3 Attitudes, attitude change and behaviour

3.1 The importance of attitudes

The concept of attitude has been, and remains, central and fundamental to social psychology. Allport (1954), for example, viewed attitudes as 'the most distinctive and indispensable concept in social psychology'. It is not hard to see why. In virtually all aspects of our social life we are continually seeking to discover other people's attitudes, telling others of our views, and trying to change someone else's opinions. In the world of communication and information technology advertising campaigns are often aimed at instilling in us a positive attitude towards a particular product with the hope that this will result in us buying what they have to sell. Other advertising campaigns aim to persuade us to change our behaviour by changing our opinions. Disagreements with others over what may be the appropriate or correct attitude make us aware of their powerful emotional foundations. Attitudes, then, are important to understanding stereotyping, prejudice, voting intentions, consumer behaviour and interpersonal attraction to name but a few major areas in social psychology.

Attitudes are also important simply because people hold a very large number of them towards many objects, other people and themselves. How attitudes come to be formed will be dealt with shortly; suffice to say that our parents, peers, powerful others, media and cultural norms all play an important role in determining the attitudes we hold. Attitudes towards minority groups (racial, ethnic or religious, for

example) when strongly held and evaluated negatively provide the foundations of prejudice and discrimination. It is also important to remember that people differ markedly in their attitudes towards the same object or person. Social norms (implicit or explicit 'rules' of behaviour in one's peer group, social class difference, etc.) as well as cultural norms (more general codes of conduct and ethical standards of a society – which may also be either explicit or implicit) are responsible for a certain degree of uniformity, but an individual's direct experience produces a diverse range of attitudes and opinions. For example, early childhood experiences, family values, level of educational attainment and sub-culture ethos all contribute to creating differences among people.

Two reasons for social psychologists directing so much attention to the study of attitudes are: (a) given that the goals of social psychology are to understand, explain and predict behaviour (see Chapter 1), then knowledge of people's attitudes provides crucial insights; (b) attitudes are relatively enduring but also relatively easy to change (when considered in relation to beliefs and values), hence variables and circumstances which cause attitude change and behaviour change through persuasion are important to understand.

It may prove useful to distinguish between beliefs and values. *Beliefs* are what we hold to be true about the world; beliefs vary in how strongly they are held and how important those beliefs are for us. For example, a person believing in the existence of God would regard that belief as important and one which affected many other beliefs the person holds, for example, in marriage and attending church. By contrast, a person may believe, with good reason, that it is important to wear sunglasses while driving in sunshine, but such a belief is not likely to be of central importance to the person and hence it is unlikely to affect many other beliefs. Strongly held beliefs which are of central importance to us are highly resistant to change. This is also true of attitudes, as we shall see later in this chapter (Section 3.6).

Values represent our ethical and moral codes of conduct and are highly influenced by cultural, social and peer group norms. Values influence the way we conduct our life, what we look for in a relationship, how law-abiding we will be, etc. Like beliefs, values are highly resistant to change; when they do change, for example when a person becomes a member of a religious cult, a person's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour may also change dramatically. To make a simplistic summary, beliefs represent what we *think* is true about the world and values represent how we *feel*, morally and ethically about the world in which we live.

3.2 Formation of attitudes

Most social psychologists would agree that attitudes are learned through direct or indirect experience. However, recent research by Waller *et al.* (1990) and Keller *et al.* (1992) has produced evidence to show that genetic factors may also play a role. As with much other research on genetic influences in psychology, research by Waller *et al.* (1990) found that the attitudes of identical twins correlated more highly than the attitudes of non-identical twins. This was found both when identical twins were reared together and reared apart. The attitudes investigated ranged from religious matters to job satisfaction. However, the more generally accepted view is that social learning exerts the strongest influence on the formation of our attitudes.

3.2.1 Learning theory approaches

The social learning of attitudes may come about through classical conditioning. Early studies have shown that when initially neutral words are paired with a stimulus, such as an electric shock, which elicits a strong negative response from a person, the neutral word soon comes to elicit the negative response on its own (Staats *et al.*, 1962). More recently Krosnick *et al.* (1992) have shown that classical conditioning may occur subliminally (i.e. below the level of consciousness of the person). Here pictures of a stranger engaged in routine daily activities were shown to students. Interspersed with these pictures were others designed to produce positive feelings (such as laughing) but for very brief periods of time. Students shown such positive pictures subliminally evaluated the stranger more positively than students not shown subliminal pictures.

Instrumental or operant conditioning, through the use of rewards and punishments, clearly has an important role to play in the formation of attitudes. Modelling also has a strong influence on the formation of attitudes. Modelling is a Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1973) approach where attitudes are learned through observing the behaviour of significant others and, crucially, how that behaviour is rewarded or punished (i.e. evaluated positively or negatively). When children model their behaviour from their parents, this often results in the child behaving as the parents do rather than how the parents tell the child to behave!

3.2.2 Direct experience

Many of the attitudes we hold are based upon our own direct experience, and attitudes formed as a result of frightening or traumatic experiences

are often resistant to change (Oskamp, 1977). The type of social learning discussed above often accounts for formation of attitudes. However, repeated exposure to an attitude object may be sufficient to affect your evaluation and hence form an attitude (Zajonc, 1968). When we first hear a new record we may feel neutral or mildly dislike it, however repeated listening often serves to make us like the record very much (or strongly dislike it!).

Finally, social comparison also contributes to attitude formation; this is where we compare ourselves with another person or group of people and adjust our attitudes as we think appropriate. In a study conducted by Maio *et al.* (1994) participants were led to believe that negative views about a group of people ('Camarians' – a fictitious group) they knew little about came from another group of people (British) the participants respected. Participants expressed negative attitudes towards the 'Camarians' as a result of the social information from the British.

3.3 What are attitudes?

The challenge of providing a clear, valid and useful definition of attitudes is a product of (a) the term 'attitude' being used in extremely diverse and imprecise ways in everyday language; and (b) an attitude being a psychological construct used to refer to certain mental processes of a person. The latter presents a problem for scientific psychology since attitudes may only be inferred from what people say and do. An attitude cannot be directly observed or measured, as many phenomena can in the physical sciences such as chemistry or biology. The term attitude is used to represent and summarise a collection of psychological phenomena: it is a shorthand way of summarising simply that which is complex.

In trying to understand better what attitudes are we will look at two approaches: first, the *functions* that attitudes serve for a person; and, second, a *structural* approach that relates attitudes to other key psychological phenomena. Neither approach, on its own, offers a complete answer to the question of what attitude are, however, taken together they may come close to doing so.

3.3.1 The functional approach

Traditionally, the functional approach (McGuire, 1969; Katz, 1960; Smith *et al.*, 1956) suggests that attitudes promote the well-being of an individual by serving, essentially, four functions. These are the adaptive function, the self-expressive function, the ego-defensive function, and

the knowledge function. The basic idea is that attitudes help a person to mediate between the inner demands of the self and the outside world (especially material, social and informational aspects).

The *adaptive* (or *utilitarian*) function concerns the extent to which attitudes enable a person to achieve a desired goal and avoid what is distasteful. Socially, an important process of identification takes place. A person develops similar attitudes to those people he or she likes and seeks out as friends those perceived to have similar attitudes. In short, this function is hedonistic in that it serves the purpose of increasing satisfaction or pleasure and avoiding punishment or pain.

The *self-expressive* function acknowledges a need to tell others about oneself and to know one's own mind, i.e. be conscious of what we feel, believe and value. One aspect of this relates to the discussion of 'identity' in Chapter 2, where Erikson's view that a sense of identity is important for the well-being of a person was discussed, and how emotionally devastating loss or lack of identity can be for people.

The *ego-defensive* function suggests that attitudes can serve to protect people from themselves and other people. Katz (1960) used a psychoanalytic perspective employing the Freudian concept of defence mechanisms. With respect to self-protection, attitudes may serve to maintain self-image, for example, often there are times when we find it painful to think about how we have behaved. Probably most people, at some time, have experienced guilt and remorse upon waking in the morning after being rather the worse for drink at a party the night before where they did or said something over-the-top or embarrassing. Our attitude towards ourselves as, essentially, a sensible, thoughtful and considerate person may help us not to think about the embarrassing episode or dismiss it as unrepresentative of how we normally behave. In short, positive attitudes about ourselves help maintain a positive self-image. With respect to the ego-defensive function and other people, it is often the case that in dealing with threats to our ego (self-image, self-esteem), we project our own conflicts onto other people, as is sometimes the case with prejudice.

The *knowledge-function* concerns how a person organises, structures and processes information about their social world. This function allows us to see the world as a more familiar, predictable and less uncertain place. The knowledge function allows us to simplify our world. This has both advantages and disadvantages, for example, stereotypes of people may lead to prejudice and discrimination (see Chapter 10).

Recent theory and research regards information processing as of central importance to understanding the function of attitudes. In recent reviews of attitudes and attitude change (see Olson and Zanna, 1993;

Tesser and Shaffer, 1990) psychologists now regard attitudes as either serving one central function or multiple functions. The principle of cognitive consistency, first introduced by Heider (1946), is where people strive to maintain consistency between: different attitudes; beliefs, values and attitudes; and attitudes and behaviour. The lack of cognitive consistency may lead to an unpleasant mental state, as with cognitive dissonance (see Section 5.1). The attempt to maintain consistency may affect how information is processed (Frey and Rogner, 1987), for example, holding a strong negative attitude to the Conservative Party may lead us to interpret information about the 'privatisation' policy over the past 15 years negatively. Research on schemata in social psychology (Taylor and Fiske, 1981) indicates that both the encoding and retrieval of information are often guided by a person's desire to maintain cognitive consistency.

