books on the subject. Wilson Bryan Key claimed that subliminal stimuli were everywhere! “You cannot pick up a newspaper, magazine, or pamphlet, hear radio, or view television anywhere in North America without being assaulted subliminally,” Key (1974) announced (p. 5). He claimed that advertisements for cigarettes, liquor, and perfume contained embedded erotic pictures that caused people to march off and buy these products, like brainwashed automatons from the old film, *Coma*.

You yourself may have heard the term *subliminal* or *subliminal advertising*. It’s easy to locate the words on the Web. There are dozens of Web sites with names like “Subliminal Ads—Brainwashing Consumers?” and “The Top 13 Subliminal Messages in Presidential Campaign Ads.” Reflecting this belief in the power of subliminal ads, over 70% of respondents in scientific surveys maintain that subliminal advertisements are widely used and are successful in promoting products (Rogers & Smith, 1993; Zanot, Pincus, & Lamp, 1983). In a similar fashion, many people believe that subliminal messages in rock songs manipulate listeners. Some years back, parents of two men who committed suicide charged that the rock group Judas Priest had induced their sons to kill themselves. The parents claimed that Judas Priest had subliminally inserted the words “Do it, Do it” underneath the lyrics in a morbid song called “Beyond the Realms of Death.” (The parents lost the case.)

Beliefs are powerful entities. In the case of subliminal advertising, they can drive fears and influence emotions. Researchers, curious about subliminal message effects, have long studied the impact of subliminally embedded words and pictures. Their conclusion: No credible evidence supports the claim that subliminal ads influence attitudes or behavior. To appreciate how
scholars arrived at this judgment and what it tells us about the psychology of advertising, we need to briefly examine the research on this issue.

**Definition**

In the popular view, subliminal advertising means powerful advertising that appeals to emotional, even unconscious, needs. Given this broad definition, it is not surprising that many people believe advertising is subliminal. Scholars define subliminal differently—and far more precisely. Subliminal perception refers to an instance in which an individual "responds to stimulation, the energy or duration of which falls below that at which he ever reported awareness of the stimulus in some previous threshold determination," or when a person "responds to a stimulus of which he pleads total unawareness" (Dixon, 1971, p. 12). More simply, subliminal perception is perception without awareness of the object being perceived. It is "sub-limen," or below the "limen" or threshold of conscious awareness. Making matters more complicated, the limen is a hypothetical construct, not one that is always easy to pinpoint.

Applying this perceptual concept to advertising is not a simple matter and is far more complicated than glib commentators like Key assume. But if one struggles to apply it to advertising, in order to put popular ideas to the test, we could say that a *subliminal advertisement is one that includes a brief, specific message (picture, words, or sounds) that cannot be perceived at a normal level of conscious awareness.* This definition excludes many appeals commonly associated with subliminal ads. Commercials that contain sexy models, erotic images, vibrant colors, haunting images, or throbbing music are not, in themselves, subliminal. Why? Because the erotic or colorful image appeal is right there—you see it or hear it and if someone asks, you could tell her what you saw or heard. Even product images that have been strategically placed in movies. (e.g., Reese Pieces in *E.T.*, Burger King in *Men in Black II*) are not subliminal because advertisers hope viewers will spot and remember the products (Gass & Seiter, 1999). A subliminal ad—or, more precisely, one that contains a message that eludes conscious awareness—is a very different animal.

Subliminally embedded messages exist though. The key question is: How common are they? A study of advertising executives found that few, if any, advertising agencies strive to develop subliminal ads (Rogers & Seiler, 1994). In view of the powerful impact that ordinary ads exert, it doesn't make much sense for advertisers to rack their brains to embed subliminal messages in commercials. Besides, if the news media ever found out—and in the United States they eventually would—that an agency had slipped a subliminal spot into an ad, the bad press the advertiser would receive would overwhelm any potential benefits of the subliminal message.
Does this mean there are no subliminals anywhere in the media? Not quite. In a country as big as the United States with so many creative, ambitious, and slippery characters, it seems likely that a handful of advertising practitioners subliminally embed sexy messages in ads. (They could do this by airbrushing or using high-powered video editing techniques.) What’s more, a tiny minority of other communications—rock songs and motivational audiotapes—probably contain brief messages that lie below thresholds of conscious awareness. Thus, the major question is: What impact do subliminal messages have on consumers’ attitudes or behavior?

**Effects**

The first evidence of subliminal advertising effects came in Vicary’s report on the effects of we “Drink Coca-Cola” and “Eat Popcorn” messages. At the time, his study seemed to suggest that subliminals could potently shape human behavior. But when scholars peered beneath the surface, they discovered that his research had serious flaws. In the first place, there was no control group, an essential requirement of a scientific experiment. Thus, there is no way of knowing whether moviegoers bought more popcorn and Cokes because they happened to be hungry and thirsty that particular day. It is even possible that the movie itself stimulated sales; it was named “Picnic” and showed scenes of people enjoying food and drinks!

More seriously, Vicary never released his data or published his study. Publication and open inspection of data are basic principles in scientific research, and Vicary’s reluctance to do so casts doubt on the validity of his results. Shortly after Vicary’s findings were revealed, a respected psychological firm tried to replicate his study under controlled conditions. Using more rigorous procedures, the psychologists reported no increase in purchases of either Coke or popcorn. In 1958, a Canadian broadcast network subliminally transmitted the message “Phone Now” 352 times during a Sunday night TV show. Telephone calls did not rise during this period, and no one called the station (Pratkanis, 1998).

Although these results cast doubt on the subliminal thesis, they do not disprove it. We’re talking about only a couple of studies here. A more rigorous test involves dozens of carefully conducted experiments. Researchers have designed and conducted such studies, embedding messages in ads at levels that elude conscious awareness. They have compared the responses of experimental group participants who receive the subliminal stimuli with control group subjects who view a similar message without subliminals. These studies conclusively show that subliminal messages do not influence attitudes or behavior (Theus, 1994; Trappey, 1996). According to one scholar, the impact of subliminal advertising on consumers’ decision making is roughly the same as “the relationship
between alcohol abuse and a tour of duty in Vietnam"—in other words, negligible or nonexistent (Trappey, p. 517).

Although this may seem surprising in view of what you may have read on this topic over the years, it makes good psychological sense. Indeed, there are several reasons why one should not expect subliminally transmitted messages to influence consumer attitudes or behavior:

1. People have different thresholds for conscious awareness of stimuli. To influence a mass audience, a subliminal message would have to be so discretely beamed that it reached those with normal thresholds of awareness without catching the "attention" of those who are exquisitely sensitive to such stimuli. This would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to achieve using contemporary media.

2. There is no guarantee that consumers "see" or interpret the message in the manner that advertisers intend. (Conceivably, "Drink Coca-Cola" and "Eat Popcorn" moved so quickly across the screen that some moviegoers saw "Stink Coke" or "Beat Popcorn." This could have had the opposite impact on some viewers.)

3. For a subliminal message to influence attitudes, it must, at the very least, command the viewer's absolute attention. Such a situation is possible in the experimenter's laboratory, but not the real world. People are frequently distracted or doing other things when they watch TV or come across magazine advertisements.

4. Even if a subliminal message were embedded in an ad, it might still not get noticed, even at a subconscious level. The faintly detectable words or pictures would probably be overwhelmed by more powerful images or sounds that bombard the senses. Just because a message is "in" an ad does not mean it gets "inside" consumers. If it were that easy, everyone who works for ad agencies would be rich.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies and Beyond

Research makes abundantly clear that subliminally transmitted messages do not influence consumer attitudes or behavior. But could the belief that subliminals are powerful influence one's attitudes toward an issue? Anthony G. Greenwald and his colleagues suspected that it could. As true-blue social scientists, they decided to test their intuition. They focused attention on a different kind of persuasive communication: therapeutic self-help tapes that claim subliminally embedded messages can help listeners solve personal problems.

Greenwald and associates (1991) observed that some self-help tapes promise to enhance self-esteem by subliminally beaming messages like "I have high self-worth and high self-esteem." Others attempt to improve memory skill by subliminally transmitting messages like "My ability
to remember and recall is increasing daily." These words might be em-
bedded underneath sounds, like waves lapping against a shore. Knowing
the research as they did, Greenwald and his colleagues doubted that such
subliminals would have any impact. However, they suspected that con-
sumers' expectations that the subliminals were effective might strongly in-
fluence beliefs.

In an elaborate study using careful scientific procedures, Greenwald
and his associates obtained strong support for their hypothesis. Individu-
als who heard an audiotape that contained the subliminal message, "I
have high self-worth," did not exhibit any increase in self-esteem. In ad-
dition, those who listened to the tape that contained the "My ability to re-
member is increasing" message did not display improvements in
memory. But the belief in subliminals' impact exerted a significant effect.
Subjects who thought they had been listening to a tape designed to im-
prove self-esteem (regardless of whether they actually had) believed their
self-esteem had improved. Individuals who thought they had been listen-
ing to a memory audiotape (regardless of whether they had) were
convinced their memory had gotten better!

The researchers argued that what they had discovered was "an illusory
placebo effect—placebo, because it was based on expectations; illusory, be-
cause it wasn't real" (Pratkanis, 1998, p. 248). Their findings could also be
viewed as another demonstration of the power of self-fulfilling prophecy.
This is the idea that if you expect something to occur, sometimes it will, not
because of the objective event itself but because you altered your thoughts;
the alterations in cognitive structure then lead to changes in behavior.

Notice that a self-fulfilling prophecy operates on the conscious level,
not the secretive, subconscious level at which subliminal ads are sup-
posed to work.

This is all interesting, heady stuff. Little wonder that it has intrigued
scholars over the course of the past several decades. Even today, about a
half century after "Drink Coke, Eat Popcorn," students wonder if those
flashy Internet banner ads will subliminally implant themselves into Web
users' brains. Once again, it's doubtful. Although people can sublimi-

cally perceive information—we're not conscious of everything that slips
into our mind 24 hours a day—this does not mean that even the most
technologically sophisticated or niftiest subliminal communications can
affect consumers' attitudes toward products. On the contrary, the schol-
arly literature says they can't. (In a similar vein, some people erroneously
assume that supposedly subliminally embedded encryptions from terror-
ist groups will influence computer users. In fact, encryptions, or electron-
ically scrambled information, are unreadable to computer users who
come across them, but are decipherable on a conscious level to those who
possess the private keys to decrypt the messages.)
In view of these bogus notions of subliminal message effects, the interesting question for many researchers is not the objective impact of subliminal stimuli, but the subjective issue. Why are so many people convinced that these short, psychologically vacuous messages have so great an impact on attitudes? Laura A. Brannon and Timothy C. Brock (1994) put forth several explanations for the persistence in belief in subliminal communications, including the assumption that "if something exists it must be having an effect" (p. 289). People also yearn for simple explanations of complex phenomena like advertising, and the subliminal thesis gives them a foolproof, conspiracy-type theory that seems to explain all of advertising's powerful influences on consumers.

With all this in mind, perhaps next time you read that liquor ads contain subliminally embedded faces or bikini-clad women, you might step back a moment and ask yourself a few questions. First, what evidence is there that these faces or scantily dressed women are actually in the ads, rather than a figment of the writer's sexually active imagination? Second, even if they are "there," what evidence exists that they influence perceptions? Third, assuming the stimuli influence perceptions (a large "if"), how realistic is it to assume that they influence consumers' attitudes or behavior? By approaching advertising this way, you will quickly recognize that the mad search for subliminals takes you down the wrong trail in the quest to understand advertising effects. To comprehend the effects of advertising, we need to appreciate the emotional power of ads, but must take a more sophisticated approach.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LOW INVOLVEMENT

A good way to appreciate the many effects of advertising is to dust off the Elaboration Likelihood Model discussed in chapter 5 and review its applications to commercial persuasion. Recall that the ELM tells us that people process information differently under high and low involvement, and this has important implications for persuasion strategies. Can you think of products that are personally important, mean a lot to you, and fulfill key psychological functions? These are high-involvement purchases. You are highly involved in the consumption of these products, probably thinking about them a lot, or reckoning that you have something to lose if you make the wrong choice (Mittal, 1995). For most people, these products include cars, computers, CD players, and clothing they wear to work. Now consider the other side of the coin—products that you purchase that are of little personal concern, don't matter much to you, are mundane, and don't stimulate much thought. These are low-involvement purchases. They include soft drinks, countless grocery store products, and convenience goods like paper towels, tissue paper, and toothpaste (see Fig. 11.1).
FIG. 11.1 Advertisers use a host of peripheral appeals to promote low-involvement products like these. (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)
The ELM emphasizes that people process messages peripherally under low involvement and are, therefore, susceptible to simple appeals. Under high involvement, individuals think more centrally and deeply, taking into account the merits of the product and values stimulated by the ad. Advertising for high-involvement products cogently describes tangible benefits associated with the products. Ads also attempt to connect products with deep-seated values. The ELM has many interesting implications for advertising effects, suggesting, as it does, that we look separately at low- and high-involving advertising appeals. The next sections explore this approach.

**Mere Exposure**

According to the mere exposure thesis, simple exposure to communications can influence attitudes. Merely seeing a message repeated over and over again leads to liking (Zajonc, 1968). This is a familiar experience. The longer you gaze at a painting in a museum, the more times you hear a hip-hop song on your CD player, and the more frequently you see an advertisement on TV, the more you come to like these stimuli.

Mere exposure is a strong, robust persuasion phenomenon. It works! Research conducted over the past decades provides strong support for the theory (Bornstein, 1989). Psychologists are not sure exactly why repetition leads to liking, but they believe it has something to do with the reduction of irritation that occurs after seeing or hearing a stimulus many times. The first time television viewers saw the Taco Bell ad in which the little Chihuahua utters, "Yo quiero Taco Bell" ("I want Taco Bell"), they probably were a little confused by the phrase and put off by the presence of a smirking, talking dog in an ad for a fast-food franchise. But with repetition, they got used to the ad, adjusted to the smug little dog, and developed a sense of what would occur as the quirky ad unfolded. The more they saw the ad, the more comfortable they felt and the more they liked it.

Mere exposure places more importance on form than content. It is the format—repeated exposure to a neutral stimulus—that matters, not the content of the ad. In early research on the topic, psychologists asked people to pronounce a variety of nonsense words—for example, afvorbu, civrada, and nansoma. The words had no inherent meaning or semantic significance. Yet the more frequently individuals were exposed to the words, the more favorably they evaluated them (Zajonc, 1968). In the same fashion, the more we hear advertising slogans like "Whassup?" (Budweiser) or the time-honored "Double your pleasure, double your fun" (Doublemint gum), or see goofy animals (the Energizer Bunny), the more favorably we evaluate these ads and the products. People made fun of the old Charmin toilet paper ads ("Please don't squeeze the Charmin").
However, the ads apparently worked as Charmin, never known to consumers before, captured a significant share of the market after its nonstop advertising campaigns.

Is repetition a panacea, a factor that always works? No way! Mere exposure is most effective under certain conditions. First, it works best for neutral products and issues—those to which we have not yet developed a strong attitude. It explains how advertising forms attitudes toward products, not how it changes them. Second, once people have developed an especially negative attitude toward a product, company, or politician for that matter, repetition cannot change the attitude. In fact, it may have the opposite effect, producing more negative affect toward the issue as people ruminate about how much they hate the fast-food product, big corporation, or obnoxious politician (Tesser, 1978).

