

The Nature of Attitudes

Some people support social policies such as legalized abortion or welfare assistance for the poor, and others oppose such policies. Some people endorse ideologies such as feminism or political conservatism, whereas others disapprove of them. Some people are satisfied with their jobs, and others are not. Understanding individual differences such as these has been a longstanding interest of social psychologists, who use the concept of attitude to describe them. In the parlance of social psychology, a person who favors legalized abortion is viewed as holding a *positive attitude* toward this policy, whereas a person who is unfavorable toward legalized abortion is viewed as holding a *negative attitude* toward this policy.

Social psychologists have traditionally assumed that people's evaluations of social policies and other entities in their social environment have major consequences. Attitudes have been postulated to motivate behavior and to exert selective effects at various stages of information processing (e.g., attention, perception, retrieval). The discrepant attitudes that often characterize different subgroups of a society are believed to underlie the social conflict that political and social issues sometimes engender. Because of the importance accorded to attitudes as causes of individual phenomena such as attitude-consistent behavior and selective perception as well as of societal phenomena such as social conflict and discrimination, the concept of *attitude* has become a fundamental construct for most social scientists.

Although research on attitudes has been popular throughout the social sciences, the construct has been more central to social psychology than to any other academic discipline. Allport's (1935) assertion that "the concept of attitude is probably the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary American social psychology" (p. 198) is as valid today as it was fifty years ago. Despite some fluctuations in the popularity of attitude research (see McGuire, 1986b), the attitude concept has remained in wide use in social psychology and has been the focus of extensive theoretical and empirical development since the 1920s. It is this social psychological literature on attitudes that is the principal subject matter of our book.

Definition of Attitude

The conceptual definition of attitude that we use in this book is the following: *Attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor.* As we will explain in more detail, *psychological tendency* refers to a state that is internal to the person, and *evaluating* refers to all classes of evaluative responding, whether overt or covert, cognitive, affective, or behavioral.

This psychological tendency can be regarded as a type of bias that predisposes the individual toward evaluative responses that are positive or negative.

An attitude develops on the basis of evaluative responding: An individual does not have an attitude until he or she responds evaluatively to an entity on an affective, cognitive, or behavioral basis. Evaluative responding, whether it is covert or overt, can produce a psychological tendency to respond with a particular degree of evaluation when subsequently encountering the attitude object. If this tendency to respond is established, the person has formed an attitude toward the object. Moreover, a mental representation of the attitude may be stored in memory and thus can be activated by the presence of the attitude object or cues related to it.

In terms of this definition, attitude is one of many *hypothetical constructs* used by psychologists (MacCorquodale & Meehl, 1948). Like other hypothetical constructs, attitudes are not directly observable but can be inferred from observable responses. The relevant observations are responses that are elicited by (or occur in close conjunction with) certain stimuli. As a general strategy in psychology, when certain types of responses are elicited by certain classes of stimuli, psychologists infer that some mental state (e.g., mood, emotion, attitude) or disposition (e.g., personality trait) has been engaged. It is this state or disposition that is said to explain the covariation of stimuli and responses. Attitude is one of numerous implicit states or dispositions that psychologists have constructed to explain why people react in certain ways in the presence of certain stimuli. Whether psychologists use the term attitude or some other construct to account for an observed covariation between stimuli and responses depends on the conventions they have established for defining these inner states and dispositions. For this reason, it is important to discuss in more detail the type of inner state that is implied by defining attitude as an evaluative tendency.

Attitudes as Tendencies

One aspect of this inner state is inherent in our definition of attitudes as *tendencies*. In referring to an attitude as a tendency, we mean to imply that attitude is an internal state that lasts for at least a short time. As well as the term *tendency*, the term *disposition* has been used by psychologists to refer to such internal states, and, indeed, some social psychologists have used the term disposition (or predisposition) in their definitions of attitude (e.g., Ajzen, 1984; Chein, 1948; D. Davis & Ostrom, 1984). For example, Donald Campbell (1963), in a widely read discussion of the attitude construct, treated attitude as an *acquired behavioral disposition*, that is, a learned state that creates an inclination to respond in particular ways. In addition to attitude, Campbell considered concept, habit, schema, and many other constructs to be instances of acquired behavioral dispositions. However, because *disposition* is often used by psychologists and laypeople to describe personality, the term tends to connote states that endure for a relatively long period of time. Yet some attitudes are relatively temporary and changeable, especially if they are unimportant to the people who hold them (see Chapter 12). Because the term *tendency* does not necessarily imply a very long-term state, we prefer to use this term in our definition of the attitude construct, even though many attitudes, of course are quite enduring.

Despite Campbell's (1963) definition of attitudes as *acquired* and many other theorists' assumption that attitudes are learned (e.g., Allport, 1935; Doob, 1947), the idea that attitudes are learned is best not included in the definition of the attitude construct. Instead, the definition of attitude should allow for the possibility that some attitudes are unlearned insofar as they originate at least partially from some biological base. For example, McGuire (1985) has suggested that some attitudes may arise from genetic sources, and this suggestion has received some support from sociobiological research (e.g., Lumsden & Wilson, 1981) and behavior geneticists' studies of attitudes held by twins reared apart and together (e.g., Lykken, 1982; Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1990). Moreover, Zajonc's (1980b, 1984; Zajonc, Murphy, & Inglehart, 1989) argument that affect can be triggered by purely sensory input without mediation by higher mental processes also supports the view that some attitudes may have an unlearned component. Even though the attitudes most widely studied by social psychologists probably are learned, it is unwise for theorists to rule out by definitional fiat attitudes that are not acquired from experience.

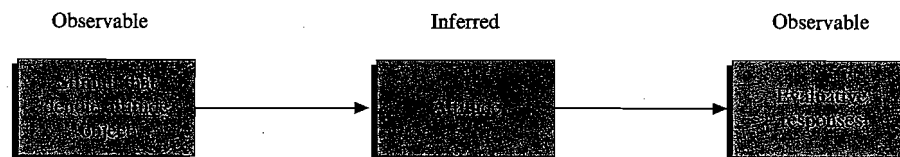
It should now be apparent that our definition of attitude in terms of a tendency that is expressed by evaluating an entity with some degree of favor or disfavor possesses advantages in terms of its generality. This definition readily encompasses attitudes that are learned or unlearned, enduring or changeable, and important or unimportant.

Attitudes as Evaluative

Our definition of attitude as an evaluative tendency presumes that attitude is an evaluative state that intervenes between certain classes of stimuli and certain classes of responses (see Figure 1.1). Moreover, this evaluative state is assumed to account for covariation between these stimuli and these responses. Explaining the important role of evaluation in this definition requires discussion of the classes of stimuli and responses whose covariation is ordinarily ascribed to attitudes.