The functional approach has implications for changing attitudes: to achieve attitude change two things need to be known: (a) the attitude held; and (b) the function that attitude serves for the person. To effect attitude change the approach should match the function, for example, an attitude serving a knowledge function is most likely to be changed by exposing the person to new information. On the other hand, an attitude serving an ego-defensive function is unlikely to be changed by the presentation of new information, but may be changed by appealing to a person's self-image.

3.3.2 The structural approach

The structural approach regards attitudes as an evaluation, positive or negative, of an attitude object (person or animate). This reflects a traditional *three component model* relating cognitions, affect and behaviour (Katz, 1960). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define an attitude as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with same degree of favour or disfavour'. In this definition the evaluation includes both overt and covert cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. This is represented in Figure 3.1.

The cognitive component refers to beliefs, opinions and ideas about the attitude object: the affective component refers to the evaluation (good or bad, liking or disliking) of the attitude object and often reflects a person's values (see earlier); the conative component refers to behavioural intentions and/or actual behaviour associated with the attitude object. Newcomb's (1950) definition of an attitude as a 'learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to an object' clearly related attitudes to behaviour – which is problematic as we shall see later in section 3.7. Newcomb's
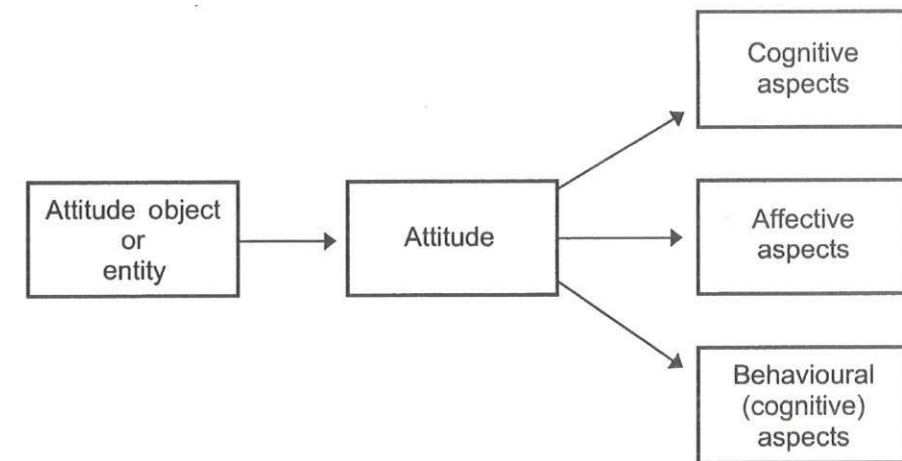
Figure 3.1: Relationship between attitude object, attitude and the three aspects. After Eagly and Chaikan (1993)

definition also assumes attitudes are learned and that people strive to achieve consistency (discussed earlier in this chapter).

The three component model, shown in Figure 3.1, assumes there is a high degree of consistency between beliefs, affect and behaviour. However, people often act in ways opposite to how they think or feel they should; in short, inconsistency is a feature of our lives. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed a *one-dimensional model* in which the evaluation (positive or negative and from strong to weak) is the key factor. In this model an attitude is simply an evaluation of an attitude object and is determined by the various expectations about the attributes of the attitude object and our evaluation of the attributes. This is represented in Figure 3.2.

From this example, a mother's attitude towards nursery education is a function of various expectancies about the effects and consequences of such education together with an evaluation of each. The example also shows that some expectancies are positively evaluated and one is negatively evaluated. This reflects how an attitude may be a mixture of positive and negative evaluations. In the nursery education example the mother will hold a positive attitude. The shortcomings of this *expectancy value* model of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) are that it does not take into account the relative importance of each expectancy. For example, the influence on moral development may be an overriding factor resulting in a negative attitude to nursery education. The model also assumes that people carefully think about expectancies and their evaluations when forming an attitude. Sometimes only one expectancy or attribute
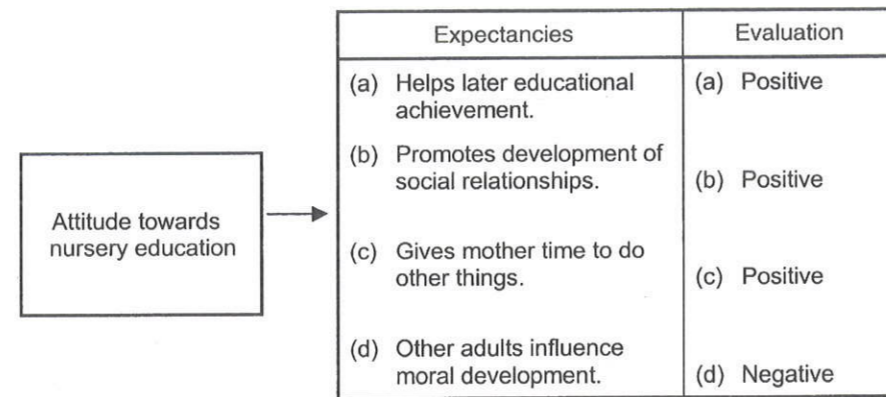
Expectancies	Evaluation
(a) Helps later educational achievement.	(a) Positive
(b) Promotes development of social relationships.	(b) Positive
(c) Gives mother time to do other things.	(c) Positive
(d) Other adults influence moral development.	(d) Negative

Attitude towards nursery education →

Figure 3.2: Example of the one-dimensional expectancy-value model of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) of attitudes

may be important in determining the attitude held (McGuire, 1985) or attitudes are learned without a person thinking a lot (see the previous section on the role of classical and operant conditioning in attitude formation).

The structural approach provides insight into how attitudes, beliefs, intentions and behaviour may be related. However, the assumptions identified in the discussion above often are not truly reflective of what people do, how they think, or how attitudes are formed in the first place.

3.4 Measuring attitudes

Social psychologists have been very inventive in their attempt to measure attitudes; this inventiveness ranges from asking people (through various types of self-report questionnaires), observing people (sometimes as participant observers) to indirect measures (for example, physiological responses).

Three main aims inform this desire to obtain measures: (a) often it is not enough to know that a person feels positively or negatively about an attitude object, an indication of the *strength* with which an attitude is held may also be important; (b) the use of standard, reliable and valid approaches allows different psychologists, who may perhaps research in different countries, to obtain measures that can be compared with each other; and (c) attempts to change attitudes, for example by persuasion, may be assessed through objective measures obtained before and after the attempt to change the attitude is made.

3.4.1 Indirect measures

Scientifically, and ideally, the most objective methods for measuring attitudes would be those which people were either unaware of or unable consciously to affect. Indirect measures, where you do not ask the person about his or her attitude directly, have taken a number of forms: the three most common being physiological, unobtrusive and projective techniques.

Physiological techniques (such as galvanic skin response, heart rate, pupillary dilation) of measuring attitudes assume that the affective (emotional/evaluative) component of attitudes correlates with the activity of the autonomic nervous system (that part of the nervous system thought to be beyond our conscious control). While little evidence exists showing correlation between physiological measures and attitudes, Hess (1965) demonstrated that if a person's pupils dilated (increase in pupil size), a positive attitude was indicated, and if there was pupil constriction (decrease in pupil size), it was indicative of a negative attitude. Generally, though, such an approach has met with only limited success. It is now accepted that most physiological measures are sensitive to other variables but may provide an indication of intensity of feeling but not direction, i.e. whether the attitude held is positive or negative (Cacioppo and Petty, 1981).

Unobtrusive measures rely on the assumption that behaviour is consistent with attitudes. So, for example, a measure of attitude towards religion may be frequency of church attendance. Or, to take another example, the extent to which two people like each other may be reflected in the amount of eye-contact they engage in (the more two people look at each other, the more they like each other). But as will be seen in Section 3.7, behaviour may not always provide a good guide to attitudes.

Projective techniques take advantage of the fact that people often project their own attitudes on to others. Hence asking someone to, for example, fill in the balloons in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 may provide us with knowledge of the person's attitude to authority. Both examples are designed to investigate a person's attitude to authority; from responses given it may be inferred whether a person has a submissive or disrespectful attitude.

