The
DYNAMICS
of Persuasion

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Preface

Persuasion is one of the oldest fields of academic study—it dates back thousands of years; indeed Aristotle was arguably the Western world's first great persuasion theorist. In our own era, persuasion has been studied primarily by means of the theories and methods of social science research. Numerous scholars have made contributions to our knowledge of persuasion, and the field has generated a host of intriguing concepts and an impressive body of knowledge on persuasion processes and effects.

Persuasion is not simply a science, however. It is also an art. In the 16th century, the Italian writer Machiavelli wrote a book entitled *The Prince*, in which he counseled politicians on how to use power and social influence techniques to manipulate the masses and to achieve personal and political goals. Since then, politicians and rulers have made considerable use of persuasion techniques. Unfortunately, these techniques have been employed successfully by the likes of Hitler and Stalin; fortunately, they have been used to accomplish positive end-states by individuals ranging from Thomas Jefferson to Susan B. Anthony. Today, there is a burgeoning persuasion industry that includes advertising, sales, public relations, political consulting firms, and a host of private and public companies that seek to change attitudes and influence social behaviors.

This book is designed to enhance students' understanding of persuasion theory and its applications to everyday situations. The volume presents an up-to-date review of persuasion theory and research; it also attempts to show students how these theories can deepen our understanding of how persuasion is practiced in a variety of real-life situations. The book is designed as a text for undergraduate students who have heard the terms *attitude* and *persuasion* bandied about, and who wish to know more about these fascinating concepts. The book is also designed to introduce graduate students to theory and research in the field of persuasion. Finally, the book

provides faculty members and other professionals with an up-to-date review of research in the field of persuasion.

This book takes a broad look at persuasion research. It examines psychological approaches to persuasion, interpersonal communication theories, and the interface between persuasion and mass communications, in particular mass media information campaigns. Thus, the book examines research on cognitive processing of persuasive messages, compliance-gaining in interpersonal contexts, and the effects of large-scale health communication campaigns. By necessity, some contexts have been excluded. For example, political persuasion and public opinion—which happen to be research interests of mine—have been discussed only in passing and by example, for a full-scale discussion of these issues would have required another volume, or hundreds more pages at the very least.

The book is organized into three sections. The first section, *Foundations of Persuasion*, provides an introduction to basic terms and concepts (notably, persuasion and attitude). The next chapters in this section focus on the formation of attitudes and on the issue of consistency between attitudes and behavior. The second section, *Changing Attitudes and Behaviors*, examines theory and research on attitude change. The focus of this section is predominately psychological, as I examine theories and empirical investigations that are directed at individual-level variables, such as cognitions and affects. The third section of the book, *Communication Approaches*, focuses on the contributions that interpersonal and mass communication scholars have made to our understanding of persuasion. It examines persuasion in interpersonal contexts, and it explores the complex effects of mass media information campaigns. The final chapter tries to integrate persuasion theories with mass communication issues by providing a discussion of the implications of persuasion concepts for media information campaigns.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PART I
FOUNDATIONS OF PERSUASION

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Introduction:
A Case Study in Persuasion

There is general agreement that persuasive communications exert a strong impact on attitudes and behaviors. Consider the following diverse examples of persuasion in action:

Some years ago, Ron Jones, a high school history teacher, conducted a week-long experiment to show how easy it is for a charismatic leader to mobilize support for his cause. Jones ordered his students to take a new seating posture, to carry paper and pencils for note-taking, and to stand at the side of their desks when asking questions. Subsequently, Jones introduced a class salute, which he called the Third Wave salute.

Jones then announced "the Third Wave is a nationwide program to find students who are willing to fight for political change in this country."[1] In an effort to simulate the mass rallies that the Nazis organized during the 1930s, Jones announced that there would be a rally at noon on Friday for Third Wave members only. On the day of the rally, a feverish excitement could be felt around the school. Jones stood up to speak and gave the Third Wave salute, which "was followed automatically by two hundred arms stabbing a reply." Then Jones broke the news. "There is no such thing as a national youth movement called the Third Wave," he told the crowd. "You have been used, manipulated, shoved by your own desires into the place you now find yourself. You are no better or worse than the German Nazi we have been studying." The class was silent as it began to grasp the reality of what had happened.