Finally, you can repeat an advertisement too many times. After a certain point, repetition leads to boredom, tedium, and irritation. A phenomenon known as wear-out occurs (Bornstein, 1989; Solomon, 1999). Early in the mere exposure curve, repetition is a positive experience, reducing uncertainty, inducing calm, and bringing on a certain amount of pleasure. After a certain point, repetition has the opposite effect, and people become annoyed with the ad. Repetition ceases to lead to positive affect and can induce negative feelings toward the ad or product (see Fig. 11.2). This is one reason why companies like McDonald’s and Coke frequently switch slogans and change advertising agencies. They want to prevent wear-out and preserve the effect of a novel campaign slogan.

The Magic of Association

There’s a marvelous McDonald’s ad I have shown in the classroom over the years. It never fails to bring forth smiles and to elicit positive reactions

![FIG. 11.2 Repetition, advertising, and wear-out. After a certain number of repetitions, advertising can lead to wear-out.](image-url)
from students who view it. The ad begins with a football coach lecturing a team of 8-year-old boys. He intones, "A great man once said, 'Winning, gentlemen, isn't everything, it's the only thing.'" Suddenly we hear one of the boys, obviously oblivious to the coach's serious tone, shout, "Look, a grasshopper." All the youngsters jump up to take a look. The coach throws down his hat in mock despair. Another coach, kneeling down, says seriously to one of the boys, "I-formation, 34 sweep, on 2. Got it?" When the boy, doing his best to understand but obviously bewildered, shakes his head, the coach says, "Just give the ball to Matt. Tell him to run for his daddy, okay?" The boy nods happily.

As the camera pans the oh-so-cute boys in their blue uniforms; shows us the misty, but picture-perfect, football day; and lets us watch the players do push-ups while fathers feverishly peer through video cameras to record their sons' every movement, we hear the narrator say, "It starts every September with teams like the Turkey Creek Hawks and the Bronx Eagles." Alas, these September days are about more than just winning football games, the narrator goes on to suggest; they're about dads and sons, good times, and—now the pitch—where you go after the game. Soft, sentimental music builds as the scene slowly shifts to what must be a later point in time—the boys smiling and enjoying themselves at McDonald's, no doubt chomping down burgers and fries. And so, the narrator intones, the scene moving back to football, McDonald's would like to salute the players, coaches, and team spirit that are part of these fall September days. The visual then profiles a boy, looking up at the "winning-isn't-everything" coach. "Can we go to McDonald's now, Coach?" he asks. Patiently, kindly, but firmly, the coach notes, "Sit down, Lenny. It's only halftime." The music, playing softly in the background, trails off and fades, as the ad gently comes to a close.

The advertisement illustrates the principle of association. It associates the good feelings produced by football, boys playing pigskin on weekend afternoons, and autumn with the fast-food franchise, McDonald's. It has linked these images seamlessly, though obviously, using an indirect strategy to promote McDonald's. McDonald's has not told us the reasons why its hamburgers are tasty (that might be a hard sell, given what we know about fast-food diets!). It has not provided cogent arguments that dining at McDonald's is a healthy, useful activity for budding athletes. In fact the ad has provided neither argument nor logic. Instead it has employed the rich language of emotion, telling us a story, associating McDonald's with positive, pleasant images that are peripheral to the purchase decision. If you tried the same technique in a job that required you to provide arguments why clients should purchase your product, trying to associate your product with good times, all the while humming a sentimental tune, you would be fired! Yet McDonald's succeeds because the
world of advertising is not purely or primarily rational. It invariably prefers emotion to syllogistic logic. It frequently favors Aristotle's pathos to his deductive logos.

There are countless examples of the use of association in advertising, ranging from perfume and cologne ads that link their products with sex appeal to cigarette ads that associate their brands with relaxation, good times, and virile masculinity (see Box 11–1). Association is perhaps the most important reason why advertising succeeds. It explains why things—material objects with no inherent value—acquire powerful meanings (near-magical auras) in consumers' eyes. Scholars have advanced several theories to explain how association works. They include classical conditioning and semiotics.

**BOX 11–1**

**CIGARETTE ADVERTISING**

An antismoking videotape shown in college classrooms offers an intriguing insight into the strategies tobacco companies use to market cigarettes. The video begins as magazine ads and billboards depict attractive young people smiling and relaxing while smoking a Kool or Virginia Slims. Smoke wafts up from a lit cigarette, as a guitar plays and a gentle male voice sings:

If you want some real contentment to live life at its best,
You can buy these dried tobacco leaves to breathe into your chest.
And then look up at the billboard while all the promises come true . . . for you.
You'll feel alive with pleasure, playful as a child
You've come to where the freedom is.
You're cool and mild . . .
So look up at the billboard, see her smile and sexy intent
But the only one who's laughing is the advertising man. (Kilbourne & Pollay, 1992)

Cigarette advertising, a multibillion dollar business around the globe, exploits psychological strategies to hook young people into smoking or to convince satisfied customers to stick with their brands. Ads have associated cigarettes with the pristine outdoors, sexuality, and rugged independence (as in the American icon, the Marlboro Man). Appeals geared to young women play on the psychological functions cigarettes serve, like independence and autonomy. The copy in a Virginia Slims ad says, "I always take the driver's seat. That way I'm never taken for a ride." Because cigarettes cannot be advertised on radio or TV in the United States, advertisers have relied on a variety of other techniques to promote their product, including billboards, magazine ads, event sponsorship, and linking their logos with athletic contests and rock concerts, a practice known as brand-stretching

*Continued*
(Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2002). Movies like Basic Instinct, Pulp Fiction, My Best Friend's Wedding, and Titanic depicted characters smoking, with apparent enjoyment. In some cases tobacco companies paid movie producers to place cigarettes in their films (Basil, 1997). In an effort to reach the burgeoning youth market, multinational cigarette companies have distributed tobacco-branded clothing abroad, and in the United States have plastered cigarette logos on candy and children's toys.

Perhaps the most famous mass-marketing technique is Old Joe, the cigarette-puffing cartoon character promoting Camels. Several studies reported that Old Joe is recognized by more than 91% of children (e.g., Fischer et al., 1991; Horovitz & Wells, 1997). However, now that cigarette advertising cannot be displayed on large billboards, in sports arenas, or other public places, tobacco companies have taken their graphic, hedonistic images to another venue: the World Wide Web. The Web is a potential gold mine for cigarette advertising. Marketers can deliver moving images and interactive features to a captive audience of kids who love to surf the Net and delight in playing "grown-up" by revealing consumer information to companies. One study found that cigarettes are a "pervasive presence" on the Web, especially on sites that sell products or feature hobbies and recreation. Sites associate smoking with glamorous lifestyles and with thin, physically appealing women (Hong & Cody, 2001).

In light of increases in teen smoking, evidence that more than one third of high school students smoke, and statistics showing that 90% of smokers begin during adolescence, there has been much concern about the effects of such marketing on children (Brown & Walsh-Childers, 2002). Yet so many factors influence smoking behavior—including parental smoking and having siblings who smoke—that it is difficult to parcel out the unique contribution advertising makes. Researchers are not of one mind on this subject. Some scholars are quick to point out that kids may recognize Joe Camel, but have no intention of lighting up a Camel or any other cigarette for that matter (McDonald, 1993).

Even so, the scholarly consensus is that cigarette advertising predicts increased consumption of cigarettes, and that ads increase the symbolic attractiveness of cigarettes, particularly among young people (Andrews & Franke, 1991; Pierce et al., 1998; Schooler et al., 1996). Teenagers are by nature triers and product experimenters. Searching for ways to gain belonging and independence, some adolescents are attracted to cigarettes, and advertising enhances their appeal as badges of youthful identity—products some teens "wear," along with clothing, earrings, and tattoos (Pollay, 1997, p. 62).

What's more, a related marketing strategy—point-of-purchase cigarette marketing—appears to be highly effective. With mass-media advertising
being phased out, in the wake of the legal agreement between the state attorneys general and the tobacco industry, the tobacco industry is spending close to $3 billion on aggressively marketing cigarettes in retail establishments like convenience stores. Convenience stores are a prime location, as many young people frequently shop there. In some stores, more than 20 tobacco ads greet customers. The ads, positioned so they catch young people’s attention, have marked effects on adolescents’ perceptions of tobacco. One study found that in-store promotions significantly enhanced eighth- and ninth-graders’ perceptions of the accessibility and popularity of cigarettes, factors that increase the chances young people will begin smoking (Henriksen et al., 2002).

All of this raises important ethical questions. Cigarette marketing unquestionably pushes the ethical envelope of persuasion to its limits. Yet even its fiercest critics acknowledge that tobacco marketing—and advertising in particular—is not coercive. People are free to accept or reject advertising’s deceptive appeals. Ads are not threatening individuals with sanctions if they don’t light up. More broadly, cigarette consumption is legal, and companies have a right to promote their products through the mass media. And yet advertisers associate cigarettes with benefits (sex appeal, ruggedness, independence) that are unlikely to materialize in reality, while saying nothing about the dirty, addictive aspects of the product. Such ads surely must be criticized by those who value honesty and truth telling, particularly to young, vulnerable members of the audience. Legal scholars have noted that cigarette advertising is protected under the First Amendment; yet this does not make it ethically permissible or worthy of endorsement on moral grounds.

It is a complex debate, the question of cigarette advertising—and tobacco marketing more generally. Defenders point to the value of individual liberty and need to preserve a society in which media can promote any product that consumers desire, even those that can kill them. Critics point to the sham of advertisers spending millions of dollars to come up with ever more clever ways to hook young people into depending psychologically on a life-threatening product. Is this the kind of society we want, they retort?

Particularly problematic are tobacco companies’ blatant attempts to hook young people into smoking. “The clearest statement (of this),” reporter Philip J. Hilts (1996) discovered, after extensively studying cigarette marketing, “came in a question and answer period at a regional (R. J. Reynolds Company) sales meeting. Someone asked exactly who the young people were that were being targeted, junior high school kids, or even younger?”

The reply came back “They got lips? We want ‘em.” (Hilts, p. 98).
Classical Conditioning. The granddaddy of association concepts, conditioning dates back to Pavlov. "Does the name Pavlov ring a bell?" Cialdini (2001) asks humorously, reminding us of the Russian psychologist's century-old study that paired an unconditioned stimulus (food) with a conditioned stimulus (bell) to produce a conditioned response (salivation to the bell). Psychologists have applied classical conditioning to social learning, particularly attitude acquisition. In a study conducted in a post-World War II era preoccupied with understanding how Nazi-type prejudice could have developed, Staats and Staats (1958) showed that individuals could acquire negative attitudes toward the word "Dutch" simply by hearing it paired with words that had negative connotations ("ugly," "failure"). In a similar fashion, consumer behavior scholars have shown that attitudes toward products can be classically conditioned through association with pleasant images (Grossman & Till, 1998; Stuart, Shimp, & Engle, 1987).

Classical conditioning processes help us understand how people develop favorable attitudes toward products. However, conditioning is a rather primitive model that does not take into account: (a) people's symbolic representations of objects in their minds, and (b) how they mentally link images with products. Consequently, we need to examine another view of association in advertising.

Semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. It helps us understand how signs—visual objects or geometric shapes with no inherent meaning—take on a rich tapestry of social and cultural meaning. A symbol is a sign with substance—a sign that bursts with value and emotional signification. Viewed as it might have been prior to Nazi Germany, the swastika is merely a strange, twisted shape. Yet, merged with Hitler's rhetoric and German atrocities, it becomes a symbol of hate, anti-Semitism, and crimes against humanity. The Cross and Star of David are shapes, but as symbols they are much more. The Cross symbolizes Jesus' crucifixion and redemption—an emblem of Christian Love. The Star of David, a six-pointed star formed by superimposing two equilateral triangles, is a symbol of Judaism, Jewish culture, and the State of Israel.

Advertising—like religion and politics—thrives on signs. It transforms signs into symbols that give a product its meaning or "zip" (Goldman & Papson, 1996). Take a look at the signs in Fig. 11.3. Glance first at Coca-Cola, closing your eyes to gain a clearer fix on the image. Do the same for the Nike Swoosh and McDonald's. What comes to mind? Images, feelings, pictures, people? I'd be willing to bet they did, even if you don't like the products or purchase them. Such is the power of advertising. It attempts to fill commodity signs with meaning, to give value to brands, and to stamp imagery onto products that differ only trivially from their
competitors. Consider that classic entry in the sneaker wars, the Nike Swoosh. As Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson (1996) observe:

Once upon a time, the Nike swoosh symbol possessed no intrinsic value as a sign, but value was added to the sign by drawing on the name and image value of celebrity superstars like Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan possesses value in his own right—the better his performances, the higher his value. The sign of Nike acquired additional value when it joined itself to the image of Jordan. Similarly, when Nike introduced a new shoe line named “Air Huarache” and wanted to distinguish its sign from those of other shoe lines, Nike adopted John Lennon’s song “Instant Karma,” as a starting point for the shoe’s sign value. Nike justified drawing on Lennon’s classic song by insisting that it was chosen because it dovetailed with Nike’s own message of “self-improvement: making yourself better.” (p. 10)

This was the Nike “advertising sign machine” of the late 1980s and ’90s, featuring associations between its Swoosh and Jordan, Bo (“Bo Knows”) Jackson, and Spike Lee. Since then, Nike has embarked on numerous ad campaigns, including ones that feature commercials resembling MTV videos—brilliant, but blatant, attempts to associate the Swoosh with images resonant with a younger market. Nike, like other advertisers, strives constantly to redefine its image in the eyes of a new market niche through ever-inventive ways of combining signs with in-vogue celebrities, trends, and images.

Yet for all of its insights, semiotics does not explain how advertising creeps into the minds of consumers. It is a theory of message content, not message effects. To understand associative advertising impact, we must turn to cognitive psychological concepts. Consider that advertising shapes attitudes toward products by helping forge an association between the product and a pleasant, memorable image. Once the attitude is formed, it must be retrieved or accessed, particularly at the moment when consumers are making a product decision. Accessibility, the extent
to which people can "call up" an attitude from memory, comes to the
fore when discussing advertising's effects on attitudes. Research dis-
cussed in chapter 2 suggests that the more exposure consumers have to
advertisements that plant the association between a product and image,
the more they can quickly get in touch with their attitude when they are
trying to decide which soft drink, fast food, or sneaker to purchase. Ad-
vertisers recognize this and try to influence the extent to which people
can activate product attitudes from memory.

Thus, McDonald’s ads try to induce consumers who are in the mood
for fast food to call up the feelings they had when they watched an ad
like the one described earlier. Coke tries to access years of internalized
associations between its product and positive images. These include mid-
20th-century linkages between Coca-Cola and patriotic appeals that call
to mind artist Norman Rockwell; the classic 1971 song that associated
Coke with global, ethnic diversity ("I'd like to buy the world a Coke and
keep it company. It's the real thing"); and current multicultural cam-
paigns that span Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa (see Box 11-2). In
the view of some observers, Coke may have even built and activated as-
sociations between its soft drink and the Christian religion! A minister
once told a Coca-Cola bottler, "I see a strange connection between your
slogan, 'The pause that refreshes,' and Christ's own words, 'Come unto
me all ye that travail, and I will refresh you' " (Martin, 2000). In these
ways, Coke ads give powerful meanings to a "mixture of water, carbon
dioxide, sugar, flavorings, and colorings" (Myers, 1999, p. 7).