There are both advantages and disadvantages associated with indirect techniques of attitude measurement. The advantages are that such techniques are less likely to produce socially desirable responses, the person is unlikely to know what attitude is being measured, an indication of the
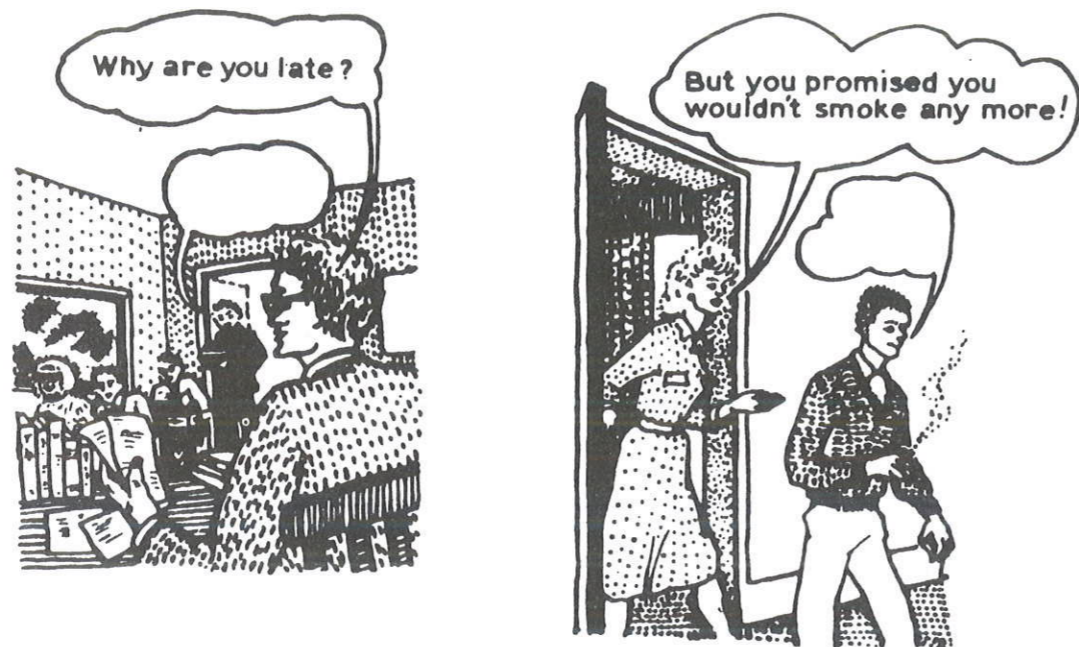
Figures 3.3 & 3.4: Examples of indirect, projective techniques for measuring a person's attitude. In figure 3.3 you are required to give an explanation for why you are late. In figure 3.4 you have to give an explanation for smoking. Adapted from Oppenheim (1992)

strength with which the attitude held is obtained, and the attitude is unlikely to be affected by being measured. The disadvantages are that it is difficult to measure an attitude directly (i.e. positive or negative); attitudes are inferred, and such methods are not as reliable as one would desire. In the case of physiological measures there exists conflicting evidence about their validity. Nevertheless, indirect measures often offer an appropriate approach when investigating highly sensitive social topics.

A measurement technique developed by Cacioppo and Tissinary (1990) purports to measure both the direction and intensity with which an attitude is held through measurement of a person's facial muscles. Measurement of facial muscles is made using the facial electromyograph (EMG), which detects minute muscle movements not normally visible to the human eye. A positive attitude is indicated by increased activity of the zygomatic muscles (see Figure 3.5). A negative attitude is indicated by increased activity in the corrugator muscles. Furthermore, it is proposed that the degree of activity of either sets of muscles is an indicator of the strength with which the attitude is held.
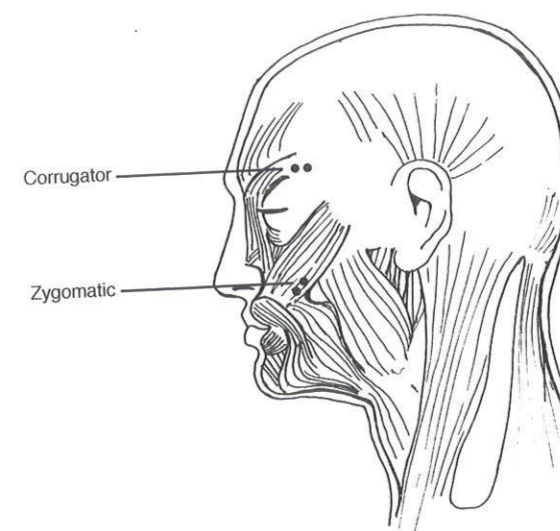
Figure 3.5: Facial muscle movement and attitudes. A positive attitude is associated with increase in the activity of zygomatic muscles; a negative attitude by increase in activity of corrugator muscles. Adapted from Cacioppo and Petty (1981)

3.4.2 Direct measures

Direct measures (rating scales) of attitudes are, perhaps, those best known since they commonly appear in magazines, newspapers, etc. Two approaches will be described: the Likert scale and the Semantic Differential. These are probably the most widely used rating scales in social psychology.

Likert (1932) developed a method of attitude measurement by summating responses to a considerable number of statements representative of the attitude in question, for example, if a social psychologist were interested in attitudes to euthanasia, a list of, say, 30 statements relevant to the topic would be generated. Half these should be favourable and half unfavourable. People would rate each statement on a five-point scale which would be drawn up as follows:

(1) It is the duty of doctors to keep people alive for as long as possible

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

(2) People suffering from a terminal illness should be helped to die if it is their wish

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

A person's attitude is simply the summed score from each question (notice in the above example that a high score indicates a favourable attitude to euthanasia, a low score an unfavourable attitude). This is the basis of the Likert method. However, a number of technical procedures are needed to ensure that response bias is not present, such as equal numbers of favourable and unfavourable attitude statements. One shortcoming is that middle scores from summing responses to a number of questions may result from moderate answers to each question or an inconsistent response pattern. A further shortcoming is that such a five-point scale is not linear, i.e. the difference between 'strongly agree' and 'agree' is probably greater than that between 'agree' and 'undecided'. Nevertheless, the Likert scale remains popular because it is both easy to construct and administer.

The Semantic Differential, developed by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957), provides both a measure of attitude strength and further information concerning the significance of the attitude to the individual. The Semantic Differential entails the rating, on seven-point scales, of an attitude object (person or thing) using numerous bipolar adjective scales. For example, below is a number of bipolar adjectives related to attitudes to pornography:

Pornography

Good	— — — — — — —	Bad
Clean	— — — — — — —	Dirty
Beautiful	— — — — — — —	Ugly
Strong	— — — — — — —	Weak
Active	— — — — — — —	Passive
Cruel	— — — — — — —	Kind

People would simply be asked to place a tick above one of the dashes corresponding to how they feel about pornography in relation to that particular bipolar adjective. This would then be converted into a rating value rating from +3 through zero to –3.

The Semantic Differential provides three types of information about the attitude object: evaluative, potency and activity information. The *evaluative* dimension (in the above example, good–bad, clean–dirty, beautiful–ugly), measures the favourableness or unfavourableness towards the attitude object. The *potency* dimension (strong–weak, cruel–kind) and the *activity* dimension (active–passive) provide additional information about the significance of the attitude object to the individual whose attitude is being measured.

Generally, the evaluative dimension has been regarded as the most important of the three, as it is the dimension that measures the strength with which a person holds a particular attitude. The main advantage of the Semantic Differential is that the same bipolar adjectives are applied to different attitude objects. The main disadvantage is that these bipolar adjectives may not be applicable or appear relevant to a wide range of different attitude objects.

The expectancy-value approach of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), discussed earlier, offers a way of measuring attitudes that asks a person: (a) to indicate the extent to which a belief is thought to be true; and (b) to evaluate, from extremely desirable to extremely undesirable, each of the attributes identified in (a). Table 3.1 provides a worked example and shows that the person has a very positive attitude towards the police (because each attribute is evaluated positively with those most positively evaluated thought to be true about the police).

This approach has proved popular in applied settings such as marketing, politics and family planning, since the features (beliefs) about the attitude object are specified. One problem, though, is achieving agreement between different researchers concerning the major features of beliefs.

Such direct methods used to measure attitudes are popular mainly because they are extremely easy to administer and construct, as well as providing reasonably valid and reliable measures. Considering both

Attributes	**Beliefs** On a scale of 0–10 rate the extent to which you believe the attributes to be true about the police	**Evaluation** On a scale of –10 to +10 rate your evaluation of each of the attributes
Police are:		
Trustworthy	8	+10
Reliable	6	+8
Intelligent	7	+6
Quick to respond	3	+6

Table 3.1: Measuring a person's attitude towards the police using Fishbein & Ajzen's (1975) expectancy-value scale

direct and indirect measures of attitudes it would be true to say that there is room for improvement and refinement of techniques to make attitude measurement both more reliable and accurate. Part of the problem social psychologists experience in predicting behaviour from attitudes (see Section 3.7) comes from inappropriate or poorly constructed measuring instruments.

3.5 Attitude change and persuasion

In our everyday lives we are exposed to countless attempts to change our attitudes, strengthen existing attitudes and form new attitudes. Politicians, advertisers, friends and authority figures, to name but a few, try to persuade us round to their point of view. Advertisements for brand products, such as soap powders, are as much about maintaining customer loyalty as they are about winning new customers. In what follows we will be investigating different approaches to attitude change and persuasion. As we shall see, there is no simple recipe that guarantees success: in some circumstances people behave rationally, at other times people may make snap judgements. Additionally, an underlying assumption of all attempts at attitude change through persuasion is that behaviour will be affected.

3.5.1 Cognitive consistency and dissonance

The principle of *cognitive consistency* underlies much of what we mean when we talk about thinking and behaving as rational human beings. Essentially the idea is that people strive to maintain consistency between: (a) beliefs, values and attitudes; (b) attitudes, intentions and behaviour; and (c) different attitudes. Organising attitudes, beliefs and behaviour into internally consistent structures both underscores and presumes what we mean by human rationality. It follows, then, that a person placed in an *inconsistent* position will be motivated to reduce or avoid the inconsistency. However, people often find themselves holding two attitudes which are inconsistent and not wanting to change either, or continue to act in ways that conflict with their attitude (for example, thinking smoking is bad for you but continuing to smoke).

