

# 6

## Attitudes: Content, Structure and Functions

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### KEY CONCEPTS

affective component of attitude  
attitude  
attitude-behaviour relation  
attitude function  
attitudinal ambivalence  
behavioural component of attitude  
cognitive component of attitude  
explicit measures of attitude  
implicit measures of attitude  
mere exposure effect  
MODE model  
multicomponent model of attitude  
one-dimensional perspective of attitudes  
self-monitoring  
self-perception theory  
socially desirable responding  
theory of planned behaviour  
theory of reasoned action  
two-dimensional perspective of attitudes



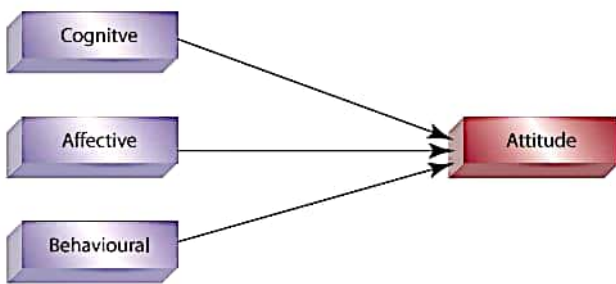


Figure 6.1 The multicomponent model of attitude.

### The affective component of attitudes

**affective component of attitude** the feelings or emotions associated with an attitude object.

The *affective component of attitudes* refers to feelings or emotions associated with an attitude object. Affective responses influence attitudes in

a number of ways. A primary way in which feelings affect attitudes is due to affective reactions that are aroused in the individual after exposure to the attitude object. For instance, many people indicate that spiders make them feel scared. These negative affective responses are likely to produce a negative attitude towards spiders.

Feelings can become associated with attitude objects in several ways. A number of researchers have used classical conditioning paradigms to assess how pairing affective information with an attitude object can produce a positive or negative attitude. For example, Krosnick, Betz, Jussim and Lynn (1992) conducted a study in which participants were presented with a series of pictures of an unfamiliar person. Importantly, each picture was preceded by an affect-arousing image that was presented at a subliminal level, that is, at very brief exposure below the threshold necessary for conscious encoding (see Chapter 4, this volume). For some participants, these images were negative (e.g., a bucket of snakes, a bloody shark), while for other participants these images were positive (e.g., a pair of kittens, a couple getting married). After seeing the pictures of the unfamiliar person, participants were asked to evaluate this individual. As can be seen in Figure 6.2, Krosnick et al. found that participants who were subliminally presented with the positive images liked the individual more compared with participants who were subliminally presented with the negative images. Not only were participants' attitudes affected by the subliminal presentations, so too were their perceptions of the target person's personality characteristics and physical attractiveness.

In addition to classical conditioning and subliminal priming, another way in which affect guides attitudes comes from research by Zajonc and colleagues (e.g., Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980; Murphy & Zajonc, 1993; Zajonc, 1968). These researchers argue that attitudes are formed on the basis of affective responses that precede conscious thought.

**mere exposure effect** increase in liking for an object as a result of being repeatedly exposed to it.

To test this hypothesis, studies have examined how the *mere exposure* of stimuli can influence an attitude. In these

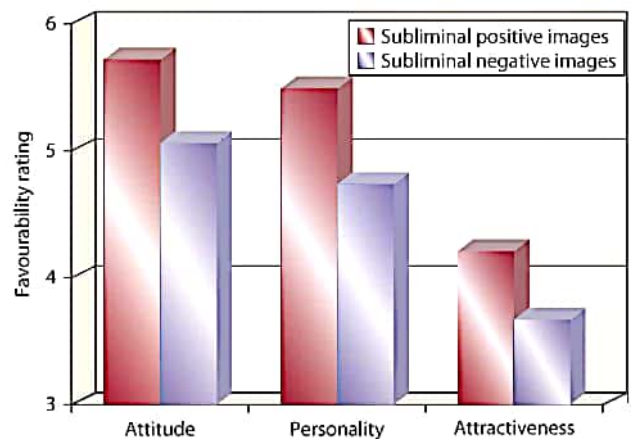


Figure 6.2 The influence of subliminal priming on social perceptions (adapted from Krosnick et al., 1992).

studies, different types of unfamiliar stimuli (e.g., various Chinese characters) are presented to participants a certain number of times. They are then shown again to participants along with other, novel stimuli (e.g., new characters), and participants' attitudes towards the familiar and unfamiliar characters are measured. A large number of studies have revealed that stimuli that have been presented many times are liked more than stimuli that have not been seen before. For instance, in one study by Zajonc (1968), participants were initially shown 12 different Chinese characters. During this exposure phase, each character was shown either 25 times, 10 times, 5 times, twice, once or not at all. Later, participants were asked to indicate how much they liked each character. The results of this study are presented in Figure 6.3. As can be seen, participants' attitudes towards the characters became more positive the more times the character had been seen at the exposure phase. The mere exposure phenomenon helps explain why we sometimes come to like classical music melodies that we hear repeatedly, even when we are unable to recall the artist who composed the music or any details of our prior experiences hearing it.

