PERSUASION IN SOCIETY

HERBERT W. SIMONS
with JOANNE MORREALE and BRUCE GRONBECK
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Persuasion in Society is an integrative, comprehensive guidebook to understanding, practicing, and analyzing persuasion. It brings together the academic contributions of humanists and social scientists and adds to them the insights of professional persuaders and communication analysts. That the study of persuasion is important—indeed vital—should need little argument. Human beings are both creators and products of their societies in a never-ending cycle. In the United States, our economic system, our republican form of government, our commitments to freedom of speech and religion and to equality of opportunity, our conceptions of ourselves as a sovereign people, and even our idea of nationhood can be traced to efforts at persuasion in centuries past. Indeed, there is scarcely a cultural truism that was not at one time or another the subject of considerable controversy. What is considered true today is certain to be questioned in the future as new efforts at persuasion take the place of the old.

Understanding society, then, requires understanding persuasion. The study of persuasion also has direct, personal payoffs. A recent survey of 2,800 executives by the American Management Association asked, “What is the No. 1 need for success in business today?” The overwhelming response was “to persuade others of my value and the value of my ideas” (Story, 1997, p. 3).

Persuading others is one side of the persuasion equation; the other is responding intelligently and discerningly to the armies of message makers who compete for your attention, your agreement, your involvement, and your money. Persuasion is the engine of our market-driven global economy, say the authors of a recent article in the American Economic Review—its title: “One Quarter of GDP Is Persuasion” (McCloskey & Klamer, 1995).

In our increasingly smaller but more complicated world, being an intelligent consumer of persuasive messages is not easy. Take the problem of message density.
Today, many more persuasive messages are presented to us at dizzying speeds. Tons of information are available at the click of a mouse. Yet how should we process it all? How can we make wise judgments when there are so many to be made? One obvious solution for persuadees is reliance on cognitive shorthands (e.g., “Doctor knows best,” “The majority must be right,” and “She’s too cute to turn down”). Yet when are they reliable, and when are they not? When they’re not, can we “say no” to them? When we need more than cognitive shorthands, how can we best come to judgment?

Persuasion in Society is written for the would-be persuader as well as the persuadee. It assists persuaders in thinking through issues, then preparing to engage audiences, whether for a one-shot persuasive speech or a long-term campaign or movement. It likewise assists persuadees by sensitizing them to the wiles of persuaders, including the persuader’s capacity to overcome audience defenses by appearing not to be attempting persuasion at all.

This book’s dual perspective, its shifting between the roles of persuader and persuadee, is also designed to place ethical questions in persuasion front and center. The central ethical problem was put by Aristotle in the first systematic treatise on rhetoric (i.e., persuasion), written thousands of years ago. Persuasion, he observed, gives effectiveness to truth, but it also gives effectiveness to error, bad judgment, and deliberate falsehood.

Moreover, deception comes in degrees and is not always harmful to others. So whose perspective should we adopt as we confront persuasion’s many ethical dilemmas: that of the persuader or the persuadee? (Audiences tend to be far less forgiving of persuaders than persuaders are of themselves.) My approach in repeatedly shifting between perspectives is to cause sometimes painful, but I hope illuminating, double vision.

Persuasion in Society was written for the “beginning” student of persuasion, but this is a term that fairly begs for clarification. Chances are that you began figuring out how to persuade before your first birthday. First, you cried because your belly hurt. That was biology, not persuasion. But soon you learned that if you could act as if your belly hurt, whether it did or not, then you could get your mother’s attention, perhaps even her sympathy. That may well have been the beginning of your career as a student of persuasion—an ignoble beginning, built on deception, but a beginning nonetheless.

Well, you’re a bit older at this point. Putting technicalities aside, let’s call you a beginning persuasion student if this is your first persuasion course and if you are of typical college age, say 18 to 25. The persons who have studied your generation report that your attitudes toward schooling and habits of study are quite different from those of your baby boomer parents, and different still from those of my generation (Hamlin, 1998). Some important differences so far as this book is concerned are these: You like your lessons tight, succinct, and arrestingly illustrated—just like on television. You’re not much for newspaper reading or even for network television
news, but you respond well to the conversational style of television talk shows. As channel surfers and Internet browsers, you look for what interests you and turn off the rest. Some observers claim that you’re not very critical message recipients—you’re highly selective about getting entertainment but not about gathering information for a speech or term paper.

*Persuasion in Society* will try to meet you halfway: lively, yes, but not at the price of cutting back on a point that needs development; interesting visuals, but selected more to instruct than to entertain. Indeed, a good deal of the “teaching” that takes place in this book is around visuals. As for reports that you’re not very critical message recipients, I hope that’s not true, but if it is, *Persuasion in Society* should help you do better.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this book was at least 40 years in the making. My earlier text on the subject, *Persuasion: Understanding, Practice, and Analysis* (Simons, 1976/1986), has been so thoroughly reconceptualized and updated that my editor and I feel justified in calling *Persuasion in Society* a new book, rather than a revised edition of the earlier text. Some things have not changed, including my most basic convictions that persuasion is about winning beliefs, not arguments; that communicators who seek to win belief need to communicate with their audiences, not at them; and that persuasion at its best is a matter of giving and not just getting—of moving toward persuadees psychologically, recognizing that they are most likely to give you what you want if you can show them that what you propose also gives them what they want. This is the essence of my *coactive* approach to persuasion, which involves reasoning from the perspective of the other or, better still, building from common ground.

*Persuasion in Society* also remains focused on clear-cut instances of attempted persuasion—called paradigm cases—but gives increased attention to cases in which intent to persuade is not so obvious. I’ve become convinced, for example, that popular entertainment programming, as in television sitcoms, does more to shape American values—indeed, the media-connected world’s values—than do sermons and editorials, political oratory, and parental advice. Yet seldom do people think of sitcoms as forms of persuasion. Also occupying a place in what I call the gray areas of persuasion’s domain are newscasts, scientific reports, classroom teaching, and, yes, textbooks such as this one—all rendered especially credible by appearing in the guise of objectivity.

**Preview of Chapters**

The preview that follows highlights some of this book’s distinctive features. One of those features, amply illustrated in the first chapter of Part 1, is the book’s heavy reli-
ance on stories as a pedagogical tool. Chapter 1 uses stories to address fundamental issues: What is persuasion? How is it different from other forms of communication and other forms of influence? In that persuasion deals in matters of judgment rather than certainty, how trustworthy is it? If, on some controversial issues, well-informed experts may reasonably disagree, does this mean that any persuasive argument is as good as any other? The chapter also introduces the behavioral and critical studies approaches to the study of persuasion, the one social-scientific, the other derived from the humanities. *Persuasion in Society* draws on both of these approaches, attempting to take the best from each.

In introducing basic psychological principles, Chapter 2 pulls together behavioral theory and research on the psychology of persuasion but not in an exhaustive way, as might a text devoted exclusively to the behavioral approach. Rather, the aim of the chapter is to derive principles from theory and research that have practical payoffs as guides to the practice and analysis of persuasion. Broached in Chapter 2 for purposes of illustrating the psychology of persuasion is President Clinton’s handling of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. I return to this case study in subsequent chapters, focusing especially on President Clinton’s speech of August 17, 1998, in which he admitted to an affair with the White House intern.

Chapter 3 moves beyond paradigm cases to begin this book’s exploration of the gray areas of persuasion. Its key principle is that the same communicated message may be multimotivated, be multileveled, and have multiple effects—thus perhaps persuading and serving other communicative functions at the same time. In addition to alerting readers to persuasion’s many guises and disguises, Chapter 3 raises concerns about mass persuasion’s cumulative ideological effects.

Part 2 of *Persuasion in Society* develops principles of coactive persuasion that are introduced in Chapter 4. Whatever your goals as a persuader, whatever your audience and situation, says the coactive approach, you should be engaged in a process of bridging differences by moving toward the persuadee psychologically. Usually, this involves building on common ground between the two of you, but sometimes it requires that you put aside your own perspective and attempt persuasion from the perspective of the persuadee. Emphasized here is the importance of situational analysis and audience adaptation as preconditions for bridging the psychological divide between persuader and persuadee. Also introduced are ways of combining credibility and attractiveness, reason, and emotion.

The remaining chapters of Part 2 elaborate on the principles of coactive persuasion introduced in Chapter 4. Focusing on paradigm cases, as opposed to those in the gray areas of persuasion, they identify resources of communication that are available to the persuader, including those classified by Aristotle under the headings of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. For Aristotle, *ethos* referred to the person of the persuader as perceived by the audience. *Pathos* translates most immediately into appeals to emotion but includes incentives of every type. Indeed, there is no clear separation be-
between *pathos* and *logos*, the apparent logic of the message, as you should see in the chapters on cognitive shorthands and on argument.

Chapter 5 identifies verbal, nonverbal, and audiovisual resources of communication that are available to the persuader. What can you do to play up a piece of news? What can you do to play it down? How can you get a friend to comply with your request? How can you turn down a friend’s request without endangering the friendship? Think of these vast resources as components of a giant rhetorical tool chest, to be drawn on as the situation requires.

Chapter 6, on framing and reframing, focuses on ways that persuaders may lead persuadees to think “outside the box.” Not infrequently, the same facts can be reconfigured or recontextualized; for example, a near-certain disaster reframed as an opportunity. Brought together in this chapter are behavioral research on framing effects and critical studies across a wide range of cases, from political confrontations to psychotherapy.

Chapter 7, on cognitive shorthands, performs double duty. It first draws on a popular book on persuasion, Cialdini’s *Influence: Science and Practice* (1993), as a source of useful insights about how to persuade. The chapter then illustrates persuasion in the guise of objectivity by analyzing Cialdini’s book as rhetorical in its own right, warranting critical scrutiny. Does rhetorical criticism detract from social science? Not according to social scientist Joseph Gusfield (1976). Rhetorical criticism makes for better social science, he argued. That, in any case, is the goal of Chapter 7. It aims at deepening your understanding of cognitive shorthands, rather than undoing Cialdini’s basic contribution.

Chapter 8, on reasoning and evidence, focuses on how to build a case for or against a policy proposal. While Chapter 7 concentrates on the sort of snap decision making required of all of us in our fast-paced, message-dense society, Chapter 8 is about how to come to judgment and then get audiences to share that judgment on issues requiring careful thought and deliberation.

Part 3 of this book honors the differences in contexts for persuasion and examines some of the more significant ones with a view toward suggesting principles distinctive to each. The need for Part 3 should be apparent from the variety of paradigm cases identified in Chapter 1 and from the brief discussion of gray areas of persuasion. For example, when you stand up and deliver a classroom speech, there is little advanced opportunity to question those you’re trying to persuade. If you’re a political candidate or a product advertiser, you may have an audience of millions and a budget that enables you to test-market messages scientifically and then air them numbers of times. If you’re leading a protest movement, you may not be able to pay the bus fare of the people you’re bringing to city hall for an all-day demonstration. If you’re in a conflict situation, you will find that you’re at least as much a persuadee as a persuader. Moreover, you and your adversary may not restrict your modes of influence to persuasion alone.
Chapter 9, on going public, is about readying yourself for that moment when you present your ideas before an audience. For unprepared and overprepared speakers, it is often an unnerving experience, but this chapter provides ways to combine passion and polish. Featured in the chapter is a three-step approach to persuasive message preparation that begins with goal setting and ends with test-marketing. The chapter concludes with lessons from research on message design and on adaptation to different types of audience.

Chapter 10, on campaign planning, identifies stages and components of organized, sustained efforts at persuading others, as in campaigns to discourage teenage smoking or to encourage charitable giving. Featured in this section are guides to conducting small-scale campaigns of a sort that students can plan and execute. Chapter 10 then takes up the topic of indoctrination campaigns, ranging from the benign (e.g., campaigns designed to make good citizens of us all) to the highly controversial (e.g., recruitment campaigns by religious cults). Briefly surveyed here, too, is the role played by persuasion in public relations, particularly in crisis management campaigns.

Chapter 11 focuses on modern political campaigns, particularly those for the presidency, in which virtually nothing is left to chance. Here we see the best in persuasion that (a lot of) money can buy. We also sometimes see the excesses of rhetorical combat, as in attack advertisements that prompt false inferences when they are not fabricating outright. Chapter 11 features a tongue-in-cheek “Machiavellian Guide” to getting elected to high office, inviting readers to confront for themselves the ethical dilemmas that candidates face on a regular basis. A typical principle: Raise as much money as you can as early as you can, all the while deploring America’s corrupt system of campaign financing.

Chapter 12, on product advertising, looks first at its history, identifying at each stage certain characteristic goals and strategies, then showing how they don’t so much get dropped as added to by each new generation of advertisers. Today’s advertising—including the so-called anti-ad—gets the lion’s share of attention in the remainder of the chapter, with sections on visual persuasion in advertising and on deceptive advertising language.

Chapter 13 examines situations in which interactants shift back and forth between the roles of speaker and listener, persuader and persuadee. The chapter focuses on interpersonal conflict situations, those in which people who live together, work together, and so forth find themselves locked in a struggle over seemingly incompatible interests. It concludes on a positive note with a vision of the ideal persuasion dialogue and with case studies of productive conversation.

Chapter 14 examines another type of struggle, that waged by social movements in behalf of causes they consider just. As with interpersonal conflicts, the study of conflicts between movements and the institutions and countermovements they oppose requires exploring new principles of persuasion, different from those that apply
to nonconflict situations, such as mere differences of opinion between friends. The resources available to movement leaders also stand in sharp contrast, say, to those of other campaigners.

Besides offering chapters on the one-shot message, on various forms of campaigning, on advertising, on social movements, and on persuasion in interactive situations, Part 3 pulls together in a concluding chapter questions about the ethics of persuasion. Featured in Chapter 15 is a discussion of the ethics of faculty advocacy in the college classroom. Do your professors attempt to persuade you, or do they maintain a stance of strict neutrality in the classroom, even in discussions of highly controversial issues? What should be their role? Is it the professor’s job to profess, as one scribe has argued? Is it to teach you how to think, not what to think? Is neutrality impossible on controversial issues, and are those professors who claim to be “telling it like it is” really masking their own persuasive intent? Finally, you will find three appendices in this book. Appendix I pulls together theories of persuasion to provide a compendium of “how-to” principles on the science and art of persuasion. Appendix II lists tactics of persuasion appropriate to different types of audiences. Appendix III presents in one place 116 issues of ethics vs. effectiveness that were raised in the book, and invites you to revisit them.

