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Attitudes and Attitude Change by Gerd Bohner and Michaela Wänke.
Hove, East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press. 2002. Pp xi + 295, Paper £14.95.
ISBN 0- 86377-779-1.

Review by Derek Rutter (University of Kent at Canterbury)

This is an excellent addition to the series, *Social Psychology: A Modular Course*. The preface says of the series that it ‘aims to provide undergraduates with stimulating, readable, affordable, and brief texts by leading experts committed to presenting a fair and accurate view of the work in each field, sharing their enthusiasm with students, and presenting their work in an approachable way’. This latest volume meets those aims admirably.

The book is divided into three sections, ‘Basic issues in attitude research’, ‘Where do attitudes come from?’, and ‘The consequences of attitudes’ – followed by a two-page Postscript. The first section consists of a chapter each on the concept of attitude and why attitudes are important, how attitudes are measured, and the structure and strength of attitudes. The meat comes in the second section, with chapters on nature and nurture as sources of attitudes, attitudes as temporary constructions, persuasion (two chapters), and the influences of attitudes on behaviour. The third section examines the influence of attitudes on information processing and behaviour, and the postscript asks ‘What’s left?’, an essentially rhetorical question that nevertheless allows the authors to speculate a little on future directions.

The book has two great strengths, I think. The first is the balanced, accomplished way in which the authors review the ‘classic’ literature in sufficient detail to allow the reader to understand the origins of today’s theories and research, whilst leaving space for a thorough, scholarly exploration of the latest work. One striking example is the account of the Yale Program of research, which the authors call the ‘message-learning approach’. In the majority of texts the program is described in great detail or is dismissed in a paragraph or two. Here it is outlined precisely and succinctly, in just enough detail to demonstrate the conceptual and empirical links into what developed next, the dual process approaches – which are then examined in a full chapter of their own. I have not seen this done so well before, and indeed the chapters on persuasion are among the most impressive in the book.

The second strength of the book is the accessibility of its format and style. The student is addressed directly throughout – ‘we’ and ‘you’ are used regularly – and the prose is clear and elegant. The chapters are structured carefully, with sensible headings and sub-headings, and each ends with a page-long summary, a set of exercises (some of which I shall use), endnotes, a brief, well-chosen bibliography of further reading, and a full list of references. There is nothing ‘dumbed-down’ or ‘showy’ – just scholarly text, and well-chosen black and white figures. The book will be adopted widely as a key text for intermediate to advanced undergraduates – masters students and teachers too – and its structure will make for easy updating and revision in subsequent editions. I am delighted to recommend it.