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Categorization and Social Influence

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A relevant dimension in studies of social influence is whether or not the targets of influences see themselves as sharing the same social category as the influence source. The most commonly advanced hypothesis is that the effects of categorization (whether at the cognitive level of accentuating intragroup similarities and intergroup differences, or at a more motivational level of ingroup favouritism and/or outgroup discrimination) should facilitate the influence of an ingroup source and diminish that of an outgroup source. However, it appears to be difficult to draw any general conclusion given that in practice experimental effects have not all consistently been in a single direction, especially if manifest and latent influences are distinguished (Moscovici, 1980). The first objective of this chapter is to review those studies which have varied the degree of identity between source and target, and the second is to present the principal conceptualizations of the links between categorization and influence.

The effects of categorization on influence

There is first of all a series of studies which have manipulated the categorization (ingroup or outgroup) of sources having a majority status (Doise, Gachoud & Mugny, 1986; Pérez, Mugny & Moscovici, 1986; Volpato, Maass, Mucchi-Faina & Vitti, 1990). Ingroup majorities have more (direct and immediate) influence than outgroup majorities. In those studies which have also considered indirect dimensions of influence, this ingroup majority advantage disappears in interaction with other factors.

Studies in which subjects are simultaneously exposed to minority and majority positions do not contradict and indeed confirm these findings. Thus, in the study by Pérez and Mugny (1987), the ingroup majority achieved greater direct influence than the outgroup majority, but at the indirect level this simple effect disappeared in interaction with the categorization of the minority. In the Clark and Maass (1988b) study, categorization of the majority was not varied – it was an ingroup – but it could be seen that it had more influence at the public level than either an ingroup or an outgroup minority. At the private level an interaction could again be observed with the categorization of the minority as either ingroup or outgroup.

In studies where the categorization involved is based on arbitrary criteria (such as whether one over- or underestimates the number of pupils attending secondary school, whether one is in the same classroom, and so on) the ingroup has more influence at the public level than the outgroup. This 'simple categorization' effect can even be observed when the source has a minority status (cf. two studies by Martin, 1988b, 1988c, and one by Papastamou et al., cited in Mugny & Pérez, 1991a, pp. 24–27), as well as when the minority or majority character of the source is not made salient (Wilder, 1990, study 1).

In two studies on attitudes towards abortion, in which gender was used as the basis for categorization, it was found that a male minority group had more influence than a female minority group. In the Maass, Clark and Haberkorn (1982) study they constituted an ingroup source (although when the variance was decomposed the effect did not reach significance), while in the Pérez and Mugny (1985b) study they represented an outgroup. This gender effect may be specific to the theme of abortion because in a task involving estimation of increases in study grants, Martin (1988b) found that a female minority group produced more public influence among other women than did a male minority group, while men were more influenced by a male source.

If one turns to consideration of another variable, the distance between the attitude of the target and that of the source, one finds similarly variable results. In the Clark and Maass (1988a) studies on homosexual rights, an outgroup (homosexuals) produced more influence than an ingroup source (heterosexuals) among those subjects most favourable to homosexual rights; the ingroup source, however, produced more influence than the outgroup source among subjects who had the least favourable attitudes. Mackie, Worth and Asuncion (1990) observed that the ingroup had a stronger influence than the outgroup but only among subjects who were most opposed and when the message contained a 'strong' argument. Using the theme of xenophobic attitudes, Mugny, Kaiser and Papastamou (1983) found the opposite interaction: the outgroup (a group of foreigners) had more influence than the ingroup (a group of fellow compatriots) on the most xenophobic subjects; an ingroup minority had more influence than an outgroup minority on those subjects whose own position was already closest to the anti-xenophobic message.

In four studies in which perception of the source was 'individualized' or 'personalized', ingroup and outgroup achieved the same degree of influence (Doise et al., 1986; Martin 1988a; Papastamou et al., cited in Mugny & Pérez, 1991a; Wilder, 1990).

