

# SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: Unraveling the Mystery, 3/e

---

© 2005

Douglas T. Kenrick  
Steven L. Neuberg  
Robert B. Cialdini

---

**0-205-43000-7** Exam Copy ISBN  
(Please use above number to order your exam copy.)

---

Visit [www.ablongman.com/relocator](http://www.ablongman.com/relocator) to contact your local Allyn & Bacon/Longman representative.

## SAMPLE CHAPTER

The pages of this Sample Chapter may have slight variations in final published form.

Allyn & Bacon  
75 Arlington St., Suite 300  
Boston, MA 02116  
[www.ablongman.com](http://www.ablongman.com)



CHAPTER 5

# Attitudes and Persuasion



## The Changing Story of Peter Reilly

In 1973, Peter Reilly was a sensitive and intelligent 18-year-old whose life changed forever when he returned home after an evening church meeting to find his mother lying on the floor, murdered. Though reeling from the sight, he had the presence of mind to phone for help immediately.

At five feet seven inches and 121 pounds and with not a speck of blood on his body, clothes, or shoes, Peter Reilly seemed an unlikely killer. Yet from the start, when they found him staring blankly outside the room where his mother lay dead, the police suspected that Reilly was responsible for her murder. The reason for that suspicion had less to do with what they knew about him than with what they knew about the victim. She took delight in irritating the people she met—men especially—belittling, confronting, and challenging them. By any measure, she was a difficult woman to get along with. Thus it did not seem unreasonable to police officials that Reilly, fed up with his mother's constant antagonisms, would fly off the handle and slaughter her in a spasm of rage.

At the scene and even when taken in for questioning, Reilly waived his right to an attorney, thinking that if he told the truth, he would be believed and released in short order. That was a serious miscalculation. Over a period of 16 hours, he was interrogated by a rotating team of four police officers,

### The Changing Story of Peter Reilly 139

#### The Nature of Attitudes 141

Attitude Formation 141  
Attitude Strength 142  
Attitude–Behavior Consistency 143

#### What Is Persuasion? 145

Measuring Attitude Change 145

#### **FOCUS ON Method**

*The After-Only Design* 146

Cognitive Responses:  
Self-Talk Persuades 148

#### **FOCUS ON Application**

*Smoking the Tobacco Companies with Counterarguments* 150

Dual Process Models of Persuasion: Two Routes to Change 151

The Goals of Persuasion: Why People Change Their Attitudes and Beliefs 155

#### Seeking Accuracy 155

Good Shortcuts 155  
What Affects the Desire for Accuracy? 159

#### **FOCUS ON Social Dysfunction**

*Defensiveness and Denial* 160

#### Being Consistent 162

Balance Theory 163  
Cognitive Dissonance Theory 164  
What Affects the Desire for Cognitive Consistency? 166  
Consistency with What? 168

#### Gaining Social Approval 170

Self-Monitoring 170  
Gender: Women, Men and Persuasion 170  
The Expectation of Discussion 171  
Self-Monitoring and the Expectation of Discussion 171

#### Revisiting the Story of Peter Reilly 173

#### Summary 174



*Peter Reilly being taken away after his conviction.*

including a polygraph operator who confidently informed Reilly that, according to the lie detector, he had killed his mother. The chief interrogator told Reilly, falsely, that additional evidence proving his guilt had been obtained. He also suggested to the boy how he could have done the crime without remembering any such thing: Reilly had become furious with his mother, had erupted into a murderous fit during which he slaughtered her, and now had repressed the horrible memory. It was their job, Reilly's and the interrogator's, to "dig, dig, dig" at the boy's subconscious until the memory was recovered.

Dig, dig, dig they did, exploring every way to bring that memory to the surface, until Reilly did begin to recall—dimly at first but then more vividly—slashing his mother's throat and stomping on her body. Analyzing, reanalyzing, and reviewing these images convinced him that they betrayed his guilt. Along with his interrogators, who pressed him relentlessly to break through his "mental block," Reilly pieced together from the scenes in his head an account of his actions that fit the details of the murder. Finally, a little more than 24 hours after the grisly crime, though still uncertain of many specifics, Peter Reilly formally confessed in a signed, written statement. That statement conformed closely to the explanation that had been proposed by his interrogators and that he had come to accept as accurate—even though he believed none of it at the outset of his questioning and even though, as later events demonstrated, none of it was true.

When Reilly awoke in a jail cell the next day, with the awful fatigue and the persuasive onslaught of the interrogation room gone, he no longer believed his confession. But he couldn't retract it convincingly. To almost every official in the criminal justice system, the confession remained compelling evidence of his guilt: A judge rejected a motion to suppress it at Reilly's trial, ruling it voluntarily made; the police were so satisfied that it incriminated Reilly that they stopped considering other suspects; the prosecuting attorneys made it the centerpiece of their case; and the jury members who ultimately convicted Reilly of killing his mother relied on it heavily in their deliberations.

When Reilly awoke in a jail cell the next day, with the awful fatigue and the persuasive onslaught of the interrogation room gone, he no longer believed his confession. But he couldn't retract it convincingly. To almost every official in the criminal justice system, the confession remained compelling evidence of his guilt: A judge rejected a motion to suppress it at Reilly's trial, ruling it voluntarily made; the police were so satisfied that it incriminated Reilly that they stopped considering other suspects; the prosecuting attorneys made it the centerpiece of their case; and the jury members who ultimately convicted Reilly of killing his mother relied on it heavily in their deliberations.

These individuals did not believe that a normal person could be made to confess falsely to a crime without the use of threats, violence, or torture. But they were wrong: Two years later, evidence was found hidden in the chief prosecutor's files that placed Reilly at a time and in a location on the night of the crime that established his innocence and that led to the repeal of his conviction and to the dismissal of all charges.

What happened in that interrogation room that was so powerful that it manufactured an admission of murder yet was so elusive that police, prosecutors, judge, and jury did not grasp its impact? Through what mysterious methods and extraordinary circumstances could the police convince a wholly innocent man of his guilt? The methods were not so mysterious nor the circumstances so extraordinary. They embodied the features of everyday persuasion—the kind of persuasion you are exposed to hundreds of times a day (Davis & O'Donohue, 2003). Some persuasion attempts will occur in conversations with friends and acquaintances; others will appear on billboards or in radio, magazine, or television ads; still others will ambush you on the Internet (Mandel & Johnson, 2002) or even in public restrooms where several companies specialize in advertising signage (Turnquist, 2000). In the remainder of this chapter, we will consider how those appeals can generate attitude and belief change, how that change can be measured, and what goals are served by the change.

By far the majority of persuasion research has focused on attitude change. So, before beginning our exploration of how they are changed, let's examine the nature of attitudes.

# The Nature of Attitudes

As we noted in Chapter 2, attitudes are positive or negative evaluations of particular things. But how are they formed in the first place? What makes them strong or weak? And to what extent do they predict behavior? Social psychologists have provided answers to each of these questions. Let's start at the beginning with the topic of attitude formation.

## Attitude Formation

Where do attitudes come from? They spring from several sources.

**Classical Conditioning** Through the process of classical conditioning, we come to like or dislike new objects or events merely because they are associated with objects or events we already like or dislike. For instance, when we associate people with something positive—like the receipt of good news—we like them more, even though they didn't cause the good news (Manis, Cornell, & Moore, 1974). Conversely, when we associate people with something negative—like being with them in a hot, humid room—we like them less (Griffitt, 1970). Even associations of which we are unaware can shape our attitudes (e.g., Cacioppo, Priester, & Berntson, 1993). In one study, students viewed a series of slides of a woman going about her daily routine and were asked to form an impression of her. Just before each slide presentation, however, they were subliminally exposed to photos of either positive or negative objects (e.g., a bridal couple, a bloody shark). As expected, students exposed to the positive photographs formed a more favorable attitude toward the woman in the slides (Krosnick, Betz, Jussim, & Lynn, 1992).

**Operant Conditioning** Through the process of operant conditioning, people learn by being rewarded or punished. People can learn to hold an attitude in this way. In one experiment, students at the University of Hawaii were contacted by phone and surveyed about their attitudes toward the creation of a Springtime Aloha Week. Half the students were rewarded whenever they expressed a favorable attitude toward the idea; the interviewer said “good” each time a student's views supported the event. The remaining students were rewarded with a “good” each time they expressed an unfavorable attitude. One week later, all students completed a questionnaire on local issues, and buried within the questionnaire was an item assessing their feelings toward Springtime Aloha Week. As expected, students previously rewarded for favoring the event expressed more positive attitudes toward it than did students rewarded for opposing it (Insko, 1965).

**Observational Learning** We do not need to experience rewards and punishments firsthand to learn lessons from them. Instead, we often learn by observing others (Bandura, 1986). When we see others punished, we avoid their behaviors and the attitudes they represent. When we see others rewarded, we engage in those behaviors and adopt the attitudes they represent. For instance, children with fearful feelings toward dogs became significantly more positive toward them after simply watching movie clips of other children enjoying their interactions with a variety of dogs (Bandura & Menlove, 1968).

**Heredity** For most of the history of the study of attitudes, theorists assumed that attitudes developed exclusively through the learning process. Although it is undeniably true that experience plays a role, more recent evidence indicates that there is also an unlearned, genetic component to many attitudes such as those involving political and religious issues (Abrahamson, Baker, & Caspi, 2002; Olson, Vernon, Harris, & Jang, 2001). For instance, attitudes toward the death penalty

or censorship are much more likely to be influenced by heredity than are attitudes toward teenage drivers or the wisdom of learning Latin (Martin et al., 1986). Research by Abraham Tesser (1993) indicates that these genetically influenced attitudes are particularly strong and influential in social life. Not only can people tell you more quickly what they prefer on these issues, they are more likely to resist your attempts to change them, and they will dislike you more if you hold an opposing position on these issues.

## Attitude Strength

Not all attitudes are equally strong. Why should we care whether an attitude is strong or weak? One reason is that strong attitudes resist change (Bassili, 1996; Petty & Krosnick, 1996). This is true in two senses. First, strong attitudes are more stable than weaker ones; they are more likely to remain unchanged as time passes. Second, they are less pliant than weaker attitudes in that they are better able to withstand persuasive attacks or appeals specifically directed at them. Let's say you now hold a strong attitude toward gun control. Not only is your attitude likely to be the same next month, but also if someone tried to change your mind on the issue at that point, you would probably not be influenced.

What are the components of a strong attitude that make it unlikely to change? Research by Eva Pomeranz, Shelly Chaiken, and Rosalind Tordesillas (1995) suggests that there are two main reasons that strong attitudes resist change: *commitment* and *embeddedness*.

People are more *committed* to a strongly held attitude. That is, they are more certain that it is correct (Tormala & Petty, 2002). In addition, a strongly held attitude is more *embedded in* (connected to) additional features of the person, such as the individual's self-concept, values, and social identity (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995). For example, officers of the National Rifle Association are both committed to an anti-gun control position and typically make that position a central part of their social identities. Consequently, they are unlikely to change their attitudes on this topic.

It appears that both commitment and embeddedness make strong attitudes more resistant to change (Visser & Krosnick, 1998). But, they do so in different ways (see Figure 5.1). Being committed to a particular attitude causes people to review relevant information in a biased fashion and to intensify their opinions. All this leads them to dismiss evidence that goes against their initial attitude. For example, in one experiment, participants who already had strong attitudes about capital punishment were shown an essay and a research study that opposed their position on the issue. They reacted by rejecting this information, deciding that the essay's arguments were weak and the study's methods were flawed (Pomeranz, Chaiken, & Tordesillas, 1995).

The embeddedness of the attitude did not cause participants to reject contradictory information, however. Embeddedness restricted change in another way—by simply tying the attitude to so many other features of the person (beliefs, values, additional attitudes) that it became difficult to move in any direction. That is, because changing an embedded attitude would mean changing all sorts of other aspects of the self, people are reluctant to undertake the process (O'Brien & Jacks, 2000).

On the surface, the evidence that people are unlikely to change strong attitudes and beliefs makes the phenomenon of persuaded false confessions—such as Peter Reilly's—even more mystifying. Surely, a blameless person has strongly held attitudes and beliefs regarding his or her own innocence. Indeed, because this is the case, experienced criminal interrogators typically do not try to attack such a belief directly until they have first weakened it.

A favorite tactic used to weaken a belief of innocence is to convince suspects that they don't remember doing the deed because they were powerfully affected by alcohol or drugs or, in the case of Peter Reilly, a blind rage, while performing it (Ofshe &

Leo, 1997). During his interrogation, Reilly reported being greatly alarmed by the idea—planted well before the interrogation began—that he could have suppressed the memory of his murder of his mother, because that idea sent the first tremors of self-doubt through him.

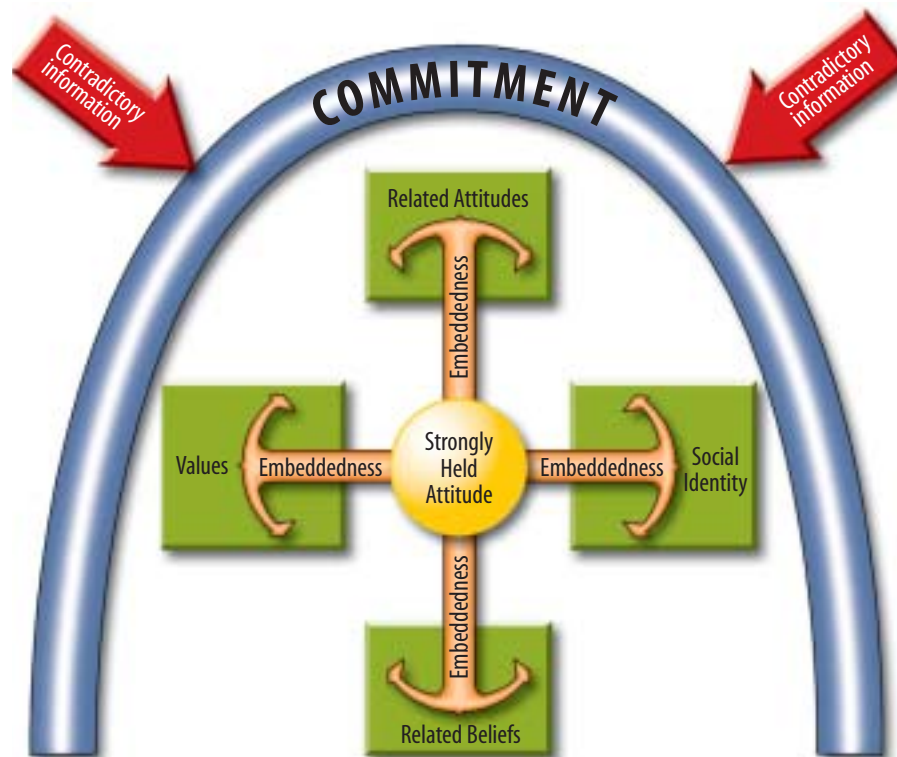
This tactic works so well for interrogators because it undercuts both of the aspects of strong attitudes and beliefs that resist change. First, it reduces suspects' commitment to their innocence by undermining the certainty of their belief in that innocence: Suspects cannot be sure that they haven't perpetrated the crime if it is possible that they don't remember it. Second, the tactic decreases the embeddedness of the belief by unhooking the crime from the self-concept of the person who committed it: The view of oneself as someone who could not have done such a thing simply does not apply if it was the alcohol or drugs or blind rage that did it.