Festinger's (1957) theory of *cognitive dissonance* is the most widely researched cognitive consistency theory, and the main reason for this is that it offers a general theory of human social motivation. Dissonance was defined by Festinger (1957) as 'a negative drive state which occurs when an individual holds two cognitions (ideas, beliefs, attitudes) which are psychologically inconsistent'. Basically cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable (negative) state of tension which a person wishes

to change (drive) towards feeling comfortable. Festinger's original view was that any inconsistency would cause tension and hence dissonance. However, Cooper and Fazio (1984), in reviewing two decades of research on dissonance detailed four main conditions necessary for dissonance to occur. To understand dissonance better we will look at Festinger's often quoted example of cigarette smoking.

For a person who smokes cigarettes the fact 'I smoke cigarettes' and the knowledge that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer should produce a state of dissonance (assuming that the person cares about their health and does not wish to die). Cognitive consistency or consonance may be achieved in a number of ways: the person could (a) stop smoking; (b) try to ignore or refute the link between smoking and lung cancer; or (c) trivialise the importance of the discrepancy between attitudes and behaviour. No doubt you can think of other ways in which consistency could be achieved. One reason social psychologists have paid so much attention to cognitive dissonance is that *attitude change* is predicted to occur if there is no change in a person's behaviour to achieve consistency. Before looking at classic research demonstrating the breadth of application of cognitive dissonance we will detail the conditions identified by Cooper and Fazio (1984) as necessary for dissonance to occur.

Conditions for dissonance

The first condition is that the person must be aware that an inconsistency between an attitude and a behaviour has negative consequences. Scher and Cooper (1989) demonstrated that when people see no problems or undesirable consequences arising between an attitude and behaviour, dissonance does not occur. In our smoking example, if a person believed that smoking did not cause lung cancer (or more generally ill-health), dissonance would not arise and change (of attitudes) would not take place. The second condition is that the person must take responsibility for the behaviour – in attributional terms (see Chapter 5) an *internal* attribution is made in which the behaviour is under our control and we choose to engage in it. A smoker freely chooses to smoke, but dissonance may not occur if the smoker regards his or her behaviour as an addiction or as a result of being forced to smoke (i.e. an *external* attribution).

The third condition is that physiological arousal must be felt. Losch and Cacioppo (1990) demonstrated that when people are put in a dissonant situation they show physiological arousal. However, evidence is needed that such physiological arousal is experienced as an unpleasant state. If this were not the case, there would be no motivation to change.

Elliot and Devine (1994) conducted an experiment whereby participants in one condition were asked to write an essay counter (i.e. opposite) to their own attitude – in this case students were asked to write in favour of increased tuition fees. In another condition, participants wrote essays against tuition fee increase. Participants in the counter-attitudinal condition provided significantly higher ratings of unpleasant feelings than participants who wrote essays consistent with their own attitudes.

The fourth condition identified by Cooper and Fazio (1984) is that the person must attribute the dissonance or discomfort felt to the inconsistency between their attitude and behaviour. When a person attributes the physiological arousal to something other than their behaviour (for example, some external factor), dissonance does not occur and no attitude (or behaviour) change results.

Table 3.2 summarises the above and provides, using the general example of smoking, instances which produce and do not produce dissonance. In summary, for dissonance to occur in relation to attitudes and behaviour, a person must be aware of inconsistency, take responsibility for the behaviour, experience negative physiological arousal and attribute that arousal to the inconsistency.

As mentioned earlier, the breadth of application of dissonance theory is the main reason social psychologists have conducted research on Festinger's (1957) original idea for over 40 years. Three areas have received considerable attention: decision-making, forced compliance behaviour and justification of effort.

Decision-making

Anyone who makes a decision in which the alternatives considered have both positive and negative consequences is predicted to experience 'post-decisional dissonance'. The important point to note is that dissonance is experienced only *after* a decision has been taken; this is because the alternative taken will nearly always embody both positive and negative aspects. The alternatives rejected, by contrast, may have positive features which are absent from the choice made. Cognitive dissonance arises for the decision-maker because the cognitions of having selected an alternative with negative aspects and rejected others with positive aspects means a trade-off has been made. The decision-maker expects and hopes the trade-off will prove worthwhile, but does not really know this at the time. An example will help clarify the points being made here.

Suppose you are trying to decide which car to buy, and, for sake of simplicity, further suppose the choice is between a Rover and a Peugeot. One approach to assist decision-making would be to draw up a checklist of the important features you are looking for in a car and see how the two makes compare. Table 3.3 summarises such an exercise. Assuming these six features are the important ones for you and that they are equally weighted (of equal importance), the make of car with the greatest number of positives, if we implement a simple decision rule, is the one to buy. So you go out and buy the Rover. It is now, having bought the car, that you will experience dissonance: this is because you have made a choice in which there are negative features (expensive, spares hard to get, etc.) and rejected a choice with some positive features (Peugeot is cheap, easy to get spares for, etc.).

Condition	Dissonance present	Dissonance absent
1. Attitude – behaviour inconsistency seen to have negative consequences	Smoking causes lung cancer	Research has not proved that smoking causes lung cancer
2. Person takes responsibility for their behaviour	It is my choice to smoke	Smoking is an addiction. I can't do anything about it
3. Negative physiological arousal experienced	I feel uncomfortable about the consequences of smoking	Avoid thinking about consequences of smoking
4. Arousal/discomfort attributed to inconsistency	I am concerned about my smoking	I feel discomfort because other people are always hassling me to stop smoking

Table 3.2: Conditions necessary for cognitive dissonance and ways in which dissonance may be avoided. After Cooper and Fazio, 1984

Feature	Peugeot	Value	Rover	Value
Price	Relatively cheap	–	Expensive	–
Comfort	Hard and noisy	+	Smooth and quiet	+
Petrol	Not economical	–	Economical	+
Spares	Available and cheap	–	Hard to get and expensive	–
Servicing	Infrequent and cheap	+	Frequent and expensive	–
Reliability	Poor	+	Good	+

Table 3.3: Balance sheet of features considered when buying a car and how Peugeot and Rover compare on these features

One way in which dissonance may be reduced is by *bolstering* the alternative decided on, this means that consonant information will be *selectively* sought to make the choice taken seem even more attractive and the alternative rejected less attractive. Ehrlich *et al.* (1957) found that people who had just bought a new car looked at magazine articles and advertisements which praised their choice of purchase, and, at the same time, ignored or read reports criticising other alternatives considered but rejected.

Brehm (1956) further demonstrated that people downgrade the rejected alternative and upgrade the alternative taken. In this experiment a number of women were shown various household appliances, then asked to rate each appliance in terms of attractiveness.

Subsequently, each woman was given the choice of one of the two appliances she had rated most attractive. The women received the appliance of their choice and were asked to rate the two appliances again. Brehm found, as predicted by dissonance theory, that the appliance chosen was rated as more desirable and the rejected appliance as less desirable than before having made the choice.

Another way of reducing post-decisional dissonance is to trivialise positive aspects of the alternatives rejected (Simon *et al.*, 1995). Individual decision-making operates at many levels in our lives – from deciding what car to buy, through organisational decisions up to international levels in politics – but at all levels the phenomenon of *post-decisional* dissonance applies. Figure 3.6 summarises the decision-making process, and ways of reducing post-decisional dissonance. The point to emerge is that while pre-decisional behaviour may be rational, justification of the decision taken by cognitive bolstering or trivialisation of alternatives not taken (bolstering the chosen alternative and downgrading the merits of the rejected alternative) may not be rational.

Forced compliance behaviour

The less a person is paid for doing something against his or her beliefs or attitudes, the more he or she is likely to change those beliefs or attitudes. Conversely, the more a person is paid to do such a thing, the less he or she has to justify it to him or herself, consequently, the less likely are his or her attitudes to change. This is perhaps one of the more surprising predictions of cognitive dissonance theory. The prediction derives from dissonance theory since a state of dissonance arises for a person when he or she is unable to justify his or her behaviour. Hence, doing something you do not agree with or arguing for a position opposite to your own views or attitudes where there is insufficient justification (external reward of
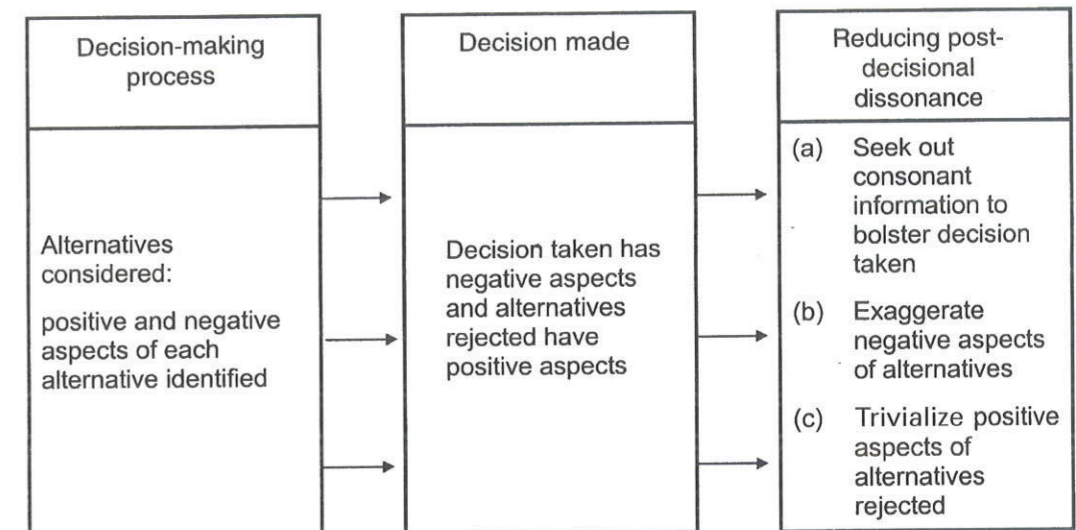
Figure 3.6: Post-decisional dissonance: how it occurs and how it may be reduced

money, for example) causes dissonance. The two cognitions, 'I am of such and such a view' and 'I am acting or arguing against my view' creates dissonance. Dissonance may be reduced by changing one of the cognitions: the person has already done or said something against his or her view so this cannot change (unless he or she distorts the past). In consequence, it is most likely that the person's own views will change to be consonant (or less dissonant) with his or her behaviour. This was first investigated in the classic experiment by Festinger and Carlsmith (1959).

Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) had students perform a very dull and boring task (turning pegs in a peg-board) for one hour. The students were then asked to tell another participant in the study, who was waiting to do the task, that the task was very interesting, worthwhile and good fun to do, i.e. they were asked to misinform the waiting participant. There were two experimental conditions: students asked to lie about the task were paid either $20 or $1 to do so. Festinger and Carlsmith were interested in the students' attitude to the task *after* telling the waiting participants that it was interesting. It was found that participants who were paid $20 rated the task, after performing it, as boring and of little relevance, whilst participants paid $1 rated the task, again after performing it, as interesting, relevant and enjoyable.

Findings from numerous forced-compliance experiments are explained in terms of justification. The claim is that when there is sufficient external justification ($20 in the Festinger and Carlsmith experiment) participants experience little, if any, dissonance and hence don't

have to change their attitudes. However, when the external justification for telling a falsehood is insufficient ($1 payment) participants experience cognitive dissonance. Since they cannot change their behaviour (they are forced or requested to comply with the experimenter's wishes), their attitudes change. The low reward condition ($1) offers insufficient external justification for the behaviour so *internal* justification is sought. The internal justification is to view the task as interesting, hence dissonance is reduced or eliminated.

Two important modifications have been made to the basic propositions of dissonance theory. First, Aronson (1969) suggests that we need to assume that people perceive themselves as decent and honest to experience dissonance in forced-compliance situations. This makes sense, since if you do not think lying to or misinforming others is a bad thing then you will not need to justify your behaviour (either externally or internally). Second, we must also assume that the four conditions identified by Cooper and Fazio (1984) specified earlier, are present, only then can we say that post-decisional dissonance is present.

Justifying effort

Before gaining acceptance to clubs, fraternities, groups, gangs, etc., there are often 'initiation rites' to go through. Dissonance theory explains how these 'rites of passage' serve a distinct social psychological function. The prediction is that the more effort a person puts into achieving a goal, the more attractive and worthwhile it is perceived to be when finally achieved. Dissonance theory states that *regardless* of how attractive, desirable, interesting, etc., the goal actually is, it is what a person goes through to achieve it that determines its worth. Why should a person experience dissonance here? If you gain membership to a club or society and have to go through 'hell and high water' to get this, you are likely to be extremely upset if you subsequently discover the club or society to be boring and worthless. Dissonance arises because the cognition 'I have put a lot of time and effort into gaining entry to this club' and 'the club is dull and worthless' are dissonant; people do not normally put a lot of time and effort into something useless. To reduce dissonance the person could leave the club or society he or she has just joined – this is unlikely since the person would have to acknowledge and accept that he or she had wasted time and effort. Festinger and Carlsmith predict the person will perceive the club or society to be interesting and worthwhile; this justifies the expenditure of time and effort.

Aronson and Mills (1959) devised an experiment to test this. They recruited women to join a group discussing the psychology of sex.

However, before the women could join the discussion group they were told they had to go through a screening test (the screening test being the 'initiation'). Participants were randomly allocated to one of three 'screening-test' conditions: (a) 'severe initiation' where the women had to recite aloud, in the presence of a male, obscene words and sexually explicit passages; (b) 'mild initiation', where women recited aloud sexual but not obscene words; (c) 'no initiation' where women were admitted to the discussion group without any screening.

After this the participants in each condition listened to what they thought was a live discussion of the psychology of sex (in fact all participants listened to the same tape recording of a discussion), which was deliberately made to be dull and boring. After listening to this boring discussion the participants were asked how much they liked it, found it interesting and worthwhile, etc. Aronson and Mills found, consistent with the prediction of dissonance theory, that participants who had gone through the 'severe initiation' found the discussion interesting and worthwhile. Participants admitted to the discussion without any initiation thought it dull and boring, while 'mild initiation' participants found the discussion only slightly interesting and worthwhile. Generally, research has found that whatever we put effort into may result in dissonance and hence attitude change (Axsom and Cooper, 1985) and the more effort put in, the more something is liked (Wicklund and Brehm, 1976).

Summary

Cognitive dissonance theory has attracted a great deal of research because of its wide range of application. The dissonance arousing aspects of decision-making, forced-compliance behaviour and justifying effort have all shown that while the desire to achieve harmony or consonance may be rational, the means of achieving it often is not. More recent research has identified the conditions necessary for dissonance to occur and shown that physiological arousal resulting from inconsistency between attitude and behaviour can be measured. Finally, Axsom and Cooper (1985) further demonstrated that attitude change resulting from attempts to reduce dissonance may be long-lasting and persist for a year or more.

3.5.2 Self-perception theory

Bem (1967) pointed out that our actual behaviour often determines what attitude we hold. So to quote one of Bem's examples, 'since I eat brown bread then I must like brown bread'. Applying this logic to the

Festinger and Carlsmith study described above, Bem would say that since the participants are telling the other that the peg-board task is interesting then they find it to be so.

Self-perception theory states that a person *forms* his or her attitudes through self-observation of behaviour, followed by a self-attribution of a consistent attitude. In Bem's approach there is no need, as he says, 'to postulate an aversive motivational drive toward consistency' but it is important to ask how general an explanation of attitude formation and change this approach can offer. In cases where a person does *not* already possess an attitude or set of beliefs towards something, behaviour may be a good guide to attitudes. However, when a person already holds a strong attitude, self-perception theory would seem less applicable.

To understand *attitude formation* self-perception theory may be very useful, but in looking at *attitude change* the approach seems less productive.

3.5.3 Traditional approach to persuasion (Yale studies)

The classic studies of Janis and Hovland (1959) investigated how the three factors of source of the communication, structure of the message and who the message is aimed at may affect attitude change. Most of this research was concerned with how persuasive communications associated with advertising may change or strengthen attitudes. Janis and Hovland proposed that attitude change resulting from source factors occurred because such factors influenced the amount of *attention* paid to the communication; message factors influenced the comprehensibility of the message for the audience; and audience factors resulting in attitude change occurred because of acceptance by the audience of the communication. This, as well as the specific variables studied for each of the factors, is summarised in Figure 3.7.

Hovland *et al.* (1953) have shown that the source (the person making the communication) is more likely to be effective if that person is seen as, for example, trustworthy or an expert in the field. The motives of the source are also important – Walster *et al.* (1966) showed that a person who argued for a position against their own best interest was perceived as more credible (and hence more influential) than a person who argued for a position in their own best interests (resulting in little influence over others). If a murderer asks to be hanged you can believe they are telling the truth!

The message itself in a persuasive communication has been looked at in two main ways: first, fear appeals; second, organisation of message. Are strong or weak fear appeals more effective in changing attitudes? It
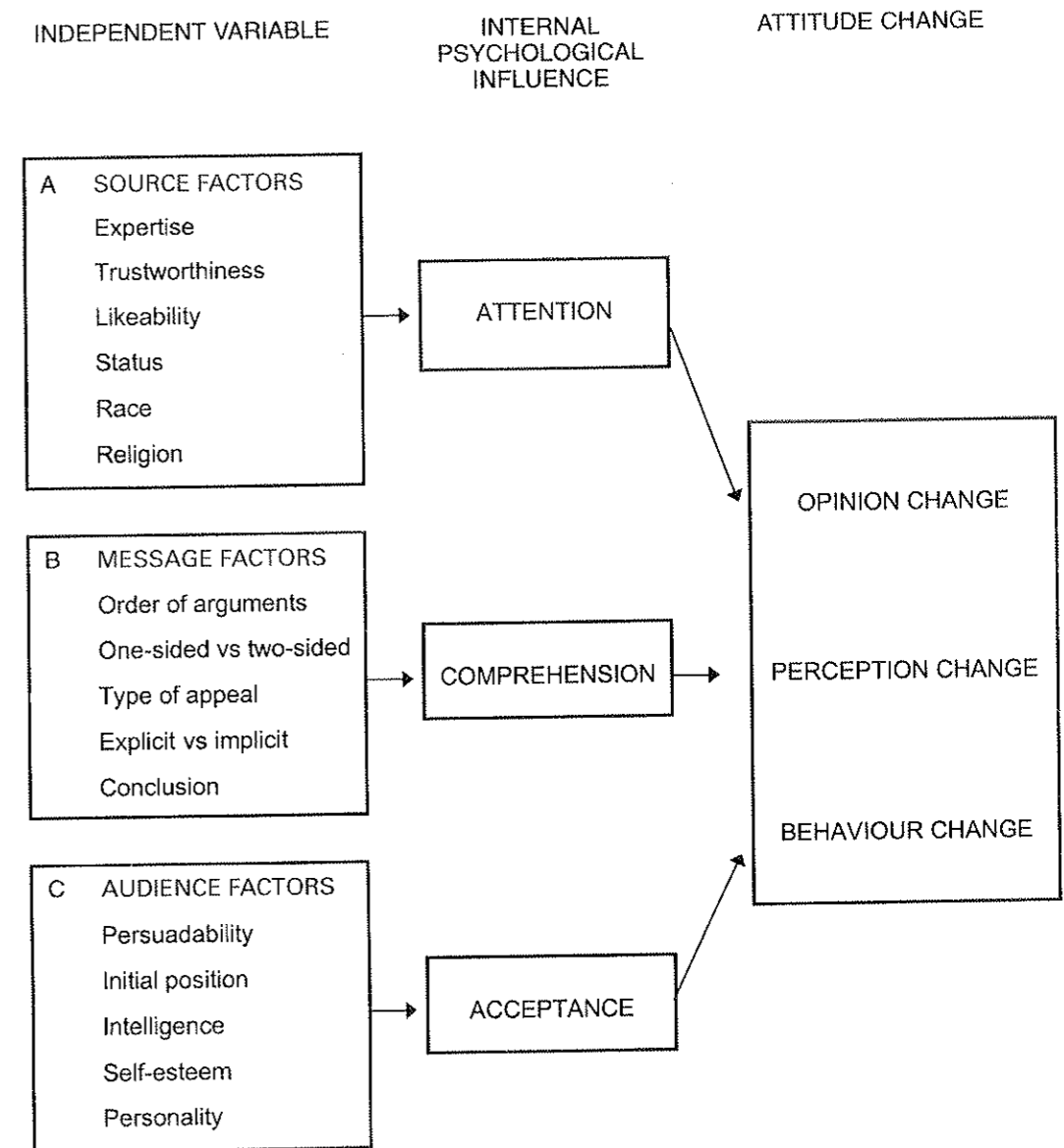
Figure 3.7: Diagram showing how different types of persuasive communication (independent variable) have psychological influence which results in attitude change. After Janis and Houland (1959)