We first consider the matter of responses. The responses that are regarded as attitudinal are evaluative in nature, where evaluation is defined as the imputation of some degree of goodness or badness to an entity. Because evaluation is the critical feature of attitudes, the observable responses relevant to inferring the presence of an attitude are therefore those that are regarded as revealing or expressing evaluation. Thus, evaluative responses are those that express approval or disapproval, favor or disfavor, liking or disliking, approach or avoidance, attraction or aversion, or similar reactions.

FIGURE 1.1.
Attitude as an
inferred state that
accounts for
covariation between
stimuli denoting
attitude object and
evaluative responses
to these stimuli.



Evaluative responses and the tendencies that are presumed to underlie them are regarded as differing in *valence* or *direction*, because they can be bifurcated into positive and negative evaluations. In addition, evaluations of a given valence differ in *intensity* or *extremity*, when, for example, very positive evaluations are distinguished from moderately positive evaluations, which are, in turn, distinguished from slightly positive evaluations. Therefore, social scientists often represent the hypothetical state that they assume underlies evaluative responding as a location on a bipolar continuum or dimension that ranges from extremely positive to extremely negative and that includes a reference point of neutrality. The task of attitude measurement, which we consider in Chapter 2, is to order people in terms of this quantitative latent variable.¹

Evaluation, the imputation of some degree of goodness or badness to an entity, can be regarded as one aspect of the ascription of meaning to entities in the environment. Although attitude researchers have been occasionally criticized for their emphasis on evaluation (McGuire, 1985), this tradition has remained very strong over the years. In the broadest sense, the utility of focusing on evaluation, in contrast to other types of meaning, can be judged by the body of research on attitudes, which is reviewed in this book. For example, to the extent that research has shown that people's behavior can be predicted from knowledge of the evaluative meaning that they assign to entities (see Chapter 4), the study of attitudes is important and properly is a major focus of social psychology.

Another testimony to the importance of evaluation is found in Charles Osgood's research on meaning (e.g., Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). In numerous studies, Osgood and his colleagues had respondents rate a large number of concepts on adjectival scales, each defined by a pair of words of opposite meaning (e.g., hard-soft, weak-strong, excitable-calm, good-bad, active-passive, noisy-quiet, valuable-worthless). When people's ratings of concepts were submitted to the statistical procedure of factor analysis, three dimensions or components of meaning usually emerged and accounted for most of the variability in these ratings (see discussion of semantic differential in Chapter 2). The dimension typically accounting for the largest proportion of the total variance was labeled *evaluation* because it related very closely to ratings on scales such as good-bad and valuable-worthless. The two other dimensions that commonly emerged, but accounted for smaller proportions of variance in respondents' ratings, were labeled *potency* (relating to ratings on scales such as strong-weak and hard-soft) and *activity* (relating to ratings on scales such as active-passive and fast-slow). This research thus suggested that a large portion of the meaning that people assign to entities in their world is evaluative in nature. In fact, Osgood and his associates equated a concept's location on the evaluative dimension with attitude toward the concept (e.g., Osgood et al., 1957).

Attitude Objects

An evaluation is always made with respect to some entity or thing that is the object of the evaluation. This entity yields the stimuli that elicit the evaluative responses that are regarded as following from the attitude. In the language of social psychology, entities that are evaluated are known as *attitude objects*. Virtually anything that is discriminable

can be evaluated and therefore can function as an attitude object. Some attitude objects are abstract (e.g., liberalism, secular humanism), and others are concrete (e.g., a chair, a shoe). Particular entities (e.g., my green pen) can function as attitude objects, as can classes of entities (e.g., ballpoint pens). Behaviors (e.g., playing volleyball) and classes of behaviors (e.g., participating in athletic activities) can also function as attitude objects. In general, anything that is discriminated or that becomes in some sense an object of thought can serve as an attitude object.

Although the attitude objects that could be studied are limitless, certain types of attitude objects have received a large share of the attention in research. Social scientists have most often examined attitudes toward social policies (e.g., offshore oil drilling, busing schoolchildren to achieve racial integration), ideologies (e.g., political liberalism and conservatism), and social groups, especially minorities (e.g., blacks, Hispanics). The terms *social attitudes* or *political attitudes* are somewhat loosely applied to such attitudes, which generally have implications for relations between social groups and are relevant to governmental policy as well. In addition, attitudes toward minority groups are often called *prejudice*, especially if these attitudes tend to be negative. Attitudes toward individual people, often called *liking* or *interpersonal attraction*, have also been studied a great deal. Attitude toward one's self is often termed *self-esteem* (M. Rosenberg, 1965). Attitudes toward relatively abstract goals or end states of human existence (e.g., equality, freedom, salvation) have also been of interest. These attitudes are usually termed *values*.² Although we do not make the conceptual distinction between values and attitudes that some theorists have made (e.g., Rokeach, 1968, 1980; M.J. Rosenberg, 1960a), we do endorse the importance of understanding the relations that exist between evaluations of more abstract and more concrete attitude objects (see Chapter 3).

An attitude object, even if it is a unique entity, is encoded from a variety of stimuli. For example, the attitude object *my brother* is in fact perceived through a variety of stimuli (his name, a picture of him, a letter from him, etc.). When the class of stimuli that denote my brother are observed to elicit responses expressing a certain degree of evaluation, it is inferred that I hold an attitude toward him described by some degree of favorability or unfavorability. In general, when observations of an individual show that a class of stimuli (those denoting a given attitude object) and a class of this individual's responses (those expressing a given degree of evaluation) covary, social scientists infer that this individual holds an attitude toward this entity.

Attitude is distinguishable from other concepts that also refer to people's implicit tendencies or dispositions because an attitude is inferred only when stimuli denoting an attitude object are observed to elicit responses expressing a given degree of evaluation. Some other concepts, such as personality traits, are considerably broader than attitude because the class of stimuli that allows observers to infer the disposition in question encompasses much more varied stimuli than those that denote a single entity. For example, because people characterized as high in the personality trait of *self-monitoring* are particularly sensitive to cues concerning the situational appropriateness of their behavior, they would respond to other people and a large variety of interpersonal events in distinctive ways (see M. Snyder, 1974, 1987). In addition, for trait-like concepts, the class of responses that is relevant to inferring the disposition is generally much broader

than evaluative responses. For example, behaviors relevant to self-monitoring include self-presentation, friendship choices, sexual behavior, and responsiveness to persuasive communications. Other concepts, such as mood, are broader on the stimulus side, but are primarily evaluative on the response side. For example, a depressed mood might be ascribed to people who react unfavorably (and perhaps relatively passively as well) to a variety of personal and impersonal entities. By specifying that attitude should be inferred only on the basis of evidence of evaluative responding to a circumscribed entity, social scientists give precise and distinctive meaning to the concept.