Negotiating style (cf. Mugny, 1982) tends to interact with the identity of the source. In one study on 'green' attitudes, Mugny and Papastamou (1982) found that when influence targets are led to see themselves as similar in identity to the source of influence, the latter has more influence when the argument is made in a rigid style than when it is made in a more flexible style, when subjects are led to see themselves as dissimilar, it is the source

with the flexible style that is more influential. In a study on attitudes towards foreigners, Mugny and Pérez (1985) observed the same interaction effect. In the same vein, Mugny, Kaiser, Papatiamou and Pérez (1984) discovered that a source sharing the same nationality arguing in favour of rights for foreigners had more influence if the argument was based on radical socio-political principles, while a source consisting of foreigners had more influence when the same case was argued from humanitarian principles.

Another problem concerns the effects of categorization in different influence conditions. In studies in which the school to which the source belongs is varied (same school as the subjects or a rival school), results when they have been significant have shown that the ingroup has more impact at the public level than the outgroup (Mackie et al., 1990; Martin, 1988a; Wilder, 1990). Martin observed that at the private level the outgroup had as much influence as the ingroup, both kinds of source producing more change than that of a control condition without a persuasive message.

In some studies measures of influence at both a direct and an indirect level have been available. Thus, in a paradigm based on musical preferences, Aebischer, Hewstone and Henderson (1984) found that an outgroup majority (from a different and devalued education establishment) had more indirect influence than a valued ingroup majority source, while there was no difference in direct influence. In a study of environmentalist attitudes (Pérez & Mugny, 1985a), it was found that when the persuasive message was seen to have derived from a single individual selected at random and not representative of the group, direct influence was greater than when the source was seen to represent the opinion of the entire group. However, at an indirect level the effects were reversed: the message representative of the group had more impact than the unrepresentative message. In a study involving attitudes on abortion and contraception (Pérez & Mugny, 1986a), the connotation of a source was manipulated (the source was characterized in terms of entirely positive attributes or entirely negative attributes), while the source was also an ingroup minority (same age-group as the subjects: young people) or an outgroup minority (different category: adults between 30 and 50 years old). The minority outgroup with positive connotations was more influential at the direct level than the outgroup with negative connotations, and more influential also than the ingroup with a positive image. At the level of indirect influence the most significant effect was that of the negative-image ingroup, as compared to the positive-image ingroup.

In two studies Volpato et al. (1990) measured the effects of categorization on creativity. They led subjects to believe that a committee either in their own town (ingroup) or in another town (outgroup) had produced two communications, one by the majority and the other by a minority, respectively opposing or favouring the establishment of a final exam at the completion of baccalaureat studies. They were exposed only to the argument in favour of this proposal. The results showed that a smaller number of subjects indicated they were in favour of the source's proposition when this was

presented as originating from an ingroup minority. The proposition was more widely accepted when it was attributed to an ingroup majority or indeed an outgroup minority. Although the direct influence of an ingroup minority was shown to be less than in these other two conditions, in these two studies this same condition produced a higher proportion of subjects who invented new solutions to solve the problem.

Finally, on the matter of differentiated influence, Mugny et al. (1983) reported that under certain conditions an outgroup arguing on humanitarian grounds had greater delayed influence than the same outgroup using a socio-political argument.

These, in summary, are the effects which have been observed of categorization on social influence. It must be acknowledged that their diversity and complexity is such that the most prudent conclusion would be to admit that there is no systematic effect associated with categorization as such, nor any straightforward relation between categorization and type of influence. The hypothesis that there is an ingroup bias in influence has therefore to be regarded as inadequate; the variables moderating the effects of categorization appear to be as numerous as the paradigms. Perhaps this disparity of manipulations reflects a belief that 'simple categorization' (cf. Tajfel, Plament, Billig & Bundy, 1971) is sufficient to produce intergroup effects, and, by analogy, differences in social influence. This leads us to consider what are currently the most elaborate explanations in this field, and to ask to what extent they can account for this diversity.

Independence and heterogeneity of the source

Wilder invoked independence and heterogeneity of the source (1977, 1978, 1990; cf. also Harkins & Petty, 1981, 1983, 1987) to account for conformity in restricted groups, and more recently to explain why one should expect an ingroup to have more influence than an outgroup. The idea is that the individuals who comprise a group have more influence if they are perceived as independent entities than if they are perceived as a collective entity. The reasons advanced for this are, on the one hand, that information provided by a group is treated with less care (for example, in a less personalized and less specific manner), and, on the other, that members perceived as a group are considered less credible because they are attributed less independence. Recently, Wilder (1990) has used this argument to predict that an ingroup will have more influence than an outgroup. His reasoning is that the target starts from the presupposition of a greater homogeneity among outgroup members than among the members of his or her own group. The target would recognize finer distinctions within the ingroup which would lead to a perception of members of the ingroup as more independent of one another. The same author argued that his is not a motivational explanation of ingroup superiority (it does not appeal to a motive of ingroup favouritism or of discrimination against the outgroup), but rather a cognitive explanation,

