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ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The Role of Norms and Group Membership



Edited by

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—Deborah J. Terry
—Michael A. Hogg

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It is equally important to study the assumption of accessibility of the cognitive representation of social identity, for this strikes at the core of the mental processes that may produce social identity's effect on dissonance. Accessibility of one's social identity may affect dissonance in two ways. One is chronic accessibility. There may be some people for whom group-anchored social identity is always accessible. One can think of religious, political, or social group members who always view themselves as the prototype of their group. They live, breathe, and sleep as, say, militia members, fundamentalists, Boy Scouts, and so on. For such people, group membership is always accessible, constantly guiding their thoughts and their actions.

Perhaps more interesting (at least, to students of social cognition) is the accessibility of a social identity that is caused by a person's immediate situation. As we indicated earlier, people have multiple social identities. They may be parents, recreational athletes, Boy Scouts, Republicans, and professors. The cognitive representations of their social groups may be equally available but not equally accessible. To become accessible, situational cues might bring a particular social identity to the foreground of memory. The procedures of the studies that were presented here may have made social identity cognitions accessible, although accessibility was not systematically varied in that research. Members of an evangelical Christian group were specifically recruited for one study and the nature of the attitudinal material was directly relevant to their group membership. In the prior study, members of a specific campus political group were recruited and the counterattitudinal essay they wrote was directed pointedly at their core political beliefs. It is quite reasonable that the procedures made their religious and political social identities immediately accessible and that those cognitions then guided their attitudes and behaviors. Varying accessibility of social identity systematically is important. This might be done by priming procedures in which alternate representations are made accessible. The relevant group for which social identity is expected to preclude attitude change can be primed, as can an alternate group for which one's social identity would not be threatened by counterattitudinal behavior. One's role as an individual can also be primed by experimental manipulation. In that way, we can obtain evidence for the mediating process by which social identity alters the course of dissonance reduction.

In conclusion, the often ignored roles played by group membership, social categorization, and social identity offers the promise of expanding our knowledge of cognitive dissonance. The possibility that responsibility diffusion can alter dissonance arousal and that social identity can systematically alter the potential modes of dissonance reduction are fruitful avenues for future research.

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Social Influence and Identity Conflict

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One of the findings most regularly observed in social psychology is that certain kinds of behavior do not always relate to attitudes. From the point of view of social influence, this observation brings us back to the fact that changes in attitudes and beliefs do not necessarily involve a change in the corresponding behaviors. Indeed, attitude change, of the kind often obtained with influence strategies modeled on learning or information processing, seldom translates into a change in behavior and on this point information campaigns seem to be characterized by a relative lack of effectiveness (cf. Hyman & Sheatsley, 1978; Lewin, 1978; McGuire, 1985; Roberts & Maccoby, 1985). This shortcoming assumes a particular importance when modification of behavior is the primary goal of social influence, especially when the behaviors of concern are health-threatening. One notable example is smoking and the campaigns aimed at eradicating this habit, the focus of this chapter's analysis.

Ever since the first discoveries of a link between tobacco consumption and the likelihood of developing cancer (e.g., Doll & Hill, 1950, 1952), behind campaigns to ensure that people, and particularly those who are smokers, become aware of this link and consequently decide not to smoke (e.g., Generalitat Valenciana, Direcció General de Salut Pública, 1995; World Health Organization [WHO], 1988, 1993; see also Roemer, 1993).

These campaigns, like others that have had the aim of inducing healthy behaviors (e.g., sexual practices that reduce the risk of contracting human immunodeficiency virus), have been devised around, and primarily inspired by, models of persuasion (e.g., McGuire, 1985; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a) and fear appeals (e.g., Janis & Feshbach, 1953; Rogers, 1975) as means for motivating smokers to give up smoking and motivating nonsmokers to maintain their abstinence (cf. Leventhal & Cleary, 1980; Maibach & Parrott, 1995; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1995).

Although it would be no easy task to summarize and evaluate all such public information campaigns, they do appear to have a significant impact insofar as awareness of the risks linked to tobacco consumption is concerned. For example, whereas, in 1964, 66% of Americans claimed to know that smoking increased the risk of contracting lung cancer, by 1987, this proportion exceeded 90% of the population (cf. American Lung Association, 1987; see also Dawley, Fleischer, & Dawley, 1985; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 1989). This recognition of the health risk also seems to have occurred among the smokers who largely shared the views of the nonsmokers in this respect (cf. Cecil, Evans, & Stanley, 1996; GVDGSP, 1993; Kristiansen, Harding, & Eiser, 1983; Pervin & Yarko, 1965), both groups acknowledging the benefits for health in giving up smoking (cf. Brownson et al., 1992). Finally, the same opinions seem also to have penetrated to a much younger section of the population (down to and including 10-year-olds) who display an awareness of the negative consequences of smoking and for the most part concede that smoking represents a health problem (cf. O'Rourke, Smith, & Nolte, 1983). Furthermore, smokers seem to accept the discrimination to which they are subjected (cf. Echebarría Echabe, Fernandez Guede, & Gonzalez, 1994), accepting a ban on smoking in public places (cf. GVDGSP, 1993) or else favoring the introduction of antismoking measures (e.g., campaigns of persuasion, restrictive measures, fines; cf. Eroski, 1988).