References


Investigative journalist Janet Malcolm (1999) tells the story about a defense attorney who wound up in jail for a year because she could not, or would not, tell a persuasive story in her own defense. Instead of winning an acquittal for her client, she wound up incriminating herself—or so a jury found. The prosecution convinced the jurors that the woman had crossed the line between defending a con artist and collaborating with him. Yet the woman was innocent, Malcolm insists. Indeed, she was too innocent! Had she assembled for the jurors a convincing narrative from the wholly accurate facts at her command, any jury would have acquitted her. But the woman did not believe in coherent, convincing narratives. She preferred what she thought of as the raw, objective truth—what really happened—however messy, incoherent, and unsatisfying. And so the woman, says Malcolm, was figuratively guilty of another crime: She bored her jurors to death.

In one of Plato’s Dialogues on persuasion, the conversation turns on the question of whether rhetoric, the art of persuasion, is a corrupt art. As was his habit in the...
Dialogues, Plato (n.d./1952) has his mentor, Socrates, speak for him, while Gorgias, for whom the Dialogue is named, serves as the principal antagonist.

Gorgias begins the debate by observing that the ability to impress an audience is the surest path to power and influence. His student, Polus, adds that power is the greatest good. Socrates will have none of it. Rhetoric, he maintains, is an art of gul-ling the ignorant about the justice or injustice of a matter, without imparting any real knowledge. Rhetoric does great damage to the world by making the worse appear the better argument and allowing the guilty to go free (Smith, 1998).

Years later, Plato's student, Aristotle, would offer a defense of rhetoric (Cooper, 1932). Aristotle's response to Plato (and to Socrates) concedes the dangers of rhetoric but rejects their alleged inevitability. Rhetoric can be—indeed, often is—an instrument for giving effectiveness to truth. He adds that truth is not always easy to come by. Still, those deliberating about issues of policy have a need to come to judgment, and those brought before the court of justice have the right to defend themselves. Only philosophers such as Plato and Socrates have the luxury of suspending judgment until they have arrived at universal principles. In the meantime, ordinary citizens will need help as decision makers in assessing alternative courses of action and as persuaders in determining from among the available means of persuasion what is best said to this audience on that occasion.

Both Plato's critique of rhetoric and Aristotle's defense of it contain a good deal of wisdom, but as you might have anticipated, this book gives Aristotle the edge in the debate. To be sure, rhetoric can be used to deceive, mislead, exploit, and oppress. Clever persuaders can exploit what Aristotle called the "defects of their hearers." The innocent in Aristotle's day could be made to appear guilty by attackers doing little more than waving a bloody shirt. Imprudent actions can still be made to appear wise by use of sham arguments, known as fallacies, that appear reasonable on first impression but fall apart on close examination.

All this is possible, as Socrates claimed in the Gorgias, but it is not inevitable. Persuaders can serve the interests of their audiences at the same time as they serve their own interests; they can achieve power with others and not simply power over others. Moreover, truth does not stand on its own hind legs. If it is to serve the interests of others, it must be communicated persuasively to them.

Insufficiently appreciated by Plato was Aristotle's key insight: Persuasion deals in matters of judgment, rather than certainty. Judgment matters cannot be settled by fact alone or by sheer calculation. On controversial issues such as these, honest differences of opinion can be expected. Even experts can legitimately disagree on what the facts are, which facts are most relevant, and, most important, what should be made of them.

As you advise on a host of familiar personal problems, supposedly expert mental health professionals took diametrically opposed positions. Should my husband's 7-year-old daughter from his previous marriage be permitted to sleep in our bed every time she has a bad dream? asked one distraught stepmother. "You should be
more tolerant of your husband’s dilemma,” suggested a psychologist. “It is just inap-
propriate for a 7-year-old daughter to be sharing the marital bed on a regular basis,”
said another. Should I tell my very pregnant sister living many miles away that her fa-
ther has just died? asked a concerned sibling. “I strongly favor delaying telling your
sister until after she delivers her baby,” urged one psychologist. “If you value the
closeness of your family and respect your sister, don’t exclude her at this critical
time,” urged another (Hall, 1998, p. 7).

The psychologists offered judgments—in these cases, conflicting judgments.
But just because persuasion deals in matters of judgment rather than certainty, this
was not for Aristotle an invitation to impulsive or random decision making or to per-
petual indecision. As Aristotle said, only philosophers have the luxury of postponing
the day of reckoning.

Nor was Aristotle of the opinion that any decision was as good as any other, any
argument as good as any other. As much as audiences might be taken in by clever de-
ceivers, still truth, according to Aristotle, had a natural advantage over falsehood,
and logic a natural advantage over illogic. The power of truth and logic is best appre-
ciated when we accede to them reluctantly, as in the following case.

At an inner-city junior high school for students who had been booted out of
other schools, an eighth-grade English class came to life when a student proposed
that the school be put on trial for unfair rules. But the student who proposed the
mock trial found himself in the role of the defense attorney for the administration,
and he could not resist doing a convincing job in its behalf. Witness 1 for the prose-
cution was destroyed on cross-examination as he was caught overgeneralizing. No,
he admitted, the milk at the school is not always spoiled. In fact, it rarely is. Witness
2 was forced to concede that the school doesn’t really enforce its rule against bringing
candy to class. Then the defense attorney caught the prosecution off guard by press-
ing an objection: The prosecution had been leading the witness. And so it went.
When the deliberations were concluded, the seven student judges voted 6 to 1 for
the administration (Michie, 1998).

Consider now the story of the defense attorney who wouldn’t tell a convincing
story in her own defense. Aristotle would have counseled her otherwise. Indeed, his
own treatise on rhetoric is spiced with stories, just as this book is. Like the tales just
told of the defense attorney, the mental health professionals, and the junior high
school students, stories give truths their hind legs.

Defining Persuasion

1. At a college fair in Hong Kong, a Harvard representative recruits prospec-
tive graduate students skilled in science and mathematics. Never does he
claim that Harvard is best, but the one-sided information he imparts makes
the case for him.

2. An ad for a soccer shoe on British TV features a white soccer star outmaneu-
vering two black defenders. The same company features a black soccer hero
in another ad targeted to black consumers of soccer shoes.

3. On the occasion of his 30th anniversary as pastor to a conservative congre-
gation, a minister announces that his son is gay and that he is mighty proud
of him.

4. A museum in New York keeps a priceless borrowed treasure in a collection
of forgeries until it can go on display. The curator assures its insurers that
burglars won't know it's a "fake fake."

5. A clothing store announces its seventh "going out of business" sale.

6. A *Jerusalem Post* editorial complains about the government's new regula-
tions governing hate speech over the Internet.

7. An undergraduate student invents what he believes is a novel excuse
for turning in a late paper; his grandmother died, and he had to attend the
funeral.

8. A young Chinese activist for democracy stands defiantly before a row of
tanks en route to breaking up a months-long protest demonstration at
Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

9. A television ad critical of a campaign opponent's prescription plan superim-
poses the word *rats* subliminally—that is, at a rate below the level of most
viewers' conscious awareness (see Picture 1.1).

10. An embattled presidential candidate attempts to climb out from under the
shadow cast by the current president. “I'm my own man,” declares Al Gore
in his nomination acceptance speech.

What do these widely different scenarios have in common? The central charac-
ter (or characters) has a clear intent to persuade. Another shared feature is the use of
communication (sermons, editorials) to accomplish that goal. Yet another is that
message recipients—otherwise referred to here as receivers, audiences, or persuadees—
are invited to make a choice of some sort. These paradigm cases of persuasion involve
no complex admixture of motives, no masking of persuasive intent, no questions
about whether they are attempts at persuasion or some other form of influence.
Typically, it is clear from their contexts what sorts of practices they are and what they
are designed to accomplish. For example, editorials are featured in an editorial or op-
ed section of the newspaper; sermons are usually given in places of worship by persons designated to present them. If persuasive intent is not apparent from the context, it is made obvious by what is said and by how it is said. These persuaders of the paradigm variety rely, at least in part, on linguistic or paralinguistic (language-like) messages. Their messages clearly promote a point of view, a proposed action of some sort, or both. In general, when the term persuasion is used in this book, it is with the paradigm cases in mind.

This book's definition of persuasion highlights features common to the paradigm cases. Persuasion is human communication designed to influence the autonomous judgments and actions of others. Persuasion is a form of attempted influence in the sense that it seeks to alter the way others think, feel, or act, but it differs from other forms of influence. It is not the iron hand of torture, the stick-up, or other such forms of coercion. Nor, in its purest sense, is it the exchange of money or other such material inducements for actions performed by the person being influenced (see Box 1.1). Nor is it pressure to conform to the group or to the authority of the powerful.

**Picture 1.1.** The insertion of “RATS” in this political advertisement probably backfired, but by this book’s definition, it was an act of persuasion nonetheless. The ethics and effectiveness of subliminal advertising are discussed in Chapter 12. SOURCE: Reuters/Reuters TV/Archive Photos. Reprinted with permission.
Addressed as it is to autonomous, choice-making individuals, persuasion predisposes others but does not impose. It affects their sense of what is true or false, probable or improbable; their evaluations of people, events, ideas, or proposals; their private and public commitments to take this or that action; and perhaps even their basic values and ideologies. All this is done by way of communication. According to St. Augustine more than 1,500 years ago, the fully influenced persuadee likes what you promise, fears what you say is imminent, hates what you censure, embraces what you command, regrets whatever you build up as regrettable, rejoices at whatever you say is cause for rejoicing, sympathizes with those whose wretchedness your words bring before his very eyes, shuns those whom you admonish him to shun . . . and in whatever other ways your high eloquence can affect the minds of your hearers, bringing them not merely to know what should be done, but to do what they know should be done. (quoted in Burke, 1950/1969, p. 50)

Persuasion by this definition may succeed or fail at influencing judgments or actions, but it is still persuasion. The emphasis here is on persuasion as a practice. No matter what the jury’s verdict, for example, the attorneys for the plaintiff and the defense are assumed to be engaged in the practice of persuasion. The core of persuasion’s “domain” consists of clear-cut attempts at persuading others (Figure 1.1).
The *gray areas* of persuasion are cases in which intent to persuade is not so clear. It is not always clear, for example, whether the news is being slanted deliberately or whether your teacher is knowingly promoting a point of view in the classroom. Included here as well are unintended effects of intentionally persuasive messages. Seldom are persuaders fully aware of everything they are saying and doing when communicating a message. The effects they intend are not always the effects they achieve. Combs and Nimmo (1993) have commented on the unintended effects of Barbie doll promotions (see Picture 1.2).

Like ‘jolly ol’ Saint Nick, Barbie is a cultural icon. The doll represents something more than a plaything or diversion; combined in Barbie’s face, figure, and lifestyle are a host of ideas (call them symbols) about how young girls should look, act and be. Barbie teaches young girls what growing up in American society is all about. (p. 4)
Some textbooks treat paradigm cases as the whole of persuasion, but this book does not. Among the cases in the gray areas of persuasion are those in which intent to influence another’s judgments is masked, played down, or combined with other communicative motives. As Chapter 3 argues, our culture often neglects cases in which persuasion and expression, persuasion and information giving, and persuasion and other forms of influence are intermixed.

**Why Is Persuasion Important?**

Think about the last time you visited a shopping mall or even a supermarket. Virtually every object there was market tested, advertised, and merchandised to get you to buy, buy, buy. The objects in these stores do more than service your material needs; they’re also symbols, especially for new generations of consumption communities in the United States and abroad. These are people who define themselves and their friends by what they wear and what music they listen to and what they watch on television (Barber, 1996). Why, for many years, was basketball star Michael Jordan (Pic-
By the conclusion of the 1999 Senate trial on William Jefferson Clinton’s impeachement, *Newsweek* and *Time* had between them run a record 26 covers on the “Monicagate” scandal, and the network news shows had given it more than 2,300 minutes of airtime (Seplow, 1999). During that time, the American people had absorbed a great deal of information about the scandal that formed the core of their beliefs. They learned, for example, that Clinton had misled them for several months about his illicit relationship with the White House intern and that he had probably misinformed his close aides as well in an effort to derail the investigation by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. Beginning with the revelations contained in
surreptitiously taped phone conversations between White House intern Monica Lewinsky and her supposed friend, Linda Tripp, and concluding with DNA evidence on Monica’s dress, the fact of Clinton’s sexual involvement with Lewinsky had become well nigh incontrovertible.

Yet Americans’ attitudes toward President Clinton’s job performance and toward whether he should be removed from office stemmed not just from their beliefs about sex, lies, and audiotapes but also from their values. Were Clinton’s transgressions important? Were they as important as the good job most people believed Clinton had been doing in managing the economy and conducting foreign policy? Most Americans believed that President Clinton was untrustworthy but placed a higher value on the job he was doing. They saw him as a “low virtue, high competence” president, and most liked what they saw (McGee, 1998, p. 1).

Together, these beliefs and values strongly influenced Americans’ attitudes toward President Clinton’s performance and continuation in office. Their attitudes, in turn, served as knowledge structures, called schemas, for the filtering of new information. They performed, as it were, the work of a mental secretary, determining what new information would be allowed in the door, what importance it would be assigned, and how it would be interpreted. Americans were polarized about the impeachment issue, making it unlikely that either side would be moved very much by new information or new arguments. Their attitudes toward the proposal to impeach ranged from hostile to enthusiastically supportive, with relatively few people on the fence. These attitudes influenced people’s perceptions of the Senate trial as well as what they said to friends and coworkers.