Our definition of attitude as an evaluative tendency represents consensual usage in modern social psychology. Yet, as shown by the long and interesting history of the attitude concept, this meaning evolved gradually over a number of decades (see Allport, 1935; D. T. Campbell, 1963; D. Fleming, 1967; McGuire, 1969). Gordon Allport's (1935) statement, no doubt the best known of the early definitions provided by psychologists, illustrates the more global nature of earlier definitions: "An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (p. 810). Although historically important, this definition does not satisfactorily distinguish an attitude from a trait, mood, habit, or other tendencies or dispositions of the individual because the key notion of evaluation is missing. Still, our definition shares an important feature with Allport's—namely, the idea that an attitude is an internal state that intervenes between stimuli and responses and affects these responses. Moreover, Allport's emphasis on an internal state (or, as we would term it, a psychological tendency) was consistent with earlier psychological conceptions of attitude (e.g., Spencer, 1862/1895; Titchener, 1910).

Attitude and Latent Processes

The treatment of attitude as a hypothetical construct or latent variable that is not directly observable raises the issue of whether attitude is merely a conceptual convenience—a construct invented by social scientists because it is a handy tool for describing a certain type of covariance between stimuli and responses. Alternatively, attitude might be meant to imply some sort of hidden mechanism or latent process that truly exists in people's minds but that cannot be observed directly, given current technology. Although the attitude concept has been used in both ways (see DeFleur & Westie, 1963), modern usage favors the latent process idea.

The latent process conceptualization implies that psychological and physiological events underlie attitudes, although the exact description of these events is a matter of continuing scientific debate. A minimal sense in which attitudes presume a latent process follows from the idea that the formation of an attitude entails the cognitive activity of assigning evaluative meaning. Zanna and Rempel (1984, 1988) regarded this cognitive activity as a type of categorization whereby an entity is assigned some degree of evaluative meaning; they defined attitude as the categorization of an entity along the evaluative dimension. However, from our point of view, attitude should not be defined as synonymous with this categorization process. Rather, attitude is more

appropriately regarded as an outcome of this categorization process (or other processes). As a result of having evaluated an entity with some degree of favor or disfavor, the individual may assign evaluative meaning to the entity. The individual would then possess an attitude, which is an internal state that endures for at least a short period of time and presumably energizes and directs behavior.

The cognitive phenomena that comprise this internal state may include a mental representation of the tendency that results from having responded evaluatively to an entity. This mental representation is stored in memory and can be subsequently activated. These memorial processes are being considered by contemporary social psychologists whose interests center on the accessibility of this mental representation (e.g., Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986). Other cognitive research pertains to the structural details of attitudes' mental representations. For example, a structural issue of current interest is the extent to which representations of attitudes are unipolar and thereby represent only one's own position or are bipolar and thereby represent opposing positions on issues (see Chapter 3). Further amplifying the latent processes underlying attitudes is psychophysiological research on the linkages of attitudes to physiological substrates (e.g., Cacioppo, Petty, & Geen, 1989; see Chapter 2).

Consideration of latent processes raises the issue of whether the abstract definition of attitude should be framed in terms of one or more of these latent processes. For example, Doob (1947) defined attitude as a learned, implicit anticipatory response and analyzed attitudes by means of Hullian learning theory constructs such as gradients of generalization and discrimination. Zanna and Rempel (1988) defined attitude in terms of the cognitive process of categorization. Currently popular is Fazio's (1986, 1989) definition of attitude as an association in memory between an attitude object and an evaluation.

From our perspective, such definitions are overly narrow because they presume a particular model of the processes that underlie attitudes. Thus, Doob's (1947) definition reflects the Hullian learning theory perspective popular in the 1940s. Not only does this definition follow from a particular understanding of the nature of learning (see Chein, 1948), but also the definition unwisely rules out the possibility that some attitudes are unlearned. Zanna and Rempel's (1988) definition illustrates the general perspective of cognitive psychology with its emphasis on categorization. Fazio's (1986) definition of attitude reflects an associative learning model that has been popular at various points in the history of psychology (see J.R. Anderson & Bower, 1973), most recently in contemporary associative network models of memory (e.g., J.R. Anderson, 1983; Bower, 1981; see Chapter 3). These and other definitions of attitude that invoke particular models of psychological process run the risk of going out of style as the focus of psychological theories evolves over the decades. Only a more general and abstract definition can endure among researchers and scholars, despite inevitable shifts in consensual opinion regarding what key processes underlie attitudes.

Definitions of attitude in terms of particular processes are sometimes thought to be more objective than more abstract definitions such as the one we advocate. This objectivity is believed to follow from aligning attitude with a specific process that can be assessed using accepted methods in psychological laboratories. Yet we view the

more abstract definitions of attitude, such as our own evaluative tendency definition, as equally objective because they can also be assessed using objective indicators. By not equating attitude with a particular process, however, more abstract definitions allow attitudes to be assessed by means of a variety of indicators. These measurement issues are considered in Chapter 2.

Despite our preference for a general and abstract definition of attitude, narrower definitions are sensible within certain theoretical traditions and certainly can provide a useful guide to thinking about certain problems. For example, in terms of Fazio's (1986) definition of attitude as an object-evaluation association, the strength of this association becomes important, and strength is assessed by the latency of research subjects' evaluative responses to representations of the attitude object (see Chapter 4). Fazio's perspective suggests a theory of how attitudes guide behaviors—namely, that stronger attitudes are more likely to induce attitude-consistent behavior. Nonetheless, many other considerations are relevant to understanding the attitude-behavior relation, and the majority of these other factors cannot readily be coordinated to the associationist conception of attitude (e.g., prior knowledge, see Chapter 4). In other domains of attitude research as well, the associationist definition would yield certain insights but fail to encompass others.

In summary, although we do not advocate defining attitude in terms of particular psychological processes, there is growing evidence of the reality of attitudes at the level of latent cognitive and physiological processes. This reality suggests that the concept of attitude is more than a mere conceptual convenience postulated to describe broad stimulus-response correlations. Indeed, scientific evidence demonstrating that latent processes underlie attitudes lends considerable plausibility to Allport's (1935) claim that an attitude is "a mental and neural state of readiness" (p. 810).

