

**Indirect majority and minority influence:
An exploratory study**

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Abstract

In a 2 x 2 design, 85 subjects were asked to estimate the size of angles (direct influence) that were either 90° or 85°, after being confronted with incorrect judgements of a majority (88 per cent) or a minority (12 per cent) of people estimating the angles at 50°. Additionally, pre- and post-test measures were used to establish indirect influence on subjects' judgements pertaining to acute angles (i.e. on the estimation of indirect influence of lines constituting the angles, and on the imaginary weight of figures represented by these angles). Overall, little direct influence is observed. This may partly be due to the introduction of a denial of the credibility of the source in all conditions. In fact, some evidence of direct influence is only found in the majority-85° angles condition. An instance of indirect influence (on the estimation of length of lines) appeared as the result of a majority stance when the angles in the experimental phase were 90°. When these angles were 85°, indirect minority influence (on the estimation of weight of figures) was observed. These effects had been predicted on the basis of the hypothesis stating that indirect majority influence would be possible when subjects expected consensus on the correct response (in the 90° angles condition), without being able to reach consensus at the manifest level (because of the denial and the restriction imposed by the clear shape of 90° angles). Indirect minority influence was hypothesized to be stronger in a situation that allows for diverse responses (i.e. for 85° angles).

INTRODUCTION

An intriguing question posed by studies concerning minority influence (cf. Maass and Clark, 1984; Moscovici, 1976; Moscovici and Mugny, 1987; Moscovici, Mugny and Van Avermaet, 1985; Mugny, 1982; Mugny and Pérez, 1991; Nemeth, 1986) is that groups which do not have any remarkable normative power, nor creditable informational competence, nevertheless can become influential, but mainly at an indirect or latent rather than direct or manifest level, that is, in the form of a conversion (Moscovici, 1980).

Probably the most remarkable hypothesis in this respect is that of Moscovici (1980), who postulates an inverse relation between credibility of the source and the validation process, this process being understood as 'an examination of the relation between its response and the object or reality' (see also Moscovici and Personnaz, 1980). That is, the statement is made that 'in the face of a discrepant majority all attention is focused on others, while in the face of a discrepant minority, all attention is focused on reality' (*ibidem*, p. 215). It is through this validation process that minority or less credible sources (versus majority or more credible ones) are supposed to produce the conversion effect, i.e. indirect influence rather than direct influence.

Some of the most direct evidence of this process can be found in experiments on what has been called 'denial', specifically designed to deny any credibility to a source of influence. These studies have shown that a minority source whose message was previously denied (i.e. judged as implausible and unreasonable) attains less immediate influence but, paradoxically, such a denial increases its delayed indirect influence (in three-week-delayed measures of opinions related to but not directly mentioned in the persuasive message; Moscovici, Mugny and Pérez, 1984); furthermore, denial increases the influence of a minority but not of a majority source (Pérez, Mugny and Moscovici, 1986).

However, other studies seem to contradict these conclusions. For instance, in Nemeth and Wachtler's (1983) experiment, either a majority or a minority proposed a number of either correct or incorrect solutions to a task of embedded figures. In the face of a minority, subjects found more correct novel solutions, regardless of whether the minority was correct or incorrect. But this effect also tended to appear when the source of influence was a majority, but only when it was incorrect rather than correct ($p < 0.06$, Nemeth and Wachtler, 1983). A similar effect of indirect majority influence is found in an experiment using an Asch-like material suitable for the measurement of indirect influence (Mugny, 1984). Subjects were given the incorrect response of either a majority or a minority; some of them were told that the experiment was investigating perceptual illusions and were provided with examples of such illusions, thus invalidating the source's credibility. Results show that direct influence was greater for majority than for minority sources and that an indirect influence was induced by the majority when subjects believed that there was a perceptual illusion, and by the minority when such an illusion did not invalidate its responses. In other words, the system of responses of a majority stance seems to generate effects of indirect influence similar to those usually produced only by minority sources, when the responses of the majority are invalidated (perceptual illusion) or has no basis recognizable by the targets (incorrect majority).

