CHAPTER 6

Attitudes

OUTLINE

I. Putting Common Sense to the Test
II. The Study of Attitudes
   A. How Attitudes Are Measured
   B. How Attitudes Are Formed
   C. The Link Between Attitudes and Behavior
III. Persuasion by Communication
   A. Two Routes to Persuasion
   B. The Source
   C. The Message
   D. The Audience
   E. Cultural Influences on Persuasion
IV. Persuasion by Our Own Actions
   A. Role Playing: All the World’s a Stage
   B. Cognitive Dissonance Theory: The Classic Version
   C. Cognitive Dissonance Theory: A New Look
   D. Alternate Routes to Self-Persuasion
   E. Cultural Influences on Cognitive Dissonance
V. Review
VI. Key Terms

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: GUIDELINES FOR STUDY

You should be able to do each of the following by the conclusion of Chapter 6.

1. Define what is meant by “attitudes.” Discuss how attitudes are measured, including both self-report and covert techniques, as well as measurement of implicit attitudes. (pp. 181-186)

2. Discuss the relationship between attitudes and behaviors. Explain what types of attitudes are most likely to predict behavior, and under what circumstances. (pp. 186-189)

3. Define and distinguish the peripheral and central routes to persuasion. Identify factors that dictate which route of processing is taken. (pp. 189-192)

4. Explain how and under what circumstances message source affects whether people are likely to be persuaded. Discuss the reasons behind the sleeper effect. (pp. 192-197)

5. Explain how the content of a message affects whether people are likely to be persuaded. Describe how the cognitive and emotional content affects message persuasiveness, as does message order. Consider evidence regarding the effectiveness of subliminal persuasive messages. (pp. 197-203)

6. Explain how characteristics of the audience, including cultural considerations, can moderate the extent to which it is persuaded by a message. Describe strategies for enabling an audience to resist efforts at persuasion. (pp. 203-206)
7. Explain the elements of the classic version of cognitive dissonance theory, and the relevance of this theory to understanding attitude change. (pp. 207-211)

8. Explain the “new look” of cognitive dissonance and how it expands upon the original theory. Discuss cultural influences on cognitive dissonance. (pp. 211-213)

9. Consider alternate routes to self-persuasion such as those described by self-perception theory, impression-management theory, and theories of self-esteem. Explain how the processes postulated by these theories differ from those described by cognitive dissonance theory. (pp. 213-216)

MAJOR CONCEPTS: THE BIG PICTURE
Below are three basic issues or principles that organize Chapter 6. You should know these issues and principles well.

1. The study of attitudes has been one of the foundations of social psychology. Researchers measure attitudes by asking people direct questions about their attitudes or by assessing people’s behavior or physiological responses. In general, our attitudes are not as strong a predictor of our behaviors as one might think. However, attitudes do a better job of predicting behavior when the attitude is specific to a behavior or particularly important.

2. One of the earliest fields of study in social psychology focused on persuasion, the changing of people’s attitudes through communication. Research in this field has found that there are two basic routes to persuasion: a central route that emphasizes the content of a message and systematic deliberate processing of information, and a peripheral route that emphasizes more rules of thumb or heuristic processing of information. The source of a message, its content, and the audience that hears the message all affect whether the message will be persuasive.

3. People are also persuaded by their own actions and the roles that they play. Cognitive dissonance theory maintains that when people engage in an action that conflicts with their attitudes they will feel tension, and that the easiest way to reduce this tension is to change their attitude. In this way, the theory predicts that people will change their attitudes to match their behavior. Recent revisions to cognitive dissonance theory suggest that this attitude change occurs mostly when people take responsibility for their actions. Other approaches emphasize that people rationalize their behaviors by changing them to manage a positive impression with others, to maintain a positive view of themselves, or to be consistent with the way in which they perceive their own behavior.

KEY TERM EXERCISE: THE CONCEPTS YOU SHOULD KNOW
Below are all of the key terms that appear in boldface in Chapter 6. To help you better understand these concepts, rather than just memorize them, write a definition for each term in your own words. After doing so, look at the next section where you’ll find a list of definitions from the textbook for each of the key terms presented in random order. For each of your definitions, find the corresponding textbook definition. Note how your definitions compare with those from the textbook.

