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Persuasion, Social Influence, and Compliance Gaining

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*To my dear old dad, who gave me my sense of humor and who,
sadly, isn't around for the third edition of this text.*

—Robert Gass

*To "Miss Gordon," my second-grade teacher, for knowing
that self-concept is the proper starting place.*

—John Seiter

*To our families—Susan, Jordan, Graham, Debora, and Christian—
for doing without us when we were writing and
for putting up with us when we weren't.*

—Robert Gass and John Seiter

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2

What Constitutes Persuasion?

What is persuasion? How broad or narrow is the concept? Is persuasion a subset of human communication in general, much like baseball is a subset of sports? Or is persuasion an element found in all human communication in the same way that coordination plays a role in every sport? Not surprisingly, different authors view the concept of persuasion in different ways and have, therefore, adopted different definitions of the term. In this chapter we explore some of the ways persuasion has been defined. We offer our own rather broad-based, far-reaching conceptualization of persuasion based on five limiting criteria. We also offer our own model of what persuasion is (Gass & Seiter, 1997, 2000) and examine two additional models (Chaiken, 1979, 1980, 1987; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b) of how persuasion functions.

You may have encountered some unusual uses of the term *persuasion*. For example, we have a friend in the construction industry who refers to his sledgehammer as his "persuader." He tends to err on the side of cutting a 2 × 4 board too long, rather than too short, and then "persuading" it into place. As another example, you may recall seeing one of those old gangster movies in which a mob boss orders his henchman to take somebody out back "for a little gentle persuasion," meaning a beating. Although we don't normally associate persuasion with pounding lumber or pummeling people, even in ordinary usage the term does have a wide variety of meanings. Consider each of the hypothetical situations in Box 2.1, "What Constitutes Persuasion?" Which of these scenarios do you consider to be persuasion?

Adding to the difficulty of defining persuasion is the fact that persuasion also goes by a variety of other names. Some of its aliases include terms such as *advising*, *brainwashing*, *coercion*, *compliance gaining*, *convincing*, *education*, *indoctrination*, *influence*, *manipulation*, and *propaganda*. Of course, whether these terms are considered pseudonyms for persuasion, or simply related terms, depends on one's definition of persuasion.

Defining a concept is analogous to building a fence. A fence is designed to keep some things in and other things out. In the same way, a definition encompasses some elements or aspects of a concept within its domain while excluding others. Which "species" of human communication is to be found inside the "barnyard" of persuasion depends on the size and shape of the fence a particular author builds. Fortunately, the differences in various definitions can be clarified, if not resolved, by focusing on two key considerations. We turn to these next.

BOX 2.1

What Constitutes Persuasion?

1. Muffin notices a grubby-looking weirdo in one of the front seats of the bus she is boarding. He seems to be muttering to himself and has a noticeable facial twitch. She opts for a seat toward the rear of the bus. Did he “persuade” her to sit elsewhere?
2. Benny Bigot is the principal speaker at a park rally to recruit more members to the American Nazi party. Many of the people who hear Benny are so turned off by his speech that they are more anti-Nazi than they were before they attended the rally. Did Benny “persuade” them?
3. During a dramatic pause in his lecture for his 3-hour night class, Professor Hohum hears a student’s stomach growling. The professor then decides it would be a good time for the class to take a break. Did the student “persuade” Professor Hohum?
4. Babbs is standing at a street corner watching passersby. The first three people she sees are wearing sweatshirts with political and/or social slogans emblazoned across the front. The fourth person to pass by is wearing a plain white T shirt. Are the first three people “persuading” Babbs? Is the fourth?
5. Fiffi is contemplating going on a major diet. She realizes she is overweight because she tips the scales at just under 250 pounds, and her obesity affects her self-esteem. However, she has read that obese people who lose lots of weight typically gain the weight back within a short period of time and that people are genetically predisposed to a certain weight. She convinces herself that there is no point in dieting. Did Fiffi “persuade” herself?
6. Bubba is at the supermarket pondering which of two brands of beer to purchase, a cold-filtered brew or a fire-brewed brew. After studying both brands attentively, he opts for the cold-filtered variety. Unbeknownst to him, another shopper observed his deliberations. That shopper then walks over to the display and selects the same brand. Did “persuasion” take place?
7. Trudy is an impressionable freshperson who is in a jam. She has just realized a term paper is due in her philosophy class. Desperate, she asks Rex, who is the captain of the debate squad, if he will help her. Rex offers to give her an “A” paper he submitted when he had the same class two years prior if Trudy will sleep with him. Is Rex using “persuasion”?

Pure versus Borderline Cases of Persuasion

The first consideration is whether one is interested in pure persuasion, or borderline cases of persuasion. By *pure persuasion*, we mean clear-cut cases of persuasion, on which most people would agree. Everyone would agree that a presidential debate, or a television commercial, or an attorney’s closing remarks to a jury are instances of persuasion. Such examples represent “paradigm cases” (O’Keefe, 1990; Simons, 1986) of persuasion because they are at the core of what we think of when we envision persuasion at work. Other instances, though, lie closer to the boundary or periphery of what we normally think of as persuasion. These instances we refer to as *borderline cases* of persuasion. Not everyone would agree that a derelict’s mere appearance “persuades” passersby to keep their distance. Nor would everyone agree that involuntary reflexes such as burps, blinking, and pupil dilation

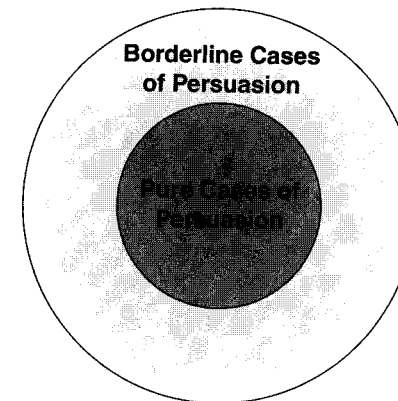


FIGURE 2.1 Preliminary Model of Persuasion.

constitute “persuasive” phenomena. These cases are less clear-cut, more “iffy.” Much of the disparity in definitions is rooted in the fact that some authors are concerned with pure persuasion, whereas other authors are concerned with borderline cases as well. It isn’t so much a matter of being right or wrong as it is a matter of how wide a net each author wishes to cast. The preliminary model of the scope of persuasion (Figure 2.1) illustrates this distinction in approaches.¹ As the shading in the model suggests, the dividing line between pure and borderline persuasion is fuzzy, rather than distinct.