But were attitudes alone fully predictive of what people would say to their friends and coworkers about the Clinton affair? Probably not. Another important predictor for many Americans (not all) was subjective norms. Many persons’ public actions (as opposed to their privately held attitudes) were influenced by what they believed was most socially acceptable. Should they snub their noses at the Clinton-Lewinsky affair as unworthy of serious attention? A great many Americans publicly dismissed the importance of the scandal even as they tuned in to CNN and MSNBC each night for the latest salacious details. Their public actions may have been attitude related, but subjective norms played an important role as well.

Of course, some Americans thought hard about the Clinton-Lewinsky matter, whereas others were either unwilling or unable to perform the necessary mental labor. The former pursued what Petty and Cacioppo (1981/1996) call the central route to judgment making; the latter pursued a peripheral route, probably relying for their judgments on cognitive shorthands. These are rules of thumb that enable people to get on with their lives without protracted deliberation, for example, “Everybody lies about sex, so what’s the big deal?”

Mention of routes to persuasion suggests that being persuaded is a learning process. Americans learned to like or dislike Clinton on the basis of information, associa-
tions, and anticipated rewards and punishments. These constituents of the learning process were also at work as Americans contemplated the policy options of removal or continuation in office. Americans not only learned information but also learned whom to trust. Typically, they tended to be guarded and defensive when exposed to sources they perceived as untrustworthy. To some extent, messages presented in the guise of entertainment (e.g., Jay Leno’s jokes about the scandal) or news (e.g., CNN’s intensive coverage) had a better chance of influencing their judgments and actions.

Which comes first: attitudes or actions? Actions such as voting for a candidate or signing a petition follow in the wake of attitudes. But the acts of expressing a commitment to a position (such as by voting or signing a petition) have a way of reinforcing privately held attitudes. This helps explain the increasing partisanship in the House and Senate over the issue of impeachment. As members of Congress went public with their views, they became more firmly committed to those views.

Much the same phenomenon occurred among ordinary citizens in response to President Clinton’s historic speech on August 17, 1998, in which he admitted to the American people for the first time that he had misled them. It was Clinton’s task in the speech to retain the loyalty of his many longtime supporters who had found news of the affair and subsequent cover-up troubling by helping them find ways of understanding and perhaps forgiving his transgressions. For those who had made no secret of their dislike for Clinton and revulsion toward what he had done, the task of winning converts was probably impossible. But perhaps Clinton could defuse some of their hostility and even create a sense of cognitive inconsistency between the Clinton they knew and despised and the Clinton they now saw on their television screens.

The Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, then, has much to teach about the psychology of persuasion. The rest of this chapter elaborates on the principles already illustrated.

Beliefs and Values as Building Blocks of Attitudes

Every field has its own jargon, and some fields use familiar terms in special ways, just as the terms attitude, belief, and value are used in this book in special ways. “Having an attitude” is sometimes used to mean being ornery, stubborn, and hard to get along with, but here the term attitude is used differently. Many people speak of their values as things they believe in, but in this text, values include judgments of negative worth—for example, negatively valuing adultery. Furthermore, a distinction is made between believing in something (e.g., the value of honesty) and believing that something (e.g., the belief that Clinton lied). It is in the latter sense that belief is used in this book. The word opinion is also used in various ways. Is opinion the same as a be-
“sunny” attach to orange any more than to grapefruit? Yet overwhelming numbers of respondents report viewing the orange as sunnier, more intimate, and faster; the grapefruit as older and more intellectual (Dichter, 1960). Findings of this sort are not lost on persuaders, as the discussion in Chapter 12 on analyzing product advertising indicates.

**Persuasion as Psychological Unbalancing and Rebalancing**

Psychological inconsistency disturbs people, enough so that they will often go to great lengths to reduce or remove it. Numerous consistency theories have been put forward by psychologists, some referred to by that name, others labeled as balance theories, dissonance theories, or congruity theories (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981/1996). Already discussed was the likelihood of attitude change under conditions of insufficient justification for performance of a counterattitudinal act, such as role-playing a lifestyle you believe is unethical.

A common denominator in cases of psychological inconsistency is the sense that something is discrepant. In the foregoing case, the obvious discrepancy is between actions and attitudes, but pride hangs in the balance as well; for example, a binge drinker may suffer the sense of wounded pride at knowing that she occasionally drinks to wild excess while realizing that it is irrational and even dangerous.

Another source of psychological inconsistency stems from perceived discrepancies between our attitudes toward other people, our attitudes toward objects, and their attitudes toward the same objects. For most of us, balanced states are preferable to imbalanced states. For example, if Wallace likes (+) pizza and Wallace likes (+) Kate, Wallace would find it psychologically consistent for Kate to like (+) pizza. But a sense of imbalance (psychological inconsistency) is created for Wallace if Kate says she hates (-) pizza or if Kate reports liking (+) pizza but Wallace loses his stomach for the food (-). Even discrepancies in degree of liking can be uncomfortable, according to some consistency theorists. For example, if Kate’s favorite food was pizza and Wallace liked it only a little, this too could be discomfiting for Wallace, perhaps leading him to think less of Kate, more of pizza, or both.

Imbalances create motivation for attitude change, and persuaders may be quick to exploit them, even foster them. To senators repulsed by Clinton’s private behavior and efforts to deny or make light of it, the president’s successes in office were psychologically inconsistent and so, too, was the public’s willingness to look past the transgressions as long as they approved of his performance in office. By repeatedly calling attention to Clinton’s pluses during the impeachment trial, Clinton’s attorneys hoped to increase the sense of psychological inconsistency. Acquittal, they suggested, was the only rebalancing alternative.
This chapter has presented basic psychological principles of persuasion and, in the process, has introduced you to psychological theories. From its origins as a field of study, psychology has been divided between theories emphasizing similarities between humans and other animal species and theories emphasizing humans’ seemingly distinctive capacity for reason. It should not be surprising, therefore, that psychological theories of persuasion should divide in similar ways. One possible explanation for the successfully concluded exchange at the supermarket deli is that the customer was conditioned to buy a package of Sagamento not unlike a pigeon in a psychological laboratory being trained to hop on one foot, then the other. But an alternative explanation is that the conversants had simply reasoned together until a rational decision to purchase the Sagamento had formed in the customer’s mind.

The theorists featured in this chapter were by no means unmindful of such features of human animality as the role of emotion in persuasion, of seemingly unconscious associations, as well as of incentives for action. Petty and Cacioppo (1981/1996) describe a central route to persuasion in which the quality of an argument is likely to make a great deal of difference to persuadees, but they also recognize that there are times when humans are likely to rely on cognitive shorthands, using what the theorists call a peripheral route to persuasion.

BVA theory pictures humans as distinctive by virtue of their capacity to derive attitudes from their beliefs and values but does not exclude the roles of emotions and unreason in the formation of beliefs and values. Likewise, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)
see human action as a weighted combination of attitudes toward the behavior in
test question and subjective norms—the weight varying depending on how much im-
portance is assigned in the given case to what valued others think. The product of
this type of seemingly rational calculation, however, might be the decision to join a
religious cult or a right-wing militia. Poorly supported group stereotypes can also in-
fluence the formation of beliefs and values, say the proponents of schema theory.

The persuadees in McGuire’s (1968) theory vary between those who remain un-
persuaded because they are critical of what they understand, those unlikely to be per-
suaded because of difficulties comprehending and recalling the message, and a mid-
dle-range group that is most persuadable because it is neither too critical to resist
accepting the persuader’s recommendations nor incapable of understanding them.

Again and again, reason is mixed with unreason and downright irrationality—
most clearly, perhaps, in theories of psychological consistency. Although the attempt
to reconcile conflicting cognitions or attitudes seems rational, it can lead two friends
to sever a relationship over something as trivial as the taste of pizza.

So what should the persuader make of all this? Explicit in some theories, implicit
in others, are guidelines for selling an XL7 Zippo sedan, coaxing a deli customer into
trying a package of Sagamento, and convincing Americans that William Clinton
should have been impeached and removed from office or continued as president and
celebrated for his accomplishments. For example, if your goal is conversion, encour-
gee people to role-play positions counter to their existing attitudes but offer minimal
incentives to try out these roles. If your goal is a fully convinced ally who will remain
supportive of your position in the face of counterarguments, appeal to the message
recipient by way of the central route to persuasion. But if it’s a quick sell that you’re
after, consider providing cognitive shorthands. (These will be discussed in far more
detail in Chapter 7.)

These same guidelines should be warning signals to you as persuadees. Beware,
for example, that the innocent “yes” you give to the deli salesperson’s question may
land you with far more Sagamento than you really wanted. As for that sexy-looking
XL7 Zippo sedan, why not? We only live once!

Questions and Projects for Further Study

1. In light of your reading of this chapter, how different are humans from laboratory
   rats, dogs, pigeons, and so forth?
2. The best way to learn new terms is to try your hand at illustrating them with ex-
   amples of your own. Try doing that with respect to the following:
   a. The relationship between beliefs, values, and attitudes
   b. The relationship between attitudes, subjective norms, and public actions
c. The differences between central and peripheral processing
d. How the learning of an attitude (e.g., liking yogurt) might be influenced by new information, by associations, and by expected benefits
e. How the act of publicly expressing a commitment to a position may reinforce privately held attitudes
f. The differences between response reinforcement, response shaping, and response changing
g. How schemas influence information processing
h. The principle of insufficient justification
i. Balancing and unbalancing

3. What is a theory? What is your theory about the relationship between logic and emotion in persuasion? How might research be used to test your theory?

Notes

1. You may find it surprising to find values mentioned in connection with something as mundane as the purchase of a car. But safety is as much a value in thinking about car purchases as fair play is in thinking about modes of conduct and as self-fulfillment is in thinking about goals in life. As used here, then, values are relative to contexts of judgment.

2. Even when audiences are predisposed to decode messages accurately, there are apt to be problems. Numerous examples can be provided of persuasive efforts that failed because of difficulties in translation or other problems in bridging linguistic divides. A notorious example was the campaign to market in South America a style of Chevrolet, the Nova, that had been selling well in North America. Unfortunately, no va in Spanish means “it doesn’t go.”

3. There isn’t anything terribly rational about this state of affairs. Why, after all, should the people we like necessarily like the same foods we like? Shouldn’t it be possible for us to like them just as much despite minor differences in food tastes? Still, the preference for balanced states seems to be powerful (Heider, 1958).

4. Consistency theories vary considerably in the options they identify for reducing psychological imbalances. For some, an asymmetry between attitudes toward a person (e.g., Kate) and attitudes toward an object (e.g., pizza) could be resolved only by a complete rebalancing. But as other theorists have observed, humans are capable of lesser remedies. Said Festinger (1957) in his original Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, they can decide that some discrepancies are not important. They can also compartmentalize, keeping separate in their heads, for example, Clinton’s moral transgressions and his apparent competence as president. Similarly, said Abelson and Rosenberg (1958), they can differentiate: deciding, for example, that there is a difference between lying about matters of state (very bad) and lying about personal matters (not as bad). From distinctions such as these, many a politician has crafted successful defenses against charges of wrongdoing in
On the first day of the freshman seminar, Professor Steven Jones approaches student Linda Smithers and says, “Ah, you must be Linda.” She says, “And you must be Steven.” “No,” says the professor, “I’m Dr. Jones” (Lakoff, 1990, p. 154). Is this guy putting me down? Linda asks herself. Is he on some kind of ego trip? Or is he merely letting me know how he prefers to be addressed? She looks to his nonverbals for the answer.

Beyond the paradigm cases of persuasion are the gray areas of persuasion where persuasive intent is mixed with other motives or hidden from the audience (and perhaps even from the persuader) or persuasion is combined with other forms of influence. These more complex forms of persuasion are actually quite commonplace in society, and often we are taken in by them because they appear as something entirely trustworthy: as spontaneous expression, for example, or as mere entertainment, or as objective news reporting. But to fully grasp their power and significance, you will
need a far more sophisticated view of the communication process than that presented in Chapters 1 and 2.

The view of communication presented here begins with the theory that the individual communicative act is the bearer of multiple meanings. Linda and Steven (or should we call him Professor Jones?) don’t just communicate information about who they are; their exchange is also about such relational matters as how they see themselves, how they see the other, how they see the other seeing them, and how they would like to be seen. This, moreover, is just the beginning of the story. Human communication is often multimotivated. It takes place through multiple channels. It is seldom fully explicit. Even then, intended meanings and received meanings may be different. There is seldom an arbiter available to say who is “right.” Thus, in a sense, persuader and persuadee cocreate meaning. Sometimes, as in a long-term relationship, meanings may be fought over and ultimately negotiated.

From a concern with individual messages, Chapter 3 moves to consideration of the cumulative effects of multiple messages. Think, for example, of the differences between individual advertisements and advertising as a recurring institutional practice. What happens to a society when its consumers are repeatedly bombarded with the message that their happiness depends on what they own? What happens to that society when the heroes and heroines of its television dramas are predominantly white middle class? Of special interest here is how multiple meanings and their cumulative effects shape ideologies.

An ideology is the glue that joins attitudes together, helping to explain, for example, why someone who is pro-life is also likely to favor prayer in schools, capital punishment, and a reduction in food stamp programs for the poor. Because they are widely shared systems of beliefs and values, ideologies bind people together in such groups as the religious right, the cultural left, libertarians, liberals, fiscal conservatives, and radical feminists. More fundamentally, ideologies join people of an entire society together; these systems of thought are called cultural ideologies. Rich or poor, conservative or liberal, Americans tend to be far more committed to materialism and individualism than, say, a village in rural India today or a New England village 300 years ago. Some theorists believe that ideologies are at their most powerful when people are least aware of their hold on them. According to this view, the ideas most basic to the functioning of capitalist societies, such as the “right” to own private property, are also the most taken for granted. (Imagine, said Karl Marx, if we were to view private property as “theft.”) In modern society, hegemonic (all-controlling) ideas such as ownership of private property are shaped and reinforced from childhood on in a thousand ways, some deliberate, some unintentional, with the news and entertainment media playing a major role. This chapter will highlight the role of the “infotainment” media in the shaping of cultural ideologies, both in the United States and abroad.
Table 3.1 charts these gray areas around the core, identifying four areas that were the focus of this chapter. In the gray areas are persuasion masked as—or mixed with—information giving, scientific demonstration, entertainment, and seemingly authentic, spontaneous expression.

