



The dependency of interpersonal evaluations on context-relevant beliefs about the other

Jesse G. Delia , Walter H. Crockett , Allan N. Press & Daniel J. O'Keefe

To cite this article: Jesse G. Delia , Walter H. Crockett , Allan N. Press & Daniel J. O'Keefe (1975) The dependency of interpersonal evaluations on context-relevant beliefs about the other, Communications Monographs, 42:1, 10-19, DOI: [10.1080/03637757509375872](https://doi.org/10.1080/03637757509375872)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637757509375872>



Published online: 02 Jun 2009.




[Submit your article to this journal](#) 



Article views: 10



[View related articles](#) 



Citing articles: 25 [View citing articles](#) 

THE DEPENDENCY OF INTERPERSONAL EVALUATIONS ON CONTEXT-RELEVANT BELIEFS ABOUT THE OTHER

JESSE G. DELIA, WALTER H. CROCKETT, ALLAN N. PRESS, and DANIEL J. O'KEEFE

IT is a commonplace observation that some people are fine work partners but social bores while other people are charming socially but lazy and indolent at work. However, the implications of this commonplace for the nature and functioning of interpersonal attitudes seem to have been overlooked in much of the recent work on impression formation. The observation suggests, for example, that our orientation toward another person can be a complex mixture of attributions of differing evaluative valence along different dimensions of judgment; that in a multidimensional social world we are quite capable of recognizing without discomfort that the same person can, in different contexts, be evaluated at opposite poles of the different dimensions; and that our evaluation of a person in either of the single contexts will not necessarily predict, nor be predicted by, our evaluation of the same person on an overall evaluative continuum.

Such implications, while rooted in the observations of naive psychology, are nonetheless substantially at variance with much of the prevailing work in impression and attitude formation. It seems enough to note, for example, that the

Mr. Delia is Associate Professor of Speech Communication and Research Associate Professor of Communications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Mr. Crockett is Professor of Psychology and of Speech Communication and Human Relations at the University of Kansas; Mr. Press is Research Associate in the Department of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas; Mr. O'Keefe is a doctoral candidate in Speech Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

SPEECH MONOGRAPHS, Vol. 42, March, 1975

considerable research on stimulus pooling in impression formation¹ and such attitude change models as that of Osgood and Tannenbaum² consider only the evaluative aspect of trait meanings and are concerned only with overall, context-free evaluation.³

Fishbein has stated with cogency the limitation of this concern with context-free interpersonal evaluations: ". . . our attitude toward a person as a co-worker may be quite different from our attitude toward the same person as a friend. This should not be surprising; if an individual were asked to describe a particular person as a card player, he would give a different set of beliefs about that person than if he were asked to describe the same person as a co-worker."⁴ Surprisingly, however, in formulating his model

¹ See, for example, Norman H. Anderson, "A Simple Model for Information Integration," in *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook*, ed. Robert P. Abelson, et al. (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1968), pp. 731-743 and Samuel Himmelfarb, "General Test of a Differential Weighted Averaging Model of Impression Formation," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 9 (1973), 379-90.

² Charles Osgood and Percy Tannenbaum, "The Principle of Congruity in the Prediction of Attitude Change," *Psychological Review*, 62 (1955), 42-55; and Percy H. Tannenbaum, "The Congruity Principle: Retrospective Reflections and Recent Research," in *Theories of Cognitive Consistency*, pp. 52-72.

³ While other than the evaluative dimension have been used to test some of the integration models, particularly Anderson's weighted averaging model, a single global judgment has always been the criterion and the global evaluative judgment clearly has been the dominant focus of study.

⁴ Martin Fishbein, "Attitude and the Prediction of Behavior," in *Readings in Attitude Theory and Measurement*, ed. Martin Fishbein (New York: Wiley, 1967), p. 480.

of the belief-attitude relationship, Fishbein in fact employs a context-free conception of belief.⁵ That is, belief in his operationalization is defined by the strength of association between an element and the attitude object; the content or referent of the belief is quite irrelevant to Fishbein's scheme.⁶ Applied to person perception, this means that the qualities *efficient on the job* and *interpersonally sensitive* will be entered with the same weightings into Fishbein's equations so long as they are equally strongly associated with the person; that the holder of the beliefs may see them as differently relevant to particular contexts of interaction does not enter into the experimenter's concern. And even if, as Fishbein suggests, beliefs are elicited only with respect to a specific context, the context-specific attitude predictions will primarily reflect, not judgments of the strength of association between the attitude object and its belief components, but the fact that the subjects have implicitly made judgments concerning which of their beliefs are relevant to their evaluations in the particular context. It is not surprising, therefore, that recent research has found that predictions of attitude from the summation of unweighted evaluations of object-defining components are almost identical to those based on Fishbein's formulation involving belief-strength weightings.⁷