**BOX 11-2
SELLING GOD, COUNTRY, AND COKE**

How did a drink composed of sugar, caramel, caffeine, lime juice, and kola
nuts become a multibillion dollar seller? How, in short, did Coke become
"the real thing"? In two words: "advertising" and "marketing," conclude
authors like Mark Pendergrast, who wrote the book, *For God, Country and
Coca-Cola*. Based on his research, Pendergrast offers a number of sugges-
tions on how to market products like Coke through mass media. They in-
clude the following:

1. **Sell a good product.** And if it contains a small dose of an addictive
drug or two, all the better.
2. **Develop a mystique.** An air of mystery, with a touch of sin, sells.
3. **Sell a cheaply produced item.** Coca-Cola has always cost only a frac-
tion of a cent per drink to produce.
4. **Make your product widely available.**
5. Use celebrity endorsements wisely—but sparingly.
7. Develop cultural sensitivity. If you intend to sell your product around the world, do not trap yourself in an “Ugly American” image.
8. Be flexible enough to change.
9. Pay attention to the bottom line.
10. Advertise an image, not a product. As one Coke advertiser liked to remind his creative staff, “We’re selling smoke. They’re drinking the image, not the product” (Pendergrast, 2000, pp. 461–465).

Other advertisements employ similar strategies. Ads for Levi’s 501 jeans, particularly outside the United States, attempt to call up connections between jeans and such positive values as youth, rebelliousness, and the U.S.A. The American commercial icon, Campbell’s Soup, spent much of the 20th century building powerful linkages between its product and down-home days with Mom and Dad (albeit of the White variety). Campbell’s ads seemingly left an imprint, as one consumer acknowledged:

Campbell’s tomato soup is the only one that will do. It’s like a cozy, comforting thing. It tastes good mainly because you associate it with what it did for you when you were a kid. Maybe it doesn’t even taste that good, but somehow it works on a level beyond just your taste buds. (Langer, 1997, p. 61)

In these ways advertisers subtly build associations into signs, products, and brands, transforming things into symbols of desire, warmth, and hope, and making objects the stuff of dreams (Langrehr & Caywood, 1995; McCracken, 1986). Although ads do not always exert this impact—the floors in advertising agencies are littered with footage from unsuccessful meaning-making campaigns—ads can potently influence affect toward products. In light of advertising’s widely recognized ability to shape product attitudes, it is little wonder that people unschooled in advertising effects leapt onto the subliminal seduction bandwagon.

**Peripheral Processing**

The ELM’s emphasis on peripheral processes complements discussion of association and mere exposure. When consumers are in a low-involvement mode—as most are when they encounter ads for soft drink, lip balm,
paper towel, and toothpaste products—they process ads through the peripheral route. Repeated exposure and associations serve as peripheral cues; so do source factors, like celebrity endorsements and use of sexually attractive product endorsers.

Celebrities are particularly interesting and potentially powerful source factors. Celebrities transfer meanings from their cultural identity to the product. As researcher Grant McCracken (1989) observed:

No mere model could bring to Baly-Matrix the properties that Cher delivers, nor could any model have summoned the impatient, time-tested integrity, John Houseman gave the Smith-Barney line "We make money the old-fashioned way, we earn it." Only a man playing Houseman's roles in the way Houseman played them could empower the slogan as Houseman did. Celebrities have particular configurations of meaning that cannot be found elsewhere. (p. 315)

Celebrities are particularly apt to enhance consumer attitudes when their characteristics "match up with," or are relevant to, the product being promoted (Chew et al., 1994; Lynch & Schuler, 1994). For example, when Michael Jordan and soccer star Mia Hamm promoted Nike, their athletic expertise was salient. It served as a simple "click-whirr" reason to prefer Nike sneakers (Cialdini, 2001). Ditto for Bob Dole, the former senator who product-endorsed Viagra after running unsuccessfully for president at the age of 73.

Celebrity characteristics do not always match product attributes, however. Former professional football quarterback Joe Montana promoted Diet Pepsi. So did Ray Charles, in an amusing skit that played on his knowledge of his blindness. Pop singers Britney Spears and Shakira celebrity-endorsed Pepsi. In these cases, their fame bonded to the product, enhancing its sign value.

Celebrities' physical attractiveness can also serve as a peripheral cue. Attractiveness can influence attitudes by blending, association-style, with the product, or it can work by stimulating identification processes ("I want to 'be like Mike' "). (Celebrity endorsers can net advertisers millions, but they also can be persuasive liabilities, as Pepsi discovered years ago when Madonna created controversy for her "Like a Prayer" video. Pepsi pulled the ad. And then there's the case of once-in-demand, now-taboo, O. J. Simpson.)

Ads can also work peripherally simply by putting low-involved consumers in a good mood. Just being in a good mood can influence positive affect toward products, without impacting beliefs in the slightest (see Petty et al., 1993). Pleasant music, goofy gimmicks (Budweiser's frogs), and incongruous, humorous situations can put people in a good mood.
This can increase memory and liking of the ad, which can influence brand attitudes (Muehling & McCann, 1993).

The same consumer psychology applies when people process Internet advertising under low-involvement conditions. When cruising the Net in a low-involved state or glancing over banner ads for products that don’t touch on important needs, consumers are apt to be swayed by attention-grabbing cues, like the size, color, and dynamic animation of banner ads (Cho, 1999).

**HIGH INVOLVEMENT**

Another category of advertising concerns high-involvement products—those that are important to us personally, touch on our self-concepts, or are big-ticket, expensive items (see Fig. 11.4). When consumers are in the market for an ordinarily high-involvement product, like a car, jewelry, computer, or even clothing, they process ads centrally. The Elaboration Likelihood Model emphasizes that under high-involvement conditions, people consider the merits of the product, connect the product to core values, and systematically process product commercials (Andrews & Shimp, 1990; Roehm & Haugtvedt, 1999). They carefully process factual information like price and consider the material benefits of the purchase (see Fig. 11.5). When they are on-line and come across banner ads for high-involvement products like cars, consumers may be uninfluenced by the ads’ size or color. Instead, they may be especially likely to click the ads to request more information about the product (Cho, 1999). As a general rule, strong, cogent arguments on behalf of the product should carry the day.

But what constitutes a strong, cogent argument on behalf of a product? On this point, our ordinarily useful Elaboration Likelihood Model lets us down. It doesn’t tell us the specific arguments that are likely to be most compelling under high consumer involvement. To identify the types of messages that are apt to resonate with people purchasing personally important products, we need to turn to another persuasion theory. Functional theory, discussed in chapter 3, helps bridge consumer attitudes and persuasion. You may recall that the functional approach says that attitudes serve specific psychological functions or needs for individuals. Messages are most likely to influence attitudes if they target the function the attitude serves. Let’s see how this works in the case of advertising.

Some attitudes serve a **utilitarian** function. People purchase products to gain specific, tangible rewards (Shavitt & Nelson, 2000). Parents who need a minivan to transport their kids, pets, or groceries have utilitarian
FIG. 11.4 To many consumers, computer, photographic, and electronic products are highly involving. Advertisers use factual, social, and value-based appeals to promote these products. (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)
Figure 11.5 Involvement and brand attitudes (From Mitchell, "Effects of Visual and Verbal Components of Advertisements on Brand Attitudes," JOURNAL OF CONSUMER RESEARCH 13 (1986), pp. 12-24).

reasons for purchasing a car. Ads targeted at these parents commonly emphasize the passenger space and roominess of, say, a Chevy Suburban or Honda Odyssey.

People buy products for reasons other than tangible benefits. They buy to fulfill ambitions, dreams, and fantasies. Thus, product attitudes serve symbolic, as well as material, functions.

For example, some attitudes serve a social-adjustive function. People purchase products to gain acceptance from peers. One mother confessed that "in my neighborhood, if you don't have a brand name bicycle, the kids rib you. We had to go out and buy (my son) a $300 bike so the kids would leave him alone. He was getting harassed because he had a cheaper bike" (Langer, 1997, p. 64). Although the mother's comment may seem silly or petty or worse, it does reflect a common perspective toward products. Advertising designed to reach this mom might hype the brand name of the bike or suggest that the advertised bike is a best-seller among kids.

Product attitudes also serve a social identity function. Consumers purchase cars, jewelry, and other highly involving goods to enhance their identities—to set them apart from others. People buy big-ticket items to gain status, look cool, show off an identity to others, or express love. Ads appeal to these needs, using pictures, images, and the syntax of advertising to suggest that owning products makes you happy. "May promote feelings of superiority," a tag line for a Nissan car unabashedly stated.

Advertisements for highly involving products also employ association-based appeals, but they invite deeper processing than do association-based appeals for low-involving products. As Paul Messaris (1997) notes:

In the single category of automotive ads, one can encounter analogies to lions (Toyota), tigers (Exxon), cheetahs (BMW), military aircraft (Dodge, Honda, Jaguar, etc.), and Fabergé eggs (Lincoln). . . . If the creator of an ad
wants to make the point that a certain car is powerful, the verbal text can
convey this message explicitly, through such words as “dynamic,” “breath-
taking,” “supercharged,” or, indeed, “powerful.” When it comes to the ad’s
pictorial content, though, this aspect of verbal syntax, the adjective–noun
relationship, has no direct visual counterpart. One alternative, then, is sim-
ply to show an image of the car accelerating rapidly and trust the viewer to
make the appropriate inference. . . . Showing the car next to some other ob-
ject or entity that also possesses power increases the likelihood that the
viewer will get the point, not so much because of the doubling of powerful
objects as because the juxtaposition should lead the viewer to intuit what it
is that they have in common. (pp. 191,193)

Consumer attitudes also serve a value-expressive function. Individu-
als purchase products to express deep-seated values. People with strong
environmental attitudes steer clear of things that damage the environ-
ment and seek out products that are environmentally friendly. Advertis-
ers target environmentally conscious consumers by playing up concern
for ecology in their ads. The Body Shop plays up its opposition to scien-
tific testing of animals. L. L. Bean advertises its “durable, practical prod-
ucts for men and women who love the outdoors” (Goldman & Papson,
p. 194). Advertisers take code words like recycling and green and cleverly
associate them with their products. In these ways they try to convince
middle-class Baby Boomers and Gen Xers that they can shop til they
drop, while at the same time purchasing products that are oh-so environ-
mentally correct.

Value-based appeals have long been a staple of advertising. In fact,
advertising agencies have developed elaborate strategies to measure con-
sumers’ values and lifestyle choices, hoping to tailor ads to match the
values of particular audience segments. Automobile companies, hoping
to solidify their niche in the competitive car market, have been particu-
larly concerned with tapping into consumers’ values. Some years back
they discovered that minivan buyers sought out cars for different reasons
than sport-utility customers. Summarizing market research on the topic,
a reporter noted that “minivan buyers tend to be more comfortable than
sport utility buyers with being married; sport utility buyers are more
commonly concerned with still feeling sexy, and like the idea that they
could use their vehicles to start dating again” (Bradsher, 2000, p. A1).
Minivan buyers are more apt to participate in family gatherings and in
conversations with friends. The more restless, self-focused sport-utility
owners prefer to dine at fine restaurants, go to sporting events, or physi-
cally work out.

Advertisers have exploited these findings. Ads for Ford’s Windstar
minivan feature a dozen mothers and their kids arrayed around a Wind-
star. The ads note that the moms are all Ford employees who worked
together to redesign the van. In contrast, a TV ad for Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited depicts a driver who had to climb a pile of rocks that blocked access to his mansion. Automobile designers also take advantage of value-based marketing studies. They design SUVs so that they are masculine and aggressive, "often with hoods that resemble those on 18-wheel trucks (and) vertical metal slats across the grilles to give the appearance of a jungle cat's teeth. . . . By contrast . . . sedans and station wagons have open grilles that look toothless" (Bradsher, p. A16).

Summary

Advertisers centrally process high-involved consumers, just as highly involved viewers centrally scrutinize ads. Advertising executives like to stay one step ahead of the consumer, using market research to devise ads that match the functions products serve for individuals in a given culture (Han & Shavitt, 1994).

In addition to functional theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model helps us understand the effects of advertising. Involvement, the centerpiece of the discussion, has complex influences. A particular product (for example, shampoo) can be low involving for one consumer and highly involving to another. As noted in chapter 5, a particular factor (a model's attractiveness) can function as a peripheral cue, argument, or catalyst for additional thought. Complicating matters even further, involvement is not a static variable in the world of advertising. Advertisers frequently try to convince people that a low-involving product (sneakers) is of deep, personal importance. Global events also shake up consumers' involvement with goods and services. Airline advertising used to be a low-involvement game. After September 11, airline safety became an issue of paramount importance, necessitating a change in airlines' TV appeals.

THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY

Another factor that enters into the psychology of advertising is personality. Individuals differ in their evaluations of advertising. Advertisers take this into account when they devise ads that appeal to different personality types or audience niches. The personality factor that has generated the most attention is one discussed earlier in this book—self-monitoring. You may recall that image-conscious high self-monitors differ in a variety of ways from the relentlessly "Be yourself" low self-monitors. High self-monitors adopt attitudes for social-adjustive purposes, to help them fit into social situations. Low self-monitors hold attitudes for value-expressive reasons, to assist them in expressing their core views toward life.
Psychologist Kenneth G. DeBono argued that these differences in the functional basis of attitudes have interesting implications for advertising. High self-monitors, he suspected, should be especially responsive to advertising messages that help one adjust one's image to fit a particular situation. Low self-monitors, by contrast, should be more influenced by ads that call attention to the intrinsic value or performance of the product.

DeBono tested his ideas in a series of intriguing experiments. As he suspected, high self-monitors were especially influenced by "soft-sell" appeals that called attention to the image one could project by purchasing the product. Low self-monitors were swayed more by "hard-sell" ads that highlighted the quality or durability of the product (DeBono, 2000; Snyder & DeBono, 1985). These findings can be easily applied to advertising campaigns. Advertisements frequently highlight the image associated with owning a product. Such ads should be more effective with high- than low self-monitors. For example, this classic, savvy Sprite ad of a few years back geared to a female market should be particularly influential with high self-monitoring women:

You're a woman
of the 90's.
Bold, self-assured and empowered.
Climbing the ladder of success at work
and the Stairmaster at the gym.
You're socially aware and politically correct.
But you probably know all this already
because every ad and magazine
has told you a zillion times.
No wonder you're thirsty. (Goldman & Papson, p. 264)

On the other hand, this MasterCard ad, exploiting the desire for authenticity, should appeal more to low self-monitors. The ad shows a guy sitting on top of a hill overlooking a lovely Mediterranean town. As he gazes into the distance, the narrator remarks:

Alright, brace yourselves. Your credit line has nothing to do with your value as a person, OK? You could have a shiny Gold MasterCard with a credit line of at least $5000, I don't care. It doesn't make you a better person. (He pauses, and shifting his tone of voice he wonders aloud:) Well, I don't know, maybe it does? I mean if knowing that the Master Assist Plan can refer you to a good doctor or lawyer anywhere in the world, let you relax and stop being so uptight and just have fun and be yourself—then, yeah, I suppose a Gold MasterCard could have some effect. (Goldman & Papson, pp. 143–144)

Keep in mind that these are general predictions. There is not one type of low-self-monitoring consumer, nor one kind of high-self-monitoring
buyer (Slama & Singley, 1996). Low self-monitors like jazzy products, and high self-monitors don’t want products that will break once they buy them. Nonetheless, research on self-monitoring reminds us that one size does not fit all when it comes to advertising, and that advertising is more apt to be effective when it targets the needs that products fulfill.