depends: for example, people high in self-esteem are more likely to be influenced a long time after the high fear appeal. This has been further refined by Baumeister and Covington (1985) who found that in other circumstances people with high self-esteem are just as easily persuaded

as those with low self-esteem, but do not want to admit it! Leventhal (1970) demonstrated that smokers shown a 'high fear' film on lung cancer were found to smoke less than smokers shown a 'low fear' film when contacted five months later.

The organisation of the message has been looked at in two important ways: (a) one-sided or two-sided arguments; (b) order of the information presented. The latter is dealt with in some detail with respect to impression formation (Chapter 4). The effectiveness of one-sided or two-sided arguments depends on the nature of the audience (target of the communication), for example, it has been found that if the audience already believes in the position being argued for, then a one-sided presentation is effective. However, if the audience is opposed to the position, a two-sided, rather than a one-sided, argument is more likely to produce attitude change. Table 3.4 summarises some of the key variables with respect to source, message and audience likely to cause attitude change.

3.5.4 Systematic and superficial processing

An underlying assumption of both the cognitive dissonance and traditional approaches to attitude change is that people think quite deeply or *systematically* about the message or the information. Drawing upon ideas and concepts from cognitive psychology, Petty *et al.* (1994) propose a dual-process approach, called the *elaboration-likelihood model*, which proposed that people adopt one of two approaches when presented with

Factor	Variable causing attitude change
1. Source	Experts more persuasive than non-experts Popular/attractive communicators cause more change than unpopular/unattractive communicators Someone speaking rapidly more persuasive than someone speaking slowly
2. Message	High fear appeals cause more change than low fear appeals Message not intended to persuade more likely to cause change than if seen as intended
3. Audience	People with low self-esteem generally easier to persuade than people with high self-esteem Hostile audiences more persuaded by a two-sided argument rather than one side being presented

Table 3.4: Source, message and audience variables causing attitude change

attitude-relevant information. People may process information given in a persuasive communication either *superficially* or *systematically*. When using superficial processing to deal with information a person will not spend much time analysing the information but respond using rules of thumb (heuristics, see Chapter 4) or more 'automatic' responses. In this case the information will not be elaborated very much. Attitude change resulting from superficial processing is described by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) as taking a *peripheral route*. By contrast, when using systematic processing a person will invest considerable cognitive effort in understanding and analysing the information. Attitude change resulting from systematic processing has taken what has been called a *central route*. Attitude change through the central route will depend on the quality of arguments and information presented. By contrast, attitude change through the peripheral route will depend upon areas that are responded to in a more 'automatic' or less thought out way. Figure 3.8 depicts the details of the elaboration-likelihood model.

What determines whether high elaboration (central route) or low elaboration (peripheral route) of the persuasive communication occurs? Petty and Cacioppo (1990) identified two main factors – a person's motivation and cognitive capacity. If a person is highly motivated, and has the time and ability (cognitive capacity) to process the information, the central route will be used. Where motivation is low and/or cognitive capacity is limited the peripheral route will be used.

A person's *motivation* is affected by concern for accuracy, self-relevance and certain personality factors. When investigating personality factors such as need for cognition Cohen (1957) and Cacioppo *et al.*, (1983) found that people with a high need for cognition are more likely to elaborate information and hence take the central route to attitude change. People who have a concern for accuracy and find information of great personal relevance are also more likely to take the central route to attitude change.

Cognitive capacity is determined by three things: a person's cognitive ability, relevant knowledge possessed and the absence of distractions. Hence, where there is ability, knowledge and no distractions, the central route will be used; conversely, lack of ability, little knowledge and the presence of distractions is most likely to result in the use of the peripheral route.

Research has demonstrated that attitude change which results from the central route is more enduring than change resulting from the peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Furthermore, behaviour is more consistent with attitudes when the change occurs through the central route. Attitude change resulting from the peripheral route is
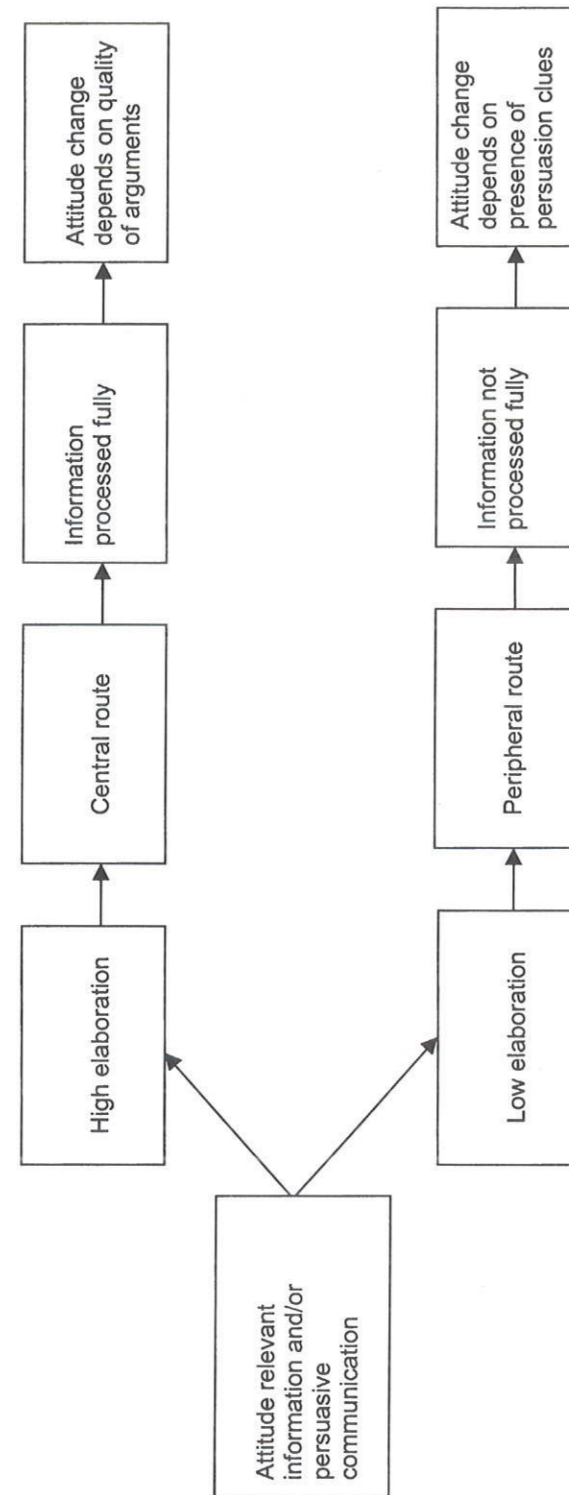
Figure 3.8: The elaboration-likelihood model of attitude change, based on Perry and Cacioppo (1986)

likely to be relatively short term and behaviour less likely to be consistent with attitudes. Figure 3.9 summarises what has been said above.