The Commonsense Concept of Attitude

In daily life, laypeople use the concept of attitude in approximately the same manner that social scientists use it. As we have explained, social scientists infer an attitude upon observation that evaluative responding is elicited by stimuli that denote a particular attitude object. Laypeople may also infer attitudes on the basis of such observations. For example, noticing that an individual sends money to organizations such as the Sierra Club, writes letters to legislative representatives supporting the regulation of industrial pollution, and circulates petitions opposing nuclear power plants and offshore oil drilling might lead observers to label this person an *environmentalist*. In this example the attitude object can be regarded as environmental preservation, an object that encompasses a number of specific social goals as well as organizations supportive of these goals. Similarly, noticing that an individual donates money to right-wing political candidates, endorses a tax code of limited progressivity, and opposes legal abortion might lead observers to label this person a *conservative*. In this example the attitude object can be regarded as political conservatism, which encompasses various social policies. Thus, in realms such as these, laypeople often infer that individuals' social attitudes account for the patterning of their evaluative behavior. Even though laypeople

may spontaneously invoke the term attitude only occasionally (e.g., "she has a racist attitude"), the very common practice of using a label implying an attitudinal position (e.g., "she is racist") surely qualifies as an instance of attitudinal inference.

Occasionally the term attitude is used in the natural language in a broader sense than it is used in the social scientific literature. For example, in contemporary American slang, a person is sometimes described as "having attitude," when a trait of "pugnacity, sullen deviance, and self-confidence tipping over into arrogance" (Safire, 1990, p. 18) is implied. Similarly, when an uncooperative person is described as having a "bad attitude" or an "attitude problem," attitude has taken on personality-trait meaning, and no specific attitude object is indicated. Also, when athletes and their coaches emphasize "mental attitude" in explaining successful competition, there is no attitude object in the sense that we have defined it. Despite such exceptions, the formal definition of attitude presented in this book is consistent with most everyday usage of the term attitude as well as with the application of labels that imply attitudinal positions (e.g., "environmentalist"). This close link with the natural language is no doubt one source of the popularity and enduring appeal of attitudinal research in the social sciences. Yet social scientists have restricted the term attitude to a particular meaning and provided a formal and precise definition. Clear meaning of this sort is a great advantage because it fosters the development of measuring instruments and facilitates research.

Research on Inferences about Attitudes. In social psychology a moderate-sized research literature has accumulated concerning people's inferences about others' attitudes (see E. E. Jones, 1979; M. Ross & Fletcher, 1985). In typical experiments of this genre subjects are presented with statements of beliefs about an attitude object that were allegedly made by a target person (e.g., a student's essay containing the statement "Castro can and does attempt to take over our neighbors and convert them to communist satellites [*sic*] by using methods of infiltration sabotage and subversion [*sic*]" Jones & Harris, 1967, p. 5). Subjects are then asked to infer this target person's attitude (i.e., toward Castro). In such research, subjects typically infer that target persons hold attitudes that are evaluatively consistent with their belief statements. Yet, these inferences are also influenced to some extent by information about the conditions under which the targets' statements were made. For example, if the target person is said to have been required to take the viewpoint expressed in the statements, subjects infer a less extreme attitude than they infer if the target is said to have made the statements of his or her own free will. In general, if situational cues convey that a target was constrained to take a particular viewpoint, perceivers are less likely to believe that the target's attitude corresponds to his or her expressed viewpoint, especially if having to advocate this position appears to have been an unforeseen consequence or in some other sense an unintended behavior (H. J. Fleming & Darley, 1989).³ In related research on subjects' inferences concerning their *own* attitudes (e.g., Bem, 1972), people have been shown to use the evaluative implications of their own behaviors as a guide to inferring their attitudes (see Chapter 11). This research has also yielded important insights concerning the cues that people take into account in making attitudinal inferences.

Questions concerning the processes underlying attitudinal inferences are quite important in social psychology insofar as they are part of a more general interest in understanding people's causal attributions as well as their inferences about personal tendencies and dispositions (E. E. Jones & Davis, 1965; H. H. Kelley, 1967; L. Ross, 1977). In this book, attitudinal inferences are explored in some detail as aspects of persuasion and social influence (see Chapters 8, 11, and 13). These forms of attitude change require that people interpret and react to the statements that convey other people's attitudes.

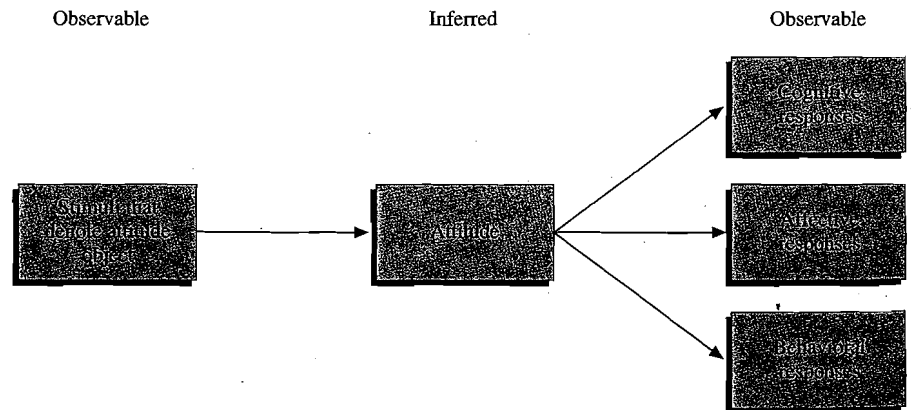
In experiments on commonsensical attitudinal inferences, subjects are required to answer inquiries about attitudes. Thus, their spontaneous inferences are not examined.⁴ Despite this limitation, this research is generally consistent with the claim that people commonly infer the attitudes that underlie their own and others' behavior. People may often think about themselves and others in terms of the attitudes that their public statements and overt behavior convey.

The Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Analysis of Attitudes

Classes of Evaluative Responses

As depicted in Figure 1.2, social scientists often have assumed that responses that express evaluation and therefore reveal people's attitudes can be or should be divided into three classes—cognition, affect, and behavior (e.g., D. Katz & Stotland, 1959; M. J. Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). The *cognitive* category contains thoughts that people have about the attitude object. The *affective* category consists of feelings or emotions that people have in relation to the attitude object. The *behavioral* category encompasses people's actions with respect to the attitude object.

FIGURE 1.2.
Attitude as an
inferred state, with
evaluative responses
divided into three
classes (cognitive,
affective, and
behavioral).



