

Majority and Minority Influence

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Abstract

The study of minority influence has advanced considerably since the late 1960s when Moscovici's pioneering efforts brought the minority's role in the process of persuasion and social influence to the forefront. Moscovici's (1980) insight that the underlying processes of majority and minority influence are quite different has been supported, but the steady pace of research has uncovered various unanticipated findings not easily explained by his conversion theory. In this review, we track recent developments and debates in the field, and consider some major explanatory models of minority influence and their differential postulates regarding cognitive processing and attitude change. We pay particular attention to Crano's (2001) leniency contract model, which details the specific conditions under which majorities and minorities impart influence. Finally, we advance some novel postulates regarding the persuasive impact of out-group minorities.

Up to the late 1960s, social psychologists largely neglected the influence potential of the minority. This inattentiveness presumably was based on the supposition that only the majority could impart influence in a group. Moscovici's pioneering work challenged this perspective and showcased the influence power of a hitherto-benched player – the minority. The well-known green/blue studies of Moscovici, Lage, and Naffrechoux (1969) showed that minorities were capable of influencing judgments of apparently basic perceptions. He asserted that the minority could be a potent source of influence in promoting innovation and change (Moscovici, 1994; Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972). How else would laws change or social norms evolve if the minority had no influential effect on the majority? The distinctive insights and consistent advocacy by the minority spurs change that eventually leads to innovation. Meanwhile, the majority was seen as preoccupied with exerting its power to preserve preexisting norms by eliciting (public) compliance (Moscovici, 1980).

That a minority can influence is no longer a subject of debate among most social psychologists, but who, and under what conditions it can exert influence is the topic of considerable and continuing discussion (Crano & Seyranian, 2007; Mackie, 1987; Martin & Hewstone, forthcoming; Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994). The original explanatory

model, Moscovici's conversion theory (1980, 1985), explains the impact of the minority on people's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors through a dual-process model of influence. His theory holds that being at odds with the majority or minority creates inner turmoil, which results in a motivation to reduce conflict. People want to be identified with the majority owing to its control of resources (rewards, information) and to avoid the potential ostracism and ridicule by the majority if one adopts the minority position. When confronted with a counterattitudinal majority, a *comparison process* occurs that leads to compliance: individuals compare the majority's position with their own to determine correspondence. They publicly comply with the majority position without thorough examination of message content because their focus is on sustaining relations with the majority. Conversely, because the minority is distinctive, it captures attention and curiosity even though minority identification is shunned. As such, people attempt to understand the discrepancy between their position and the minority through a *validation process* that leads to conversion. Message content is closely analyzed through effortful consideration, producing an eventual attitude conversion that is indirect rather than direct, private rather than public, and delayed rather than immediate.

The scientific contribution of conversion theory cannot be overstated; it has served as a springboard for almost all minority influence research in Europe and North America. Nevertheless, many unanticipated findings have fallen outside conversion theory's explanatory boundaries. Today, debate surrounds the question of the *cognitive processes* involved in minority influence (e.g., heuristic versus systematic processing) and *the type* of attitude change (focal or indirect, immediate or delayed) that a minority effects. For any model to resolve the uneven literature, it must account for:

- The conditions under which minority messages are elaborated
- When ingroup versus outgroup minorities prevail
- When the minority will have an immediate effect
- If and when minority effects are delayed
- When the minority has no persuasive impact
- The conditions under which a change on the targeted belief will follow a minority message, and when change on an indirect attitude (which is related to the focal attitude but not identical to it) will occur

Satisfying these requirements is the aim of the context/comparison model (Crano, 2001) and of one of its components, the leniency contract (Crano & Alvaro, 1998a). This approach will receive particular attention in this review, alongside several other proposed modifications to conversion theory.