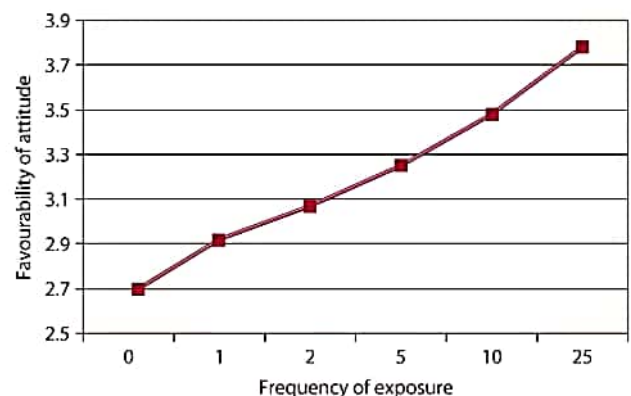


Figure 6.3 The influence of repeated exposure on attitudes (adapted from Zajonc, 1968).



## WHAT IS AN ATTITUDE?

*How can we best define an attitude?  
Can we have attitudes about anything?*

In their influential book *The Psychology of Attitudes*, Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p. 1) define an attitude as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor'. Inherent in this definition is the idea that reporting an attitude involves the expression of an *evaluative judgement* about a stimulus object. In other words, reporting an attitude involves making a decision concerning liking vs. disliking, approving vs. disapproving or favouring vs. disfavouring a particular issue, object or person.

An attitude, when conceptualized as an evaluative judgement, can vary in two important ways. First, attitudes can differ in *valence*, or direction. Some attitudes that a person possesses are positive (like our attitudes towards the Welsh rugby team), others are

negative (like our attitudes towards liver), and yet others are neutral (like our attitudes towards eating fried foods). Second, attitudes can differ in *strength*. For example, while one person might feel very strongly about the Euro, a second person might feel much less strongly about the same topic. You will learn more about different aspects of attitude strength later in this chapter.

Until now, we have used different examples when describing our own attitudes. This leads to an important question – can *anything* be the object of an attitude? Basically, any stimulus that can be evaluated along a dimension of favourability can be conceptualized as an attitude object. As noted by Eagly and Chaiken (1993), some attitude objects are abstract concepts (e.g., 'liberalism'), others are concrete (e.g., a computer). Furthermore, one's own self (e.g., self-esteem) and other individuals (e.g., a particular politician) can serve as attitude objects, as can social policy issues (e.g., capital punishment) and social groups (e.g., people from Canada).

### SUMMARY

Reporting an attitude involves the expression of an evaluative judgement about a stimulus object. Attitudes differ in strength and valence, and any stimulus that can be evaluated along a dimension of favourability can be conceptualized as an attitude object.



### PIONEER

**Alice Eagly** (b. 1938) completed her undergraduate degree at Radcliffe College before pursuing a PhD at the University of Michigan (1965). Her research on attitude change (with Shelly Chaiken) led to the development of the heuristic-systematic model of persuasion. Together, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) wrote *The Psychology of Attitudes*, arguably the most comprehensive volume written on the attitude concept. In addition to her research on the psychology of attitudes, Eagly has made enormous contributions to our understanding of the psychology of gender.



## THE CONTENT OF ATTITUDES

*Can attitudes be influenced by unconsciously learned emotional responses to an object?  
How do beliefs shape attitudes?  
When do people infer (or perceive) their attitudes from their behaviour?*

So far, we have seen that attitudes can be thought of as an overall evaluation (e.g., like–dislike) of an attitude object. This definitional perspective has generated a number of conceptual models of the attitude concept. Historically, one of the most influential models of attitude has been the *multi-component model* (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Zanna & Rempel, 1988). According to this perspective (see Figure 6.1), attitudes are summary evaluations of an object that have *affective, cognitive and behavioural* components. A number of researchers have considered how these three components contribute to the formation and expression of attitudes.

**multicomponent model of attitude** a model of attitude that conceptualizes attitudes as summary evaluations that have affective, cognitive and behavioural components



**Plate 6.1** *How strong is your attitude towards the Euro?*

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

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The study of attitudes is at the core of social psychology. Attitudes refer to our evaluations of people, groups and other types of objects in our social world. Attitudes are an important area of study because they impact both the way we perceive the world and how we behave. In this chapter, we introduce the attitude concept. We consider how attitudes are formed and organized and discuss theories explaining why we hold attitudes. We also address how social psychologists measure attitudes, as well as examining how our attitudes help predict our behaviour.

# Introduction

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All of us like some things and dislike others. For instance, we both like the Welsh national rugby team and dislike liver. A social psychologist would say that we possess a positive *attitude* towards the Welsh rugby team and a negative *attitude* towards liver.

Understanding differences in attitudes across people and uncovering the reasons why people like and dislike different things has long interested social psychologists. Indeed, almost 70 years ago, Gordon Allport (1935, p. 798) asserted that the attitude concept is 'the most distinctive and indispensable concept in . . . social psychology'. That statement remains equally valid today; the study of attitudes remains at the forefront of social psychological research and theory.

**attitude** an overall evaluation of a stimulus object

In this chapter, we introduce a number of important issues regarding the attitude concept. First, we define the term 'attitude'. We will show that expressing an attitude involves making an evaluative judgement about an attitude object. Second, we devote attention to the content of attitudes. We will show that attitudes have affective, cognitive and behavioural components. Third, we consider the structure of attitudes. We will show that attitudes can be organized and structured in different ways. Fourth, we consider the psychological functions or needs that are served by attitudes. We will show that people hold attitudes for a number of reasons. Fifth, we introduce how attitudes are measured, concentrating on direct and indirect strategies that psychologists have developed to measure attitudes. We will show that attitudes can be measured in many different ways. Finally, we review research that has addressed a key question for attitude researchers: under what circumstances do attitudes predict behaviour? We will show that our attitudes and opinions are quite effective in predicting how we behave.





