

Kiesler C A, Collins B E & Miller N. *Attitude change: a critical analysis of theoretical approaches*. New York: Wiley, 1969. 386 p.
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In the 1960s and 1970s, the field of attitude change and the theories underlying it dominated both empirical and theoretical work in social psychology. Yet the theories and their supporters lived relatively independent lives, with little critical challenge to types of theories, such as behavioral, cognitive, or functional, and few attempts to test competing theories. Our book provided a critical assessment of the formal properties of each theory and suggested numerous ideas for empirical testing. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this book has been cited in over 230 publications.]

Theoretical Confrontations in Attitude Change

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In 1935 Gordon W. Allport called attitudes "the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology."¹ And so it remained until at least the late 1970s. Indeed, Allport traced work on this concept back to L. Lange's work in 1888 on *Aufgab*, or task-attitude, long before the first book on social psychology ever appeared (1905).

It was a core concept, and the research paradigm for its experimentation provided the approaches to much of social psychology from interpersonal attraction to group conflict to conformity. However, the research really centered *within* particular theories by the authors and their graduate students. I had worked at Stanford with L. Festinger, whose cognitive dissonance theory² was the leading theory for 15-20 years. B.E. Collins and N. Miller worked at Northwestern with D.T. Campbell, who advocated a much more behavioral approach.³

All three of us were junior faculty at Yale when a book salesman told each that the other two were thinking of writing a book critically

reviewing the major theoretical approaches to attitude development and change. We collaborated, thinking the book would be stronger with our different points of view. It must have been a good idea because, when we sent out a prospectus and a couple of chapters I had written to nine publishers, all responded enthusiastically. The reviews of the book were extremely favorable as well—one called it "an instant classic."

The people whose theories we reviewed responded pretty uniformly as well. Every one of them who commented to me said the same thing, "You were unfairly critical of me, but right on with everyone else."

The authorship was decided in an amusing way. At the last minute, on the very night the three couples were opening champagne to celebrate the completion of the book, we had a little dispute about who would be first author. So, while the three wives waited, we three went downstairs to my den and played a hand of poker for authorship. I dealt, and at the end of the hand the authorship list was as it was before the hand.

Why has this volume been cited so often? I think there are several reasons. One is it was obviously the right book at the right time. The various publishers were enthusiastic even though it was a very high level book and we projected sales of only about 2,500 volumes (based on sales of some other attitude books coming out of the Yale series). In that we were wrong: it sold closer to 20,000, went out of print, and was reprinted in 1983.

Most important, probably, we deliberately tried to provoke thought and research within and between theories. We raised enough issues and questions for hundreds of theses and dissertations. It has also been used as one of the small number of core books in graduate programs in social psychology (and communications programs, as well). More personally, it was both fun and exciting to write. It helped me sort out ideas that played a big role in my early career, and it had a profound effect on my subsequent book on the psychology of commitment.⁴

[Editor's note: A recent review article that cites Kiesler's book is referenced below.⁵]

1. Allport G W. Attitudes. (Murchison C, ed.) *Handbook of social psychology*. Worcester, MA: Clark University Press, 1935. p. 798-884. (Cited 60 times since 1966.)
2. Festinger L. *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957. 291 p. (Cited 2,395 times since 1966.)
3. Campbell D T. Social attitudes and other acquired behavioral dispositions. (Koch S, ed.) *Psychology: a study of a science*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963. p. 94-172. (Cited 80 times since 1966.)
4. Kiesler C A. *The psychology of commitment: experiments linking behavior to belief*. New York: Academic Press, 1971. 190 p. (Cited 200 times.)
5. Chaiken S & Stangor C. Attitudes and attitude change. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* 38:575-630, 1987.

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