Still, not all guises are deliberate disguises, intended to deceive and manipulate. The professions of science, journalism, and accounting make legitimate claims on our attention, however much we may find evidence of persuasion rather than “pure” logic or “pure” description. Entertainment does not cease to amuse us or interest us just because it also persuades us. The generic box of tissues that attracts us by its “re-alness” still contains objects that we can really use. The blue jeans that promote an image of unadorned authenticity also cover the lower half of the body—comfortably, durably, and relatively inexpensively.

Although Part 2 of this book focuses on paradigm cases of persuasion, the perspective on communication introduced in this chapter to help you identify nonobvious instances of persuasion applies to persuasion’s core as well. Moreover, the principles presented here fit well with those articulated in Chapter 2. Consider the following as you are introduced in Chapter 4 to the coactive approach to persuasion.

1. Human beings project images of themselves as they communicate about substantive matters.

2. Communicators are not entirely in control of the effects they produce.

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**Table 3.1 Gray Areas of Persuasion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Cases</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unclear or masked intent</td>
<td>• Persuasion in the guise of news reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Innuendo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unavoidable persuasion</td>
<td>• The generic box of tissues on a supermarket shelf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintended effects of intentionally</td>
<td>• Ideological effects of advertising and entertainment programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persuasive messages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed intent</td>
<td>• Blue jeans worn for comfort and to impress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A sportscast designed to sell the station as it gives the news</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Messages make connections between things—between, say, the car being advertised and the life of luxury with which it is linked. As the ad sells the car, it also reinforces desire for a life of luxury.

4. Message recipients are cocreators of meaning. In so doing, they often self-persuade in ways unintended by communicators.

5. The message is mostly thought of as what is said by the communicator, whether verbally or nonverbally. But broadly speaking, the message is anything to which the message recipient attends and assigns meaning. It may include the context of the message, not just the text; it will probably include the source of the message, not just what is said.

Taken together, these principles should help us better understand a number of things: how, for example, product advertising promotes ideologies, not just products; how what we take to be reality is in part rhetorically constructed; and how news of Michael Jordan’s latest contract with Nike helps sell both Air Jordans and Michael Jordan.

Questions and Projects for Further Study

1. Do you actively seek to promote an image of yourself to others, or do you merely project one?
2. How do you address your professors? How do they address you? What’s being metacommunicated about power, respect, and liking by these interactions?
3. Is there a dominant, widely shared ideology in this country, or are there many competing ideologies with no single dominant ideology? How would you describe your own ideology?
4. What is objectivity? As a communicator, is it possible to be fully objective? Discuss in relation to news, textbooks, tax statements, scientific reports, and so forth.
5. Review the discussion of consumption communities in Chapter 1. Are there consumption communities in the United States? Do you “belong” to one? How would you describe it?
6. Is the Americanization of cultures around the world a good or bad thing?
Coactive Persuasion

When the U.S. Congress refused to provide funding for an expensive but highly promising vehicle for research in physics known as the supercollider, their refusal was termed “the revenge of the ‘C’ students.” Yet, says communication scholar John Angus Campbell (1996), one might ask who really deserved the middling grade. “Were the ‘C’ students the legislators who failed to grasp the national interest in physics, or were they the physicists who failed to adapt their arguments to a popular forum?” (p. 212).

Persuasion is a process of bridging differences—reducing psychological distances—to secure preferred outcomes. The physicists’ job was to close the gap between their belief in the merits of building a supercollider and what Congress saw as the public interest. Even attempts to reinforce existing beliefs may involve perceived
differences of a sort. For example, a political campaign manager, perceiving a gap between the current level of activity by campaign volunteers and the amount needed to win at the polls, may attempt to reinforce their commitments to the cause. How persuaders can best bridge the psychological divide is the subject of this chapter and the focus of Part 2 of the book. It has direct implications for persuadees as well. The principles and techniques of coactive persuasion introduced here are also employed by persuasion professionals via the mass media—where ordinary citizens are far more likely to function as persuadees.

Coactive persuasion is an umbrella term for the ways that persuaders might move toward persuadees psychologically so that they will be moved, in turn, to accept the persuaders’ position or proposal for action. This book’s conception of it derives primarily from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (Cooper, 1932), from Kenneth Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950/1969b), from social-psychological theory and research (e.g., Allen & Preiss, 1998; Shavitt & Brock, 1994), and from reports by practitioners in fields as diverse as politics and psychotherapy.

Just what form coactive persuasion takes depends on the situation, for example, whether it uses the mass media or involves interpersonal communication: if interpersonal, on whether persons A and B are locked in a conflict of interests or merely have a difference of opinion; if the mass media, whether the object of their talk is to convince each other or to persuade some third party such as the voters in a political contest. In a staged confrontation, as when two presidential candidates are facing each other in a television debate, coactive persuasion may be highly combative toward the adversary even as it appeals coactively to the target audience. Thus, although coactive persuasion is essentially “friendly” persuasion, it is not without its weaponry.

Taken together, the components of the coactive approach (listed in Box 4.1) constitute a logic of “rhetorical proof,” as opposed to the logics expected from scientists or mathematicians. Above all, it is a logic of adaptation, finding in audiences and situations the grounds on which appeals are presented and arguments addressed.

**Using Receiver-Oriented Approaches**

Coactive persuasion recognizes that receivers of messages are by no means cut from the same cloth. As an extension of this principle, it underscores the need to provide “different strokes for different folks.” For example, the department of communication at a large university sought to have its course in public speaking made mandatory for all undergraduates. To the college of business, it appealed for the practical benefits. To colleagues in education, it characterized public speaking as especially relevant for teachers and their students. The department recognized, however, that these appeals would cut little ice in its own college of liberal arts, which prided itself
on maintaining traditional academic values in the face of pressures for practicality and relevance. Accordingly, the chairman of the department circulated to his colleagues in liberal arts a long and scholarly memo on the humanistic rhetorical tradition that characterized public speaking training as a venerable practice that began with the preparation of citizen-orators in ancient Greece and Rome. They were duly impressed.

This important principle can be illustrated with another example, this one from psychotherapy. One of the hardest things for patients to do, report Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974), is to display to the therapist the symptoms they are so eager to control. Here is how Watzlawick et al. use the principle of “different strokes for different folks” in working to overcome their patients’ resistance:

To the engineer or computer man we may explain the reason for this behavior prescription in terms of a change from negative to positive feedback mechanisms. To a client associating his problem with low self-esteem, we may concede that he is evidently in need of self-punishment and that this is an excellent way of fulfilling this need. To somebody involved in Eastern thought we may recall the seeming absurdity of Zen koans. With the patient who comes and signals, “Here I am—now you take care of me,” we shall probably take an authoritarian stand and give him no explanation whatsoever (“Doctor’s orders!”). With somebody who seems a poor prospect for any form of cooperation, we shall have to preface the prescription itself with the remark that there exists a simple but somewhat odd way out of his problem, but that we are almost certain that he’s not the kind of person who can utilize this solution. (p. 126)

Coactive persuasion, then, is receiver oriented rather than source oriented. This distinction may become clearer by contrasting these receiver-oriented examples with
The last two decades of the first millennium A.D. were not particularly kind to the tobacco industry. With newscasts announcing new evidence of the dangers of secondhand smoke, pressures mounted to ban the smoking of tobacco in public places. The tobacco industry responded with a campaign of its own. Prohibited from advertising on radio and television, it turned to the print media. One such ad, by the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (now RJR Nabisco), was apparently designed to defuse or neutralize the attitudes of nonsmokers hostile to the cigarette industry while providing emotional support to smokers for what was already becoming a socially undesirable habit (Picture 5.1).

Reynold’s key language strategy was *typification*. Reynolds typified smokers and nonsmokers by, in effect, putting words in their mouths and excluding other, more damning, words. In playing down the negatives while playing up the positives, Reynolds was doing with language what persuaders since time immemorial have done. Suppose the nonsmokers had been represented as saying, “We’re hopping mad. To us, the smoke from your cigarettes can be anything from a minor irritant to...”
A message from those who don’t to those who do.

We’re uncomfortable.
To us, the smoke from your cigarettes can be anything from a minor nuisance to a real annoyance.
We’re frustrated.
Even though we’ve chosen not to smoke, we’re exposed to second-hand smoke anyway.
We feel a little powerless.
Because you can invade our privacy without even trying.
Often without noticing.
And sometimes when we speak up and let you know how we feel, you react as though we were the bad guys.
We’re not fanatics. We’re not out to deprive you of something you enjoy. We don’t want to be your enemies.
We just wish you’d be more considerate and responsible about how, when, and where you smoke.
We know you’ve got rights and feelings. We just want you to respect our rights and feelings, as well.

A message from those who do to those who don’t.

We’re on the spot.
Smoking is something we consider to be a very personal choice, yet it’s become a very public issue.
We’re confused.
Smoking is something that gives us enjoyment, but it gives you offense.
We feel singled out.
We’re doing something perfectly legal, yet we’re often segregated, discriminated against, even legislated against.
Total strangers feel free to abuse us verbally in public without warning.
We’re not criminals. We don’t mean to bother or offend you. And we don’t like confrontations with you.
We’re just doing something we enjoy, and trying to understand your concerns.
We know you’ve got rights and feelings. We just want you to respect our rights and feelings, as well.

Thoughts to you in the interest of common courtesies to
R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company

Picture 5.1. R. J. Reynolds Messages for Those Who Do and Those Who Don’t
resources that can be exploited by persuaders to suit their own ends (Burke, 1950/1969). This chapter identifies intensifying and downplaying stratagems as well as tactics persuaders can employ for purposes of compliance gaining. It also catalogs the persuaders’ nonverbal resources and briefly surveys media resources, including the rhetorical potential of so-called new media. Chapter 6 is reserved for the powerful devices of framing and reframing. Chapter 7 focuses on influence mechanisms for peripheral processing by persuadees, Chapter 8 on types of argument and evidence used in central processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981/1996). All told, then, Part 2 of *Persuasion in Society* is designed to do for today’s reader what Aristotle long ago characterized as rhetorical theory’s most essential function: that of identifying the “available means of persuasion.” But persuaders need always to keep in mind that these means of persuasion will fall short of their mark and may even backfire unless they are well adapted to ends, audiences, and situations.

**Resources of Language**

Anyone using language to communicate faces many choices. A word, a phrase, or an entire speech might accent some features of an object while deemphasizing others. Similarly, matters might be stated in ways that conceal or reveal, magnify or minimize, elevate or degrade, sharpen or blur, link or divide, simplify or complexify, or make good, bad, or indifferent.

Chapter 1 provided the example of the catalog description for COM 390R as evidence of how the *style* of a persuasive message can prompt suspicion, even incredulity. The absence of verbs and adjectives, the failure to define terms, and the seemingly bureaucratic character of the language created the impression that the authors of this description were not particularly interested in encouraging enrollments in the course.

**Intensify/Downplay**

As in the Reynolds ad, language is most often used to play up the positives and play down the negatives. One need look no further than the 2000 presidential campaign for examples of intensifying and downplaying. In contesting for the Republi-
Framing and Reframing

Metaphors as Frames
Creative Reframing Through Generative Metaphors
Cultural Frames and Verbal Repertoires
Research on Frames and Reframes
Metacommunicative Frames
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Summary
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Jamie wants to connect the nine dots shown in Figure 6.1 by four straight lines without lifting his pen or pencil from the paper. (The solution to the problem appears in Figure 6.2, but do not peek until you too have worked on the problem for at least 2 minutes.)

At first, like nearly everyone who comes across this problem for the first time, Jamie assumes that the nine dots comprise a rectangle and that he can’t go outside the box formed by the dots. But this self-imposed rule dooms all attempts to solve the problem. Only by questioning the assumption, recognizing that the ambiguity of the task allows greater freedom than initially assumed, can those trying to solve the puz-
Then someone observed, “You know, a paintbrush is a kind of pump!” He pointed out that when a paintbrush is pressed against a surface, paint is forced through the spaces between bristles onto the surface. The paint is made to flow through the “channels” formed by the bristles when the channels are deformed by the bending of the brush. He noted that painters will sometimes vibrate a brush when applying it to a surface, so as to facilitate the flow of paint.

The researchers tried out the natural and synthetic bristle brushes, thinking of them as pumps. They noticed that the natural brush formed a gradual curve when it was pressed against a surface whereas the synthetic brush formed a shape more nearly an angle. They speculated that this difference might account for the “gloppy” performance of the bristle brush. How then might they make the bending shape of the synthetic brush into a gentle curve?

This line of thought led them to a variety of inventions. Perhaps fibers could be varied so as to create greater density in that zone. Perhaps fibers could be bonded together in that zone. Some of these inventions were reduced to practice and did, indeed, produce a smoother flow of paint. (p. 257)

“Paintbrush-as-pump,” said Schön, “is an example of what I mean by a generative metaphor” (p. 257).

“Frame” as Metaphor

Paradoxically, just as metaphors are frames, so the term frame as applied to language is itself metaphorical. The metaphor of a linguistic frame is at least partially visual,1 conjuring up images of photographic frames (the senator photographed with or without his escorts), frames in a motion picture (e.g., a battle between cowboys and Indians, first seen from the perspective of the cowboys, then from the perspective of the Indians), and picture frames (e.g., gilt-edged versus unadorned). A frame, then, is one among a number of possible ways of seeing something, and a reframing is a way of seeing it differently; in effect changing its meaning. Just as there are frames around pictures, so may there be talk about frames as frames of frames; recall the discussion of levels of communication in Chapter 3.

There is clearly a good deal of ambiguity surrounding the notions of framing and reframing, and some writers have therefore attempted to rein the terms in. To frame, suggests Entman (1993),

is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)
Note how this definition fits the examples provided thus far. Indeed, the war metaphor diagnoses, evaluates, and prescribes (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992). The catfish metaphor shifts attention from the substantive frame and presents instead a metacommunicational frame, one that makes salient the relationship between the two utility companies, suggesting a negative moral evaluation of the larger one. The paintbrush-as-pump metaphor offers no moral evaluation, but it clearly diagnoses and prescribes.

