

Theoretical Approaches to Persuasive Effects

In the five chapters that follow, five different theoretical approaches to understanding persuasive effects are surveyed. Two of these (social judgment theory, discussed in Chapter 2, and the elaboration likelihood model, discussed in Chapter 6) are viewpoints distinctively focused on persuasive communication. The other approaches (information-integration models of attitude, in Chapter 3; cognitive dissonance theory, in Chapter 4; and the theory of reasoned action, in Chapter 5), though not directly theories of persuasion, nevertheless are viewpoints that have enjoyed prominence in the study of persuasion. In good measure this is a consequence of persuasion's having been conceptualized as fundamentally involving attitude change, for the approaches surveyed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 either are or grew out of theories of attitude. All the views considered here, however, have stimulated relatively extensive research and have reasonably well-considered applications to persuasion and social influence processes.

2

Social Judgment Theory

Judgments of Alternative Positions on an Issue	30
The Ordered Alternatives Questionnaire	30
The Concept of Ego-Involvement	32
Ego-Involvement and the Latitudes	33
Measures of Ego-Involvement	34
Reactions to Communications	35
Assimilation and Contrast Effects	35
Attitude Change Effects	36
Assimilation and Contrast Effects Reconsidered	38
Critical Assessment	40
The Confounding of Involvement with Other Variables	40
The Concept of Involvement	41
The Measures of Involvement	41
Conclusion	43

SOCIAL JUDGMENT THEORY is a theoretical perspective most closely associated with Muzaffer Sherif, Carolyn Sherif, and their associates, particularly Carl Hovland and Roger Nebergall (C. W. Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965; M. Sherif & Hovland, 1961; for a classic review, see C. A. Kiesler, Collins, & Miller, 1969, pp. 238-301; for additional discussions, see Granberg, 1982; C. W. Sherif, 1980). The central tenet of social judgment theory is that attitude change is mediated by judgmental processes and effects. More specifically, the claim is that the effect of a persuasive communication depends upon the way in which the receiver evaluates the position it advocates. Thus persuasion is seen

as a two-step process in which initially the receiver assesses the position advocated by the message, and attitude change occurs after that judgment (with the amount and direction of change dependent upon that judgment). As the receiver's assessment of the position being forwarded by the communication varies, different persuasive effects will occur.

The plausibility of this general approach should be apparent. It surely seems likely that our reaction to a particular persuasive communication will depend (at least in part) on what we think of (how favorable we are toward) the point of view it advocates. But this suggests that, in order to understand a receiver's reaction to a message on a given issue, it is important to understand how the receiver assesses the various positions on that issue (that is, the various stands that a message might advocate). Hence the next section discusses the nature of persons' judgments of the alternative positions on an issue. A subsequent section discusses receivers' reactions to persuasive messages. A concluding section explores some criticisms of social judgment theory.

JUDGMENTS OF ALTERNATIVE POSITIONS ON AN ISSUE

On any given persuasive issue, there are likely to be a number of different positions or points of view available. Consider, for example, some different possible stands on an issue such as abortion: One might think that all abortion should be illegal, or that a legal abortion should be permitted only if childbirth would bring about the woman's death, or that a legal abortion should be permitted only during the first three months of pregnancy, or that a woman should be permitted to have a legal abortion whenever she requests it (and of course these don't exhaust the possibilities). A person is likely to have varying assessments of these different positions — a person will likely find some of the positions acceptable, some of the positions objectionable, and some neither particularly acceptable nor unacceptable. Since, from a social judgment theory point of view, the person's reaction to a persuasive communication on this topic will depend on the person's judgment of the position the message advocates, it is important to be able to assess persons' judgments of the various possible positions. The assessment procedure offered by social judgment theory is known as the Ordered Alternatives questionnaire.

THE ORDERED ALTERNATIVES QUESTIONNAIRE

An Ordered Alternatives questionnaire provides the respondent with a set of statements, each representing a different point of view on the issue being studied. These statements are chosen so as to represent the range of positions on the issue (from the extreme view on one side to the extreme view on the other), and are arranged in order (from one extreme to the other) — hence the name "Ordered Alternatives." (Commonly, 9 or 11 statements are used, but what is important is that all the prevailing views on the issue are somehow represented in rank order.) For example, the following Ordered Alternatives

ceiver assesses the position
curs after that judgment (with
upon that judgment). As the
ard y the communication

d be apparent. It surely seems
communication will depend
able we are toward) the point
der to understand a receiver's
ortant to understand how the
ue (that is, the various stands
ection discusses the nature of
on an issue. A subsequent
ive messages. A concluding
nt theory.

y to be a number of different
for example, some different
might think that all abortion
be permitted only if childbirth
a legal abortion should be
pregnancy, or that a woman
never she requests it (and of
rson is likely to have varying
n will likely find some of the
ctionable, and some neither
rom a social judgment theory
communication on this topic
ion the message advocates, it
ents of the various possible
y social judgment theory is

IRE

is the respondent with a set of
of view on the issue being
resent the range of positions
to the extreme view on the
me to the other)—hence the
11 statements are used, but
s on the issue are somehow
lwing Ordered Alternatives

questionnaire was developed for research on a presidential election campaign
(M. Sherif & Hovland, 1961, pp. 136-137; for other examples, see Hovland,
Harvey, & Sherif, 1957; C. W. Sherif, 1980).