But now let us consider the other side of the coin. Smokers do show some reluctance to accept the antismoking argument in its entirety. Thus, they have less exposure than nonsmokers to negative information about tobacco (cf. Becoña, 1995; Brock & Balloun, 1967; Feather, 1962), they are disinclined to accept the inevitability of the negative consequences of smoking (cf. Becoña, 1995) or to recognize the probability of specific illnesses (cf. Cecil et al., 1996; Eiser, Sutton, & Wober, 1979), and they regard the relation between the arguments for and against tobacco consumption as more evenly balanced than do nonsmokers (cf. Eiser & Harding, 1983). This resistance also can be observed with respect to giving up smoking. Although the majority of smokers have attempted to give up smoking at least once in their lives (cf. Schachter, 1982), the percentage of smokers who try to quit

seems to have diminished more recently. For example, 70% of Spanish smokers have no intention of giving up smoking in the near future (cf. Becoña, 1995; GVDGSP, 1993). The current level of tobacco consumption in the world population is estimated by the WHO to be 1,100 million people (cf. WHO, 1994, 1996). If some studies show that a proportion of smokers succeed in giving up smoking (e.g., 13% of the Spanish population are ex-smokers; cf. Ministerio Español de Sanidad y Consumo, 1993; see also USDHHS, 1989), the tendency since the beginning of the 1990s seems to show a relative stability in the number of smokers and the number of cigarettes consumed (more than 30% of the Spanish population are current smokers; cf. Becoña, 1995; Tabacalera, 1994). Furthermore, the rate of initiation of smoking among adolescents seems to be on the increase again, after reaching a plateau in the 1970s and remaining stable through the 1980s (cf. Altman, 1990; Lynch & Bonnie, 1994).

In brief, antismoking campaigns seem to transmit antismoking information and to establish a social norm against smoking that are accepted by smokers even if they show some reticence about accepting the case in its entirety. It is noteworthy, however, that the effectiveness of persuasive campaigns at the level of beliefs and attitudes is not matched by the number of smokers who give up smoking or by the number of nonsmokers who never start (Chassin, Presson, & Sherman, 1990; Leventhal & Cleary, 1980; Lichtenstein, Biglan, Glasgow, Severson, & Ary, 1990; Office of Population Censures and Surveys, 1990; Russell, 1990; WHO, 1994). This fact shows that knowledge of the risks to health does not suffice to prevent smoking (Frydman, 1987; Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1989; Thompson, 1978) and suggests that antismoking campaigns must draw inspiration from other theoretical sources if they are to overcome this inconsistency at the behavioral level. This chapter describes a body of research on social influence that aims to theorize several of the limitations which antismoking campaigns can suffer in their efforts to convince smokers to abandon smoking.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND IDENTITY THREAT

A common assumption of antismoking campaigns seems to be that smokers' becoming aware of the negative consequences of smoking is sufficient to cause them to give up smoking. However, these beliefs do have to come into direct conflict with the behavior involved in smoking (the act of smoking); that is to say, it is important that the beliefs do not remain segregated from concrete decisions smokers make with respect to their practice of smoking (cf. Eiser, 1982). The question arises, therefore, as to the nature of the factors that facilitate (or inhibit) such a conflict and that allow this conflict to be resolved in such a way that it changes the behavior.

Several factors could account for the failure to change behavior. One, for example, is the fact that smokers consider the subjective benefits associated with the act of smoking (e.g., the pleasure of smoking) are at least as important as the risks incurred (cf. Bauman & Chenoweth, 1984; Mausner & Platt, 1971); their basic ambivalence here could be resolved in favor of maintaining the habit. The absence of fear about negative consequences of smoking for health in the short term (Evans, 1976; Frydman, 1987), or underestimation of the perception of personal vulnerability (Janz & Becker, 1984; Witte, 1992) also could favor a lack of change in behavior. Expectations of risk to health seem in practice to predict neither the likelihood of taking up smoking nor the subsequent rate of consumption (Bauman & Chenoweth, 1984). Certain norms favorable to tobacco consumption to which the smoker may be exposed (such as the encouragement of friends or lack of disapproval by parents) also tend to work against any intention to stop smoking (cf. Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Furthermore, the perceived gravity of health problems is reduced to the degree that the individual observes some consensus in performing those actions that supposedly provoke the risks (Jermott, Ditto, & Croyle, 1986). Finally, perceived inability to stop smoking (Ajzen, 1988; Eiser, van der Pligt, Martin, & Sutton, 1985); the habit of consumption itself (cf. Bentler & Speckart, 1979; Triandis, 1977); and the personal norms, values, and affective evaluations of the behavior (cf. Fishbein, 1967b; Manstead & Parker, 1995) also potentially determine the occurrence of the relevant behavior.

Despite the general tendency to explain the persistence of tobacco consumption largely in terms of internal factors (nicotine dependence) rather than external factors (social pressure; cf. Chassin et al., 1990), various aspects of the social context in which antismoking campaigns occur also can cause smokers to resolve the conflict in ways that have repercussions for behavior. Social context here is taken to include the social system in which smoking is embedded (i.e., the values, norms and social representations of smoking) as well as the social relationships that smokers maintain with their acquaintances (i.e., with nonsmokers) and in particular with sources of antismoking influence. In this social context, the threat to identity of which the smoker becomes aware following exposure to the information disseminated in antismoking campaigns seems especially important in conceptualizing the passage from attitude to behavior. Two aspects define such a threat to the identity of the smoker.

The first concerns the implications of smokers' own behavior and the attitudes that correspond to this. The act of smoking locates smokers in the social field by placing them within the visible social category of smokers. Thus, tobacco consumption must be regarded as associated with a "strong"

attitude (cf. Petty & Krosnick, 1995), by virtue of the fact that it contributes to the definition smokers have of themselves, that it will be linked to values that are important to smokers, and that it will therefore carry a high affective value. In addition, because of the habitual nature of the practice and the benefit that smokers derive from tobacco consumption, they will be especially concerned about restrictive measures (cf. Petty & Cacioppo, 1979a, 1979b). Finally, the habitual practice of smoking also defines the smoker as someone strongly committed to tobacco use (cf. Pomerantz, Chaiken, & Tordesillas, 1995). In brief, given that attitudes to smoking and the behavior associated with it are important to smokers and are linked to their self-concept, any attempt to change these is bound to introduce a threat to their identity.