**PIONEER**

Born in Poland, **Robert Zajonc** (b. 1923) completed his PhD at the University of Michigan (1955). He remained at the University of Michigan until 1994. Zajonc's research covered many areas relevant to the psychology of attitudes. His work on the mere exposure effect led to the development of an influential program of study exploring how affective processes influence attitudes and actions. This research led Zajonc to consider the role of unconscious processes in determining preferences and behaviour.



### The cognitive component of attitudes

**cognitive component of attitude** thoughts, beliefs and attributes associated with an attitude object

The *cognitive component of attitudes* refers to beliefs, thoughts and attributes we associate with a particular object. In many cases, a person's attitude might be based primarily upon a consideration of the positive and negative attributes about the attitude object.

For example, when one of us recently bought a new car, he devoted considerable attention to factors such as different vehicles' safety records, petrol mileage, resale value and repair costs. In this example, attitudes towards the different cars were formed via a conscious consideration of the positive and negative characteristics of each car. Cognitions have an impact on many types of attitudes.



**Plate 6.2** Attitudes toward different cars might be based on the positive and negative characteristics of each car.

Within the study of intergroup attitudes (see Chapters 3 and 14, this volume), stereotypes are usually considered as beliefs about the attributes possessed by a particular social group. Further, many studies have revealed that possessing negative stereotypes about a group of people is associated with having a prejudicial attitude towards the group (e.g., Esses, Haddock & Zanna, 1993; Kawakami, Dion & Dovidio, 1998).

Cognitions, in the form of beliefs, are a key part of one approach to attitudes, which argues that attitudes are derived from more elementary cognitions about the attitude object. Specifically, Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) expectancy-value approach describes an attitude towards an object as the sum of 'expectancy × value' products. Expectancies are beliefs or subjective probabilities that the object possesses a certain attribute; these beliefs may range from 0 to 1 in strength. Values, or evaluations, are ratings of the attributes, normally from -3 to +3. An attitude object will be evaluated positively if it is seen as leading to, or associated with, positive things and avoiding negative things. Only salient beliefs count towards the overall attitudes; these are beliefs that a person considers most relevant. We can illustrate the model by computing a person's attitude towards the game of golf. This person might think that golf is (1) a valuable form of exercise, (2) a good way to see friends and (3) frustrating. Each of these beliefs will have both an expectancy and a value. For example, exercise might have a high expectancy (.9) and positive evaluation (+3); seeing friends might be perceived as having a lower expected outcome (.7) that is somewhat positive (+2); while frustration is (thankfully!) somewhat infrequent (.3) but very negative (-3). The individual's overall attitude towards golf is computed by summing the belief-evaluation products (e.g.,  $2.7 + 1.4 - .9 = 3.2$ ).

### The behavioural component of attitudes

The *behavioural component of attitudes* refers to past behaviours with respect to an attitude object. For instance, people might infer that they have a negative attitude towards nuclear power plants if they recall having previously signed a petition against having a nuclear power plant built near their neighbourhood.

The idea that people might infer their attitudes on the basis of their previous actions was developed by Bem. According to Bem's (1972) *self-perception theory*, individuals do not always have access to their opinions about different objects (see also Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Bem argued that this is especially likely when the person's attitude is particularly weak or ambiguous. Many studies have shown results consistent with this reasoning. For example, Chaiken and Baldwin (1981) asked participants to complete a questionnaire containing items that were framed in a way to remind people of either their pro-environment behaviours (e.g., picking up the garbage of others) or their

**behavioural component of attitude** past behaviours associated with an attitude object

**self-perception theory** a theory which assumes that individuals often do not know their own attitudes and, like outside observers, have to engage in attributional reasoning to infer their attitudes from their own behaviour



anti-environment behaviours (e.g., leaving on lights in unattended rooms). After completing this task, participants indicated their attitude towards the environment. The results were consistent with self-perception theory. When participants had been reminded of their positive behaviours, they reported more favourable attitudes than participants who had been reminded of their negative behaviours. Furthermore, this effect was obtained only among those individuals who, prior to the experiment, had weak attitudes about environmental matters.

Behaviours may also influence strongly held attitudes, but in a different way. Festinger (1954) proposed that people can change their attitudes in order to be consistent with behaviours that they have performed. For example, people might convince themselves that they like several boring tasks if they have just been given a small payment to tell others that the tasks are great (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Many experiments support Festinger's hypothesis that this effect occurs because the counterattitudinal behaviour induces an aversive arousal, which participants are motivated to reduce (Zanna & Cooper, 1974; Zanna, Higgins & Taves, 1976). Additional evidence suggests that this effect is particularly likely to occur when the behaviour is threatening to the self-concept (Holland, Meertens & van Vugt, 2002; see Chapter 7, this volume).

Behaviours also influence attitudes in a more direct way. Research has demonstrated that performing a behaviour that has evaluative implications or connotations influences the favourability of attitudes. For example, Briñol and Petty (2003) conducted a study in which participants believed they were participating in a consumer research study on the quality of headphones. Participants were informed that a headphone manufacturer was interested in determining how headphones performed when listeners were engaged in various movements such as dancing and jogging. Briñol and Petty (2003) had participants move their heads in *either* an up-and-down motion (nodding the head) or a side-to-side motion (shaking the head) as they listened to an editorial played over the headphones. When the arguments contained in the editorial were strong, it was expected that moving one's head in an up-and-down motion would lead participants to be more positive about the position being advocated in the message, because nodding is a motion that is commonly associated with agreement. The results revealed that participants were more likely to agree with the content of a highly persuasive appeal when they moved their heads up and down as compared to side to side (see also Wells & Petty, 1980).