- _____ (A) The election of the Republican presidential and vice presidential candi-
dates in November is absolutely essential from all angles in the country's
interests.
- _____ (B) On the whole the interests of the country will be served best by the
election of the Republican candidates for president and vice president in
the coming election.
- _____ (C) It seems that the country's interests would be better served if the presi-
dential and vice presidential candidates of the Republican party are
elected this November.
- _____ (D) Although it is hard to decide, it is probable that the country's interests
may be better served if the Republican presidential and vice presidential
candidates are elected in November.
- _____ (E) From the point of view of the country's interests, it is hard to decide
whether it is preferable to vote for the presidential and vice presidential
candidates of the Republican party or the Democratic party in November.
- _____ (F) Although it is hard to decide, it is probable that the country's interests
may be better served if the Democratic presidential and vice presidential
candidates are elected in November.
- _____ (G) It seems that the country's interests would be better served if the presi-
dential and vice presidential candidates of the Democratic party are
elected this November.
- _____ (H) On the whole the interests of the country will be served best by the
election of the Democratic candidates for president and vice president in
the coming election.
- _____ (I) The election of the Democratic presidential and vice presidential candi-
dates in November is absolutely essential from all angles in the country's
interests.

In completing this questionnaire, the respondent is asked initially to indicate
the one statement that he or she finds most acceptable (say, by putting ++ in the
corresponding blank). The respondent is then asked to indicate the other
statements that are acceptable to the respondent (+), the one statement that is
most objectionable to the respondent (XX), and the other statements that are
unacceptable (X). The respondent need not mark every statement as either
acceptable or unacceptable; that is, some of the positions can be neither
accepted nor rejected by the respondent. (For a discussion of procedural details,
see Granberg & Steele, 1974.)

These responses are taken to define the respondent's judgmental latitudes on
that issue. The range of positions that the respondent finds acceptable is said to
form the respondent's *latitude of acceptance*, the positions that the respondent
finds unacceptable constitute the *latitude of rejection*, and the *latitude of
noncommitment* is formed by the positions that the respondent neither accepts
nor rejects.

Obviously, the structure of these judgmental latitudes may vary from person to person. In fact, two respondents might have the same "most acceptable" position, but have very different latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment. For example, suppose that on the presidential election issue Carol and Mary both find statement B most acceptable—their own most preferred position is that, on the whole, the interests of the country will be served best by the election of the Republicans. Mary finds statements A, C, D, and E also acceptable, is noncommittal toward F, G, and H, and rejects only the extreme Democratic statement I; Carol, on the other hand, thinks that A is the only other acceptable statement, is noncommittal regarding C and D, and rejects E, F, G, H, and I. Mary thus has a larger latitude of acceptance than Carol (Mary finds five of the statements acceptable, whereas Carol finds only two so), a larger latitude of noncommitment (three statements as opposed to two), and a smaller latitude of rejection (only one statement is objectionable to Mary, whereas five are to Carol). Notice (to jump ahead for a moment) that even though Carol and Mary have the same most preferred position, they would likely react quite differently to a persuasive communication advocating position E: Mary finds that to be an acceptable position on the issue, but Carol finds it objectionable.

Thus, from the point of view of social judgment theory, a person's stand on an issue must be seen as involving something more than simply the person's most preferred position. Only understanding the person's judgment of the various alternative positions—only understanding the person's latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment—will permit one to understand the individual's reactions to persuasive messages on that issue.

Social judgment theory proposes that there is a systematic source of variation in the structure of these judgmental latitudes: ego-involvement. As the respondent's level of ego-involvement with the issue varies, so will the structure of the judgmental latitudes. Before discussing the nature of this relationship, however, some attention to the concept of ego-involvement is required.

THE CONCEPT OF EGO-INVOLVEMENT

The concept of ego-involvement has been variously described in social judgment theory, and hence there is room for some uncertainty about just what "ego-involvement" comes to (for discussion, see Wilmot, 1971a). However, very broadly speaking, what is meant by "ego-involvement" is in some ways akin to what one might colloquially mean in referring to someone's being "involved with an issue." Thus a person might be said to be ego-involved when the issue has personal significance to the individual, when the person's stand on the issue is central to his or her sense of self (hence "ego-involvement"), when the issue is important to the person, when the person intensely holds a given position, when the person is strongly committed to the position, and so on.

Two additional clarifications may be helpful. First, ego-involvement is issue-specific (see C. W. Sherif, 1980, pp. 37-40). A person might be highly involved in one issue (say, abortion) but not at all involved in another (such as

attitudes may vary from person to person. The same "most acceptable" position, rejection, and noncommitment on an election issue. Carol finds her own most preferred country will be served best by positions A, C, D, and E also, and rejects only the extreme position. She thinks that A is the only other country she likes, and rejects C and D, and rejects E, F, G, and H. Carol's position is more extreme than Mary's (Mary finds only two so), a larger latitude of acceptance (opposed to two), and a smaller latitude of rejection (objectionable to Mary, whereas five are objectionable to Carol) that even though Carol and Mary would likely react quite differently to position E: Mary finds it objectionable, Carol finds it objectionable. According to social judgment theory, a person's stand on an issue is more than simply the person's position; it is the person's judgment of the issue. The person's latitudes of acceptance and rejection permit one to understand the person's attitude on that issue.

There is a systematic source of variation in attitudes: ego-involvement. As the issue varies, so will the structure of the person's latitudes. The nature of this relationship, and the level of ego-involvement required, is what social judgment theory describes.

As previously described in social judgment theory, there is some uncertainty about just what "ego-involvement" is (see Wilmot, 1971a). However, "ego-involvement" is in some ways referring to someone's being personally involved. It is said to be ego-involved when a person's stand on an issue is based on the person's own intense feelings about the position, and so on. For example, a person might be highly involved in another (such as

environmental protection). That is to say, ego-involvement is not a personality characteristic such that persons who are highly involved on one issue will also be highly involved on most other issues; instead, involvement is topic-specific, in the sense that it can vary from issue to issue.