Three educational researchers, suspecting that professional educators could be "seduced into feeling satisfied that they (had) learned despite irrelevant, conflicting, and meaningless content conveyed by the lecturer," conducted an unusual experiment using teachers as their guinea pigs.[2] The researchers recruited a professional actor "who looked distinguished and sounded authoritative," gave him a name and title (Dr. Myron Fox), and directed him to present a talk to a group of educators

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"with an excessive use of double talk . . . non sequiturs, and contradictory statements . . . all . . . interspersed with parenthetical humor and meaningless references to unrelated topics."[3] The educators evaluated Dr. Fox favorably on six items, including use of examples, arousal of interest, and stimulation of thinking.

Wendy's, the fast-food hamburger chain, wanted to increase its sales. The company decided it was time to change its approach to advertising, so it hired advertising whiz Joe Sedelmaier to develop a series of television commercials. The commercials featured an elderly woman pulling up to the drive-through window of a competing hamburger chain, taking a look at the hamburger she received, and then crying out "Where's the beef?" Within months after the ad had aired, Wendy's reported that sales had shot up dramatically.[4]

A group of Finnish public health experts noted that Finland had an extremely high rate of coronary heart disease. To help reduce the incidence of heart disease, the researchers developed a national campaign to induce people to quit smoking. The campaign included a series of television programs that were broadcast over the national television network in Finland. Newspapers and local radio stations promoted the series, and national health centers were contacted to recruit individuals to serve as leaders of self-help groups.

A systematic evaluation of the campaign revealed that approximately 100,000 smokers (10% of all smokers in Finland) closely followed the programs, 20,000 (2% of smokers) quit smoking with the assistance of the TV program, and "some 10,000 succeeded for a period of at least six months and possibly permanently."[5]

These examples are a testament to the powerful impact that persuasive communications can have on attitudes and behavior. In this book, we explore persuasion, focusing on the effects that persuasive communications have on individuals and the processes by which they achieve their effects. We approach the issue from a scientific perspective, reviewing the many studies in communication, psychology, consumer behavior, and public health that have examined how persuasive communications influence attitudes and behavior.

To many people, persuasive messages have magical, subliminal effects. When trying to explain some dramatic instances of real-life persuasion, many people allege that the persuaders employed "mind control techniques" or that they "brainwashed" people into yielding to their messages. Yet these metaphors create a misleading impression of how persuasion works. In fact, persuasion involves a complex assortment of techniques, strategies, and mental maneuvers. It is best understood by examining the theories and findings of social science research.

To demythologize the persuasion process and to illustrate how scientific

principles can aid in the understanding of persuasion phenomena, I present an in-depth look at how communications influenced attitudes in one historical context. I deliberately chose a context that conjures up myths and emotional images to illustrate that psychological and communication factors (and not magic) undergird the persuasion process.

I focus on the Unification Church (i.e., the Moonies), a religious sect that gained thousands of adherents in the 1960s and 1970s. The Moonies provide an excellent window on persuasion. The Moonies are one of the many religious cults that have surfaced over the past several decades (Shupe & Bromley, 1980; Zimbardo, Ebbesen, & Maslach, 1977). Soon after joining the Moonies, young people frequently announced that they had been spiritually reborn, and began acting and dressing in decidedly different ways than they had before. Some observers concluded that the Moonies had "brainwashed" these young people into joining; others claimed they physically forced individuals into joining the Church. As we shall see, neither brainwashing nor physical force constitute adequate explanations of the decision to join the Unification Church. To adequately understand the process by which young people became full-fledged members of the Unification Church, we need to examine the issue from the vantage point of social influence theories; viewing the phenomenon as one involving the exercise of social influence provides a fresh and interesting way of examining this issue.

BECOMING A MEMBER OF MOON'S RELIGIOUS ARMY: A CASE STUDY

Like many of her peers, Shelley Liebert traveled abroad, hoping to find herself. "When I returned home," she said, "I decided that I wanted to lead the life of a normal, average girl. I didn't want to be a gypsy anymore. So I got a job as a secretary, and I lived at home, and I was making an effort to be as normal as I could."[6]

"It was the last day of the year," she recalled, "and on the last day of each year, all the secretaries take those little flip calendars out of their holders and let them drop from the office buildings. I was feeling very melancholy, just watching the whole year at my feet. I thought to myself: 'This is my life every year. This is the last day of the year. I have to do one thing or another.' And that's when I met them."

A member of the Unification Church approached Shelley that day. Shelley had not heard anything about the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's religious movement, which had spread from Korea to the United States in the 1970s and which claimed to have thousands of members or witnesses all over the world. "They invited me to a weekend retreat," Shelley recalled. "In that one weekend, I made up my mind to join," she said. It