

Intergroup relations, identification and social influence

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This paper reviews the research which introduces the intergroup dimension into the study of social influence processes, those of minorities in particular. After discussing the complexity of the intergroup context that presides over the diffusion of an innovation, the authors propose that social influence, categorization and identification processes can be integrated into a conceptual framework. It is shown that dominated entities, be they minorities or simply out-groups, possess an essential ability to induce and negotiate social conflict through their behavioural and negotiation styles despite their being discriminated against. It is also shown that the minority which is confronted with such discrimination exerts an influence that is often indirect and latent, in the form of a conversion.

Opinion changes may depend on the degree to which the influence target considers the opinions proposed by a source of influence to be relevant to the definition of groups or social categories in the influence setting (for example, Lewin, 1952; Hovland *et al.*, 1953; Kelman, 1958; Lange & Fishbein, 1983). However, despite the occasional reference to the group (or social category) as an important element in social influence, it must be recognized (see Mugny & Doise, 1979) that most of the work in the area of social influence fails to incorporate this important social dimension into the theoretical models it constructs. In this theoretical paper, we briefly discuss recent research especially centred upon minority influence, precisely because it explicitly considers the intergroup relations wherein processes of social influence occur.

'Single' vs. 'double' minority influence

How is it possible for minorities, even devoid of all power or recognized competence, to succeed in diffusing innovations, thus breaking the apparently mechanistic laws of asymmetric intergroup relations marked by power and dominance? (Tajfel, 1978). As Moscovici (1976) has suggested, minorities can acquire such influence essentially by systematically organizing their behaviour, maintaining their steadfastness (diachronic consistency), and by their internal unanimity (synchronic consistency). These behavioural styles are efficient in obtaining a social impact in that they generate a social conflict where the minority may represent a possible alternative. This conception of minority influence has been illustrated in numerous experiments (for an extensive review of the matter, see Moscovici *et al.*, 1984) carried out for the most part under laboratory conditions presenting no explicit social categorization, except for the divergence between majority and minority responses. What happens when such categorization is introduced?

In a review of the studies on the impact of active minorities, Maass & Clark (1984) remark that this question has very seldom been considered. The only experiment mentioned which does so is that of Nemeth & Wachtler (1973) where the minority source's ethnic origin was crossed with that of paintings for which the minority expressed its preference. It was expected that the minority would be perceived as more biased, and hence would be less influential, when it stated a preference for paintings of its own ethnic origin than when it expressed a preference for paintings of another ethnic origin. Maass *et al.* (1982), examining the same problem, proposed a distinction between 'single' and 'double' minorities: "'Single' minorities may be defined as individuals who deviate from the majority only in terms of their beliefs. . . . 'Double' minorities, in contrast, differ from the majority not only in terms of

their beliefs, but also in terms of ascribed category membership . . . or social categorization' (p. 90). The authors confronted male conservative subjects with either a 'single' (male) liberal minority or a 'double' (female) liberal minority. Their results showed that, specifically on the theme of abortion, the 'double' minority was perceived as presenting a stronger self-interest and hence exerted less influence than the 'single' minority. The authors concluded that the 'double' minority status favours the emergence of alternative interpretations of deviant minority behaviours where an attribution of self-interest may be particularly predominant.

Yet, both in Nemeth & Wachtler's (1973) and in Maass *et al.*'s (1982) experiments, the intergroup context (which superimposes a categorization upon the divergence of beliefs) seems only to impede the influence of the minority which has been categorized as an out-group. Admittedly, our own research has often shown this to happen. But nevertheless, one should also envisage conditions in which the minority can still achieve an impact in spite of this categorization. Furthermore, in both studies above, the effects of such a categorization are explained solely in terms of an attribution process (self-interest in this case) and, no matter how correct, this explanation is only partial. Our endeavour, therefore, has been to propose a broader theoretical framework allowing integration of intergroup aspects with the approach of influence processes, in particular those of minorities; this is presented below.

The intergroup context of minority influence

In any innovation setting, at least three social agents are to be distinguished (Mugny, 1982): *the power*, understood in the broad sense of a dominant agent or norm within any kind of (often institutionalized) dominance relationship; *the population* (by analogy with the 'experimental populations' constituted by our subjects) which is considered as the target *par excellence* of majority as well as minority influence attempts; finally, *the minority* in respect of the norm and often of the number (as is usual in the case of active minorities). Different kinds of relationships can often coexist simultaneously among these three entities. Between power and population, domination is the essential form of relationship. Between power and minority it takes on the form of antagonism—the 'power' of minorities residing in their ability to generate social conflict. Finally, a relationship of social influence is deemed to take place between minority and population.