The enactment of other types of behaviour also affects the favourability of individuals' attitudes. For example, Cacioppo, Priester and Berntson (1993) asked participants to engage in either arm flexion (moving one's hand towards the body – a behaviour associated with approach) or arm extension (moving one's hand away from the body – a behaviour associated with avoidance) while viewing a variety of unfamiliar Chinese characters. Later in the experiment, when asked to rate the characters, Cacioppo et al. (1993) found that characters viewed during arm flexion were rated more positively than those viewed during arm extension. Taken together, in both the Briñol and Petty (2003) and Cacioppo et al. (1993) studies, a direct physical behaviour initiated by individuals influenced the favourability of their attitude.

## SUMMARY

Attitudes have affective, cognitive and behavioural components. The affective component refers to feelings or emotions associated with an attitude object. The cognitive component refers to beliefs, thoughts and attributes associated with an attitude object. The behavioural component refers to past behaviours with respect to an attitude object.

## THE STRUCTURE OF ATTITUDES

*What are the two basic perspectives on attitude structure?*

*What is the evidence supporting a one-dimensional attitude structure?*

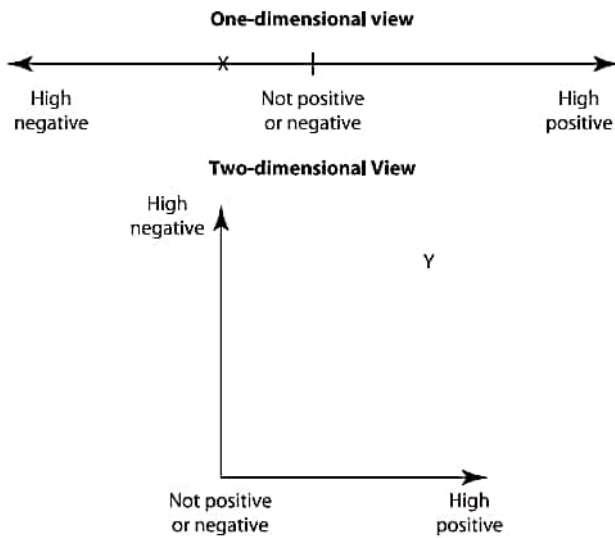
*What are some potential effects of attitudinal ambivalence?*

In addition to considering the content of attitudes, another important issue concerns how positive and negative evaluations are organized within and among the affective, cognitive and behavioural components of attitudes. It is typically assumed that the existence of positive feelings, beliefs and behaviours inhibits the occurrence of negative feelings, beliefs and behaviours. For example, this framework suggests that an individual with positive feelings, beliefs and behaviours about the Welsh rugby team is unlikely to have negative feelings, beliefs and behaviours about this team. In other words, according to this *one-dimensional perspective of attitudes*, the positive and negative elements are stored in memory at opposite ends of a single dimension, and people tend to experience either end of the dimension or a location in between.

This one-dimensional view is opposed by a *two-dimensional perspective of attitudes*, which suggests that positive and negative elements are stored along two separate dimensions (Cacioppo, Gardner & Berntson, 1997). One dimension reflects whether the attitude has few or many positive elements, and the other dimension reflects whether the attitude has few or many negative elements. This view proposes that people can possess any combination of positivity or negativity in their attitudes. Consistent with the one-dimensional view, attitudes may consist of few positive and many negative elements, few negative and many positive, or few positive and few negative (i.e., a neutral position). Inconsistent with the one-dimensional view, attitudes might occasionally subsume many positive *and* many negative elements, leading to

**one-dimensional perspective of attitudes**  
a perspective that perceives positive and negative elements as stored along a single dimension

**two-dimensional perspective of attitudes**  
a perspective that perceives positive and negative elements as stored along separate dimensions



**Figure 6.4** The one-dimensional and two-dimensional perspectives of attitude.

**attitudinal ambivalence** an instance where an individual both likes and dislikes an attitude object

**attitudinal ambivalence.** The two-dimensional perspective explicitly allows for this ambivalence to occur, whereas the one-dimensional perspective does not.

The one-dimensional and two-dimensional perspectives are presented in Figure 6.4. The top panel depicts the one-dimensional view of attitudes. Person X, who is plotted on an axis depicting the one-dimensional view, would be slightly negative. The single axis does not permit one to mark Person X as being both negative and positive. The bottom panel of Figure 6.4 depicts the two-dimensional view of attitudes, with one axis (from middle to top)

representing variability in negative evaluations and the other axis (from middle to right) depicting variability in positive evaluations. From this perspective, a person can possess high amounts of negativity and positivity towards an object. For example, Person Y in the figure could be considered highly ambivalent.