Evaluative responses of the cognitive type are thoughts or ideas about the attitude object. These thoughts are often conceptualized as *beliefs*, where beliefs are understood to be associations or linkages that people establish between the attitude object and various attributes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). These cognitive evaluative responses include the covert responses that occur when these associations are inferred or perceived as well as the overt responses of verbally stating one's beliefs. The attributes that are associated with the attitude object express positive or negative evaluation and therefore can be located by psychologists on an evaluative continuum at any position from extremely positive to extremely negative, including the neutral point. For example, some people believe that nuclear power plants cause dangerous nuclear contamination. This belief links the attitude object with a negative attribute. Other people may believe that nuclear power plants provide cheap and abundant electricity. This belief links the attitude object with a positive attribute. Although we use the term *belief* to describe all thoughts that people have about attitude objects, evaluative responses that are cognitive in nature have sometimes been given a variety of other names, including cognitions, knowledge, opinions, information, and inferences. These terms are useful in some contexts but overlap considerably with the concept of belief that we emphasize.

A question that students raise from time to time is whether beliefs that are located at the neutral point of an evaluative dimension should be regarded as evaluative. Although a belief located at the neutral or zero point of the evaluative continuum might be considered non-evaluative by some psychologists, we prefer to regard it as expressing a degree of evaluation that happens to fall between positive and negative values. Although in theory beliefs can be truly non-evaluative in the sense that they express only other aspects of meaning (e.g., potency or activity), virtually all beliefs, including those that are heavily weighted with non-evaluative meaning, express evaluations to some degree. For example, the belief that the Purdue Boilermakers are *strong* expresses primarily potency but in addition expresses positive evaluation to some extent.

In general, people who evaluate an attitude object favorably are likely to associate it with positive attributes and unlikely to associate it with negative attributes, whereas people who evaluate an attitude object unfavorably are likely to associate it with negative attributes and unlikely to associate it with positive attributes. Formulating more exact models of this assumed relation between people's evaluations of attitude objects and their beliefs about these objects has been a focus of attitude research for a number of years. We consider this material in detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

Evaluative responses of the affective type consist of feelings, moods, emotions, and sympathetic nervous system activity that people experience in relation to attitude objects. These affective responses can also range from extremely positive to extremely negative and therefore can be located on an evaluative dimension of meaning. For example, when considering the concept of nuclear power plants, some individuals may experience a feeling or emotion of anger, and others may experience a feeling or emotion of hope and optimism. In general, people who evaluate an attitude object favorably are likely to experience positive affective reactions in conjunction with it and are unlikely to experience negative affective reactions; people who evaluate an attitude object unfavorably are likely to experience negative affective reactions and are unlikely

to experience positive affective reactions. We consider the importance of affective responding in various parts of this book (see Chapters 3, 9, and 10).

Social psychologists have sometimes regarded affect as isomorphic with evaluation itself and used the terms interchangeably (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; M.J. Rosenberg, 1960a; Zajonc & Markus, 1982). In agreement with some more recent treatments of attitude (e.g., Millar & Tesser, 1986a; Zanna & Rempel, 1984, 1988) and in recognition of the growing body of research on affect and emotion, we prefer to regard evaluation and affect as conceptually distinct. Thus, we treat evaluation as an intervening state that accounts for the covariation between classes of stimuli and the evaluative responses elicited by the stimuli, and we treat affect as one type of responding by which people may express their evaluations.

Evaluative responses of the behavioral (or conative) type consist of the overt actions that people exhibit in relation to the attitude object. Because these responses also range from extremely positive to extremely negative, they too can be located on an evaluative dimension of meaning. For example, in relation to nuclear power plants, some individuals may circulate petitions opposing their construction, and others may write letters to their legislative representatives calling for government support for their construction. In general, people who evaluate an attitude object favorably tend to engage in behaviors that foster or support it, and people who evaluate an attitude object unfavorably tend to engage in behaviors that hinder or oppose it.

Behavioral responses also can be regarded as encompassing *intentions* to act that are not necessarily expressed in overt behavior. For example, an individual may intend to circulate a petition tomorrow, but may or may not actually carry out this intention. Not surprisingly, positive evaluations are related to holding supportive intentions in relation to attitude objects, and negative evaluations to holding non-supportive intentions. More exact models of the ways that evaluations relate to behaviors and behavioral intentions are considered in detail in Chapter 4.

The division of evaluative responses into three categories has a very long history that, as McGuire (1969, 1985) has claimed, extends as far back as classical Greek and Hindu philosophers. Certainly the tradition has a long history in social psychological discussions of attitude, where the three classes of responses are sometimes referred to as the three *components* of attitudes (see D. Katz & Stotland, 1959; Krech & Crutchfield, 1948; M.J. Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960; M.B. Smith, 1947; Triandis, 1971). Given the penchant of both psychologists and philosophers to think in terms of this trinity of cognition, affect, and behavior, the distinction must be accorded a certain heuristic value. However, to be worth preserving in modern attitude theory, the distinction should have more than heuristic value. The division of evaluative responses into three components must have some discriminant validity (D. T. Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Thus, despite the positive correlations between cognition, affect, and behavior that follow from the fact that responses of all three types can be located on the common underlying dimension of evaluation, responses within each of the three categories should relate more strongly to other responses within that category than to responses in the other two categories. That is, as Ajzen (1988) also has argued, each of the three components should possess unique variance not shared with the other two. Fortunately, several empirical studies have examined these issues.

In initial studies examining the tripartite model of attitudinal responding, subjects completed a number of instruments designed to provide questionnaire measures of cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses elicited by an attitude object, and correlations within and between types of measures were examined (see reviews by Breckler, 1984a, 1984b). Studies of this type by Kothandapani (1971) and Ostrom (1969) yielded three dimensions. However, more sophisticated data analysis techniques involving structural equation analysis (see Bentler, 1980; Kenny, 1979, 1985) have subsequently been applied to these data sets by Bagozzi (1978) and Breckler (1984b), both of whom concluded that Ostrom's (1969) data weakly supported the three-dimensional model, whereas Kothandapani's (1971) data failed to support it. In addition, on the basis of analyses of questionnaire measures of attitude (excluding measures of self-reported behaviors and behavioral intentions) reported by Fishbein and Ajzen (1974), Bagozzi and Burnkrant (1979, 1985) argued for a two-dimensional model representing affect and cognition, whereas Dillon and Kumar (1985) argued that alternative models conceptually consistent with the one-component model fit these same data.

Breckler (1984a) took the view that these tests of the tripartite model were insufficient because they relied on verbal measures of responses of the three classes and presented subjects with only symbolic representations of the attitude objects (i.e., a verbal label). To correct these deficiencies Breckler had subjects respond to an attitude object (a snake) that was physically present and assessed their cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses using both verbal and nonverbal measures. Analysis of the resulting data found a three-dimensional, but not a one-dimensional, model statistically acceptable. In a second study, Breckler had subjects respond to the verbal label of "snake" and obtained only verbal self-reports of the three classes of responses. Although in this study the tripartite model was rejected because it did not sufficiently account for the systematic variability in the data, it did fit the data somewhat better than a one-dimensional model.