Second, ego-involvement and extremity of most preferred position are distinct concepts (see C. W. Sherif, 1980, p. 36). That is, to be ego-involved in an issue is not the same thing as holding an extreme position on the issue. For example, one might take an extreme stand on an issue without being highly ego-involved (e.g., I might hold an extreme position on the issue of controlling the federal deficit, even though I'm not especially ego-involved in that stand). And one can be highly ego-involved in a middle-of-the-road position ("I'm strongly committed to this moderate position, my sense of self is connected to my holding this moderate view," and so on). Thus involvement and position extremity are conceptually different.

Social judgment theory does suggest that ego-involvement and position extremity will be empirically related, such that those with more extreme positions on an issue will tend to be more ego-involved in that issue; indeed, M. Sherif and Hovland (1961, pp. 138-140) report research evidence supporting such an empirical relationship. But this empirical relationship should not obscure the conceptual difference between involvement and position extremity. Even though those with extreme positions may tend to be more involved than are those with moderate positions, it is quite possible for persons holding moderate positions to be highly involved (and equally possible for persons with extreme positions to be relatively uninvolved); hence it is important to recognize the conceptual distinction between position extremity and involvement.

EGO-INVOLVEMENT AND THE LATITUDES

Social judgment theory suggests that one's level of ego-involvement on an issue will influence the structure of one's judgmental latitudes on that issue. Specifically, the claim is that as one's level of ego-involvement increases, the size of the latitude of rejection will also increase (and the sizes of the latitudes of acceptance and noncommitment will decrease). Hence highly involved persons are expected to have a relatively large latitude of rejection and relatively small latitudes of acceptance and noncommitment. The more involved person thus will find comparatively few stands on the issue to be acceptable, and won't be neutral (noncommittal) toward very many stands, and will find a comparatively large number of positions to be objectionable.

Obviously, in order to gather evidence bearing on this claim, one needs to have a procedure for assessing ego-involvement. A number of different measurement procedures have been proposed; two of these are discussed in the next section. (Of course, one also needs a procedure for assessing the sizes of the various latitudes; the Ordered Alternatives questionnaire provides such a procedure.)

MEASURES OF EGO-INVOLVEMENT

Several different techniques have been devised for assessing the degree of ego-involvement a person has in a given issue. Two particular measures have commonly been employed, and can serve as useful examples.

SIZE OF THE ORDERED-ALTERNATIVES LATITUDE OF REJECTION As a preliminary way of studying the relationship of ego-involvement to the structures of the judgmental latitudes, the individuals studied were often persons whose involvement levels could be presumed on the basis of their group memberships.¹ One example is provided by Hovland, Harvey, and Sherif's (1957) study of the topic of prohibition in Oklahoma (at a time when that state still had prohibition laws). Some of the participants were recruited from Women's Christian Temperance Union groups, Salvation Army workers, and the like, the presumption being that these persons would be highly involved in the topic. For comparison, other participants were obtained from unselected samples (e.g., undergraduate students). Participants completed an Ordered Alternatives questionnaire, from which the structure of the latitudes could be obtained.

In studies such as these, persons in the presumably higher-involvement groups had larger latitudes of rejection than did presumably less involved participants (for a general review of such work, see C. W. Sherif et al., 1965). On the basis of such results, the size of the latitude of rejection on the Ordered Alternatives questionnaire has been recommended as a measure of ego-involvement (e.g., Granberg, 1982, p. 313; C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, p. 234): The larger one's latitude of rejection, the greater one's degree of involvement.

Of course, as the latitude of rejection increases in size, the combined size of the latitudes of acceptance and noncommitment must necessarily decrease. It appears that it is primarily the latitude of noncommitment that shrinks—that is, with an increase in the size of the latitude of rejection, there is a decrease in the size of the latitude of noncommitment, and little change in the size of the latitude of acceptance (for a review, see C. W. Sherif et al., 1965). This regularity has sometimes led to the suggestion that the size of the latitude of noncommitment can serve as an index of involvement (e.g., C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, p. 234), but the size of the latitude of rejection is the far more frequently studied index.

OWN-CATEGORIES PROCEDURE A second measure of ego-involvement was derived from what is called the "own-categories" procedure. Participants are provided with a large number of statements (60 or more) on the topic of interest, and are asked to sort these statements into however many categories they think necessary to represent the range of positions on the issue. They are told to sort the items such that those in a given category seem to reflect the same basic viewpoint on the topic, and so hang together as a category. (For procedural details, see C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, pp. 92-126.) What is of central interest here is the *number* of categories created by a respondent.² As in the studies of the Ordered Alternatives questionnaire, results were compared from selected and

sed for assessing the degree of
Two particular measures have
eful niples.

ATTITUDE OF REJECTION As a
f ego-involvement to the struc-
als studied were often persons
d on the basis of their group
Hovland, Harvey, and Sherif's
ahoma (at a time when that state
rticipants were recruited from
s, Salvation Army workers, and
ons would be highly involved in
were obtained from unselected
icipants completed an Ordered
ncture of the latitudes could be

presumably higher-involvement
1 did presumably less involved
rk, see C. W. Sherif et al., 1965).
itude of rejection on the Ordered
ided as a measure of ego-involvement
rif et al., 1965, p. 234): The larger
egree of involvement.

ases in size, the combined size of
ent must necessarily decrease. It
ommitment that shrinks—that is,
ejection, there is a decrease in the
l little change in the size of the
C. W. Sherif et al., 1965). This
on t... the size of the latitude of
olvement (e.g., C. W. Sherif et al.,
ejection is the far more frequently

nd measure of ego-involvement
ategories" procedure. Participants
ents (60 or more) on the topic of
nts into however many categories
of positions on the issue. They are
n category seem to reflect the same
ether as a category. (For procedural
26.) What is of central interest here
spondent.² As in the studies of the
were compared from selected and

unselected respondents whose involvement levels could be presumed on inde-
pendent grounds.