Which perspective is superior? At first glance, the two-dimensional perspective seems as though it should be superior because it allows for the same patterns of positivity and negativity as the one-dimensional view, while also allowing for ambivalence. For instance, it is difficult to interpret the meaning of the neutral point in one-dimensional scales for assessing attitudes (Kaplan, 1972). Imagine that people were asked to report their attitude towards eating fried foods on a nine-point scale that ranged from '1 – extremely unfavourable' to '9 – extremely favourable' as the end points, with '5 – neither unfavourable nor favourable' in the middle. If someone indicated that his or her attitude was neutral (e.g., 'neither favourable nor unfavourable'), it is half-way between the most extreme positive response option (e.g., 'extremely favourable') and the most extreme negative response option (e.g., 'extremely unfavourable'). People could choose this option because it is a compromise between many positive and negative elements of their attitude (e.g., they have many positive and negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours regarding eating fried foods) or because they have no positive or negative elements whatsoever (e.g., they have never eaten fried foods).

The failure to distinguish between these two reasons for the neutral selection is important, because measures that directly assess ambivalence predict a variety of outcomes. The best known outcome is *response polarization* (Bell & Esses, 2002; MacDonald & Zanna, 1998; see Research close-up 6.1). People who are highly ambivalent towards an object are more strongly influenced by features of their environment that make salient its positive or negative attributes. This causes them to behave more favourably towards the object when the positive elements are salient than when the negative elements are salient. In contrast, non-ambivalent people are less strongly influenced by the acute salience of the positive or negative attributes.



### RESEARCH CLOSE-UP 6.1

#### Consequences of ambivalent attitudes

MacDonald, T.K. & Zanna, M.P. (1998). Cross-dimension ambivalence toward social groups: Can ambivalence affect intentions to hire feminists? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 427–441.

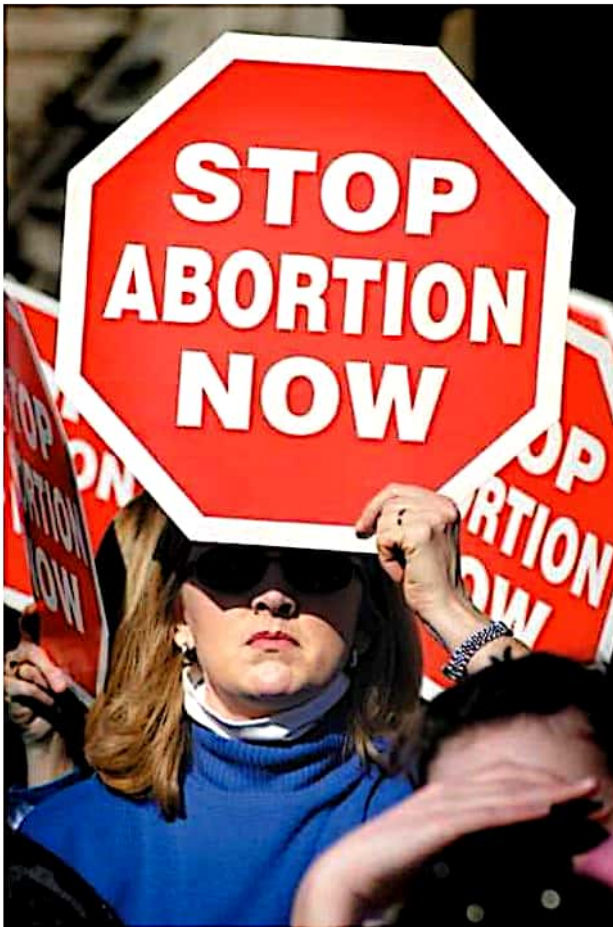
#### Introduction

One of the reasons for the emergence of attitudinal ambivalence as an important construct is its potential to explain why people

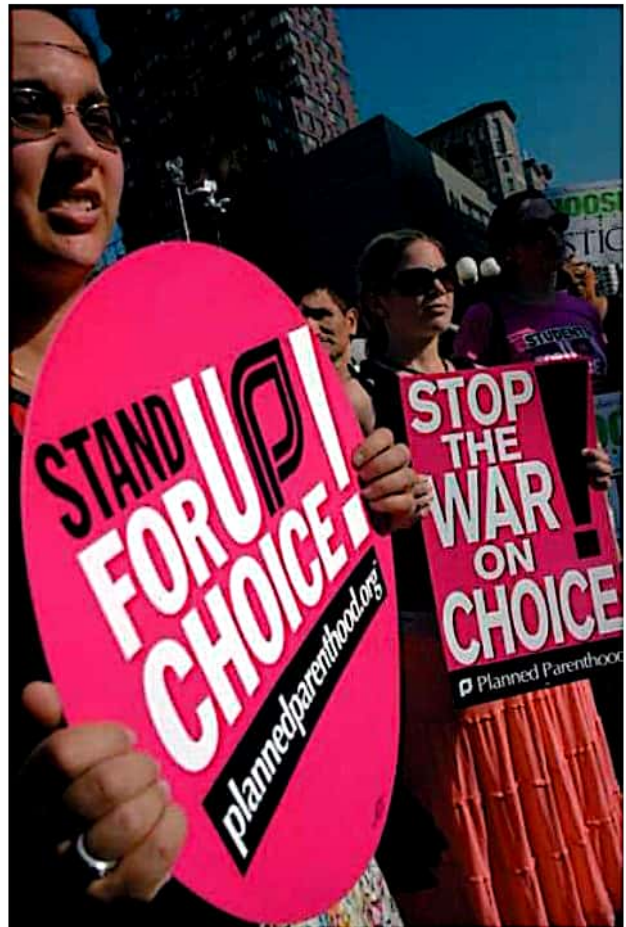
sometimes react in very polarized ways to controversial groups or issues. This notion was illustrated nicely in MacDonald and Zanna's (1998) research, which examined consequences of students' ambivalence towards feminists. In an initial set of data, these investigators found that some students tended to both admire feminists *and* dislike them. This pattern can be labelled as cognitive-affective ambivalence, because it represents conflict between how the individuals think (e.g., admire feminists for their perceived courage) and feel (e.g., dislike feminists because of their perceived stridency). The investigators' second study, which is the focus of this close-up, examined



(a)



(b)



**Plates 6.4a and b** Attitudes toward abortion might be based on freedom of choice and sanctity of human life.

highly accessible attitudes increase the ease with which people make attitude-relevant judgements. For example, people who have accessible attitudes towards an abstract painting have been shown to be subsequently faster at deciding whether they prefer the painting over another painting (see Fazio, 2000).