Cognitive Processing, Attitude Formation, and Attitude Change

Moscovici's (1980, 1985) theory stimulated minority influence researchers to examine the conditions under which messages attributed to majority

or minority groups elicit differential cognitive elaboration. Conversion theory held that majorities initiated low-effort cognitive processes through comparison, which resulted in compliance, whereas minorities elicit higher-effort message scrutiny through validation ending in conversion to the minority position. Advances in persuasion research (e.g., elaboration likelihood model of persuasion, see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; the heuristic/systematic model, Chaiken, 1980) changed how researchers viewed comparison and validation processes, and require modifications of the original conversion model. According to the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion, when one is sufficiently motivated to process a message, effortful message scrutiny is used (central route processing, also known as high elaboration, or in heuristic/systematic model language, systematic processing). This processing strategy not only induces attitude change, but strong attitudes are likely to result from effortful and intense message consideration (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Without motivation to elaborate a message, a less effortful cognitive processing strategy, peripheral processing (also known as low elaboration, or in heuristic/systematic model language, heuristic processing), is employed. Instead of closely scrutinizing message content, peripheral cues such as source credibility are used to assess the validity of the message, which may result in attitude change. However, such attitudes are weak and susceptible to subsequent revision.

Some minority influence researchers have drawn parallels between Moscovici's (1980) comparison versus validation processes with low versus high elaboration (De Dreu & De Vries, 1993; Martin, Hewstone, & Martin, 2003). This creative extension of conversion theory suggests that minority messages may induce systematic processing of message content. Conversely, by virtue of its perceived credibility and power, the majority prompts heuristic processing without close message scrutiny. This understanding of majority and minority influence only provides a partial picture, which as will be seen, appears to hold only under restricted conditions. Research suggests that high message elaboration may be used in response to messages of both the majority (De Dreu & De Vries, 1996; Mackie, 1987) and minorities (Kerr, 2002; Martin et al., 2003), and under some conditions, both majority and minority messages are processed peripherally (Martin & Hewstone, 2003). Thus, *whether* majorities or minorities induce cognitive elaboration is less at issue than *when* each one does, and what outcomes ensue.

To account for this apparently rocky data topography, researchers have advanced a series of modifications to conversion theory. Some of these revisionist models are more or less in line with the postulates of conversion theory (Martin et al., 2003); others differ markedly (Mackie, 1987). For example, in combining the predictions of conversion theory with the elaboration likelihood model, Martin et al. found that minority messages on euthanasia were processed systematically, resulting in strong attitudes that were resistant to counterpersuasion, persistent over time, and predictive of behavior. In the absence of situations encouraging message scrutiny

(e.g., negative personal outcomes), majority messages were processed heuristically, leading to weaker attitudes that were susceptible to counter-persuasion, less persistent over time, and not predictive of behavior. However, a complication that weakens enthusiasm for conversion theory was presented in another study by Martin and Hewstone (2003), which showed that minorities could produce immediate and direct change on the focal issue. This finding is at variance with conversion theory's prediction that minorities institute indirect attitude change, but delayed focal change.

Mackie's (1987) social consensus treatment of influence diverges most markedly from conversion theory. It predicts high elaboration as well as direct and indirect attitude change for majority but not minority messages. Why? People expect consensus, or anticipate that everyone agrees with their position. Crano (1983) showed this especially likely with highly vested beliefs. When the majority's message is counterattitudinal, people's expectations of consensus are violated to a larger degree than counterattitudinal minority messages (in fact, counterattitudinal minority messages are more in line with expectations); thus, a lack of consensus with the majority stimulates message processing. Assuming that the majority's position is construed as valid, elaboration prompts both direct and indirect attitude change. On the other hand, Nemeth (1986) suggests that *both* majority and minority messages are cognitively elaborated, albeit differently. Majorities elicit convergent processing (i.e., converging with and understanding the majority viewpoint), which may induce direct attitude change. Minorities stimulate divergent processing (considering alternative viewpoints), possibly spurring indirect, but not direct, attitude change.

Building on the social consensus perspective with the notion of convergent/divergent processing, De Dreu and De Vries (1993, 1996) and De Dreu, De Vries, Gordijn, and Schuurman (1999) suggested that direct change on the focal issue occurred through systematic processing of majority messages. Because people's expectations regarding consensus are violated with counterattitudinal majority messages, targets elaborate the message via convergent processes to understand the majority position. In the course of convergent processing, focal change may occur. Conversely, counterattitudinal messages from minorities promote heuristic processing, except when situational factors (e.g., high involvement; De Dreu & De Vries, 1996) motivate receivers to scrutinize minority messages systematically. Then, people will consider alternatives via divergent processing, which may result in change on related issues, but not the focal issue.