Systematic differences were observed in the number of categories employed.
Those participants who were presumably highly involved created fewer cate-
gories than did low-involvement participants. Such results suggested the use of
the own-categories procedure as an index of ego-involvement: The fewer
categories created, the greater the degree of ego-involvement (e.g., C. W. Sherif
et al., 1965, p. 126).

This result can seem to be counterintuitive, but it makes good sense from the
perspective of social judgment theory—particularly against the backdrop of
assimilation and contrast effects (to be discussed shortly). With increasing
involvement, increased perceptual distortion is thought to be likely. When
involvement is exceptionally high, the individual's thinking takes on an abso-
lutist, black-or-white quality; in such a case, only two categories might be
thought to be necessary by the respondent ("Here are the few statements
representing the right point of view—the one I hold—and here are all the
wrongheaded ones"). Thus it is that social judgment theory expects that greater
involvement will mean fewer categories created in the own-categories pro-
cedure.³

As is probably apparent, the own-categories procedure is rather cumbersome
for large-scale administration, especially compared to an Ordered Alternatives
questionnaire. Not surprisingly, of these two means of assessing ego-involvement,
the more frequently used index has been the size of the latitude of
rejection on the Ordered Alternatives questionnaire.

REACTIONS TO COMMUNICATIONS

Social judgment theory holds that a receiver's reaction to a given persuasive
communication will depend centrally on how he or she assesses the point of
view it is advocating. This implies that, in reacting to a persuasive message, the
receiver must initially come to decide just what position the message is forward-
ing. Social judgment theory suggests that, in reaching this judgment (about
what position is being advocated), the receiver may be subject to perceptual
distortions termed "assimilation and contrast effects."

ASSIMILATION AND CONTRAST EFFECTS

Assimilation and contrast effects are perceptual effects concerning the judg-
ment of what position is being advocated by a persuasive message. An assimila-
tion effect is said to occur when the receiver perceives the message as
advocating a position closer to his or her own position than it actually does; that
is, an assimilation effect involves the receiver minimizing the difference
between the message's position and the receiver's position. A contrast effect is
said to occur when the receiver perceives the message as advocating a position
further away from (more discrepant from) his or her own position than it
actually does; thus a contrast effect involves the receiver's exaggerating the
difference between the message's position and the receiver's position.⁴

Social judgment theory offers a rule of thumb concerning the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects (see C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, p. 129). Broadly speaking, a communication advocating a position that falls in the receiver's latitude of acceptance is likely to be assimilated (perceived as even closer to the receiver's own view), and a communication advocating a position in the latitude of rejection will probably be contrasted (perceived as even more discrepant from the receiver's view). In the latitude of noncommitment, it appears that one might find either assimilation or contrast effects; social judgment theory does not clearly identify the point at which assimilation effects stop and contrast effects begin, but this point seems likely to occur somewhere in the latitude of noncommitment but close to the latitude of rejection (see C. A. Kiesler et al., 1969, p. 247).

Notice, thus, that the perceived position of a persuasive communication may be different for persons with differing stands on the issue. An illustration of this phenomenon was offered by M. Sherif and Hovland (1961, p. 151), who constructed a message concerning a presidential election. The communication briefly listed the claims of the two major parties on various campaign issues, but did not take sides or draw clear conclusions; that is, the message represented something like position E—the middle position—on the Ordered Alternatives questionnaire presented above. When pro-Republican respondents were asked what position the message advocated, they characterized it as being slightly pro-Democratic; pro-Democratic respondents, on the other hand, saw the message as being slightly pro-Republican. Both groups of respondents thus exhibited a contrast effect, exaggerating the difference between the message and their own stand on the issue. (For other research illustrating assimilation and contrast effects, see Atkins, Deaux, & Bieri, 1967; Hurwitz, 1986; Manis, 1960; C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, pp. 149-163.)

Assimilation and contrast effects appear to be magnified by ego-involvement. That is, there is a greater degree of perceptual distortion (regarding what position a message is advocating) as the receiver's degree of involvement increases (C. W. Sherif, Kelly, Rodgers, Sarup, & Tittler, 1973; C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, p. 159). However, it appears that assimilation and contrast effects are minimized by messages that make clear what position is being advocated. That is, only relatively ambiguous communications are subject to assimilation and contrast effects (see Granberg & Campbell, 1977; C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, p. 153; M. Sherif & Hovland, 1961, p. 153). When a persuader makes clear just what view is being forwarded, assimilation and contrast effects are minimized.

ATTITUDE CHANGE EFFECTS

Whether receivers will change their attitudes following reception of a persuasive communication is said by social judgment theory to depend on what position the message is perceived to be advocating—that is, the perceived location of the communication with respect to the latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment. The basic principle offered by social judgment theory is this: A communication that is perceived to advocate a position that falls

ning the occurrence of
, 1965, p. 129). Broadly
t falls in the receiver's
ved as even closer to the
a p c n in the latitude
s even more discrepant
ment, it appears that one
d judgment theory does
ffects stop and contrast
where in the latitude of
see C. A. Kiesler et al.,

ive communication may
e. An illustration of this
d (1961, p. 151), who
on. The communication
arious campaign issues,
the message represented
ne Ordered Alternatives
respondents were asked
zed it as being slightly
ther hand, saw the mes-
respondents thus exhib-
en the message and their
ssimilation and contrast
86; Manis, 1960; C. W.

gnified by ego-involvement
stortion (regarding what
degree of involvement
tler, 1973; C. W. Sherif
tion contrast effects
tion is being advocated.
e subject to assimilation
C. W. Sherif et al., 1965,
rsuader makes clear just
st effects are minimized.

ving reception of a per-
eory to depend on what
—that is, the perceived
latitudes of acceptance,
ered by social judgment
ocate a position that falls

in the latitude of acceptance or the latitude of noncommitment will produce attitude change in the advocated direction (that is, in the direction sought by the message), but a communication that is perceived to advocate a position that falls in the latitude of rejection will produce no attitude change, or perhaps "boomerang" attitude change (that is, change in the direction *opposite* that advocated by the message).