⁵ Fishbein's model is presented in *ibid*; in Martin Fishbein, "An Investigation of the Relationships between Beliefs about an Object and the Attitude Toward that Object," *Human Relations*, 16 (1963), 233-40; and in Martin Fishbein, "A Behavior Theory Approach to the Relationships between Beliefs about an Object and the Attitude toward the Object," in *Readings in Attitude Theory and Measurement*, pp. 389-400.

⁶ See Martin Fishbein and B. H. Raven, "The AB Scales: An Operational Definition of Belief and Attitude," *Human Relations*, 15 (1962), 35-44.

⁷ Anthony J. Smith and Russell D. Clark III, "The Relationship Between Attitudes and Beliefs," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26 (1973), 321-26.

All of this is to emphasize that an attitude toward another person is more than a simple evaluation. There may be many different cognitive bases for the same general overall evaluation of a person. If we are to understand how a subject's orientation toward an acquaintance is related to his behavior toward that person, we must determine not only the subject's overall evaluation of his acquaintance, but what the subject "knows" about the person that is relevant to the contexts of anticipated interaction and how this "knowledge" is translated into evaluations on context-specific, rather than global, dimensions of judgment.

These ideas are obviously not new in social psychology. Numerous theorists have emphasized the cognitive component of attitudes;⁸ theorists have also pointed out that different components of an attitude become salient as the context surrounding the attitude object changes.⁹ Considerations such as these have been implied in examinations of the relationship between attitudes and behavior.¹⁰ Our purpose in the present study was simply to put the ideas on an empirical footing by conducting a simple experiment which demonstrated their merit.

In the experiment subjects differing in cognitive complexity were given positive information about the work behavior of another person and negative in-

⁸ See, for example, David Krech and Richard S. Crutchfield, *Theory and Problems of Social Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948).

⁹ See, for example, Theodore M. Newcomb, Ralph H. Turner, and Philip E. Converse, *Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965).

¹⁰ See, for example, Donald T. Campbell, "Social Attitudes and Other Acquired Behavioral Dispositions," in *Psychology: A Study of a Science*, Vol. 6, ed. Sigmund Koch (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp. 94-172; and Alan W. Wicker, "Attitudes Versus Actions: The Relationship of Verbal and Overt Behavioral Responses to Attitude Objects," *Journal of Social Issues*, 25 (1969), 41-78.

formation about his social behavior, or vice versa; were asked to write impressions of the person with respect to one context or the other; and then evaluated him on a general like-dislike dimension, on his value as a work partner, and on his value as a social companion. In addition, the written impressions were decomposed by the subjects into their individual belief elements and component evaluations and belief-strength judgments were obtained. Two weeks later, subjects were asked to write impressions from memory of the same person, this time with respect to the opposite context as previously, and then to evaluate him once more on the three separate dimensions.

We expected that, both immediately and two weeks later, subjects' evaluations of the person on the different dimensions would reflect the valence of the information they received on those dimensions, i.e., would be positive for one context and negative for the other, while their overall evaluation would be approximately neutral. Most importantly, we also expected that even though the content of their written impressions on each occasion would change drastically depending on whether they wrote about the person's actions at work or socially, these changes would not influence their ratings on these scales. Since we believed that the most important factor affecting the subject's impressions would be their implicit judgment of the relevance of their belief attributions about the other to each context of interaction, we also predicted that the sum of the evaluations of the component beliefs would predict only the relevant context-specific evaluations. Further, given our above stated reasoning, we also expected that weighting the component evaluations with judgments of belief strength—that is, using Fishbein's formula for the pre-

diction of attitude as a function of both belief strength and evaluative judgments—would not improve any of the predictions of evaluation.