A variation of the elaboration-likelihood model called the heuristic-systematic model has been proposed by Chaiken *et al.* (1989). The systematic aspect is virtually identical to that described above. Heuristic processing of information represents one type of superficial processing. Heuristics of thinking (see Chapter 4) are simple rules that people use to make rapid decisions or judgements. For example, a simple rule might be 'statements made by experts are to be trusted', hence an expert providing support to a persuasive communication may influence a person to change their attitude. Any thought about the communication itself is not needed since it is 'underwritten' by an expert and experts are trusted. Other heuristics that might be used are feeling good or bad about something where we like what we feel good about (Schwarz and Clore, 1988); or an 'attractiveness heuristic' where we think attractive people are likeable and that we tend to agree with people we like, for example, Chaiken (1979) showed that attractive people can be more persuasive than people not judged to be attractive; Pallak (1983) demonstrated this in an experiment on product advertising. In summary, attitude change and persuasion can come about both through superficial and systematic processing of information. However, the effect is more enduring when the central route (systematic processing) is used. Heuristics are an aspect of the peripheral route (superficial processing) that allow us to make quick judgements.
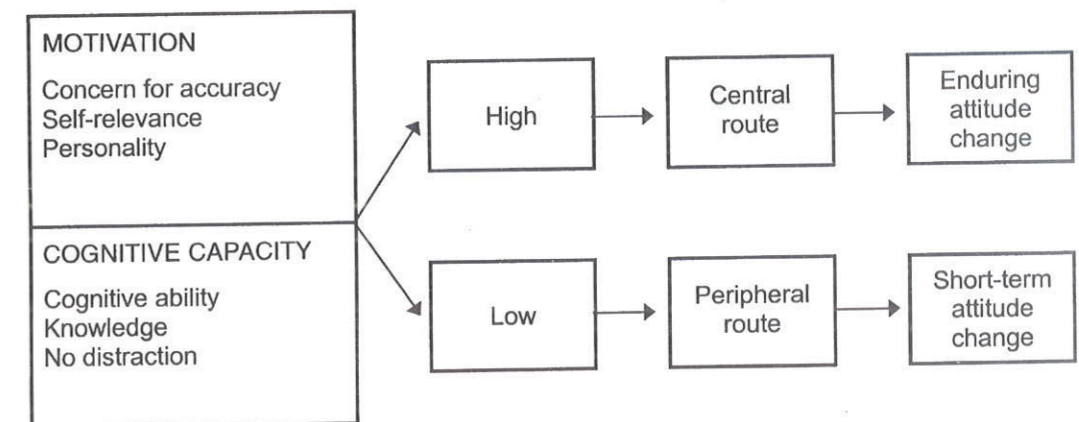

Figure 3.9: Effects of high and low motivation on central and peripheral routes and permanence of attitude change

3.5.5 Cultural differences

Hofstede (1980) reported a social psychological study of over 40 countries. One result of his analysis was to classify countries using just a few dimensions. One dimension was labelled 'individualism-collectivism' which is to do with whether a person's identity is characterised by personal choice and achievements or collective harmony and group belongingness. Hofstede found North Americans to fall into the former category and Asians the latter category. If this is the case, different types of persuasive communications should be effective in each culture. Han and Shavitt (1993) analysed American advertisements and found that on the whole they promoted individualism such as personal success and independence. By contrast, Korean advertisements had strong themes of collective harmony. This research also showed that advertisements promoting individuality were more persuasive to Americans than those promoting family and shared values. The reverse was found with Koreans.

3.6 Resisting attitude change

In our everyday social life we are constantly bombarded by attempts to change our attitudes; this may come from friends, colleagues at work, the media, etc. If we were susceptible to all persuasive communications our attitudes and behaviour would be constantly changing. Strongly held attitudes are resistant to change, and social psychologists have explored three main ways in which we resist attitude change: reactance, forewarning and selective avoidance.

Reactance (Brehm, 1966; Rhodewalt and Davison, 1983) is where our attitude changes in an *opposite* direction to that which is intended. This may happen in situations where a lot of pressure is being put on us, for example, to buy a particular product. Whether a person merely expresses an opposite view as a result of strong pressure or whether their attitude actually changes in the opposite direction has yet to be established.

Forewarning helps to resist attempts at persuasion since we can develop counter-arguments, and think more about our attitude in advance. Hiromi and Fakuda (1986) conducted an experiment in which two groups of participants were presented with a persuasive communication; one group was warned in advance about the persuasion attempt, the other group were not. The researcher found, as predicted, that the latter group showed more attitude change than the former group. This approach of forewarning has been found to be particularly effective in

'inoculating' young children (four to eight year olds) against television advertising (Feschback, 1980).

Selective avoidance is a strategy often used to avoid information that challenges our attitudes; in research on cognitive dissonance the converse is found whereby people seek out information that confirms their attitude or decision (Brehm, 1956). To resist attempts to persuade, people adopt a strategy that results in selected exposure to information. This means that attitudes may be maintained even though objectively there is sufficient good evidence to justify change. Selective avoidance may not, therefore, be a rational approach to dealing with attitude relevant information.

3.7 Attitudes and behaviour

At the beginning of this chapter it was stated that attitudes have a central place in social psychology, and one important reason for this is that attitudes determine behaviour (Allport, 1935). Early research, as we shall see, reported a poor relationship between attitudes and behaviour. However, more recently social psychologists have looked closely at *how* and *when* attitudes influence behaviour. The picture that emerges is more complex than originally thought.

La Piere (1934) conducted what has now come to be regarded as a classic study. La Piere travelled around America with a Chinese student and his wife and recorded how the two Chinese people were treated in numerous hotels and restaurants. On only one occasion were they treated inhospitably. Six months later La Piere sent a letter to all the places he had visited with the Chinese couple and asked the restaurants and hotels if they would accept Chinese clientele. The surprising result was that over 90 per cent of the replies to the letter were negative: Chinese people would not be welcome. Figure 3.10 summarises the findings.

The apparent inconsistency of people saying one thing and doing something different is of major interest to attitude-behaviour research. Why should this discrepancy exist? Many reasons come to mind, for example, inaccurate measurements, not taking account of how strongly a person holds an attitude, or attempting to relate general attitudes to specific behaviour as in the La Piere study (general attitudes to Chinese people against specific attitudes to a Chinese couple accompanied by an American).

Defleur and Westie (1958) attempted to relate specific attitudes to specific behaviours to overcome the problems of the La Piere study. They asked a large number of white people specific questions about blacks and whites in order to gain a measure of prejudice. This allowed
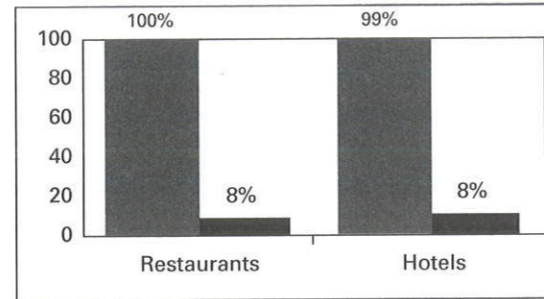
Percentage accepting
Chinese clientele

Figure 3.10: Responses to actual visits and letters to owners of hotels and restaurants to serving Chinese people. After La Piere (1934)

them to identify prejudiced and unprejudiced people. Participants in both groups were asked to pose for a photograph with a black person. Prejudiced people were less willing to do this than unprejudiced people. Generally, research has found that a better attitude-behaviour link is found where the level of specificity of attitude and behaviour is the same.

3.7.1 Reasoned action and planned behaviour

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggest that behaviour may be more accurately predicted if we know about a person's intentions with respect to behaving in a particular way. This is the basic idea behind their *theory of reasoned action*. The theory takes into account subjective norms (normative beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour), attitudes towards the behaviour (determined from expectancies and values described when we looked at attitude measurement – Section 3.4) and behavioural intention to predict behaviour. This is summarised in Figure 3.11.

Using this model Fishbein *et al.* (1980) found a good correlation between voting intentions and how people actually voted in both an American Presidential election and a referendum on nuclear power. One shortcoming of the theory of reasoned action is that it does not take into account whether the behaviour is under the control of a person, i.e. how easy or difficult it would be for a person to behave in a certain way. For example, you may intend to achieve a high mark for an assignment but there may be many factors outside of your control (availability of books, time, etc.) which may prevent this. To take this into account Ajzen (1989) modified the theory to

incorporate a person's *perceived behavioural control*. This is called the theory of *planned behaviour*. Perceived behavioural control influences both the behavioural intention and the behaviour itself (as represented in Figure 3.11). Beck and Ajzen (1991) investigated this theory by asking students to indicate ways in which they had been dishonest. The dishonest behaviour ranged from cheating in examinations, or shoplifting to telling lies. Students were also asked to indicate how much control they thought they had over each of these behaviours. It was found that cheating in the future could be better predicted than shoplifting. This may be explained by the finding that students reported greater perceived control over cheating than shoplifting. This indicates that the latter may be more of a spontaneous behaviour, and cheating a more planned behaviour.

Overall, the approach of Fishbein and Ajzen has resulted in a much better understanding of the attitude-behaviour link and how attitudes, mediated through behavioural intentions, influence actual behaviour. However, while this may work quite well when we have time to think and plan what we do, there are many occasions when our behaviour appears to be more *automatic* and not thought about carefully or planned.