The conflict elaboration theory of Pérez and Mugny (1996) also suggests that majorities spur convergent thinking while minority influence involves divergent processing, but only when individuals are making aptitude judgments. Aptitude judgments involve tasks that have only one (unclear) correct answer. For aptitude judgments tasks, conflict elaboration is concerned with increasing the likelihood of obtaining the correct answer

and showing a positive image of abilities. When exposed to high competence (i.e., majority) sources, conflict is almost nonexistent; the source's position is adopted virtually without question through convergent processing. Intense convergent processing of the majority's message may even spur indirect attitude change or generalization of the position to related tasks. Low competence sources (i.e., minority) rouse uncertainty and create a conflict of incompetence – one is unsure whether to trust the competence of the source or oneself. The perceived incompetence of the source ensures no direct attitude change. However, divergent processing and validation of the minority's message may spur indirect influence in problem-solving such that multiple considerations are used to achieve a solution to the task (Mugny, Butera, Sanchez-Mazas, & Pérez, 1995).

Other explanatory models highlight the impact of the *type* of minority advocate in determining cognitive processing and subsequent influence. Yet there is disagreement on how minority messages are cognitively processed. For instance, Kerr's (2002) research shows that active minorities incite systematic message processing, whereas majorities encourage heuristic processing when topics are not highly self-relevant. Baron and Bellman (2007) did not replicate this finding, and suggested that courageous (similar to active) minorities provide heuristic cues of credibility and commitment that encourages targets to process their messages heuristically (for a compatible interpretation, see Kruglanski & Mackie, 1990).

How is this incongruous state of affairs to be put to rights? We believe the context/comparison and its the leniency contract component (Crano, 2001; Crano & Alvaro, 1998b; Crano & Chen, 1998; Crano & Hannula-Bral, 1994) provide a broad theoretical basis that integrates some of these seemingly contrary models and findings. According to the context/comparison model, different types of attitude processes (attitude formation versus attitude change) and perceptions of the subjective or objective nature of the issue under consideration determine the type of cognitive processing that will ensue, as well as the likelihood that the minority or majority will prevail. As most of the research reviewed to this point involves objective issues, we will focus on the implications for well-formed versus weak (or non-) attitudes in majority- and minority-induced attitude change for objective issues (for a detailed discussion of the context/comparison model's predictions on minority/majority effects for subjective issues, see Crano, 1994; Crano, forthcoming; Crano & Hannula-Bral, 1994; Crano & Seyranian, 2007; Gorenflo & Crano, 1989). Objective issues refer to the *perception* or belief that there is a right or wrong position on an issue. Thus, individuals who are convinced that capital punishment is wrong, that it must be abolished, and that there are compelling reasons for this position, may be seen as holding views that are self-defined as objective. Objective choices are different from subjective ones, which are perceived clearly as matters of preference or palate (white wine or red?). Subjective issues concern choices seen as involving personal preferences, not verifiable, right or wrong

judgments. Issues perceived as corrigible, as capable of correction, do not fall into the category we label as subjective – they are objective issues.

Objective Issues: Formation versus Change in the Context/Comparison Model

In attitude *formation* contexts (i.e., when the attitude is not well developed), attitude strength by definition is not great. In contrast, in attitude *change* contexts, the attitude may be well established and held with some degree of vested interest (Crano, 1995, 1997; Crano & Burgoon, 2001). When a strong attitude is attacked, conflict (Moscovici, 1980, 1994; Pérez & Mugny, 1996) is aroused and some type of defense will be mounted, whether it is in the form of counterargumentation, source derogation, biased processing, or distortion. Conversely, in attitude formation contexts, there is by definition little conflict and not much to defend, as targets have no strong position and little vested interest or involvement in the message topic. Crano and Hannula-Bral (1994) hypothesized that the unexpectedness of a minority group's message may facilitate attention and possible acceptance in such contexts, and their prediction was supported. Findings by Martin and Hewstone (2003) also appear supportive of the counterintuitive possibility that the minority might enjoy a *persuasive advantage* in some situations. When their persuasive message focused on a topic in which participants probably had only a weak attitude at best (euthanasia), and little vested interest, strong minority messages were more influential on focal attitudes than majority messages. Moreover, attitudes formed as result of minority (versus majority) influence seemed more resistant to subsequent persuasion, and more likely to persist and predict behavior (Martin et al., 2003). In attitude formation contexts, then, minority messages appear to be systematically processed, as classic conversion theory would predict. However, contrary to conversion-based expectations, this minority effect on the focal attitude is not delayed – it occurs immediately.