Although we don’t think there is a single, correct definition of persuasion, we do think there are some things that a functional, contemporary definition of persuasion ought to do. A contemporary definition should take into account the rich complex of verbal, non-verbal, and contextual cues found in interpersonal encounters, which, as we noted in Chapter 1, is the arena in which most influence attempts occur. These elements do not function separately but rather operate in an interrelated manner, each affecting the other. A contemporary definition also should acknowledge the many subtle, implicit cues that accompany face-to-face influence attempts. By implicit cues, we mean communication that occurs at a very low level of awareness, or even unconsciously. As an example, cultural factors might influence a person’s choice of compliance-gaining strategies, without the person even realizing it (Wiseman et al., 1995). As another example, nonverbal cues are heavily relied on in deception detection, even though individuals aren’t always mindful of how or why they think another person may be lying (Hale & Stiff, 1990; Seiter, 1997). Such implicit communication is, in fact, quite common (Langer, 1978, 1989a, 1989b; Roloff, 1980) and an important ingredient in persuasion. The definition and model of persuasion that we offer later in this chapter take these features into account.

Limiting Criteria for Defining Persuasion

A second consideration in defining persuasion involves the limiting criteria that form the basis for a given definition. Five basic criteria can be gleaned from the various definitions offered in the literature (Gass & Seiter, 2004). We examine each of these criteria in turn.

Intentionality

Is persuasion necessarily conscious or purposeful? Is there such a thing as “accidental” persuasion? Many who write about persuasion adopt a source-centered view by focusing on the sender’s intent as a defining feature of persuasion. Bettinghaus and Cody (1994) adopt this view, stressing that “persuasion involves a conscious effort at influencing the thoughts or actions of a receiver” (p. 5). For some authors, the presence of intent or purposefulness is what distinguishes persuasion from *social influence* (Gass & Seiter, 2000, 2004).

Certainly, pure persuasion would seem to be intentional. When we think of obvious cases of persuasion we tend to think of situations in which one person purposefully tries to influence another. But what about borderline cases of persuasion? We believe that many influence attempts take place without any conscious awareness on the part of the persuader.

As just one instance, parents quite commonly instill beliefs, impart values, and model behavior for their children (Bandura, 1977). Yet they may not realize how much of what they say and do is absorbed by their young-uns. As any parent will attest, many of the lessons parents “teach” their children are completely unintended. As another example, in children’s fairy tales beauty is often equated with good (the beautiful princess, the handsome prince) and ugly with evil (the ugly witch, the ugly stepsisters). Yet surely the intent in reading children such fairy tales is not to instill false stereotypes in their impressionable young minds.

As another example of unintentional influence, consider the case of the copycat behavior of some adolescents who watched the MTV show *Jackass*. The show, which has since been canceled, featured Johnny Knoxville and some of his pals performing a variety of daring, bizarre, and sometimes crude stunts. Examples include Johnny Knoxville getting shot with a stun gun, sprayed with pepper spray, and being turned upside down in an out-house. Hey, it’s a living. The show itself was rated TV-MA, a designation suggesting it was unsuitable for viewers under the age of 17. Each episode carried explicit viewer advisories, in both text and audio, warning viewers not to try the stunts at home. Highly dangerous stunts also displayed a skull and crossbones in the lower right portion of the screen (Rauzi, 2001; Rutenberg, 2001).

But that wasn’t enough to stop 13-year-old Jason Lind from pouring gasoline on his legs and setting them on fire at a friend’s house. This was just after he’d watched the “human barbecue” segment, in which Knoxville donned a flame retardant suit, strapped steaks to his body, and rolled around on a grill to cook them. Another boy also set himself on fire after watching a different episode in which Knoxville, again wearing a fire retardant suit, was set ablaze under the supervision of a pyrotechnics expert.

Clearly, the show’s producers did not intend for viewers to imitate the dangerous stunts. In fact, to minimize MTV’s liability, the producers added extra advisories to dissuade viewers from engaging in copycat behavior. No matter how many cautions were included, however, some viewers seemed bound and determined to follow a “monkey see, monkey do” pattern of behavior. Whether one calls this persuasion, or influence, it was definitely unintended.

As another example of unintentional influence, the author of the syndicated comic strip “Rex Morgan, M.D.” came under fire for issuing unsound medical advice. In the comic strip in question, Rex Morgan prescribed baby aspirin for a 13-month-old suffering

from a cold. The use of aspirin, however, has been linked to Reye’s syndrome, a potentially fatal disease, which can afflict infants and young children following exposure to the flu or chicken pox. Rex Morgan had committed cartoon medical malpractice. He should have prescribed acetaminophen instead.

The cartoon’s author, Woody Wilson, was flooded with calls and letters from medical professionals pointing out the potentially dangerous error. He issued an apology and accepted full responsibility for the error. At the same time, however, Wilson warned that the comic strip was intended solely as entertainment and that readers “should never use the medical opinions or treatments illustrated in Rex Morgan, M.D. as a substitute for a visit to a qualified medical professional” (cited in Beyette, 1997). Let’s face it, though, millions of readers, with and without medical insurance, intelligent and unintelligent, might have unwittingly followed Rex Morgan’s advice. Influence can occur when none is intended.

A second way in which an “intent” criterion is problematic is that people do not always know what specific outcome they are seeking as the result of an interaction. Face-to-face encounters, in particular, are laden with spontaneity. Social influence may arise in and through our interaction with others, rather than as a result of planning and forethought. An influence attempt may unfold in the middle of a conversation that wasn’t present at the beginning of the conversation. Sometimes persuasion just happens.

A third problem with relying on an “intent” criterion involves situations in which there are unintended receivers. Imagine a scenario in which two people are discussing which bets to place on a horse race. One tells the other about an inside tip on a horse that’s a “sure thing.” A third person overhears the conversation and as a result places a wager on the horse. In such situations persuaders don’t intend for third parties to be influenced. Yet they often are. In determining what constitutes persuasion, we shouldn’t focus exclusively on where a persuader was aiming, but on whom the message hit.

Two studies (Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Kirkland, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1987) clearly demonstrate the operation of the “unintended receiver effect.” In these studies, the researchers created a situation in which third parties overheard an ethnic slur directed against an African American. The results of both studies revealed that the overheard ethnic slur led to lower evaluations by the third parties of the individual at whom the slur was directed. Notice that a reliance on an intent standard for defining persuasion tends to



Unintentional influence in a cartoon strip.