based on perception of the homogeneity or heterogeneity of members of the influence source. A series of four experiments illustrates this model (Wilder, 1990), and to these may be added two studies by Mackie et al. (1990) which show that the message attributed to an ingroup is given greater attention than one attributed to an 'other' group.

One difficulty posed by this analysis is the implication that an ingroup is nothing but an aggregation of separate individuals. Thus the comparison made is between an aggregate of individuals and an outgroup rather than between an ingroup and an outgroup. This does not take into account recent developments in the theory of levels of self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), according to which three such levels may be distinguished: a superordinate level at which individuals see themselves as identical to all other human beings; an intermediate level at which the social identity of the individual is defined by the assertion of differences between groups or categories of membership and non-membership; and finally a subordinate level which defines personal identity in terms of categorization of the self as a unique being, distinct from all others including members of one's own group. From this perspective, 'personalized' perception is not synonymous with ingroup categorization. If this argument is conceded, it would appear that Wilder's model, rather than explaining the ingroup-outgroup difference, is more suited to accounting for the superior influence of a personalized source (whether belonging to an ingroup or an outgroup) as compared to that of a source perceived in more 'depersonalized' or homogeneous terms.

The results of a study (Pérez, Mugny & Navarro, 1991) justify our stress on the importance of these distinctions. In this study subjects were required to react to a message either in personal terms (subordinate level of self-categorization), or in 'social terms', which is to say at the intermediate level, in one of two ways: either to react as a representative of their membership group (in this case young people) or as a member of the outgroup (adults). The results show that direct influence is greater when the message is treated in either personal or ingroup terms. These findings are consistent with the predictions of Wilder's model. However, at the indirect level, while influence remains strong in the personalized condition, it disappears in the ingroup condition, an effect which confirms the importance of not confounding the personalized level with the intergroup level. Additionally, indirect influence was found in reaction to the message in intergroup terms. This set of results is interpretable in terms of the notion of ingroup paralysis: under the conditions provided subjects conform to positions prototypical of the ingroup, which has the effect of paralysing examination of other positions from a personal point of view or from any other point of view which is not that of the ingroup. In this case the ingroup introduces a resistance to change and innovation. In a series of studies Sánchez-Mazas, Pérez, Navarro, Mugny and Jovanovic (1993) have confirmed that when subjects are led to the self-perception that in terms of their attitudes they are identical to their own group, this paralyses any change in their attitudes.

Influence according to self-categorization theory

Self-categorization theory treats influence as an intergroup phenomenon (cf. Turner, 1981a, 1991). The fundamental factors are the level of self-categorization and the ways in which individuals seem to operate to determine the validity of their opinions and behaviour. In the first place individuals begin by anticipating that their judgements and actions in a given task will coincide with those of other members perceived as similar to the self and who are regarded as a comparison group appropriate to the situation. Individuals will be confident that their own judgements are valid to the degree that similar others are observed to express the same opinions or behave in the same way in the situation.

Uncertainty and loss of confidence in their judgements and behaviours increase when individuals find themselves in disagreement with other group members whom they perceive, despite the disagreement, as similar to themselves, which is to say as an ingroup. Insofar as this disagreement cannot be attributed to differences between the self and the group this theory predicts a change in judgements or behaviours in the direction of those of the group or of those which best represent the ingroup consensus; those which are most prototypical.

No such expectation exists when the others are perceived as different, which is to say as an outgroup. Disagreement in this case can be attributed to differences in group membership, according to the principle of categorical differentiation (Doise, 1976). Consequently, disagreement with the outgroup produces little uncertainty, and it is not anticipated that individuals in these circumstances would change their judgements or their behaviour.

In the application of his theory to minority influence, Turner (1991) claims in addition that for a minority to exert influence it must present itself, or be perceived, as forming part of the ingroup (and not an outgroup), which is to say a subgroup that defends a pro-normative position within the ingroup. He predicts a reduction in direct influence if the disagreement the minority introduces in the group is polarized to the point of turning it into an intergroup, and not simply an intragroup, conflict.