When dealing with well-formed and well-vested attitudes (e.g., when British students were queried about converting from the pound to the euro), a different picture emerged. Martin and Hewstone (2003) showed that strong messages delivered by a majority had a more immediate impact on targets' focal attitudes than the same messages attributed to a minority. In addition, minority messages were processed heuristically in attitude change contexts, whereas majority messages were processed systematically. This result was corroborated by De Dreu and De Vries (1993, 1996) and De Dreu et al. (1999), who attacked established attitudes in their experiments (e.g., increasing course load in university; requiring university admission exams) and found similar variations in majority versus minority cognitive processing strategies. Their studies also consistently suggest that in attitude change contexts, minority messages may spur indirect change. This finding is consistent with the predictions of classical conversion theory as well as

the leniency contract, which details majority and minority influence only in the context of attitude change.

The Leniency Contract: Majority/Minority Effects for Attitude Change

In classic conversion theory, the majority is thought to impart influence by threatening ridicule or ostracism. Its effects are predicted to persist so long as the majority maintains surveillance. This is a sensible position, but it begs a number of questions. For example, why should targets care if, say, 88% of a particular group holds a particular position, or judges a particular slide to be green rather than blue? In these cases, there is no direct or implied threat, and little chance the majority is watching. If majority influence truly depends on pressure and surveillance alone, it would seem that mass-mediated majority appeals would not stand much chance, yet there is plenty of evidence that such messages can have profound effects (Atkin, 2002).

Two added problems with classic conversion theory vis-à-vis the data at hand (see also Crano, 1994) is that it does not allow for persistent change when majority surveillance is relaxed, nor does it explain why the majority sometimes fails to exert any influence whatsoever. The leniency contract was developed to address these theoretical shortcomings. It suggests that for objective issues, the implication of influence on self-definitions may explain why majority appeals (such as mass-mediated messages) have marked effects. It may not only be the sheer weight of the majority itself that applies influence, although, in some cases, this may be true (Crano & Alvaro, 1998a); the perceived implications of influence for one's own self-definitions also may exert pressure to change. That being said, let us turn to the leniency contract, which depicts the theoretical decision points that must be traversed on the route to attitude change or resistance.

Majority Influence

The model begins with the assumption that on objective judgments, attributing a communication to a source of majority or minority status initiates a series of systematic and predictable cognitive responses. Mentioning the majority or minority status of an influence source changes the persuasion context from cold cognitive elaboration to one involving interpersonal issues of self-identity and group belongingness (see Tajfel, 1981). Involving the self changes the persuasion context from one of information processing to motivated elaboration, because succumbing to, or resisting, an influence source now has implications for one's self-definition. This implies that elaboration of messages includes consideration of the in-group and out-group status of the majority or minority source. An *in-group* is a social group that one belongs to, whereas a group of which one is not a member is

referred to as an *out-group* (Sumner, 1906). As David and Turner (1999, 2001) demonstrated, whether a minority or majority source is construed as an in-group or an out-group affects how individuals respond to counterattitudinal messages. These researchers' studies demonstrated that in-groups possess more potential to influence than out-groups (Turner, 1991; but see Pérez & Mugny, 1987, for a different observation).