In summary, combining these two groups of studies, we find that while in some cases denial seems to facilitate the indirect influence of minority sources but not of majority sources, in others the reverse seems true. Our hypothesis is that these seemingly contradictory effects might be due to the nature of the knowledge which is in play in the various issues chosen to build up the influence situation. Particularly, studies on denial enhancing minority influence (cf. Pérez *et al.*, 1986) have been carried out basically using opinion issues which allow for a diversity of responses, while the studies by Nemeth and Wachtler (1983) and by Mugny (1984) have employed materials demanding only 'one' response. Thus, when the issue induces the subject to expect only one (correct) unanimous response, then denial would increase indirect influence by a majority. Conversely, when the issue (i.e. opinions) allows for a certain pluralism, i.e. when the subject is not led to expect a full consensus, then denial would increase indirect influence by a minority.

These effects suggest that indirect influence, which depends on a constructive way of thinking, can be exerted by majorities as well as minorities. The cognitive elaboration that signifies the occurrence of indirect influence fundamentally differs from compliance (with a majority), which can be prevented by the denial of the credibility of the source of influence. However, for indirect influence to occur, the degree of consensus expectation elicited by the task has to match the amount of consensus expectation raised by the source. For a majority source, whose points of view are highly unanimous, such a correspondence is achieved when the subject matter also calls for a unique response (i.e. when one deals with facts; cf. Gorenflo and Crano, 1989). We refer to this as the *representation of unicity*. By contrast, for minority points of view, which suggest that reality can be seen in different ways, correspondence is reached when the subject matter allows for a certain multiplicity of opinions. We call this the *representation of plurality*. When these perceived characteristics of the source and of the task coincide, subjects will engage in a process of validation, and direct more attention to the content of the message the source presents, than to the characteristics of the source. In the case of majority influence, concentration

on the message is necessary to be able to reconstruct one's own perception of reality, in order to form a judgement which matches the majority point of view. In other words, to re-establish uniformity. When exposed to minority influence, concentration on the message makes it possible to construct an innovation. Thus, indirect influence can be the result of either pressures toward uniformity or the elicitation of innovation.

This is the core of the theoretical problem that led us to conceive the exploratory study reported here, where, in all conditions, a denial was introduced. While issues of a factual nature were used in all conditions, the degree of consensus expectation they raised was varied.

Several conditions had to be fulfilled in order to make a first test of these hypotheses, the first condition being to evade the use of cognitions of a fundamentally different nature (e.g. opinions versus perceptions). We have chosen to use a perceptual issue, in which we introduced some changes suitable to vary the degree of consensus expectation.

We asked subjects to give several judgments (some in order to measure direct influence, some to measure indirect influence) on a series of figures which were 90° in some conditions, and 85 degrees in others. The source of influence, which was also varied (either a majority of 88 per cent or a minority of 12 per cent), had supposedly estimated these angles as 50°. The rationale for this manipulation of angles was that with 90°-figures subjects would expect a higher consensus and uniformity of responses, while with 85°-figures the consensus expectation would be less and, therefore, an absence of total consensus and the emergence of some divergence in the responses would be more easily admitted.

A second condition was to assure that the influence observed would indeed be due to the representation of the unicity or plurality, instead of simply being the result of normative and informational pressures (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). More in particular, the purpose was to prevent compliance (Kelman, 1958). In order to achieve this, the subjects responded anonymously, without any explicit pressure to conform. Moreover, in all conditions we introduced an invalidation of the credibility of the source (denial), which is known to counteract the occurrence of direct influence (Pérez *et al.*, 1986).

Following our line of reasoning, we should find that, despite the denial (or thanks to it!), majority sources produce an indirect influence (measured from perception of characteristics of figures other than those dealt with by the source) when the stimulus is a 90°-angle (high consensus expectation), while the same should be true for minority sources with an 85°-angle (low consensus expectation). With respect to direct influence (judgements on the estimated angle of figures) our prediction was that the denial should reduce it at its minimum. If direct influence should occur at all, we should find it in the majority source-85° condition. In this condition, the relatively low consensus expectation leaves the possibility that majority retains its ability to induce compliance, despite the denial of its credibility.