## Attitude–Behavior Consistency

To what extent does your attitude toward gun control affect your behavior with regard to gun control legislation? Although it sounds like a simple question, it's more complicated than you might think. Several factors influence the likelihood that a person's attitude will be consistent with his or her behavior.

**Knowledge** The more knowledge we have about something, the more likely it is that our pertinent attitudes and actions will be consistent with one another (Kallgren & Wood, 1986). Therefore, the more you know about gun control laws, the greater will be the chance that your evaluation of such laws will predict your conduct in support of or in opposition to them. In addition, if you came to this greater knowledge through direct contact with the effects of the laws—perhaps you were harmed (or rescued) by someone with a gun—your attitude would be even more predictive of your behaviors toward these laws, as firsthand experience creates stronger

**Figure 5.1** Why strong attitudes resist change



Commitment—one quality of strong attitudes—shields attitudes against contradictory information, whereas embeddedness—a second quality of strong attitudes—anchors them to a variety of other change-resistant features of the self.

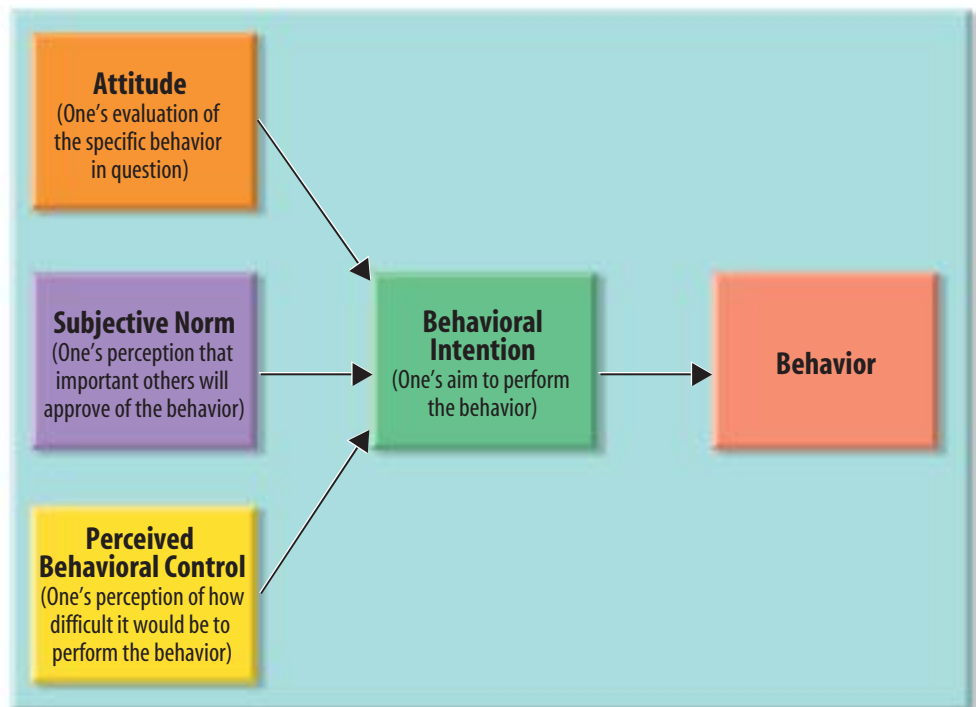
attitude–behavior consistency than does secondhand exposure (Millar & Millar, 1996; Fazio & Zanna, 1981). So, two aspects of knowledge intensify the link between attitudes and related actions—the *amount* of knowledge acquired on the subject and the *direct (versus indirect) nature* of the knowledge (Davidson, Yantis, Norwood, & Montano, 1985).

**Personal Relevance** Some years ago at Michigan State University, when government officials proposed raising the legal drinking age from 18 to 21, nearly all students were opposed to the plan. Yet, when asked to act consistently with their negative attitudes by campaigning against the proposal, those who were under 20 (and, consequently, would be personally affected by the new law) were much more likely to volunteer (Sivacek & Crano, 1982). This result fits with many others indicating that one’s attitude on a topic will be a better predictor of one’s deeds when the topic is personally relevant (Crano, 1995). Therefore, your attitude toward gun control legislation would be more likely to govern your actions if someone close to you was thinking of purchasing a gun.

**Attitude Accessibility** An attitude is accessible to the degree that it springs to mind quickly. And, a highly accessible attitude is likely to stimulate actions that are consistent with it (Fazio, 1995). To demonstrate this point in a political campaign, Russell Fazio and Carol Williams (1986) asked potential voters to express their attitudes toward then presidential candidates Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale by pressing keys on a hand-held recording device. The speed with which the citizens began punching in their responses was the measure of attitude accessibility. Although this measure was taken during the summer of the 1984 presidential race, the researchers didn’t assess consistent behavior until immediately after Election Day (November 4th) when they phoned participants to ask how they voted. Remarkably, the quicker participants had indicated their preferences in June and July, the more likely they were to act in line with those preferences in the voting booth four to five months later. In like manner, if you asked each of your friends about their attitudes toward gun control laws, you should be able to tell which of them would act consistently with their responses by judging how quickly they offered those responses.

**Figure 5.2**  
**The theory of planned behavior**

According to this theory, attitudes aren’t the best predictors of behavior; behavioral intentions are. However, these intentions are influenced by attitudes as well as by subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.





Of course, attitudes aren't the only factors that influence actions. In fact, Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein claim that attitudes influence action by first influencing a person's *behavioral intentions* (specific aims to act in a certain way) and that these intentions are more likely than the attitudes themselves to predict behavior. In their *theory of reasoned action* (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and in a modified version called the **theory of planned behavior** (Ajzen, 1991), these researchers identified two additional factors (besides attitudes) said to influence behavior through their impact on behavioral intentions. First is what they termed *subjective norms*, which refer to a person's perception that important others would approve or disapprove of the behavior in question. For example, your intention to campaign for changes in gun control laws should be influenced by your view that the important people in your life would respect or disrespect you as a result. The second additional factor said to influence behavioral intentions is *perceived behavioral control*, which refers to one's perception of how difficult it is to perform the behavior in question. Even if you'd really like to campaign for gun control changes (attitude) and even if the significant people in your life would respect you for it (subjective norm), you probably wouldn't intend to do it if time limitations or other circumstances made it seem unrealistic. Quite a lot of research has supported the theory (see Figure 5.2), especially for behaviors that require deliberation and planning (Albarracin, Johnson, Fishbein, & Muellerleile, 2001; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).



**Pervasive persuasion.** *Persuasive appeals are everywhere in our daily lives.*

## What Is Persuasion?

If we are to place the blame for Peter Reilly's false confession within the workings of the persuasion process, we had best establish what we mean by the concept. Although social scientists have defined **persuasion** in a variety of ways, we view it as change in a private attitude or belief resulting from the receipt of a message. So, if a discussion with your supervisor at work about her favorite political candidate caused you to change what you said publicly about the candidate or even to sign a petition supporting the candidate, you would not necessarily have been persuaded by her comments. Your public statements might reflect just an attempt to get your boss's approval, not a genuine shift in your thoughts or feelings about the politician. It's only when a message brings about inner change in your views on a topic that we can say that it persuaded you. As we discussed in Chapter 2, *attitudes* are favorable or unfavorable evaluations of particular things. *Beliefs*, on the other hand, are thoughts (cognitions) about these things. In this chapter, we will examine how both can be changed through the persuasion process.

Fortunately, our efforts will be aided greatly by a large body of research into the factors that make for an effective persuasive message. Indeed, beginning in earnest with government information and propaganda programs enacted during World War II (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; Lewin, 1947; Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, Star, & Williams, 1949), social psychologists have been studying the persuasion process for over half a century.

## Measuring Attitude Change

As should be apparent, clever persuaders have developed many techniques for changing attitudes and beliefs, even initially strong ones. In the process of trying to understand whether and when these various techniques are effective, researchers

### Theory of planned behavior

*A theory stating that the best predictor of a behavior is one's behavioral intention, which is influenced by one's attitude toward the specific behavior, the subjective norms regarding the behavior, and one's perceived control over the behavior.*

**Persuasion** *Change in a private attitude or belief as a result of receiving a message.*

have had to confront the knotty question of how to measure persuasion accurately. After all, we can't claim that a persuasion tactic works if we can't tell how much change it creates. And correctly measuring change is often no simple task. You've no doubt recognized that your actions change if someone is recording them. Of course, scientists studying persuasion want to record it in its truest, least altered form. Consequently, they frequently rely on certain proven methods for reducing the impact of the act of measurement on their data.

We briefly discussed one such method in Chapter 2, in which we described how researchers sometimes measure attitudes unobtrusively (covertly), without asking subjects to give self-reports of these attitudes. In these cases, the researcher judges the attitude in question by simply observing an attitude-relevant behavior. For instance, Cialdini and Baumann (1981) were able to predict the outcome of a presidential election by observing the littering of campaign ads. Voters at the polls were less likely to litter flyers they found on the windshields of their cars if the flyers' message supported their favored candidate. In fact, before official voting totals were announced, this measure correctly predicted the winner at all nine voting locations where it was used.

In general, researchers have found that these covert techniques are more accurate than self-report measures only when people have a good reason to be less than honest about their true feelings—for example, when they want to appear more fair-minded or unprejudiced than they actually are (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Nowicki & Manheim, 1991). Under these circumstances, covert techniques are preferred because they are a more **nonreactive measurement** than are self-reports; that is, using them to record a response is less likely to distort the response. When there is no good reason for people to hide their feelings, however, self-reports are usually preferred because they inquire about attitudes more directly (Dunton & Fazio, 1997).

Assessing attitude through secret observation isn't the only way scientists have tried to make their studies nonreactive. To help achieve this goal, they have also identified a particular research design, the *after-only design*, which assesses persuasion by measuring attitude only after the persuasion attempt.

## FOCUS ON *method*

### The After-Only Design

Suppose that you belong to a group that wants to save lives by reducing the speed limit on state highways and that you have been assigned the job of writing a persuasive letter on this issue that will be mailed to all the citizens of your town. Suppose further that after reading the rest of this chapter, you devise a letter full of persuasive tactics. But before authorizing the funds for a full mailing, the treasurer of your group, who is skeptical of your persuasive skills, requires that you first do a test on a small sample of people to see if your letter is genuinely effective. What could you do to best test your letter's ability to change citizen attitudes?

Chances are that your first answer to this question would be wrong. Many students assume that the best—or only—way to perform such a test properly is by doing a *before-after design* study of attitude change, in which the attitudes of the intended audience are measured both prior to and then again following the persuasive message. Let's say you do such a study. First, you go door to door surveying the attitudes of a randomly selected set of citizens toward highway speed limits; this would be your *before-measure*. Then, a week later, you send your persuasive letter to each of these people. Next, you wait another week and survey their attitudes door to door again; this would be your *after-measure*. And, because you are a careful researcher, you include a randomly selected control group of people who didn't get the letter but did get surveyed twice—just to assure that it was truly your letter that caused any change between the before- and after-measures. The top part of Table 5.1 shows

#### Nonreactive measurement

*Measurement that does not change a subject's responses while recording them.*

**Table 5.1** The before-after and the after-only designs for studying attitude change

In both kinds of designs, subjects are first randomly assigned to either receive a persuasive message (experimental group) or not to receive it (control group). In a before-after design (top), successful persuasion is assumed if the difference between the before- and the after-measures is significantly larger in the experimental group than in the control group. In an after-only design, successful persuasion is assumed if, on the after-measure alone, the experimental group is significantly more favorable to the message than the control group.

Random Assignment to Groups	Before-Measure	Message	After-Measure	Conclusion
<b>Before-After Design</b>				
Experimental group	Measure attitude	Send message	Measure attitude	If the difference between the before- and the after-measure is significantly greater in the experimental group than in the control group, the message was probably effective.
Control group	Measure attitude	Do not send message	Measure attitude	
<b>After-Only Design</b>				
Experimental group		Send message	Measure attitude	If the attitudes on the after-measure alone are significantly more favorable to the message in the experimental group than in the control group, the message was probably effective.
Control group		Do not send message	Measure attitude	

the design of your study. If you found that the attitudes of the people who got your letter changed more than did those of the people who didn't receive it, would you then be in a position to go to your group's treasurer with convincing evidence of the persuasiveness of your message?

Not if the treasurer—we can call him Donald—is knowledgeable about research design. He might complain that your findings may not have been due solely to the impact of your letter but, instead, to the combination of your before-measure *plus* your letter. That is, Donald could say that maybe getting surveyed about highway speed limits the first time *sensitized* the people in your study to this issue so that when they got your letter, they were more receptive to its message. For example, after being surveyed initially, perhaps they began to notice how many cars travel at unsafe speeds on the highways or perhaps they paid more attention to news reports of high-speed accidents. Then, when your letter came, they may have been uniquely ready to be persuaded by it. If so, your study did not provide good evidence that just sending out your letter alone—which the group planned to do—would be effective. Donald might insist that until you showed him that evidence, he wouldn't feel justified in releasing funds for the full mailing of your letter; and he would have a legitimate point.

How could you design your study differently to avoid this criticism? Because the before-measure was the culprit in your study's design, you could simply eliminate it and measure attitudes only once, the week after your letter arrived. Fortunately, a before-measure is not necessary to establish persuasiveness, provided that a basic but powerful research procedure is used: *random assignment*, in which participants are placed in one or another condition of the study completely by chance. Random

assignment works to equate the groups of participants in each condition so that before the study begins, the groups are equivalent to one another (on average) in every way, including their initial attitudes. With groups that start out the same, we can be confident that any after-measure difference in attitude is due to the message.