Another program of research has revealed that the strength of the object-appraisal motivation is influenced by differences across people in the need for closure, which is a 'desire for a definite answer on some topic, any answer as opposed to confusion and ambiguity' (Kruglanski, 1989, p. 14). As applied to the study of attitudes, object appraisal reflects the notion that attitudes can provide such 'answers', because attitudes help people to make decisions about attitude objects. As a result, a high need for closure should increase the desire to form and maintain attitudes. Kruglanski and colleagues have tested this hypothesis in a number of studies. In one study by Kruglanski, Webster and Klem (1993), some participants (who were either high or low in the need for closure) were initially given sufficient information that allowed them to form an attitude about a legal case, whereas other participants were not given this information (and were unable to form

an initial attitude). Later, all participants were given additional information about the case. The results of the study revealed that the impact of the later information on participants' final attitudes depended upon *both* participants' level of need for closure and whether they had already formed an attitude towards the case. As can be seen in Figure 6.6, among participants who had already formed an attitude based on the initial information, those who were high in need for closure were less persuaded by new information than participants who were low in need for closure. In contrast, if participants had not yet formed an attitude, those who were high in need for closure were more persuaded by new information than participants who were low in need for closure.

### *Instrumental versus value-expressive attitudes*

Several researchers have argued for a distinction between instrumental (or utilitarian) and value-expressive attitudes (e.g., Herek,



an important potential consequence of this ambivalence: polarized evaluations of a feminist's suitability for employment. The researchers expected that ambivalent people would be more strongly influenced by a prior event, which was whether a prior candidate who was admirable-but-dislikeable succeeded or failed in an interview.

## Method

### Participants

One hundred and two students (76 women and 26 men) took part for psychology course credit.

### Design and procedure

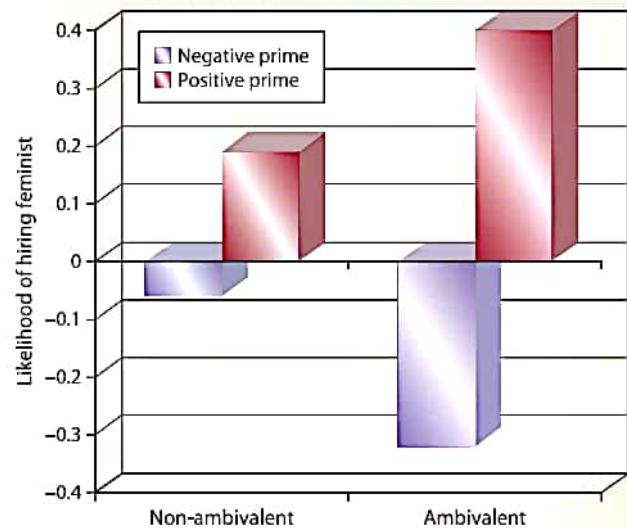
The basic design included two factors: cognitive-affective ambivalence (high or low) and prime (either positive or negative). Ambivalence was measured using a questionnaire that was presented before the main study. This questionnaire asked the participants to use several scales to rate the extent to which they admired feminists (e.g., worthy of respect) and liked them (e.g., likeable). Participants who reported admiring feminists while disliking them (or liking but not admiring them) were classified as ambivalent, whereas participants who were similar in their levels of liking and admiration of feminists (either similarly high or similarly low) were classified as non-ambivalent.

These ambivalent and non-ambivalent participants were informed in a subsequent experimental session that they were taking part in a study of how people make hiring decisions. They listened to a 10-minute audio recording of a job interview, which featured an admirable but dislikeable man who was to be successful (positive prime condition) or unsuccessful with his application (negative prime condition). Participants then completed questions about the candidate's admirable qualities (positive prime condition) or dislikeable qualities (negative prime condition).

Finally, participants received, read and evaluated the applications of several women, including one who had completed a thesis and jobs that suggested a feminist political perspective. As part of this final task, participants rated the likelihood that they would hire each woman for a job (e.g., magazine editorial assistant, ombudsman). These ratings were made using different types of scales (e.g., 0% to 100%). To interpret these ratings, the responses were converted to standardized scores, such that very low values (e.g., -2) indicated low likelihood of hiring the candidate and very high values (e.g., +2) indicated high likelihood of hiring the candidate.

## Results

The primary dependent measure was the rated likelihood of hiring the feminist applicant. As shown in Figure 6.5, participants



**Figure 6.5** Intentions to hire feminists as a function of cognitive-affective ambivalence and type of prime.

who exhibited a high degree of ambivalence towards feminists reported stronger intentions to hire the feminist candidate after seeing the admirable-but-dislikeable male candidate succeed than after seeing him fail. In contrast, participants who exhibited a low degree of ambivalence towards feminists were less affected by the success or failure of the admirable-but-dislikeable male candidate. Thus, only the ambivalent participants' intentions were affected by the prime.