The second aspect derives from the fact that smokers find themselves in a socially stigmatized position. They are aware of the relatively weak case in favor of smoking and even smokers will produce more arguments against than for tobacco (cf. Pérez, Mugny, Roux, & Butera, 1991). They share with nonsmokers a dominant representation of tobacco smoking, which contains a rather negative image of smokers (Echeburúa et al., 1994). Their legitimacy or social normativity has become progressively weakened (i.e., restrictive measures on behavior) to the point where nonsmokers have become a distinct group defending interests that conflict with their own (cf. Roemer, 1993). Finally, they are the targets of major campaigns against not only tobacco but also their behavior and their identity (e.g., Hirsch, Hill, Frossart, Tassin, & Pechabrier, 1988). This social change is therefore composed of various convergent elements that challenge the content and the value of the attitudes and behavior of smokers and consequently their identity.

One must therefore recognize that smokers now find themselves in a social context that questions their identity. One might expect these circumstances would lead them to stop smoking and this is indeed the case for a certain proportion of smokers. In effect, one way of coping with this threat to identity is to accept the antismoking point of view, which means acknowledging the criticism of their identity. If this provides the necessary encouragement to adopt a more valued identity, then internalization of the positions advocated by an antismoking source represent one possible route to the restoration of a positive self-concept. Stopping smoking would in this case be an adequate strategy for facing the threat to identity. To sum up then, one means for restoring a positive image of the self comes down to changing attitudes and behavior via a kind of mobility of identity (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which is to say the acquisition of a new identity that allows escape from the negative attributes of the old.

The threat to the identity of smokers derives its meaning, however, from contexts that tend to inhibit the decision to stop smoking, and the reality is that a majority of smokers do not quit. Why do not factors questioning the identity of smokers as a result lead them to change? A particular feature of the behavior and attitudes involved is their temporal stability (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 1995; Krosnick, 1988) as much as the motivation of the individual to preserve them (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996). Additionally, insofar as stopping smoking presupposes a change of identity (i.e., moving from the identity of smoker to that of nonsmoker or ex-smoker), then a strong identification with the membership group would inhibit social mobility (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and should create resistance to change. In brief, accepting that antismoking campaigns seek an impact in part by questioning and stigmatizing the identity of smokers (i.e., seeking to convince them of the unreasonable and illegitimate character of their behavior), raises the possibility that smokers will be aroused to defend their identity.

The issue we return to therefore is how to determine when smokers will be motivated to seek a more valued identity via a strategy of social mobility, renouncing their status as smokers, and when instead they will be more motivated to defend it. With respect to this latter alternative, the social context provides an explanation for the type of defense offered (cf. Breakwell, 1986). The existence of a threat inherent in the identity in effect adds a special element to the process of influence: The target of influence may relate the content of the threat to salient features of the social relationship (Falomir, Mugny, Sanchez-Mazas, Pérez, & Carrasco, 1998) and thus be motivated to protect his or her own identity as a response to the context of this relationship. Influence at the level of behavior will consequently be obstructed by the fact that the smoker responds in terms of a *conflict of identity*, a response characterized by a disposition to preserve initial attitudes and behaviors, and by the activation of strategies for the defense of identity (Breakwell, 1986). The threat to identity activated by an attempt to influence will introduce conflict into tobacco-related behavior and attitudes. But smokers will work out this conflict in a fashion that is primarily sociorelational and will restore their identity as smokers as a response to this salient relational context. The general hypothesis is that the resistance induced by such a conflict of identity does not allow the integration of alternative viewpoints. To sum up, when their identity is threatened, smokers will defend it rather than abandon it, as they are concerned about their own relation to the social context, in this case, their relationship with the source of influence. Working out the conflict in this way prevents them making a decision to stop smoking.

When does the social influence context allow smokers to accept a challenge to their identity and thus work through the conflict in such a way that they are led to stop smoking, and when does it push them instead toward protecting their existing identity so that the conflict prevents any such change? Given that the conflict involves interpreting the threat to identity in relation to salient elements of the social influence relationship, such a resolution depends on the presence and the salience of these elements of the social relationship. In the remainder of this chapter we consider two elements of the social influence context that are likely to determine the nature of the conflict: the relation between the groups present in such a context, and the influence relationship established between the source and the target of influence.

INTERGROUP CONFLICT AND IDENTITY CONFLICT

We have proposed that behavior and attitudes toward tobacco consumption are determined by the position smokers occupy in an unequal social relationship, one in which they appear to belong to a socially stigmatized category (that of smokers) opposed by a dominant social category (that of nonsmokers). This allows us to advance various predictions concerning the way smokers interpret the threat to their identity. We can postulate that the salience of an intergroup conflict is more likely to motivate smokers to respond to this identity threat as a conflict of identity in which preservation and protection of their current identity is the principal objective.

A study of social representations of smoking illustrates the effect of the intergroup conflict on the defensive motivation of smokers (Echeburria et al., 1994). In two experimental conditions, university students (smokers and nonsmokers) responded to a questionnaire, having been led to believe either that they were participating in "a study about tobacco" (no conflict condition) or else that they were participating in a "comparative study between smokers and nonsmokers about tobacco" (intergroup conflict condition). To reinforce this manipulation, in the intergroup conflict condition classes of students were asked to split into two groups. The smokers were asked to sit together on the right hand side of the classroom and the nonsmokers to sit together on the left hand side. First, let us note the existence of two kinds of social representation of tobacco use. The majority, which included 90.1% of the nonsmokers and 73.5% of the smokers in the study, described the consumption of tobacco in psychopathological terms and expressed negative feelings toward smokers but positive feelings about nonsmokers (negative psychopathological representation). The minority view, shared by 9.9% of nonsmokers and 26.5% of smokers, was to regard tobacco consumption in a nonstigmatized fashion, and to hold a positive stereotype of smokers (defensive positive representation).