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make senders less accountable for the consequences of their unintended communication. If a message has harmful effects, the source can disavow any responsibility by claiming "that's not what I intended."

A fourth limitation lies in the difficulty of ascertaining another's intent. What if persons disagree as to what someone's persuasive motives or goals happen to be? Complicating the picture, there can be differences between a persuader's *stated* intent versus his or her *actual* intent. Who makes the determination in such cases? The sender? The receiver? A third party? There are many vagaries involved in determining whose perception counts. An athlete whose conduct on or off the field is questioned may proclaim, "I'm not a role model," but fans and the media may reply, "Oh yes you are."

A fifth constraint involving an intent criterion has to do with intra-audience effects. In traditional, one-to-many contexts receivers may influence one another's reactions to a persuasive message. Studies have shown that people's reactions are based, in part, on feedback from those around them (Hylton, 1971). One study (Hocking, Margreiter, & Hylton, 1977), for example, found that club-goers' evaluations of a band's performance were influenced by the verbal and nonverbal reactions of other patrons. Similarly, people who watched a comedian either alone or in the presence of others rated the comedian as more funny when in the presence of others. Thus, intra-audience effects may moderate a persuader's intent by enhancing or inhibiting a message's persuasiveness.

Finally, resolving the issue of intent is particularly difficult in interpersonal contexts, in which both parties may be simultaneously engaged in attempts at influence. When there are two interactants, whose intent counts? Is it one party's actual intent that matters, or the other party's *perception* that there is an intent to persuade? Intent-based definitions, we believe, are ill-suited to modern conceptualizations of human interaction as a two-way venture. The rather linear view of persuasion that such definitions imply, from sender to receiver, ignores opportunities for mutual influence.

Effects

The effects criterion poses the question: Has persuasion taken place if no one is actually persuaded? Some authors adopt a receiver-oriented definition of persuasion by restricting its use to situations in which receivers are somehow changed, altered, or affected. Daniel O'Keefe (1990) underscores this perspective when he writes:

the notion of *success* is embedded in the concept of persuasion. Notice for instance, that it doesn't make sense to say, "I persuaded him, but failed." One can say, "I *tried* to persuade him, but failed," but to say simply, "I persuaded him" is to imply a successful attempt to influence. (p. 15)

The stronger version of this perspective views persuasion as successful if it achieves the specific outcome sought by the persuader. The weaker version of this perspective settles for outcomes falling short of what the persuader ideally had in mind. Although we recognize the attraction of this point of view, we believe there are problems with limiting the definition of persuasion in this way. We take the position that even if a person is communicating badly, he or she is *still* communicating. Similarly, we believe that a person can be engaged

in persuasion even if it is *ineffective* persuasion. The same can be said for most activities. A salesperson might fail to close a deal but would still be engaged in selling. A dancer might dance badly, stepping on his or her partner's toes, but would still be engaged in dancing. In short, a person can be engaged in an activity whether the person is doing it well or not.

An effects criterion emphasizes persuasion as a *product*. But such an orientation bears little fidelity to current conceptualizations of human communication as a *process*. If we think of persuasion only as an outcome or a thing, then an effects orientation makes perfectly good sense. We maintain, however, that persuasion is better understood as an activity in which people engage. This is more than semantic quibbling. By approaching persuasion as a process, scholars and researchers are more likely to gain insights into how it functions, or what makes it tick, because they are focusing on *what's going on*, not simply on how things turn out.

A second weakness is the same as that already associated with an intent criterion: An effects criterion embodies a rather linear view of persuasion, from source to receiver. In face-to-face encounters, however, there isn't simply *a* source and *a* receiver. Both parties may be simultaneously engaged in persuasion. Influence peddling in the interpersonal arena is a two-way street.

A third problem with relying on an effects criterion is that it is often difficult, if not impossible, to measure persuasive effects. Rotzoll and Haefner (1996), for example, concluded that only 20 to 40 percent of advertising is effective. The other 60 percent is persuasion; it's just ineffective persuasion. And even in advertising, a fairly pure case of persuasion, it is difficult to determine how much of the bottom line is due to advertising alone, compared to other factors such as pricing, packaging, and competition. In fact, the ability to measure persuasive outcomes may hinge entirely on the sensitivity of one's measuring instruments (scales, surveys, sales figures, etc.). Furthermore, what constitutes the threshold for a successful versus unsuccessful attempt at persuasion? How much attitude or behavior change must take place to say persuasion has occurred? What if a persuader succeeds in some respects, but fails in others? What if there is a delay or latency period before any effects take place? Or, conversely, what if the persuasive effects wear off quickly? And what about the occasional odd circumstance in which persuasion "boomerangs," that is, a persuader achieves an effect that is *contrary* to his or her intended purpose? Such questions, we believe, point out the many vagaries inherent in relying on an effects criterion.

A fourth problem with an effects criterion is that whether a given attempt to persuade is deemed successful or not often depends on whom one asks. Whether a labor strike is labeled a success or a failure, might well depend on whether one was gathering opinions from management or union representatives. It is often the case that, following a Supreme Court ruling, both sides proclaim victory on the courthouse steps.

We do agree that, as with an intent criterion, pure cases of persuasion can usually be evaluated by their overall effectiveness. Even then, persuasion is rarely an all or nothing venture. If one also wishes to focus on borderline cases of persuasion, one must accept the fact that partial persuasion is more the rule than the exception. Notice, too, that there is some tension between relying on intent and effects as limiting criteria: What is achieved isn't always what is intended, and what is intended isn't always what is achieved. We happen to think some of the most interesting persuasive campaigns are those that are unsuccessful, or only partially successful, or that in fact, achieve the opposite of the effect being sought.

Free Will and Conscious Awareness

Many authors endorse the view that there is a distinction between persuasion and coercion. This view is also receiver based, but it focuses on whether a person is aware that she or he is being persuaded and how much freedom the person has to accept or reject the message. Persuasion, these authors suggest, is noncoercive. As Herbert Simons (1986) puts it, "persuasion is a form of influence that predisposes, but does not impose" (p. 22). Richard Perloff (1993) also makes this point when he states a "defining characteristic of persuasion is free choice. At some level the individual must be capable of accepting or rejecting the position that has been urged of him or her" (p. 16).