METHOD

Subjects

Eighty-five students (62 male and 23 female) from the University of Tilburg, The Netherlands, voluntarily participated in the experiment (psychology students were

excluded). Since some subjects failed to answer some of the questions, slight variations will be found in the number of subjects in several analyses. All questions were answered anonymously in a written form.

Pre-test

Subjects first filled in a questionnaire on personal information (sex, age, studies, previous participation in other experiments, and also various questions about their eyesight). None of these variables had a significant effect on the results, so we will not refer to them in our report. After filling in the questionnaire, subjects were shown, one by one, nine figures with a varying angle (72.5, 50, or 27.5°) and length of the oblique and horizontal lines (there were three possibilities: both lines were 17.5 cm; the oblique line was 1 cm shorter; the horizontal line was 1 cm shorter). Each figure was shown for five seconds. Subjects had 20 seconds to answer four questions writing their responses on a leaflet prepared for this purpose. They had to estimate 'the size of the angle' (in degrees), 'the length of the horizontal line', and 'the length of the other line' (in centimetres). They were also asked to imagine that the figure represented a piece of cheese, and to estimate 'the weight of this piece of cheese' (in grams). After the pre-test, the completed questionnaires were collected.

Influence phase and experimental manipulations

During the experimental phase subjects were shown a series of six (identical) figures. After the first three figures were shown, a filler item was presented, in which the attention of the subjects was focused on a problem of a standard figure potentially embedded in one of three other figures; since this task has no remarkable effect, we will not deal with it. In conditions where a single consensual response was expected, the six figures all had an angle of 90°, while in the other conditions, all six figures constituted an 85° angle. The length of the horizontal line and the 'other line' (we called it thus to avoid an explicit suggestion of the vertical or oblique nature of the line) was 17.5 cm each.

It was explained that these figures had been judged by others in a previous experiment on visual perception. Moreover, subjects were informed that either 88 per cent (in the majority condition) or 12 per cent (in the minority condition) of these fictitious earlier participants estimated the size of the angle as 50°. These so-called previous estimates were also indicated in writing on the response sheet for every figure. Therefore, the source of influence always estimated the angle to be clearly less than its actual value. Apart from these manipulations, the procedure used to display the figures was the same as in the pre-test and the estimates subjects had to make were the same as well.

Immediately before starting the influence phase, the credibility of the responses of these sources (majority or minority) was invalidated. Subjects were shown a picture with two lines clearly differing in length. The left one was obviously longer than the right one. After indicating this, we led subjects to believe that either the same 88 per cent (in the majority condition) or the same 12 per cent (in the minority condition) of the subjects who supposedly participated in the previous experiment on visual perception judged these differing lines to be equal. With this sort of manipulation, we tried to convince subjects that they themselves had a correct perception and that those who would afterwards constitute the source of influence (88 per cent

or 12 per cent) had made a wrong judgement by estimating as equal two lines that were clearly different for the targets of influence. Subjects were then presented with a possible explanation of this erroneous (majority or minority) judgement: it could have been caused by the occurrence of a perceptual illusion (as in Mugny's experiment, 1984). To illustrate this, subjects were shown two sets of illusory figures in which seemingly differing lines or circles were actually the same. The difference between the subjectively perceived and the real size of the lines/circles in the figures was demonstrated by measuring them. All this thus develops under conditions where the source is presented as more incompetent than the subject.

The influence phase was followed by a post-test with stimuli and procedure identical to those in the pre-test. After the completion of the task as well as the source with some questions concerning their evaluation of the task as well as the source of influence. Evaluation of the task was measured by asking subjects what they thought had been of importance for the fulfilment of this task. This question was asked on several dimensions, consisting of six-point scales with labels on both end points. In a similar way, subjects could indicate their evaluation of the source of influence. Finally, some questions were asked inquiring into subjects' identification and social comparison preferences. We will deal with these items in detail on presenting the results.