This theory tends also to account for differences between direct and indirect influence in terms of the level of self-categorization which obtains at any particular moment. Thus a minority categorized as an outgroup will have less influence, whether direct or indirect. In order for minorities to produce direct influence they must be perceived as part of the ingroup. On the other hand, if a minority produces a conversion effect (indirect influence), this will be because the comparison is made within a broader context in which the minority is perceived as an integral part of the ingroup, and because at this superordinate level of categorization, its alternative norm is congruent with the norms and values of the ingroup.

This theory offers one of the most complete explanations for the tendency of an outgroup to have less influence than an ingroup. An initial problem, however, is that the theory tends to predict both a direct and an indirect

influence of an ingroup majority and does not take account of the latent paralysis effect which appears to be precisely the effect of overt conformity (Sánchez-Mazas et al., 1993). A further difficulty is that it does not allow for the fact that an ingroup minority produces less direct influence than an outgroup minority or one which is not explicitly categorized as an ingroup. Additionally, the explanation it offers for conversion does not seem to be entirely convincing. In particular, in several studies, it has been found that in the same situation the same source which does not produce a direct influence does produce indirect influence. Is one supposed to believe that in this situation the influence source is perceived simultaneously at two levels of categorization and that, for example, when faced with an item reflecting direct influence subjects see the source as an outgroup, but when they encounter an indirect item they perceive the same source as part of the ingroup? There is a similar difficulty in seeing how it is possible that at a public level the influence source could be categorized as an outgroup but at a private level as an ingroup, or how a public context could prime an intergroup context while in a private context priming a superordinate intragroup context. These possibilities certainly cannot be excluded but no research has yet supported such dynamics.

Dissoctation theory

The need to relate different levels of influence to one another is taken into consideration by dissoctation theory, which we will now present. Briefly, this theory makes a general distinction between two levels of influence: first, manifest influence, which includes public, immediate and direct influence; and, second, latent influence, which covers influence at the private, delayed and indirect levels. It provides a basis for relating processes that account for manifest influence (and which the subject can control) to the processes underlying latent influence (which the subject is less able to control consciously).

Manifest influence and positive social identity

Manifest influence is a function of normative and informational dependence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). The importance of normative dependence relates to the individual's motivation to acquire, to present or to preserve a positive self-image or self-concept. Given that one function of manifest influence is protection of a positive social identity, one is influenced at this level by sources able to exercise the strongest normative pressures or in situations in which modifications in judgements allow one to avoid costs or gain more credit than if one maintained one's independence. Susceptibility to manifest influence also flows from the uncertainties felt by the subject, such that the more the source is able to engender uncertainty in the subject (by virtue of the former's credibility, ingroup identity or majority status), the greater the source's influence.

Latent influence and social constructivism

By latent influence we do not have in mind only private influence but all influence reflecting constructivist activity. Thus, for example, it includes the case in which subjects change on dimensions which can be inferred through the operation of a given mental activity. This concerns the attention the target pays to what the source says (to its message, its judgement, its attitude, and so on), the deployment of an innovative form of thought which allows the target to derive or discover new functions and ramifications on the basis of the information provided, to establish new connections between the content given and other contents, as well as the elaboration of a new representation of the question. Some authors have discussed these kinds of activity under the heading of validation processes (Butera, Legrenzi, Mugny & Pérez, 1990-1991; Moscovici, 1980), others under the heading of divergent thinking (Nemeth, 1986). Huguet, Mugny and Pérez (1990-1991) also use the concept of decentralization. Within the set of paradigms dealing with attitudes and opinions, these activities have been described as inferences about the organizing principle underlying a position (Pérez & Mugny, 1986b). In all these cases, however, the same basic hypothesis underlies these various designations: mental activity is required if a latent mode of influence is to arise out of social interaction, and it will occur only in the context of certain kinds of social relationship and not others.

Postulates of dissoctation theory

To the degree that manifest influence is directly observable by others or is, ultimately, something of which subjects themselves are conscious, then subjects' identity is at stake whenever they are influenced by any source, and dissoctation theory recognizes that identification is more probable in the face of an ingroup source. This hypothesis indicates that a message emanating from an ingroup is more likely to be accepted, even if it is not read or processed, than a message originating with an outgroup source.