Given these various findings, it appears that a definitive empirical determination of the dimensionality of evaluative responses is unlikely in the near future. To date, the outcomes of statistical analyses of dimensionality appear to be affected by methods of data analysis (including the particular version of LISREL or other computer programs that investigators use to perform structural analyses) and the details of the particular models that investigators propose (see Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1979, 1985; Dillon & Kumar, 1985). More important, Breckler's (1984a) research suggests that dimensionality may vary as a function of the direct or indirect mode of presentation of the attitude object and the verbal or nonverbal nature of the response measures. In addition, different types of attitude objects may produce different sorts of reactions, and, in this regard, Breckler's choice of an attitude object (a snake) known to provoke strongly fearful reactions in some people may have been important to insuring a multi-dimensional outcome in his research. These issues have yet to be explored in depth. Suffice it to say that, at the present, evidence supports the empirical separability of three classes of evaluative responses under some but certainly not all circumstances.

Because cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses are often not empirically distinguishable as three classes, the three-component terminology is overly strong and

is inappropriate in its implication that the three types of responses are generally distinct; that is, distinguishable in most people most of the time (see Fishbein, 1967c; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974). A formal three-component model will probably be rejected for many perhaps even most, attitudes. Nonetheless, the tripartite distinction provides an important conceptual framework, one that allows psychologists to express the fact that evaluation can be manifested through responses of all three types, regardless of whether the types prove separable in appropriate statistical analyses. Use of the terms cognitive, affective, and behavioral should help researchers evolve an understanding of the conditions under which attitudes truly have varying numbers of components. In short, the tripartite terminology continues to be a convenient language for thinking about attitudinal responding. Therefore, in this book we refer to three *classes of evaluative responses* but eschew the formality of a three-component model of attitudes.

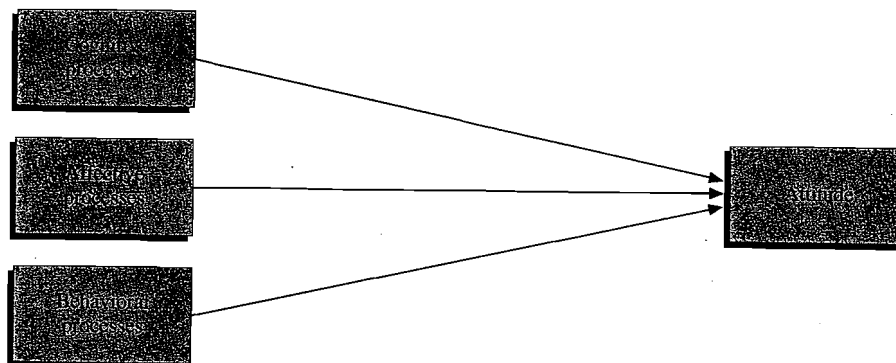
Because of our limited support of the tripartite language, we do not agree with the details of Fishbein's (e.g., 1967c) unqualified endorsement of a one-component model and rejection of a three-component model. Fishbein argued that only a unidimensional model of attitude is acceptable because all measures of attitudes, whether based on cognitive, affective, or behavioral responding, order individuals along an evaluative continuum. Fishbein's point that all measures of attitude assess evaluation is indeed valid and is in fact noncontroversial: Attitude theorists have usually regarded evaluative responses of all three types as expressing degree of evaluation. The cognitive and behavioral components of attitudes have ordinarily been thought to reflect location on a common evaluative dimension, just as the affective component has. Nevertheless, the assumption that these responses can be divided into three classes implies, as we have noted, the testable hypothesis that correlations between responses in the same class are higher than correlations between responses in different classes. Even in circumstances in which this hypothesis is supported, correlations between responses of different classes are positive because these responses are manifestations of a position on a common underlying evaluative continuum. The dimensionality of attitudinal responses thus remains an important issue for empirical and theoretical development.

Classes of Antecedents of Attitudes

Consonant with the idea that attitudinal responses can be divided into three classes is the assumption that attitudes have three different types of antecedents (see Figure 1.3). Indeed, the idea that attitudes are formed through cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes has been proposed in numerous discussions of attitudes (e.g., Breckler, 1984a; A. G. Greenwald, 1968; Insko & Schopler, 1967; Triandis, 1971; Zanna & Rempel, 1988).

The assumption that attitudes derive from a process of cognitive learning is implicit in much of the research that we review in this book and explicit in some theoretical perspectives. A cognitive learning process is assumed to occur when people gain information about the attitude object and thereby form beliefs. Information is gained by direct experience with attitude objects and by indirect experience with them. For example, one may learn directly about the attributes of a new brand of soft drink by

FIGURE 1.3.
Attitude as a
product of cognitive,
affective, and
behavioral
processes.



drinking it. Alternatively, one may learn indirectly by watching a television advertisement that describes the drink's taste and other qualities or by observing a friend's reaction to tasting the drink. One's attitude is assumed to derive from the favorability of the beliefs that are acquired directly or indirectly. Whether beliefs are acquired by direct or indirect experience with the attitude object is one determinant of the extent to which people's attitudes predict their behavior (see Chapter 4). In addition, the general idea that attitudes derive from the information that people gain about attitude objects, especially from indirect experience with them, is particularly important in research on persuasion (see Chapters 6, 7, and 8). In such research, message recipients are presented with information about an attitude object. To the extent that recipients accept this information, they are assumed to form new beliefs from which a new or changed attitude is derived. More formal development of the idea that attitudes stem from beliefs about attitude objects has been provided by expectancy-value and other algebraic models of the nature of attitudes (see Chapters 3 and 5).

The claim that attitudes are formed on the basis of affective or emotional experiences has appeared in different forms in the literature on attitudes (see Chapter 9). For example, in one of its earlier manifestations the assumption that attitude formation is an affective process appeared in the classical conditioning model of attitude change (e.g., A. W. Staats & Staats, 1958). From this perspective, attitude is a product of the pairing of an attitude object (conditioned stimulus) with a stimulus that elicits an affective response (unconditioned stimulus). As a result of repeated association, the attitude object comes to elicit the affective response, and an attitude is thereby formed. For example, stimuli repeatedly associated with the onset of electric shock would acquire negative evaluation via this affective process, and stimuli paired with the offset of electric shock would acquire positive evaluation (e.g., Zanna, Kiesler, & Pilkonis, 1970). In a different and more recent manifestation of the idea that affective responding

underlies attitudes, Zajonc (1980b, 1984) argued that "preferences" (i.e., evaluations) are based primarily on affective responses, which are often quite immediate and are not mediated by thinking about the attributes of attitude objects.