Key Terms
1. theory of planned behavior
2. cognitive dissonance theory
3. persuasion
4. inoculation hypothesis
5. central route to persuasion
6. insufficient deterrence
7. peripheral route to persuasion
8. attitude
9. elaboration
10. sleeper effect
11. need for cognition (NC)
12. insufficient justification
13. psychological reactance
14. attitude scale
15. implicit attitudes
16. facial electromyograph (EMG)
17. bogus pipeline
18. Implicit Association Test (IAT)

**Textbook Definitions**

a. A condition in which people freely perform an attitude-discrepant behavior without receiving a large reward.

b. The process by which a person does not think carefully about a communication and is influenced instead by superficial cues.

c. A personality variable that distinguishes people on the basis of how much they enjoy effortful cognitive activities.

d. The theory that attitudes toward a specific behavior combine with subjective norms and perceived control to influence a person’s actions.

e. The process by which a person thinks carefully about a communication and is influenced by the strength of its arguments.

f. An electronic instrument that records facial muscle activity associated with emotions and attitudes.

g. A phony lie-detector device that is sometimes used to get respondents to give truthful answers to sensitive attitude questions.

h. The process by which attitudes are changed.

i. The theory that holding inconsistent cognitions arouses psychological tension that people become motivated to reduce.

j. A delayed increase in the persuasive impact of a noncredible source.

k. A multiple-item questionnaire designed to measure a person’s attitude toward some object.

l. Attitudes that we cannot report in questionnaires because we’re not aware of having them.

m. A condition in which people refrain from engaging in a desirable activity, even when only mild punishment is threatened.
n. The idea that exposure to weak versions of a persuasive argument increases later resistance to that argument.

o. A positive or negative reaction to a person, object, or idea.

p. The theory that people react against threats to their freedom by asserting themselves and perceiving the threatened freedom as more attractive.

q. The process of thinking about and scrutinizing the arguments contained in a persuasive communication.

r. A covert measure of unconscious attitudes, it is derived from the speed at which people respond to pairings of concepts—such as black or white with good or bad.
ANSWERS FOR KEY TERM EXERCISE

Answers for the key terms exercise are listed below.

1. d
2. i
3. h
4. n
5. e
6. m
7. b
8. o
9. q
10. j
11. c
12. a
13. p
14. k
15. l
16. f
17. g
18. r
PRACTICE QUIZ: TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHAPTER

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Attitudes are often measured by means of self-reports, questionnaires on which respondents endorse their attitudes. Another technique often used is to collect covert measures. Covert measures are
   a. collected from the respondent’s friends, who describe what his or her attitudes are.
   b. measures that are taken in addition to self-report measures.
   c. collected by use of a bogus pipeline.
   d. measures collected indirectly.

2. The theory of planned behavior suggests that one reason attitudes might not always predict behaviors is that
   a. people may not have strong enough attitudes.
   b. people’s attitudes may be outside their awareness.
   c. people may have only false attitudes.
   d. people’s intentions to act may be different from their attitudes.

3. In a television commercial for dental floss, the spokesperson (a well-known TV celebrity) says that eight out of ten dentists recommend the product. The reference to dentists is an attempt to establish
   a. communicator credibility.
   b. self-monitoring.
   c. insufficient deterrence.
   d. fear arousal.

4. Central and peripheral routes to persuasion are proposed by
   a. the dual-process theory.
   b. cognitive dissonance theory.
   c. self-perception theory.
   d. the theory of planned behavior.

5. In their campaigns, John Smith and Jane Doe both present arguments stressing the logic of their positions and detailing the many reasons for their views. These candidates are trying to persuade voters through
   a. attitude-discrepant behavior.
   b. heuristics.
   c. the peripheral route.
   d. the central route.

6. If we must make a choice between two equally desirable options, the positive attributes of the alternative we ultimately do not choose will cause
   a. a sleeper effect.
   b. a primacy effect.
   c. cognitive dissonance.
   d. attitude inoculation.