This more positive attitude towards whatever originates in the ingroup can, especially when the subject is highly involved or motivated, give rise to a higher degree of attention to a message attributed to an ingroup and thus a more elaborated processing of the message as compared to one from an outgroup. Faced with an ingroup, because identification is more intense the message can then be accepted with a less defensive attitude and the subject can feel more motivated to pay attention to it. One may therefore predict that in certain conditions there will be direct but also indirect influence. This will only happen, however, if the situation does not induce a paralysis and if identification with the ingroup is positively valued and poses no conflict of identification.

In order for the ingroup to have indirect influence, one basic condition must be satisfied: subjects must perceive a divergence between their own position and that of their group. One risk for an ingroup is that if

individuals perceive the group to be in agreement with their own position, and this accords with an anticipated homogeneity of attitudes, they will develop a socio-cognitive paralysis, the consequence of which is to inhibit the activity necessary for the emergence of indirect influence. The attitudinal proximity which individuals often establish through their manifest conformity to the ingroup can therefore by this same process limit the latter's impact to a pattern of influences similar to compliance (positive manifest influence combined with zero latent influence), as has been observed in a number of studies (cf. Pérez et al., 1991; Sánchez-Mazas et al., 1993). One way of motivating subjects to process the ingroup message is therefore to lead them to perceive a normative conflict between their own position and that of their group, which flows not from a simple self-categorization but from an intragroup conflict.

Another difficulty for the ingroup arises in the case of identification conflict (cf. Mugny et al., 1983; Mugny & Pérez, 1991b), in which individuals are aware of belonging to a group which has little positive value and may even be negatively valued, or in which they risk being identified with such a group. In these cases, identity with or similarity to this ingroup threatens the maintenance or construction of a positive social and personal identity. Would individuals let themselves be publicly and manifestly influenced by a socially discredited group posing such a conflict of identification? In fact it is not enough to respond that in all probability they would not let themselves be influenced; it is also important to recognize what would happen at a latent level in such a situation. A basic postulate of dissociation theory is that the more that socio-cognitive activities and attention are occupied in creating a disidentification or social differentiation from a source of influence, the less these are concerned with the influence message. In the event that individuals come to give any attention to the message and to analyse it, this is undertaken on the basis of a motivation to construct a differentiation so that a negative processing of the message tends to predominate.

Let us imagine a situation in which the target of influence does not wish to be identified with the source of influence and that in one case this involves an ingroup source and in another an outgroup source.

In the situation where the influence source is perceived to be an ingroup with which the influence target does not wish to be identified (for example, the case of a discredited minority), the available data suggest that ingroup favouritism is indeed not the dominant strategy. Studies by Marques (1990) on what he has described as the black sheep phenomenon provide a direct illustration of the way in which a negatively valued ingroup can be the object of more discrimination than an equally negatively valued outgroup. The reason for this is that the more intense the identification is (for example, by virtue of a strong identity or similarity between individual and group), the more effort and activity will be required, should the occasion arise, to try to disidentify. This is the reason why ingroup influence may be zero at the latent as well as at the manifest level.

It can thus prove to be more positive for social identity to discriminate against an ingroup rather than an outgroup, or to favour the outgroup to the detriment of the ingroup. Indeed, an outgroup source can paradoxically have a net advantage, particularly at the latent level, over an ingroup source. Given that the ties of identification are less close with an outgroup, it seems reasonable to predict that disidentification with such a group requires less activity and effort, because in this case a ready-made differentiation is provided; it is founded on differences of group membership. The mental activity generating latent effects will no longer be confounded with the activity of differentiation, the two being immediately dissociated.

A major hypothesis of dissociation theory is that even in situations involving intense conflict a source categorized as an outgroup will be more likely to produce dissociation, to the degree that social differentiation is assured by the existence of a pre-established categorization, or that the differences are so great that to shift in the direction of the source's responses carries no risk of a 'categorical confusion' (Lemaine, 1974). This dynamic is also involved when the space for comparison of subject with source is multidimensional, such that there is no negative interdependence between source and target of influence (Pérez & Mugny, 1990). But this does not imply that an outgroup source will have direct influence. In reality, at the direct level it is the categorization processes that operate, as it were quite naturally. However, to the degree that this social differentiation is dissociated from message reception, conversion effects towards outgroup positions can appear. If for one reason or another the subject does not come to dissociate reception of the message from construction of this differentiation, the outgroup will no longer have any significant indirect effect (Butera, Huguet, Mugny & Pérez, 1994).