Dependent measures

As a measure of direct influence, subjects estimates (in degrees) of the size of the angles in the experimental phase was used, since it is the only stimulus dimension about which subjects were provided with information concerning the source of influence. Underestimating the real size of the angle was considered a direct positive influence of the source.

Indirect influence (pre-test/post-test differences) was measured on several dimensions: the length of the two lines and the weight of the imaginary piece of cheese. Concerning the relation between the size of the angle and the variation of the length of lines, we expected, on the basis of Robinson's (1972) review of the literature, that within the range of acute angles, the more acute the angle the longer the perceived length of its lines. Accordingly, if the decreased estimate of an acute angle implies an increase in the length of lines, then the increase in length estimates will be considered as a positive instance of indirect influence. Finally, the weight of the piece of cheese was a more straightforward index of indirect influence: since the lesser the angle, the smaller and thus lighter the piece of cheese should be. Therefore, underestimating the weight of the cheese may be interpreted as providing evidence of indirect influence.

RESULTS

Checks on the manipulations

In order to check the manipulation of the majority or minority status of the source of influence, subjects were asked to rate these people using a six-point scale on several dimensions relevant to research on majority and minority perception. It was found that in general the source was considered as rather incompetent ($m = 4.88$; 6 = incompetent) and more confusing than convincing ($m = 2.46$; 6 = convincing).

However, the majority tends to be perceived as less confusing than the minority (respectively: 2.73; 2.19; $F(1,79) = 3.049$, $p < 0.09$). On the numerous-rare scale (1 = numerous), members of the minority group were evaluated as being more rare ($m = 4.77$) than those of the majority group ($m = 4.00$; $F(1,80) = 5.975$, $p < 0.02$). Furthermore, on the original-ordinary scale (1 = original), members of the majority group were considered to be more ordinary ($m = 3.95$) than members of the minority group ($m = 3.17$; $F(1,78) = 5.147$, $p < 0.03$). Finally, subjects expressed more reluctance to belong to the minority group ($m = 1.49$; 6 = I would like very much to belong to that group) than to the majority group ($m = 2.12$; $F(1,81) = 6.642$, $p < 0.02$; see also Table 4). In conclusion, we see that the credibility of both sources was rather low. However, the nature of the source as being a minority or a majority has been clearly perceived.

We also have some data indicating how subjects interpreted the manipulation of the other variable, viz.: uniqueness (90°-angle) or multiplicity (85°-angle) of expected responses. First, on the consistent-inconsistent scale (1 = consistent), when the source gives its estimate with a 90° stimulus it is perceived as more consistent ($m = 2.17$) than when judging the 85° stimulus ($m = 3.36$; $F(1,79) = 9.469$, $p < 0.01$). Second, on the numerous-rare scale (1 = numerous), when the source gives its estimate of the 90° stimulus it is seen as more rare ($m = 4.79$) than when judging the 85° stimulus ($m = 4.00$; $F(1,80) = 6.253$, $p < 0.02$). Third, with the item 'while making the judgements I thought that the important thing was: independence (1) - compliance (6)', we found that when the stimulus was 90°, subjects tended less to independence ($m = 2.27$) than when the stimulus was 85° ($m = 1.62$; $F(1,79) = 4.685$, $p < 0.04$). We can say that these three results point to the same idea: that with the 90° stimulus the source's behaviour appears more invariable, the rare nature of its (wrong) response stands out more, and the subjects will feel less inclined to maintain their own independence of judgement. In other words, the 90° stimulus seems to be more normative and to demand more uniformity of responses.

Direct Influence

At the first trial, 88.1 per cent of the subjects in the 90°-angle conditions estimated the angle to be 90°. In the 85° conditions, 41.9 per cent of the subjects made a correct estimate. This again underlines the special character of the 90° situation, viz. as demanding more uniformity of responses. In order to measure direct influence, it was investigated for how many of the six items in the experimental phase subjects underestimated the size of the angle. That is, for each item it was established whether subject gave the correct estimate (i.e. 90° or 85° depending on the stimulus condition) or estimated the angle to be less than its real value. In this way, subjects were given a deviation value (either 0 or 1) for each of the six items in the experimental phase. By adding these values to all six items an overall measure of deviation was created. When we compare the pattern of deviation scores (see Table 1) in the four conditions, an interesting effect can be observed. In three of the four conditions, there are few subjects having a deviation score greater than 1, which points to a