Take your study. If you randomly assign people to be in the group that gets your letter or to the control group that does not, randomization will work to assure that the two groups have the same average attitude toward highway speed limits before you send the letter. (The larger the number of participants in each group, the more confident you can be that the randomization process has done its job.) Now, when you survey the attitudes of both groups a week after sending your letter, if you find a difference between the two groups on attitude toward highway speeds, you will be able to claim confidently (to Donald or anyone else) that it was most likely your letter that did the trick—because the letter was the only prior difference between the groups.

The bottom part of Table 5.1 illustrates this streamlined design for your study. The logic of this approach is used by most scientists who study persuasion. Thus you will see that the majority of studies in this chapter employ this research design—called the *after-only design*—to draw conclusions about attitude change even though no actual change is measured.

## Cognitive Responses: Self-Talk Persuades

Now that we have considered how to measure attitude change effectively, let's move to the question of how change happens. Early approaches to attitude change emphasized the importance of the message itself—its clarity, logic, memorability, and so on—because it was thought that the target's comprehension and learning of the message content were critical to persuasion (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; McGuire, 1966). Although this is often true, a valuable insight into what motivates people to change was offered by Anthony Greenwald (1968) in the **cognitive response model** of persuasion, which represents a subtle but critical shift in thinking about attitude change. Greenwald proposed that the best indication of how much change a communicator will produce lies not in what the communicator says to the persuasion target but, rather, in what the target says to him- or herself as a result of receiving the communication. According to this model, the message is not directly responsible for change. Instead, the direct cause is the *self-talk*—the internal cognitive responses or thinking—people engage in after being exposed to the message. A great deal of research supports the model by showing that persuasion is powerfully affected by the amount of self-talk that occurs in response to a message (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), by the degree to which the self-talk supports the message (Killeya & Johnson, 1998), and by the confidence that recipients express in the validity of that self-talk (Petty, Brinol, & Tormala, 2002).

**Positive Self-Talk** What are the implications of this view for the way you should fashion a persuasive attempt? Let's take as an example the letter supporting lower highway speed limits that you imagined writing to citizens of your town. The most general implication is that you would be foolish to structure the attempt without simultaneously thinking about what your audience members would say to themselves in response to the letter. You want to find ways to stimulate positive cognitive responses to your letter.

This means that besides considering features of your intended message (for example, the strength and logic of the arguments), you should take into account an entirely different set of factors that are likely to enhance positive cognitive responses to your message. For instance, you may want to delay the mailing of your letter until your local newspaper reports a rash of highway speeding deaths; that way, when your letter arrives, its message will gain validity in the minds of the recipients because

**Cognitive response model** *A theory that locates the most direct cause of persuasion in the self-talk of the persuasion target.*

it will fit with prominent, other information (Anderson, 1991; van der Plight & Eiser, 1984). Or you might want to increase the favorability of cognitive responses to your letter by printing it professionally on high-quality paper because people assume that the more care and expense a communicator has put into a persuasion campaign, the more the communicator believes in its validity (Kirmani, 1990; Kirmani & Wright, 1989).

**Counterarguments** Besides trying to ensure that your message creates positive cognitive responses in your audience members, you should also think about how to avoid negative cognitive responses—especially **counterarguments**, which weaken the impact of a persuasive message by arguing against it (Brock, 1967; Bernard, Maio, & Olson, 2003). Indeed, when Julia Jacks and Kimberly Cameron (2003) tried to change attitudes toward the death penalty, they found counterarguing to be the most frequent and effective tactic their subjects used to resist persuasion. Thus, you might want to include in your letter a quotation from a traffic safety expert asserting that higher speed limits increase automobile fatalities because, typically, people generate fewer counterarguments against a position if they learn that an expert holds it (Cook, 1969; Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978). Other tactics for reducing counterarguing have also proven effective: Giving audience members little time to formulate counterarguments or giving them distracting or overburdening tasks that drain their ability to counterargue makes audience members more susceptible to persuasion (Gilbert, 1991; Hass & Grady, 1975; Romero, Agnew, & Insko, 1996). In one study, subjects who could not counterargue (because their cognitive capacities were overburdened by a taxing task) were persuaded by information even though they knew the information was false (Gilbert, Tafarodi, & Malone, 1993).

Peter Reilly's interrogators employed each of these tactics to persuade a wholly innocent young man that he was a murderer. First, Reilly was informed that the polygraph operator was an expert in his field and that the polygraph machine could not be wrong in implicating him.

**Reilly:** *Does that actually read my brain?*

**Polygraph operator:** *Definitely. Definitely.*

**Reilly:** *Would it definitely be me? Could it have been someone else?*

**Polygraph operator:** *No way from these reactions.*

In fact, as we discussed in Chapter 4, the results of polygraph examinations are far from infallible, even in the hands of practiced operators; because of their unreliability, they are banned as evidence in the courts of many states and countries (Gudjonsson, 2003).

Second, Reilly was never given the time to form counterarguments to the theories and accusations of guilt directed at him incessantly during eight consecutive hours of interrogation; a tag-team of four interrogators took turns peppering him in rapid succession with questions, allegations, and denunciations. Third, even if he had been afforded the time to generate counterarguments, events before the interrogation had probably drained him of the ability to do so: At the start of formal questioning, he was mentally and emotionally spent and hadn't eaten or slept in 24 hours. During the interrogation, Reilly's repeated claims of exhaustion and an inability to think straight went unheeded.

**Reilly:** *I'm so damned exhausted. I'm just gonna fall asleep.*

**Interrogator:** *No you won't.*

**Reilly:** *I wish I wasn't so tired because things come into my head and go right out again.*

**Interrogator:** *What else, Peter? Run through the whole picture again.*

In sum, the same counterargument-suppressing factors that have increased persuasion in scientific research—communicator expertise and insufficient time



**Exhaustive questioning.** *Pushing suspects to defend themselves when they are physically and cognitively depleted is a notorious practice among some criminal interrogators. In one case in England, police arranged for a dog to bark through the night to keep the suspects awake until questioning could begin (Mullin, 1989).*



If you were accused of a crime you didn't commit, what would you do to avoid what happened to Peter Reilly?

**Counterargument** *An argument that challenges and opposes other arguments.*

and ability to formulate counterarguments—were used by Peter Reilly’s interrogators. Peter eventually came to believe their message, even though he knew it to be false at the time.

**Defeating a Message through Inoculation and Counterarguing** Factors that stimulate counterarguing decrease persuasion (Jain, Buchanan, & Maheswaran, 2000; Killeya & Johnson, 1998). You can use this fact to neutralize an opponent’s message. One clever way to stimulate counterarguing in an audience is to send an unconvincing message favoring your opponent’s position, which will cause the audience to think of all sorts of arguments against that rival position. Then, when your opponent delivers a stronger version of his or her message, the audience will already have a set of counterarguments to attack it. William McGuire (1964) has named this the **inoculation procedure** because of its similarity to disease inoculation procedures in which a weakened form of a virus is injected into healthy individuals.

You might use this technique in your campaign to reduce highway speed limits by including in your persuasive letter a few of your opponents’ weaker arguments (e.g., “In some countries, they don’t even have speed limits”) and asking recipients to consider the validity of those arguments. This should lead recipients to develop counterarguments against your opponents’ view and should protect them from stronger attacks by your rivals.

Although the inoculation procedure offers an ingenious and effective approach (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), by far the most common tactic for reducing the persuasiveness of an opponent’s message is simply to give audience members direct counterarguments against the strongest versions of that message. In the advertising arena, this tactic can be highly effective, as we will see in the following section.

## FOCUS ON *application*

### Smoking the Tobacco Companies with Counterarguments

Something extraordinary happened on July 22, 1969, during U.S. Congressional hearings on tobacco regulation: Representatives of the tobacco industry argued vigorously in favor of a proposal to ban all advertising of their own products on radio and television. The unexpected tobacco company support for the ban enabled legislation that has prohibited tobacco advertising on the airwaves in the United States since 1971.

What could account for this unprecedented action on the part of Big Tobacco? Could it be that in the aftermath of the 1964 Surgeon General’s Report on the frightening health consequences of smoking, tobacco company executives became concerned about the health of the nation? Hardly. They didn’t reduce their intensive ad campaign for smokers after the ban. They simply shifted their advertising dollars from the airwaves to other places such as magazines, sports sponsorships, promotional giveaways, and movie product placements. For example, secret documents of one tobacco firm included a letter from movie actor/director Sylvester Stallone agreeing to use its cigarettes in several films in return for \$500,000 (Massing, 1996).

So, it was only on the airwaves that the tobacco industry wanted to bar the advertising of its products. But this deepens the mystery of their motives even further: In the year they proposed the ban, tobacco executives had been spending four out of five advertising dollars on television because advertisers recognized it as “by far the most effective way to reach people, especially young people” (L.C. White, 1988, p. 145). What could have made them want to abandon their most persuasive route to new customers?

The answer lies in something equally remarkable that occurred two years earlier: Against all odds, a young attorney named John Banzhaf successfully argued to

**Inoculation procedure** *A technique for increasing individuals’ resistance to a strong argument by first giving them weak, easily defeated versions of it.*

the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that it should apply its “fairness doctrine” to the issue of tobacco advertising. The fairness doctrine acknowledged the power and importance of counterargument in a free society by requiring that when positions on controversial topics of public importance are broadcast, free air time must be made available to citizens wishing to state opposing views. The FCC’s ruling made an enormous difference, allowing antitobacco forces such as the American Cancer Society to air ads that punctured and parodied the tobacco ads’ images of health, attractiveness, and rugged independence—often by satirizing the tobacco companies’ own ads and showing that, in truth, tobacco use led to ill health, damaged attractiveness, and addictionlike dependence. In one, tough Marlboro Man–like characters were rendered weak and helpless by spasms of hacking, wheezing, and coughing.

From their first appearance in 1967, the counterads began to devastate tobacco sales. After a quarter-century climb, per capita cigarette consumption dropped precipitously in that initial year and continued to sink (nearly 10%) during the three years that the counterads were aired; the great majority of the decline has been traced to the counterads (McAlister, Ramirez, Galavotti, & Gallion, 1989; Simonich, 1991). The tobacco industry reacted predictably by increasing its television advertising budgets to meet this new challenge, but to no avail—because, by the rules of the fairness doctrine, the more ads they ran, the more time had to be given to the counter-arguing messages.

When the logic of the situation finally hit them, the tobacco companies maneuvered masterfully. They supported a ban on the advertising of their products on the air—*only* on the air—where the fairness doctrine applied. With these ads prohibited, the antitobacco forces could no longer receive free air time for their counterads. In the first year after the ban on tobacco ads went into effect, cigarette consumption in the United States jumped more than 3%, even though the tobacco companies were able to reduce their advertising expenditures by 30% (Fritschler, 1975; McAlister et al., 1989).



**Coughing up the truth.**  
*Counterarguments like this one can be very effective against the persuasive appeals of tobacco companies.*

Tobacco opponents found that they could use counterarguments to undercut tobacco ad effectiveness. But the tobacco executives learned (and profited from) a related lesson: One of the best ways to reduce resistance to a message is to reduce the availability of counterarguments to it. Of course, the counterarguments that people have at their disposal don’t come only from others. People are sometimes spurred to think about a message and to generate their own counterarguments. When they are willing and able to do so is the topic of the next section.

## Dual Process Models of Persuasion: Two Routes to Change

In studying cognitive responses to persuasion, researchers have recognized that people don’t always process the information carefully after receiving a message; sometimes they accept or reject it without much thought at all (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). This recognition led to the development of **dual process models of persuasion** (Chaiken, 1987; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which incorporate two basic kinds of attitude change processes—those that involve hard thinking about message arguments and those that do not (Smith & DeCoster, 2000). The first and still most prevalent dual process model is the **elaboration likelihood model** of Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1986), which proposes two routes that people can take to be persuaded—the *central* route and the *peripheral* route.

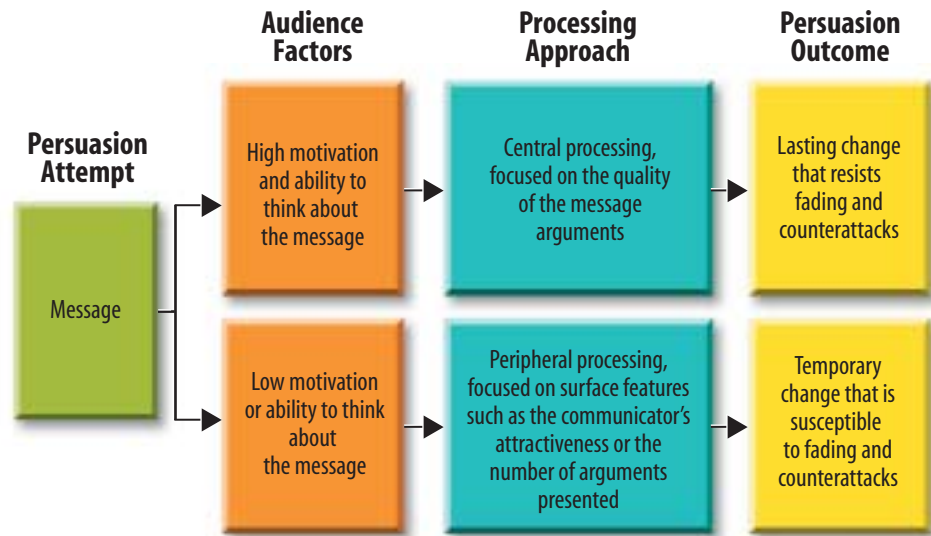
Message recipients will take the central route—paying close attention to the quality of its arguments—when they have both the *motivation* and the *ability* to do

**Dual process model of persuasion** *A model that accounts for the two basic ways that attitude change occurs—with and without much thought.*

**Elaboration likelihood model** *A model of persuasive communication that holds that there are two routes to attitude change—the central route and the peripheral route.*

**Figure 5.3**  
Dual routes to successful persuasion

Depending on whether they have the motivation and ability to think hard about a message, people will process it either centrally or peripherally. Although both processing approaches can lead to persuasion, central processing produces more enduring change.