7. Harry is listening to a debate. Harry assumes that the person with the most arguments is the best-qualified candidate. Harry’s reasoning is an example of
   a. cognitive dissonance.
   b. elaboration.
   c. a heuristic.
   d. impression management.
8. Jeanne has a negative attitude toward bikes but a positive attitude toward skateboards. If she has spent a lot of time biking and only a little time skateboarding, which attitude is likely to be the stronger one?
   a. Her attitude toward biking is likely to be stronger.
   b. Her attitude toward skateboarding is likely to be stronger.
   c. Both attitudes are likely to be strong.
   d. Both attitudes are likely to be weak.

9. Yvonne is buying a new car. The salesman sees a school sticker on her old car and says he went to the same university. The reference to a common alma mater is an attempt to create
   a. self-monitoring.
   b. communicator like ability.
   c. the need for cognition.
   d. fear arousal.

10. Mindy chose to write an essay for her English class that argued for a tuition hike even though she didn’t want one. Her instructor sent the essay to the president of the university, who decided that if students could write so well then there should not be a tuition hike. Recent research on cognitive dissonance theory would suggest that Mindy will
   a. experience physiological arousal.
   b. feel responsible for her essay.
   c. experience no cognitive dissonance.
   d. change her attitude about tuition hikes.

11. Personal involvement and the sleeper effect are two limitations on the persuasive impact of
   a. fear-arousing communications.
   b. communicator credibility.
   c. attitude-discrepant behavior.
   d. self-perception processes.

12. The mayor and her challenger set up a debate three weeks before the election. They both agree that this will be the one and only debate. The challenger gets the opportunity to decide whether to go first or last in the debate. What advice would you give her?
   a. She should go first.
   b. She should go last.
   c. It doesn’t matter whether she goes first or last.
   d. Whether she should go first or last depends on what she is going to say.

13. In theory, people who are high in the need for cognition should receive persuasive communications that rely on
   a. arguments.
   b. heuristics.
   c. attributions.
   d. mood.

14. Helen has always been upset by doctors who are late for appointments and believes that people should criticize them for this behavior. Yet she has taken a job as a sales representative for a drug company and must try to schmooze with the doctors on her route. In time, Helen is likely to
   a. learn to dislike doctors even more.
   b. dislike her job.
   c. be less concerned with doctors’ tardiness.
   d. feel stress in most of her interactions.
15. Heuristics and body movements are two kinds of cues that determine persuasion in
   a. attitude-discrepant behavior.
   b. cognitive dissonance.
   c. the peripheral route.
   d. the central route.

16. Carly decides to write a paper for her English class that argues for capital punishment even though she is against it. Cognitive dissonance theory would predict that Carly is
   a. likely to favor capital punishment more.
   b. likely to favor capital punishment less.
   c. unlikely to change her views on capital punishment.
   d. likely to find the experience enjoyable.

17. People are most likely to be in a state of cognitive dissonance if they
   a. experience no physiological arousal.
   b. engage in attitude-inconsistent behavior.
   c. engage in attitude-consistent behavior.
   d. experience negative unforeseeable consequences.

18. Advertisers and others often use the “overheard communicator” technique to enhance a speaker’s
   a. likeability.
   b. perceived competence.
   c. reactance.
   d. trustworthiness.

19. Gabriella decides to buy a portable tape player rather than a portable CD player. She wonders if she made the right decision. After discussing her purchase with a friend, she is reminded that she is a good student and a good friend. Research on self-affirmation theory would predict that Gabriella will
   a. experience physiological arousal.
   b. feel bad about her decision.
   c. experience no cognitive dissonance.
   d. come to a stronger conviction that she made the right decision.

20. Self-perception theory suggests that people change their attitudes to match their behaviors because they
   a. feel a psychological tension.
   b. want to maintain a positive self-image.
   c. infer their attitudes from their behaviors.
   d. want to impress other people.

21. This effect shows that people often forget the source but not the message, so the effects of source credibility dissipate over time.
   a. The insufficient justification effect
   b. The elaboration effect
   c. The bogus pipeline effect
   d. The sleeper effect

22. The theory that says people are motivated only to appear consistent to others is
   a. Impression-management theory.
   b. The elaboration model.
   c. Self-perception theory.
   d. Cognitive dissonance theory.
Essay Questions

23. Discuss whether attitudes lead to behaviors that are consistent with the attitudes. Describe aspects of attitudes that can strengthen their relationship to behavior.