Regarding intergroup conflict, the number of smokers who held a positive representation was found to be significantly greater (41.2%) when the social categorization was made salient. This result shows that a social context which reinforces the categorization between smokers and nonsmokers strengthens the defensive motivation of smokers because they shift significantly toward a social representation of tobacco consumption that provides more protection for their identity. Identification with smokers as a group also was found to be the principal factor underlying this representation. These results confirm, therefore, the importance of aspects of the social context (in this case the salience of the smoker vs. nonsmoker categorization) in determining the motivation to protect a socially threatened identity. It is notable that most antismoking campaigns tend to make this categorization salient.

If categorization by itself is enough to prompt the activation of processes of resistance to change in behavior, then how can these difficulties be overcome? One means for achieving influence in a social context marked by a salient intergroup categorization is to employ sources of influence that are part of the ingroup, and this will at the same time induce conditions for self-categorization (cf. Turner, 1991) rather than categorical differentiation (cf. Doise, 1978). This idea was tested in a study which confronted smokers with a strongly argued case against tobacco use (Pérez et al., 1991; see also Pérez & Mugny, 1992). The text presented described the smoker as an individual dependent on an artificial need to smoke, manipulated by publicity, and serving the interests of the tobacco industry (cf. Pérez & Mugny, 1990a). Two variables were introduced. The first concerned the majority versus minority support for the message. The second the ingroup (smokers) versus outgroup (nonsmokers) identity of the minority or majority supporters. The principal dependent measure was change in intention to stop smoking, assessed before and after presentation of the antismoking message (on a 7-point scale).

The results showed that a majority source presented as belonging to the ingroup was the only one to have any influence on the intention of smokers to give up smoking (cf. Fig. 13.1). Although its impact was weak, it differed significantly both from the outgroup majority and the ingroup minority, which both had negative influences, smokers in these cases strengthening their resolve to continue smoking. Thus, social categorization proves to be one cause of the failure of a majority source when this is perceived as an outgroup. One must recognize here that smokers respond in terms of a conflict of identity: The threat to identity is in this case associated with an intergroup relation that puts them at a disadvantage and any change in intention to stop smoking is inhibited by their purely defensive motivation. Obligated as they are to evaluate their identity in a symbolic competition (Tajfel &

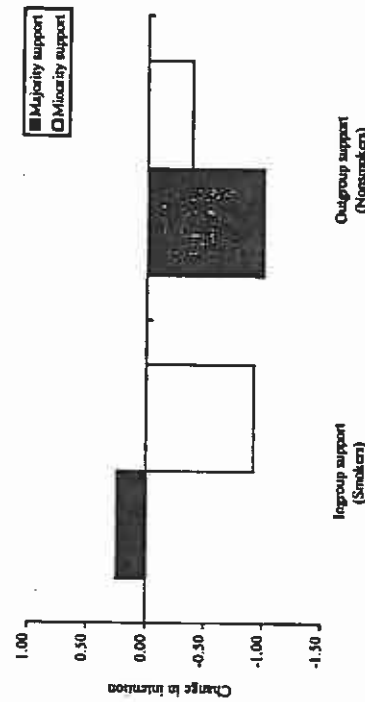


FIG. 13.1 Change in intention to quit smoking.

Turner, 1986) with nonsmokers, smokers are limited to a strategy of identity protection (Breakwell, 1986). This result has a particular importance; it suggests that the context of social categorization in which antismoking campaigns operate can in part explain their failure to change the behavior of smokers.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AS A FACTOR IN IDENTITY CONFLICT

Another possible reason for the failure to influence smoking behavior concerns the link that smokers can be led to make between the threat to their identity and the attempt to influence itself, and this can also produce a conflict of identity for smokers. In this case the influence source will be seen as the real cause of the threat to identity. Rather than accepting this external imposition, smokers will resort to protective strategies that allow them to reassert their identity. This occurs particularly when the influence source has high social status (e.g., expert or competent sources, or those with a certain power of decision over the individual). Furthermore, an influence situation can be understood as making salient a particular kind of relationship between two actors, namely a source who is supposed to influence and a target who is supposed to be influenced. In this sense, the source possesses an ascendancy over the target (i.e., a persuasive constraint), in particular by reason of his or her superior status and assumed role in the influence relation. A consequence of this is that the inherent threat to the identity of the target is more likely to be associated with this relation. The target will then

be more reluctant to treat the content of the source's message in an "objective" manner or to draw any implications for his or her own attitudes. When the influence relationship itself is made salient, treatment of information will be "biased" by the target's desire to defend his or her own beliefs and values (cf. Chaiken, Giner-Sotolla, & Chen, 1996; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961, 1962).

Most antismoking campaigns have been inspired by the principle of conformity (Leventhal & Cleary, 1980), in using high status sources (i.e., health or educational authorities) or expert sources (i.e., experts in the domain of health, cf. Karsenty & Hirsch, 1992) who are assumed to increase the informational dependence of smokers (cf. Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). The logic is that if sources are more credible they can as a result enhance smokers' recognition of the negative consequences of smoking, leading them to give up the habit. If this seems at first glance to represent an advantage in convincing smokers to stop smoking, it can nevertheless be transformed into a handicap by virtue of the way it draws attention to the threat to identity. This will give rise to an identity conflict for smokers motivating them to protect their identity as smokers.