Entman (1993) adds that frames reside in four locations in a communicative process, which may or may not coincide. These are the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture.

Communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize their belief systems. The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key-words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments. The frames that guide the receiver’s thinking and conclusion may or may not reflect the frames in the text and the framing intention of the communicator. The culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames. In fact, culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping. (pp. 52-53)

This last notion—of cultural frames—is particularly interesting. On many a social or political issue, the culture seems to supply competing aphorisms. Should the heroine of a favorite soap opera risk an affair with that handsome doctor who’s just come into town? Perhaps yes. After all, “nothing ventured, nothing gained,” “love must have its way,” and “the early bird catches the worm.” On the other hand, “safety first,” “look before you leap,” “the grass is greener on the other side,” and “thou shalt not commit adultery.”

These are just a sampling of the seemingly opposed framing expressions that pass for the common sense of Western culture. They are seemingly opposed because as Billig (1987) has observed, the aphorisms don’t directly contradict one another when taken literally. Moreover, they are typically invoked selectively, as needed, to make a point or craft an image. In this respect, they are like the lines of argument that the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians taught would-be orators and that law schools still teach prospective lawyers today. For example, a lawyer wishing to prove
Cognitive Shorthands

Cialdini’s Seven Principles

1. Contrast
2. Reciprocity
3. Consistency
4. Social Proof
5. Authority
6. Liking
7. Scarcity

Mother Turkeys or Faulty Automatic Pilots?

Summary
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I can admit it freely now. All my life I’ve been a patsy. For as long as I can recall, I’ve been an easy mark for the pitches of peddlers, fund raisers, and operators of one sort or another. True, only some of these people have had dishonorable motives. The others—representatives of certain charitable agencies, for instance—have had the best of intentions. No matter. With personally disquieting frequency, I have always found myself in possession of unwanted magazine subscriptions or tickets to the sanitation workers’ ball.

So confides Robert B. Cialdini (1993, p. xiii), a leading social psychologist, in the introduction to his highly popular book on social influence. Readers of Cialdini’s book discover that Cialdini is not alone; many suspect that they, too, are among the gullible. Cialdini compiled some powerful techniques of persuasion. But he offers
two contrasting explanations for the power of these techniques, and he never reconciles them. One is that people are like mother turkeys—programmed to respond automatically to specific triggering stimuli. “Click” goes the triggering stimulus, “whirr” goes the fixed-action response. This explanation assumes that there isn’t much they can do about their gullibilities.

The other explanation is that people are like fliers who have put their planes on automatic pilot at precisely those times when they need to be in direct control. Maybe the problem is with the automatic pilot device. Maybe the problem is with the information it is getting. But the important thing is that people can do something about their gullibilities. They can disengage their automatic pilots and engage in thoughtful, rather than mindless, message processing. This chapter will critically examine these rival frames. It is designed in part to illustrate how critical methods can be brought to bear on textbook persuasion, including the rhetoric of textbooks such as this one that are about persuasion. In the process, it will pave the way for Chapter 8 on reasoning and evidence. First, however, this chapter will survey Cialdini’s compilation of influence techniques. The techniques he identifies are immensely important, especially in a message-dense society. These are among society’s cognitive shorthands; none of us can do without them.

Cialdini’s Seven Principles

Cialdini (1993) organizes his collection of influence techniques around seven principles: (1) contrast, (2) reciprocity, (3) consistency, (4) social proof, (5) authority, (6) liking, and (7) scarcity. These cognitive shorthands are especially needed when individuals haven’t the inclination or wherewithal to engage in more mindful message processing.

For example, a visitor from a foreign shore decides to stop in her hotel’s bar for a beer. She knows nothing about American beers, and the question of which beer to choose isn’t terribly important to her. The bartender seems like a competent, friendly sort of person, so she asks him for a recommendation. Rather than indicating his personal preference, he tells her that Budweiser is the most popular beer in America. On the basis of the cognitive shorthand that “popular = good,” she decides to order a Budweiser. Besides, she assumes, an authoritative, likable source wouldn’t lead her astray. Let us examine Cialdini’s principles more carefully.

Contrast

Contrast has to do with the sequencing of message stimuli. Just as a moderately heavy object may seem heavy after you have lifted a light one or relatively light after you have lifted a heavy one, so the order of occurrence of social stimuli can make a
In 1993, Congress signed into law the Brady bill, named in honor of James Brady, former press secretary to President Ronald Reagan, who was shot and seriously wounded by John Hinckley, Reagan’s would-be assassin. Passage of the Brady bill took a dozen years (see Picture 8.1), during which time advocates of stricter gun regulation had to overcome strong resistance from the National Rifle Association (NRA). Jim Brady’s wife, Sarah, served as a spokesperson for the gun control movement. In 1986, she wrote an article for Glamour describing their ordeal.¹

On the morning of January 2, 1981, my husband Jim Brady received a call from President-elect Reagan, asking him to be his press secretary. It was a dream come true for Jim—the culmination of many years of hard work in politics.
The next two and one-half months whizzed by. There was the excitement of the inaugural, Jim’s nightly appearances on network news, the flurry of parties following his long hours at the White House. We never expected it to end so abruptly.

On the morning of March 30, 1981, as Jim was about to leave for work, he decided to go upstairs and wake our two-year old son, Scott. It was to be the last time he would climb those stairs to Scott’s bedroom. At 2:30 that afternoon, Jim was shot through the head by John Hinckley. Jim nearly died. The President and two of his security men also were seriously wounded.

Five years later, I still wonder how the John Hinckleys of the world can go into a store, buy a handgun—no questions asked—and shoot people because they hear voices or have strange visions. (pp. 96-97)

Sarah Brady’s story contains the rudiments of an argument—about the insanity of allowing the John Hinckleys of the world to purchase handguns—backed up by a piece of evidence, the Hinckley case itself. By strict standards of logic, however, this
story is insignificant, because it is about an isolated case, an “n of 1,” as they say in statistics texts. Clearly, Sarah Brady will need a lot more evidence before she is through making her case.

This chapter connects the principles of reasoning and evidence to the larger tasks of preparing a persuasive case (in the role of a persuader) and of evaluating a persuasive case (in the role of a message recipient). These tasks require balancing the standards of sound reasoning and credible evidence against the realization that persuasion typically takes place under conditions that are less than ideal for reflective argumentative exchange (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993). These conditions include those in which committed, sometimes passionate communicators, operating under time constraints, must adapt their arguments to audiences with limited information on topics that are likely to arouse audience passions and prejudices as well. Accordingly, like Sarah Brady, persuaders cannot always be expected to win belief by logic alone.

Sarah Brady’s (1986) story does pack a wallop. Its narrative details—of the parties, of the network news appearances, of Jim Brady’s impulsive farewell to his son on the morning before he was shot—are not logically essential to her case for gun regulation, but they give the reader a feeling for what the shooting of her husband meant in lived experience. The opening to Sarah Brady’s article also contributes greatly to her ethos; it literally authorizes her to speak as someone who has experienced the tragic consequences of unregulated handgun ownership firsthand. Brady couples this story with another, about a visit to Centralia, Illinois, Jim’s hometown.

A friend invited Scott, then six years old, and me for a ride in his pickup truck. We got in. Scott picked up what looked like a toy pistol and pointed it toward himself. I said, “Scott, don’t ever point a gun at anyone, even if it’s only a toy.” Then, to my horror, I realized it was no toy. It was a fully-loaded handgun that our friend kept on the seat of his truck for “safety” reasons. I wondered how many other careless adults left handguns lying around for children to pick up. My mind went back to the day Jim was shot, then to the day one of my best friends was murdered—with a handgun—by her enraged boyfriend. I decided I had to do more than think about handgun violence—I had to do something to try to stop it. (pp. 96-97)

The tales about the loaded gun and about the killing of one of Sarah Brady’s best friends are almost as powerful as the story about Jim Brady. If anything, they establish Sarah Brady as more similar to her readers and less remote from them than does the Jim Brady story. Together, the vignettes about her life give Sarah the image of being a superrepresentative of her audience. Lest there be any doubt about her credibility, she adds that she is a Republican and a conservative—not some wild-eyed
liberal who wants to ban or confiscate guns and further restrict use of hunting rifles. Sarah Brady takes pains to emphasize that she is not in that camp:

What I am for is finding a way to keep handguns out of the wrong hands—the hands of the mentally incompetent; small children; drunks, drug users and criminals; and the person who, on the spur of the moment, decides that he wants to purchase a handgun to “settle” an argument. (pp. 96-97)

She also employs enthymematic arguments in her article. An enthymeme invites the reader to supply and endorse premises that are missing from the argument but left implicit. It is a truncated argument that rests on a premise or premises it assumes its audience will accept. Virtually all persuasive discourse is enthymematic, as Aristotle observed long ago.

Most conspicuous in the opening story is the premise that the near killing of the president’s press secretary (let alone, of the president) is a bad thing. But numerous other enthymematic premises are embedded in the narrative that derive from our culture. Indeed, Brady is giving back to us our own traditional image of the American dream: of Jim Brady’s deserved rise to the top on the basis of hard work; of the call from Mr. Big; of glamorous parties mixed with more hard work; of little Scott fast asleep in an upstairs bedroom; of Mrs. Brady standing up for her beliefs.

Despite the combined power of Sarah Kemp Brady’s stories, they still tell us about only three cases, and they offer little insight about what gun regulation would actually accomplish. General claims, such as those made by Brady for gun regulation, are most likely to be believed when they are bolstered by a variety of arguments.

Propositions of Policy, Fact, and Value

Brady’s proposal for gun regulation is an example of what argumentation theorists call a proposition of policy—a controversial recommendation for action of some sort, to be taken in the future. As with any proposition of policy, certain recurring questions, called stock issues, are logically relevant to the decision on gun regulation:

1. Is there a need for a change—that is, is there a problem or deficiency of some type in the present way of thinking or of doing things? Persuaders often identify several problems with the current system, rather than focusing on any one of them. Thus, Brady could have dealt separately with the problems of gun availability to drunks, drug users, and criminals, in addition to children and the mentally incompetent.
Frederick Douglass, born in 1818 to a slave and her master, escaped from a Southern prison-house of bondage to become one of the great orators and essayists for racial equality of the 19th century. His early life is testimony to the potential of humankind to triumph over adversity. His adult life is testimony to the power of public persuasion. Douglass committed the crime, punishable by death at the time, of secretly teaching himself to read and write while a slave. The fugitive-orator came to the attention of abolitionist leader Henry Lloyd Garrison, who reported in the preface to Douglass’s (1845/1968) autobiography that he was spellbound by Douglass’s oratory on first hearing him at an antislavery convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts, in 1841.

I shall never forget his first speech at the convention—the extraordinary emotion it excited in my own mind—the powerful impression it created upon a crowded auditory, completely taken by surprise—the applause which followed from the beginning to the end of his felicitous remarks.
He came forward to the platform with a hesitancy and embarrassment, necessarily the attendants of a sensitive mind in such a novel position. After apologizing for his ignorance, and reminding the audience that slavery was a poor school for the human intellect and heart, he proceeded to narrate some of the facts in his own history as a slave, and in the course of his speech gave utterance to many noble thoughts and thrilling reflections. As soon as he had taken his seat, filled with hope and admiration, I rose, and declared that Patrick Henry, of revolutionary fame, never made a speech more eloquent in the cause of liberty, than the one we had just listened to from the lips of that hunted fugitive. So I believed at the time—so I believe now. (Garrison, 1845/1968, pp. vi-vii)

“Going public” is that moment when the private self goes public in support of a position or proposal. For audiences, it is often the moment of decision. For speakers such as Douglass, it is generally the moment after decision, and after a commitment to exercise leadership has been made.

The focus of this chapter is on the one-shot presentation or message, as opposed to persuasive campaigns, which are organized, sustained attempts to influence groups or masses of people through a series of messages. Campaigns—political, product advertising, and issue-oriented—are covered in the rest of Part 3 on the contexts of persuasion. This chapter looks primarily at what the communicator must do to win over audiences.

**The Genuinely Committed Persuader**

Going public is scary for most people. Communications scholar John Angus Campbell (1996) provides the all-too-painful picture of a first round of presentations in a public speaking classroom.

Here is a speech with no point; here is another with twelve! Here is a speech crammed with technical evidence incomprehensible to the audience. Here is a light speech backed with little thought and no research. Here is an adequate speech, if one could listen to it, but that is all but impossible because of the speaker’s odd dexterity in jingling, chewing gum, and talking all at once. Here is a speech that is being read. Here is a speech so obviously memorized that the speaker looks out at the class as though his body had been snatched by space aliens. (p. 222)

Anyone who has ever taken public speaking probably recognizes that Campbell is exaggerating only slightly. Yet these problems can be overcome, especially if students are willing to do the necessary work of gathering research materials, coming to an informed judgment on the topic at hand, preparing the message, rehearsing if it is an oral presentation, then risking themselves in genuine expressions of commitment.
For as long as the villagers of Diabougou, Senegal, could remember, it had been custom for the young girls of the community to submit to the extremely painful and often dangerous process of female circumcision. Each year during the rainy season, the ritual circumciser of Diabougou would use a razor blade to remove the clitoris, and sometimes the inner and outer vaginal lips, of 200 children. The process was not unique to Senegal; indeed, according to Vivienne Walt (1998), about 130 million African women in 28 countries are circumcised, and thousands die as a result. Thus, it is all the more remarkable that one educational campaign was able to turn public opinion around in much of Senegal. Since July 1997, 29 Senegalese communities have declared an end to female circumcision and begun pressuring other villages to join them.