In such a context, a minority's behavioural consistency in its antagonistic relationship with the power constitutes its main argument in defining the outlines of an alternative. As various experiments have shown (see Moscovici, 1976; Moscovici & Mugny, 1983), the minority must be (and be seen as: cf. Nemeth & Wachtler, 1974) firm, stable, self-confident and autonomous in this antagonistic context. Consistency means breaking off relationships with the power, refusing to negotiate with it and upsetting the established norms and rules so as to create an imbalance in the social system.

But yet another notion, that of negotiation styles, is needed to fully understand the effects of consistency. In fact, minority consistency generates a conflict that faces not only the power, but also the population which is the target of its potential influence. This is because the population, inserted in the established relationship of domination, often shares, at least to some degree, the dominant ideology displayed by the power (for an example, see Mugny, 1975). Thus, the population also will be affected by the social conflict that the minority's consistent alternative induces, and in this case the minority will have to show some flexibility, not rigidity, in order to exert its influence (Mugny, 1982).

Special attention must furthermore be paid to how minority behaviour is perceived and interpreted. These social representations have been shown to be heavily dependent on the social context of innovation discussed earlier. In fact, due to its being dominated in its

relationship with the power entity, the population is well equipped to construct interpretations of deviance derived from the dominant ideology. A dominant interpretation tends to attribute the causes of minority innovative behaviours to idiosyncratic characteristics (individualization) or personal psychological dispositions (psychologization) of the minority source (see Papastamou, 1983). These strategies are used in emphasizing the minority's negative attributes in terms of social deviance rather than its possibly positive attributes in terms of social originality (Moscovici & Lage, 1978; Mugny *et al.*, 1981). It is evident that these mechanisms of resistance in the dominant ideology which oppose the diffusion of minority innovations are in themselves yet another set of intergroup discriminations that profoundly mark the influence processes.

Social identification and minority influence

When a consistent minority is perceived as rigid it is also perceived as excluding all positions diverging from its own. The targets are then led to feel excluded in advance, without the possibility of seeking a reconciliation. In fact, the minority is categorized (in Tajfel's sense, 1972) as an out-group whose (dogmatic: see Ricateau, 1970–1971) attributes justify discrimination. In this situation, social influence behaviours (rejection or *status quo*) really constitute intergroup discriminations which are obvious at the level of explicit influence. We must then assume that the perceived rigidity prevents the targets from reaching an awareness of a common membership with the minority (see Mugny & Papastamou, 1982) which would enable them to function in terms of their own social identity. Conversely, a flexible minority is able to exert overt influence because, despite initial ideological differences or oppositions, it offers to the targets the opportunity of recognizing some of the elements of common membership in a way similar to the criss-crossing of categorizations (Deschamps, 1977; Deschamps & Doise, 1978).

This means that social influence behaviours imply not only the adoption by the population of the specific new responses proposed by the minority, but also some changes in its identification. Paraphrasing the referential informational influence model of Turner (1981), we have then been led to consider that in any social influence situation the influence target defines the influence source as belonging to one or more specific social groups or categories as it defines itself as belonging to one or more specific social groups or categories. The target knows the stereotypical characteristics of these social groups or categories (note that in different situations different characteristics may be salient: for instance, in minority influence situations, originality vs. deviance, etc.); and when the target adopts (or even merely approaches) the specific new response proposed by the source, it cognitively assigns to itself not only this specific response but also the stereotypical characteristics of the source that have become psychologically salient in the influence setting.

In summary, the target presumably redefines its psychosocial identity, at least in its overt responses. Considering that the innovation context usually emphasizes the negative characteristics of the minority and that individuals tend to seek positive social identity (Turner, 1981), one can easily understand why direct minority influence so often fails to reach its goal. For, in such circumstances, the social cost (Larsen, 1974) of identifying with the minority would be too high.

The intergroup bias can be opposed

So far we have seen that the influence mechanisms of the minority rest to a large extent on psychosocial categorization and identification processes, producing certain effects that are similar to pro in-group favouritism and differentiation from the out-group, to which the minority is often assimilated. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that minority

influence is practically non-existent. We suggest that such intergroup discrimination, as well as pro in-group bias in social influence situations, depends heavily on (a) the (minority) source's styles of influence, and (b) the public or private character of the response.

(a) *Intergroup discrimination and influence style of the source*

A minority cannot behave in the same way on the inside as on the outside of the group. When a minority is (or is perceived to be) an out-group, it should be more influential if it is flexible rather than rigid. On the contrary, when a minority is categorized as belonging to a pertinent in-group, its being more rigid should increase its influence. This follows from Moscovici's intuition (1976, p. 147) that:

... within one's own group, if it is a minority, the dogmatic style of behaviour is adequate. The fair style becomes important only when there are contacts between majority and minority, or with another group. Or, the first style is compatible with intragroup relations, the second style is compatible with inter-group relations. In brief, within a group, rigidity is effective: apart from a few exceptions, the more rigid the style, the more influence it will exert. In external relations, however, the 'fair' style, equally firm and consistent, must be used in order to affect the social environment.