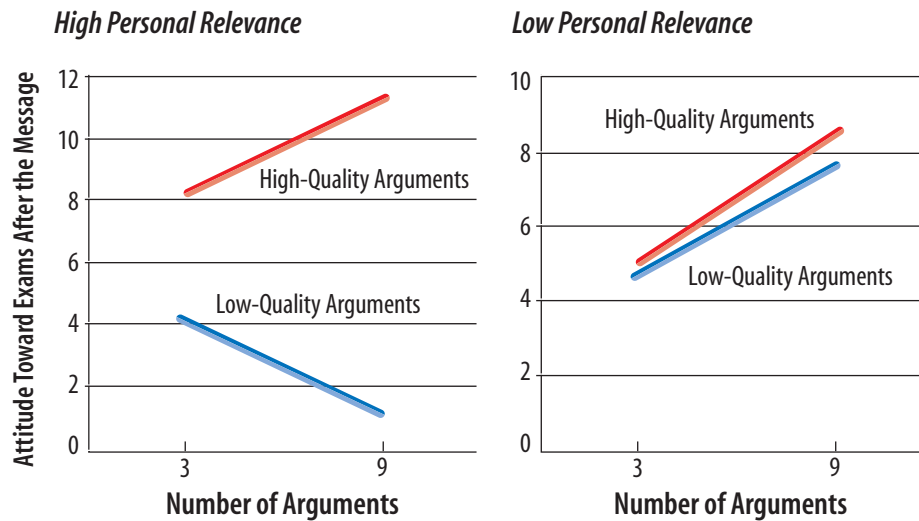
so. If either of these conditions is missing, recipients will take the peripheral route—focusing on some factor other than quality, such as the mere number of arguments or the status or attractiveness of the communicator (see Figure 5.3).

**Motivation** Two factors influence a person’s motivation to process a message centrally. The first is the personal relevance of the topic: The more an issue directly affects people, the more willing they are to think hard about it. The second is the tendency to think hard about *any* topic, called one’s need for cognition. Let’s examine these factors in turn.

**Personal Relevance** Suppose that in tomorrow’s edition of your campus newspaper you read an article describing a plan by university administrators that would require each student to pass a comprehensive exam covering all prior class work before graduation. Suppose as well that the administrators were proposing that the plan go into effect immediately so that, if approved, it would apply to you! Because of this direct personal relevance, you would be motivated to consider the administrators’ arguments carefully before deciding whether to support or oppose the plan, no doubt mulling over those arguments and analyzing them in terms of their quality. Now, imagine the same set of events with one change: the policy is designed to go into effect not this year but in ten years; so it would not apply to you. Under these conditions, the dual processing models would predict that you would respond quite differently to the article. No longer would you be motivated to pore over its points, working up arguments and counterarguments in response. Instead, you might process the administrators’ arguments lightly, deciding whether to support or oppose the proposal based on something as superficial as the number of arguments the administrators listed favoring their plan.

A study done by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1984) confirmed these predictions. College students read either three or nine arguments favoring comprehensive exams. Those arguments were either of high quality (“Average starting salaries are higher for graduates of schools with exams”) or of low quality (“The exams would allow students to compare performance against students at other schools”). Figure 5.4 shows the outcome of the study. When students thought the policy would apply to them, they processed the message centrally, becoming more favorable after reading strong arguments and less favorable after reading weak ones. However, when they thought the policy would not cover them, because it would not go into effect for ten years, students based their opinions on the number rather than the quality of the arguments.





**Figure 5.4**  
**The effects of personal relevance**

When the topic was personally relevant, students responded to a message by taking into account the quality of its arguments. When the topic was not personally relevant, the students processed the message peripherally, responding not to the quality of the arguments but to the sheer number. Thus, both central and peripheral message processing can lead to persuasion, but in different ways.

SOURCE: Adapted from Petty & Cacioppo, 1984.

**Need for Cognition** Another motivating factor resides less in the topic than in the individuals themselves: *need for cognition*. As we discussed in Chapter 3, some people simply prefer to think more fully and deeply than others about almost any issue. These people have a high **need for cognition**, the preference for engaging in central route, deliberative thinking. This need can be measured by questions inquiring how much a person likes to think deliberately about things in general (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarris, 1996). Individuals who have a high need for cognition are motivated to think in a deliberative way even about issues that are not personally relevant to them. For example, in one study, University of Iowa undergraduates read a communication containing either strong or weak arguments in favor of a tuition increase that would go into effect a decade later. Thus, the issue was not personally relevant to these students. Yet, those who had a high need for cognition expended more effort thinking about the communication's points and were more swayed by the quality of those points than were those who had a low need for cognition (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986).

In sum, people can be motivated to think deeply about a topic by such factors as the personal relevance of the topic and their natural preference for deliberative thought (need for cognition). When this motivation is high, people base their opinions on a careful analysis of the quality of the arguments for and against the issue. When this motivation is low, people don't focus so much on the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments; rather, they often base their opinions on peripheral considerations—simply counting the number of arguments, for example. Although these peripheral factors can produce as much initial attitude change as strong arguments, the change fades more quickly and is more vulnerable to persuasive attempts to change the attitude back again (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992).

Thus, in your letter designed to convince people to support lower speed limits, you would be well advised not just to provide strong arguments favoring your position but to motivate recipients to consider the arguments thoroughly, perhaps by explaining at the outset how relevant this issue is to their own safety. (“Studies show that lowered highway speed limits would prevent hundreds of deaths next year. Yours could be one of them.”) That way, the change your letter generates is more likely to last.

**Ability** Having a strong desire to process a message centrally may not be sufficient. A person must also have the ability to follow through. If you were motivated to think thoroughly about a communication—let's say an ad for a camera you wanted

**Need for cognition** *The tendency to enjoy and engage in deliberative thought.*

to buy—what could prevent you from weighing the points of the ad carefully? Researchers have uncovered several ways of limiting your ability to do so: providing distractions to take your mind off the ad (Albarracin & Wyer, 2001); providing you with information insufficient to let you know what to think about the ad's points (Wood, Kallgren, & Preisler, 1985); and providing insufficient time for you to consider those points fully (Ratneswar & Chaiken, 1991).

A study conducted by Joseph Alba and Howard Marmorstein (1987) showed how this last factor, insufficient time, can affect consumers' reactions to camera advertisements. Subjects were given information about two comparably priced camera brands, A and B. The information described 12 separate features that the cameras had in common. Brand A was described as superior to brand B on just three of these features, but they were the most important features to consider in purchasing a camera (those involving the quality of the camera and pictures). Brand B, on the other hand, was described as superior on eight of the features, but they were relatively unimportant aspects of a camera purchase (for example, the presence of a shoulder strap). In one condition of the study, subjects were exposed to each feature for only two seconds. In a second condition, subjects were given five seconds to consider each feature. Finally, a last group of subjects had as much time as they wanted to study the information about the 12 features. Later, subjects rated their favorability toward the cameras.

The results were striking. When given only two seconds per feature to evaluate the cameras, few subjects preferred the higher-quality camera (17%); the majority opted for the camera that had a greater number of unimportant advantages. When given five seconds per feature, this pattern changed somewhat; but, still, fewer than half (38%) preferred the quality choice. It wasn't until subjects had unlimited time to consider the alternatives that the pattern reversed and the majority of subjects (67%) favored the camera that had fewer but more important advantages.

Does the idea of having insufficient time to analyze the points of a communication remind you of how you have to respond to typical, rapid-fire advertisements? Think about it for a second (better still, think about it for an unlimited time): Isn't this the way radio and television commercials operate? In contrast to print ads, the points in their messages speed past in a stream that can't be slowed or reversed to

give you the chance to process any of it centrally. As a result, you focus not on the quality of the advertiser's case but on peripheral aspects of the case, such as the likability or attractiveness of the people in the ads (Chaiken & Eagley, 1983). This is also true of much of the other information you receive through the broadcast media (political opinions, interviews with public figures, and so on).

In summary, dual processing models of persuasion recognize two ways in which people process persuasive communications. Central processing involves paying attention to the quality of the arguments in the communication, which results in focused thinking about those arguments and in change that is based on their strengths and weaknesses. Peripheral processing involves paying attention to other aspects of the communication besides argument quality, such as the mere number of arguments or the communicator's likability. This leads people to change their attitudes and beliefs on the basis of these secondary factors. People are likely to engage in central processing of a message when they have both the motivation and the ability to do so. If either is missing, they are more likely to process the message peripherally.

**Slipstreaming Away.** *Because the message points of TV ads stream past us rapidly, it is difficult to assess their quality using central processing.*



No matter which kind of processing is used, people change their attitudes and beliefs to achieve personal goals. Let's consider what they are.

## The Goals of Persuasion: Why People Change Their Attitudes and Beliefs

Without much strain, you could probably think of several reasons why one person might want to persuade another, as all manner of goals can be realized by changing another's attitudes and beliefs. But why would an individual choose to *become* persuaded? What goals would be served by such change? This seems the more intriguing and instructive question (Snyder & DeBono, 1989).

To understand the functions of attitude change, we should first consider what the functions of attitude might be. Psychologists have proposed several: Through their attitudes, people can gain rewards and avoid punishments, organize information efficiently, express themselves to others, maintain self-esteem, and fit in with their groups (Herek, 1986; Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1990; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956).

Combining these various functions and applying them to the issue of attitude change, we can see three major persuasion goals. Individuals may yield to a persuasive message in order to

1. hold a more accurate view of the world,
2. be consistent within themselves, or
3. gain social approval and acceptance.

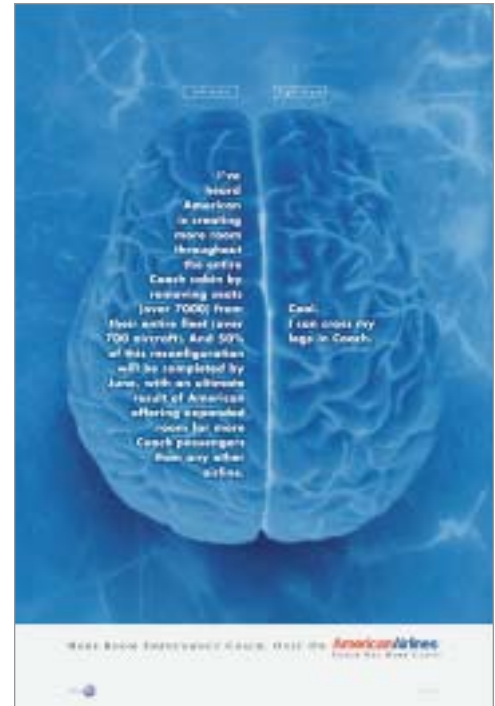
Sometimes, more than one goal can be achieved by the same attitude shift. For example, when one moves closer to a friend's position on an issue after the friend makes an excellent point, this move should promote both accuracy and social approval. Although these three goals don't always operate consciously, in the remainder of this chapter, we will consider how they motivate people to change.

## Seeking Accuracy

Silver-tongued politicians, smooth-talking salespeople, and sensationalizing advertisers can often mislead their audiences. It should come as no surprise, then, that in order to avoid costly mistakes, people want to orient themselves to the world as it truly is. Holding accurate attitudes and beliefs offers one way to do so. In this section, we will explore some of the shortcuts people use to try to achieve accuracy. We will then examine those features in the person and those in the situation that influence the accuracy goal.

### Good Shortcuts

As we have already seen, when individuals want to be accurate in their views of an issue—for example, when the issue is personally important—they spend considerable time and effort analyzing the relevant evidence (Lundgren & Prislun, 1998; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). But we must be careful not to suppose that only those thinking deeply about a topic want to hold accurate views of it (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). Frequently, people want to be accurate but don't have the time or ability to analyze the evidence closely. What then? They often rely on a different kind of evidence to help them choose correctly—shortcut evidence of accuracy. This shortcut evidence can be gathered from three sources: credible communicators, others' responses, and ready ideas.



**A dual-brainer.** This advertiser has cleverly arranged to appeal simultaneously to both central and peripheral information processors in the market.



Accuracy is usually a good thing. But is it always what we want? Think of a time when you convinced yourself to believe something that wasn't true. What was your real goal in that case?

**Credible Communicators** When circumstances don't allow a thorough examination of a persuasive communication, people striving for accuracy can base their opinions on the credibility of the communicator (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). What are the characteristics of a credible communicator? Over many years of research, two have emerged: A credible communicator is expert and trustworthy (Perloff, 1993).

**Expertise** Two thousand years ago, the great Roman poet Virgil offered simple advice to those seeking a shortcut to accuracy: "Believe an expert." Today, most people follow that advice. For instance, when the media present an expert's views on a topic, the effect on public opinion is dramatic. A single expert opinion news story in the *New York Times* is associated with a 2% shift in public opinion nationwide; when the expert's statement is aired on national television, the impact nearly doubles (Jordan, 1993; Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987).

What does this tell you about how to increase the effectiveness of your highway speed reduction letter? If there are public statements by transportation safety experts that support your position, you would make a mistake not to search for and include them, especially when your intended audience doesn't initially favor your proposal (Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963). Still, you won't be optimally persuasive by just convincing your audience that you are a source of expert information. Research conducted around the world indicates that you must also demonstrate that you are a trustworthy source of that information (McGuinness & Ward, 1980).

**Trustworthiness** Whereas expertise refers to a communicator's knowledge and experience, *trustworthiness* refers to the communicator's honesty and lack of bias. How can communicators appear to be honest and unbiased when delivering a persuasive message? They can do so by conveying the impression that their message is intended not to change attitudes in order to serve the communicators' own interests but instead to serve the audience members' interests by informing them accurately about the issues (M.C. Campbell, 1995; Davis & O'Donohue, 2003). Advertisements promising "straight talk" about a problem or product illustrate one approach often taken to establish trustworthiness. Another is trickier: Rather than arguing only in their own favor, communicators sometimes make a show of providing both sides of the argument—the pros and the cons—which gives the impression of honesty and impartiality. Researchers have long known that communicators who present two-sided arguments and who appear to be arguing against their own interests can gain the trust of their audiences and become more influential (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Smith & Hunt, 1978), especially when the audience initially disagrees with the communicator (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949).

Advertisers have hit on one particularly effective way of seeming to argue against their own interests. They mention a minor weakness or drawback of their product in the ads promoting it. That way, they create a perception of honesty from which they can be more persuasive about the strengths of the product (see Figure 5.5). Advertisers are not alone in the use of this tactic. Attorneys are taught to "steal the opponent's thunder" by mentioning a weakness in their own case before the opposing lawyer does, thereby establishing a perception of honesty in the eyes of jury members. Experiments have demonstrated that this tactic works. When jurors heard an attorney bring up a weakness in his own case first, jurors assigned him more honesty and were more favorable to his overall case in their final verdicts because of that perceived honesty (Williams, Bourgeois, & Croyle, 1993).

**Others' Responses** When people want to react correctly to a persuasive message but don't have the motivation or ability to think about it deeply, there is another kind of shortcut they can take. They can observe the responses of others to the message.

For example, if under such conditions you heard a political speech and everyone in the audience around you responded enthusiastically to it, you might well conclude that the speech was a good one and become persuaded in its direction (Axson, Yates, & Chaiken, 1987). In addition, the more consensus you witnessed among audience members, the more likely you would be to follow their lead, even if you didn't initially agree with them (Betz, Skowronski, & Ostrom, 1996). It's for this reason that interrogators are taught to say to a suspect "We believe you are guilty" rather than "I believe you are guilty" (Inbau, Reid, Buckley, & Jayne, 2001).