In addition, because Klyver, Press, and Crockett¹¹ have shown that cognitively complex subjects show less shift than noncomplex subjects in sequential evaluations of another person, we expected that complex subjects would show greater stability in their evaluations than would noncomplex subjects. Complex perceivers possess more highly differentiated and abstract systems of interpersonal constructs which serve them in processing information about their social world.¹² Given the more developed nature of their cognitive systems in the interpersonal domain, they have been shown in a number of studies to form more abstract and evaluatively integrated interpersonal impressions than their noncomplex fellows.¹³ As a consequence of their capacity to form such impressions, we expected the noncomplex subjects to focus or cognitively center more upon the immediately salient features of the interaction context and, hence, to have less stable interpersonal evaluations.¹⁴

¹¹ Nelson Klyver, Allan N. Press, and Walter H. Crockett, "Cognitive Complexity and the Sequential Integration of Inconsistent Information," a paper presented at the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, 1972. Also see Clara W. Mayo and Walter H. Crockett, "Cognitive Complexity and Primacy-Recency Effects in Impression Formation," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 68 (1964), 335-38.

¹² See Walter H. Crockett, "Cognitive Complexity and Impression Formation," in *Progress in Experimental Personality Research*, II, ed. Brendan A. Maher (New York: Academic Press, 1965).

¹³ See, for example, Jesse G. Delia, Ruth Anne Clark, and David E. Switzer, "Cognitive Complexity and the Formation of Impressions in Informal Social Interaction," *SM*, 41 (1974), 299-308. Further references are included in that report.

¹⁴ A cogent introduction to the Piagetian concept of conceptual centering as it functions in social interaction can be gleaned from Albert Mehrabian, *An Analysis of Personality Theories* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1968). pp. 121-64.

METHODS

Subjects were students in the introductory speech communication course at the University of Illinois, Urbana. Seventy subjects participated in the first session of whom only 63 were present in the second; those who did not attend both sessions were excluded from the analyses.

To assess cognitive complexity, subjects were asked to complete a version of the Role Category Questionnaire in which they described in writing two peers, one liked and one disliked, taking approximately five minutes for each description.¹⁵ The total number of different constructs used in each description were summed; separate distributions of these scores for males and females were dichotomized at the median. Those above the medians were defined as complex perceivers, those below as noncomplex perceivers.

Impression Formation Tasks

Subjects read eight blocks of information about a college student, Walt A. Half of the blocks provided information about Walt A's behavior in social situations, the other half described Walt's behavior in work situations. Before receiving this information, subjects were told to imagine that a friend of theirs who lived in another town was going to have to meet and to associate with Walt in either an informal social situation or an academic work setting. As their friend would be unable to gain any first hand information about Walt before the meeting, subjects were told to assume he had asked them to form an impression of Walt which would be helpful to him in *this situation and to communicate this*

impression to him. After reading the stimulus information, subjects wrote their impressions of Walt (in relation to one or the other context) in as much detail as possible, and then evaluated Walt on nine point scales (a) overall, as a person, (b) as a social companion, and (c) as a work partner.

After writing their impressions and evaluating Walt on the three continua, subjects were asked to read their impressions and, on a separate sheet of the experimental booklet, to list the individual beliefs which they had included about Walt. Following this, on the final page of the experimental booklet, subjects rated each of the belief components of their impressions on two provided 7-point scales. In reference to the first scale, which was bounded by the anchors "very favorable" and "very unfavorable," subjects were told to take each belief in isolation and to indicate how favorable or unfavorable a quality it was. For the second scale, bounded by "very uncertain" and "very certain," subjects were instructed to indicate the strength of their belief that Walt actually possessed the quality which they had ascribed to him. In computing predictions of context-specific and overall evaluations from these ratings, the evaluation continuum was scored +3 to -3 and the belief strength scale from 1 to 7.

Two weeks after the initial session, subjects wrote from memory an impression of Walt in relation to the opposite context. They were given an experimental booklet with instructions to describe Walt with respect to the opposite context, wrote their impressions, and then evaluated Walt again on each of the three scales provided.

Information Manipulation

On the second page of the experimental booklet subjects read eight behavior-

¹⁵ Information concerning the validity and reliability of the Role Category Questionnaire is presented in Crockett; also see Delia, Clark, and Switzer.

al descriptions of Walt purportedly supplied by eight people who knew him well. Half of the subjects read four anecdotes in which Walt was described positively in academic, work-related settings and four descriptions in which Walt was described negatively in social situations. The other half of the subjects received negative information about Walt's behavior in academic, work-related situations, and positive information about his behavior in social situations. Anecdotes about the social and work settings were presented in alternation.