Two characteristic aspects of the influence of high status sources suggest the hypothesis that high status sources will give rise to an identity conflict among smokers. The first is that identity conflict is related to the pressure introduced by an influence relation with a high status source. This stems from the fact that smokers perceive their own response, that is, their feeling that their identity is threatened, to be a reaction to the message advanced by the source. Moreover, this will be the case specifically for high status sources. We would argue that when the source has low status there will be no threat to identity associated with the influence relation, conflict being here perceived as independent of or dissociated from the source's message (cf. Pérez & Mugny, 1990b). This point can be illustrated with the results of a study (Falomir, Mugny, & Pérez, 1996) in which smokers, after having been exposed to the same antismoking case as in the study described previously (Pérez et al., 1991), had to indicate the first five ideas that came into their minds with respect to the text they had read. For each idea, we asked them to assess, in percentages, the degree to which they had thought of this before (an idea predating the text), to what degree it had been directly suggested by the text (idea derived from the text) and to what degree the idea had come to them at that moment (self-generated idea). The three percentages had to total to 100%.

The results revealed an interaction between the status of the source and the origin of the ideas (cf. Fig. 13.2). First, degree of novelty (self-generated ideas) did not differ as a function of the status of the source; this was also the smallest category of response. Depending on the source, however, the prom-

inence of the message in the conflict varied. Ideas were regarded as originating mainly from the text when the latter had a high status source than when it emanated from a low status source. In contrast, ideas were perceived to have their origin prior to reading the text when the source of this text had low status. These results suggest that smokers' response to the conflict provoked by the challenge to their identity contained in the source's message is more closely associated with the influence relationship when the source has high status, while it is dissociated from the influence relation when the source has low status. The same normative position contained in a message therefore is more compelling when this position is attributed to a high status source than when it is attributed to a low status source. The strength and salience of the social comparison involved with a high status source (cf. Moscovici, 1980; see also Guillon & Personnaz, 1983) therefore is decisive in prompting smokers to respond to the attack on their identity by relating this to a conspicuous element in the influence relationship, namely the source itself.

Another issue is that high status sources give particular legitimacy to the point of view they advocate, and this further enhances smokers' perception that their identity is under threat. Consider, for example, a study (Falomir et al., 1998; Experiment 2) in which smokers were first exposed to an antismoking argument attributed either to a high or to a low status source, and then had to indicate the importance they accorded (on a 7-point scale) to four factors commonly associated with the consumption of tobacco, two favorable to smokers (the pleasure of smoking and the reduction of stress) and two unfavorable (health and nicotine dependence) and the importance of granting respect to nonsmokers and to smokers.

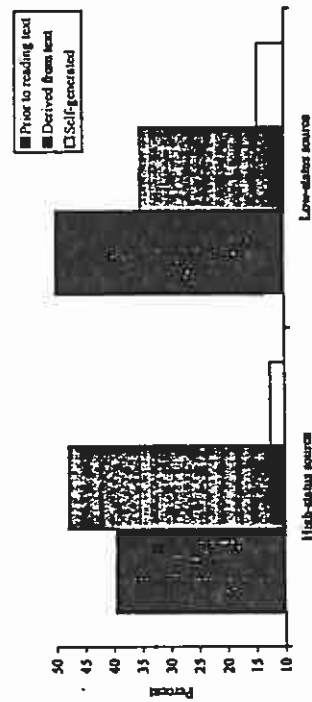


FIG. 13.2 Origins of ideas generated.

In relation to the factors associated with the consumption of tobacco (cf. Fig. 13.3), we can see that the favorable dimensions are judged less important than the unfavorable dimensions, which indicates "acceptance" of the stigmatization of smokers by smokers themselves. This is particularly true when the source has high status, for the dimensions favorable to smokers are considered more important when the source has low status. Conversely the unfavorable dimensions are judged more important when confronted with a high status source than when faced with a low status source. Along similar lines, of the two categories, nonsmokers are rated as meriting more respect than smokers, but this effect again is modified by the status of the source (cf. Fig. 13.3). When the source has high status, respect for nonsmokers is rated higher than respect for smokers, whereas this difference is nonsignificant when the source has low status. The high status source therefore appears to force more recognition of the illegitimacy of the act of smoking and to produce a stronger differentiation in the treatment regarded as appropriate for the category of smokers versus nonsmokers. In brief, it makes salient the threat to the identity of smokers for smokers themselves.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE, IDENTITY CONFLICT AND DEFENSIVE MOTIVATION

The persuasive constraint associated with the threat to identity introduced by high status sources could be argued to activate strategies for protecting identity and to obstruct the process of change. One way of testing this idea involves manipulating, on the one hand, the salience of the persuasive con-

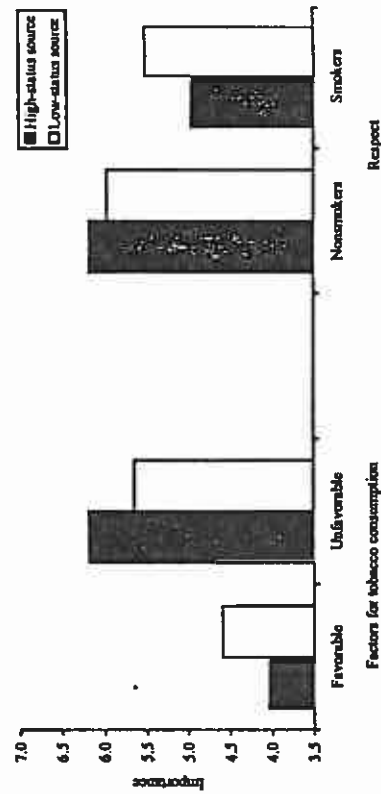


FIG. 13.3 Importance of factors associated with tobacco consumption and of respect for smokers and nonsmokers (7 = very important).

straint and, on the other, the availability to the smoker of an identity-protection strategy. The hypothesis is that when persuasive constraint is salient, such availability will reduce the influence a high status source has on the intention to stop smoking. When the persuasive constraint is not salient, the presence of such a strategy should not inhibit influence.