Several investigations have reported findings consistent with this general principle. For example, more favorable attitude change is produced when the message is perceived to fall within the latitude of acceptance than when it falls outside it (Atkins et al., 1967; Eagly & Telaar, 1972). And less favorable attitude change has been found as the size of the latitude of rejection (or involvement) increases (Eagly & Telaar, 1972; C. W. Sherif et al., 1973).⁵

This general principle has important implications for the question of the effects of discrepancy (between the message's position and the receiver's position) on attitude change. A persuader might advocate a position very discrepant from (very different from) the receiver's own view, thus asking for a great deal of attitude change; or a persuader might advocate a position only slightly discrepant from the receiver's, so seeking only a small amount of change. But what degree of discrepancy between the message's position and the receiver's position will produce the greatest amount of favorable attitude change?

Social judgment theory suggests that with increasing discrepancy, more favorable attitude change will occur—up to a point, namely, the latitude of rejection; but beyond that point, increasing discrepancy will produce less favorable reactions (indeed, may produce boomerang attitude change). Thus the general relationship between discrepancy and attitude change is suggested to be something like an inverted-U-shaped curve, and indeed (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 9) the available research evidence is consistent with that suggestion (e.g., Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963; Whittaker, 1965).⁶

But social judgment theory also points to the importance of the receiver's level of ego-involvement as an influence on the effects of discrepancy on attitude change. As receivers become increasingly involved in an issue, their latitudes of rejection presumably grow larger. Thus for low-involvement receivers, a persuader might be able to advocate a very discrepant viewpoint without entering the (small) latitude of rejection; but for high-involvement receivers, a very discrepant message will almost certainly fall into the (large) latitude of rejection. Thus, with any one influence attempt, a persuader facing a highly involved receiver may be able to advocate safely only a small change; obtaining substantial change from the highly involved receiver may require a series of small steps over time. By contrast, considerable attitude change might be obtained from the low-involvement receiver rather rapidly, through advocating a highly discrepant (but not too discrepant) position (as suggested by Harvey & Rutherford, 1958).

It should be kept in mind, however, that (from the point of view of social judgment theory) it is not discrepancy per se that is the relevant factor, but the

perceived location of the communication relative to the receiver's judgmental latitudes. Consider, for example, a receiver whose most acceptable position on the A-to-I Ordered Alternatives questionnaire was position D; positions A, B, and C formed the rest of the latitude of acceptance; position E was the latitude of noncommitment; and positions F, G, H, and I formed the latitude of rejection. A message perceived to advocate position A would be more discrepant (from the receiver's most preferred position) than a message perceived to advocate position F—yet the first message, despite being more discrepant, would be expected to elicit a more favorable reaction than the second. Thus, for social judgment theory, any effects of discrepancy on attitude change are simply indirect reflections of the role played by the judgmental latitudes—and correspondingly the inverted-U curve (relating discrepancy to attitude change) is only a crude and general guide to what persuasive effects may be expected in a given circumstance.

ASSIMILATION AND CONTRAST EFFECTS RECONSIDERED

The reader may have noticed that the attitude-change principles discussed in the preceding section refer to what position the message is *perceived* to be advocating. It thus becomes important to reconsider the role of assimilation and contrast effects in persuasion, since these influence the perceived position of a message. The crucial point to be noticed is this: Assimilation and contrast effects reduce the effectiveness of persuasive communications.

THE IMPACT OF ASSIMILATION AND CONTRAST EFFECTS ON PERSUASION
Consider first the case of a contrast effect. If a message that advocates a position in the receiver's latitude of rejection—and so is already unlikely to yield much favorable attitude change—is perceived as advocating a position even *more* discrepant from the receiver's view, then the chances for favorable change diminish even more (and indeed the chances for boomerang attitude change increase). Obviously, then, contrast effects will impair the effectiveness of persuasive messages.

But assimilation effects also reduce persuasive effectiveness. When an assimilation effect occurs, the perceived discrepancy between the message's stand and the receiver's position is reduced—and hence the communicator is seen as asking for less change than he or she actually seeks. So consider the case of a message that advocates a position in the latitude of acceptance or the latitude of noncommitment; with increasing perceived discrepancy, the chances of favorable attitude change presumably increase. But an assimilation effect will *reduce* the perceived discrepancy between the message's view and the receiver's position, and so will *reduce* the amount of attitude change obtained. Indeed, in the extreme case of complete assimilation, receivers may think that the message is simply saying what they already believe—and hence receivers don't change their attitudes at all. Thus it is that assimilation effects, like contrast effects, reduce the effectiveness of persuasive communications.

How might persuaders minimize assimilation and contrast effects? By being clear about their position on the persuasive issue at hand. As discussed pre-

the receiver's judgmental latitude at acceptable position on position D; positions A, B, and C were in the latitude of rejection. The more discrepant (from the position perceived to advocate the position discrepant, would be second. Thus, for social judgment change are simply latitudes — and correspondence to attitude change) is expected to be expected in a

CONSIDERED

The principles discussed in this passage is *perceived* to be the role of assimilation and the perceived position of a message in the latitude of assimilation and contrast effects.