¹Although the low frequencies do not allow for a formal statistical analysis, it is striking that the mean value of the underestimated angles is no more than 52.33° in the 90° conditions (11 of the 21 underestimated angles were estimated 50°). In the 85° conditions, this is 74.21° (only one of the 61 underestimations was 50°). This observation also corroborates the assumption that the 90°-angle condition results in more uniform responses.

low influence rate there. The fourth condition, however, yields a relatively large number of subjects estimating the angle to be less than its actual size: 11 subjects (52 per cent) show evidence of direct influence, nine of which do so on five or six items. This is the majority-85°-angle condition, which differs from each of the three others (Fisher test $p < 0.05$), when comparing the frequency of subjects showing a change at least on one item to those showing no change at all. Of course these results only permit us to draw the conclusion that in this particular condition there is relatively strong evidence of direct influence, as compared to the other conditions, since a base-rate level of direct influence (e.g. in a no influence condition) was not established.

Table 1. Direct influence: number of subjects underestimating the size of the angles in the experimental phase

No. of underestimated angles	Condition			
	Majority 90°		Minority 85°	
0	17	10	19	18
1	2	2	1	3
2	-	-	-	-
3	-	-	-	-
4	-	-	-	-
5	-	4	-	-
6	2	5	1	1
No. of underestimators	4	11	2	4
Percentage	19%	52%	10%	18%

Indirect influence

When we compare the pre-test with the estimations given after the influence phase (the post-test), we have three indices which can give us information about the occurrence of indirect influence. These are: the decrease (in the post-test, as compared to the pre-test) in the weight of the figure imagined to represent a piece of cheese, and the perceived increase in the length of the two lines of the figure. The differences in estimation between pre-test and post-test were established by calculating a mean difference over all nine items. Results from the ANOVA's performed on these differences scores indicate that there are no main effects in any of the three indices. However, all measures show an interaction between the type of source and the type of stimulus; on the estimated weight of the piece of cheese: $F(1,77) = 6.095$, $p < 0.02$; on the estimated length of the horizontal line: $F(1,81) = 6.230$, $p < 0.02$; on the estimated length of 'the other line': $F(1,81) = 4.539$, $p < 0.04$.

In Table 2 the means corresponding to changes observed in the weight estimates are given. The minority-85° condition ($m = -46.60$) is the condition in which more indirect influence is found, since in the post-test the imagined weight of the figure ('of cheese') is diminished compared to the majority-85° condition ($m = +129.95$, $t/77 = 2.226$, $p = 0.03$) and the minority-90° condition ($m = +151.55$, $t/77 = 2.465$, $p < 0.02$). No other means contrast reaches significance. That is, although the interaction indicates a tendency for the majority-90° condition to go with the minority-85° condition, only the latter differs significantly from the two other directly comparable

conditions. Since the weight estimates can be counteracted by an increase in the length of the two lines, we did run an analysis of covariance, with the differences in the horizontal line and the oblique line as two covariates. The effects are not substantially modified ($F(1,75) = 8.302$, $p < 0.01$), what can be explained by the non-significant correlations between the weight changes and the length changes (with horizontal line: $+0.11$; with oblique line: $+0.07$), that suggest the independence of these measures.

Table 2. Difference between post- and pre-test in the estimated weight of the imaginary piece of cheese

	90°	85°
Majority	49.26	129.95
Minority	151.55	-46.60

In Table 3 the means corresponding to changes observed in horizontal line lengths are given. In fact, the condition which really shows a greater indirect influence is that of majority source-90° ($m = +1.03$) which differs from the minority-90° condition ($m = -1.10$, $t/81 = 2.461$, $p < 0.02$), and tends to differ from the majority-85° condition ($m = -0.46$, $t/81 = 1.720$, $p = 0.089$). No other means contrast is significant, although we must note that the minority-85° condition goes in the same direction as the one where indirect influence actually takes place: majority-90°.