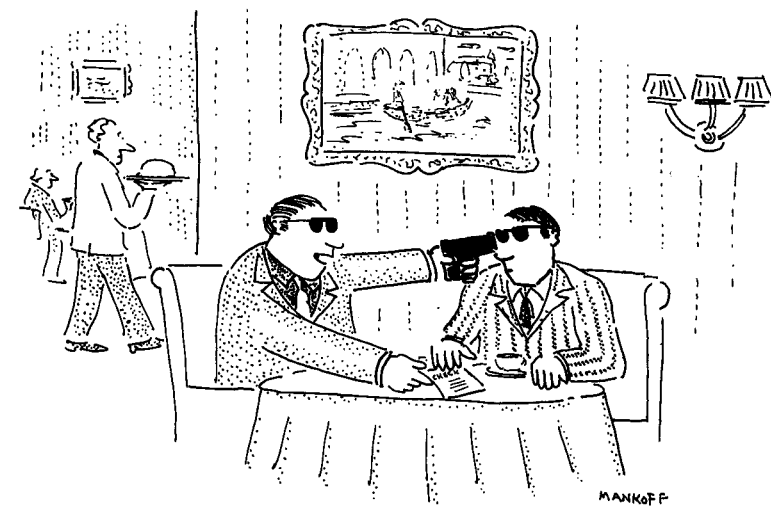
It naturally follows that if a person is unaware that an influence attempt is taking place, she or he can't consciously resist it. Thus, conscious awareness is a prerequisite for free choice. Nevertheless, we believe persuasion can and does occur without the conscious awareness of receivers. In fact, many influence attempts succeed precisely because they operate at a low level of awareness. Clandestine persuasion may be unethical, but it does exist and it can be effective. And because awareness is often a matter of degree, one may legitimately ask how much conscious awareness is required for free choice to operate. For example, consumers generally may be aware that product planting (placing products in movies and TV shows) is common, but they may not know how prevalent the practice is, let alone recognize each and every instance of product planting that occurs.

We are sympathetic to the view that persuasion is different from coercion. The difficulty lies in attempting to draw a bright line between the two. At what point does voluntary action leave off and involuntary action begin?

Coercive strategies aren't necessarily limited to negative sanctions either. Coercion also can take place in the form of rewards, incentives, inducements, flattery, ingratiation, or bribery. Seen in this way, persuasion and coercion aren't so much polar opposites as they are close relatives. A message or message strategy can easily cross the line from one to the other. Moreover, many communication encounters contain both voluntary *and* involuntary elements. A simple request by a superior to a subordinate, "Boswell, can you give me a lift to pick up my car?" may carry with it an implicit threat for noncompliance. A parent may give a child three good reasons to eat broccoli but may issue a negative sanction as well, "or no dessert for you, young lady."

In fact, we would suggest that most influence attempts we encounter in daily life include both persuasive and coercive elements. Rarely in life is one free to make a completely unfettered choice. There are almost always strings attached. This is particularly true of face-to-face encounters. If a friend asks to borrow 20 bucks, we can say "no," but there may be relational consequences for declining.

Rarely, too, are influence attempts completely coercive. For example, holding a gun to another person's head would seem to be an obvious example of coercion. We readily admit this situation is *primarily* coercive. But what if the other person doesn't believe the gun is loaded? Or what if the other person thinks the threatener is bluffing? To be successful, a threat—even a threat of violence—must be perceived as credible. Thus, even in what might seem like a clear-cut case of coercion there are persuasive elements at work. And conversely, even in what appear to be cut-and-dried cases of persuasion, there may be coercive features operating.



"I insist."

"Persuasion" and "coercion" often coexist side by side.

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People also have different dispositions and different personalities that may lead them to perceive messages differently. What one person regards as an innocent request another may view as highly coercive. As Trenholm (1989) notes, "Freedom of choice is subjective. Some people seem immune to even the most extreme threats; others feel coerced by the mildest influence attempts" (p. 6). Communication theorists are fond of saying "meanings are in people, not in words." Whether a given message is interpreted as primarily persuasive or primarily coercive is largely in the eyes of the beholder.

Because influence attempts frequently contain both voluntary and involuntary elements, and because the issue of free choice or free will is largely a perceptual phenomenon, we believe it is most useful to distinguish persuasion from coercion based on the degree of choice available. It isn't so much *whether* a situation is persuasive or coercive, but *how* persuasive or coercive the situation is.

Symbolic Action

A number of authors maintain that persuasion begins and ends with symbolic expression, which includes language as well as other meaning-laden acts, such as civil disobedience and protest marches. This approach focuses on the means, or channel, of persuasion as a limiting criterion. Gerald Miller (1980) evinces this view, writing, "persuasion relies upon symbolic transactions . . . the scholarly endeavors of persuasion researchers—and for that matter, the ordinary language usages of the term 'persuasion'—have consistently centered on the manipulation of symbols" (pp. 14–15).

Authors who limit the scope of persuasion to symbolic action fear that without such a limitation all human behavior could be construed as persuasion. Their point is well taken. However, restricting the medium for persuasion to words or symbols leads to a rather disjointed view of persuasion. We believe that a definition that limits persuasion to words and clearly codified symbols leaves out too much. Most magazine ads emphasize pictures rather than words. In fact, one study suggests that the text of a typical ad is read by less than 10 percent of the readers (Starch, cited in Dupont, 1999). The same is true of television commercials. It seems arbitrary to limit persuasion to the words contained in an ad or commercial, without considering the role of the images as well. We think that the *whole* ad or the *whole* commercial persuades.

We also believe that some of the most intriguing aspects of persuasion can be found in nonverbal behavior, which lies on the periphery of symbolic action. For example, research on the physiological correlates of deception demonstrates that a variety of involuntary nonverbal cues (such as blinking, smiling, and pupil dilation) are positive indicators of lying (DePaulo, Stone, & Lassiter, 1985). We focus on deception as a form of persuasion in Chapter 12. Research on source credibility reveals that physical attributes, such as height or attractiveness, influence judgments of source credibility (Chaiken, 1979). We examine such factors in Chapter 4. Studies have even demonstrated that aromas significantly influence individuals' moods and behaviors (Lehrner, Eckersberger, Walla, Potsch, & Deeke, 2000; Walton, 1994). We explore this topic in Chapter 15. We see little justification for excluding such forms of influence from beneath the umbrella of persuasion. Why exclude them when there is revealing, insightful research on these topics? Why exclude them when, in fact, real-world persuaders use them?