The idea that evaluations are based on behavioral responses was central in research by Bem (e.g., 1972), who argued that attitudes derive from past behavior (see Chapter 11). By this *self-perception* account of attitude formation, which we already acknowledged in our discussion of attitudinal inferences, people tend to infer attitudes that are consistent with their prior behavior. However, Bem also argued that people take into account the conditions under which they perform behaviors, with the result that they form attitudes more readily on the basis of behavior when they do not think that external forces compelled them to engage in the behavior. In addition, learning theorists have described attitudes as deriving from behavioral responses. In the stimulus-response behavior theory tradition, when overt behaviors (or covert cognitive responses) elicited by attitude objects are rewarded or punished, implicit evaluative responses occur (e.g., Doob, 1947; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). As we noted in our discussion of Doob's definition of attitude, it is these implicit evaluative responses that learning theorists have regarded as attitudes.

Implications of the Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Analysis

We have asserted that attitudes are manifested in cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses and formed on the basis of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes. This tripartite view of attitudinal responding and attitude formation raises a number of important questions.

One question is whether attitudes must have all three of these aspects, either at the point of attitude formation or at the point of attitudinal responding. Although the older three-component definitions of attitude may have implied that these three aspects must be in place in order for a true evaluative tendency to emerge, our answer to this question is a decided *no*. Attitudes can be formed primarily or exclusively on the basis of any one of the three types of processes. Individuals may, for example, learn about certain attitude objects entirely on the basis of reading. Under such circumstances of indirect experience with an attitude object, they may not engage in behaviors relevant to the attitude (except the behavior of reading) when the attitude is being formed, and the remote nature of the contact with the attitude object probably decreases the likelihood that emotional responses will be triggered by the stimuli representing the attitude object. In such instances the attitude would be formed on the basis of acquiring beliefs about the attitude object. Other attitudes may be formed primarily by affective or behavioral processes or by a mix of processes. Especially when people directly encounter attitude objects, attitude formation probably occurs by a variety of processes (see Zanna & Rempel, 1988).

It is also not universal that people respond to attitude objects by cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions. People may hold beliefs about some attitude objects but never engage in overt behaviors with respect to them or have emotional reactions.

Other attitudes may be emotion laden or action inducing in the sense that they induce primarily affective or behavioral responses.

Another issue related to the limited tripartite idea that we have espoused is the extent to which the three classes of evaluative responses are consistent with one another. In this context, consistency means that people tend to express about the same degree of evaluation of an attitude object through responses of each of the three classes. As we explained in our discussion of the dimensionality of attitudes, very high consistency between classes of evaluative responses implies that appropriate statistical analyses of an attitudinal domain would yield a one-dimensional solution. To the extent that classes of responses display some inconsistency, a multidimensional solution would be obtained. As we have indicated, statistical analyses of attitudes have yielded solutions of varying dimensionality. Thus, responses associated with some attitudes are quite consistent across response classes, and responses associated with other attitudes are somewhat less consistent. Eiser (1987) suggested that cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses will be evaluatively consistent to the extent that all three response classes contributed to the initial formation of the attitude. Breckler and Wiggins (1989a) presented findings suggesting that cognitive and affective facets of attitudes are more consistent to the extent that attitude domains are familiar and likely to be thought about frequently (e.g., abortion, nuclear weapons). Although other research has examined such consistency issues, most of this research is somewhat limited in modern terms because of the earlier tendency to view evaluation and affect as synonymous, with the consequence that only the consistency between affect (i.e., general evaluation) and cognition was investigated (see Chapters 3, 5, and 10).

A largely unexplored issue is the extent to which the cognitive, affective, or behavioral processes by which an attitude is acquired relate to the cognitive, affective, or behavioral responses that the attitude object subsequently elicits. It is possible that some sort of matching tends to occur (Millar & Tesser, 1986a; see Chapter 4). For example, an attitude acquired via a cognitive route might tend to elicit primarily cognitive responses, one acquired via an affective route might tend to elicit primarily affective responses, and one acquired via a behavioral route might tend to elicit primarily behavioral responses. However, any strong one-to-one relationships of this sort are quite unlikely. As suggested in particular by research on the cognitive-affective interface that we discuss in Chapter 9, different classes of evaluative responses impinge on one another and exist in what might be described as a cooperative, synergistic relation. One may, for example, acquire beliefs about an attitude object, think about this knowledge, and thereby decide upon a course of action or generate an emotional response. A cognitively based attitude thus feeds back on other psychological processes and gives the attitude behavioral and affective bases. Similarly, one's initial response to another person may be emotional (e.g., sexual attraction). Yet the positive attitude produced on this basis may lead to a course of action (e.g., asking the individual to dinner) or influence perception of the person's attributes (e.g., the formation of beliefs that the individual is warm and friendly). Understanding how modes of attitude formation relate to subsequent evaluative responding is clearly very challenging, and aspects of this issue are considered at various points in this book.

Attitudes as Schemas

A useful perspective for thinking about attitudes is to regard them as one type of *schema*, which is a broader classification of cognitive structures that has been investigated quite extensively by cognitive psychologists and cognitive social psychologists. Although the exact meaning of this popular concept has varied somewhat (see Landman & Manis, 1983; Markus & Zajonc, 1985), schemas are typically said to be "cognitive structures of organized prior knowledge, abstracted from experience with specific instances" (Fiske & Linville, 1980, p. 543). Exploration of attitudes as a type of schema highlights the implications of attitudes for information processing. In applying the schema construct to the social world, social psychologists have built upon the theories and methods that cognitive psychologists developed to account for the representation and processing of nonsocial stimuli. The resulting body of knowledge on social cognition is closely related to some of the work that has traditionally been carried out by investigators of attitudes. Moreover, treating attitude as a type of schema has much in common with a considerably older tradition of regarding attitude as one type of *frame of reference* (A.L. Edwards, 1941; J.M. Levine & Murphy, 1943; M. Sherif, 1936; W.S. Watson & Hartmann, 1939). This tradition also was allied with cognitive psychology—in particular, with F.C. Bartlett's (1932) demonstrations of the influence of cultural and individual factors on remembering.

As we have noted, there is consensus that schemas are cognitive structures that represent past experience in a stimulus domain by a higher order or abstract cognitive structure. In this respect, the schema construct resembles the cognitive aspect of attitudes. Thus, experience with attitude objects is assumed to lead people to associate them with attributes or more generally to think about attitude objects. These thoughts are stored and, as we explain in greater depth in Chapter 3, can be regarded as cognitive structures that organize prior knowledge.