24. Compare and contrast the central and peripheral routes to persuasion.

25. Explain how cognitive dissonance theory accounts for changes in people’s attitudes based on changes in their behavior.

26. Discuss the effects of fear arousal in politics.
ANSWERS TO THE PRACTICE QUIZ

Multiple-Choice Questions: Correct Answers and Explanations

1. d. measures collected indirectly. Covert measures, like facial movements, physiological recordings, and brain-wave patterns, are collected indirectly without the respondents being able to control their responses. The bogus pipeline is not a covert measure as respondents are aware their attitudes are being measured and can control their responses. This procedure attempts to get respondents to give accurate responses. Sometimes covert measures are collected by means of self-reports but usually they are not. Finally, asking a respondent’s friends about the respondent’s attitudes is usually viewed as assessing the friend’s attitudes about the respondent’s attitude via self-report.

2. d. people’s intentions to act may be different from their attitudes. The theory of planned behavior stresses that in order for an attitude to predict behavior, that attitude must lead to an intention to act in a specific situation. But such intentions to act do not always follow from people’s attitudes, which prevents their attitudes from predicting their behavior. The theory of planned behavior does not encompass the strength of attitudes, the awareness of attitudes, or the falseness of attitudes.

3. a. communicator credibility. In referring to the expert’s opinion, the spokesperson is drawing upon the credibility of the expert in an attempt to influence the audience. It does not appear that the spokesperson is arousing fear or attempting to deter (or use insufficient deterrence against) people’s use of the product. Finally, the spokesperson does not seem to be using a self-monitoring strategy, attempting to present himself or herself in a way that is appropriate for the specific situation.

4. a. the dual-process theory. The dual-process theory of persuasion suggests that people process information through one of two channels: a central channel in which the quality of the arguments affects people’s response to a persuasive message, and a peripheral channel in which heuristics or simplistic rules affect people’s response to a persuasive message. Cognitive dissonance theory, self-perception theory, and the theory of planned behavior do not propose central and peripheral routes to persuasion.

5. d. the central route. The central route to persuasion, as elaborated by the dual-process theory, leads to persuasion through the quality of the arguments that are presented for or against a position. John Smith and Jane Doe appear to be trying to use this route to persuasion. The peripheral route to persuasion, also elaborated by the dual-process theory, leads to persuasion through the use of heuristics or simplistic rules that people may use without even being aware of it. There is no evidence that John Smith and Jane Doe are trying to use heuristics or a peripheral route to persuasion. Finally, it does not appear that the campaigners are trying to use attitude-discrepant behavior to influence voters. This strategy would require the voters to engage in actions that would later lead to a change in their attitudes.

6. c. cognitive dissonance. When people make a choice, the positive features of the option they did not choose are inconsistent with their choice. This inconsistency creates cognitive dissonance. For example, if I choose between a chocolate chip cookie and a molasses cookie, and pick the molasses cookie, the fact that I love chocolate would be inconsistent with my choice and would create cognitive dissonance. There is no evidence that the positive attributes of the alternative not chosen (chocolate chips in my example) create a sleeper effect, a primacy effect, or attitude inoculation.
7. c. a heuristic. Here Harry is using a simplistic rule, or heuristic – whoever makes the most arguments is the best-qualified candidate. He is not elaborating on what the candidate is saying, and there is no evidence that Harry is experiencing cognitive dissonance or that he is concerned with impression management.

8. a. Her attitude toward biking is likely to be stronger. Jeanne has spent more time biking and thus has more personal contact with biking. Research shows that attitudes about objects with which people have more personal contact tend to be stronger attitudes. Jeanne’s attitude toward skateboarding is less likely to be strong because she has had little contact with skateboarding.

9. b. communicator likeability. The salesman is establishing that in at least one respect (attending the same school) he is similar to Yvonne. This similarity may increase Yvonne’s liking for the salesman, which in turn may increase his likeability. It does not appear that the salesman is arousing fear, and need for cognition is a personality construct that distinguishes people on how much they enjoy effortful cognition, so neither of these answers is correct. The salesman may be engaging in self-monitoring or trying to present himself in a way that is appropriate to the situation, but the reference to his alma mater does not seem to be a self-monitoring strategy per se.