To control for difference in information supplied to these two groups, the same incidents were used in both conditions, with Walt's behavior in these incidents changed in valence. For example, one social incident read: "Whenever Walt and I are at a party or in a group of people, Walt always tries to talk about the things they're interested in, never making himself the center of attention." In the other questionnaire this was changed to read ". . . Walt constantly talks about himself, and his accomplishments, making himself the center of attention." The four work-related anecdotes described how much Walt works, how well he works, how much he helps others in the work setting, and how serious he is about his work. The four social anecdotes described Walt's sensitivity or insensitivity to a social isolate, whether he talks or listens in social gatherings, the quality of his sense of humor, and the extent of his appreciativeness for favors.

Experimental Design and Statistical Analysis

The experiment was thus run as a 2⁴ factorial design. Between group factors were Cognitive Complexity (complex vs. noncomplex perceivers), Information Conditions (positive-social/negative-work

vs. negative-social/positive-work) and Initial Context (work or social context made salient in the initial impression); Immediate vs. Delayed Impression was a repeated-measures factor. The specific Evaluative Dimensions (work partner vs. social companion) constituted a second within-subjects factor in testing the hypothesis concerning the context-specificity of evaluation. The appropriate unweighted means analysis of variance was employed on each dependent measure.

Dependent Measures

Subjects' written impressions were first scored for the number of positive, neutral or ambiguous, and negative constructs that they ascribed to Walt. One dependent measure was the proportion of positive constructs to all the constructs a subject attributed to Walt in this written impression.¹⁶ The measure constituted an index of whether the subjects perceived only part of this information as relevant to one or the other interaction contexts since the supplied stimulus information was univalent within either the social or work dimension. Other dependent variables were subjects' evaluations of Walt on the three continua and, in addition, the absolute change from the first to the second impressions of subjects' ratings on the three evaluation scales. Finally, subjects' evaluation and certainty judgments were used to generate predictions of the derived context-specific and overall evaluations. Two predictions were made; the first was based on a simple summation of the component belief evaluations, while the second employed Fishbein's predictive formula which weights these component evaluations by its corresponding belief strength (certainty) judgment.

¹⁶ Two coders scored each impression for differentiation. The reliability coefficient for the two scorings for proportion of positive elements was .92.

RESULTS

Proportion of Positive Elements in Written Description

The only significant effect in this analysis was the predicted second-order interaction between Information Conditions, Initial Content, and Immediate vs. Delayed Impression ($F = 115.76$; $d.f. = 1,55$; $p < .001$). Subjects used about the same proportion of positive constructs to describe Walt in a given context whether the impression was written immediately after reading the information or after a two-week delay. The proportion of positive constructs was high when the information relevant to the context concerned was favorable and low when the information was unfavorable (Table 1).

Specific Context Evaluations

The same pattern of results was observed in subjects' ratings on specific dimensions (Information Conditions \times Evaluative Dimensions: $F = 243.78$; $d.f. = 1,55$; $p < .001$). As Table 2 suggests, however, this interaction was contained within a larger one (Information Conditions \times Evaluative Dimensions \times Immediate vs. Delayed Impression: $F = 8.59$; $d.f. = 1,55$; $p < .01$) which reflected the

fact that the second ratings were somewhat less polarized than the initial ones. This effect, however, simply reflected a slight regression toward neutrality of the initially highly polarized ratings. The predicted effect (which accounted for well over half the variance in the scores) was clearly and unequivocally obtained.

Overall Evaluation

As expected, the overall evaluation was unaffected by the context for which the subjects' impressions were written [the relevant F value (Information Conditions \times Initial Context \times Immediate vs. Delayed Impression) was less than 1.00; $d.f. = 1,55$; $p > .50$]. There was, however, an unexpected main effect for Information Conditions ($F = 15.76$; $d.f. = 1,55$; $p < .001$) which reflected the fact that the overall evaluations were closer to the valence of the social information than of the work information (mean evaluations for conditions with positive and negative social information, respectively, were 5.6 and 4.1 on a 9-point scale).