Although consensus among audience members increases the impact of their responses, a lone other's response to a message can sometimes greatly influence an observer's response to it as well. Criminal interrogators understand this and often support their claim that a suspect is guilty by telling the suspect that they have an eyewitness who agrees with them. What is worrisome about this tactic is that interrogators frequently employ it when no such witness exists. Not only is the use of false evidence in police interrogations legal, according to sociologist Richard Leo (1996), who watched 182 interrogations, but also, after false evidence was presented, suspects made incriminating admissions in the majority of these cases. Is it possible



## Ugly is only skin-deep.

It may not be much to look at, but beneath that humble exterior beats an air-cooled engine. It won't boil over and ruin your piston rings. It won't freeze over and ruin your life. It's in the back of the car, where the weight on the rear wheels makes the traction very good in snow and sand. And it will give you about 29 miles to a gallon of gas.

After a while you get to like so much about the VW, you even get to like what it looks like.

You find that there's enough legroom for almost anybody's legs. Enough headroom for almost anybody's head. With a hat on it.

Snug-fitting bucket seats. Doors that close so well you can hardly close them. (They're so airtight, it's better to open the window a crack first.)

Those plain, unglamorous wheels are each suspended independently. So when a bump makes one wheel bounce, the bounce doesn't make the other wheel bump.



It's things like that you pay the \$1663 for, when you buy a VW. The ugliness doesn't add a thing to the cost of the car.

That's the beauty of it.

### Figure 5.5 When something bad makes something good

Forty years ago, the advertising firm of Doyle, Dane, Bernbach was given the task of introducing a small German car to the U.S. market, where no little cars were selling and no import had ever thrived. It responded with legendary success in a series of ads that imparted overall credibility to the car and to the company by pointing to small liabilities. You may have to strain to see it, but in the ad copy, a negative comment precedes each set of positive comments.



**Crowd Control.** *When others, especially many others, respond in a positive way to an idea, we're likely to see the idea as more valid and to respond similarly.*

that some of these admissions were made by suspects who were truly innocent but convinced of their guilt by the falsified evidence? And, if so, what would be the circumstances that would lead to this remarkable form of persuasion?

Saul Kassin and Katherine Kiechel (1996) devised a study to answer precisely these questions. They constructed a situation in which college students who were performing a computer task in an experiment were accused by the researcher of a wrongdoing that they had not committed—pressing a specific key that they had been warned to avoid, which erased all of the data. Upset, the researcher demanded a signed confession from the student. How many of the students signed even though not one was guilty? That depended importantly on two features of the study. First, those individuals who had been cognitively overloaded while performing the computer task (they had to process information at a frenzied pace) were more likely to admit guilt than were those who were not overloaded by the task (83% versus 62%). As we have seen before, when people are made to feel confused and uncertain, they are more vulnerable to influence.

Second, half of the students heard a fellow subject (actually an experimental confederate) claim that she had seen the student press the forbidden key. The individuals implicated by the bogus eyewitness testimony were significantly more likely to confess than were those who were not (94% versus 50%). So powerful was the combination of these two factors that those students who were both overloaded by the situation and falsely accused by a witness admitted their guilt 100% of the time!

An even more frightening aspect of these particular students' mental states is that, apparently, most of them truly believed their confessions. When waiting alone outside the laboratory afterward, they were approached by another student (actually a second experimental confederate) who asked what had happened. Sixty-five percent of them responded by admitting their guilt to this unknown person, saying such things as "I hit the wrong button and ruined the program." Obviously, the impact of others' views—even the views of a single other—can greatly affect our susceptibility to persuasion, especially when we have first been made to feel unsure of ourselves. These factors fit disturbingly well with Peter Reilly's confession. During his interrogation, he was cognitively overloaded to the point of confusion and was then assured by others (his interrogators and the polygraph operator) that he was guilty.

**Ready Ideas** According to the availability heuristic we discussed in Chapter 3, one shortcut people use to decide on the validity or likelihood of an idea is how easily they can picture it or instances of it (Bacon, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). This gives communicators a subtle way to get an audience to accept an idea—by making the idea more *cognitively ready*, that is, easier to picture or to bring to mind.

Communicators can use two methods to make an idea more cognitively ready. The first is to present the idea several times. Much research shows that repeated assertions are seen as more valid (Hertwig, Girenenzer, & Hoffrage, 1997). Moreover, after an idea is encountered several times, it becomes more familiar and easier to picture, which makes it seem more true (Arkes et al., 1989; Boehm, 1994).

Asking an audience to imagine an idea or event is a second method for increasing its readiness and believability (Garry & Polaschek, 2000). After you have once imagined something, it becomes easier to picture the next time you consider it, thus appearing more likely. The impact of the act of imagining isn't limited to beliefs; it influences behavior too. In one study (Gregory, Cialdini, & Carpenter, 1982), homeowners were asked to imagine themselves experiencing certain benefits of cable

TV; other homeowners only read about these benefits. Weeks later, the homeowners were given the opportunity to subscribe to cable TV. Those who had imagined themselves enjoying the benefits of cable TV were more than twice as likely to subscribe (47% versus 20%).

In another study, after imagining themselves in a car accident, students at New Mexico State University became significantly more willing to support traffic safety initiatives (Gregory, Burroughs, & Ainslie, 1985). You no doubt see the relevance of these findings to your letter advocating lower speed limits: you might ask readers to take a minute and *just imagine* how easy it would be to get involved in an accident when traffic is traveling at high rates of speed.

Thus, ideas can be made to seem more valid by increasing their cognitive readiness, which can be accomplished by presenting the ideas more than once and by arranging for the audience to imagine or picture the ideas. In retrospect, it is clear that Peter Reilly's interrogators used both of these methods. He was assaulted by repeated assertions that he had murdered his mother and was incessantly pushed to imagine how he could have done it. By the time the interrogation was over, these imaginations had become reality for both the interrogators and Reilly.

**Interrogator:** *But you recall cutting her throat with a straight razor.*

**Reilly:** *It's hard to say. I think I recall doing it. I mean, I imagine myself doing it. It's coming out of the back of my head . . .*

**Interrogator:** *How about her legs? What kind of vision do we get there? . . . Can you remember stomping her legs?*

**Reilly:** *You say it, then I imagine I'm doing it.*

**Interrogator:** *You're not imagining anything. I think the truth is starting to come out. You want it out.*

**Reilly:** *I know . . .*

## What Affects the Desire for Accuracy?

The desire for an accurate perspective on a topic is not always the same. At some times and in certain people, it can be particularly intense. At other times and in other individuals, it can drop drastically. Let's explore a set of factors that affect when and how the goal for accuracy operates to influence persuasion.

**Issue Involvement** You probably have opinions on thousands of issues. Although it would be nice to hold accurate views on them all, you are more motivated to be correct concerning those that involve you directly. Political differences in a remote part of the world may spark important events there—war, revolution, and social change. But you would probably be less motivated to hold informed opinions on such issues than on a plan for a local sales tax increase. As a rule and as we've seen, you'll want to have more accurate attitudes and beliefs on issues that are *personally* important. Consequently, you'll be more likely to think hard about messages concerning these issues, becoming persuaded only when the arguments are strong (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979).

One study showed how easy it is for advertisers to get you more involved with a topic so that you will pay careful attention to their messages. The researchers wrote advertising copy—for disposable razors—that either used the self-referencing pronoun *you* exclusively (“You might have thought that razor technology could never be improved”) or did not. Individuals who saw the self-referencing ads thought more thoroughly about the information and were only influenced by it when it contained strong arguments (Burnkrant & Unnava, 1989). Can *you* see how *you* could incorporate this device into *your* letter concerning highway speed limits—and that it would be wise to do so only if *you* had good arguments to support *your* cause? Of course, textbook writers would never stoop to using this tactic.





**Mood** Being in a happy or sad mood does more than give you a positive or negative feeling; it also gives you information about the nature of your immediate situation (Schwarz & Clore, 1996). If you are feeling happy at the moment, it is likely that your current environment has recently been receptive and rewarding. If you are feeling sad, on the other hand, chances are that the environment has recently yielded something unfortunate; it will seem a riskier place, and you will feel more vulnerable (Salovey & Birnbaum, 1989). No doubt you would want to make sure that you react correctly to a persuasion attempt in this insecure environment. Thus, when in a sad versus a happy mood, you will be especially motivated to acquire accurate attitudes and beliefs that pertain to the situation at hand—because of what your mood says about the potential danger of making errors in the immediate environment (Bless, Bohner, Schwarz, & Strack, 1990; Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991).



**Done Deals** The Bible says that there is a time for all things, “a time to every purpose under heaven.” The goal of accuracy is not excused from this rule. For example, Peter Gollwitzer and his coworkers have shown that there is a particular time when people are most motivated to be accurate—when they are deciding what to feel, believe, or do. *After* that decision is made, however, the desire to see things as they really are can give way to the desire to get on with the now-made decision (Armor & Taylor, 2003; Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, & Steller, 1990). As Napoleon advised his generals, “Take time to deliberate; but, when the time for action has arrived, stop thinking and go in.”



**Unwelcome Information** Under certain circumstances, people choose to believe only what they want to believe, usually what fits with their self-interests and personal preferences (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Kunda, 1990). This tendency can affect persuasion. For example, people see information that contradicts what they prefer to believe as less valid than information that supports these beliefs; as a result, such evidence is less persuasive (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Holt, 1985). Other research has revealed how this process works. People who receive persuasive information that fits with their personal interests, preferences, and positions feel content and typically don’t expend the cognitive effort needed to look for flaws. However, those who encounter information that doesn’t fit become upset and search it for weaknesses they can use to form counterarguments (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1997; Liberman & Chaiken, 1992; Munro & Ditto, 1997). Although it is not necessarily harmful to scrutinize and resist information at odds with one’s preferred traits and beliefs, it can be self-destructive if overdone, as we see in the following section.

## FOCUS ON *social dysfunction*

### Defensiveness and Denial

Do people take a biased approach, trying to challenge and undermine negative (but not positive) information, even when the information concerns the vital matter of their own health? Indeed they do (Ditto, Scepansky, Munro, Apanovitch, & Lockhart, 1998; Kunda, 1987). For example, drivers with a history of hospitalization for auto accidents nonetheless continue to believe that they are better and safer drivers than most (Guerin, 1994; Svenson, 1981).

Suppose you were participating in an experiment using a new saliva test to detect an enzyme deficiency that predicted pancreatic disease in later life. How much would you believe in the accuracy of the new test? According to a study done by Peter Ditto and David Lopez (1992) on Kent State University students, that would depend on whether the test identified you as possessing the worrisome deficiency. Like the majority of those students, you would likely downgrade the accuracy of the test if it informed you that pancreas problems were in your future.



A second study showed how you might go about it. Ditto and Lopez asked subjects if there were any irregularities in their diet, sleep, or activity patterns over the last 48 hours that might have affected the accuracy of the test. Those who got health-threatening results listed three times more “irregularities” than did those receiving health-confirming results. Thus, they searched for ways to undercut evidence contradicting their preferred image of healthiness.

On the surface, this tendency seems potentially harmful. And it can be, as it involves finding fault with information that can warn of physical danger. However, a study by John Jemmott and his coworkers (1986) suggests that most people are not so foolish as to ignore the warning entirely. Participants in that experiment were told that an enzyme deficiency test either did or did not identify them as candidates for future pancreatic disorders. Those who were informed that they had the deficiency judged the test’s validity as significantly lower than did those informed that they were deficiency-free. Nonetheless, 83% of the deficiency-present individuals asked to receive information about services available to people who had the deficiency. Thus, although they tried to defend against the threat in the test results, the great majority did not simply brush the matter aside; instead, they made arrangements to get more information and, if need be, assistance.

Hence, for most people, the tendency to reject unwelcome information is normally not harmful in such situations because it is tempered by the accuracy motive, especially when important aspects of the self are at stake.

It is when people place no reasonable limits on their desire to view the world according to their beliefs and preferences that a serious problem arises (Armor & Taylor, 1998). This sort of reaction is more than healthy skepticism toward incongruous information. It might be characterized as *denial*, and it can be self-destructive (Gladis, Michela, Walter, & Vaughn, 1992; Lazarus, 1983).

Who are these individuals who engage in denial when confronted with troubling information? They are not merely optimists—individuals who believe that, as a rule, good things are likely to happen to them (Scheier & Carver, 1992). They are better termed *chronic unrealistic optimists*—individuals who refuse to believe that they are vulnerable to bad events in general and who, therefore, fail to take precautions against them (Davidson & Prkachin, 1997; Weinstein, 1987). Apparently, such individuals are so upset by the possibility of harm that they repress relevant information and deny that they are vulnerable to the harm (Taylor, Collins, Skokan, & Aspinwall, 1989). The irony is that by repressing and denying the existence of distressing dangers, these individuals make the very same dangers more real (Radcliffe & Klein, 2002; Robins & Beer, 2001).

This tendency to deal with threat by ignoring or denying the problem can appear in normal individuals, too, but only under certain conditions. For the most part, fear-arousing communications usually stimulate recipients to take actions to reduce the threat (Boster & Mongeau, 1984; Robberson & Rogers, 1988). For instance, a lecture to French teenagers about the dangers of alcohol was significantly more effective in changing attitudes and behaviors toward drinking when accompanied by fear-arousing versus neutral pictures (Levy-Leboyer, 1988). However, there is an exception to this general rule: When the danger described in the fear-producing message is severe but the recipients are told of no effective means of reducing the danger—self-restraint, medication, exercise, diet, or the like—they may deal with the fear by “blocking out” the message or denying that it applies to them. As a consequence, they may take no preventive action (Rogers & Mewborn, 1976).

This helps explain why it is important to accompany high-fear messages with specific recommendations for behavior that will diminish the danger: The more clearly people see behavioral means for ridding themselves of the fear, the less they



24/7 assistance (roadside or not)

We know you rely on your car a great deal. So, if the unexpected should happen to it, we'll be right there for you with everything from emergency towing to 24-hour claims assistance. In many cases, we can even cut you a check that same day. At Liberty Mutual, we know how traumatic the unexpected can be. So we plan ahead, to make it a little easier on you.

IT'S MORE THAN INSURANCE. IT'S INSURANCE IN ACTION.