EFFECTS ON PERSUASION

A message that advocates a position is unlikely to yield much change in a position even *more* discrepant. Messages for favorable change are more likely to yield a boomerang attitude change and impair the effectiveness of

effectiveness. When an effect is between the message's position and the communicator is in the latitude of acceptance. So consider the case of acceptance or the discrepancy, the chances of an assimilation effect. The message's view and the attitude change obtained. The receivers may think that the message is in the latitude of acceptance — and hence receivers will have assimilation effects, like in the case of communications.

contrast effects? By being in the latitude of rejection. As discussed pre-

viously, only relatively ambiguous communications (that is, messages that aren't clear about their stand on the persuasive issue) are subject to assimilation and contrast effects. Thus social judgment theory emphasizes for persuaders the importance of making clear one's position on an issue.

AMBIGUITY IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS One might think that the prevalence (and apparent success) of ambiguity in political campaigns suggests that something is amiss (with social judgment theory, if not with the political campaign process). After all, if ambiguity reduces persuasive effectiveness, why is it that successful political campaigners so frequently seem to be ambiguous about their stands on the issues?

It is crucial to keep in mind the persuasive aims of the political campaign. Ordinarily, the candidate is *not* trying to persuade audiences to favor this or that approach to the matter of gun control or abortion or arms control (or any other "campaign issue"); rather, the persuasive aim of the campaign is to get people to vote for the candidate. That is, candidates are trying to convince voters on the question of who to vote for — and candidates are *never* ambiguous about their stand on that issue (the true persuasive issue of the campaign). Thus on the topic on which candidates seek persuasion (namely, who to vote for), candidates do not take unclear positions.

Candidates do adopt ambiguous positions on the "campaign issues" of environmental protection, gun control, and so forth. If a candidate were trying to persuade voters that "the right approach to the issue of gun control is thus-and-so," then being ambiguous about his or her position on gun control would reduce the chances of successful persuasion on that topic. Such ambiguity would encourage assimilation and contrast effects, thereby impairing the candidate's chances of changing anyone's mind about gun control.

But, ordinarily, candidates don't seek to persuade voters about the wisdom of some particular policy on a given campaign issue. Usually, the candidate hopes to encourage voters to believe that the candidate's view on a given issue is the same as the voter's view. That is to say, candidates hope that, with respect to campaign issues (such as abortion or arms control), voters will assimilate the candidate's views (overestimate the degree of similarity between the candidate's views and their own).

Social judgment theory, of course, straightforwardly suggests how such an effect might be obtained. Suppose — as seems plausible — that for most voters, the positions around the middle of the scale on a given campaign issue (arms control, environmental protection, or whatever) commonly fall in the latitude of noncommitment or the latitude of acceptance; for a small number of voters (e.g., those with extreme views and high ego-involvement on that topic), such positions might fall in the latitude of rejection, but most of the electorate feels noncommittal toward (if not accepting of) such views. In such a circumstance, if the message suggests some sort of vaguely moderate position on the issue, without being very clear about exactly what position is being defended, then the conditions are ripe for an assimilation effect regarding the candidate's stand on

that topic. (For research concerning assimilation and contrast effects in political campaigns, see J. A. Anderson & Avery, 1978; Brent & Granberg, 1982; Granberg, 1982; Granberg & Jenks, 1977; Granberg, Kasmer, & Nanneman, 1988; Judd, Kenny, & Krosnick, 1983; M. King, 1978.)

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Social judgment theory obviously offers a number of concepts and principles useful for illuminating persuasive effects. But several problems in social judgment theory and research have become apparent.

THE CONFOUNDING OF INVOLVEMENT WITH OTHER VARIABLES

One weakness in much social judgment research stems from the use of participants from preexisting groups thought to differ in involvement (e.g., in the research on the prohibition topic, using members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union to represent high-involvement subjects). This research procedure has created ambiguities in interpreting results, because the procedure has confounded involvement with a number of other variables.

Two variables are said to be "confounded" in a research design when they are associated in such a way as to make it impossible to disentangle their separate effects. In the case of much social judgment theory research, the persons selected to serve as high-involvement participants differed from the low-involvement participants not just in involvement, but in other ways as well. For example, the high-involvement participants had more extreme attitudes than the low-involvement participants (e.g., M. Sherif & Hovland, 1961, pp. 134-135). In such a circumstance, when the high-involvement group displays a larger latitude of rejection than the low-involvement group, one cannot unambiguously attribute the difference to involvement (as social judgment theory might propose). The difference in latitude size might instead be due to position extremity.

From a social judgment theory point of view, the apparent empirical association between involvement and position extremity (higher involvement being associated with more extreme positions) complicates the research process. One might well expect that, on the whole, higher involvement, more extreme attitudes, and larger latitudes of rejection would go hand in hand. But involvement and position extremity are treated as distinct concepts by social judgment theory, and so it is important for theoretical purposes to be able to distinguish the effects of involvement from the effects of position extremity. Social judgment theory claims that larger latitudes of rejection are the result of heightened ego-involvement, not the result of extreme positions per se (e.g., C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, p. 233); hence it is particularly unfortunate that the research designs confounded involvement and position extremity.

In fact, the groups used in much social judgment research differed not only in involvement and position extremity, but in age, educational level, and so on.

and contrast effects in political
1978; Brent & Granberg, 1982;
Granberg, Kasmer, & Nanneman,
1983, 1985.

number of concepts and principles
several problems in social judg-
ment.