**ADVERTISING ETHICS**

It is a lot easier to document advertising effects than to arrive at universally accepted conclusions about its ethics. Long before the arrival of Old Joe Camel and the Budweiser frogs, critics debated the ethics of advertising. Adopting a deontological approach (see chapter 1), critics have argued that the test of ethical communication is whether it treats people as an end, not a means—or, more practically, whether the communicators’ motives are honorable or decent. Viewed in this way, advertising can fall drastically short of an ethical ideal. Advertisers develop ads that make promises they know products can’t deliver. Cigarettes don’t offer hedonistic pleasure; cars don’t make you rich or famous; and making pancakes for your kids on Saturday won’t assuage your guilt about neglecting them all week, despite the plaintive plea of a Bisquik pancake commercial.

Advertisers want consumers to project fantasies onto products in order to hook individuals on the image of the brand. Viewed from a deontological perspective, advertising is not ethical because advertisers are not truthful. If the decency of the communicators’ motives is the criterion for ethical communication, advertising fails. Advertisers deliberately construct fantasies to serve their clients’ needs, not to aid the customer in living a healthier, happier life.

Responding to these criticisms, defenders of advertising note that consumers recognize that advertising creates untruths. They do not expect ads to tell them “the way things really are in society,” Messaris (1997) notes. “Almost by definition,” he says, “the portrayals of the good life presented in ads carry with them the implicit understanding that they are idealizations, not documentary reports” (p. 268). In effect, advertising defenders say, “Don’t worry; be happy.” Advertising is capitalism’s playful communication, an effort to give people an outlet for universal human fantasies.

In the end, the verdict on advertising depends on the criteria we use to judge it. Judged in terms of consequences on society, advertising’s effects are ambiguous. Exposure to beautiful people or unimaginable wealth may cause dissatisfaction in some consumers (Richins, 1991), but can lead others to reach for loftier goals. Judged strictly on truth-telling criteria, advertising rarely makes product claims that are demonstrably false.
However, it almost always exaggerates, puffs up products, and links products with intangible rewards. “All advertising tells lies,” Leslie Savan (1994) says. However, she notes that “there are little lies and there are big lies. Little lie: This beer tastes great. Big lie: This beer makes you great” (p. 7).

In the final analysis, advertising will remain an ethically problematic, but necessary, part of capitalist society. Needed to differentiate and promote products that (truth be told) differ only trivially from one another, advertising keeps the engines of the free market economy rolling. It increases demand and allows companies to sell products, prosper, and employ managers and workers. On the macroeconomic level, advertising plays an essential, critical role in contemporary capitalism. From an ethical perspective, advertising remains, as Schudson (1986) put it, an “uneasy persuasion.”

CONCLUSIONS

Advertising is such a pervasive part of American culture that is difficult to conjure up images of products that are not influenced by what we have seen in commercials. If you were asked to free-associate about Coca-Cola, Budweiser, Nike, Herbal Essence, or cars running the gamut from Mustangs to minivans, your mental images would undoubtedly contain ideas and pictures gleaned from commercials. It is physically difficult, if not impossible, to call to mind an advertising-free image of products. This is because advertising plays a critical role in shaping, reinforcing, even changing attitudes toward products.

Little wonder that critics have charged that advertising’s power comes from subliminally embedded messages that elude conscious awareness. Research finds that subliminal communications exert virtually no impact on attitudes. However, the conscious belief that a message contains a subliminal message can influence attitudes. The subliminal notion is more hoax than reality, but it persists because people cling to simplistic ideas about how advertising works.

As suggested by the ELM, advertising works through different pathways under low and high involvement. When viewing ads for low-involvement products, consumers process information peripherally. Repetition, associational appeals, and celebrity source endorsements are influential. Association, whose theoretical foundations run the gamut from classical conditioning to accessibility, is a potent weapon in advertising campaigns.

When thinking about more personally consequential purchases, consumers process ads centrally, taking into account the benefits products offer and the psychological functions that products serve. When directing
ads at highly involved consumers, advertisers use factual messages and symbolic appeals targeted to particular attitude functions.

Although advertising is pervasive, it does not magically alter attitudes. As social judgment theory reminds us, advertising will not mold deep-seated attitudes toward products. It is not apt to change attitudes on the spot. Instead, it works gradually, influencing cognitions, enhancing positive affect, and meshing with consumers' values, lifestyles, and even fantasies about products.

Ever controversial, advertising has been condemned by those who see in it a ready way to manipulate Americans into buying products they don't need. Critics argue that advertising inculcates a strange philosophy of life that puts great faith in the ability of products to satisfy universal human desires. Yet even those who criticize advertising ethics acknowledge that people seem to have a need for the "things" advertisers promote. Whether due to human nature, contemporary capitalism, or a complex combination of both, "things are in the saddle," critic Twitchell (1999) notes. But he adds, "we put them there. If some of us want to think that things are riding us, that's fine. The rest of us know better" (p. 19).
CHAPTER 12

Communication Campaigns

Bill Alcott and Sy Graham were horrified. They were aghast at what people did to their bodies, day after day shoveling unhealthy, even dangerous, food into their mouths. Didn’t people know the damage that meat, fried foods, and butter did to the stomach and heart? Convinced that Americans needed to change their diets, Alcott and Graham organized a health food store that supplied fresh fruits and vegetables. A proper diet, in their view, consisted of wheat bread, grains, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. By eating healthy food and avoiding anything that harmed the body, Graham and Alcott emphasized, people could live longer, healthier lives.

Sound familiar? Another example of contemporary activists trying to convince consumers to give up junk food? Well—not exactly. Alcott and Graham were committed health reformers, but they communicated their message some time ago. More than 150 years ago, to be precise! William Alcott and Sylvester Graham, born in the late 1700s, promoted their nutrition reform campaign in the 1830s. They were early advocates of health education, pioneers in a clean-living movement that began in the United States in the 1800s and continues to this day. Alcott’s writings can be found in scattered libraries across the country. Graham—or at least his name—is known worldwide through his Graham cracker (Engs, 2000).

Long before it became fashionable to tout one’s opposition to smoking or drugs, activists were pounding the pavement, preaching and proselytizing. Campaigns to improve the public health date back to the early 1800s, with Alcott and Graham’s vegetarianism, health reformers’ condemnation of the “evil, deadly” tobacco, and the Temperance Movement’s efforts to promote abstinence from alcohol. Clean-living movements, as Ruth Clifford Engs (2000) calls them, took on special urgency during the 1830s and 1840s, with the outbreak of cholera, an infectious disease that spread through filthy water, a common problem during a time when drainage systems were poor if nonexistent and pigs roamed the streets.
feeding on uncollected garbage. Although the causes of cholera could be traced to the social environment, cholera (like AIDS a century and a half later) was viewed as “God’s punishment for vice, sin, and moral flaws” (Rushing, 1995, p. 168).

The cholera epidemic led to massive changes in sanitation. It also catalyzed the public health movement in the United States. Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, in response to infectious diseases and public health problems, reformers launched campaign after campaign. These included promotion of “do-it-yourself,” herb-based cures for disease, religious revivalist efforts in the 1880s that linked physical fitness to moral fitness, and venereal disease education movements that began in the early 20th century and continue apace in the 21st.

Public campaigns have not focused exclusively on health. Some of the most potent campaigns in the United States have centered on political issues. The Revolutionary Generation—Washington, Jefferson, Adams, and Revere—used newspapers and symbolic protests like the Boston Tea Party to convince their peers to revolt against England. The 19th century witnessed the growth of antislavery abolitionists, the Women’s Suffrage (Right to Vote) Movement, and—unfortunately—crusades to prevent “undesirable” people (such as Irish Catholics) from emigrating to the United States (Engs, 2000; Pfau & Parrott, 1993).

Political and health campaigns flourished in the 20th century, with the proliferation of television and realization that activists could change institutions through a combination of persuasion and protest. In the public health arena, we have continuing campaigns to convince people to quit smoking, stop boozing, reject drugs, and practice safer sex. In the political arena, campaigns are ubiquitous. Presidential elections, local elections, crime prevention, gun control, abortion, stem cell research, the war on terrorism—these are all arenas that have witnessed intensive communication campaigns.

Campaigns reflect this nation’s cultivation of the art of persuasion. They rely on argumentation, sloganeering, and emotional appeals in an effort to mold public attitudes. They are not always pretty or logical. They can cross into coercion, as when antismoking groups push for bans on smoking in the workplace. They are conducted to shape public policy, as well as attitudes.

Campaigns—colorful, vibrant, controversial, and American in their smell and taste—are the focus of this final chapter. The chapter is organized into several sections. The first describes the nature of campaigns. The second reviews major theories of campaign effects. In the third section, I summarize knowledge of key campaign effects. The fourth section touches on ethical issues surrounding campaigns, and the final portion looks briefly at campaigns waged in the political arena.
THINKING ABOUT CAMPAIGNS

Just say no to drugs. . . . This is your brain on drugs. . . . Welcome to Loserville. Population: You. . . . Friends don’t let friends drive drunk. . . . Only you can prevent forest fires.

These are some of the most famous emblems of public information campaigns in the United States. However, campaigns involve more than clever slogans. They are systematic, organized efforts to mold health or social attitudes through the use of communication. Or, to be more specific, campaigns can be defined broadly as:

(a) purposive attempts; (b) to inform, persuade, or motivate behavior changes; (c) in a relatively well-defined and large audience; (d) generally for noncommercial benefits to the individuals and/or society at large; (e) typically within a given time period; (f) by means of organized communication activities involving mass media; and (g) often complemented by interpersonal support. (Rice & Atkin, 2002, p. 427)

People don’t devise campaigns with the flick of a wrist. They require time and effort. Typically, activists or professional organizations hatch a campaign concept. They sculpt the idea, working with marketing and communication specialists, pretest messages, and take their communications to the real world in the hope they will influence behavior.

Like advertising, information campaigns apply theories to practical problems. However, advertising campaigns differ from their public information counterparts in a variety of ways:

1. Commercial advertising is designed to make profit for companies. Information campaigns are not purely capitalistic undertakings. They are designed to promote social ideas or improve public health. Typically, prosocial projects have smaller budgets than advertising campaigns. This can limit their effectiveness.

2. News plays a greater role in information campaigns than it does in advertising. Advertising involves paid commercial messages. Campaigns utilize ads, but they also attempt to relay messages through the "nonpaid media": news. For example, health education planners have worked with journalists to produce stories that discuss dangers of cigarette smoking and a high-cholesterol diet (Flora, 2001).

3. Interpersonal and organizational communication plays a more important role in campaigns than in advertising. The McGruff “Take a Bite Out of Crime” campaign supplemented media messages with supportive communication from community groups, businesses, and local police forces (O’Keefe et al., 1996). The Stanford cardiovascular risk reduction project involved multiple communication efforts, including hundreds of
educational sessions and distribution of thousands of nutrition tip sheets to grocery stores. The D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) campaign developed an elaborate school curriculum, with police officers teaching children ways to say no to drugs.

4. Ad campaigns try to induce people to do something, like buying a six-pack of beer or soft drinks. Information campaigns often try to convince consumers not to perform a particular activity (not to smoke, litter, or drive after imbibing).

5. Information campaigns invariably face more daunting obstacles than commercial efforts. It is usually easier to convince someone to buy a commercial product than to "buy into" the idea that she should quit smoking or drinking alcohol.

6. Campaigns frequently target their messages at the 15% of the population that is least likely to change its behavior (Harris, 1999). These may be the poorest, least educated members of society, or the most down-and-out intravenous drug users who continue to share HIV-infected needles. By contrast, commercial campaigns focus on the mainstream—on those who are shopping for a product or a dream.

7. Information campaigns involve more highly charged political issues than do commercial efforts. Campaigns frequently encounter strong opposition from powerful industries, such as tobacco companies, beer distributors, oil companies, or gun manufacturers. Antitobacco campaigns, for example, have become embroiled in the politics and economics of tobacco production.

8. Campaigns are more controversial than ads. Even critics acknowledge that advertising is humorous, fun, and clever. Campaigns touch more directly on values, prejudices, or self-interested positions. They can elicit strong sentiments. For example, gun control campaigns pit the value of social responsibility (gun companies should not sell products that endanger citizens) against the equally important value of individual liberty (people have a right to arm themselves to protect their property and families).

**Locating Effects**

What impact do campaigns and media have on public health? That's a big question; thus, you need big ideas to help you grapple with it. Communication scholars Jane D. Brown and Kim Walsh-Childers (2002) developed a framework to help explain media influences on personal and public health. They proposed that mass media effects fall into three categories: (a) intention of the message producer (intended/unintended), (b) level of influence (personal/public), and (c) outcome (positive/negative). An effect can be intended, as when health communicators develop campaigns
to reduce binge drinking, or unintended, as when teenagers conclude from watching music videos that drinking is cool. The bulk of effects discussed in this chapter are intended, since they emanate from campaigns designed to influence attitudes.

A campaign effect can occur at the personal level (a public service ad convinces parents to buy a new child safety seat to protect their infant) or at the public level (Americans learn from news stories that properly installed child seats can reduce the risk of injury to young kids, or a legislator decides, after watching campaign ads, to introduce a bill requiring that all new cars have a special anchoring device to keep the safety seat in place). Finally, effects can be positive or negative.

Viewed in this way, campaigns are multifaceted phenomena. They are complex events that can be examined from different points of view. A good way to begin this examination is to look at theories articulated to explain campaign effects.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Three major models of campaigns have been developed. The first is a psychological, individual-level perspective. The other two approaches focus on the bigger picture, viewing campaigns from a macro, community-level orientation.

The psychological approach emphasizes that you can't expect a campaign to change behavior instantly, lickety-split. Instead, change occurs gradually, in stages, in line with the ancient Chinese proverb that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." For example, J. O. Prochaska and his colleagues note that people progress through different stages of change, including precontemplation, during which they are not aware they have a psychological problem, to contemplation, in which they begin considering how to make a change in behavior, to action, in which they actually modify risky behaviors (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Persuasive communications are tailored to the needs of people at a particular stage. Messages directed at precontemplators try to convince them that their behaviors (chain-smoking) put them and loved ones at risk, while communications geared to contemplators encourage them to consider substituting a new behavior for the risky behavior (chewing Nicorette gum instead of smoking Newports).

A second approach combines stages of change with persuasive communication theory. According to McGuire (1989), persuasion can be viewed as a series of input and output steps. In Fig. 12.1, the input column labels refer to standard persuasion variables out of which messages can be constructed.
The output row headings correspond to the steps that individuals must be persuaded to take if the message is to have its intended impact.

As the figure shows, a message must clear many hurdles if it is to successfully influence attitudes and behavior. An antidrug campaign may not clear the first hurdle—exposure—because it never reaches the target.
audience, or alternatively because receivers, finding the message threatening, tune it out as soon as they view it. Or the message may pass the first few steps, but get knocked out of the box when it threatens deeper values or psychological needs.

The input–output matrix has an optimistic side. It says that campaigns can succeed even if they don’t lead to major changes in behavior. Indeed, such changes aren’t always reasonable to expect, based only on short-term exposure to communications. Campaigns can be regarded as successful if they get people to remember an antidrug ad (Step 4) or if they teach them how to say no to attractive drug-using peers (Step 5). Over time, through subsequent interventions, people can be persuaded to make long-term behavioral changes (Steps 10–12).

Stage-based psychological models are useful. However, they ignore the larger context—the community and society in which campaigns take place. The next two theories address these issues.