The assumption that attitudes have affective and behavioral aspects, in addition to cognitive, is central to the theoretical framework that we have introduced. Paralleling attitude theorists' assumptions about affect, some schema theorists (e.g., Fiske & Linville, 1980) have asserted that schemas "elicit affect as well as inference" (p. 522). However, other schema theorists (e.g., S.E. Taylor & Crocker, 1981) have preferred to limit schemas to their cognitive aspects. Paralleling attitude theorists' attention to behavioral manifestations of attitudes is schema theorists' assumption that schemas have behavioral consequences. However, despite the universality of this assumption, the impact of schemas on behavior has been explored relatively little. In contrast, the relation between attitudes and behavior has been studied extensively (see Chapter 4).

Given that the cognitive aspects of attitudes strongly resemble those of schemas and the assumptions made about the affective and behavioral manifestations of attitudes partially overlap assumptions made about schemas, it is important to emphasize the sense in which the two concepts are distinguishable. The concepts differ because the term attitude refers to evaluation, whereas the term schema has been used more broadly. Because attitude pertains to evaluation and not to all aspects of mental representations, it is possible to regard attitude as a subtype of the more general schema

concept. Nonetheless, the focus of attitude researchers on evaluations will likely maintain some separation between social cognition and attitude research. Because evaluative structures are very likely to be infused with affect and to energize and direct behavior, this concentration of attitude researchers on evaluations may be advantageous with respect to some kinds of predictions, especially those regarding behavior. Cognitions not laden with good-versus-bad meaning are probably much less likely to elicit emotions or energize behavior. Thus, it is with good reason that many schema theorists have been cautious about making specific claims concerning the affective and behavioral manifestations of schemas.

The gain from thinking about attitudes as a type of schema comes from the link that is forged with existing knowledge about the impact of schemas on cognitive processing. Schemas have been held to influence all aspects of information processing (see review by Markus & Zajonc, 1985). On the input or encoding side, schemas have been shown to affect the attention given to information as well as the encoding and judgment of this information. Evidence for this impact on attention and encoding comes from a variety of studies showing that comprehension and memory for stimuli are improved if some label, category, or concept is also presented to enable people to organize the stimuli in some way (e.g., Bransford & Johnson, 1972). Presumably the label, category, or concept activates a schema, which allows people to comprehend and organize the stimuli in its terms.

On the output or decoding side of information processing, schemas are held to have a selective effect on the retention, retrieval, and organization of memory. Under some circumstances, people have better memory for stimuli that fit their schemas than for stimuli that do not fit, and under other circumstances, schema-inconsistent information is particularly memorable (see Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Stangor & McMillan, 1992). Thus, the effects of schemas on memorial processes appear to be somewhat complex. Very similar issues of selectivity in information processing have long been an interest of attitude researchers, who have claimed that attitudes influence attention to and interpretation of attitude-relevant information as well as memory for this information. These issues are considered primarily in Chapter 12.

Attitudes and Motivational Issues

The view that schemas are useful because they allow people to represent and organize the information they encounter echoes one of the important themes of attitude theorists' analyses of the functions or needs that attitudes serve for individuals. For example, in his taxonomy of four types of functions relevant to attitudes, Daniel Katz (1960; Katz & Stotland, 1959) asserted that one of the functions attitudes serve is to organize and simplify people's experience. Katz named this function the *knowledge function*. Katz's thinking about this aspect of attitudes resembles the view that schemas are needed to enable people to make sense out of their experience.

Katz (1960; Katz & Stotland, 1959) proposed three additional functions that attitudes may serve. His *adjustment* or *utilitarian* function presumed that attitudes enable people to maximize rewards in their environment and to minimize punishments. As would be expected from this function's learning-theory heritage, attitudes satisfy this function by means of a presumed tendency for people to form favorable attitudes toward stimuli associated with satisfaction of needs and unfavorable attitudes toward stimuli associated with punishment. According to Katz's *ego-defensive* function, attitudes also enable people to protect themselves from unpleasant realities. Theorizing about this function derived from psychoanalytic ideas about defense mechanisms. Finally, according to Katz's *value-expressive* function, attitudes allow people to express their personal values and self-concept. Theorizing about this function derived from ego psychology and other varieties of personality theory.

The functions proposed by Katz (and by other theorists; see M. B. Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956) presume that certain general needs or motives energize and direct attitudinal functioning. The particular needs and motives that are considered by attitude researchers at any point in time tend to derive from the type of theory that is popular in social psychology and in psychology more generally. For example, Katz's utilitarian function reflected the importance of learning theory, and his ego-defensive function reflected the impact of psychoanalytic theory. Both of these theories were much more popular in the 1950s, when Katz developed his typology, than they are now. Because cognitive theorizing has been dominant in social psychology and in psychology more generally during recent years, much current thinking about motivational issues by attitude researchers has the cognitive flavor of Katz's knowledge function. Cognitive accounts of motivation have included, in addition to the idea that people are motivated to simplify and organize stimuli, the idea that people desire to reduce inconsistencies between related cognitions. Also, as theories about the self-concept and self-presentation have become increasingly important in social psychology (e.g., A. G. Greenwald, 1980; Schlenker, 1980; Steele, 1988), principles somewhat like those which Katz included in the value-expressive function have gained adherents in some types of attitude research. Accounts of motivation emphasizing that attitudes facilitate the formation and maintenance of social relationships have also been important in attitude research (e.g., Kelman, 1958; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). In addition, as noted in our discussion of the attitude construct, attitudes are themselves assumed to energize and direct behavior, and thus to have motivational implications in and of themselves, quite apart from broader motives that they may serve. Consideration is given to these motivational themes in Chapter 10 and elsewhere in this book. Indeed, motivation is an increasingly important component of contemporary research on attitudes.

Notes

1. Whether people represent their own attitudes as a point on a continuum is a considerably more subtle issue that we address in Chapter 3. Here we refer only to social scientists' common practice of defining attitudes operationally as points along an evaluative continuum (see Chapter 2).
2. For example, Rokeach (1968, p. 160) defined value as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence." Evaluation is the central feature of this statement, which is thus consistent with our definition of attitude.
3. Yet the major issue in this research tradition is whether observers sufficiently take into account the situational constraints that may induce people to take attitudinal positions. According to the widely cited concept of *fundamental attribution error* (L. Ross, 1977), perceivers insufficiently weight situational constraints in their interpretations of others' behavior and overestimate the importance of personal tendencies and dispositions, which include personality traits and abilities as well as attitudes.
4. Although research by Winter and Uleman (1984) and by Winter, Uleman, and Cunniff (1985) has examined the spontaneity of people's inferences about personality traits, analogous research on attitudinal inferences has yet to be conducted.