We can also think of situations in which pure behavior, for example, nonsymbolic actions, are nevertheless persuasive. When a basketball player makes a head fake to fool a defender, we would maintain that the player is *persuading* the defender to go the wrong way. The fake is all behavior, but the player has to *sell* the fake to get the defender to "bite" on it. As another example, some victims of shooting rampages have managed to survive by playing dead. Playing dead is an act of pure nonverbal persuasion. There are numerous other situations in which individuals use nonsymbolic means to influence others.

We believe that restricting the study of persuasion exclusively to symbolic expression leads to a fragmented understanding of the subject. Persuasion involves more than language usage or symbol usage. There are a whole host of factors at work. Physical features about a person, such as height, weight, sex, age, or ethnicity, may have persuasive potential. The same may be said for a person's demeanor, mannerisms, involuntary utterances (such as burping or belching), and reflexive actions (such as being startled or laughing). Knowledge of a person's past or other relational cues may carry persuasive weight, as may situational or contextual cues. Unless the notion of symbolic action is expanded to include all of these features, we believe such a restriction offers only a partial picture of the whole of persuasion. Interestingly, many authors who profess an adherence to symbolic action nevertheless treat a variety of nonsymbolic aspects of behavior, such as those just mentioned, in their texts.

Interpersonal versus Intrapersonal

How many actors are required for persuasion to take place? A last limiting criterion that deserves mention is whether persuasion can involve only one person or whether persuasion

requires the participation of two or more distinct persons. Some scholars adopt the view that engaging in persuasion is like dancing the tango; it takes two (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994; Johnston, 1994; Perloff, 1993). We agree in the case of the tango, but not in the case of persuasion. In fact, we maintain that attempts at self-persuasion are quite common. A person who is on a diet might tape a picture of a lean, "chiseled" model on the refrigerator door to reinforce his or her motivation to lose weight. A person might search for a rationalization to do something he or she wants, such as blowing the rent money on front row concert tickets. In such cases, people engage in self-persuasion by talking themselves into whatever they wish to do. New Year's resolutions are a case in point. They involve making a commitment to do something or to stop doing something. The act of making the commitment serves to increase one's resolve.

We are sympathetic to the two or more perspective but suggest that, once again, the issue comes down to whether one wishes to focus exclusively on pure cases of persuasion or borderline cases as well. We heartily agree that when we think of pure cases of persuasion, we conjure up an image of one person persuading another. When we include borderline cases, we imagine instances in which individuals sometimes try to convince themselves.

A Model of the Scope of Persuasion

In light of the five limiting criteria just discussed, we can now offer an enhanced model (see Figure 2.2) that encompasses both pure and borderline cases of persuasion (Gass & Seiter, 1997, 2004). Note that, as with the preliminary model, the inner circle represents pure persuasion, that is, what we think of as the core or heart of persuasion. The outer circle represents borderline persuasion. Superimposed on top of these two circles are five wedges, each representing one of the five limiting criteria previously discussed. The inner portion of each wedge represents the pure case for that criterion. The outer portion represents the borderline case. Once again, the shading between the inner and outer circles reflects the fuzzy dividing line that exists between pure and borderline persuasion.

Based on this enhanced model, you can appreciate the fact that different definitions feature different wedges of the inner and outer circles. Source-oriented definitions restrict persuasion to the inner circle of the "intentional-unintentional" wedge. Receiver-based definitions limit persuasion to the inner circle of the "effects-no effects" wedge. Other receiver-based definitions favor the inner circle with respect to the "free choice-coercion" criterion, and so on.

As you can also see from the enhanced model, some definitions concern themselves with several wedges at the same time, whereas other definitions are based on a single limiting criterion. It's worth noting that all definitions of persuasion—including our own, which we present shortly—are linguistic constructs. They exist in the world of words. Whether a given situation involves persuasion is not a matter of fact, but of judgment.

Our own preference is for an expanded view of persuasion that includes borderline cases as well as pure persuasion. We tend to side with the view that persuasion is sometimes unintentional; that it sometimes has no discernable effects; that people aren't always aware of when it is occurring; that it often includes at least some coercive features; that it needn't be conveyed exclusively via symbols; and that humans do, on occasion, engage in

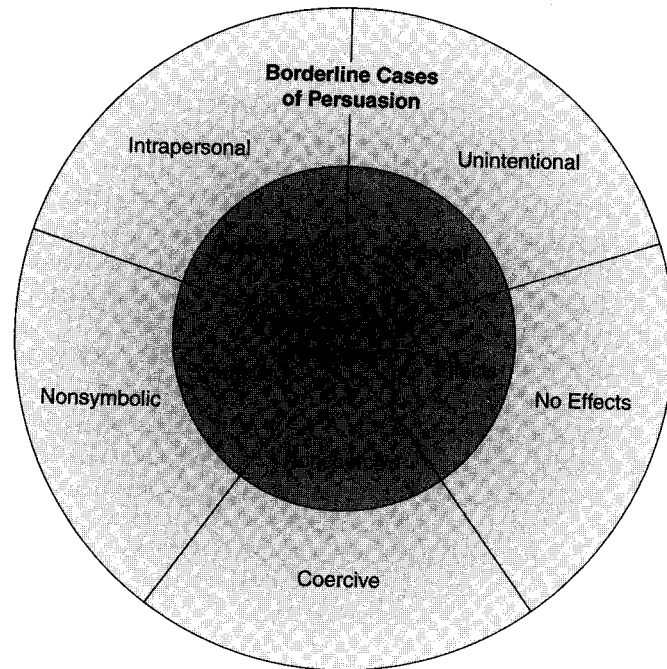


FIGURE 2.2 Enhanced Model of Persuasion.

self-persuasion. Many of the topics discussed in later chapters reside in the outer ring of our model. As we've already indicated, we believe that some of the most intriguing aspects of persuasion can be found there. We firmly believe we must look at both the inner and outer rings to fully understand the phenomenon of persuasion.

The Context for Persuasion

Consistent with current conceptualizations of persuasion, we view social influence as a process. Thus far, however, our model has remained relatively static. A final feature must be incorporated into our model to reflect the nature of persuasion as a process. That feature is the context for persuasion. The context in which persuasion occurs, for example, within a small group, via mass media, in an organizational setting, and so forth, is crucial because it is the context that determines the nature of the communication process. In a face-to-face setting, for example, influence is a mutual, two-way process. In an advertising setting, influence tends to be more linear, from the advertiser to the consumer (there may be feedback from consumers, but it is delayed). Each context imposes its own unique set of constraints on the options available to persuaders.