The single speech or other one-shot communication described in Chapter 9 is important, but seldom does it achieve a significant, enduring impact on its own. That job is left to persuasive campaigns—organized, sustained attempts at influencing groups or masses of people through a series of messages. Campaigns take many
forms—political campaigns (discussed in Chapter 11), product advertising campaigns (Chapter 12), and various issue-oriented campaigns (Chapters 10 and 14). This chapter introduces campaigning as a multistage, multimessage process and then explores in more detail two particular types of campaigns: indoctrination campaigns and public relations campaigns.

**Campaign Planning**

Campaigns proceed through stages, each stage building on the last yet exhibiting a life of its own (Figure 10.1). All of them should be anticipated in the initial planning, but plans will also need to be modified from time to time as new information is received. The following summary of factors to consider in the planning process is intended to be quite general to encompass a wide variety of campaign types.

**Setting Campaign Goals**

Campaigns arise from a sense that interests (e.g., a corporation's profits) or values (e.g., a people's safety or survival) held dear by an organization must be protected or advanced (Salmon, 1989). But to succeed, a campaign must have specific goals. The goal might be to elicit specific behaviors: enough votes to win election as student council president, enough raffle sales to enable the college orchestra to make an overseas trip, or enough support from local townspeople to get city council approval for a bicycle-only lane on Main Street. Other campaigns are less concerned with specific behavioral payoffs than with influencing beliefs and values. They vary from public relations campaigns that aim at fostering more favorable images of a group or organization, such as a fraternity or sorority, or church or synagogue, to indoctrination campaigns that seek to socialize or resocialize individuals with the aim of getting them to endorse entire ideologies and lifestyles. Religious cults stage indoctrination campaigns of this sort, but although far-out worship groups might be accused of brainwashing or thought control, mainstream organizations such as the military and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service often get by using similar persuasive tactics under far more acceptable labels such as "re-education" (Pratkanis & Aronson, 1991). Varying degrees of legitimacy are also conferred on reform-oriented social movements (discussed in Chapter 14). Their efforts at institutional change might target personnel (e.g., hiring more black police officers and firing the police chief), practices (e.g., stricter enforcement of housing codes), policies (e.g., university policies of "publish or perish"), or institutional values and priorities (rewarding research by faculty over quality of teaching).
Audience and situation also should be taken into account in formulating subsidiary goals. For example, a fund-raising campaign in behalf of a college orchestra should not be so aggressive that it garners the orchestra an overseas trip at the price of reduced attendance at home events. Other secondary goals in situations primarily designed to elicit specific behaviors (e.g., lottery sales) might revolve around issues of personal identity. Will those who volunteer for this fund-raising effort feel good about themselves when it’s been completed? Will they have made friends rather than lost them, honored their consciences rather than betrayed them? Can people commit to the cause without feeling utterly consumed by it (Dillard, 1988)?

Situations are seldom ideal for the fulfillment of campaign goals. Thus, it is a good idea to formulate primary goals at several levels: (a) what the campaign would ideally like to achieve, (b) what it expects to achieve, and (c) the bare minimum that
would still make the campaign worthwhile. Often, the large-scale information campaign is of questionable value when measured against the time, effort, and money expended to conduct the campaign. For example, it has proved far more effective—and cheaper—to mandate installation of air bags in automobiles than to educate and convince consumers that air bags are an option they should purchase.

An example of flexible goal setting involves efforts by the Temple Issues Forum (TIF) to place issues of higher education higher on the agenda in Philadelphia city politics. TIF’s official mission is to promote public debate and discussion at Temple University on issues of potential interest to the university community. Its main purpose has been to stimulate civic and intellectual engagement by students, not to influence city politics. But having run a televised mayoral forum at Temple on the topic of “Higher Education and the City,” TIF’s planning group identified a number of issues that fairly begged to be addressed through the long term and not just by way of a one-time-only mayoral forum. These included issues of marketing the city as a world-class center for higher education and of encouraging its college and university graduates to remain in the city and perhaps start businesses in the area. It included as well issues of urban education: how better to prepare urban high school graduates to do college-level work.

TIF’s planning group toyed with the possibility of promoting action on all these fronts, and it even talked with a foundation representative about organizing a consortium of colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area to be called “Greater Collegiate Philadelphia.” But group members knew that this goal was remote, although the other goals were difficult to realize but not completely beyond the group’s capacity to make a difference. Minimally speaking, TIF’s planning group was confident it could succeed at its agenda-setting goal, and it anticipated that everyone, including TIF itself, would benefit from the mayoral forum. So, in keeping with the principles of goal seeking, TIF had short- and long-term goals, as well as optimal, realistic, and minimal goals.

Undertaking Research and Development

What management experts refer to as the R&D function of business organizations has its counterpart in persuasive campaigns. It involves the gathering of arguments and evidence to be used in building persuasive messages, as well as the development of know-how for implementation. The failure to take these necessary steps is common among amateur campaigners. One well-intentioned student attempted to launch a campaign to require bicycle safety education in the public schools. Intuitively, he decided that the best way to get action was to testify at a meeting of the city school board. Unfortunately, he had not yet come up with a plan for such a program, discovered how and where decisions of this type are made in the school system,
Several years ago, the *New Yorker* ran a story on tactics used by campaign organizations in visual character assassinations of opponents (Stengel, 1998). Frank Luntz, a Republican campaign consultant, is reported as saying that black-and-white photos are used to resemble police mug shots. Small, fuzzy photos of the opponent are selected to force the television viewer’s attention. According to the reporter, the visual grammar of the images is fairly standard. “Your opponent’s face should have some combination of the following elements: a five-o’clock shadow, half-closed eye or eyes (or that attractive deer-caught-in-the-headlights look), and an open mouth” (p. 52). Democratic consultant Henry Sheinkopf gives testimony of the lengths to which ordinary color shots of Republican opponents are “grayed up,” decolorized, to add to the opponent’s sinister look. Another Democratic consultant is quoted as warning that the picture shouldn’t be too awful, lest the viewer lose trust in the candidate running the ad: “Ugly, but not nauseating—that’s the standard” (p. 53).

The United States is a republic of words and images. Its institutions of power are increasingly dependent on the media, its power holders and power seekers increas-
ingly dependent on money and technological know-how to purchase and effectively use media resources.

The mass media—including television entertainment programming and not just news—are forces of influence in their own right. For example, in running its story, the *New Yorker* could have chosen from a number of available news frames. (The one thing it could not have done was avoid a frame.) It could have presented itself as a watchdog for the public, ever alert to the misdeeds of those nasty candidates and their even nastier spin doctors. It could have written an admiring piece—aren’t those folks clever? It could have been—and perhaps it was—faintly ironic: Many Americans naively believe that pictures don’t lie, that seeing is believing. This magazine and its sophisticated readers surely know better. But here’s some news on how the game is played. Interesting, isn’t it?

When Americans “think politics,” they usually have in mind political campaigns, especially contests for high office. Some people, perhaps most, then utter a collective groan and pronounce them boring. To be sure, political campaigns have boring elements: the same dull speeches given week after week, the same hoopla at party convention after party convention. But they are important. If you pick up on the strategizing behind political campaigns, they are endlessly fascinating and immensely instructive about the art of persuasion. The campaign managers will assure you that in getting out their candidate’s story, they are merely telling it like it is, but that is just part of the hype of political campaigns.

Way back in 1924, Calvin Coolidge’s brain trust produced a silent film for movie house distribution showing “Silent Cal,” as he was called, to be a man of great energy and vigor. The hyping of political candidates in Campaign 2000 has not changed much since that day, but it has become a good deal more sophisticated. The Clinton years provided a textbook’s worth of lessons in how to capture the ideological middle, steal the opponent’s thunder, and weather scandal after scandal through two elections. But it was the Republicans—advising first Nixon, then Reagan—who fashioned today’s technologies for fine-tuning the electorate, targeting swing voters with market-tested, custom-tailored appeals, and, above all, raising the enormous sums of money necessary to run extravagant television campaigns. No industry—not the soap or the beer or the car manufacturers—spends as much for mass persuasion on an annualized basis in the United States as do the organizations that seek to get their candidates elected to high office. American political campaigning is now being imitated worldwide, complete with sound bites, photo opportunities, quick responses, nightly tracking polls, focus groups, opposition research, and devastating attack ads (Nagourney, 1999).

These accoutrements of the “new politics,” as they’ve been called, are overlaid on the old in the United States. The new politics is never ending; no sooner has an election been won (or lost) than the next election’s hopefuls begin plotting strategy, lining up supporters, and gathering funds. First-term presidents may govern more or
less independently, but they always need people near them who'll answer the question, “How will this affect the chances for reelection?” The pollsters and the media consultants are seldom far away from the Oval Office.

The “old” politics is confined to a period marked out as “electing time,” a time and a place for the type of persuasion called “campaigning.” It’s often marked visually by flags, balloons, bunting done in patriotic colors, posters, bumper stickers, perky music, and campaign slogans—“America must get moving again!” Electing time is a special time and place separate from political business as usual. It is a time for assessing where we’ve been as a political people, where we are, and where we think we ought to be going—a break in the usual debates over ways and means, war and peace. Sometimes, as in the days of Lincoln and Douglas, it involves long speeches in stuffy auditoriums or long harangues at outdoor rallies, but increasingly it is marked by sound bite politics and the visual politics of television ads and photo ops.

This chapter examines political campaign persuasion as visual spectacle and verbal argument. In particular, it will take note of the strategies and tactics of contemporary presidential campaigns, some of them so Machiavellian as to place the interests of the campaigner in competition with those of the society as a whole.

Persuasion in the Four Stages of Presidential Campaigning

Political campaigning in this country has become an extended operation even for local and county offices. Presidential campaigning, in particular, proceeds actively for more than 2 years. At different stages are specialized forms of persuasion.

Pre-Primary Period (Surfacing)

The ideal presidential candidate is an ideal president—a statesman able to transcend politics in the nation’s and the world’s interests. But to become president, one must be a politician in the narrow sense: able first to wrest the party nomination, then to be the superior competitor for election in November. Few among the nation’s leaders possess all these attributes, and those who do may choose not to run. The prospect of having to solicit enormous sums of money deters some potential candidates. Those who do run tend to be fabulously rich or well connected. To be taken seriously, they will need organization, endorsements from party influentials, and name recognition. Of course, some candidates declare themselves candidates from a faint hope that their candidacies will “catch on” because they want the chance to ex-
The first global advertisement, “Drink Coke,” was broadcast simultaneously in every inhabited part of the globe in January 1992. In another case, only vigorous opposition from environmental groups prevented a firm called Space Marketing Inc. from launching an inflatable, milelong billboard into space, bearing corporate logos for various companies. The “space ad” would have appeared to be about the size of the moon, and people from every corner of the globe would have been able to view it as it circled the earth.

Advertising is one of the most prevalent forms of persuasion in contemporary American society and, indeed, around the world. Americans remain the most advertised-to people on earth. Most Americans are exposed to 3,000 commercial messages a day, and American children and teenagers sit through about 3 hours of television commercials a week (Durning, 1993, pp. 13-14). Prime-time commercials take up more airtime in the United States than in any other nation. In addition to television
Advertisements are everywhere. Billboards, bumper stickers, signs, posters, and numerous other forms of publicity for persons, places, and products line our route as we travel to school or work. Most of us receive junk mail or are subjected to telephone marketing at one time or another. Advertising has even commingled with education. College classroom bulletin boards are frequently decorated with pamphlets offering vacations, test preparation courses, and self-improvement guides. In recent years, Whittle Communications’ Channel One has been beamed into high school classrooms. Students are forced to watch advertisements as part of their education. Whittle even opened a clothing line that prominently displayed the Channel One logo (Whittle Update, 1993).

Advertisements have become so integral to the fabric of our lives that we may believe that we hardly notice them, and therefore, we downplay their ability to influence us. “I never pay attention to ads,” is a common claim. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to escape ads, and the billions of dollars spent by advertisers each year suggest that advertisements are doing something. Most important, as Chapter 3 argued, advertising shapes and reinforces ideologies. Michael Schudson (1984) called advertising’s dominant ideology capitalist realism. Says Jonathan Dee (1999), capitalist realism’s central value is the “fetishism of commodities. . . . [It] amounts to an insistent portrait of the world as a garden of consumption in which any need . . . can be satisfied by buying the right things” (p. 63). Even the most “informative” advertisement reinforces the central ideological conviction that we are what we own.

Advertisements also sell us images of our ideal selves and of the world in which we live. In attempting to position us as consumers and dispose us favorably toward a product by linking it to our most cherished beliefs and values, advertisements also reinforce those beliefs and values, sometimes to our own detriment. Although we may
not like to admit it, we often do believe that using a certain product will make us particular types of people, will bring us happiness, or will offer us a social identity. Advertisements work when we “buy” the images they offer: images of who we are, what kind of life we should lead, how we should spend our time and money. Thus, all ads, even the most “objective,” use psychological and cultural appeals to create and reinforce social meanings and identities for their users.

The Changing Character of Advertising Campaigns

Product advertising campaigns change with new technologies and with increased knowledge about consumer psychology. Today’s television advertisements are far more sophisticated than the ads of decades past. But so, too, are consumers more adept at tuning out. Increasingly, consumers are being given the technologies to skip past advertisements entirely—at least those that are not embedded within regular programming (Lewis, 2000).

As Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1986) note, commodities have always served twin functions: to satisfy immediate needs, such as for food or shelter, and to “mark” interpersonal distinctions, such as status, power, or rank, in social groups (p. 47). Commodities, then, have both material functions to satisfy needs and symbolic or ideological functions to convey social meanings.

In traditional societies such as the United States, before the industrial revolution, whatever advertising existed occurred in a realm in which both material and symbolic meanings of commodities were familiar and commonly understood. But the coming of the industrial society in the late 19th century altered the entire social context and social significance of advertising. For the first time, people were surrounded by mass-produced goods made by unfamiliar people in unfamiliar settings; moreover, the purposes and benefits of these goods were not always immediately obvious. As a result, advertising became necessary to connect commodities to culturally approved means of satisfying needs.