Table 3. Observed means for the interaction effect of the source of influence and the stimulus on the estimation of the length of lines (post-test minus pre-test estimations)

	90°	85°
Horizontal line		
Majority	1.03	-0.46
Minority	-1.10	0.45
'The other line'		
Majority	0.86	-0.22
Minority	-1.27	0.62

With respect to the effects in the length of 'the other line' (see Table 3), the breakdown of the interaction shows that the majority-90° condition ($m = +0.86$) is the one that really differs from the minority-90° condition ($m = -1.27$, $t/81 = 2.144$, $p < 0.04$), and the latter tends to differ in turn from the minority-85° condition ($m = +0.62$, $t/81 = 1.923$, $p = 0.058$).

In summary, two conditions produce a clearer indirect influence: majority-90° and minority-85°. The effect of the former is mainly a change in the length of the lines of the figure, while the latter produces the influence on the decrease of the imagined weight of the figure.

Table 4. Evaluation of the source of influence on the scales: likeable (1) - dislikeable (6) and 'Would you like to belong to that group?' not at all (1) - very much (6)

	90°	85°
Likeable-dislikeable		
Majority	3.86	3.35
Minority	3.30	3.86
'Belong to that group'		
Majority	2.38	1.86
Minority	1.14	1.82

Attractiveness of the source

In a number of questions asking subjects about their perception of and relation to the source, on the likeable (1)-dislikeable (6) dimension, a significant interaction effect is found between type of source and type of stimulus ($F(1,78) = 3.973, p < 0.05$). The means, as shown in Table 4, suggest (but no contrast between individual conditions reaches significance) that the source of influence is as dislikeable in the majority-90° as in the minority-85° conditions. It is of interest to note that in the conditions where there is most evidence of indirect influence, the source of influence is disliked most.

In addition, subjects were asked to indicate on a six-point scale (ranging from 1 = not at all to 6 = very much) how much they would like to belong to the majority/minority group. The results show a significant main effect of the type of the source ($F(1,81) = 6.642, p < 0.02$) which is qualified by a significant interaction between type of source and type of stimulus ($F(1,81) = 5.984, p < 0.02$). The means, as presented in Table 4, essentially reveal that the subjects would least like to belong to the group in the minority-90° condition ($m = 1.14$), which is the only condition showing neither evidence of direct nor of indirect influence. It should be added that the answers in all the four conditions are at the lower end of the scale, indicating that the source of influence is generally considered to be rather unattractive.

DISCUSSION

Results show very little direct influence, that is, on the estimates of the size of the angle of the figures about which the judgement of the source was given. At this level, majority differed significantly from minority when stimulus was 85°. Even if we do not know if this effect is due to a positive majority influence or a negative reaction against the minority, due to the absence of appropriate control conditions, the difference is congruent with classical results in conformity studies (e.g. Crutchfield, 1955), since when there is a decrease in the degree of confidence subjects may have in the correctness of their judgements (85° angles), then their dependence with respect to the more unanimous response (that of the majority in this case) increases. It is understandable that there is no more influence at a direct level, in particular in the majority-90° conditions, and the occurrence of a manifest influence could even have been striking in our paradigm. In effect, both majority and minority lacked a certain normative 'power', for the subjects were not under their control, among

other reasons because they responded anonymously (cf. Deutsch and Gerard, 1955), and the informational 'power' of the sources was explicitly and globally reduced too, by introducing a manipulation invalidating the credibility of their responses. In any case, this direct influence does not mean adopting the same response as the source (50°), but only displacing responses in the same direction. These little shifts are probably due to the residual normative and informational 'power' always symbolizing majority positions, no matter how erroneous they are or how much out of their control subject may feel when giving a response, as suggested by Spering (1946, cited in Asch, 1952) when he found that despite the explicit indication that the autokinetic effect was a perceptual illusion, some interindividual convergence still appeared. Or the Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) finding that subjects are still influenced when there are neither informational, nor normative dependency (see also Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