3.7.2 Automatic behaviour

Fazio (1989) proposed an approach in which easily accessed attitudes that quickly come to mind, spontaneously almost, have an automatic influence on behaviour. This is most likely to happen with more general, rather than specific, attitudes, for example, if somebody comes up
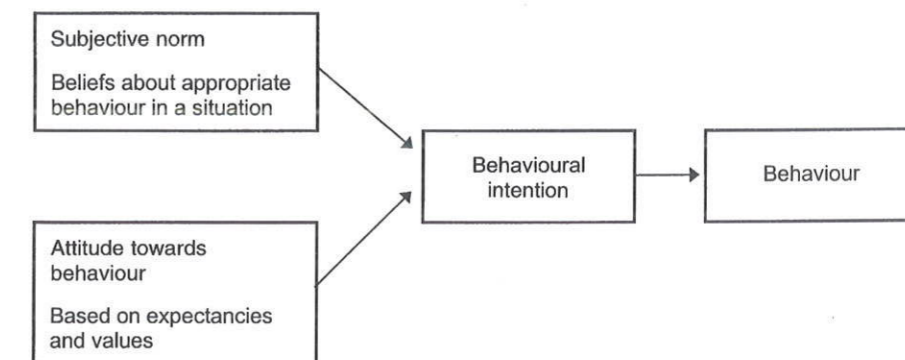

Figure 3.11: Key components in Fishbein & Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action

to you in the street asking you to fill in a questionnaire, your behaviour is most likely to be related to your general attitude towards people requesting your time in public places. Additionally, as stated above, the attitude must be readily *accessible,* and Fazio (1986) proposes that the greater the accessibility of the attitude, the more consistency there will be between attitudes and behaviour. For example, attitudes based on personal experience are likely to be more vividly recalled from memory and hence more accessible. Attitudes that are constantly brought to mind will have greater accessibility as shown in an experiment by Powell and Fazio (1984).

3.7.3 Personality variables

Behaviour may not be consistent with attitudes because some people may simply not behave in ways consistent with what they believe. If this is the case neither methodological or theoretical advances, as described earlier in this chapter, will be of much use. Self-monitoring (Snyder, 1979) offers a way of accounting for poor attitude-behaviour relations by saying that some people *do* behave in consistent ways (low self-monitor) while others *do not* (high self-monitor). The behaviour of the high self-monitor is determined more by the demands of the social situation and behaviour appropriate to that social situation (for example, social norms).

The low self-monitor exhibits a high degree of consistency between attitudes and behaviour since behaving according to one's own beliefs and attitudes is the prime consideration for this personality type. The high self-monitor, by contrast, may seem to others like a different person in different social situations with different people present.

The self-monitoring personality dimension has implications for research on cognitive dissonance, for example, in counter-attitudinal tasks low self-monitors would be expected to change their attitude to be consistent with their behaviour. High self-monitors would not change their attitudes as they would see it as appropriate to behave in that way in that kind of situation.

Snyder and De Bono (1985) demonstrated the differential effects of advertising on high and low self-monitors. In this experiment groups of high and low self-monitors were exposed to one of two advertisements for coffee. In one advertisement the quality of the produce was emphasised, in the other the image was emphasised. It was predicted that high self-monitors would be more influenced by image and low self-monitors would be more influenced by quality. Results confirmed this and found that not only did high self-monitors prefer coffee when advertised by image but they were willing to pay for it!

In summary, early research questioned the link between attitudes and behaviour. More recent theoretical developments have highlighted the importance of knowing a person's behavioural intentions, how much perceived control there is over behaviour and whether there is time to plan a behavioural response or whether circumstances produce a more automatic action. The picture is more complicated than once thought, but social psychologists now understand *how* and *when* attitudes related to behaviour much more fully.

3.8 Application: attitudes and health

Health psychologists are concerned to understand both health and illness from social, psychological, individual and psychophysiological perspectives (Taylor, 1995). In attempts to change people's behaviour to a more healthy lifestyle, health promotion campaigns often attempt to change our attitudes. Social psychologists have contributed greatly in the past ten years or so. For example, Baron and Richardson (1994) have shown that a persuasive communication which induces fear results in people paying more attention to a message than if fear is absent. This should have the consequence of encouraging *systematic processing* of information and a *planned-action* approach to behaving. However, if the fear in a message is made to be personally relevant attitude, change may be resisted through avoidance and defensiveness (Liberman and Chaiken, 1992).

A study investigating the effect of different mass media campaigns aimed at getting people to change behaviours to reduce their risks of cardiovascular disease was conducted by Maccoby *et al.* in 1977, and followed through over ten years later by Perlman (1990). In this study three American towns in the same state were subjected to different campaigns over a two-year period. In one town the campaign was conducted through the mass media – television, radio, leaflets, etc. In the second town the same media campaign was conducted together with workshops available for individuals who were in the higher risk categories. The third town was the control condition and received no media campaign or instructions for higher risk categories. The researchers took measures of (a) change in knowledge about cardiovascular diseases; and (b) behavioural changes in the high risk categories. Greatest behavioural change was found in the town that was given both the media campaign and workshops. Figure 3.12 shows that the greatest increase in knowledge was in the same town.

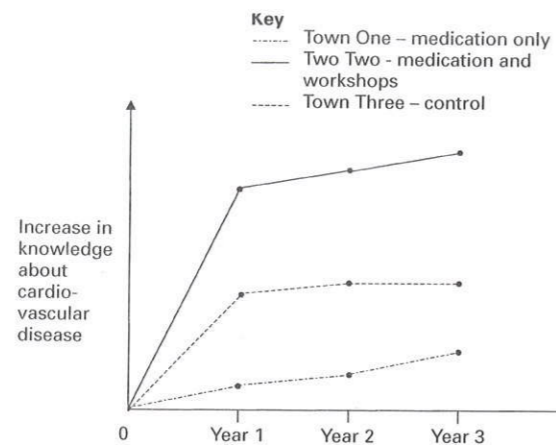The media campaign plus workshops was most effective in changing

Key
Town One – medication only
Two Two – medication and workshops
Town Three – control

Increase in knowledge about cardio-vascular disease

0   Year 1   Year 2   Year 3

Figure 3.12: Change in knowledge about cardiovascular disease in three towns exposed to different campaigns

attitudes, and maintaining consequent changes in behaviour. This approach is most likely to invoke the systematic or central route to attitude change. In line with claims made in Section 3.5.4 earlier, attitude change has been found to be more enduring and those attitudes to be more consistent with behaviour. The findings of this study seen in the context of systematic processing of information to bring about attitude change may offer health psychologists powerful ways of promoting healthy behaviour in people.

3.9 Summary

- Social psychologists regard attitudes as central and fundamental to understanding social thought and behaviour. Attitudes are important for understanding stereotyping, prejudice and interpersonal attraction.
- Most social psychologists regard learning through direct or indirect experience as the major explanation for the formation of attitudes; some evidence from twin studies offers a genetic explanation for attitude formation.
- Attitudes may be seen to serve both structural and functional purposes for a person. The structural approach relates attitudes to values, beliefs, intentions and behaviour. The functional approach concerns adaptive, knowledge, ego-expressional and self-expressive functions.
- Attitudes may be measured by both direct and indirect means. Indirect measures, such as physiological or projective techniques, are less reliable but not so obtrusive as direct measures such as the Likert and Semantic Differential rating scales.
- The principles of cognitive consistency state that attitudes are related to other attitudes, beliefs and behaviour in a consistent way. Cognitive dissonance occurs under poor conditions and is a general theory of human social motivation.
- The conditions for cognitive dissonance are: person must be aware of inconsistency between attitude and behaviour; the person must take responsibility for the behaviour; physiological arousal must be felt; and, person must attribute discomfort to the attitude – behaviour inconsis-tency.
- Research on cognitive dissonance has focused on the three main areas of decision-making, forced-compliance behaviour and justification of effort.

- The traditional approach to persuasion (Yale studies) investigated the factors of source of communication, structure of message and who the message was aimed at. A range of variables for each of these factors has been found to cause attitude change.
- The elaboration-likelihood model proposes that people may adapt one of two approaches to information: superficial or systematic. Superficial information processing results in low elaboration with the person following a peripheral route. Systematic results in high elaboration causing the person to follow a central route.
- High motivation and/or high cognitive capacity will usually lead to a person following a central (high elaboration) route. Attitude change is more enduring when information is processed through a central route.
- Cultural differences have shown Americans to be more influenced by advertisements emphasising individuality while advertisements emphasising collectivity had greater influence over Asians.
- People may resist persuasive communications and attitude change through reactance, forewarning and selective avoidance.
- Social psychologists have had an enduring interest in how and when attitudes influence behaviour. The classic study of La Piere demonstrated a poor link; however, a general attitude should not be compared with a specific attitude in this context.
- Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action takes into account subjective norms, a person's attitude towards the behaviour and behavioural intentions in predicting behaviour from knowledge of a person's attitudes.
- The theory of reasoned action was modified to take account of the perceived control a person has over the behaviour; this is called the theory of planned behaviour.
- Fazio proposed that attitudes which come readily and easily to mind may have an automatic influence on behaviour. This happens for general attitudes and attitudes that are readily accessible.
- The study of attitudes has received extensive application in health psychology. Theory and research here aim to change both attitudes and behaviour to promote a healthy lifestyle.

3.10 Suggestions for further reading

Eagly, A. H. and Chaiken, S. 1993: *The Psychology of Attitudes*. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
   Provides a comprehensive, readable and reasonably up-to-date review of theory, research and advances in the general field of attitudes.
Hewstone, M., Stroebe, W. and Stephenson, G. M. (ed.) 1996: *Introduction to Social Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
   Provides two good chapters on attitude structure, measurement and function, and attitude formation and change by leading European researchers. Up-to-date with good critical analysis.

Oppenheim, A. N. 1992: *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement.* 2nd edition. London: Pinter.

> Second edition of a classic text expanded to include more on the pros and cons of different approaches to attitude measurement. Good advice for avoiding pitfalls when designing a study to measure attitudes.

Stroebe, W. and Stroebe, M. S. 1995: *Social Psychology and Health.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

> Follows on from the application given in this chapter to show a wider range of ways in which theory, concepts and principles in attitudes and attitude change apply to a variety of health aspects.