Absolute Change of Evaluations

As expected, analysis of the scores for absolute change in evaluations from the first to the second impressions showed

TABLE 1
PROPORTION OF POSITIVE CONSTRUCTS IN WRITTEN DESCRIPTIONS

Set of Information	Work Impression		Social Impression	
	given immediately	delayed	given immediately	delayed
work-positive/social-negative	.70	.71	.29	.24
work-negative/social-positive	.20	.28	.77	.68

TABLE 2
MEAN EVALUATIONS ON WORK- AND SOCIAL-RELATED DIMENSIONS

Set of Information	Work Dimension		Social Dimension	
	Immediately	Delayed	Immediately	Delayed
work-positive/social-negative	7.1	6.6	2.9	3.7
work-negative/social-positive	1.7	2.0	6.4	6.4

significant effects only for Cognitive Complexity. This main effect was highly significant for both the stability of the overall evaluation ($F = 12.67$; d.f. = 1,55; $p < .001$; means of 0.71 and 1.74 units of change for complex and non-complex subjects, respectively) and for the mean of the absolute shifts on the two specific dimensions ($F = 7.41$; d.f. = 1,55; $p < .01$; means of 0.82 and 1.34 units of change, respectively, for complex and noncomplex subjects).

Prediction of Evaluations from Component Ratings

The correlations between the sum of the component evaluations,¹⁷ both without and with belief strength weightings, are summarized in Table 3. These correlations clearly demonstrate that the most important factor affecting the predictions was whether subjects were asked to supply only those beliefs relevant to a particular context of interaction. As predicted, the sum of the evaluations of the

¹⁷ The simple sum of the component evaluations was employed for comparability to predictions based on Fishbein's model and not out of any preference for a summative function of component integration. We do not wish to contribute further to the so-called "adding vs. averaging" controversy; that the issue is largely a bogus one is made clear by Bert H. Hodges, "Adding and Averaging Models for Information Integration," *Psychological Review*, 80 (1973), 80-84. The unweighted average of the component evaluations was a nonsignificantly better predictor of the obtained evaluations than was the unweighted summation.

component beliefs implicitly judged as relevant to a particular context predicted the obtained evaluation of Walt in that context, but did not predict either his overall evaluation or his evaluation in the other interaction context. Also as expected, these predictions were not improved through the addition of component belief strength weightings.¹⁸ It is also important to note that this failure of the belief-strength weightings to improve the attitude predictions cannot be attributed to low variability in these ratings. The mean standard deviation of subjects' belief-strength ratings was 1.28.

DISCUSSION

These results are hardly surprising. The specificity of evaluations to particular contexts is clearly a matter of common experience.¹⁹ The relative stability

¹⁸ Fishbein typically finds that belief-strength weightings improve the prediction of attitude. There is, however, an important methodological difference between his procedure and that included here. Where a supplied list of beliefs are usually given belief-strength ratings by his subjects, in the present study each subject's belief-strength ratings were made on beliefs included in his own initial written impression. The present procedure probably guarantees that only subjectively relevant beliefs are included, whereas in Fishbein's procedure the belief-strength judgment may, in part, substitute for a relevance judgment.

¹⁹ One should note, however, that such specificity would probably not hold for qualities drawn from every pair of domains. That the work context is clearly delineated from and relatively independent of the social context in our culture is suggested by the appearance

TABLE 3
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PREDICTED AND OBTAINED EVALUATIONS*

Dimension of Evaluation	When Salient Context is	
	Work	Social
Social	+ .01 (-.11)	+ .52** (+.51)**
Work	+ .49** (+.52)**	-.02 (+.03)
Overall	+ .22 (+.15)	+ .29 (+.28)

*Weighted predictions are included in parentheses; in no case were the unweighted and weighted predictions significantly different; degrees of freedom with the work and social contexts salient were, respectively, 26 and 33.

** $p < .01$

of complex subjects' evaluations replicated the results of previous studies and reflects the greater capacity of complex subjects to form evaluatively integrated impressions which are not centered upon the immediate situation. Surprising or not, however, the results have significant implications for the conduct of communication research.

The Concept of Attitude

While the distinction between contexts can be introduced into models such as those of Anderson, Fishbein, and Osgood and Tannenbaum,²⁰ such a refinement has not been made. Instead, the adequacy of increasingly complex models is tested again and again on a single overall continuum—typically the evalu-

ative dimension. Beliefs are seen as vacuous elements which have stronger or weaker degrees of association with a particular person or policy; the evaluation of each belief is treated as merely one component which contributes to the overall attitude toward the object; and attitudes are taken to be the key to understanding persons' actions.