**Diffusion Theory**

Developed by Everett Rogers (1995), this approach examines the processes by which innovations diffuse, or spread through, society. Campaigns are viewed as large-scale attempts to communicate innovative ideas and practices through mass media and interpersonal communication. The following can be regarded as innovations:

- seat belts
- child safety seats
- bicycle helmets
- designated drivers
- jogging
- low-cholesterol diets
- sun tan lotion
- latex condom use
- pooper scoopers

Diffusion theory identifies a number of factors that influence the adoption of innovations. An important variable is the characteristic of the innovation. The more compatible an innovation is with people’s values and cultural norms, the more likely it is to diffuse rapidly in society. Conversely, the less congruent an innovation is with prevailing values, the less rapidly it is accepted. Environmental recycling and dropping litter in trash cans did not take hold in the 1960s because they diverged from the dominant ideologies: “Bigger is better”, “Commercial growth trumps all”. Two decades later, when environmental preservation had emerged as a major cultural value, these practices were more widely adopted.
Another attribute of an innovation is the degree to which it promises a clear, salient reward to the individual. A barrier to condom use is that condoms do not offer an immediate reward. The advantage condoms offer—preventing pregnancy or HIV infection—is not visible immediately after the consummation of sex. As Rogers notes, "the unwanted event that is avoided . . . is difficult to perceive because it is a non-event, the absence of something that otherwise might have happened" (p. 217). Partly because the benefits of condom use are not readily apparent, safer sex practices have not always been a quick, easy sell. By contrast, in a different behavioral domain, adoption of a low-cholesterol diet brings immediate, observable changes in weight and blood pressure. It thus has been successfully promoted in a variety of campaigns.

Communication plays a critical role in the spread of innovations. Diffusion theory asserts that mass media are most influential in enhancing knowledge of the innovation, while interpersonal communication is more effective in changing attitudes toward the innovation. Newspapers, television, and the Internet have played a major role in informing people of unhealthy lifestyles. Why do you think so many people know that smoking causes cancer, buckling up can save your life, or unprotected, risky sex can lead to AIDS? Why do so many of us know you can reduce your cancer risk by quitting smoking, that physical exercise can promote longevity, or condoms can prevent HIV? The media have told us these things. Although the media are frequently criticized, they deserve credit for providing information about unhealthy lifestyles and ways to live a healthier life.

Such information comes from both news and entertainment media. News stories frequently set the agenda, or influence people's beliefs about what constitute the most important problems facing society (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Entertainment programming can also have an innovation-diffusing or agenda-setting impact. Spurred by activist groups, television producers have increasingly included discussion of such innovations as designated drivers, rape hotlines, and birth control pills in their programs. One study reported a 17% increase in viewers' knowledge of emergency contraception after ER showed a victim of date rape being treated with a morning-after pill (Brown & Walsh-Childers, 2002).

It is not all blue skies and rosy fields, however, when it comes to media and campaigns. Consider that poor people or those with little education frequently know less about health issues than people who are wealthier or have more education under their belts (Freimuth, 1990). One objective of campaigns is to narrow the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged members of society. Unfortunately, just the opposite can occur. Campaigns can widen the disparity, so that by the end of the campaign, the rich and better educated people are even more
knowledgeable of the problem than their poorer, less-educated counterparts (Gaziano, 1983; Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996). (This is known as the knowledge gap; see Fig. 12.2.) There are a number of reasons why such knowledge gaps occur. One key reason is that the health information is less likely to reach, or be mentally accepted by, disadvantaged individuals. Those who have been disadvantaged by society may be so preoccupied with tangible, survival needs that they neglect to focus on health issues that are of long-term personal importance.

Diffusion research suggests ways to reach low-income, low-educated individuals. The news media can publicize health innovations through special programming (Chew & Palmer, 1994). They can also supplement media coverage with intensive interpersonal efforts in the community. The similarity principle comes into play here (see chapter 6). Individuals are typically more receptive to communications delivered by those who are perceived as sharing their values and background. As a staff member in an AIDS prevention program geared to gay Native Americans remarked, "I think this is pretty basic for us, the philosophy of Natives helping Natives, and we got 100% Native staff, 100% Native board, most of our volunteers are Native, and it's really about hearing the information coming from another Native gay man" (Dearing et al., 1996, p. 357). Of course, in an ideal world it wouldn't matter a whit whether the communicator was Native or gay—just whether the individual knew his stuff and cared about those he sought to influence (the basics of credibility). However, this is a real world, and people are frequently more apt to listen to someone who they perceive to be similar to themselves, particularly when the topic is a stressful one.
Diffusion theory, in sum, tells us a great deal about how communications can publicize and promote innovations. However, it neglects the hard-nosed, savvy world of media marketing, a key element in today's campaigns. This is the focus of a second, macro approach to campaigns that applies marketing principles to health.

**Social Marketing**

Social marketing is defined as "a process of designing, implementing, and controlling programs to increase the acceptability of a prosocial idea among population segments of consumers" (Dearing et al., 1996, p. 345). Social marketing is an intriguing concept. It says, in effect: "You know all those great ideas developed to sell products? You can use them to sell people on taking better care of their health. But to do that, you must understand marketing principles." There are five strategic steps in a social marketing campaign: (a) planning, (b) theory, (c) communication analysis, (d) implementation, and (e) evaluation (Maibach, Kreps, & Bonaguro, 1993; see Fig. 12.3).

**Stage 1. Planning**
Campaign objectives

**Stage 2. Use of Theory**

**Stage 3. Communication Analysis**
Audience analysis and segmentation
Formative research
Channel analysis and selection

**Stage 4. Implementation**
Marketing mix
Macrosocial considerations

**Stage 5. Evaluation and Reorientation**
Outcome evaluation

Planning. During this first phase, campaigners make the tough choices. They select campaign goals. They decide whether to focus on creating cognitions or changing existing ones. They deliberate about whether to target attitudes or behavior.

Theory. Models, concepts, and theories are the backbone of campaigns. You cannot wage a campaign without some idea of what you want to achieve and how best to attain your objectives. The central issue is whether your idea is sound, based on concepts, and of sufficient breadth so as to suggest specific hypotheses. Ideas may be cheap, but good ideas are invaluable. One thing that differentiates effective and ineffective campaigns is that the former reflect painstaking application of theoretical principles; the latter are based on “seat of the pants” intuitions. Theories suggest a host of specific campaign strategies, appeals, and ways to modify projects that aren’t meeting stated objectives. Campaigns have employed behavioral theories, affective approaches, and cognitive models (Cappella et al., 2001; Witte et al., 1993). We see how these work in actual situations later in the chapter.

Communication Analysis. After a guiding theory is selected, it must be applied to the context. This occurs during the down-to-earth communication analysis phase of the campaign. Early on, campaign specialists conduct formative research to probe audience perceptions (Atkin & Freimuth, 2001). If you were devising a campaign to persuade children not to try cigarettes, you would want to know the negative consequences that kids associate with cigarettes (Bauman et al., 1988; Morrison et al., 1996). You would discover that children don’t worry about dying from smoking; they’re more concerned about bad breath or becoming unpopular. Armed with these facts, you would develop messages that creatively played up these negative consequences. You would pretest your advertising spots to see which ones worked best, edit them, and ship them to local media for airing at appropriate times of the day.

Implementation. During this phase, the campaign is designed, finalized, and launched. Marketing principles play a critical role here. Of particular importance are the four Ps of marketing: product, price, placement, and promotion.

Product? Most of us do not associate products with health campaigns. Yet products can be prosocial, as well as commercial. Products marketed in health campaigns include Neighborhood Crime Watch posters, child safety seats, gun trigger locks, and Don’t Drink and Drive pledge cards.

Products come with a price. The price can be monetary or psychological. In the AIDS context, planners debate whether to charge a price for
condoms (dispensing them free of charge saves people money, but it also can make the product seem "cheap" or "unworthy"). Psychologically, the price of using condoms may be less-pleasurable sex or fear of offending a partner. Campaigns devise messages to convince people that these costs are more than offset by the benefits safer sex provides.

Placement involves deciding where to transmit the message. This is critically important, as correct placement can ensure reaching the target audience; incorrect placement can mean that a good message misses its target. The favorite weapon in communication campaigns is the public service advertisement (PSA), a promotional message placed in news, entertainment, or interactive media. Once novel, PSAs are now part of the media landscape, informational sound bites that savvy young people have come to enjoy or ignore. Clever, informative PSAs get noticed and can shatter illusions of invulnerability; dull—or obnoxious—ones are mentally discarded. Thus, market research and creative concept development play important roles in sculpting effective PSAs.

The channel—TV, print, or Internet—is a key factor in placement decisions. Television allows campaigners to reach lots of people and to arouse emotions through evocative messages. However, it is very expensive. Print reaches fewer people but can more effectively impart specific, complex information (Schooler et al., 1998). Interactive media—CD-ROMs, video games, Web sites, the Internet—usually reach fewer people than conventional mass media. However, they offer several advantages. They are usually cheaper than other media, permit upgrading of messages, and allow campaigns to tailor messages to audience subgroups (Kreuter et al., 2000).

There are numerous Web sites and CD-ROMs that impart health information, making them theoretically useful as modes of reaching target audiences, particularly young people. Researchers, who have pondered ways of most effectively using interactive media to influence young audiences, have noted that interactive media are likely to be especially effective when they use age-appropriate role models, promote on-line discussion, and involve learning by doing (Lieberman, 2001). Engaging, interactive techniques are especially appropriate in campaigns that revolve around video games. For example, one game, Packy & Marlon (www.clickhealth.com), teaches diabetic children self-management skills by simulating a diabetic character’s blood sugar levels. Players can win the game if the food and insulin choices they make for the character allow his blood sugar to stay at normal, healthy levels. They lose if they make choices that push the character’s blood sugar to such low or high levels that he cannot function. The game has produced improvements in diabetic children’s self-management behaviors. Kids who regularly played the game experienced a 77% reduction in emergency room visits (Lieberman, 2001).
Promotion, the final marketing P, flows out of the planning process. Promotion involves persuasion—application of theories discussed in this book and implemented in a campaign setting.

*Evaluation.* This is the final phase of the campaign—the point at which planners discover if the campaign worked. Unlike campaigns of the 19th and early 20th centuries, today’s projects can be empirically assessed. Effects can be studied at the *individual level*, as when researchers compare those who saw many campaign messages with those who did not. If the campaign worked, individuals who saw many PSAs should change their attitude more in the intended direction than those who saw relatively few.

Researchers also evaluate campaigns at the *community level*. One town is randomly assigned to be the treatment group; its citizens receive promotional materials, for example, on seat belt use. An equivalent community serves as the control—its residents are not exposed to campaign messages. Researchers then compare the communities, for instance by having police officers stand on street corners counting the number of drivers wearing safety belts. If a higher proportion of drivers in the treatment community wears safety belts than in the control town, the campaign is declared a success (Roberts & Geller, 1994).

Evaluation is critical because it indicates whether campaign objectives have been met. It’s not a perfect science. In surveys, one never knows for sure whether those who saw campaign messages were the same in all other ways as those who did not happen to view the campaign. In community evaluations, researchers can never be 100% certain that the treatment and control towns are exactly alike. If the treatment community in the safety belt study had more drivers who were older (and therefore more safety-conscious) than the control community, the older age of drivers, rather than the campaign, could have produced the observed effects. Researchers take precautions to factor in these extraneous variables, quantifying their contributions in statistical tests.

Evaluation is a valuable way to assess campaign impact. It gives campaigners useful feedback for future campaigns. It also serves an important political function. Private and public groups spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on campaigns. They are entitled to know if they have gotten their money’s worth. When government spends taxpayer money on antismoking or antidrug campaigns, the public has a right to know if socially valuable goals—reducing smoking or drug use—have actually been achieved.

There is one last point to be made about social marketing. Campaigns may be based on theory, planned according to marketing principles, and evaluated through high-powered statistics. However, they take place in the real world, with its rough edges, cultural norms, and political constraints.
Societal norms and macrosocial factors influence campaigns in a variety of ways. Antismoking campaigns had little chance of changing attitudes so long as most Americans trusted the tobacco companies or doubted that smoking caused cancer. As Americans learned that tobacco companies withheld knowledge that smoking was addictive and accepted as fact evidence of the causal impact of smoking on cancer, antismoking campaigns faced a more receptive audience to their messages. Even so (and not surprisingly), antismoking campaigns attempting to increase public support for regulation of the tobacco industry have faced daunting opposition from the tobacco industry, as the gripping, factually based movie *The Insider* documented.

In a similar vein, AIDS prevention campaigns have been influenced by macrosocial and cultural factors. Americans' discomfort with homosexuality has impeded—indeed, doomed to failure—activists' efforts to persuade television networks to broadcast PSAs that talk frankly about safer sex among gay men (Perloff, 2001). On the other side of the cultural divide, gay political leaders in cities like San Francisco have sometimes stridently opposed public health campaigns to clean up or close city bathhouses. Their resistance has stemmed from a strong libertarian desire to pursue private (but sometimes dangerous) pleasures and activities, as well as more understandable fears of being stigmatized by social institutions (Rotello 1997). Thousands of miles away, in AIDS-infected Africa where tens of millions are expected to die in the first decade of the 21st century, campaigns are hampered by pro-sex cultural norms. In many African societies, sex is viewed 100% positively, as an essential form of recreation between lovers, casual friends, and even adulterers. Polygamy is widespread and sanctioned (Rushing, 1995). In addition, African prostitutes, who would like their clients to use condoms, are hindered by cultural norms that put sex in men's control. “We are women, we are weak and shy, we cannot ask them to use condoms,” one prostitute acknowledged (Cameron, Witte, & Nzyuko, 1999, p. 153).

All these factors affect the design and implementation of social marketing campaigns. When we take theory into the real world, with all its politics, values, and emotional messiness, we find that life is more complex and campaigns are inseparable from the culture in which they take place.

Do campaigns work? Do they influence targeted attitudes and behaviors? What do you think? What's your best guess?

There is little question that campaigns face an up-hill battle. As McGuire's input/output matrix notes, interventions must first attract the
target audience and capture its attention. This can be difficult. For a variety of psychological reasons, Caroline Schooler and her colleagues (1998) note, "those whom a campaign most seeks to reach with health information are the least motivated to pay attention to it" (p. 414). The last thing addicted smokers, drug users, or gamblers want to do is pay attention to moralistic messages that tell them to stop doing what makes them happy.

Not only don't campaigns always succeed in reaching difficult-to-influence audiences, they turn them off with preachy messages or communications that aren't in sync with audience needs. Even campaigns with creative messages may fail because planners lack money to repeat the message enough times to guarantee an effect. Effects produced by a campaign also may not persist over time. Knowledge of emergency contraception obtained from watching the ER episode mentioned earlier dropped significantly at a follow-up measurement (Brown & Walsh-Childers, 2002). Thus, there is no guarantee a campaign will work. It may fail, and many do.

Okay—but I wouldn't be devoting an entire chapter to this topic if campaigns failed consistently and repeatedly! In fact, a half century of research indicates that if practitioners know their stuff, apply theory deftly, and utilize principles of social marketing, they can wage effective campaigns. Campaigns will succeed when practitioners:

1. Understand the audience and tailor messages to fit its needs and preexisting attitudes.
2. Segment the audience into different subgroups, fitting messages ever more exquisitely to the orientations of specialized groups.
3. Refine messages so that they are relevant, cogent (based on principles discussed in this book), and of high production value.
4. Coordinate efforts across media, and repeat messages over time and in different media and interpersonal channels.
5. Choose media channels (PSAs, news, entertainment TV, Internet) that are viewed by members of the target audience.
6. Use entertaining characters, visuals, and themes that weave together different messages (O'Keefe et al., 1996; Parrott, 1995).
7. Supplement media materials as much as possible with community contacts (McAlister & Fernandez, 2002; Rice & Atkin, 2002).
8. Appreciate that it is frequently easier to promote a new behavior (fruit and vegetable consumption) than to convince people to stop a dysfunctional behavior (unsafe sex) (Snyder, 2001).
9. Try, whenever possible, to build enforcement into the campaign (Snyder & Hamilton, 2002). Seat belt campaigns that have emphasized that police will be enforcing seat belt laws have been especially effective in promoting seat belt use.
10. Be realistic. Keep in mind how difficult it is to change deep-seated attitudes and well-learned behaviors. "Set realistic expectations of success . . ., be prepared for a long haul . . ., (and) give more emphasis to relatively attainable impacts, by aiming at more receptive segments of the audience and by creating or promoting more palatable positive products" (Atkin, 2002, p. 37).