10. c. experience no cognitive dissonance. Even though Mindy chose to write a counter-attitudinal essay, she is unlikely to experience cognitive dissonance because her actions had no negative consequences. In fact, her actions produced a result that was consistent with her attitude; her essay actually prevented the tuition hike she opposed. Because Mindy is unlikely to feel cognitive dissonance, she is also unlikely to experience physiological arousal, take responsibility for her essay, or change her attitude about tuition hikes.

11. b. communicator credibility. When people are personally involved with a topic, they are more likely to process information about that topic through the central route to persuasion. Processing information in this way should lead them to be less concerned with communicator credibility and more concerned with the content of the message. The sleeper effect is the tendency for people to lose track of which message was associated with which communicator such that, over time, the effect of communicator credibility becomes increasingly less and people evaluate the message more on its own merit. Fear-arousing messages may have less affect for people who are personally involved with a topic, but there is no evidence that the sleeper effect influences fear-arousing communications. Finally, attitude-discrepant behavior and self-perception processes are more likely to occur when people are personally involved with a topic and thus probably not affected by the sleeper effect.

12. a. She should go first. Because the election is just a few weeks away, the challenger would probably be better off going first, so she could take advantage of the primacy effect. Research shows that when two messages are presented together and there is a time separation before people make a decision about the quality of the messages, as is the case in this example, people tend to prefer the first message – a primacy effect. Recency effects tend to occur when people make a decision about the quality of the messages immediately after the messages are presented. Primacy and recency effects are general effects and seem to be the result of the way people’s memories work; as such, they do not seem to be affected by the content of messages.

13. a. arguments. The dual-process theory suggests that people who are high in the need for cognition are more likely to process information through the central route to persuasion and, therefore, are more likely to rely on the quality of arguments for or against a position. By the same token, they are less likely to rely on heuristics associated with the peripheral route to persuasion.
14. c. **be less concerned with doctors’ tardiness.** On her route, Helen will probably meet a lot of doctors who are late for their appointments with her, but Helen will probably have to say things like, “That’s OK. I don’t mind that you are late for your appointment.” This action that is discrepant with her attitude will likely set the wheels of justification in motion, and Helen will likely change her attitude to match her behavior. As she makes this transition, it is unlikely that she will dislike doctors more, dislike her job, or be stressed in most of her interactions.

15. c. **the peripheral route.** When people are persuaded through the peripheral route, they are persuaded without fully processing the incoming information. Instead of relying on the content of the information, they use simplistic rules, or heuristics, and rely on simple cues like body movements when processing information along this route. In contrast, persuasion in the central route is determined by the quality of the arguments, not peripheral cues. Attitude-discrepant behavior and cognitive dissonance are likely to promote attitude change through self-justification.

16. a. **likely to favor capital punishment more.** Early research testing cognitive dissonance theory found that when people write essays that are contrary to their attitudes, they often change their attitudes so that they are closer to their essays. Cognitive dissonance explained this finding by noting that the act of writing the essay is inconsistent with the writer’s attitudes, which should produce cognitive dissonance. The easiest way to reduce this dissonance is for the people to change their attitudes; after all, they cannot take back their essays. Therefore, in this example, cognitive dissonance theory would predict that Carly will change her attitude about capital punishment and become more in favor of it; and because she has experienced cognitive dissonance, she probably has not found the experience enjoyable.

17. b. **engage in attitude-inconsistent behavior.** An inconsistency between people’s attitudes and their behavior is likely to produce cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is associated with physiological arousal, so if people experience no physiological arousal they probably have no cognitive dissonance. Attitude-consistent behavior does not produce cognitive dissonance because the attitudes and behavior in this case are consonant, not dissonant. Finally, research has shown that unforeseeable consequences often prevent cognitive dissonance in situations when it might otherwise be present.

18. d. **trustworthiness.** People will often discount a persuasive communication if they know that the person is trying to persuade them. The “overheard communicator” technique tries to nullify this discounting by presenting the persuasive appeal as if it were not directed at the audience. This technique gives the impression that the communicator is quite sincere and trustworthy. The “overheard communicator” technique has not been shown to have an affect on likeability or the perceived competence of the communicator, nor has it been shown to create reactance.