The results of the present study show that ratings on an overall continuum can mask quite divergent ratings for different specific continua. It is especially worth emphasizing that subjects clearly made an implicit judgment concerning which of their belief attributions were relevant in predicting interaction in the work and social contexts.²¹ In combination with the failure of the belief-strength weightings to improve attitude predictions, this implies that beliefs should be treated as substantive cognitions which have content and thus differential relevance to different lines of action, rather than as vacuous entities whose primary function is to contribute some increment of affect to the overall evaluation. Context-relevant beliefs, not generalized evaluations, were the basis of the subjects' anticipated course of action toward the other.

These findings thus provide a basis for understanding the "attitude-behavior problem." It has long been recognized that one's overall evaluation of an attitude object is only problematically related to one's performance of a specific

of qualities relative to each context in different factors in studies of the relationship among interpersonal qualities. See, for example, Seymour Rosenberg, C. Nelson, and P. S. Vivekananthan, "A Multidimensional Approach to the Structure of Personality Impressions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9 (1968), 283-94. Seymour Rosenberg and Andrea Sedlack, "Structural Representations of Implicit Personality Theory," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, VI, ed. Leonard Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1972), 235-97; M. P. Zana and D. L. Hamilton, "Attribute Dimensions and Patterns of Trait Inference," *Psychonomic Science*, 27 (1972), 353-54. Independence is also suggested by studies in judgment of sociometric choice and leadership specialization. See, for example, Robert F. Bales, "Task Roles and Social Roles in Problem-solving Groups," in *Readings in Social Psychology*, ed. Eleanor E. Maccoby, Theodore M. Newcomb, and Eugene L. Hartley, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1958), pp. 437-47. Oppositely-valenced qualities that were judged appropriate to two related contexts would doubtless influence the valence of ratings on both contexts.

²⁰ This could be accomplished perhaps by weighting the value of a stimulus element according to its relevance to the context under consideration, or even by obtaining a number of different scale values for the element on each of several relatively independent dimensions. Anderson and Lopes have recently presented a cogent argument demonstrating that a model which considers both stimulus component value and weight can handle dimensional relevance; see Norman H. Anderson and Lola L. Lopes, "Some Psycholinguistic Aspects of Person Perception," *Memory and Cognition*, 2 (1974), 67-74.

²¹ We note with interest that the subjects were making the same kinds of judgments concerning the situational relevance and specificity of personality characteristics which Mischel has recently argued academic personality theorists should make if they are to adequately predict behavior. See Walter Mischel, "Toward a Cognitive-Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality," *Psychological Review*, 80 (1973), 252-83; also see Daryl J. Bem and Andrea Allen, "On Predicting Some of the Time: The Search for Cross-Situational Consistency in Behavior," *Psychological Review*, 81 (1974), 506-20.

action toward that object. But the present findings suggest that it is context-relevant beliefs, not attitudes, that guide persons' actions. The question inevitably arises whether the concept of attitude is as indispensable as a perusal of the persuasion literature would indicate. It would seem, on the basis of the present results, that a more satisfactory account of persuasion could be constructed by recognizing that it is beliefs, not attitudes, that guide the behavior of the situated social actor.

Now it is true that generalized attitudes towards objects are significantly related to multiple-act behavioral criteria, as Fishbein and Ajzen have noted.²² Fishbein and Ajzen come to terms with this by suggesting that multiple-act criteria "be viewed as an alternative attitude measurement procedure."²³ Hence they account for the relation between generalized attitudes and (properly constructed) multiple-act criteria by transforming it into merely a high correlation between verbal and behavioral measures of attitude.²⁴ On our view, on the other hand, the relation is explicable as follows. The overall attitude is a function of beliefs about the object. When multiple-act criteria are employed, the chances of some particular belief becoming relevant increases. To the extent that a variety of contexts are sampled in the multiple-act measure, a large number of beliefs about the object come into play. Thus it is to be expected that the multiple-act criteria (by virtue of the variety of beliefs involved) will be significantly

related to the generalized attitude.