Research stems from the use of
to differ in involvement (e.g., in
members of the Women's Christian
movement subjects). This research pro-
duces results, because the procedure has
several variables.

In a research design when they
are impossible to disentangle their
social judgment theory research, the
different participants differed from the
movement, but in other ways as well.
Subjects had more extreme attitudes

M. Sherif & Hovland, 1961,
the high-involvement group dis-
tinction-involvement group, one cannot
distinguish involvement (as social judgment
theory size might instead be due to

However, the apparent empirical associ-
ation (higher involvement being
indicates the research process. One
higher involvement, more extreme
attitudes go hand in hand. But involve-
ment concepts by social judgment
theory proposes to be able to distinguish
position extremity. Social judg-
ment are the result of heightened
situations per se (e.g., C. W. Sherif
fortunate that the research designs
theory.

Social judgment research differed not only
age, educational level, and so on.

As a result, one cannot confidently explain observed differences (e.g., in the size of the latitude of rejection, or in the number of categories used in the own-categories procedure) as being the result simply of involvement; one of the other factors, or some combination of other factors, might have been responsible for the observed effects. Hence much of the research evidence bearing on social judgment theory is not as strong as one might want; these various confoundings complicate the task of drawing clear conclusions from the research evidence. (For a more general discussion of this problem with social judgment research, see C. A. Kiesler et al., 1969, pp. 254-257.)

THE CONCEPT OF INVOLVEMENT

Ego-involvement is not a carefully defined idea. The notion of ego-involvement seems to involve a variety of conflated concepts—the person's stand on the issue being central to the person's sense of self, the issue's importance to the person, the issue's relevance to the person, the degree of commitment the person has to the position, the degree of intensity with which the position is held, and so on (for a useful discussion, see Wilmot, 1971a).

But these are distinguishable concepts. For instance, I can think an issue is important without my stand on that issue being central to my self-concept (e.g., I think the issue of controlling the federal deficit is important, but my sense of identity isn't connected to my stand on this matter). I can hold a given belief intensely, even though the issue isn't very important to me (e.g., my belief that the earth is round). An issue may not be personally relevant to me (e.g., abortion), but I could nonetheless be strongly committed to a position on that issue, and my stand on that issue could be important to my sense of self. I can hold a belief strongly (say, about the superiority of a given basketball team) even though that belief isn't central to my self-concept.

The general point is that the notion of involvement contains a number of distinct concepts that have been run together in an unsatisfactory manner. It is possible to distinguish (conceptually, if not empirically) commitment to a position, importance of the issue, personal relevance of the issue, and so forth, and hence a clear understanding of the roles these play in persuasion will require separate treatment of each. (For examples of efforts at clarifying one or another aspect of involvement, see Greenwald & Leavitt, 1985; Park & Mittal, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985.)

THE MEASURES OF INVOLVEMENT

Several worrisome findings have been reported concerning the common measures of ego-involvement: the size of the latitude of rejection in the Ordered Alternatives questionnaire and the number of categories created in the own-categories procedure. No one of these findings is especially damaging by itself, but taken together they indicate some cause for concern.

For example, Wilmot (1971b) examined the association between the size of the Ordered Alternatives latitude of rejection and the number of categories used in the own-categories procedure. One would expect a substantial negative

correlation between these measures (persons with larger latitudes of rejection should use fewer categories), but the observed correlation (.03) was not significantly different from zero. Wilmot also found that these measures were not substantially correlated with respondents' ratings of how important the topic was to society, how important the topic was to them personally, or how committed they were to their most acceptable position: The correlations ranged from $-.03$ to $.08$ (for related results, see R. A. Clark & Stewart, 1971).

R. A. Clark and Stewart (1971) examined the average size of the Ordered Alternatives latitude of rejection on a number of different issues. Social judgment theory would expect that issues with relatively large latitudes of rejection would be ones that are relatively ego-involving for the respondents, whereas issues with relatively small latitudes of rejection would presumably be comparatively uninvolved. But Clark and Stewart found that, for college undergraduate respondents, the average latitude of rejection was larger for the issue of the quality of Walter Cronkite as a newscaster than for the issue of the harms and benefits of drug use; the average latitude of rejection was nearly identical for the question of the desirability of ice cream as a dessert and the issue of the extent to which grades accurately reflect class achievement. Results such as these obviously cast some doubt on the viability of the Ordered Alternatives latitude of rejection as an index of ego-involvement. (For additional relevant work concerning indices of ego-involvement, see Hartley, 1967, pp. 99-100; Makdah & Diab, 1976; Markley, 1971.)

Some related difficulties (concerning measures of ego-involvement) have arisen in the context of the claim that ego-involvement is issue-specific. In studying this claim, researchers have obtained ego-involvement indices from respondents concerning a number of different topics, examining the extent to which persons are consistent (across issues) in their apparent levels of involvement. Significant cross-topic consistencies have been observed by several investigators using a variety of involvement measures, including the Ordered Alternatives latitude of rejection and the number of categories created in the own-categories procedure (e.g., R. A. Clark & Stewart, 1971; Glixman, 1965; McCroskey & Burgoon, 1974; see also F. A. Powell, 1966; compare Eagly & Telaak, 1972).

At least some of these findings of cross-issue consistency can be accommodated by social judgment theory. As C. W. Sherif (1980, p. 38) has pointed out, social judgment theory acknowledges that when topics are closely related in some fashion (e.g., where the issues all concern some fundamental ideological dimension relevant for the respondent), then the level of involvement on one of the issues will likely be similar to the level of involvement on the other issues. Thus in studies where the topics are related, a finding of cross-topic consistency is not damaging to social judgment theory. This analysis can be used to explain some of the reported cases of cross-topic consistency, namely, ones where the topics are related (e.g., McCroskey & Burgoon, 1974), but it cannot easily explain other cases in which the topics are apparently not related (e.g., R. A. Clark & Stewart, 1971).

with larger latitudes of rejection correlation (.03) was not significant that these measures were not as important the topics to them personally, or how position: The correlations ranged (Clark & Stewart, 1971).