To understand the approach taken, let us begin with considerations of people's responses to influence levied by the majority, on issues deemed objective by the influence target. The left side of the model in Figure 1 outlines a series of decision points that allow prediction of transient, lasting, or no compliance to majority influence. The target of influence is assumed to be part of the majority. The model suggests that when confronted with majority-sourced pronouncements, people decide whether the majority group is self-relevant: does membership in the majority play a significant role in the individual's social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)? Self-relevance is evaluated based on what compliance or resistance to the majority message implies in terms of the individual's own position in the majority group (Crano, 2001). For instance, membership at a public speaking club may not be valued and seen as unimportant to how a target defines him or herself; therefore, compromising one's position in the group poses little threat. Should the majority group be of little consequence to one's self-definition (low self-relevance), majority pressure will fail. However, suppose the group is relevant to the target's identity. Then, the next decision point concerns the legitimacy of majority pressure. Is the majority a legitimate source of influence on the topic at hand? Is the issue pertinent to the majority group, its scope of knowledge and concerns? Perceptions of legitimacy depend on whether or not the majority is deemed an appropriate source of information on the critical issue (Crano, 2001). A member of a club football team might be influenced by the group's consensual decision to use Adidas, even though the individual might favor Pumas. In this instance, majority pressure might be judged legitimate, thus encouraging further elaboration. However, suppose the majority of the soccer club were to argue that it was the duty of all members to vote for a particular political party in a coming election. The target might feel that politics and football were not mutually relevant, and thus the pressure exerted by the club was illegitimate. In that instance, the attempt would fail. The target would disengage from the group, psychologically if not physically, and no change would occur. Indeed, research by Tormala and Petty (2002, 2004) on the ramifications of successful resistance suggests that in some circumstances the majority might lose value in the eyes of the unmoved influence target, and find its subsequent persuasion attempts met with strong resistance.

Suppose, however, that the majority's counterattitudinal message is judged both self-relevant and legitimate. Then, the target will consider the message carefully and message strength becomes important. Elaboration