The implications are thus that the correlation between generalized attitude and multiple-act criteria conceals the operation of beliefs in guiding situated actions; that it is context-relevant beliefs that provide the key to understanding actions; and that the concept of attitude thus may be unnecessary for a coherent account of behavior in general, and of persuasive effects in particular. It seems clear that researchers who are interested in impressions and persuasion ought to pay considerably more attention than they have in the past to variations in subjects' orientations toward other people or attitude objects as a function of the contexts in which they occur and of the subjects' relevant cognitions about the objects and contexts. Along the same lines, communication researchers who seek an understanding of everyday social interaction would do well to note the relation between interactional contexts and specific aspects of persons' impressions of others, and to recognize the way in which these guide the formation of lines of action. We believe with Abelson that such reorientation will lead to a reevaluation of the often almost exclusive concern with general, context-free conceptions of affect.²⁵

The Concept of Belief Salience

The foregoing account turns on the idea that beliefs about an object become differentially relevant (and thus salient) in various contexts. The present results have implications for the way in which this process is conceptualized, and in particular for the view of belief salience offered by Cronen and Conville.²⁶ These

²² Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, "Attitudes towards Objects as Predictors of Single and Multiple Behavioral Criteria," *Psychological Review*, 81 (1974), p. 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 62; see also Martin Fishbein, "The Prediction of Behaviors from Attitudinal Variables," in *Advances in Communication Research*, ed. C. David Mortensen and Kenneth K. Sereno (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 22.

²⁴ Fishbein and Ajzen, p. 64; Fishbein, "The Prediction of Behaviors," p. 22.

²⁵ Robert P. Abelson, "Are Attitudes Necessary?" in *Attitudes, Conflict, and Social Change*, ed. Bert T. King and Elliott McGinnies (New York: Academic Press, 1972), pp. 19-32.

²⁶ Vernon E. Cronen and Richard L. Conville, "Belief Salience, Summation Theory, and the Attitude Construct," *SM*, 40 (1973), 17-26.

researchers claim that the essential process which underlies the functioning of silence in attitude operation is the effect of the immediate situation in eliciting without the person's active cognitive mediation those beliefs having strong associations with particular situational cues.²⁷ Although Cronen and Conville's findings failed to support this view, a misanalysis of their data led them to present it as a viable interpretation of the process underlying belief salience in attitude formation and change.²⁸ The present results, on the other hand, clearly

²⁷ For a penetrating analysis of the research purportedly supporting Cronen and Conville's position see William F. Brewer, "There Is No Convincing Evidence for Operant or Classical Conditioning in Adult Humans," in *Cognition and Symbolic Processes*, eds. W. B. Weimer and D. S. Palermo (Potomac, Md.: Erlbaum, 1974), 1-42.

²⁸ The significant chi-square comparison Cronen and Conville reported in Table 1 depends as much for its significance upon the number of subjects who deleted negative beliefs after being subjected to the adverse experimental situation as upon the number making the predicted additions of negative beliefs. If the appropriate comparison is made between those subjects showing negative additions and the combined total of those showing deletions or no change, the chi-square is 2.42 with Yates' correction ($p > .10$). Inspection of Cronen and Conville's results clearly show that almost as many (8 vs. 10) subjects in the crucial "rabbits" condition changed in the direction opposite their hypothesis as in favor of it. Within this condition, where the *addition* of negative beliefs was predicted, a significantly greater number of subjects (26 vs. 10, chi-square = 7.11, $p < .01$) opposed their hypothesis than supported it.

demonstrate that the essential link by which particular beliefs become salient in particular contexts is the implicit cognitive judgment of relevance made by the situated social actor. In Cronen and Conville's study such a judgment of relevance was not a meaningful possibility (the subjects would have had to transfer situationally induced aggression towards the experimenter to the concept "love" or "rabbits"); hence it is not surprising that there were no consistent shifts in the content or evaluation of subjects' orientations toward the attitude objects. However, the striking shifts in content and valence obtained in the present study show that a necessary part of the subject's evaluation of the attitude object was a tacit judgment of belief relevance. Different aspects of his impression were relevant—and hence became salient—as he considered upon a meaningful course of action toward the other within each of the two contexts. The present results also suggest that the transitory changes in overall manifest evaluation effected by making particular beliefs salient are not great; where such changes do occur they are likely to be exhibited primarily by noncomplex persons who, due to the less developed nature of their system of dimensions for processing interpersonal information, conceptually center upon the immediate context.