This intuition fits in very well with the categorization model. We may suppose that, when the subjects consider the minority to be full members of their identification group or category, the greater the conflict the greater the subjects' urge to approach the minority's position in order to re-establish a consensus regarding the characteristics common to the in-group. And conversely, for an out-group minority, the greater the disagreement the greater the importance of 'marking the difference', i.e. of discriminating.

These hypotheses have been confirmed in an experiment (Mugny *et al.*, in press) concerning attitudes towards the presence of foreigners in Switzerland. Before completing an attitude questionnaire, the subjects read a text produced by a minority that was strongly in favour of foreigners. The following three experimental variables are essential to our present discussion: (1) subjects were either of Swiss or of foreign national identity; (2) the minority source was presented as either of Swiss or of foreign national identity; (3) the argument used in making the pro-foreigner demands (the same demands in all conditions) was either more flexible (built around humanitarian considerations and justifying the demands in terms of the necessity to respect human dignity and fundamental humanitarian principles) or more conflictual (formulated in terms of workers' rights).

Two important effects are relevant to our demonstration: first, an interaction appeared between the source's national identity and the nature of its argument. The Swiss minority was more influential when using a more conflictual argument rather than a less conflictual one. The reverse was true for the foreign minority: when arguing on humanitarian grounds it obtained more influence than when it did so in a more conflictual manner. Secondly, a second-degree interaction between the three variables considered here indicated that the interaction effect between the source's identity and the nature of its argument was due essentially to the Swiss subjects who, furthermore, were less favourable to foreigners than foreign subjects. This confirmed a secondary hypothesis of a stronger identification process in subjects with a more crystallized identity and for whom the question of identification would be the most salient in such a situation of influence—the Swiss in this instance.

These results suggest that, even though intergroup discrimination does in fact underlie social influence processes, such discrimination may nevertheless be modulated by the source's behavioural styles thus leading to greater or lesser influence. We believe that this question of reciprocal effect between social influence processes (through various behavioural styles) and intergroup discriminations may open up a most promising new line of research.

(b) *Intergroup relations and conversion phenomena*

As we have seen until now, it is not without difficulty that a minority exercises its influence. Direct, public or open minority influence is not easily achieved. It depends to a large extent on the discriminatory climate of intergroup relations in which social influence is to take place, and on the identification process involved in being socially influenced, both these intergroup dynamics being in turn affected by the minority's behavioural style. Let us now briefly consider the latent influence effects—not necessarily regulated by discriminatory principles—that such intergroup conflicts may produce.

Since early research on minority influence (Moscovici *et al.*, 1969), it has become more and more evident that its effects are more often latent than manifest. This latent quality of minority influence has been viewed as an effect of conversion (Moscovici, 1980) characterized by the fact that it is most likely to show up when (a) the conflict induced by the minority is powerful, and (b) the measure of influence upon attitudes or judgements is taken after a lapse of time (for details on the 'sleeper effect', see Moscovici *et al.*, 1981).

Since the minority is frequently assimilated with an out-group, it is legitimate to suppose that achieving such an effect of indirect influence would be typical of sources categorized as out-groups. Several experiments about the influence of minorities have been specifically devoted to the study of the indirect or delayed effects that a minority source, explicitly categorized as an out-group, is able to produce. They all converge in showing that, even though such a source finds it difficult to exert direct influence, the presence of indirect influence (Aebischer, 1984; Pérez & Mugny, in press) or delayed influence (Mugny *et al.*, 1983) can nevertheless be detected.

A tentative explanation of these recent findings can be suggested by making a distinction between two forms of identification: (1) an identification *sensu stricto*, defined by the self-attribution of the source's characteristics which were made salient in the influence situation itself; (2) an identification *sensu lato*, defined by the subject's representation of his or her own position in a social field which has been redefined as a consequence of the minority's intervention. The mere fact that a minority gains recognition as a possible alternative in a social field, notwithstanding its lack of direct influence, brings about a cognitive activity that reshuffles the field's categories and reassigns different characteristics to the various entities which have been newly identified and differentiated in this process. Thus, even though it may be deprived of direct influence, the minority source seems to act upon the entire social field and hence on the significance that previously or newly expressed opinions and judgements may have in identifying with it. This is why a minority is seldom without having gained some social impact.

Conclusion

The lesson deriving from this discussion is clear: social influence processes in general, and minority influence in particular, are also governed by intergroup discrimination and identification rules. However, dominated entities, be they minorities or simply out-groups, possess an essential 'power' to question their being discriminated against and to achieve social change: their behaviour and negotiation styles, and their ability to induce and negotiate social conflict. This is an example of how research on intergroup relations and research on (minority) influence may both profit from attempting to articulate their particular approaches at the theoretical level. For our part, we have greatly benefited from having been in contact with the ideas of the late, and sadly lamented, Henri Tajfel.

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