Throughout the 20th century, consumption and the advertising of commodities became increasingly integral to American life. Leiss et al. (1986) distinguish four phases in the development of consumer culture that are explored in this section: idolatry, iconology, narcissism, and totemism (pp. 277-295). A fifth new stage of consumer culture is the pantheistic phase. These stages do not supplant one another. New modes of advertising are added to the old, as the techniques that mark each stage are periodically revived and discarded in accordance with a particular product’s requirements and the advertiser’s ever present need to engage the consumer.
function, not mechanically, but poetically, through metaphor, association, repetition, and other devices that suggest a variety of possible meanings. The viewer, therefore, does not just watch once and start salivating, but senses gradually, half-consciously, the commercial’s welter of related messages.

And just as the viewer needn’t recognize these subtleties in order to take them in, so, perhaps, the advertisers themselves may not know their every implication, any more than a poet or filmmaker is fully aware of all that his work implies. (p. 29)

Robert Goldman (1992) has said that the “fundamental work accomplished within an advertising space is the connection and exchange of meanings between an object (a named product) and an image (another referent system)” (p. 71). This chapter has charted changes in that connection and exchange of meanings, beginning with the idolatry phase, then moving through stages of iconology, narcissism, and totemism to today’s pantheistic stage. Today’s product advertising uses new technologies and sophisticated market research in targeting narrowly segmented markets. Although some advertisers continue to rely on techniques of persuasion developed in bygone years, others are exploring new ways of getting the attention of consumers and their money. Some ads mock traditional conventions, others are made to look fresh and spontaneous or newslike, as in documentaries. Still others traffic in deliberate verbal and visual ambiguities, inviting consumers to project their own meanings onto the ads.

Advertisers do not tell you the good and the bad about their products; instead, they play up their good, play down their bad, while denigrating competitors’ products, if they mention them at all. Broadly speaking, then, virtually all product advertising is not about truth but about persuasion, and this chapter has illustrated the myriad ways that product advertising may deceive, or at least attempt to deceive.

Product advertising can be deceptive, but does that necessarily mean that it is dangerous? What if the viewer knows that the claims made in behalf of the expensive perfume have been exaggerated and that the model’s beauty has been visually enhanced? What if that same viewer enjoys the verbal misdirection and has no problem with the digital enhancement? What if she experiences even greater pleasure from imagining herself being like this perfect woman and perhaps being seen by others as similar to the model—this by virtue of her having purchased and put on the same perfume that the model wore?

Similar questions can be asked about today’s anti-ads. So what if there’s a disconnect between the ad’s narrative and the product being advertised? So what if another ad mocks an earlier generation’s advertising conventions? So what if an ad pulls us in

Summary

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Similar questions can be asked about today’s anti-ads. So what if there’s a disconnect between the ad’s narrative and the product being advertised? So what if another ad mocks an earlier generation’s advertising conventions? So what if an ad pulls us in
by getting us to laugh or prompting us to believe that it has been recorded live when it wasn’t?

Product advertising has a goodly share of critics. Their list of alleged harms from particular types of advertisements is large. Beauty products promote an unattainable beauty ideal, thus causing reduced self-esteem and sometimes severe problems such as anorexia and bulimia. Women are fetishized as sexual commodities in ads of many types targeted to men. Adolescents’ inclination to rebel is fueled by ads encouraging nonconformity and sometimes destructiveness. Ads for alcohol products contribute to alcoholism, ads for tobacco products cause addiction, and so on.

A concern of some ad researchers is that students trained to be critical of ads such as these may not be measurably superior to those not so trained (Tatlow, 1992). Yet society as a whole has taken steps to curb or control some of these forms of advertising—for example, bans on liquor and cigarette advertising on television. Defenders of even these products insist they can be taken in moderation—that, in general, consumers must assume some responsibility for their purchasing decisions. At the least, it can be said that not everyone is harmed by product advertising that deceives or promotes antisocial values. First, there must be a predisposition to diet to excess (or eat to excess), argue those who refuse to assign full responsibility to advertisers for food disorders. They have a point.

A more general charge, that the cumulative effects of product advertising can be dangerous, was taken up in Chapter 3. Schudson’s (1984) capitalist realism captures in a phrase the commodification of consumer culture in which practically everything—including antimaterialist, anticonsumerist objects—can be bought for a price. The alleged dangers of consumerism are many: a dependence on store-bought things, rather than on ourselves; a devaluing of what enriches the society but doesn’t lend itself to mass marketing; excessive materialism—you are what you own; and a narcissistic society, given over to selfish pleasures. Still, as defenders of capitalism maintain, imagine how costly the truly useful and necessary things in life would be without commercial advertising. Moreover, advertising need not appeal to the worst in us to be successful. Those who carp at commercial advertising haven’t found a suitable alternative.

The debate about product advertising continues, and it takes on greater significance as politicians emulate the product advertisers. Perhaps the greatest danger in a nation raised on 30-second spots of every type is that the daily deluge dulls the critical senses, prompting us increasingly to process messages mindlessly, and prompting message makers to address us in sound bites rather than with arguments and in entertaining little playlets rather than with solid evidence. Commenting on ads in which a Converse sneaker is promoted as “unselfish” or a Volkswagen promoted by way of a story that has nothing to do with cars, Dee (1999) laments that “the real condition of advertising speech is not falsehood as much as kind of truthlessness” (p. 66).
In a medium designed primarily to entertain, television advertising must entertain, and it is doing that better and better. But as Neil Postman (1985) warns us in a book aptly named *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, there are dangers in taking everything un-seriously. Postman sees Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* as prophetic. As Huxley saw it, “People will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think” (cited in Postman, 1985, p. vi).

Questions and Projects for Further Study

1. Do an inventory of products that you purchased in the last month: clothing, food items, and so on. How many did you learn about through commercials?
2. Find examples of ads that use traditional advertising conventions. Then find anti-ads that mock those conventions, play off of them humorously, traffic in deliberate ambiguities, or blur the line between the real and the rhetorical.
3. Find examples of your own of the various types of deceptive advertising language. In your view, are any of these potentially harmful to consumers?
4. Find examples of visual deception in advertising. Again, ask yourself whether any of these forms of deception are potentially dangerous.
5. Large retail manufacturers such as Anheuser-Busch, Procter & Gamble, Revlon, and Philip Morris provide an excellent opportunity to study narrowcasting at work because they market different brands of the same product (e.g., beers, detergents, perfumes, and cigarettes) differently, each for a different target audience. Find examples of narrowcasting by comparing a retail manufacturer’s ads for different brands of the same product type.

References

“Sue, is that you? Hi, it’s Jake. Jake Edelman. I was wondering if you’d be willing to sell one of your demo rackets—you know, the Wilson 6.4? I’ve been trying it out the last few weeks and I kinda like it. What with the end of the indoor tennis season, I figure you might be willing to part with it for 60 bucks.”

“No way, Jake. It would cost me $140 to replace it.”

“Well, it is used, Sue, and this is its second season. How about $75?”

“Make it $80.”

“Deal. I’ll bring a check this Sunday.”

In an oft-quoted passage from *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke (1950/1969) reminds us that “the *Rhetoric* must lead us through the Scramble, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pres-
Persuasion in Social Conflicts

A social conflict is a clash over at least partially incompatible interests. For several reasons, the techniques of persuasion prescribed for nonconflict situations are not always applicable to conflict situations.

First, social conflicts are not simply misunderstandings, semantic confusions, or communication breakdowns, although they sometimes begin that way. Situation comedies are rife with apparent crises between husband and wife or boss and employee in which the source of tension is an error of fact or interpretation that is easily correctable with a bit of dialogue. These might more accurately be labeled pseudo-conflicts.

Second, the notion of a clash of incompatible interests presupposes something more than a disagreement, difference of opinion, or academic controversy. This point is important because people tend to minimize or wish away conflicts by treating them as if they were mere disagreements. For example, consider the difference
It is April 23, 1989—early on in a sustained student protest that will eventuate in a bloody massacre on June 3 and 4 of that year. The place is Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, symbolic for its history of ritual celebrations of Chinese culture and political governance; symbolic, too, because from the government buildings adjoining Tiananmen issue forth the decrees that radiate from the capital to all of China.

Beijing is to China what Washington, D.C., is to the United States, and the Chinese university students have done what even American students would be for-
bidden to do. In direct violation of orders from the Chinese police, they have occupied the square on a continuous basis—equivalent to American students taking over the Mall surrounding the Washington monument and adjoining the Capitol building.

Quite apart, then, from what the speakers will be saying to the assembled multitudes at Tiananmen, the act of takeover sends a powerful message. Although nonviolent, it is an act of massive defiance—hence, far more militant, say, than a visit to one’s congressional representative armed with signatures on a petition.

One of the speakers on April 23 is a professor from Beijing University named Chen Mingyuan. “We are the masters of our country,” he says. The *we* is important because it signals a joining of professors and students. This alone is noteworthy in a country in which professors traditionally stood well above their students in the status hierarchy and generally kept their distance from them.

“We are the masters of our country,” says Chen. Is the professor suggesting something on the order of a takeover of the country by the educated elite? Or perhaps the *we* refers more generally and more ambiguously to “the people.” In either case, the *we* is incendiary in a country not known for heeding the wishes of the intelligentsia or for Western democratic ideals.

“We are the masters of our country,” says Chen. Is this a way of saying that Tiananmen is a grassroots protest, not something imported from foreigners; furthermore, that the protesters are expressing identification with the country, even as they are disidentifying with the government’s policies? On this occasion, every word takes on potential significance. Never mind that thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of those assembled at Tiananmen, are probably out of earshot of the speech. Word of the speech is distilled through the crowd.

Professor Chen Mingyuan mentions the death of Hu Yaobang, a reformer who had been removed 2 years earlier as party secretary. Every major social movement has its list of heroes and legends, enemies and unmitigated evils. In the oblique language of Chinese politics, Hu had signaled his commitment to Chinese democratization and his opposition to government-tolerated corruption. Thus, the very mention of Hu Yaobang’s death is a unifying expression of ideology.

Professor Chen then compliments the crowd on an earlier demonstration. “The demonstration was spontaneous, the petition peaceful, and the mourning of Comrade Yaobang very orderly. I think the students from Beijing University should feel very proud of themselves.”

The takeover of Tiananmen square was a decidedly militant act. Yet it is important that protest be construed as peaceful and orderly, if at all possible. Those who witness it, or hear about it, must be convinced that the protesters are not wildly deviant or unjustifiably rebellious. They must be seen, rather, as a habitually law-abiding aggrieved group of persons who have been unable to achieve their ends by lesser means. Thus Professor Chen’s compliment to the students takes on significance, and
they erupt in a chant: “Long live the students! Long live democracy! Long live freedom!” The chanting at Tiananmen is reminiscent of American protests of the 1960s for civil rights (“Freedom now! Freedom now!”) and against the war in Vietnam (“Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids have you killed today?”). There is a ritual quality to chantings of this sort, as if the crowd were speaking as one, with what Gustave Le Bon (1896) long ago called the “group mind.”

Chen Mingyuan then speaks of freedom:

When I pronounced the word “freedom,” some people became nervous. Some would say, “Freedom is a bad word.” But I feel that freedom is the most beautiful word in the world. Why should only other people be allowed to use it? Why is it that this beautiful word is not in the vocabulary of our great motherland and our great people?

Yes, we are poor. We are backward. We are uneducated. We are living a better life. But we do have this ideal of freedom and democracy.

To those accustomed to Western conceptions of freedom, Professor Chen’s pronouncement on the beauty of the word Freedom may sound a bit trite. But in a country barely cutting its teeth on democratization, freedom, and especially press freedom, it must have appeared to those assembled as truly revolutionary.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the students wanted exactly what we in the West have and enjoy. This is an assumption that the Western news media may have helped popularize, in part because the students and professors they talked with tended to be those whose English was especially good, and who, in general, were more Western-minded. It may come as a surprise that between chantings for freedom and democracy, the demonstrators would stand and sing the anthem of the Communist government, the “Internationale.”

Indeed, much of the remainder of the speech is bland by American standards. It calls for a reduction in inflation, then at 18%. It demands that education be made a top priority on the list of government expenditures. It insists, in strident terms, that government corruption and government-tolerated corruption be ended and severely punished.

Then Professor Chen closes:

Maybe someone will say, “You students should return [to your universities] and study quietly. You professors should simply teach your courses.” But all these problems constantly wear us down. We can’t accept this. We shall never accept it!

Note once again, the we-they opposition, characteristic of social movement rhetorics. Note as well the histrionic prediction: “We shall never accept it.” This, too, is characteristic of what movement agitators the world over pledge to their followers.
Not only do these leaders prophesy continued unity and resistance, whatever the sacrifices, but also they insist that collective action is urgently needed, that victory is likely (or at least possible) if they band together, and that their personal interests are linked with the group’s interests.

The rhetoric of protest issues not just from the microphone or the bullhorn but from the crowd itself—a rhetoric of symbolic acts, not just of words. Those at Tiananmen who repeatedly weathered the rain in flimsy sleeping bags were fortified by each other and by the support of friends, relatives, and strangers who braved the police to provide the students with food and drink and emotional support. Word spread of old ladies who stood in the way of trucks full of soldiers entering the city and lectured them to turn around and go back where they came from. Some city officials, not only in Beijing but in other cities where demonstrations erupted, apparently turned a blind eye to the events around them, or at least held back from the use of physical force. This, too, moved the protesters at Tiananmen, as it did Chinese and Western journalists. Having been moved, Chinese journalists provided inspiration in their own right. Timorous at first, they eventually defied censorship orders and provided a fuller accounting of what they had seen and heard. Western journalists, for their part, not only covered the events at Tiananmen and surroundings but also fed back to the protesters news of the sympathetic responses they were getting round the world.

What Are Social Movements?

