Cognitive Response Theory

The research we’ve been reviewing suggests that attitude change often depends on the thoughts the person generates about the attitude issue. This process was given prominence in a theory of attitude change known as **cognitive response theory**.

### 1. Theoretical Assumptions

Cognitive response theory was originally developed as a modification of the Yale approach. The Yale program researchers had maintained that message learning and retention are necessary for attitude change to occur. Yet how much a person learns or remembers about a persuasive message is often not a good predictor of whether or not that person changes his or her attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1984, 1993; Petty & C., 1998). In consideration of this finding, Greenwald (1968) proposed that attitude change isn’t determined by how well the person learns and remembers a persuasive message, but by the thoughts the person has while receiving the message.

Figure 7.7 presents a more formal description of the theory. The theory assumes that people who receive a persuasive communication actively think about the position being advocated. Some of these thoughts support the position being advocated; others (called counterarguments) oppose it. Additionally, some of these thoughts are mere repetitions of arguments presented in the message itself; other thoughts are entirely original, being either novel or topic-relevant thoughts the person has had before. Finally, the theory assumes that these thoughts (or cognitive responses) determine attitude change, with attitude change occurring when a persuasive appeal evokes more

![Figure 7.6](image-url)