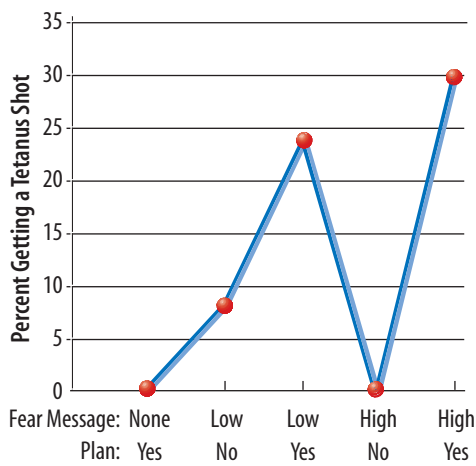
To find a Liberty Mutual representative near you, visit [www.libertymutualinsurance.com](http://www.libertymutualinsurance.com)

Liberty Mutual

© 2003 Liberty Mutual Group

**When you're all at sea, call me.** *Advertising appeals like this one can be effective when they alert recipients to a danger and then provide clear steps for reducing the danger.*

will need to resort to psychological means such as denial (Leventhal & Cameron, 1994) (see Figure 5.6). The lesson: Don't try to persuade people through fear without giving them specific steps to handle the fear (Das, deWitt, & Stroebe, 2003). This applies to your letter designed to convince citizens of the dangers of high speed limits. Vividly describing the highway mayhem these high speed limits allow should be effective as long as you also describe specific steps recipients can take to reduce the danger, such as contributing to relevant political action groups or calling relevant legislators (whose phone numbers you should provide).



**Figure 5.6**  
**Fear is not enough. You have to have a plan**

Students read a public health pamphlet on the dangers of tetanus infection that either was or was not laden with frightening images of the consequences of contracting tetanus. In addition, they either did or did not receive a specific plan for how to arrange to get a tetanus shot. Finally, there was a control group of students who got no tetanus message but did get a plan. The high-fear message spurred recipients to get a shot only if it included a plan identifying the specific actions they could take to secure a shot and thereby reduce their fear of tetanus.

SOURCE: Adapted from Leventhal & Cameron, 1994.

**Expertise and Complexity** Suppose you are sitting on a jury deciding how much money to award a man who claims that he contracted cancer as a result of exposure to a chemical while on the job. His employer, a manufacturing firm, admits that he was exposed to this chemical but disputes that it caused his cancer. One piece of evidence you hear is the testimony of an expert witness, Dr. Thomas Fallon, who states that scientific data show that the chemical does indeed lead to cancer in a variety of species, including humans. How swayed are you likely to be by this expert? According to a study done by Joel Cooper, Elizabeth Bennett, and Holly Sukel (1996), that would depend not just on how expert you think he is but also on how complex his testimony was.

In that study, mock jurors heard Dr. Fallon described as either highly expert or only moderately expert on the topic. Some of the jurors then heard him give his testimony in ordinary language, saying simply that the chemical causes liver cancer, several other diseases of the liver, and diseases of the immune system. Other jurors heard him give his testimony in complex, almost incomprehensible language, saying that the chemical led to “tumor induction as well as hepatomegaly, hepatomegalocytosis, and lymphoid atrophy of the spleen and thymus.” The most interesting finding of the study was that the highly expert witness was more successful in swaying the jury only when he spoke in complex, difficult-to-understand terms. Why? The study’s authors think that when Dr. Fallon used simple language, jurors could judge the case on the basis of the evidence itself. They didn’t need to use his expertise as a shortcut to accuracy. However, when his testimony was too obscure to understand, they had to rely on his reputation as an expert to tell them what to think. These results suggest an interesting but disconcerting irony: Acknowledged experts may be most persuasive when people can’t understand the details of what they are saying!

## Being Consistent

The giant of 19th-century British science, Michael Faraday, was once asked about a long-hated academic rival, “Is the professor always wrong, then?” Faraday glowered at his questioner and replied, “He’s not that consistent.”

In Faraday’s dismissive description of his opponent’s intellect, we find a pair of insights relevant to the goal of consistency. The first is straightforward: Like most people, Faraday considered consistency an admirable trait that ought to appear in one’s behavior. When it doesn’t, there is cause for scorn (Allgeier et al., 1979). Finding the second insight requires a bit more digging. Why did Faraday feel the need to deflate his rival’s occasional accomplishments at all? A social psychologist might answer the question by suggesting that Faraday himself was a victim of the workings of the **consistency principle**, which states that people are motivated toward cognitive consistency and will change their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and actions to achieve it. To maintain consistency within his unfavorable view of his rival, Faraday

had to find a way to negate the successes of the man—hence, the characterization of his opponent’s accomplishments as inconsistencies.

Although we can’t be certain that a desire to be personally consistent motivated Faraday’s response (he’s been unavailable for questioning since 1867), we can review the evidence for the causes of similar responses in modern-day individuals. In the process, we will first examine the two main consistency theories—balance and cognitive dissonance—that have guided the investigations of persuasion researchers. Then, we will consider the features in the person and in the situation that affect the goal of being consistent.

## Balance Theory

According to Fritz Heider (1946, 1958), who proposed **balance theory**, we all prefer to have harmony and consistency in our views of the world. We want to agree with the people we like and disagree with those we dislike; we want to associate good things with good people and bad things with bad people; we want to see things that are alike in one way as alike in other ways, too. Heider says that such harmony creates a state of cognitive balance in us. When we are in a state of balance—perhaps finding ourselves agreeing on a political issue with someone we truly like—we are content; there is no need to change. But if our cognitive system is out of balance—for example, when finding ourselves disagreeing on an issue with the person we like so much—we will experience uncomfortable tension. To remove this tension, we will have to change something in the system. Let’s take a closer look at balance theory to see how this pressure to change can affect persuasion.

Name your favorite movie actor. Now, suppose you heard this person advocating a political position that you opposed. The theory states that your cognitive system would be out of balance because you would be disagreeing with someone you liked—recall, balance exists when you agree with a person you like or disagree with one you dislike. What could you do to relieve the resulting tension and bring the system into balance? One maneuver would be to change your feelings about the actor; that way you would then disagree with someone you dislike. A second approach would be to change your attitude toward the topic; that way you would then agree with someone you like. In both instances, harmony would again reign.

Which approach you would take would likely depend on the strength of your attitudes. For example, if you had very deep feelings about the political topic—let’s say gun control—you would probably achieve balance by changing your opinion of the actor who disagreed with you. If, however, you didn’t have a strong attitude toward the topic, you would be more likely to achieve balance by changing that attitude to agree with the liked individual. A great deal of research has supported the predictions of balance theory as it applies to attitude change (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Greenwald et al., 2002; Priester & Petty, 2001). In general, people do change their views in order to keep the connections involving themselves, communicators, and communication topics in harmony.

Advertisers frequently try to make use of this tendency in their choice of famous spokespersons for their products. By the logic of the communicator expertise effect we discussed earlier, it makes sense for the Nike Corporation to hire golf star Tiger Woods to promote their golf equipment. But by what logic would the General Motors Corporation want to pay him millions of dollars to promote their Buicks? By the logic of balance theory. Because people like Tiger Woods, they should come to like whatever he is advocating (or just associated with). According to balance theory, one doesn’t have to be expert to be convincing, just liked.

The willingness of manufacturers to pay enormous sums to celebrities (whose talents may be unrelated to their products) suggests that the business community has determined that the pull of cognitive balance makes the investment worthwhile. Evidence of the potential return on investment to business of being associated with positive people and things can be seen in the results of a poll indicating that



**Life in the balance.** *The actions of highly regarded celebrities can have a favorable impact on more than just product sales. When well-liked Today Show host Katie Couric (whose husband died of colon cancer) underwent a colonoscopy on the air, colonoscopy rates in the United States rose by more than 20% in the following months (Bjerkie, 2003).*



Before basketball star Kobe Bryant was charged with sexual assault, he was a spokesperson for an Italian company (Nutella), which trumpeted the fact that Bryant had spent years in Italy while growing up. After he was charged, this company was the first to drop his contract. How does all this fit balance theory?

**Consistency principle** *The principle that people will change their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and actions to make them consistent with each other.*

**Balance theory** *Heider’s theory that people prefer harmony and consistency in their views of the world.*

76% of consumers would switch to a corporate brand or product connected to favorably viewed causes such as the Olympics (Kadlec, 1997). According to the credit card company Visa, which is an Olympic sponsor, if a store displays a Visa sign featuring the Olympics rings symbol, Visa card purchases rise by 15 to 25% (Emert, 2000).

## Cognitive Dissonance Theory

By far, the theoretical approach that has generated the most evidence for the motivation to be consistent is Leon Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory. Like balance theory, its basic assumption is that when people recognize an inconsistency among their attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors, they will feel a state of uncomfortable psychological arousal (termed **cognitive dissonance**) and will be motivated to reduce the discomfort by reducing the inconsistency. In addition, Festinger stated that people will be motivated to reduce an inconsistency only to the extent that it involves something important. For example, if you perceive an inconsistency in your beliefs about the wisdom of riding motorcycles—on the one hand, they seem economical but, on the other, dangerous—you should feel strong dissonance only if riding motorcycles is a real and important issue for you, perhaps because you are thinking of buying one. This helps explain why strong dissonance effects rarely occur unless the self is involved (Aronson, 1969; Stone, 2003). When the inconsistency includes something about the self, it becomes more important and the need to resolve it increases.

Before dissonance theory came to prominence, persuasion theorists had focused mainly on changing attitudes and beliefs first, assuming that these shifts would then cause behavior change. Although this sequence often occurs, one of the valuable contributions of dissonance theory has been to show that the reverse can also occur—changing a behavior first can spur an individual to change related attitudes and beliefs in an attempt to keep them consistent with the action (Cooper & Scher, 1994).

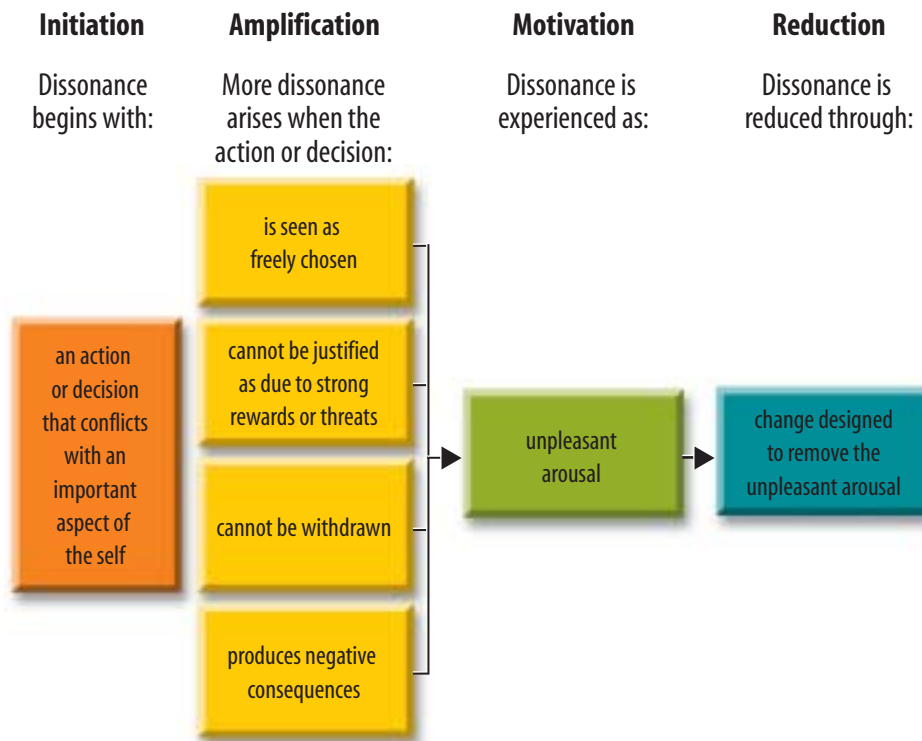
There have been many dissonance experiments performed through the years, but the one published by Leon Festinger and J. Merrill Carlsmith in 1959 is easily the most famous. In the study, subjects who had performed a boring task (turning pegs on a board) were paid either \$1 or \$20 to tell the next subject that the task was interesting and a lot of fun. When later asked their attitudes toward the boring task, those receiving the \$1 payment had come to see it as more enjoyable than had those receiving \$20, who hadn't changed their attitudes at all.

How can we explain this strange result? Dissonance theory offers an answer. Subjects paid only \$1 had to confront two inconsistent cognitions about themselves: "I am a generally truthful person" (something that almost everyone believes) and "I just told a lie for no good reason." The easiest way for them to reduce the inconsistency was to change their attitudes toward the enjoyableness of the task; that way, they would no longer have to view themselves as lying about its being fun. In contrast, subjects paid \$20 had no dissonance to reduce because they had a good reason (*sufficient justification*) for what they did—the \$20. After all, even a generally truthful person will tell a white lie for \$20. So, because of the \$20, what they did was not inconsistent with their views of themselves as generally truthful; hence, they didn't feel any pull to change their attitudes toward the task.

**Cognitive dissonance** *The unpleasant state of psychological arousal resulting from an inconsistency within one's important attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors.*

**Counterattitudinal action** *A behavior that is inconsistent with an existing attitude.*

**Counterattitudinal Behavior** This explanation of the Festinger and Carlsmith study underscores a fundamental assertion of dissonance theory: A **counterattitudinal action**—behavior that is inconsistent with an existing attitude—will produce change in that attitude only when there is *insufficient justification* (i.e., no strong additional motivation for taking the action). It is for this reason that contrary behavior leads to attitude change principally when the actor feels that he or she has had *free choice* in performing it (Brehm & Cohen, 1962). For example, if you signed a petition supporting a disliked politician because your boss at work insisted on it, you would not be likely to



**Figure 5.7**  
**From dissonance induction to dissonance reduction**

A number of factors initiate, amplify, motivate, and reduce cognitive dissonance.

feel a strain to become more positive toward the politician because you would probably see yourself as having little choice in the matter, given your boss's strong pressure. When potent external forces (threats, bribes, requirements) take away one's sense of personal choice in counterattitudinal behavior, dissonance rarely results (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993); see Figure 5.7.