With these factors in mind, it is time to turn to specific applications of campaign principles. The next sections review communication campaigns in context.

THE McGRUFF CRIME PREVENTION PROJECT

Some years back, there was considerable concern about rising crime rates and rampant drug abuse. During the 1980s and '90s, many people worried they would be mugged if they walked outside at night; inner-city neighborhoods were like war zones, terrorized by drug dealers; and there was little cooperation between neighborhood residents and police. In hopes of changing things for the better, the National Crime Prevention Council sponsored a public communication campaign designed to teach crime and drug prevention behaviors and to encourage citizens to take steps to protect themselves, their families, and neighborhoods (O'Keefe et al., 1996).

The campaign, produced by the Advertising Council and widely disseminated in the media, centered on a series of entertaining public service announcements. The PSAs attempted to arouse fear about crime, while also generating anger at drug dealers and criminals. The centerpiece of the media campaign was an animated trench-coated dog named McGruff who urged viewers to take concrete steps "to take a bite out of crime," such as by locking doors and windows and participating in neighborhood crime watch programs (see Fig. 12.4). Over time, the campaign branched out. Children and teens became a target audience, with PSAs focusing on missing children, drug abuse, and resisting peer pressure to take drugs.

McGruff, as the campaign is sometimes called, is generally regarded as a classic, textbook case of how to run an effective communication campaign. The project was well funded, repeated messages in different media using different motifs (thereby capitalizing on mere exposure principles), and promoted cognitive learning by employing an entertaining character (the McGruff dog). It also supplemented media by employing extensive community activities.
Here are six things vandalism is not:

1. Not cool.
2. Not a game.
3. Not lawful.
4. Not smart.
5. Not pretty.

What vandalism is, is "WRECK-CREATION".
It's not something to be proud of. So if you know a group of vandals, don't treat 'em like stars—let 'em know it's not cool. Let's face it, when they bust a window, it's got to be fixed. And that same money could've bought your class a field trip instead. So talk to your principal, and find out what you can do to stop vandalism.

Help me, McGruff.

FIG. 12.4 A McGruff "Take a bite out of crime" ad. (Reprinted with permission of the National Crime Prevention Council.)
Garrett J. O'Keefe and his colleagues systematically evaluated the project. Their findings:

- Eighty percent of a sample of U.S. adults recalled having seen or heard McGruff PSAs.
- Nearly 9 in 10 respondents said they believed the ads had increased children’s awareness of neighborhood drug abuse. About a quarter of individuals exposed to the campaign said they had taken specific crime prevention precautions as a result of having viewed the PSAs.
- The decade-long campaign coincided with sharp increases in the number of people who used outdoor security lights and special locks on doors or windows.
- Exposure to the campaign led to significant increases in crime prevention behaviors, including reporting suspicious activities to the police and joining with others to prevent crime (O'Keefe, 1985).

Successful as the campaign was, it is possible that it exerted several unanticipated negative effects. It might have led to increases in accidents by stimulating people untrained in gun use to purchase guns for self-protection. By encouraging people to report suspicious activities to the police, it may have unwittingly increased mistrust or suspicion of unorthodox, but hardly criminal, individuals. Campaigns frequently have unintended effects, and campaigners must hope that the benefits (crime reduction and increased citizen participation in community policing) exceed the costs. In the case of McGruff, the pluses far exceeded the minuses.

ANTISMOKING AND CARDIOVASCULAR RISK REDUCTION CAMPAIGNS

These are probably the most famous public information campaigns in America. Many of us recall seeing PSAs that associate cigarettes with ugly, despicable images or suggest that no one cool smokes anymore ("Welcome to Loserville. Population: You"). Where do the ideas for these campaigns come from?

In a word, theory! Antismoking campaigns have been among the most theory driven of all public communication interventions. Campaigns have applied cognitive, affective, and behavioral concepts to the development of campaigns (Ohme, 2000).

Cognitively based campaigns have targeted children's beliefs about smoking and the types of people who smoke. Guided by the theory of reasoned action (see chapter 3), researchers identify perceived drawbacks of smoking. "It's a gross habit, it smells, . . . . Even just being around people
who smoke, you know, my eyes start to water and burn,” children told researchers Laura A. Peracchio and David Luna (1998), who used this information to devise antismoking messages (p. 51). Based on findings that short-term negative consequences of smoking (bad smell and harm to eyes) are of central importance to kids, the researchers developed print ads that played on these themes:

One of the ads, “Sock”, depicts a dirty, grimy sweatsock with the caption, “Gross,” next to an ashtray full of cigarette butts with the caption, “Really gross” . . . . (A second) ad, “Tailpipe”, reads, “Inhale a lethal dose of carbon monoxide and it’s called suicide. Inhale a smaller amount and it’s called smoking. Believe it or not, cigarette smoke contains the same poisonous gas as automobile exhaust. So if you wouldn’t consider sucking on a tailpipe, why would you want to smoke?” (Peracchio & Luna, p. 53)

The first ad was simple and concrete; it worked well with 7- and 8-year-olds. The second was more complex and resonated more with 11-year-olds.

A more elaborate intervention, devised by Michael Pfau and his associates, succeeded in stiffening adolescents’ resistance to experimenting with cigarettes. Pfau drew on inoculation theory, a cognitive approach discussed in chapter 5. Persuaders employing inoculation deliberately expose people to a message they want them to reject, then follow up this initial treatment with a dose of powerful arguments refuting the message. Applying inoculation to antismoking, Pfau and Van Bockern (1994) told seventh-grade students that peer pressure would cause some of them to modify their opposition to smoking and begin to smoke. This was subsequently followed by statements that smoking was cool or won’t affect “me,” coupled with refutations of these arguments. The inoculation treatment intensified negative attitudes toward smoking.

A cautionary note: Cognitive campaigns directed at young people should start before high school. Around the end of middle school, as pressures to be popular mount and self-esteem frequently plummets, teenagers look to smoking as a way to be cool or to enhance their identities (e.g., Pfau & Van Bockern, 1994). Researchers recommend that inoculation campaigns commence in seventh grade—or before.

Affectively oriented campaigns focus on feelings associated with smoking. Tobacco advertising has succeeded in linking smoking with relaxation, pleasant affect, and popularity (Romer & Jamieson, 2001). To counter this, campaigns apply classical conditioning and associative network ideas discussed earlier in this book. They explicitly associate ads with negative images. For example:

In one ad . . . a young male is chewing tobacco and spitting it from time to time into a soft drink paper cup. His female friend, whose attention is
absorbed by the movie they are watching, mechanically grabs the cup and reaches it to her mouth without looking inside. A scream is then heard, suggesting that the friend was horrified and disgusted when she tasted the liquid and, by extension, was also horrified and disgusted by her friend's behavior. ... (In another ad), a beautiful girl is smoking a cigarette, but each time she inhales her face is covered with more and more nicotine and tar. This ad creates a huge aesthetic dissonance and shows that, regardless of how attractive you are, smoking makes you repulsive. (Ohme, 2000, p. 315)

Other affectively oriented ads play cleverly on fear appeals, walking the razor-thin line between not scaring teens enough and scaring them too much. One TV spot developed by the American Legacy Foundation parodies a soft-drink ad. Three young people bungee jump off a bridge to save cans of fictional Splode soda. Two of the jumpers grab a can and are yanked back to the safety of the bridge. The third jumper's can explodes as he opens it, and he disappears in a burst of flames. On the screen appear the words, "Only one product actually kills a third of the people who use it. Tobacco."

The third category of antismoking campaigns—behavioral interventions—draws on social learning theory, a model developed by Albert Bandura. Noting that people do not have to be rewarded, like rats or pigeons, to learn new behaviors, Bandura (1977) has called attention to the powerful role that observing role models plays in social influence. Theorists have adapted his ideas to public health. Using mass media, interpersonal instruction, and behavior modification techniques, they have detailed the dangers of smoking and of maintaining a high-cholesterol diet. At the same time, campaigns have taught people the cognitive skills necessary to quit smoking and adopt a healthier lifestyle.

The classic and most elaborate of these interventions were developed at Stanford University. The campaigns included TV spots, radio PSAs, and a weekly doctor's column that appeared in Spanish language newspapers. School curricula, workplace classes, and intensive interpersonal instruction supplemented the media messages. During interpersonal sessions, counselors used behavior modification techniques, encouraging smokers to substitute sugar-free lozenges and asking others to keep track of the healthy food they ate each week.

Researchers dreamed up a nifty way to evaluate the campaigns. They chose several small California cities with comparable demographic characteristics. Certain cities were assigned to the media treatments, others served as controls. Researchers then compared respondents in the treatment and control cities on several indices, including health knowledge, smoking reduction, and decreases in cholesterol level.

The campaigns had modest effects, smaller than some anticipated, but practically significant (Hornik, 2002). The Stanford communications increased knowledge of healthy eating, diet, and exercise. What's more,
communities that received the campaign displayed significant decreases in cholesterol level and blood pressure. At-risk individuals who received interpersonal instruction dramatically reduced the number of cigarettes they smoked a day (Farquhar et al., 1990; Maccoby & Farquhar, 1975).

**State Antismoking Campaigns**

Emboldened by Stanford’s efforts but determined to do better, campaign planners in several states have mounted impressive antismoking interventions. Using state funds and monies available from the legal settlement with the tobacco companies, states have blitzed the airwaves with antismoking messages. Armed with as much as $90 million, campaigners have enlisted help from creative advertising agencies, developing ads like one aired in California. The advertisement “used actual footage from a congressional hearing, during which the chief executives of each of the major tobacco companies denied, under oath, that nicotine was addictive. The advertisement culminated with the question, ‘Do they think we’re stupid?’” (Pierce, Emery, & Gilpin, 2002, p. 100).

Campaigns in California, Arizona, Massachusetts, and elsewhere in the United States have significantly influenced smoking attitudes and behavior (Burgoon, Hendriks, & Alvaro, 2001; Pierce et al., 2002; Siegel & Biener, 2002). A multimillion dollar, decade-long campaign seems to have produced a sharp decline in cigarette consumption in California (see Fig. 12.5). An Arizona media campaign that endlessly repeated the hip phrase, “Tobacco: Tumor-causing, teeth-staining, smelly, puking habit,” pushed young people to evaluate smoking more negatively. In addition, media PSAs, coupled with school-based smoking prevention programs, reduced smoking by 35% in portions of the U.S. Northeast and Northwest (Worden & Flynn, 2002).

**Macrosocial Picture**

One of the critical hard-fact realities of antismoking campaigns is that they take place in a heavily politicized environment, in which well-funded public health groups battle billion-dollar tobacco companies, who in turn heavily lobby state legislators who control the purse strings for these campaigns. In California, the fighting has been particularly vicious. When the campaign aired its “Do they think we’re stupid?” spot, the tobacco industry issued a legal threat to the network TV stations in California. Under political pressure, state campaign planners dumped the ad (Pierce et al., 2002).

In spite of these obstacles, the California campaign succeeded. It did so because the tobacco control program had significant grassroots support; its messages also contained emotional arguments that smokers
found persuasive. Antismoking campaigns have had similar success elsewhere in the country (and abroad as well). Yet at the outset few believed that tobacco education stood much of a chance, in light of the political and economic power wielded by cigarette companies. However, media campaigns have succeeded in changing attitudes toward smoking, promoting bans on secondhand smoke, and creating a public opinion climate that has made it easier for attorneys to successfully sue tobacco companies for damages. By riding the wave of a contemporary public health movement, seizing on antipathy to Big Tobacco, appealing to American values of self-improvement, and controversially working with coercive bans on smoking in public places, the David of anticigarette marketing has successfully battled the Goliath of American tobacco companies. While many Americans smoke—and they always will, as long as cigarettes are legal—the contemporary antismoking movement will long be remembered for helping create a cleaner, smoke-free environment in the United States.

ANTIDRINKING CAMPAIGNS

The school year over, Carla Wagner and her friend Claudia Valdes enjoyed a leisurely lunch at the Green Street Café in Miami's Coconut Grove. After Wagner, then 17, paid the tab with her credit card, the two hopped into her 2000 Audi A4 and headed to a girlfriend's house, stopping en route to pick up a $25 bottle of tequila using a bogus ID. There Wagner and Valdes drank several shots, passed around two pipefuls of pot and watched
Wagner jumped back into her car with Valdes, then 18, taking the passenger seat. Racing home, Wagner rounded one curve at more than 50 mph. A few moments afterward, as Wagner tried to dial a cell phone, the car hit gravel and fishtailed out of control. Valdes, who sustained a broken pelvis and lacerated liver, recalled later, "I think I saw an image walking or Rollerblading or whatever she was doing."

That shadow was Helen Marie Witty, 16, out for an early-evening skate. But the Audi, doing 60 mph in a 30-mph zone, had left the northbound lane and veered onto the bike path, hitting Witty and tossing her 30 ft. before the car wrapped itself, like a giant C, around a tree.

As for Witty, "She still looked like an angel, her eyes open" (says a motorist who saw the crash and realized she was dead). "She looked peaceful and angelic." (Charles, Trischitta, & Morrissey, 2001, pp. 67–68).

Stories like these are all too common. Some 16,000 Americans are killed in alcohol-related car crashes each year, accounting for 40% of all traffic deaths (Webb, 2001). Excessive drinking has other negative consequences. It can cause liver disease and cancer, and induce severe memory loss. Given the gravity of these effects, social activists have launched a variety of antialcohol campaigns.

The public service advertisement has been a major weapon in media campaigns. PSAs run the gamut from the famous "Friends don't let friends drive drunk" to ads that question the popular image that drinking equals fun by depicting a young woman vomiting after drinking beer (Andsager, Austin, & Pinkleton, 2001). It is tempting to assume that these campaigns work; after all, they are produced by advertising specialists and appear on national television. However, as noted throughout this chapter, such an assumption is unwarranted. Young people frequently complain that popular antidrinking PSAs are corny, cheesy, and preachy (Andsager et al., 2001; see also Slater et al., 1998). Some PSAs fail to provide a realistic discussion of drinking. By focusing on "generic peers," they neglect to consider the important role that same-sex friends and parents play in decisions about whether to drink (Austin & Meili, 1994; Trost et al., 1999). Still other campaigns fail to create messages powerful enough to undo the effects of sexy, slick pro-drinking commercial spots.

The news is not all bad. Two campaign interventions, with solid foundations in social marketing principles, have helped to reduce alcohol abuse.

**The Designated Driver Campaign**

The designated driver is such a simple, potentially effective innovation you would think it would have been invented soon after the first reports of traffic fatalities surfaced. The notion that a group of friends selects one
person to abstain from drinking that evening is intuitive and appealing. However, social change takes time, and it took years for the innovation to diffuse. Now, it is commonly accepted, thanks to campaigns organized by activist groups, including the Harvard School of Public Health (Winsten & DeJong, 2001).