Central to our theoretical preoccupations, several ways of indirect influence appear. The majority source, with a 90° stimulus, produced an effect of indirect influence on the perception of length of the two lines, and the minority source, with a 85° stimulus, produced an effect of influence on the estimates of the weight of the figure. These effects of indirect influence are difficult to explain, either by the notion of normative influence or by the notion of informational influence. The former seems inappropriate because the indirect nature of this influence renders it uncontrollable directly by the source. Moreover, the informational influence is also unlikely to account for these indirect effects. Firstly, because the perceived value of the information the source gives is, in general, strongly diminished. Not only were its responses obviously wrong, what is more, in addition, the source's way of 'perceiving' was explicitly invalidated, since it was suggested that it was a group producing several perceptual errors. Furthermore, even though the source might have a certain informational value, it would still remain unexplained why subjects in most conditions do not integrate such information into their direct responses (as in Kelman's study, 1958), that is, on the same dimension where the source gave the information.

Let us now consider the most plausible explanation we find for these results, which is directly derived from the general hypothesis based on our assumption that majorities induce a representation of unicity and, in turn, minorities induce a representation of plurality. The representation of unicity operates in two ways: one reflects conformity or compliance and lies in what Nemeth (1986) means by the dynamics of convergent thinking: in the face of a majority source which is salient for the subjects, they tend to adopt this source's response, discarding other possible alternative — even more correct — responses (cf. Nemeth and Staw, 1989). But there is a second way of operating: instead of adapting their own responses to what the source says, in order to make only one point of view dominating (re-establishing of consensus), subjects can also redefine or change (their perception of) the object properties, in order to let them fit the source's point of view, and thus the unicity is constructed (re-establishing of uniformity). When the representation of unicity is activated, subjects would show a tendency to make it intervene at a direct level; however, if it is not possible for them at this level for various reasons (e.g. when an informational deficiency in the source is manifest), then they would make it intervene at an indirect level. We suspect that this may also be the case, because the judgements are interdependent (cf. Pérez and Mugny, 1990a,b), because a norm of objectivity is operating, or simply because the type of judgements permit determin-

ing exactly what is the correct response (cf. Goethals, 1972; Gorenflo and Crano, 1989).

So, our interpretation is that, in the majority source-90° stimulus condition, such a redefinition of indirect properties of stimulus would take place in order to make them coincide with the point of view directly expressed by the source. This redefinition would occur, due to the failure to re-establish the unicity at a direct level (since the source's system of responses was invalidated, as reflected by the low credibility attributed by the subjects to the source), which does not mean that the representation of unicity failed to be activated. This representation has activating strength enough for certain properties of objects to be reconstructed in order to make them coincide with a unique vision of reality. In this respect, it is worth noting the peculiar nature of this effect of indirect majority influence: it appeared on the perceptual illusion-distorsion of length of the lines when its visual support, that is, the figure with an angle of 90°, was not physically present.

On the other hand, the representation of plurality, which lies in a divergent functioning of thinking, as Nemeth (1986) understands it, would account for the indirect changes occurring in face of minority sources in various influence situations: when a norm of originality predominates (cf. Maass and Volpato, 1989), or when judgments are given in a multidimensional way or in a plural social space (cf. Pérez and Mugny, 1990a). This would be the case in our minority source-85° stimulus condition. Briefly, two reasons can be put forward as to why such an effect should occur in this condition. First of all, because it is a condition where no unanimous response is given to subjects; on the contrary, they are told that it is a minority response. Second, the stimulus itself brings about a lower consensus expectation (85°): as we have seen, in the face of this stimulus, subjects themselves feel more independent when giving their judgments, and also the source's responses, though in reality always the same, appear to them as being less consistent, which could mean that subjects perceived the 85° stimulus to allow for different estimates. As a result, in this specific condition of influence (minority and less clear-cut stimulus), the lack of a majority consensus and the allowance of seeing the object in different ways can lead the targets to adopt a divergent way of thinking. Moreover, it can induce targets to orientate their (influenced) responses on indirect dimensions, due to, among other reasons, an antiminority intergroup bias and identification conflicts usually induced by minorities because of their mere existence (cf. Mugny and Pérez, 1991).

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