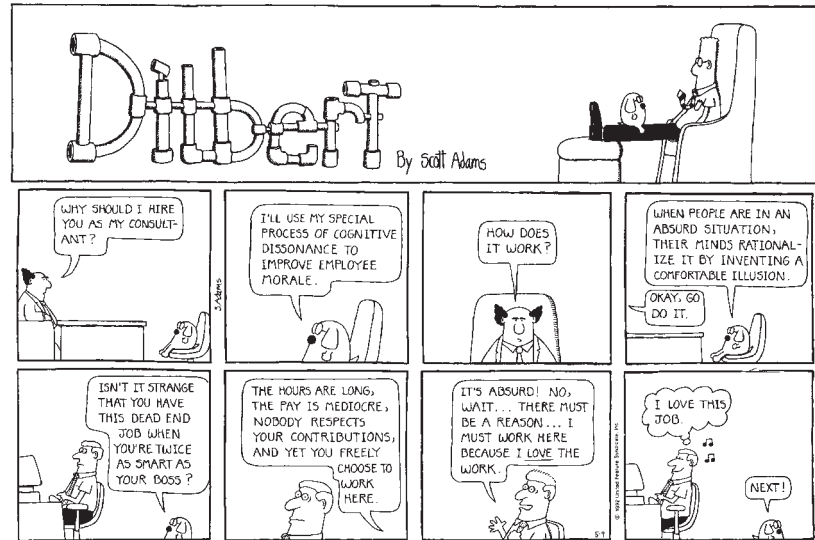
**Postdecisional Dissonance** Counterattitudinal behavior isn't the only way that dissonance is produced. Another source of dissonance was examined in a study conducted at a Canadian racetrack, where bettors at the \$2 window were approached and asked what chance they thought their favored horse had to win (Knox & Inkster, 1968). Half were asked immediately before placing their bets, and half were asked immediately after. In two separate studies, those asked after laying down their money were significantly more confident of their horse's chances. How odd. After all, nothing about the race, field, track, or weather had changed in the few seconds from before to after the bet. Perhaps not, but according to dissonance theory, something about the bettors had changed: They had experienced **postdecisional dissonance**, which is the conflict one feels between the knowledge that he or she has made a decision and the possibility that the decision may be wrong. To reduce the unpleasant conflict, the bettors persuaded themselves that their horses really would win.

In general, soon after making a decision, people come to view their selections more favorably and all the alternative selections less favorably; this is particularly so when they feel highly committed (personally tied) to the decision (Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In the case of the racetrack bettors, they became committed once they placed their bets and could no longer change their choices. At that point, they became irrevocably tied to their selections and had to reduce their postdecisional dissonance by convincing themselves that they had chosen correctly. Recall that, earlier in this chapter, we said that after an irreversible decision, the desire to see things accurately is no longer paramount (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995); dissonance theory tells us that it is replaced by the desire to see things consistently (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2002).

#### Postdecisional dissonance

*The conflict one feels about a decision that could possibly be wrong.*

**Dogbert does dissonance.** Although dissonance rarely works as dramatically as depicted here, cartoonist Scott Adams has accurately captured several of the conditions (low pay, insufficient justification, free choice) that the theory says lead to self-delusion.



## What Affects the Desire for Cognitive Consistency?

The goal of achieving (or simply maintaining) cognitive consistency has been the subject of considerable research within social psychology (Albarracín & Wyer, 2000). That research has uncovered several features of the person and of the situation that play a role in determining how the desire for consistency affects persuasion. Most of the evidence for the impact of these features comes from explorations of dissonance theory.



**Arousal** Festinger (1957) claimed that inconsistency produces unpleasant arousal and that people will frequently change their attitudes to be rid of the discomfort. In general, research has supported both components of Festinger's claim.

First, there is good evidence that inconsistency does result in increased arousal (Elkin & Leippe, 1986; Harmon-Jones, Brehm, Greenberg, Simon, & Nelson, 1996). In one study, researchers set up a typical dissonance procedure: Princeton University students were given free choice to write an essay contrary to their attitudes toward a total ban of alcohol on campus. The researchers said that they needed an essay that was in favor of the ban and asked for such an essay, saying, "We would appreciate your help, but we want to let you know that it's completely up to you." When these students agreed to write the counterattitudinal essay, their arousal (as measured by physiological recordings) jumped compared to similar students who were given no free choice in the matter. Thus, just as dissonance theory would expect, individuals who freely chose to act contrary to their existing attitudes experienced elevated tension as a result of the personal inconsistency (Croyle & Cooper, 1983).

Second, there is also good evidence to support the other part of Festinger's claim—that people will modify an inconsistent attitude as a way of reducing the accompanying unpleasant arousal (Fazio, Zanna, & Cooper, 1977; Zanna & Cooper, 1974). In one experiment, subjects who freely wrote a counterattitudinal essay but did not experience any arousal, because they had secretly been given a tranquilizer, did not alter their attitudes toward the topic; thus, eliminating the arousal eliminated the need to change (Cooper, Zanna, & Taves, 1978). Other studies have found that it is not just general arousal that is crucial to the change process but rather the particular variety that Festinger first suggested—*unpleasant* arousal (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Losch & Cacioppo, 1990). It is the annoying quality of that arousal that motivates change, discomfiting inconsistent individuals until they do some-

thing to restore consistency. In all, research has implicated uncomfortable arousal as a critical factor in inconsistency-based attitude and belief shifts.

**Preference for Consistency** In introducing the consistency goal, we reported a quotation from Michael Faraday that indicated his value for consistency. Most people would agree, but not everyone. Consider the following statements by various other famous persons: Ralph Waldo Emerson: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds”; Oscar Wilde: “Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative”; and our favorite, Aldous Huxley: “The only truly consistent people are dead.” Obviously, the concept of consistency is not held in universally high regard (Staw & Ross, 1980).

This insight led one of the authors of this textbook and two colleagues to develop a Preference for Consistency scale by asking subjects to agree or disagree with such statements as “It is important to me that my actions are consistent with my beliefs” and “I make an effort to appear consistent to others” (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995). They found that individuals who scored low on preference for consistency didn’t show typical consistency effects such as cognitive dissonance. As one might expect, the motive to be self-consistent doesn’t apply to those who don’t value consistency (Bator, 1998; Nail et al., 2001; Newby-Clark, McGregor, & Zanna, 2002).

**Consequences** The outcomes of a counterattitudinal act affect the amount of attitude change it creates. Because no one wants to perform *consequential* behaviors that conflict with an existing attitude, it stands to reason that the more impact a person’s behavior has had on the world, the more he or she will feel motivated to change attitudes to fit that behavior. For example—if, after agreeing to write a counterattitudinal essay favoring big tuition hikes at your school, you learned that your essay persuaded administrators to schedule a large increase, you should be especially likely to convince yourself of the need for the increase. Research generally supports this view (Collins & Hoyt, 1972). Although strong negative consequences of inconsistent actions don’t seem necessary for attitude change, they do enhance it (Harmon-Jones et al., 1996; Johnson, Kelly, & LeBlanc, 1995).

**Salience of the Inconsistency** If, as we have suggested, people change their attitudes and beliefs to be rid of an inconsistency, then aspects of the situation that make the inconsistency salient (prominent) to them should produce greater change (Blanton, Cooper, Skurnik, & Aronson, 1997). One way to make an inconsistency salient is through the use of the *Socratic method*, an approach for shifting a person’s position on a topic by posing questions that reveal hidden contradictions between it and the person’s position on related topics. Socrates, the author of the method, felt that once the discrepancies were made obvious, the person would try to eliminate them. Research on persuasion has supported Socrates’ prediction: Most people react to messages that reveal their inconsistencies by moving toward consistency (McGuire, 1960; McGuire & McGuire, 1996).

In fact, an effective way to get people to perform socially beneficial acts is to make salient the discrepancy between what they value and what they do (Harmon-Jones, Peterson, & Vaughn, 2003). Suppose that a survey-taker called and inquired into your attitude toward recycling and that you expressed a high opinion of it. Suppose that she then asked you to recall the times in the past month that you had failed to recycle (a newspaper or soft drink can). Most likely, after being confronted with this mismatch between your beliefs and actions, you would resolve to be more supportive of recycling in the future. This tactic of getting people to express their commitment to a good cause and then pointing out that they have not always lived up to that commitment has successfully reduced energy consumption in Australian households (Kantola, Syme, & Campbell, 1984). In the United States, Elliot Aronson and his coworkers have employed the tactic to increase water conservation, recycling, and condom use (see Fried & Aronson, 1995).



How would you rate yourself on preference for consistency, high or low? Why do you think you feel the way you do about personal consistency?

Think how a salient inconsistency could have pushed Peter Reilly to admit to a murder someone else committed. At first, he had no memory of the crime. But, after hours of mind-draining interrogation, he began to accept the “expert” evidence against him in his polygraph test, began to defer to the assurances of authority figures that he was guilty, and began to see the imagined scenes of his involvement as real. Is it any surprise that his failure to recall any specifics, which had become the single, salient inconsistency in the case, couldn’t stand for long? Soon thereafter, he began not simply to admit to the killing but to add details. When these specifics didn’t match with the facts the interrogators knew, they would claim that Reilly was being evasive, and he would offer different specifics. In one instructive exchange, after being chastised for remembering incorrect details, he plaintively asked his interrogator for “some hints” so he could make everything fit.

What happened to Reilly is remarkably similar to what happened in the earlier-discussed Kassin & Kiechel (1996) study, in which innocent people were accused of hitting a computer key that ruined data. Many of those who came to believe (on the basis of false evidence) that they were guilty remembered details of how and when the (non)event occurred, saying such things as, “I hit it with the side of my hand right after you called out the A.” Evidence like this aligns well with a conclusion drawn by psychologists studying other kinds of responding (for instance, eyewitness testimony in court and “recovered” memories in therapy sessions): So wide-ranging is the desire for consistency that it can reach into one’s memory and change the features of recalled events to make them conform to a newly installed belief (Davis & Follette, 2001; Loftus & Ketcham, 1994).

## Consistency with What?

Although most people strive to be consistent with their prevailing self-concept, this can lead to different behaviors because not everyone shares the same view of self. For instance, the desire for consistency often results in different behaviors in different cultures, because what people want to be consistent with differs in these cultures.



**Successful Ads in Different Cultures** When advertisements for the U.S. military tempt recruits by challenging them to become “All that you can be” and when ads for L’Oreal cosmetics urge women to ignore the products’ high prices because “You’re worth it,” they are appealing to a type of personal self-enhancement that would seem foreign to many people in non-Western cultures. That is so because, as we first discussed in Chapter 2, in North America and Western Europe, the prevailing sense of self is different from that of much of the rest of the world. Primarily, it involves the individual, the single person; hence, it is this individualized version of the self that is enhanced or protected by attitude and belief change.

In many other cultures, however, the prevailing conception of the self is not so narrow. Rather, it is a collective self, expanded to include one’s group (Cohen & Gunz, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For citizens of these cultures, performing an act that doesn’t fit with a personal belief doesn’t necessarily threaten the most important (collective) conception of self. Consequently, such personal inconsistencies may not be especially motivating. This may explain why residents of Eastern communal cultures appear to show traditional dissonance effects much less often than do Westerners: Traditional dissonance procedures typically engage only the individualized self (Heine & Lehman, 1997).

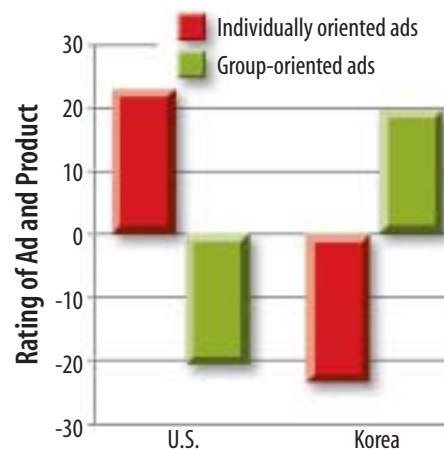
This is not to say that citizens of communal societies fail to enhance or protect important aspects of themselves through attitude and belief change. However, the emphasis is on the collective version of self. For example, a message should be more effective in a communal society if it promises group rather than personal enhancement. But the opposite should be true in an individualistic society. To test this rea-





soning, Sang-Pil Han and Sharon Shavitt (1994) examined advertisements in two nations characterized by either an individualized or a collective sense of self—the United States and Korea, respectively. First, they evaluated the advertisements that appeared in popular U.S. and Korean magazines over a two-year period. They found that in Korea, the ads appealed more to group and family benefits and harmony, whereas in the United States, they appealed more to individual benefits, success, and preferences.

But, just because advertisers in the two cultures use different kinds of appeals, does that mean that they work as intended? To answer this question, Han and Shavitt conducted a second study. They created ads for products (for instance, chewing gum) that emphasized either personal or group benefits (“Treat yourself to a breath-freshening experience” versus “Share a breath-freshening experience”). Next, they showed the ads to potential consumers of the products in Korea and the United States and asked for reactions. In Korea, people were more positive toward the ad, the product, and a purchase when the ad focused on group gain; in the United States, the reverse occurred (see Figure 5.8). Thus, ads that emphasized advantages to the group or to the individual were more successful when the emphasis matched and promoted the culture’s predominant version of self.



**I am the one. We are the world. Ads like that on the left, which connect to an individualized sense of self, are more successful in the United States. Ads like that on the right, which connect to a collective sense of self, are more successful in Korea.**

**Figure 5.8**  
**Selling the self in two cultures**

Citizens of the United States and of Korea rated magazine advertisements that emphasized the achievement of either personal or group goals. In the United States, where an individualized sense of self predominates, raters had more favorable reactions to ads appealing to individual benefits. But in Korea, where a collective sense of self predominates, the group-oriented ads were better received.

SOURCE: Adapted from Han & Shavitt, 1994.

## Gaining Social Approval

If you learned that a close friend was offended by your opinion on gun control, would you consider changing your position somewhat? People sometimes shift their positions to gain approval from those around them. Holding the right position can project a public image that opens doors to desired social exchanges, whereas holding the wrong position can lead to social rejection. The motivation to achieve approval is called **impression motivation**, because its goal is to make a good impression on others (Chaiken et al., 1989; Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996). This tendency can sometimes conflict with the pursuit of the other two persuasion-related goals we have discussed—those of accuracy and consistency. Let's explore which features of the person and situation tend to make the third goal, social approval, rise above the others.



### Self-Monitoring

If social gains motivate attitude change, we might expect those who are most attuned to relationships and interpersonal settings to change their attitudes most in response to such rewards.

Certain individuals are especially adaptable in their opinions as they move from situation to situation. Like attitudinal chameleons, they are able to adjust their “colors” to those that are favored in each new environment. As we discussed in Chapter 4, these individuals are called high self-monitors because they constantly monitor and modify their public selves (how others see them) to fit what is socially appropriate (Snyder, 1987). In contrast, low self-monitors are much more likely to rely on their own standards in deciding how to respond in a new situation. Thus high self-monitors are more motivated by the social approval goal than are low self-monitors, who are more motivated by the consistency goal (DeBono, 1987).