Working with Hollywood production studios and TV networks, campaigners succeeded in placing dialogue or messages in 160 entertainment programs, including such classics as Beverly Hills 90210, Growing Pains, and Cheers. PSAs have appeared widely, with some featuring appearances from U.S. presidents.

The campaigns seemed to have influenced beliefs and behaviors. Years ago people used to joke about drinking when under the influence. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson gave reporters a tour of his Texas ranch, driving 90 miles per hour and sipping a cup of beer. As late as 1988, two months before the campaign began, just 62% of respondents said they and their friends designated a driver all or most of the time. Following the campaign, the proportion shot up significantly to 72% and is undoubtedly higher today.

The belief that people should not be allowed to drink when they drive has reached such high levels it can be regarded as a social norm. Although the campaign cannot take credit for all this success, it certainly has helped to legitimize the use of designated drivers in the United States.

Public health experts Jay A. Winsten and William DeJong argue that the campaign succeeded because: (a) it had support from powerful Hollywood insiders; (b) the designated driver message (which places responsibility on the individual, not beer companies) allows the networks to do something positive about drinking, while not alienating the alcohol industry, on whom they depend for much of their advertising; and (c) the message could be easily sandwiched into programs (all a character need ask is, “Who’s the designated driver tonight?”). In contrast, teen pregnancy and AIDS prevention appeals are more controversial and more difficult to incorporate into program scripts.

Social Norms Marketing

It isn’t clear whether Leslie Baltz, who was in her fourth year (at the University of Virginia), wanted to drink that much. The 21-year-old honor student, who had a double major in art history and studio art, liked to paint and sketch. Once, at the age of 11, she wrote 31 poems for her mother, one for each day of the month, about love, dreams, and impermanence.

At a party that Saturday, Ms. Baltz drank enough booze-spiked punch that she decided to lie down at a friend’s house while her buddies went out. When they returned that night after U. Va.’s 34–20 upset of Virginia Tech, they found her unconscious at the foot of a stairway.
Ms. Baltz's blood-alcohol level was 0.27%, more than triple the state's legal limit for drivers, but probably survivable if not for her fall. . . . She was declared dead of head injuries.

Thus, Ms. Baltz became the fifth Virginia college student to die of alcohol-related causes that autumn, and the 18th at U. Va. since 1990. (Murray & Gruley, 2000, p. A10)

Unfortunately, Leslie is not the only student to die as a result of alcohol abuse. Accidents due to drinking claim too many students' lives each year. Drinking, of course, is common on campus. Over 90% of students have tried alcohol, close to 25% display symptoms of problem drinkers, and others report experiences such as these over the course of a year:

- Had a hangover: 62.8%
- Got nauseated or vomited: 53.8%
- Drove a car while under the influence: 31.3%
- Were taken advantage of sexually: 12.2%
- Took advantage of someone else sexually: 5.1%

(Murray & Gruley, 2000)

Still others can be defined as "binge drinkers"—men who consume at least five, and women who drink four or more, drinks in one sitting (see Fig. 12.6)

For years, universities used a pastiche of antidrinking appeals, ranging from scare tactics to pictures of cars destroyed by drunk drivers. Convinced that these did not work and searching for something new, they recently perfected a technique based on communication and social marketing. Called social norms marketing, it targets students' perception that other people drink a lot. The idea is that students overestimate how much alcohol their peers consume. Believing that everyone else drinks a lot and wanting to fit into the dominant college culture, they drink more than they would like. The solution follows logically: "If students' drinking practices are fostered, or at least maintained, by the erroneous perception that other students feel more positively toward these practices than they do," two scholars noted, "then correcting this misperception should lower their alcohol consumption" (Schroeder & Prentice, 1998, p. 2153).

A number of universities have adopted this approach in an effort to curb alcohol abuse. The University of Virginia placed posters in the blue and orange school colors in freshman dorms. "Most U. Va. 1st years have 0 to 4 drinks per week," posters declared. "Zero to 3," stated frisbees distributed at Cornell University, making reference to the number of drinks most students consume when at a party. A Rutgers University "RU SURE?" campaign devised messages listing the top 10 misperceptions on campus, ranging from the humorous ("It's easy to find a parking place on campus") to the critical ("Everyone who parties gets wasted"). The latter
FIG. 12.6  Binge drinking is a major problem on college campuses. Universities have employed a variety of strategies to curb binge drinking, with varying success. (Photograph by William C. Rieter.)
was followed with the answer that two thirds of Rutgers students stop at three or fewer drinks (Lederman et al., 2001). At Washington State University, Project Culture Change blanketed the campus with posters that said, “Heavy drinking at WSU has decreased every year for the past five years” (see Box 12-1).

### BOX 12–1

**PROBING PERCEPTIONS OF AN ANTIDRINKING CAMPAIGN**

How do researchers conduct formative research and probe audience perceptions of campaign messages? How do planners of a social norm antidrinking campaign adjust their strategies to fit students' points of view? These questions were on the minds of a group of Washington State University communication researchers when they evaluated a campus social norming project (Hansen, Kossman, Wilbrecht, & Andsager, 2000). The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with a variety of Washington State University (WSU) freshmen, asking them pointed questions about binge drinking and campaign messages. Here is some of what they found:

**Moderator:** Some of you say that 16 to 17 drinks is binge drinking. Do you think, on average, that’s what a lot of people do?

**A.C.** (a student): Well, for guys and girls, it’s, like, different.

**Kelly** (a student): It depends on the girl.

**Moderator:** On average, how many drinks do you think the average person has when they go out?

**A.C.:** It depends on what you do.

**Zach** (a student): Yeah, it depends on what kind of party you go to.

**A.C.:** If you’re drinking to get drunk, then you will have a lot, but if you’re drinking to socialize and, like, meet some girls or something like that, then you just want to be buzzed so you’re just like sort of loose, and you don’t have inhibitions or anything like that.

**Moderator:** Do you think drinking is a problem on the WSU campus?

**A.C.:** We drink a lot more than some of the other college campuses I have been on.

**Lisa** (a student): I think everybody knows about it because Pullman is out in the middle of nowhere. What else is there to do but go out and party.

**A.C.:** We should form a drinking team (laughter from the group).

**Moderator:** So at what point do you think that drinking is out of control?

**A.C.:** I think if you’re passing out every time you drink.

**Kelly:** I think puking. If you pass out or, like, puke and pass out, that’s bad. You shouldn’t drink that much to puke.

**Lisa:** I think it’s either passing out or just blacking out. If you do that every single time you drink, then maybe that’s out of control.
ANTIDRINKING CAMPAIGNS

Moderator: Okay, we're going to show you some ads that have been developed to kind of dispel any misconceptions about how much drinking there is, and then we're going to talk about them a little bit. (Moderator presents an ad with a picture of three students smiling and standing arm in arm. The tag line is: “Most WSU students drink moderately. 65% of WSU students have 4 or fewer drinks when they socialize.”)

Zach: It doesn’t look like they’re drinking. I don’t think they were drinking at all. I think he just randomly got some picture. If they had like keg cups and stuff, that would be a rocking picture. (Later.) See, there’s, like, a number of people on campus who just don’t drink at all and they bring down that mark by a whole lot.

Moderator: So you should separate them out into those who drink on campus (and those who don’t)?

Kelly: It could be true for girls to have four drinks and be buzzed and good to go. But for guys, I think it's totally different. I think there should be a difference for guys and girls.

Moderator: (Presents an ad with students rock climbing. The copy reads: “Most WSU students drink moderately. Heavy drinking at WSU has decreased every year for the past five years.”) Okay, what do you guys think of this one?

Zach: What’s with the people climbing?

A.C.: Most people don’t drink when they’re rock climbing. As that would be very dangerous.

Moderator: Do you think the ad would be more effective if there were people with alcohol in the pictures? Basically, are you saying that the message in the ad just isn’t believable?

Kelly: Well, the message is maybe okay, but the pictures just really don’t go.

Zach: That’s a believable message though.

Kelly: It's very believable—but just different pictures.

(Excerpts adapted from Hansen et al., 2000)

Note. The interviewers' questions were folksy and tapped into students' beliefs. To their credit, students responded openly and genuinely. Based on the interviews, the researchers concluded that university freshmen were not educated about binge drinking (they defined binge drinking as having 16 drinks or puking, when in fact binging involves having 4 to 5 drinks on a single occasion). Researchers concluded that messages should emphasize the impact of drinking on students' lives. Ads, they suggested, should contain pictures that relate more to the message. This type of formative research provides useful insights into students' perceptions, suggesting more effective ways to appeal to the target audience.

What's the verdict? Does social norming work? Empirical studies offer some—but not total—support. Northern Illinois University implemented a social norms campaign, which used communications to decrease the number of students who thought binge drinking was the campus norm.
Prior to the campaign, 70% of the students believed binge drinking was common practice. By the campaign’s conclusion, the percentage had dropped to 51%. Self-reported binge drinking decreased by nearly 9% during this period (Haines & Spear, 1996).

Other studies, using more fine-tuned scientific methods, have reported similar findings (Godbold & Pfau, 2000; Schroeder & Prentice, 1998). These results have intrigued scholars, but raised questions. Some wonder whether students genuinely changed their views or were just saying they had, in order to comply with the norm of pleasing the faculty investigator. Other scholars doubt that simply providing correct information is sufficient to overcome more emotional reasons people choose to drink (Austin & Chen, 1999). Still others fear that social norming encourages drinking. “Are you saying that four drinks a week is a healthy choice?” one student asked campaign coordinators. “I mean, maybe it is, maybe it isn’t. It’s definitely illegal for the first-years (at U. Va.)” (Murray & Gruley, 2000, p. A10).

One other potential dilemma of social norms marketing has also surfaced, pointing to the role social context plays in communication campaigns. Which industry do you think might like the idea of encouraging students to drink, if only modestly? That’s right: The beer industry! Anheuser-Busch Brewers funded the University of Virginia social norms campaign to the tune of $150,000. Coors and Miller gave the University of Wyoming and Georgetown University thousands of dollars for similar campaigns. Anheuser made certain that the ads displayed its corporate logo. This raises ethical questions. Did beer industry sponsorship inhibit campaigners, causing them to shy away from developing hard-hitting antidrinking ads? Did the association of moderate drinking and the beer company logo actually strengthen pro-boozing attitudes?

Thus we glimpse the complex issues surrounding social norms marketing. It is an engaging idea, one that creatively plays on young people’s desire to fit in with the majority. However, it probably works best when implemented in conjunction with other persuasion principles.

**Drug Prevention Campaigns**

“The facts are these,” researchers Jason T. Siegel and Judee K. Burgoon (2002) observe. “Almost half of all high school students surveyed used marijuana on at least one occasion, and more than 25% of high school students who were questioned reported using marijuana 30 days prior to being surveyed. Illicit drug use costs taxpayers upward of $110 billion a year. In addition to impairing cognitive functioning, marijuana use is associated with increased risk of dropping out of high school, driving
under the influence, engaging in crime, and destroying property. . . . The goal is simple: Persuade people not to do drugs. Seems easy enough in principle. Unfortunately, even with $3 billion being spent by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America on media time alone, the amount of people who use illegal substances is not decreasing” (p. 163).

Modern antidrug campaigns date back to First Lady Nancy Reagan, who famously urged a generation of young people tempted by crack-cocaine and other ’80s-style substances to “just say no to drugs.” Her advice got a lot of bad press at the time. However, it had a simplicity to it, based, as it appeared to be, on Nike’s Zen-oriented “Just do it” advertising of the era. The 1980s campaign and a more recent project launched by the U.S. government’s Office of National Drug Control Policy have centered on PSAs. These have included the world-famous “This is your brain on drugs” and a host of recent spots, including ones in which teens criticize their parents for controlling their behavior when they were younger, but at the end, each says “thanks” to their parents for keeping them drug free.

Judging by the number of people who can remember these ads, you might think the campaigns were phenomenal successes. However, recall does not equal attitude change, nor does it signal a motivation to alter an intention to experiment with drugs. The campaigns raised awareness, a necessary step in motivating people to change problematic behaviors. However, some ads came off as controlling or condescending, a kiss of death in campaigns directed at naturally rebellious adolescents (see Burgoon, Alvaro et al., 2002). In order to change young people’s attitudes toward drugs, campaigns must consider communication principles, such as these:

1. **Pretest, target, and tailor.** Antidrug campaigns are more apt to succeed if they identify young people’s salient beliefs and target them in compelling messages (Fishbein et al., 2002). Formative research tells us that teenagers, who believe they will live forever, are not particularly impressed by the argument that drugs can kill you. More intimidating is the prospect that drugs will ruin a relationship. One successful antidrug campaign put this insight to use in message design, featuring an ad in which a teenage girl complains that since her boyfriend started smoking marijuana, “he just lays around and is forgetting things. . . . She complains he avoids her like he avoids all his other ‘problems,’ and she walks out, slamming the door. A message board reads, ‘Marijuana: it’s messed up a lot of relationships’ ” (Palmgreen et al., 2002, p. 40).

2. **Segment the audience.** Social marketing emphasizes that campaigns should devise different appeals to fit different subgroups. A key factor that has emerged in drug prevention research is the personality variable, sensation seeking. People who are high in sensation seeking (you may be
one or know someone who is) enjoy thrills and adventures, like bungee jumping and parachuting. They prefer a nonconformist lifestyle (characterized by unconventional music and art), and seek out a variety of stimulating social and sexual experiences (Zuckerman, 1979). They also derive psychological and physical gratification from drugs and are more apt to use drugs than people who are low in sensation seeking (Donohew, Palmgreen, & Lorch, 1994). Given the many ways that high sensation seekers differ from low sensation seekers, it makes sense that drug prevention communications targeting highs should employ different appeals than those geared to lows. This viewpoint has been articulated and elaborately tested by Lewis Donohew, Philip Palmgreen, and their associates (Donohew et al., 2002; Palmgreen et al., 2002). Far from arguing that the same message fits all potential drug users, Palmgreen and Donohew suggest that communications should be tailored to fit high and low sensation seekers' different needs. In order to reach high sensation seekers, messages should be novel, exciting, graphic, and emotionally strong. Communications targeted at low sensation seekers should be familiar, easygoing, and less intense. However, as a general rule, given that so many drug users are high in sensation seeking, campaigners with a fixed budget are advised to develop PSAs that point out exciting alternatives to drug dependence.

3. **Use multiple formats and channels.** Media PSAs can create awareness and help people recognize they have a drug problem. To help people move from mental to behavioral change, PSAs must be supplemented by news stories mentioning celebrities who have maintained a drug-free lifestyle, as well as by extensive community activities to help people talk with counselors or stay in treatment programs.

**VALUES AND ETHICS**

You know the old game “Where’s Waldo?” that you played when you were a kid? You would try to spot the cagey character, Waldo, who was hiding somewhere in the house or outdoors. He was always there, you just had to locate his whereabouts. So it is with values and ethical aspects of campaigns, an issue touched on but not directly broached in this chapter. Noted one ethicist, “They are always there, the value judgments: the choices in policy decisions. There are always choices made” (Guttman, 2000, p. 70).

It’s nice to think of campaigns as these objective entities, planned by scientifically minded behavioral engineers, implemented by marketing specialists, and evaluated by statisticians. Although campaigns have measurable effects to be sure, they take place in real-world contexts
Social–structural factors, political complexities, and value judgments necessarily intervene. You can appreciate this by considering the following questions. They appear simple at first blush but are actually tinged with value issues:

1. **What is the problem the campaign hopes to solve?** A healthy-eating campaign may be designed to change attitudes toward eating high-cholesterol food, or to slowly put pressure on fast-food restaurants to offer healthy food choices. A gun control campaign may focus on teaching gun owners to take safety precautions when loading a gun, or on intensifying public opinion pressure on legislators to support legal suits against the gun industry like those brought against Big Tobacco.