By context, we don't simply mean the number of communicators present, although that is certainly one key factor. The context for communication also includes how synchronous or asynchronous communication is. Synchronous communication refers to the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages. Such is the case in face-to-face interaction.

Asynchronous communication refers to a back-and-forth process that involves some delay, such as email.

Another contextual factor is the ratio of verbal to nonverbal cues that are present. A print ad consisting entirely of text would rely exclusively on verbal cues (words) to persuade. A poster featuring only an image would rely exclusively on nonverbal cues to persuade. Most persuasive messages involve both verbal and nonverbal cues. The ratio of verbal to nonverbal cues available in any persuasive situation imposes particular constraints on the persuasion process.

An additional contextual factor is the nature and type of media used in the persuasion process. Television commercials, radio ads, magazine ads, and telemarketing are all mediated forms of persuasion. Face-to-face encounters, such as door-to-door sales and panhandling, are unmediated. As with the other contextual factors, each medium imposes its own constraints on the persuasion process.

Yet another contextual factor involves the goals of the participants. The prevailing view is that most, if not all, interpersonal communication is goal-directed (Dillard, 1989, 1990, 1993, 2004; Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989; Tracy, 1991). That is, participants typically enter into communication encounters with specific objectives in mind. Canary and Cody (1994) break down these goals into three types—*self-presentational goals*, *relational goals*, and *instrumental goals*. Self-presentational goals have to do with identity management. People want to project a favorable image of themselves to others. Relational goals have to do with what people want out of their relationships; how to develop them, improve them, change them, and so forth. Instrumental goals involve attempts at compliance gaining. People's goals may be thwarted or may change during a persuasive encounter. Even so, the nature of the goals they are seeking imposes certain constraints on the persuasion process. We'll have more to say about this topic in Chapter 11.

A final contextual variable involves sociocultural factors that affect the persuasion process. People from different cultures or subcultures may persuade in different ways (Ma & Chuang, 2001). They may respond to persuasive messages differently as well. For example, research suggests that some cultures prefer more indirect approaches to compliance gaining (hinting, guilt, reliance on group norms), whereas other cultures prefer more direct approaches to compliance gaining (direct requests, demanding) (Wiseman et al., 1995). Different cultural traditions can dramatically affect what is expected or accepted in the way of influence attempts.

Note that all of these contextual factors are operating at once in a given persuasive situation. Each of the contextual factors constrains the process of persuasion in one way or another. The context involves the totality of the relationships among all these factors. The final version of our model, depicted in Figure 2.3, illustrates how persuasion is shaped by context (Gass & Seiter, 1997). Context, then, is what determines the nature of the process involved in a given persuasive situation.

A Working Definition of Persuasion

At last we arrive at our own definition of persuasion. Our view is that *persuasion involves one or more persons who are engaged in the activity of creating, reinforcing, modifying,*

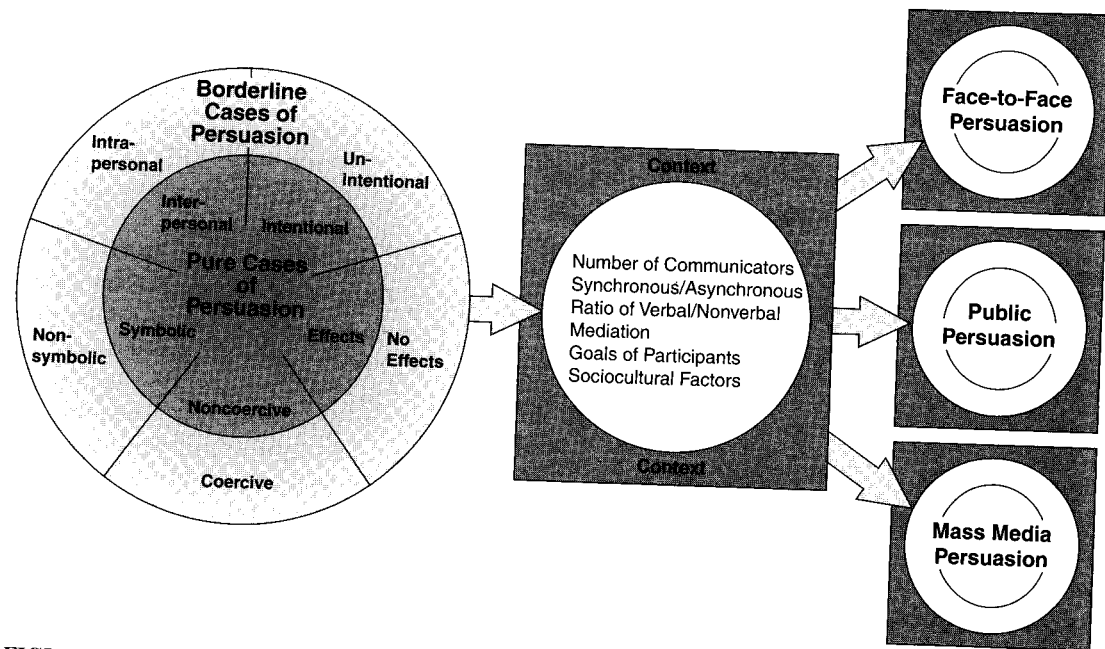


FIGURE 2.3 Completed Model of Persuasion. This figure illustrates three of many possible persuasive situations.

or extinguishing beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations, and/or behaviors within the constraints of a given communication context. The advantage of our definition is that it encompasses the full scope of persuasion, both pure and borderline cases. Our definition also emphasizes persuasion as an activity or a process; it is something people do. We are uncomfortable treating persuasion as a product or an outcome, which explains our bias against an effects standard. Our definition encompasses the notion that in face-to-face encounters persuasion is a two-way street. Each party has an opportunity to influence the other. This explains our reluctance to label only one party the sender, as an intent criterion seems to suggest, or only one party as the receiver, as an effects criterion tends to imply. With respect to our definition, we also wish to stress that persuasion doesn't involve simply changing one's own or another's mind, though that is the most typical connotation (Miller, 1980). Persuasion can also involve creating new beliefs or attitudes, where none existed before. It can also involve reinforcing, strengthening, or solidifying attitudes already held by receivers. And persuasion also can involve attempts to extinguish or eliminate beliefs and attitudes. The latter approach is exemplified by Alcoholics Anonymous' position that alcoholics must abandon the belief that other people are responsible, or circumstances are to blame, for their dependency.