The demonstrators at Tiananmen Square were part of a social movement, that is, it was uninstitutionalized or outside the mainstream. In extreme cases, as at Tiananmen, the ideas guiding members of social movements, their methods of action, and their core organizations (social movement organizations; SMOs) are all considered suspect or downright illegitimate in the larger society of which they are a part. Moreover, social movements are cause-oriented collectivities; they exist primarily to promote an ideology (e.g., democratization) and/or a program of action (e.g., petitioning the government to lower the rate of inflation). This is their cause, and they promote it through extended periods. Finally, unlike self-help organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous, social movements see as their mission to exert influence outside their own SMOs. Formally, then, a social movement is an uninstitutionalized collectivity that operates on a sustained basis to exert external influence in behalf of a cause. The civil rights movement in the United States provides another example.

In the 1960s, the SMOs supporting civil rights included the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), headed by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored
Indelibly stamped on the pages of this book is the news of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. Perhaps by the time you read these words, it will be a faint memory. Monica who? Yet in addition to having had an illicit sexual relationship in the White House with Monica Lewinsky, the president repeatedly lied about it to the American people, was impeached by the House, then nearly convicted by the Senate. Impeachment of an American president happened only once before in history; it was not your everyday occurrence.

Yet most Americans seem to have forgiven President Clinton, if ever they were outraged. The speech analyzed in Chapter 10 that nearly everyone of importance in Washington condemned at the time apparently did no long-term damage to the president’s approval ratings; so long as economic prosperity held steady, his ratings remained exceptionally high. The analysis in Chapter 10 of Clinton’s August 17 apologia focuses on its effectiveness, but what of its ethics? The president, after all, appears to have ducked real responsibility for his actions even as he claimed to be
taking “full responsibility.” He insisted that what he had done was a purely private matter, even as he was forced to admit that he had publicly prevaricated. He seems to have expressed greater anger at what was done to him by the Kenneth Starr investigation than remorse for his own misdeeds.

So should Clinton be condemned for unethical persuasion, even as the effectiveness of the speech is grudgingly acknowledged? Should we as a society deplore its evasions, hypocrisies, and deliberate ambiguities? Or, from another perspective, should we congratulate Clinton for slipping out of a noose that was unfairly slung around his neck? Should we applaud his rhetorical dexterity as necessary to the continuation of an exceptionally competent performance in office? Should we condemn those who blew the affair all out of proportion, including not just his Republican opponents but also the news media?

Questions of ethics are complicated and frustrating—no right or wrong answers, except when we feel wronged or believe we have been witness to unspeakable evils committed against others. Clitorectomies in Senegal. Human rights abuses in China. Ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Child abuse, brainwashing of cult members, and stolen elections here at home. Then ethics become crystal clear—to clear, perhaps, because our moral certainties can blind us to complexities that deserve to be taken into account.

This book has identified many such complexities, deliberately muddying the waters. Well-told stories give truths their hind legs, it was said. But they also give falsehoods their hind legs. Persuasion operates under conditions of uncertainty, time constraints, and limited information. Not surprisingly, therefore, so-called experts give contradictory advice. Highly educated people commit logical fallacies. All people—educated or not—use cognitive shortcuts. If truth is elusive—if, on some issues there seems to be no truth or no single, overriding truth—why not lie, evade, exaggerate, or simply choose language or visuals or nonverbals that will play up your version of the truth and downplay your opponent’s?

All people deceive, and some professions seem to make a virtue of it. Recall Robert Jackall’s (1995) take on public relations. In that world, he said, “There is no such thing as a notion of truth; there are only stories, perspectives, or opinions” (p. 365). Jackall adds that in the world of public relations,

As long as a story is factual, it does not matter if it is “true.” One can feel free to arrange these facts in a variety of ways and to put any interpretations on them that suits a client’s objectives. Interpretations and judgments are always completely relative. The only canon binding this process of interpretation are those of credibility, or, more exactly, of plausibility. . . . Insofar as it has any meaning at all, truth is what is perceived. Creating the impression of truth displaces the search for truth. (p. 365)
But if Plato was right, the same could be said about rhetoric generally: Truth is held hostage to effectiveness as the persuader makes the worse argument appear to be the better argument. (See Box 15.1.)

The ancient Sophists would probably have seen themselves in Jackall’s description, but being masters of rhetoric, they no doubt would have put a different spin on it. “Yes,” today’s sophist declares—whether lawyer, product advertiser, political candidate, or PR professional—“I put spin on my stories, but so what? Am I so different in that respect from journalists, textbook writers, teachers, scientists, or, indeed, from ordinary people doing what they can to look good, feel good, and perhaps do good?” Remember the defense attorney in this book’s opening story? She wound up going to jail because she believed in telling but one, unvarnished truth. No such thing!

So yes again, ethical questions in persuasion are often quite complicated, and this closing chapter is not about to resolve them. What it can do—what it will do—is offer some systematic ways of thinking about the issues, then show how these approaches to ethics can be brought to bear on the sorts of cases you are likely to confront. What it will also do, once it gets through with issues facing you, is talk about us—we who teach college students. When, if at all, should professors profess their opinions? Is there any way of staying neutral in academic arenas of controversy such as the persuasion classroom?

Beyond that, this chapter offers a vision of the good society, one in which people are mindful as persuadees when they need to be, and in which the major institutions of society make it easy for that to happen.

**Perspectives on Ethics**

There are many perspectives on ethics, among them pragmatism, utilitarianism, universalism, dialogic ethics, and situationalism (Solomon, 1984). These seem particularly relevant to the ethics of persuasion.

**Pragmatism**

Three people respond to your newspaper ad for a used car, and you make an appointment with each to show up at roughly the same time. You apologize for having made a mistake in scheduling, although you actually wanted all three to show up at the same time to impress them that your car is a hot item, much in demand. Ethical? Unethical? Borderline?
BOX 15.1  Kenneth Burke on “Sincerity”

Plato’s critique of rhetoric applies with full force to coactive persuasion. Nothing in the coactive approach requires a notion of truth, certainly not an absolute truth. Coactive persuaders deal, as all persuaders do, in appearances. Moreover, coactive persuasion builds on what Kenneth Burke (1950/1969) called the principle of identification. This, in essence, is what moving toward the other psychologically is all about. Said Burke, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (p. 55). But as Burke was quick to point out, this symbolic “joining together” deflects attention from human differences. Said Burke, “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the [persuader] to proclaim their unity” (p. 22).

The coactive approach thus raises fundamental questions about sincerity, authenticity, integrity. Indeed, says Burke (1950/1969), “Persuasion by flattery is but a special case of persuasion in general” (p. 55). Burke (1968) himself presents a withering picture of the persuader as chameleon, in the form of a poem about a Presbyterian.

He Was a Sincere, Etc.

He was a sincere but friendly Presbyterian—and so
If he was talking to a Presbyterian,
He was for Presbyterianism.
If he was talking to a Lutheran,
He was for Protestantism.
If he was talking to a Catholic,
He was for Christianity.
If he was talking to a Jew,
He was for God.
If he was talking to a theosophist,
He was for religion.
If he was talking to an agnostic,
He was for scientific caution.
If he was talking to an atheist,
He was for mankind.
And if he was talking to a socialist, communist, labor leader, missiles expert, or businessman,
He was for
PROGRESS. (p. 238)
BOX 15.1  Continued

Is the coactive approach to persuasion inherently immoral? Perhaps. But look at it from another perspective. Burke’s (1950/1969) chameleonlike Presbyterian can truthfully be many things to many people, and, in stretching himself ever farther to accommodate himself to the beliefs, values, and attitudes of other people, he is performing an essential function of language itself: that of “inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (p. 43). In using identification to induce cooperation, Burke’s Presbyterian is offering up what is nearly always a preferable alternative to coercion or domination. Moreover, even if his appeals to common ground are advantage seeking, Burke reminds us, they need not reap gains at the expense of the other. Both may benefit.

Think in this connection of such ordinary uses of coactive persuasion as fraternity or sorority recruitment. Lola, a promising recruit, tells you that she is interested in learning more about your sorority. You put your sorority’s best foot forward, emphasizing features of Kappa Phi Zeta (KPZ) life that you think are wonderful and that you expect Lola will value as well. Lola also allows that she is from Juneau, Alaska. “Funny that you mention it,” you say. Your family vacationed in Alaska last summer and had a wonderful time. Is there anything wrong with this approach?

Now suppose that Lola informs you that she is interested in pledging a high-status sorority, one that will be the envy of her friends back in Juneau. You happen to care less about KPZ’s ranking in the sorority world, but you assure Lola that, yes, KPZ has a high-status reputation. You go on to mention other features, associated with status, such as the number of beauty pageant winners at KPZ, that you think will turn Lola on. This, you will recall, is an example of reasoning from the perspective of the other.

Although reasoning from the perspective of the other is sometimes judged insincere, doesn’t this depend on how it is done? Isn’t the key question whether persuaders are honest about their own feelings in respect to those reasons? Suppose you make clear to Lola that you were looking at matters from her perspective, and not necessarily your own. Would this place you on safer moral ground?

I believe so. Still, coactive persuasion can be ethically quite questionable. Suppose that you and your family had not vacationed in Alaska last summer. Suppose that Burke’s Presbyterian chameleon despised Catholicism, even as he proclaimed himself a Christian.

Note
Appendix I

Resources for the Persuader

Use the following as reminders of principles covered earlier in the book. Make use of the principles as needed. Refer to earlier chapters for elaboration of the principles. Keep in mind that this is but a partial list.

Theoretically Derived Resources

- **From Aristotelian Theory:** Combine (a) Ethos (perceived competence and trustworthiness of the speaker), (b) Pathos (the motivational/emotional appeals you can offer your audience, and (c) Logos (the perceived logic of your case).

- **From BVA Theory:** Influence attitudes by directing thought about audience beliefs and values: (a) Make positive beliefs and values appear more salient while downplaying the importance or relevance of beliefs and values harmful to your cause, (b) strengthen some beliefs and values and weaken others, and (c) add advantages or positives to those your audience has already thought of.

- **From the Theory of Reasoned Action:** (a) Convince audiences that valued others would have them act as you have recommended they act, or (b) play down the importance of what valued others think.

- **From the Elaboration of Likelihood Model (ELM):** (a) Encourage central processing (for more powerful, longer-lasting effects) by increasing audience ability and motivation to think long and hard about the issues, while helping them along with sound arguments and good evidence, favorable to your cause; and/or (b) encourage peripheral processing.
Appendix II

Different Strokes for Different Folks

Hostile Audiences or Those Who Strongly Disagree With You

1. Work hard to build rapport and to establish good will and attraction.
2. Use a yes-yes or yes-but approach. Build from areas of agreement to areas of disagreement.
3. Establish acceptance of principles before advocating specific proposals.
4. If possible, establish credibility and demonstrate the existence of a problem on one occasion; delay the specifics of a plan until the next occasion.
5. Use sources and evidence that your audience can accept.
6. Disarm the audience with humor.
7. Use the method of residues. That is, show why alternative solutions are not advisable as a way of suggesting that yours is the only reasonable alternative.

Critical Audiences and Conflicted Audiences

2. Show consistency with your positions on other issues.
3. Reveal first premises or make sure they are clearly implied. Reason logically with audiences from premises to conclusions.
4. Use the both-sides-with-refutation approach.
Appendix III

Ethical, Unethical, or Borderline? A Self-Survey

By now you’re surely aware of the importance of confronting ethical issues in persuasion but also aware of their complexities. Is honesty always the best policy? If so, what about so-called white lies, those told for the purpose of benefiting others? Does the end always justify the means? If so, whose ends need to be considered? Only the persuader’s? How much consideration should be given to the interests of the persuadee, or to the interest of society as a whole? Should ethics be a matter of concern only when we are the targets of persuasion, or should we strive for consistency by applying the Golden Rule—that is, by doing unto others what we would have them do unto us?

Pulled together in this appendix are more than 100 examples from the book of persuasive practices that by one standard or another might be considered ethically questionable. Are there any practices on the list that you think are highly unethical? If so, according to what standards? Are there other practices that you applaud, although others might find them objectionable? If so, are there characteristics that these cases share in common? Are there yet other practices for which insufficient information is provided, such that you might favor the practice in one context but object to it if other details were provided? If so, what is it about the details that would influence your judgments in these borderline cases?

You can use this appendix to formulate and test your own philosophy of ethics. As a first step, try rating the practices on a scale from -3 (highly unethical) to +3 (highly ethical), with the zero point reserved for the borderline cases (-3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3). Next, go back over the ratings to glean insights about the bases for your judgments. Are there consistent patterns in the ratings that reveal you to be a pragmatist, a universalist, a situationalist, or someone firmly committed to a dialogic ethic? If you judged most of the examples as borderline (0 on the scale), you’re clearly a situationalist but not necessarily indifferent to ethical principles. See if you can identify the sorts of details that if added to a borderline case could swing your vote this way.
way or that. Do they reveal you to be a utilitarian? Are you someone sympathetic to
the unsophisticated persuadee but not to those who should know better? Perhaps
someone who is most concerned about ethics when you yourself stand to lose? Does
your self-survey reveal you to be content with adhering to society's ethical stan-
dards—or wanting to change them?

Next, go back over the list and see if there are any ratings you'd like to change.
Your instructor may invite you to discuss these with the class.

List of Cases

The following examples are listed by chapter for ease of review in the text. Rate
each of them on a scale from -3 to +3.

Chapter 1

1. You weave together the facts at your disposal to create a convincing case in
your own defense (thus, not just letting the facts "speak for themselves").

2. A speaker impresses an audience without telling the listeners anything that
they didn't know before.

3. You use fallacious (i.e., illogical) arguments to make imprudent courses of
action seem wise.

4. You present yourself as an expert in giving advice without being certain as
to what's best in a given situation.

5. A recruiter presents prospective graduate students with a one-sided case
for applying to an Ivy League school without mentioning opposing argu-
ments.

6. A company constructs two ads on British TV for a soccer shoe: one for
white soccer players, the other for black soccer players.

7. A clothing store announces its seventh "going out of business" sale.

8. An undergraduate fabricates an excuse for turning in a late paper.

9. Female beauty is represented to children in Barbie dolls that show Barbie
to be very thin, thus prompting some children to be excessively weight-
conscious.

10. War propaganda presents your country's troops as freedom fighters and
the enemy troops as terrorists.