This idea was tested in another study (Falomir, 1996), in which smokers were exposed to the usual antismoking argument, attributed this time only to a high status source (a group of experts). First, the experiment involved varying the style (imperative vs. optional; cf. Pérez & Mugny, 1991) in which the message challenged the smokers. For example, in the strong persuasive constraint condition, the source declared: "As university professors, our conclusion is that it is absolutely essential that every smoker has these ideas put in his head, and that he accepts them without discussion. There can be no question here of leaving to each smoker the freedom to draw conclusions as he chooses." In the weak persuasive constraint condition, the conclusion is formulated in terms of desires, each smoker explicitly being free to draw his or her own conclusions. The manipulation is thus very similar to those used in the psychological reactance paradigm (cf. Brehm & Brehm, 1981).

Second, the possibility of defending identity was manipulated by the presence versus the absence of social support for the participants (cf. Breakwell, 1986), on the assumption that one is more likely to make use of social support and be resistant to change when confronted with a strong threat to identity. In the social support condition, participants were informed that the majority (90%) of smokers were not in favor of antismoking measures. In the lack of social support condition, they were informed that the majority of smokers were in favor of such measures. Recourse to social support here is regarded as an identity protection strategy to the degree that it serves as a heuristic for the social validity of one's position (cf. Chaiken, 1980; Festinger, 1950b; Turner, 1991), and this has elsewhere been shown to allow the individual to resist change (cf. Allen, 1975; Asch, 1951; Doms, 1987; Milgram, 1974). Furthermore, the availability of social support, in the form of an exaggerated consensus, proves to be functional in the search for a positive identity (Agostinelli, Sherman, Presson, & Chassin, 1992; Goethals, 1987; Ross, Green, & House, 1977; Sherman, Presson, & Chassin, 1984).

The principal dependent measure here again is represented by change in intention to give up smoking, assessed (on 7-point scales) before and after presentation of the antismoking message. Two further measures were included to provide a better assessment of the processes activated. One of these was a measure (on a 7-point scale) of change in agreement with the antismoking arguments contained in the message. If the dynamics predicted are observed only for the measure of intention to stop smoking, one would

be in a position to claim that identity conflict operates beyond the mere acceptance (or rejection) of the source's position; that is, it operates at the level of the personal decision a smoker takes to stop smoking. The other measure was of the identification of smokers with their own group of fellow smokers. The expectation here was that smokers who increase their resolve to stop smoking should display a reduced identification with smokers as a category.

Analysis of variance, with the two measures of change—in agreement with the antismoking message and in intention to stop smoking—as repeated measures and the two experimental variables as between-subject factors, revealed an interaction between the three variables. The mean change scores are presented in Table 13.1. In relation to change in intention to stop smoking, the results confirm the predictions. When persuasive constraint is strong, the presence of social support limits change in intention to stop smoking while its absence facilitates this change. Moreover, the availability of social support reduces change only when the persuasive constraint is strong. These results confirm that social support tends to reduce the influence of a high-status source but that this effect only occurs when the smoker is exposed to a strong persuasive constraint that would otherwise cause the smoker to take the threat to identity into consideration.

In relation to changes in agreement with the arguments contained in the message, no significant effects were found for either of the experimental manipulations. Nonetheless, a comparison between the two measures of change shows that when the persuasive constraint is strong and smokers do not have the support of their group, the positive change in intention to stop smoking differs significantly from the negative change in agreement with the message.

TABLE 13.1
Change in Agreement with Antismoking Arguments
and in Intention to Stop Smoking

	Persuasive Constraint		
	Strong		Weak
Social Support	Absent	Present	Present
Agreement with antismoking arguments:			
	-0.80 ^b	0.09 ^{ab}	0.08 ^{ab}
Intention to stop smoking:	0.81 ^a	-0.36 ^b	0.80 ^a

^aPositive values indicate increase in agreement; increase in intention to stop smoking.
^bMeans with distinct subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

The fact that the predicted dynamics are not observed in the change in agreement with the message but in the change in intention to quit smoking suggests that the conflict of identity is not a mere response to an influence attempt but that it implies a particular elaboration of the identity threat.

What is the beneficial effect of social support when the smoker is not in a constraining influence relation? The results of this study indicate that social support aids the decision to stop smoking when the persuasive constraint is weak. Because this support—in the form of an exaggeration of the size of the ingroup—reduces the ingroup favoritism classically found in intergroup relations (Blanz, Mummendey, & Orten, 1995), one might suppose that the support of the group therefore suffices to protect the identity of smokers in the influence relation, and this then allows them to process the position advocated by the source. Complementary results do indeed show that, in this condition, smokers attach more weight to the source's antismoking message.

Identification with smokers as a group represents an important factor in tobacco consumption. For example, identification with the stereotype of the smoker explains the subsequent initiation of young people into the smoking habit (Barton, Chassin, Presson, & Sherman, 1982; Chassin et al., 1981) and also explains the practice of smoking itself (Echebarria et al., 1994). Finally, therefore, correlational analyses were executed to see if identification with smokers as a group explains any of the variance in resistance to change. The results show that group identification is associated with the intention to maintain tobacco consumption when smokers do not have the support of their group and are confronted by a strong persuasive constraint to accept propositions that threaten their identity as smokers. In other words, change in intention is of the same order as reduced identification: Conspicuous absence of support increases smokers' intention to stop smoking, the persuasive constraint forcing them to recognize the negative implications for identity that the lack of a protective strategy prevents them from defending and consequently maintaining.