2. **What is the locus of the dilemma?** Campaigners may perceive that the roots of a health problem are psychological—for example, personal shortcomings of drug abusers. Alternatively, they may take a more macro view, arguing that the problem is rooted in social conditions: a billion-dollar global drug industry, indirectly backed by the U.S. government, that preys on vulnerable youth. The perceived locus of the problem will influence campaign strategies and choice of social marketing techniques.

3. **If the goal is to benefit the public good, is the campaign designed to do more good for certain members of the public than others?** There is no absolute definition of "public good." Instead, the definition inevitably reflects value judgments. Should good be defined in utilitarian terms—a cardiovascular risk reduction campaign designed to reach the greatest number of people? Or should it be viewed in a more deontological fashion, emphasizing values like justice—as when planners of a blood pressure screening campaign, acknowledging that poverty produces great psychological stress, choose to focus only on poor people? Similarly, as Nurit Guttman (1997) puts it, “should campaign resources be devoted to target populations believed to be particularly needy or those who are more likely to adopt its recommendations?” (p. 181). It is more difficult to reach needy individuals, as well as the hard core that is at greatest risk for disease. By opting for reachable goals—trying to do the greatest good for the greatest number—are campaigns coping out at the get-go, favoring the advantaged over the disenfranchised?

4. **How are values implicated in the solutions campaigners recommend?** An AIDS prevention campaign that urges people to practice safer sex has opted not to communicate the values of abstinence or waiting to have sex until you are married. Social norm-based antidrinking campaigns advocate moderate drinking, an option that some parents oppose.

5. **How do values influence criteria used to proclaim success?** Evaluators must devise benchmarks that can be used to determine if a campaign has succeeded. Values come into play here. For example, an intervention to
promote breast cancer screening could be deemed successful if it increased the number of women who had mammograms yearly. However, given that those most likely to get mammograms are women with insurance that covers the procedure, the criteria for success excludes poor women (Guttman, 2000). The evaluator may reason that a campaign cannot do everything, and note that increases in mammography even among those with insurance policies is an achievement. That may be a reasonable call, but it reflects a certain set of value judgments.

6. Finally, although different values shape campaigns, all campaigns are based on a core assumption: The world will be a better place if social interventions effortfully try to change individual behavior. Campaigns assume that social marketing interventions to change individual behavior and improve the public health are worthwhile ventures. This puts communication campaigns at odds with a strict libertarianism that regards individual liberty as an unshakable first principle. Libertarians would question why we need campaigns since people know that smoking causes cancer but choose to smoke, or know all about the risks of HIV but prefer to practice unsafe sex because it’s fun. Don’t people have a right to make their own choices and live life according to their own rules, even those that strike others as self-destructive?

It is a good question, one that philosophers have been asking in one fashion or another for centuries. Campaigns must necessarily balance individual liberties and the public good. Both are important values. Clearly, when your liberty (to smoke) threatens my good health by exposing me to secondhand smoke, it’s a no-brainer for many people. But how far should you go in taking away liberties for the sake of the larger whole? Is it right to ban smoking in every public place, as the more coercive of antismoking activists would recommend? Where do you draw the line?

AND NOW PLEASE—A WORD FROM OUR POLITICAL SPONSOR

It happens every four years. Not that most American voters are enormously invested in presidential election campaigns. About half of the electorate votes, and young people are particularly unlikely to cast their ballots (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999). Nevertheless, politics (a topic not much discussed in this chapter) matters. Political decisions—on such issues as education, tax cuts, Social Security, and crime—have an enormous impact on our lives.

Electoral campaigns determine who will represent us in national and local government. They also shape public policy. Nowadays, political
campaigns are not limited to electoral matters. We live in the era of the "permanent campaign," in which political marketers (a late-20th-century innovation) wage campaigns to influence public opinion on all manner of issues, including health care reform, stem cell research, the death penalty, and the U.S. war on terrorism.

No persuasion book could possibly be complete without a discussion of politics. Although persuasion theories have been applied to politics elsewhere in the book, thus far there has been no description of political communication campaigns. The topic is so big and interdisciplinary it cannot be discussed in detail in a general book like this one. However, it is possible to venture several main pointers about the role persuasive communications play in political campaigns. Thus, the next section switches from the health to the political and international campaign contexts. I draw on research and theory to briefly outline strategies that candidates and issue proponents can employ to attain their objectives. To win contemporary campaigns, research suggests that candidates deploy the following persuasive strategies:

1. **Develop a core set of positions that spring from a political philosophy.** Harking back to the ancient era of the 1980s, one notes that Ronald Reagan ran as a conservative opposed to big government and in support of a bolder U.S. foreign policy. His platform appealed to voters looking for leadership and tired of the Democrats' big-government policies. He won the 1980 election handily.

2. **Communicate a vision through strategic use of media.** The message, a centerpiece of persuasive communication, is of central importance in politics. The still-classic example is Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign, in which he focused relentlessly on the nation's economic woes, offering specific proposals. Guided by the slogan, "It's the Economy, Stupid," Clinton's campaign succeeded in setting the agenda—that is, in convincing people that the economy was the most important issue facing the country, and also in suggesting that Clinton was the most qualified candidate to take on this challenge.

3. **Market an image.** In an age of mass media, few voters meet the candidates. They must, therefore, rely on the image communicated through TV and other media. Campaigns manufacture images through marketing, polling, and positioning the candidate in appealing ways. Images are never entirely accurate: John F. Kennedy loved his family, but he also loved cavorting with women, an image Americans did not acquire until much later.

4. **Make a personal, emotional connection with people.** The ability to connect with people still counts, even in a media age (Newman & Perloff, in press). The reason George W. Bush, a newcomer to national politics in
2000, fared so well is that he forged strong emotional connections with sympathetic voters, implicitly taking a chapter from the source attractiveness playbook. Forging a personal connection is as important a factor in political success in the early 21st century as it was in the early 20th.

5. **Appeal persuasively to undecided voters.** In recent elections, undecided voters have played a key role in determining the outcome of the race. To reach these voters, candidates must poll incessantly, tailor different messages to diverse audience subgroups, avoid political gaffes, and take ambiguous positions on hot-button issues like abortion and gun control. It’s the latter ambiguity—skeptics call it dishonesty—that turns off some people to politics and gives third-party candidates their charm.

**The Campaign Like No Other**

It’s been called a hinge moment in history, one of those “pivots on which our lives move from one world to another” (Garreau, 2001, p. 6). The events of September 11 had a shattering impact on people’s psyches. We all remember the destruction of the World Trade Center—even today. The attacks transformed America’s military and political priorities, causing its leaders and citizens to recognize that we had to fight and win a new kind of war, a war like no other, as was frequently said in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

Few doubted the need for military action; indeed, nearly 90% of Americans supported military action in retaliation for the terrorist attacks (Drinkard, 2001). More surprising to many, perhaps, was the call for a campaign to influence opinion in the United States and abroad. Americans were accustomed to campaigns waged to win elections, influence opinion on political matters, and, of course, to change unhealthy behaviors. However, George W. Bush’s decision to mount a full-scale domestic and international campaign to influence opinions toward the war and the United States came as a surprise to some Americans, particularly when they learned that Bush had appointed a former advertising executive, dubbed the “Queen of Madison Avenue,” to serve as campaign director (McCarthy, 2001).

A persuasion campaign made eminent sense, however, when one considered the critical role that public opinion played in democracy. Health campaigners recognized the need to influence public opinion when they waged antismoking and antidrinking campaigns. They not only sought to change individuals’ attitudes toward cigarettes and booze, but also to apply indirect pressure on the tobacco and alcohol industries to change their policies toward advertising directed at young people. In a similar fashion, the Bush administration recognized it could not mount a successful war effort without strong support from the American people.
It also realized that if it was to gain support from foreign governments and influential Arab leaders, it would have to combat the images of America held by so many Arabs and Muslims across the world.

The campaign would be fought on two fronts: domestic and international. The domestic campaign centered on rallying the American public behind the president and his war policies. This required a keen appreciation of persuasion principles. One of the most critical was language and the use of what Theodore Roosevelt called "the bully pulpit." As "the symbolic embodiment of the nation," the president's words and expressions can sway emotions and influence policy (Euchner, 1990). Although not known for his glib rhetoric, Bush used language skillfully in the months that followed the terrorist attack. Adapting the words of the great British prime minister, Winston Churchill, to the present moment, Bush told the nation, "We will not tire. We will not falter. And we will not fail." Nonverbally, he projected calm and strength—not easy qualities to muster when your nation is attacked and all eyes are fixated on you, but precisely the qualities a leader needs to convey during times of crisis.

Bush appealed to American values—faith in God, tolerance for people of diverse faiths (notably, Muslims and Arab Americans), and optimism for the future. In this way he hoped to say things that resonated with people, and were cognitively consistent—not dissonant—with their core values. Recognizing the power of organizing principles, what social scientists call frames, Bush framed terrorism as an attack on freedom and civilization itself. Liberal scholars thought the frame understated the extent to which terror is rooted in socioeconomic conditions (Rothstein, 2001). Yet the overwhelming number of Americans shared Bush's belief that it was really quite simple—a battle of good versus evil, the legitimate need of a country to defend itself against unspeakable attack. His poll numbers in the fall of 2001 reflected Americans' support of his policies and frame: Over 85% of the public approved of the job he was doing as president. While some of his war policies troubled civil libertarians, he used rhetoric and public relations effectively in 2001, rallying the public around the flag and war effort.

As Bush worked the airwaves, his aides worked the street: Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, to be specific. White House aides met with Hollywood executives to enlist their help in promoting the war on terrorism. Celebrity actors and actresses—Julia Roberts, Jennifer Lopez, Tom Cruise, Robert DeNiro—willingly did promos for the war effort or entertained the troops in well-publicized media tours.

The International Campaign. The battle for world public opinion shaped up as a far more difficult contest, one that took place on a larger,
more complex, and volatile playing field. How do you influence millions of Muslims and Arabs who have come to love America’s commercial products (from Levi’s jeans to Michael Jordan), but despise the U.S. government, and misunderstand America herself (Burns, 2001)? How do you influence Arab young people, who cannot find meaningful employment in their own countries, are provided no legitimate outlet for expressing political grievances, and, “with one foot in the old world and another in the new,” find Islamic fundamentalism a simple, tempting alternative (Zakaria, 2001, pp. 30, 32)? How can you realistically hope to change these folks’ attitudes toward America or succeed in making “American values as much a brand name as McDonald’s hamburgers or Ivory soap” (Becker, 2001, p. A1)?

The campaign, launched in the fall of 2001, faced an additional problem—the terrorists’ ability to manipulate modern media to their own ends. Osama bin Laden, like other evil charismatic leaders, displayed a canny knowledge of media and symbols. Within hours after the United States bombed Afghanistan in October 2001, the terrorist appeared in a videotape, “citing Islamic scripture, his rifle leaning against a rock beside him,” celebrating the September 11 attacks (Kifner, 2001, p. 5). To be sure, his rhetoric turned off those Muslims who recognized his exploitation of their religious doctrine for his purposes. Yet it resonated to some degree with hopeless men and women on the Arab street or with those who had internalized years of anti-Western education. For still others—who planned to join the jihad and deluded themselves into thinking that Jews flew the planes into the World Trade Center—his speech was pure political poetry (Bragg, 2001).

Under such circumstances (facing fanatics and daunting odds), how do you conduct a campaign to influence worldwide opinion? For starters, one must recognize that it is essential to carefully apply communication campaign principles to the problem at hand. The U.S. government did this, attempting in its communication to do the following:

1. Capture audience attention. After a faulty start, the administration realized that to reach the Arab world, it had to beam its message to Arab media. U.S. military leaders did interviews with Al Jazeera, the Arab satellite television channel. Experts argued that it needed to supplement this by communicating messages on TV channels that showed the popular Arabic version of “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” (Fandy, 2001).

2. Appeal to the undecideds. One scholar estimated that 40% of Arab public opinion agreed with the United States and not the terrorists, another 10% supported bin Laden, while the remaining 50% disliked bin Laden’s band of thugs, but distrusted the U.S. approach to the Middle East (Fandy, 2001). Trying to appeal to the latter Arab men and women,
the United States released a videotape that showed bin Laden smiling and boasting of attacks that killed over 3,000 people.

3. Display goodwill. In early speeches, George W. Bush took pains to show that he respected the religious faith of the world’s Muslims. “The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends,” he said. “We respect your faith. . . . Its teaching are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah” (McQuillan, 2001, p. 3A).

4. Use credible communicators. There is only so much that an American president can do to appeal to Arabs and Muslims worldwide. Experts argued that moderate Arab opinion leaders, or celebrities like Muhammad Ali, who condemned terrorism, were more credible sources. (Ali, perhaps the most celebrated individual of Muslim faith in the world, did a one-minute spot designed for broadcast over Arab television networks in which he stressed that the war was not directed at Islam, but against terrorists who murdered innocent people.) Communicators like Ali violate the knowledge bias and can enhance trustworthiness.

5. Understand your audience’s beliefs—the logic behind their dislike of America—and target beliefs that are most susceptible to change. It doesn’t help to talk about enduring freedom to people who have no freedom. Instead, it is better to frame arguments about America’s democratic values in terms that those in Arab countries can appreciate.

Needless to say, these weren’t easy tasks. A campaign could do only so much. Nonetheless, the U.S. campaign appeared to have made inroads into anti-American attitudes held by some of the world’s Muslims. Naturally, the campaign planners and the U.S. president made their share of mistakes (like Bush’s early calling for a “crusade” on terrorism, a term that evoked images of Western attacks a thousand years ago). The communication campaign also changed directions in response to changing military and political events. The campaign was neither static nor perfect. Yet in one sense it reflected the best of American society: appeals to reason and respect for freedom to make up one’s mind—values terrorists abhor.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Communication campaigns are vital activities, focused on using media and persuasion to improve social conditions. They have a long, proud history in this country. Contemporary campaigns are creatures of the current era, with its technological marvels and cultural diversity. Campaigns are guided by psychological, diffusion, and social marketing approaches. They can’t save the world or change the political structure, but,
executed effectively, they can influence individual behaviors and public policies. We have seen how campaigns can have significant, positive effects in the health and political arenas.

This chapter and the book as a whole have argued that if we understand how people think and feel about communication, we have a pretty good chance of changing their views in socially constructive ways. That is a foundation of persuasion scholarship. It seems to have a great deal of empirical support. Yet it is always worth playing devil's advocate with oneself and noting that there are people whose attitudes you can't change. There are people who will smoke no matter how many times they are exposed to an antismoking message, and others who will abuse drugs even after you tell them they can get busted precisely because they enjoy the thrill of testing the law. Still others will practice unsafe sex, knowing full well they are HIV-positive.

Persuasive communication, like all forces in life, has limits, a point emphasized at various times in this text. The fact that communication has limits does not mean it is powerless or ineffectual or always plays into the hands of the rich or corrupt. Persuasion can have these effects, of course, but it can also be an instrument of self-insight, healing, and social change. Whether it is a force for good or bad depends on us and our values—on how we go about trying to change people’s minds at work and at home, on how we approach the practice of persuasion with strangers and those we love.
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