If our definition seems expansive, it is because we believe the topic of persuasion itself is rather far-ranging. We wish to examine not only the core of persuasion in this text but its periphery as well. The majority of our examples focuses on pure cases of persua-

sion. However, from time to time we dabble on the fuzzy outer edges. We find some of the borderline cases of persuasion quite interesting, and we believe you will too.

So What Isn't Persuasion?

Given the breadth of our definition, you're probably wondering, "What *isn't* persuasion then?" We address this concern now. Our position is that the ingredients for persuasion can be found in most, if not all, communication transactions. The degree to which these persuasive ingredients are present, not their mere presence or absence, is what matters. We think most human communication involves at least the *potential* to influence, for example, to create, modify, reinforce, or extinguish beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations, and behaviors. Of course, one may choose not to focus on the persuasive, or potentially persuasive, elements in a communication situation. One can concentrate on some other aspect of communication instead. The potential for persuasion remains nonetheless. What matters, then, is how persuasive a given communication situation is, not whether a communication situation is persuasive or not.

Our position is not that most, or all, human communication is only persuasion. Many other features of communication can command one's attention. For example, one can examine the role of self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction without discussing persuasion. One can study nonverbal cues and liking without focusing on persuasion. One can look at how people try to save face during conflicts without involving persuasion. Persuasive elements needn't comprise the focus of attention even if they are present. One can focus on other relevant features of human communication to the exclusion of persuasive processes.

Although we believe that nearly all human communication is potentially persuasive, we don't believe the same about all human behavior. The mere act of breathing, in and of itself, doesn't seem like persuasion to us—although under the right circumstances it could be (such as pretending to be out of breath). Tripping over a rock, by itself, doesn't seem like a persuasive act to us, although, again, under certain conditions it could be (such as pretending to be clumsy). A good deal of human behavior, then, we don't consider to be persuasion, unless and until some additional conditions are met. We don't think everything humans do is persuasive.

There are also some forms of communication that we've excluded from consideration in this text for purely practical reasons. For example, we don't address the possibility of human-to-animal persuasion, or vice versa, though such a case probably could be made. We don't examine the power of hypnotic suggestion as a form of influence. We don't examine attempts to persuade via paranormal or psychic activity either. We've heard that some people with cancerous tumors try to "talk to" their cancer and "persuade" it to go away. We don't deal with that topic here, except insofar as it may constitute a form of self-persuasion. We don't consider terrorism as a form of persuasion, though a case could be made that it is an intentional effort to change attitudes. We also don't address a host of other intriguing topics, such as the role of prayer or meditation, as forms of persuasion. We simply don't have the space to devote to those topics here. Thus, as big as the fence that we've built is, there is a lot of human communication we've left out.

Dual Process Models of Persuasion

Now that we've clarified what we think persuasion is, we want to take a look at how it functions. To this end we present a brief explanation of two prevailing models of persuasion. Both are known as *dual process* models (Chaiken & Trope, 1999) because they postulate that persuasion operates via two basic paths. The two models share many similarities and in our opinion, both do an excellent job of explaining how persuasive messages are perceived and processed.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion

Richard Petty and John Cacioppo's (1986a, 1986b) *Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion*, or *ELM*, is one of the most widely cited models in the persuasion literature.² Their model proposes two basic routes to persuasion that operate in tandem. The first of these they call the *central route*. The central route, or *central processing* as they sometimes refer to it, involves *cognitive elaboration*. That means thinking about the content of a message, reflecting on the ideas and information contained in it, and scrutinizing the evidence and reasoning presented. The second route to persuasion is known as the *peripheral route*. The peripheral route, or *peripheral processing* as it is sometimes called, involves focusing on cues that aren't directly related to the substance of a message. For example, focusing on a source's physical attractiveness, or the sheer quantity of arguments presented, or a catchy jingle as a basis for decision making would entail peripheral processing. According to the ELM, the two routes represent the ends, or anchor points, of an elaboration continuum (Petty, Rucker, Bizer, & Cacioppo, 2004). At one end of the continuum, a person engages in no or low elaboration. At the other end, a person engages in high elaboration.

To illustrate the two basic routes, imagine that Rex and Trudy are on a date at a restaurant. Trudy is very health conscious, so she studies the menu carefully. She looks to see whether certain dishes are fatty or high in calories. When the food server arrives to take their order, she asks, "What kind of oil is used to prepare the pasta?" She might sound picky, but Trudy is engaging in central processing. She is actively thinking about what the menu says. Rex, however, is smitten with Trudy's good looks. He hardly looks at the menu, and when the food server asks for his order, he says, "I'll have what she's having." Rex is engaging in peripheral processing. He's basing his decision on cues that are unrelated to the items on the menu.

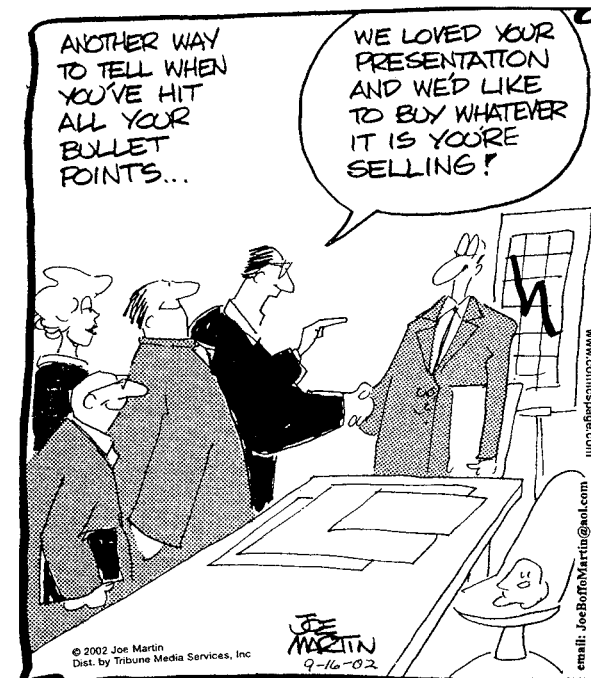
Petty and Cacioppo acknowledge the possibility of *parallel processing*, that is, using both routes at once (Petty, Kasmer, Haugtvedt, & Cacioppo, 1987). However, they suggest that there is usually a trade-off between central and peripheral processing, such that a person tends to favor one route over the other. Whether a person emphasizes the central or the peripheral route hinges on two basic factors. The first of these is the individual's *motivation* to engage in central processing. Because central processing requires more mental effort, a person with greater motivation is more likely to rely on central processing. Typically, this means the person has *high involvement* with the topic or issue. That is, the topic or issue matters to him or her or affects him or her personally. If a person has *low involvement* with a topic or issue, he or she will be less inclined to engage in central processing, and more likely to resort to peripheral processing.