Conversion dynamics and the nature of the task

Let us acknowledge that at the psychological level the influence situation produces a dissociation of the relation with the source from the processing of the message. One question remains then unanswered, namely: what can motivate the subject, particularly when faced with an outgroup, to process the content of the message?

A first possibility is that epistemic expectations intervene which are specific to the nature of task to which the outgroup's divergent judgement relates. For example, in objective, non-ambiguous tasks (of the type used by Asch, 1956) for which only one correct response, whatever its provenance, is assumed to be possible, the influence mechanism of an outgroup generally rests upon the motivation of the subject to re-establish uniformity of judgements. In such a situation and given the impossibility of changing the source, it is the subject who ends up changing, always at the latent level, in order to reconcile social differentiation and epistemological beliefs concerning the necessity of consensus (Butera et al., 1994).

When tests of ability are involved (for example, estimating distances) and subjects presuppose that there do exist objectively correct answers but do not know what they are and so feel uncertain of their ability, outgroups can achieve an influence by the triangulation effect already described: outgroups' judgements can be perceived as valid by virtue of their socially independent origins (cf. Goethals, 1972).

When the tasks involve opinions, differentiation from the outgroup at the level of attitudes itself constitutes an epistemological requirement (Pérez, Mugny, Llavata & Fierres, 1993) which accounts for manifest discrimination. The indirect effects of an outgroup (in particular when this is a minority) arise from the fact that dissociation allows a centration on the contents and initiates a debate about ideas (Billig, 1985). Examination of a contrary argument, even if this is in order to resist it, implies in particular that one increases one's exposure to information from the other. Here then, as in the case of denial (Falomir, Mugny & Pérez, 1996), a process of social cryptoamnesia may be engaged through which, paradoxically, ideas may be internalized whose social origins may be forgotten as a result of dissociation (cf. Mugny & Pérez, 1991b).

Certain social minorities (for example, black people) may also constitute outgroups protected by the *Zeitgeist* in such a way that discrimination towards them is socially censured, at least for a significant proportion of society. In this case, a double effect can be produced. At a manifest level there may be on the one hand, a greater influence (reflecting social desirability) which does not, however, generalize to the latent level, and, on the other, an effect close to socio-cognitive paralysis. Paradoxically it is when subjects discriminate against minorities that they experience a conflict the resolution of which can provoke a change in latent attitudes (cf. Pérez, Mugny, Llavata & Fierres, 1993). The occurrence of racist, xenophobic or sexist acts can therefore be in conflict with norms and values of justice and social equality accepted more generally by subjects. The self-reproach arising from this discrimination can thus act as a mechanism for change in latent attitudes.

Conclusion

It is clear that intergroup dynamics, at least with respect to social influence, are not confined to the habitually recognized effects of social categorization (accentuation of intragroup similarities and intergroup differences). They also involve strategies for constructing or maintaining a positive social identity, and can additionally disfavour the ingroup or favour the outgroup, in particular as a function of whether or not the social context threatens the targets' personal and social identities in their relations with salient entities in the categorial field.

Of the two factors that are fundamental to understanding social influence in an intergroup context, one certainly is the dynamic of identification or

differentiation, but the other is the conflict created by the divergent position of a source of influence. Simply categorizing a source as ingroup to produce identification is insufficient to guarantee influence, whether at the manifest or the latent level. It is the divergence and conflict which determine matters in one direction or the other and these alone are able to account for latent processes of constructivism.

In all cases, divergence creates a conflict by reason of epistemological presuppositions about the task, in particular expectations about consensus or dissensus. Categorization therefore is not alone in playing an active role, processes of influence have their own autonomy by virtue of the relational but also socio-cognitive conflicts which they introduce. From this point of view, dissociation theory seems to provide a tool which allows us, to a greater degree than models offering a single-process view of intergroup effects, to organize the multiple dynamics which can arise from the interaction between categorization and social influences.

Note

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