19. c. **experience no cognitive dissonance.** Self-affirmation theory proposes that people experience cognitive dissonance because their actions have threatened their self-image and that if their self-image is repaired after it has been threatened then they will no longer experience cognitive dissonance. In this case, making a difficult decision may have threatened Gabriella’s confidence that she is a competent decision maker, thus perhaps initially creating cognitive dissonance; but when she was reminded she is a good student and a good friend, this information should have repaired her self-image and removed any cognitive dissonance she may have felt. Because Gabriella is unlikely to experience cognitive dissonance, she is unlikely to experience physiological arousal, feel bad about her decision, or come to a stronger conviction that she made the right decision.
20. infer their attitudes from their behaviors. Self-perception theory proposes that people infer their own attitudes in the same way that they infer other people’s attitudes: on the basis of behaviors. Therefore, self-perception theory suggests that people make inferences about their own attitudes from their behaviors. Self-perception theory does not propose that people change their attitudes because they feel a psychological tension, want to maintain a positive self-image, or want to manage the impressions of others.

21. The Sleeper Effect. Time may heal the effects of a bad reputation. Hovland and Weiss (1951) varied communicator credibility (for example, the physicist versus Pravda) and found that the change had a large and immediate effect on persuasion. But when they re-measured attitudes four weeks later, the effect had vanished. Over time, the attitude change produced by the high-credibility source decreased, and the change caused by the low-credibility source increased. This latter finding of a delayed persuasive impact of a low-credibility communicator is called the sleeper effect.

22. Impression-management theory. An alternative to a dissonance view of self-persuasion is impression-management theory, which says that what matters is not a motive to be consistent but a motive to appear consistent. Nobody wants to be called fickle or be seen by others as a hypocrite. So we calibrate our attitudes and behaviors publicly just to present ourselves to others in a particular light (Baumeister, 1982; Tedeschi et al., 1971). Or perhaps we are motivated not by a desire to appear consistent but by a desire to avoid being held responsible for the unpleasant consequences of our actions (Schlenker, 1982). Either way, this theory places the emphasis on our concern for self-presentation.

Answers to Essay Questions: Sample Essays

23. In general, attitudes show a weak relationship to behavior; they predict behaviors, but not very well. For one thing, people are not always thinking about their attitudes. Indeed, attitudes are better predictors of behavior when the attitudes are accessible – that is, when people are thinking about their attitudes. In addition, not all attitudes are well thought out and clear in the minds of the people who hold them. Some attitudes are closer to a weak impression than to a strong feeling that people have toward an object. Attitudes generally are better predictors if they are strong.

24. The dual-process model proposes that there are two basic routes by which persuasive communication leads to changes in attitudes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route to persuasion leads to attitude change that occurs when the audience pays attention to the quality of the arguments and elaborates or thinks about the content of the message. When people are persuaded via the central route to persuasion, they systematically process the information with which they are presented. The peripheral route to persuasion leads to attitude change that occurs when the audience pays attention to heuristics that suggest what attitude change should take place. When people are persuaded via the peripheral route, they spend little time analyzing the information that is being presented, and they may not even be aware that they are being persuaded.

25. Cognitive dissonance theory proposes that when people have two thoughts that are psychologically inconsistent, they will experience physiological arousal and cognitive dissonance. In addition, the theory suggests that people will be motivated to reduce this cognitive dissonance by changing whatever thought is easiest to change. When people engage in a behavior that is inconsistent with their attitudes, they are likely to have conflicting thoughts such as “I just did that” and “I don’t think people should do that.” These two thoughts are psychologically inconsistent and, as such, lead to physiological arousal and cognitive dissonance. To reduce this dissonance, people are more likely to change their attitudes – that is, to think “Maybe it is OK if
people do that.” This thought is much easier to change than the thought that they had engaged in the action.

26. Guided by Terror Management Theory and the prediction that a deeply rooted fear of death motivates people to rally around their leaders as a way to ward off anxiety, Mark Landau and his colleagues (2004) found that college students expressed more support for President George W. Bush and his policies if they were reminded of their own mortality or were subliminally exposed to images of 9/11 than if they were not. This result is not limited to the laboratory. Analyzing patterns of government issued terror warnings and Gallup polls, Robb Willer (2004) found that increased terror alerts were predictably followed by increases in Presidential approval ratings.