The average size of the Ordered of different issues. Social judgmentally large latitudes of rejection for the respondents, whereas it would presumably be compared that, for college undergraduates was larger for the issue of the harm for the issue of the harms and rejection was nearly identical for a dessert and the issue of the achievement. Results such as the Ordered Alternatives experiment. (For additional relevant see Hartley, 1967, pp. 99-100;

measures of ego-involvement) have involvement is issue-specific. In ego-involvement indices from topics, examining the extent to their apparent levels of involvement have been observed by several measures, including the Ordered number of categories created in the Stebbins, 1971; Glixman, 1965; Howell, 1966; compare Eagly &

The consistency can be accommodated (1980, p. 38) has pointed out, when topics are closely related in some fundamental ideological level of involvement on one of involvement on the other issues. Finding of cross-topic consistency analysis can be used to explain consistency, namely, ones where the on, 1974), but it cannot easily be apparently not related (e.g., R. A.

Taken at face value, then, the finding of significant cross-topic consistency (among unrelated topics) suggests two possible conclusions. One is that these "measures of ego-involvement" are *not* really assessing ego-involvement; after all, ego-involvement is topic-specific, and whatever these measures are assessing isn't topic-specific. The other possible conclusion is that social judgment theory is wrong to claim that ego-involvement is issue-specific; this conclusion presumes that these measures *are* assessing ego-involvement, and hence the finding that the measures exhibit significant cross-topic consistency means that involvement levels are similarly associated across topics. Of course, one can't draw both conclusions — but either one reflects unfavorably on social judgment theory and research.

In short, there are good empirical grounds for concern about the adequacy and meaning of the common measures of ego-involvement.⁷ This is perhaps to be expected, given the lack of clarity surrounding the concept of ego-involvement; one cannot hope to have a very satisfactory assessment procedure for a vague and indistinct concept. In any case, the empirical evidence suggests that the various indices of ego-involvement ought not be employed unreflectively.

CONCLUSION

In some ways social judgment theory is obviously too simplified to serve as a complete account of persuasive effects. Notice, for example, that from a social judgment theory point of view, the only features of the message that are relevant to its impact are (a) the position it advocates and (b) the clarity with which it identifies its position. It doesn't matter whether the message contains sound arguments and good evidence, or specious reasoning and poor evidence; it doesn't matter just what contents the message contains, or how the message material is organized. Everything turns simply on what position the message is seen to defend. And surely this is an incomplete account of what underlies persuasive message effects.

But a theory can be useful even when incomplete. Social judgment theory does draw one's attention to important facets of the process of persuasion: the relevance of assimilation and contrast effects, the possibility that two persons with the same most acceptable position on an issue might nonetheless have very different assessments of the alternative stands on the issue, the importance of considering variations in receiver involvement in the topic, and so forth. Despite some obvious weaknesses, then, one may surely credit social judgment theory with some positive contributions.

NOTES

1. In fact, as C. A. Kiesler et al. (1969, p. 244) point out, the anchoring of attitudes in reference groups is emphasized in some social judgment theory conceptualizations of involvement, and consequently this was an attractive research procedure for social judgment studies.

2. Of subsidiary interest is the *distribution* of statements across categories: High- and low-involvement participants often differ in their use of their created categories, with high-involvement participants tending to use some categories disproportionately (C. W. Sherif et al., 1965, p. 239).

3. The own-categories procedure can also be used to obtain measures of the judgmental latitudes (by asking the respondent to indicate the most acceptable category, other acceptable categories, and so forth, and then examining the proportion of statements falling into the various latitudes), but there is more research evidence concerning number of categories created than concerning the comparative sizes of the judgmental latitudes thus assessed, and hence attention here is focused on the use of the number of categories created as an index of ego involvement.

4. Assimilation and contrast effects (more broadly defined than here) are familiar psychophysical phenomena. If you've been lifting 25-pound boxes all day, a 40-pound box will feel even heavier than 40 pounds (contrast effect), but a 27-pound box will probably feel much like all the others (assimilation effect). The psychophysical principle involved is that when a stimulus (the 40-pound box) is distant from one's judgmental anchor (the 25-pound boxes), a contrast effect is likely; but when the stimulus is close to the anchor, an assimilation effect is likely. Indeed, social judgment theory was explicitly represented as an attempt to generalize psychophysical judgmental principles and findings to the realm of social judgment, with the person's own stand on the issue serving as the judgmental anchor (see M. Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

5. However (as discussed in Chapter 6), there have been several reported cases in which increased involvement has been associated with increased persuasiveness of counterattitudinal messages (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b), findings that would seem not easily reconciled with social judgment theory (but see Chapter 6, note 9, for further discussion).

6. For any individual receiver, the relation of discrepancy and attitude change is presumably not expected to be an inverted-U curve, but something rather more like half of such a curve: increasing attitude change up to the latitude of rejection, but with a sharp drop-off (not a gentle decline) at that point. But when data are averaged across many respondents, one expects (because of small individual variations, inevitable measurement error, and so on) to obtain something more like the inverted-U-shaped curve discussed in the text.

7. Though not discussed here, less frequently employed measures of ego-involvement — particularly ones based on Diab's (1965, p. 312) suggested procedure — appear to have similar problems; see L. Powell (1976) and Wilmot (1971b).