## Discussion

MacDonald and Zanna (1998) concluded that cognitive-affective ambivalence has important consequences for behaviour. When people possess this ambivalence, making them mindful of either the cognitive (e.g., admiration) or affective (e.g., dislike) elements of their attitudes causes their behaviour to reflect the salient elements. As a result, ambivalent people might appear to strongly favour a person who is a target of their ambivalence (e.g., a feminist) in some situations (e.g., after a positive event), but strongly disfavour the individual in other situations (e.g., after a negative event). Thus, behaviour that may seem quizzical and contradictory on the surface may be explicable by considering the extent to which there is ambivalence in the underlying attitude.

## SUMMARY

An important issue related to attitudes concerns how positive and negative evaluations are organized within and among the affective, cognitive and behavioural components of attitude. The one-dimensional view postulates that the positive and negative elements are stored as opposite ends of a single dimension. The two-dimensional view postulates that positive and negative elements are stored along two separate dimensions.

## WHY DO WE HOLD ATTITUDES?

*What is the most basic psychological need served by attitudes? How might knowledge of attitude functions influence choice of persuasive messages in advertising campaigns? Do people vary in the functions of their attitudes?*

Individuals hold attitudes for a variety of reasons. For example, our attitudes towards the Welsh rugby team developed from many of our friends and colleagues supporting the same team. In contrast, our attitudes towards abortion are based on the value we place on an individual's freedom of choice and the sanctity of human life. Over the years, attitude researchers have devoted considerable attention to understanding the needs or functions that are fulfilled by attitudes.

**attitude function** the psychological need fulfilled by an attitude

The most prominent models of *attitude functions* were developed almost 50 years ago (Katz, 1960; Smith,



**Plate 6.3** Attitudes towards, e.g., the Welsh rugby team may be developed from friends supporting the same team.

Bruner & White, 1956). Smith et al. (1956) suggested that attitudes serve three primary functions or needs: object appraisal, social adjustment and externalization. *Object appraisal* refers to the ability of attitudes to summarize the positive and negative attributes of objects in our social world. For example, attitudes can help people to approach things that are beneficial for them and avoid things that are harmful to them (Maio, Esses, Arnold & Olson, 2004). *Social adjustment* is fulfilled by attitudes that help us to identify with people we like and to dissociate from people we dislike. For example, individuals may buy a certain soft drink because it is endorsed by their favourite singer. *Externalization* is fulfilled by attitudes that defend the self against internal conflict. For example, bad golfers might develop an intense dislike for the game because their poor performance threatens their self-esteem.

In his own program of research, Katz (1960) proposed four attitude functions, some of which relate to those proposed by Smith et al. (1956): knowledge, utility, ego defence and value expression. The *knowledge* function represents the ability of attitudes to organize information about attitude objects, while the *utilitarian* function exists in attitudes that maximize rewards and minimize punishments obtained from attitude objects. These functions are similar to Smith et al.'s (1956) object-appraisal function. Katz's *ego-defensive* function exists in attitudes that serve to protect an individual's self-esteem and is similar to Smith et al.'s (1956) externalization function. Finally, Katz proposed that attitudes may serve a *value-expressive* function, such that an attitude may express an individual's self-concept and central values. For example, a person might cycle to work because she values health and wishes to preserve the environment.

A number of themes have developed from research on attitude functions since the development of these theoretical perspectives. Here, we focus on two important developments. First, evidence implies that strongly held attitudes fulfil an object-appraisal function. Second, a distinction between instrumental attitudes (those that serve a utilitarian function) and symbolic attitudes (those that serve a value-expressive function) appears to be useful. In the following sections, we describe evidence regarding these observations.

### Object appraisal

Smith et al.'s (1956) object-appraisal function (which combines aspects of Katz's utilitarian and knowledge functions) perhaps best explains why people form attitudes in the first place. This function suggests that attitudes classify objects in the environment for the purposes of action. In their description of the object-appraisal function, Smith et al. suggested that attitudes are *energy-saving devices*, because attitudes make attitude-relevant judgements faster and easier to perform. Two programs of research have directly supported this line of reasoning, while suggesting important caveats. First, Fazio (1995, 2000) argued that the object-appraisal function should be more strongly served by attitudes that are high in accessibility. This prediction is based on the assumption that strong attitudes guide relevant judgements and behaviour, whereas weak attitudes will have little effect during judgement and behaviour processes. Consistent with this hypothesis, research has shown that

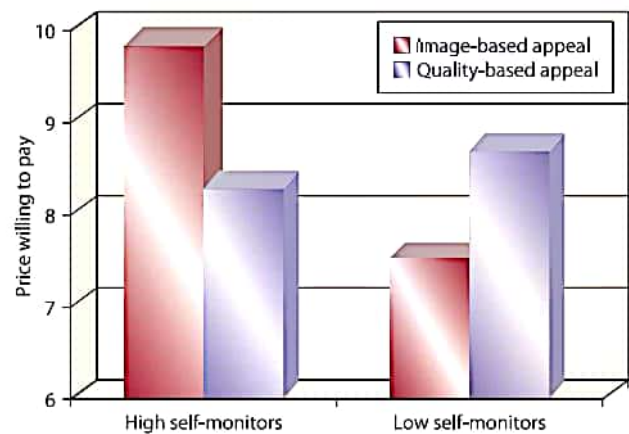


**self-monitoring** an individual difference construct concerning differences in how people vary their behaviour across social situations

(1985) found that individual differences in self-monitoring affected the persuasiveness of different types of advertisements. *Self-monitoring* (Snyder, 1974, 1987) refers to differences in how people vary their behaviour across social situations. While high self-monitors are oriented to situational cues and finely tune their behaviour to the situation in which they find themselves, low self-monitors tend to behave in ways that are consistent with their core values and tend not to adapt their behaviour to the situation in which they find themselves (see Individual Differences 6.1). As applied to advertising, Snyder and DeBono predicted that high self-monitors might be more influenced by advertisements that convey the positive images associated with using a particular product, while low self-monitors might be more influenced by advertisements that feature the quality of a product.