Coping with Identity Conflict in Social Influence

We have, therefore, a particular kind of influence situation in which the identity of the target (the smoker) is socially threatened and in which elements of the influence context—social categorization or the status of the influence source—ensure that this conflict with the smoker's identity will be recognized. One way of avoiding the activation of a conflict of identity is by allowing smokers to respond in terms of a threat to their identity but without leading them to relate this threat to features of the influence context. This, for example, would be the case if, when faced with a high status influence source, a smoker is able to assert autonomy and independence. A

self-affirmation process (Steele, 1988) would reduce the persuasive constraint associated with an unequal influence relationship of this kind. Let us consider some observations on this point.

In a study by Pérez, Falomir, and Mugny (1995), smokers were exposed to the usual antismoking message, attributed either to a source with superior social status (a group of university professors) or to one of inferior status (a minority group). During the experimental session, they either did or did not have the opportunity to smoke. The results showed that when they were faced with a superior status source, the smokers increased their intention to give up smoking if they could smoke. This effect was specific to the high status source condition; when the source had low status, the act of smoking had a negative effect on change. In the context of this chapter, our interpretation is that smoking represents a positive expression of the smoker's identity in the face of a high status source. The modification of this relationship with the source of influence, manipulated in the experiment by allowing the smoker to redress the balance of this otherwise unequal relationship, produced the increased influence on the intention to quit smoking.

Another study supports this interpretation (Falomir et al., 1996), and also helps to resolve an undecided question: Is the opportunity to affirm identity provided by participants' being able to smoke or the act of smoking itself? The option to smoke or its absence, as it was operationalized in the Pérez et al. (1995) study, allows another explanation. In this study the possibility of smoking in effect confounded permission to smoke with the act of smoking itself. The possibility of smoking could play a dual role. On the one hand, it might diminish the salience of constraint by rendering temporarily inoperative a social norm regulating behavior, in this case the normal prohibition of smoking associated with public places. On the other hand, it allows the performance of an act that is against the persuasive intention of the source, so that by this act the target regains a certain autonomy in the face of the source. Also in the preceding study, participants in the condition that allowed smoking were in fact encouraged to smoke, and all had smoked. The procedure in this experiment was different. In the condition allowing smoking, the experimenter neither encouraged smokers to light up nor did he discourage them if they were inclined to do so, and this allowed a distinction to be made between those participants who did and those who did not smoke. The hypothesis tested was that it is the act of smoking and not simply the opportunity to smoke that should allow participants some control in the relationship with a high status source, because only in smoking do the participants preserve their identity (if the participant does not smoke, he or she submits to the source). For a low status source, the participants do not interpret the conflict of viewpoints in terms of the influence relation, and consequently, the act of smoking should in this condition be unimportant in the

expression of identity. In this case, smoking becomes merely an expression of disdain for a point of view that a priori has no particular expertise or credibility, and it should therefore inhibit influence.

In this study, participants first read an antismoking text (identical to that used in the previous study), attributed in half the conditions to an expert source (university professors) and in the other half to a nonexpert source (high school students). They were next asked to memorize a list of 16 adjectives that could be used to describe the source (half positive and half negative). As in the previous study, they then had to wait in silence for 4 minutes during which they either did or did not have the opportunity to smoke. In the nonsmoking condition, there were no ashtrays in the room and in addition notices were posted indicating the prohibition. When asked if they could smoke, the experimenter indicated he had no power in the matter and emphasized that the prohibition was due to the lack of ventilation in the room. In the condition in which smoking was possible, ashtrays were available so that those participants who wished to smoke could do so, and the notices forbidding smoking were removed. The experimenter recorded whether or not participants did actually smoke. Analyses of variance were executed with status of the source as a variable and also in terms of whether participants were not allowed to smoke, were able to do so but did not, or were able to smoke and did so. The two measures considered here concern change in agreement with the antismoking claims contained in the text, and change in personal intention to give up smoking.

In relation to the first of these measures, change in agreement with extracts drawn from the message, the only significant effect was for the status of the source, the expert source having more influence than the nonexpert source. For changes in intention, depicted in Fig. 13.4, there was an interaction between the two variables that confirms that, when participants could not smoke, the nonexpert source produced more change than the expert source. Decomposition of effects for the superior status source shows primarily that participants who did smoke tended to change more than the nonsmoking participants. When the source had low status, participants who could smoke and did so changed less than those who could not smoke and less than those who could smoke but did not. Finally, among the participants who had the option of smoking, those who took advantage of this option changed, as predicted, more when the source had high status than when the source had low status, whereas those who chose not to smoke under these conditions did not differ as a function of source status.

These results clearly reflect a distinct way of working out the conflict between divergent points of view. On the one hand, an expert source produces an increase in agreement with its claims, in contrast to a nonexpert source, but not necessarily in intention to give up smoking. Indeed, only

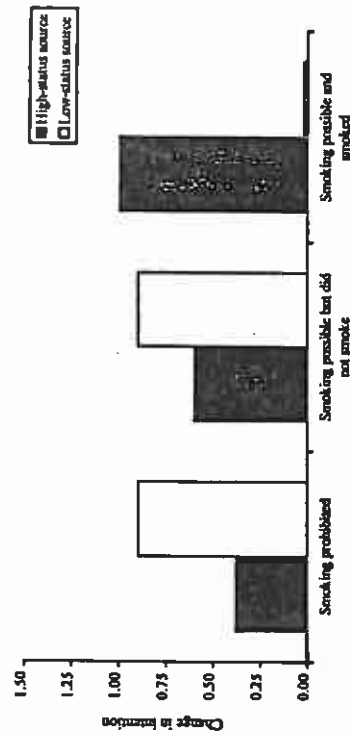


FIG. 13.4 Change in intention to quit smoking.

self-affirmation contributed to a conflict that worked out at an identity level leading also to a change in intention. Faced with a low status source, the target would locate the debate primarily outside (upstream, as it were, from) the confrontation with this source (see Fig. 13.2). This reaction facilitates an internalization of the conflict created by the message (Pérez et al., 1995) that is dissociated from the relationship with the source (Pérez & Mugny, 1990b). The change in intention found when smokers are unable to smoke reflects the consequences at a latent level of treatment of the threat to identity; a conversion effect occurs (cf. Moscovici, 1980).