If high self-monitors are especially sensitive to what others think of them, might they be especially susceptible to advertising that promises a desired image in the eyes of others? That is what one study found. High self-monitors were more persuaded by ads that promoted socially appealing images (prestige, sophistication) associated with particular brands of coffee, whiskey, and cigarettes than they were by ads touting the quality of the same brands (Snyder & DeBono, 1985). In sum, high self-monitors, who pay special attention to the social rewards of the situations they enter, pay special attention to persuasive arguments that show them how to maximize those social rewards.



### Gender: Women, Men, and Persuasion

Like high self-monitors, women tend to be sensitively attuned to relationships and interpersonal issues. This sensitivity affects the way they respond to persuasive appeals. When Wendy Wood and Brian Stagner (1994) examined the research investigating differences in persuadability between men and women, they reported a surprising conclusion: Women seem to be more readily influenced than men. What might account for this tendency in women? One hint comes from evidence that the tendency is strongest in group pressure contexts, in which a person's position is out of line with those of the rest of the group. Under these conditions, women are most likely to yield to influence attempts (Eagly & Carli, 1981). An even more instructive insight comes from work showing that if others in the situation cannot observe whether change has taken place, women don't change any more than men (Eagly & Chryala, 1986; Eagly, Wood, & Fishbaugh, 1981). Thus, you shouldn't expect your letter concerning highway speed limits to generate more change in women, as

**Impression motivation** *The motivation to achieve approval by making a good impression on others.*

there is no evidence that women are more persuaded than men under private circumstances.

Why would the presence and surveillance of others in the situation affect women's willingness to agree? Wood and Stagner think the reason lies in the approved gender role for women in most societies. In social contexts, it often falls to women to cultivate positive relationships, to build interpersonal bridges, and to assure social harmony—all of which can be accomplished by shifting toward agreement (Tannen, 1990). To do less is to risk the social disapproval that goes with failing to live up to societal expectations. After all, if women are expected to perform the vital task of fostering cohesiveness and consensus, they are likely to be rewarded for finding ways to agree rather than disagree, especially in social contexts (Carli, 1989; Stiles et al., 1997).

## The Expectation of Discussion

Earlier, we reviewed research showing that when an issue is personally relevant, people think hard about it and are persuaded only by messages containing strong arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 1986). These tendencies reflect the desire for accuracy in one's opinions: If an issue affects you personally, you will want to change your position only if provided with good reasons. Persuasion researchers Michael Leippe and Roger Elkin (1987) wondered what would happen if they pitted this accuracy goal against the goal of gaining social approval.

To find out, they gave Adelphi University undergraduates a communication arguing for the implementation of comprehensive exams at their school in the next year. Half heard strong arguments, and half heard weak arguments in the message. Just as had been found in prior research, these personally involved students thought deeply about the message arguments, and were much more persuaded when its arguments were strong versus weak. Other subjects in the study were treated similarly except for one difference: They were told that, after hearing the message, they would have to *discuss* their views on the topic with another student whose position was unknown. With this difference, the researchers introduced another consideration to their subjects. Not only did they have to be concerned about the accuracy of their opinions, but also they had to consider the impression their opinions would make on their future discussion partner. Among these subjects, the strength of the message arguments made much less of a difference in determining their attitudes. Rather than changing a lot when the arguments were strong and very little when they were weak, these subjects chose to hold moderate opinions no matter which arguments they heard.

When do these admissions of persuasion reflect actual changes in attitude? It appears that opinion shifts designed to create a good impression on another can become lasting when the process of shifting causes people to think about the topic in a different way than before—for example, by taking the perspective on the topic of the person one is trying to impress. If, instead, the shifts don't cause people to think differently or deeply about the issues, the changes don't last, and people “snap back” to their original positions as soon as they think they don't have to impress anyone any longer (Cialdini, Levy, Herman, Kozlowski, & Petty, 1976; McFarland, Ross, & Conway, 1984; Wood & Quinn, 2003).

As we have seen, the goal of social approval becomes more relevant when people expect to have to discuss their views with another. However, this expectation does not have equally powerful effects in all people and all situations. In the next section, we see how it interacts with other factors to alter persuasion.

## Self-Monitoring and Expectation of Discussion

Earlier, we differentiated high self-monitors, who focus on the goal of social approval in deciding when to be persuaded, from low self-monitors, who focus more on the goal of self-consistency. One team of researchers (Chen, Schechter, & Chaiken,



**Fender bender. Gender-tender.** *Because of accepted gender roles, women often try to find grounds for agreement in social interactions.*



1996) reasoned that it should be the approval-oriented, high self-monitors whose attitudes would be most affected by the expectation of discussion. In an experiment testing this reasoning, subjects received a communication arguing that the media should reduce its coverage of terrorist hijackings. Half expected that, after reading the communication, they would have to discuss their views on the topic with another subject whose opinion was unknown. The other half also read the communication but anticipated no subsequent discussion. As predicted, only the high self-monitoring subjects were influenced by the expectation of discussion, becoming significantly more moderate in their positions when they thought they would have to defend those positions. Thus, making approval relevant to the persuasion situation influenced the attitudes of just those individuals who act primarily to achieve the social approval goal.




Our consideration of the impact of the desire for approval on attitude change provides yet another way to understand Peter Reilly's baseless confession. At the time he made it, he had a strong respect for the police (hoping himself to become an officer someday), had just lost his only family, and had been informed, falsely, that his friends had expressed no interest in his well-being—all of which were likely to make him crave the approval of those in that room. Tragically for Reilly, they were his persuaders, and the one sure way to gain their approval was to agree with them.



Can you recall an instance when you agreed with others on an issue just to gain their approval? What do you think the effect was on your true attitude?

## Summary Table

Table 5.2 Summary of the goals served by persuasion and the factors related to them.

Goal	The Person 	The Situation 	Interactions 
Seeking accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue involvement</li> <li>• Mood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Done deals</li> <li>• Unwelcome information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One component of credibility is expertise. When striving for accuracy, people rely on the expertise of a communicator principally when the message is highly complex.</li> <li>• A second component of credibility is trustworthiness. Those who characteristically rely on it as a guide to accuracy are low in need for cognition.</li> </ul>
Being consistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arousal</li> <li>• Preference for consistency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consequences</li> <li>• Salience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are more likely to be persuaded by messages that are consistent with the predominant sense of self in their culture.</li> </ul>
Gaining social approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-monitoring</li> <li>• Gender</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectation of discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High self-monitors (who pay more attention to social rewards) shift their attitudes and beliefs more than do low self-monitors when expecting a discussion.</li> </ul>

## REVISITING

### The Story of Peter Reilly

When Peter Reilly was interviewed about his life 20 years after the murder, much damage was still evident. At 38, he was disillusioned, divorced, unemployed, and recently back in Connecticut after bouncing through a series of low-paying jobs in other states (O'Brien, 1993). At the end of that interview, Reilly revealed what it was about the entire affair that most puzzled and distressed him.

Interestingly, it was not the puzzle of how he could be persuaded to confess falsely to a murder. Comments he made at a conference two years later demonstrated that he understood quite well how it could and did happen:

To be kept awake for many hours, confused, fatigued, shocked that your only family was gone, in a strange and imposing place, surrounded by police who continue to tell you that you must have done this horrible thing and that nobody cares or has asked about you, . . . assured by authorities you don't remember things, being led to doubt your own memory, having things suggested to you only to have those things pop up in a conversation a short time later but from your own lips . . . under these conditions you would say and sign anything they wanted. (Reilly, 1995, p. 93)

If Peter was aware of precisely how he was led to confess, what was the mystery that still confounded him 20 years after the fact? It was the puzzle of why the police had never changed their minds about him. Despite strong evidence of his innocence, those who extracted his admission of guilt and who used it to convict and imprison him still believed it, insisting that, "The subsequent reinvestigation did nothing to change the fact [of Reilly's guilt] as far as we are concerned" (Connery, 1995, p. 92).

Why haven't the police and prosecutors in the case been swayed by the uncovered evidence pointing clearly to Reilly's innocence? Consider the intense cognitive dissonance they would feel if they permitted themselves to believe that they had trapped, convicted, and imprisoned an innocent boy who never fully recovered from the ordeal, while the real killer roamed free. Because that belief would be so inconsistent with the central conception of themselves as champions of fairness and justice, it makes sense that they would deny validity to the idea and to any evidence that supported it. To do otherwise would invite heavy psychological costs.

Does psychological self-protection really explain the inflexibility of these individuals? Perhaps any police official or prosecutor looking at the totality of the evidence would judge Reilly guilty. However, that possibility does not fit with the answer to the last mystery we will consider in the Reilly case: How did information hidden for years in the chief prosecutor's files surface to exonerate Reilly after the verdict? Death led to Reilly's rebirth. The prosecutor died of a heart attack, and his successor (who had not been involved in the conviction) came across some startling evidence in the case files—eyewitness reports of two people, including an off-duty state trooper, placing Reilly in another location at the time of the crime. He quickly recognized the need to serve justice by disclosing the evidence and freeing Reilly.

Indeed, every court officer who has seen the evidence and who was not part of the prosecution team decided similarly. It is telling that those officials who were in some way responsible for the harm to Reilly remain adamant that the evidence



**Peter the wiser.** *At a conference more than twenty years after his interrogation, Peter Reilly demonstrated that he understood very well how the police once persuaded him of his guilt. But he's never understood why they won't concede their error. If Peter asked you for help in resolving this question, what would you tell him?*

implicates him. But those looking at the same evidence and having no personal responsibility for past harm see things very differently.

What can we think about the motives of the first prosecutor? By all accounts, he believed fervently in Reilly's guilt until the day he died, sure that he was acting fairly and righteously (Connery, 1977). He no doubt dismissed the critical evidence as unreliable and a hindrance to true justice. And what should we say about the character of the other officials involved who have committed and recommitted themselves to their initial positions in the face of contrary information? If terms such as *immoral* or *malevolent* don't seem appropriate, what label would best apply? We can offer a suggestion: *Human*.

## Summary

### What Is Persuasion?

1. Persuasion is a change in a private attitude or belief resulting from the receipt of a message.
  2. Strongly held attitudes are resistant to persuasion because of two properties: commitment and embeddedness.
  3. Researchers use two methods to try to measure persuasion in a nonreactive manner: covert measures and after-only designs.
  4. According to the cognitive response model, the most direct determinant of persuasion is not the persuasive message itself but what the recipient says to him- or herself in response (self-talk).
  5. Dual process models of persuasion recognize that attitude change can occur through either deep or superficial processing of the message arguments.
  6. Recipients of a message process it deeply when they have both the motivation and the ability to do so; otherwise they process it superficially.
3. People are more motivated to be accurate in their views when the issue involves them personally and when they are in a sad mood.
  4. People most want to hold accurate attitudes and beliefs before a decision. After the decision is made, they may prefer to be biased in favor of their choice.
  5. Sometimes people resist information because it conflicts with what they prefer to believe. When individuals take this to an extreme by denying the validity of threatening information, they put themselves at risk.
  6. People are most likely to use communicator expertise as a shortcut to accuracy when the communication is complex.

### Seeking Accuracy

1. Most of the time, people want to hold accurate attitudes and beliefs. One way to achieve this goal is to process persuasive messages deeply, thinking carefully about the arguments. However, a second path to this goal is a superficial route in which recipients use shortcut evidence of accuracy.
2. Three sources of shortcut evidence are credible communicators, the responses of others to the message, and ready ideas.

### Being Consistent

1. According to the consistency principle, we are motivated toward cognitive consistency and will change our attitudes and beliefs to have it.
2. Heider's balance theory and Festinger's dissonance theory both propose that inconsistency produces an uncomfortable tension that pushes people to reduce the inconsistency.
3. Heider asserted that individuals want to experience balance in their cognitive systems and will change their attitudes and opinions to keep the systems in harmony.
4. According to Festinger, inconsistencies on important issues lead to dissonance (a state of uncomfortable psychological arousal). Research has

shown that dissonance is most likely to occur when a counterattitudinal action conflicts with an important aspect of the self, is viewed as freely chosen, cannot be justified as due to strong rewards or threats, cannot be withdrawn, and produces negative consequences.

5. Not everyone desires consistency. In fact, those who have a low preference for consistency try to avoid it.

### Gaining Social Approval

1. People sometimes change their attitudes and beliefs to gain approval.
2. High self-monitors are focused on making a good impression; consequently, they are more likely to be persuaded by advertisements that promise a desirable image in the eyes of others.
3. Women, too, seem more responsive to interpersonal considerations in changing their positions,

but not for reasons of image. Instead, the feminine gender role assigns them the task of creating social harmony, which they can often accomplish by finding ways to agree, especially in groups.

4. When expecting to have to discuss one's position on an issue, individuals move toward the center if the position of their discussion-partner is unknown; if it is known, they move toward the partner's position. These tactical shifts, designed to achieve social approval, can lead to genuine, lasting attitude change when the shifts cause people to think differently or more deeply about the issue than before.
5. When the goal of social approval is salient, high self-monitors, who prioritize social approval, are especially likely to change their attitudes toward another when they anticipate a discussion with that other.

## Chapter 5

### Key Terms

**Balance Theory** *Heider's theory that people prefer harmony and consistency in their views of the world.*

**Cognitive response model** *A theory that locates the most direct cause of persuasion in the self-talk of the persuasion target.*

**Consistency principle** *The principle that people will change their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and actions to make them consistent with each other.*

**Counterargument** *An argument that challenges and opposes other arguments.*

**Counterattitudinal action** *A behavior that is inconsistent with an existing attitude.*

**Cognitive dissonance** *The unpleasant state of psychological arousal resulting from an inconsistency within one's important attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors.*

**Dual process model of persuasion** *A model that accounts for the two basic ways that attitude change occurs—with and without much thought.*

**Elaboration likelihood model** *A model of persuasive communication that holds that there are two routes to attitude change—the central route and the peripheral route.*

**Impression motivation** *The motivation to achieve approval by making a good impression on others.*

**Inoculation procedure** *A technique for increasing individuals' resistance to a strong argument by first giving them weak, easily defeated versions of it.*

**Need for cognition** *The tendency to enjoy and engage in deliberative thought.*

**Nonreactive measurement** *Measurement that does not change a subject's responses while recording them.*

**Persuasion** *Change in a private attitude or belief as a result of receiving a message.*

**Postdecisional dissonance** *The conflict one feels about a decision that could possibly be wrong.*

**Theory of planned behavior** *A theory stating that the best predictor of a behavior is one's behavioral intention, which is influenced by one's attitude toward the specific behavior, the subjective norms regarding the behavior, and one's perceived control over the behavior.*