To test this hypothesis, Snyder and DeBono (1985) presented participants with one of two versions of an advertisement for a particular brand of whisky. In both versions of the advertisement,

(1985) found that individual differences in self-monitoring affected the persuasiveness of different types of advertisements. *Self-monitoring* (Snyder, 1974, 1987) refers to differences



**Figure 6.7** The influence of self-monitoring and appeal type on willingness to pay for a consumer product (adapted from Snyder & DeBono, 1985).

there was a picture of a whisky bottle resting on a set of architects' plans for a house. In one version of the advertisement, the picture was accompanied by the phrase 'You're not just moving in, you're moving up'. In the second version of the advertisement, the same photo was accompanied by the phrase 'When it comes to great taste, everyone draws the same conclusion'. It was predicted that high self-monitors would be more persuaded by the image-based appeal, while low self-monitors would be more persuaded by the quality-based appeal. The results of the study are shown in Figure 6.7. As predicted, Snyder and DeBono (1985) found that high self-monitors were willing to pay more for the whisky when presented with the image-based appeal, whereas low self-monitors were willing to pay more when presented with the quality-based appeal. Further research has demonstrated that these 'match the message to the function' effects occur because people devote more attention to convincing arguments that match the function of their attitude than to convincing arguments that do not match the function of their attitude (Petty & Wegener, 1998b).

## INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES 6.1

### Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring refers to differences in how people vary their behaviour across social situations (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors are oriented to situational cues and tune their behaviour to the social situation, whereas low self-monitors tend to behave in ways that are consistent with their values and tend not to mould their behaviour to the social situation. Self-monitoring is assessed by a scale developed by Snyder (1974). Sample items are listed below. For each item, respondents are asked whether the statement is true or false as applied to them.

- 1 I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information.
- 2 I can only argue for ideas which I already believe.
- 3 When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behaviour of others for cues.
- 4 My behaviour is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes and beliefs.
- 5 In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.
- 6 I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favour.

High self-monitors would be more likely to judge statements 1, 3 and 5 as true of themselves, whereas low self-monitors would be more likely to judge statements 2, 4 and 6 as true of themselves.

### SUMMARY

Individuals hold attitudes for a variety of reasons. The most prominent models of attitude functions were developed almost 50 years ago by Smith et al. (1956) and Katz (1960). Among the functions, the object-appraisal function is especially important as it suggests that attitudes serve as energy-saving devices that make judgements easier and faster to perform. There is also an important distinction between instrumental and value-expressive attitudes. Knowing the primary function of an attitude is important, because attempts at attitude change are more likely to be successful when the persuasive appeal matches the function of the attitude.



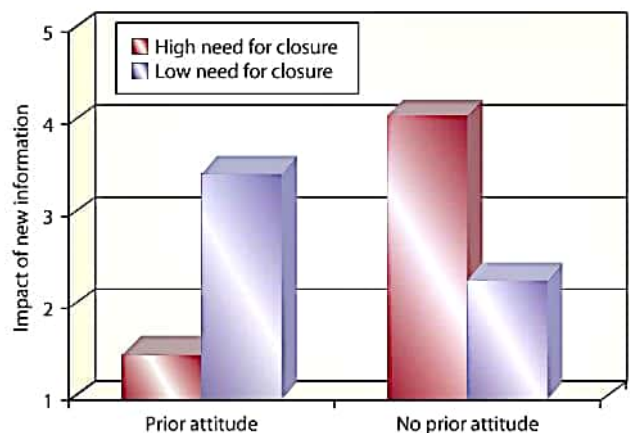
**Plate 6.5** A person might cycle to work because she values health and wishes to preserve the environment.



**Plate 6.6** How accessible is your attitude towards Queen Elizabeth II?

1986; Prentice, 1987; Sears, 1988). Instrumental attitudes classify attitude objects according to their ability to promote self-interest, whereas value-expressive attitudes express concerns about self-image and personal values. Many lines of research support the distinction between instrumental and value-expressive attitudes. First, some attitude *objects* elicit attitudes that are associated primarily with one or the other of these functions. For example, Shavitt (1990) found that people's thoughts about air conditioners and coffee focus on the utility of the objects, whereas thoughts about greeting cards and national flags tend to focus on the objects' capacity to symbolize the self and social values.

Second, evidence indicates that people are more persuaded by messages containing arguments that match the primary function of their attitudes than by messages containing arguments that do not match the primary function of their attitudes. For example, Shavitt (1990) found that instrumental advertisements for products about which people held instrumental attitudes (e.g., an air conditioner) were more persuasive than symbolic advertisements for instrumental products. Similarly, Snyder and DeBono



**Figure 6.6** The impact of new information by prior attitude and need for closure (adapted from Kruglanski et al., 1993).