The second factor that determines whether a person will rely on central or peripheral processing is his or her *ability* to process information. A person must not only be willing

but also able to engage in central processing. Some people are more adept at grasping ideas, understanding concepts, and making sense of things. Some people also have more knowledge of or expertise in certain topics or issues than others. Thus, receivers are more likely to process a persuasive message via the central route if they have the motivation and ability to do so. If they lack the motivation or the ability, they will tend to rely on peripheral processing instead.

Aside from ability and motivation, a variety of other factors can tilt the balance in favor of central or peripheral processing. These include distractions, such as background noise, time constraints, a person's mood, or a personality trait called *need for cognition*. Need for cognition has to do with how much a person enjoys thinking about things. We discuss this trait in more detail in Chapter 5.

Researchers have found that persuasion via the central route tends to be more long-lasting, whereas persuasion via the peripheral route tends to be more short-lived (Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995). This seems sensible: When we think about ideas, they are more likely to be absorbed. Similarly, persuasion that takes place via central processing also tends to be more resistant to counterinfluence attempts than persuasion via peripheral processing. This also makes sense: If you've thought through your position, you're less likely to "waffle." Researchers have also found that if receivers disagree with the content of a message, using central processing causes them to generate more counterarguments. That is, they mentally rehearse their objections to the message. If receivers disagree with a message and rely on peripheral processing, however, they will generate fewer counterarguments or other unfavorable thoughts about the message.



Peripheral processing in action.

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The Heuristic Systematic Model of Persuasion

Another model of persuasion that bears many similarities to the ELM is Shelley Chaiken and Alice Eagly's *Heuristic Systematic Model*, or *HSM* (Chaiken, 1980, 1987; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). As with the ELM, the HSM operates on the assumption that individuals rely on two different modes of information processing. One mode, called *systematic processing*, is more thoughtful and deliberate. Systematic processing in the HSM is roughly analogous to central processing in the ELM. The other mode, called *heuristic processing*, relies on mental shortcuts. Heuristic processing is based on the application of *decision rules* or *heuristic cues* that help simplify the thought process. An example of a decision rule would be buying a TV based on its brand-name ("Sony's are reliable"). An example of a heuristic cue would be choosing one wine over another because the bottle was prettier. Heuristic processing in the HSM is roughly equivalent to peripheral processing in the ELM.

Chaiken and Eagly's model also maintains that *simultaneous processing* of messages is commonplace. That is, messages travel the heuristic and systematic routes concurrently. As with the ELM, the HSM states that *motivation* and *ability* are two primary determinants of the extent to which heuristic or systematic processing will be used. A problem for both models is that, to date, there is limited empirical evidence of simultaneous processing, at least in laboratory studies of persuasion (Booth-Butterfield et al., 1994; Chaiken et al., 1989).

Another feature of the HSM is the *sufficiency principle*, which states that people strive to know as much as they need to when making a decision but no more or less. On the one hand, people want to devote the time and attention to issues that the issues deserve. On the other hand, people can't afford to spend all their time and mental energy worrying about every little thing. Therefore, people balance their heuristic and systematic processing to create the best "fit" for the issue at hand.

By way of illustration, suppose Irwin is thinking of buying a PDA. If Irwin didn't know much about such devices, he could take one of two approaches. He could rely on systematic processing by reading up on handheld organizers in electronics magazines. He would likely adopt this route if he thought he really needed one (motivation) and he lacked the necessary knowledge about them (sufficiency principle). But he would also need to have time to gather information and be able to understand it (ability). Alternatively, he could opt for heuristic processing. He could base his decision on a friend's advice using a simple decision rule ("Lance knows his electronics"). Or he could base his decision on a heuristic cue, such as the brand ("Blackberry is the best brand"). He would be more likely to resort to heuristic processing if he didn't really need a handheld organizer—it was only an electronic toy (low motivation)—or if he didn't think he could make sense of the information about them anyway (lack of ability).

Both the ELM and HSM are useful for explaining and predicting people's reactions to persuasive messages. Literally dozens of studies devoted to testing the explanatory and predictive power of these two models have been conducted. These studies have generally upheld the models' utility. Although both models have their critics (see Kruglanski & Thompson, 1999; Mongeau & Stiff, 1993; Stiff & Boster, 1987), it is safe to say that they enjoy considerable support in the literature. We develop and amplify principles related to the ELM

and HSM throughout this text. Because we refer back to both models repeatedly, it would be worth your while to familiarize yourself with their basic concepts for later reference.

Summary

We began this chapter by presenting a preliminary model of persuasion that distinguished pure from borderline cases of persuasion. We argued for an expanded view of persuasion, emphasizing the importance of borderline cases to an overall appreciation of what persuasion is. We then identified five limiting criteria for defining persuasion that were reflected in an enhanced model of persuasion. We discussed what we believed to be the limitations of basing a definition of persuasion on any one criterion. We then introduced our own completed model of persuasion (Gass & Seiter, 1997) that emphasized the role of context in the persuasion process. We followed our model with our own broad-based, far-reaching definition of persuasion. Lastly, we provided a brief explanation of Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion and Chaiken and Eagly's Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) of persuasion.

ENDNOTES

1. More than two decades ago, Simons (1986, p. 116) introduced a model of persuasion having concentric circles, representing pure persuasion, peripheral persuasion, and nonpersuasion. Our preliminary model (Figure 2.1) draws on his work.
2. Not all scholars are enamored with Petty and Cacioppo's model. Among others, Mongeau and Stiff

(1993) and Stiff and Boster (1987) have criticized the ELM for its theoretical and empirical limitations. Petty, Wegener, Fabrigar, Priester, and Cacioppo (1993) and Petty, Kasmer, Haugtvedt, and Cacioppo (1987) have responded to many of the criticisms directed against their model.

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