In contrast, when the participant is faced with an expert source, the conflict would be interpreted more in terms of the relationship with the source (cf. Fig. 13.2). When the influence context excludes a positive response to this influence relation, which in this case is when participants do not smoke, the persuasive constraint associated with the source is found to lead to a defensive attitude characteristic of an identity conflict. The results also support the corollary of this dynamic: Individuals placed in a situation involving identity threat need some positive way of adjusting to the influence relationship if they are to be able to work out their own personal attitude (i.e., the intention to give up smoking). In effect, when the source has high status and when the participant takes advantage of the freedom to smoke, overt conformity is accompanied by a change in personal intention, a sign of a genuine internalization (Kelman, 1958).

Finally, the simple fact of allowing smoking appears to be insufficient to induce these effects. Only the act of smoking is in itself a regulative element.

The action of smoking would contribute to self-affirmation, allowing the smoker to reassert freedom and autonomy in the context of a salient and constraining influence relationship.

CONCLUSION

We have proposed that the social context in which antismoking campaigns operate includes factors that counteract the translation of attitudes and beliefs about tobacco use into behavior such as quitting smoking. On this basis we have argued that the prevailing social norms, values, and practices against tobacco consumption introduce a threat to the identity of smokers that can explain a part of this difficulty. In effect, if this threatening social context is intended to encourage smokers to seek out a more valued identity, then a defensive interpretation of this threat in terms of an identity conflict prevents internalization of the antismoking perspective at the level of action; that is, it prevents the smoker deciding for himself or herself to stop smoking. The ineffectiveness of antismoking campaigns in changing the behavior of smokers can partly be attributed to this kind of dynamics.

On the one hand, we have seen that the social context is characterized by a categorization of people into smokers and nonsmokers, and this is more over one of those rare categorizations that is not subject to the taboo against discrimination. This leads smokers to preserve a social identity distinct from that of the category of nonsmokers. The emergence of a conflict of identity is less likely here to the extent that the identity of smokers is guaranteed in the relation with nonsmokers, or else if such a comparison is not salient (e.g., if the influence source is an ingroup). On the other hand, the kind of high status sources that are most frequently associated with antismoking campaigns (e.g., experts) encourage an interpretation of the threat as an identity conflict and this motivates smokers to defend their identity within the influence relationship. A conflict of identity is less likely to arise if smokers can preserve their autonomy and independence in the influence relationship or if the influence source does not impose any persuasive constraint (e.g., because it has low status or is a minority source).

In pursuing measures to overcome the marginalization of various ethnic minorities (e.g., Gypsies in Europe, Native Americans in America), or social minorities (e.g., unemployed, smokers, or the obese), society develops influence strategies intended to convert them to dominant norms, values, and practices. Influence on these stigmatized groups is limited by the very status ascribed to them, a status that is intrinsically threatening. Individuals belonging to these groups may accept and meet such a threat by trying to acquire a new majority identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). But such a process presupposes that individuals acknowledge the implications of their current

stigmatized social status, and this is not always the case. Even if these individuals are aware of or accept such a threat in some way, they still may be motivated to defend it in the social relationship rather than to change it. If these stigmatized groups respond in terms of an identity conflict, any influence on them would be more likely to fail.

By way of conclusion, we note that Moscovici (1985) distinguished three ways of confronting the conflict introduced by a difference of opinion: (a) a rational demonstration of the validity or invalidity of a point of view, (b) the use of power to impose a solution, and (c) reciprocal influence to negotiate the conflict. Up to now, antismoking campaigns seem to have drawn primarily on the first two of these, which is to say they try to convince smokers that smoking is bad, and they introduce legislation that will lead smokers to stop smoking. However, the validity of a point of view is not inherent solely in the facts on which it draws, and the relation an individual maintains with other social actors affects the validity he or she accords to opposing points of view as well as the way he or she treats them. In effect, even though the credibility or power of a source of influence can in themselves reinforce the validity of their claims, this is not always the case. To put it in other terms, the norms regulating social relationships (e.g., the reciprocity rule; cf. Cialdini, 1993) also determine the processes of change. The results reported in this chapter are then more in accord with the notion that expert sources or those possessing power may need to negotiate the conflict they create.

14

The Perceived Impact of Persuasive Messages on "Us" and "Them"

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The mass media potentially play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behavior, not only through coverage of persuasive advertising campaigns that are specifically designed to influence the audience but also through the portrayal—in entertainment, news, and current affairs programs—of people, their opinions, and behavior. Moreover, apart from the direct, persuasive effects of media content on attitudes and behavior, people's beliefs or assumptions about media influences on others also may have a substantial indirect effect. That is, attitudinal and behavioral change may arise from the perception that the opinions of others have been influenced by the media. This chapter reviews research that deals not with the direct effects of persuasive messages on people's attitudes and behavior but with the indirect effects that result from people's beliefs about the impact of persuasive messages on others. Specifically, we describe research on the third-person effect (Davison, 1983) in which people expect the media, and persuasive communications in general, to have a greater effect on others than on themselves.

Against a dominant tendency to treat persuasive communication and social influence within groups as separate areas of inquiry, recent research has sought to re-emphasize the role of social groups in the persuasion process (see Mackie, Gastardo-Conaco, & Skelly, 1992; Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990; McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson, & Turner, 1994; van Knippenberg &