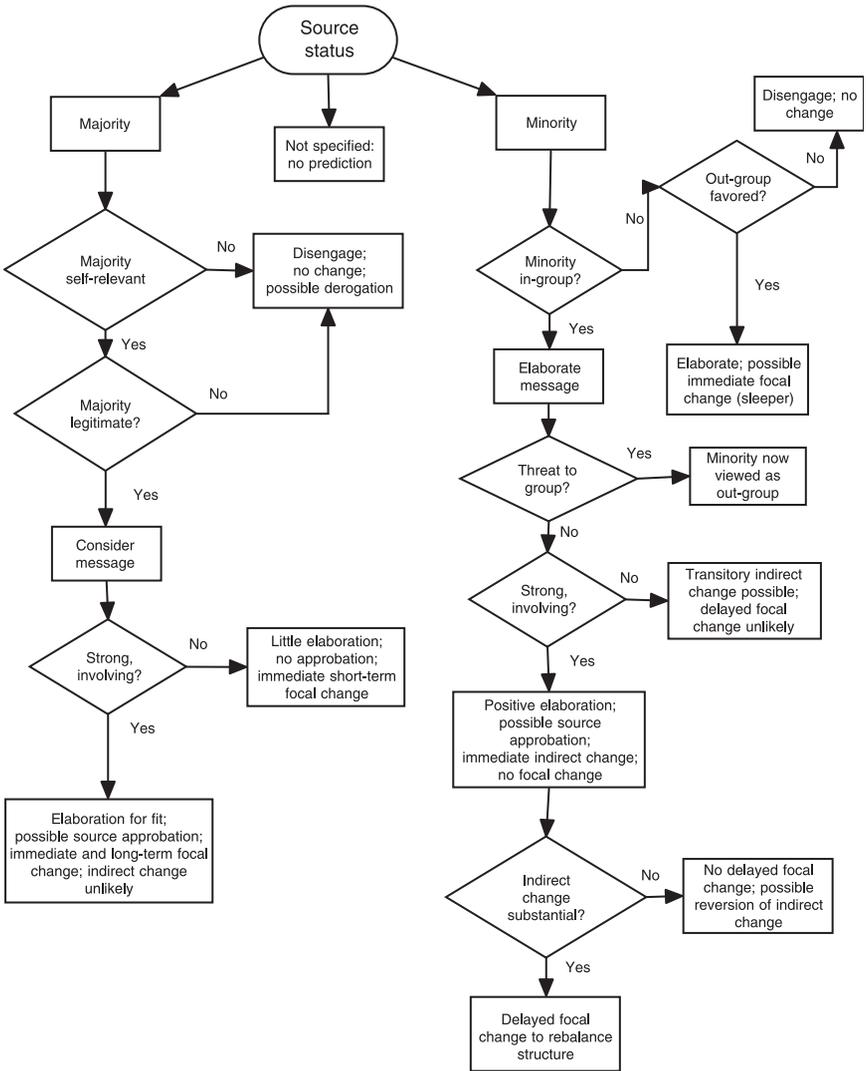


Figure 1 Context/categorization model with leniency contract: Attitude change for objective judgments.

of a weak message will result in a weak response. The targeted individual will change in response to the message, given its self-relevance (for group membership) and legitimacy, but the change will not persist (compliance). If the message is strong, elaboration will produce both immediate and persistent change on the focal issue. Past research provides empirical evidence of these effects (Baker & Petty, 1994; Crano & Chen, 1998; De Dreu & De Vries, 1993; Mackie, 1987). Such change will not

spread to related beliefs, because the elaboration that occurs in this circumstance is an *elaboration for fit*, rather than an *elaboration for gist*. Its purpose is not to absorb the essence of the message, but to determine how to act so as to bolster one's membership in the group (see Crano & Alvaro, 1998a, b). The work of Prislin, Limbert, and Bauer (2000) and Prislin, Brewer, and Wilson (2002) demonstrates the strong pull of majority membership. The motive for elaboration here is to learn how best to present oneself to ensure continued group approval. For this reason, even if the majority's message is adopted, it will not influence related beliefs, because its adoption is motivated by concerns for self-presentation rather than validity.

Minority Influence

Out-group minorities

The picture changes considerably when the counterattitudinal message is attributed to a minority. In this case, pressure to comply is minimal, but this is not to suggest that the minority cannot persuade. In minority influence contexts, the target's initial reaction is to determine the status of the minority. Is the minority in-group? If not (see Figure 1), a series of follow-up decisions ensue. The first is concerned with a specification of the out-group categorization. Is the out-group privileged in some way? If not, and if it does not appear to pose a threat to the in-group, its message is dismissed (see David & Turner, 1999, 2001). Its impact is so trivial that its rejection is not translated into further out-group rejection. Should an unfavored out-group be perceived as a threat, its messages may not be treated nonchalantly. Threats are attempted obstructions to the survival or central goals of the group, which often are understood as attacks on group identity. If the threat is great, people may feel that group identity requires bolstering, lest the group fall prey to the out-group position and risk dissolution. As such, threat may motivate attempted comprehension of the out-group message to facilitate the mounting of defenses (counterargumentation) to protect the group. This would necessitate elaboration of the out-group message. Individuals may employ *defensive elaboration* simultaneously to understand and derogate the out-group position. Thus, a cognitive filter of argument negation would be employed during message elaboration; that is, messages would be processed so that they could be negated and discredited. Defensive elaboration not only inoculates (McGuire, 1964) group members from influence, but may polarize. The outcome of such a process is similar to a contrast effect (see Tormala & Petty, 2007), whereby an influence target's shifts away from the position advocated by the (out-group) source.

Although these propositions await direct test, past research suggests their plausibility. In the presence of threat, out-group members are evaluated

more negatively than in nonthreatening situations (Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993). When an out-group minority is evaluated negatively, its influence potential is greatly diminished (Martin, 1992).

If the out-group is favored or privileged, its position is considered and may have an immediate effect that fades over time, as it is not based on strong elaboration. Favored out-groups are groups of high status or of high regard, but they do not play a role in the target's identity. The types of sources used by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) in studies of high source credibility fit this description.

In-group minorities

If the minority is in-group, a different process is brought online. A counterattitudinal message delivered by a member of one's in-group is surprising precisely because it is nonnormative. As such, the receiver is motivated to understand why the message was delivered and what it entails – in short, to elaborate it. The first goal of elaboration is concerned with the continuance of the group. If the group serves a social identity function, it is important that it remain viable. Thus, a central concern is whether or not the message is a threat to the group's existence. If it is, and the minority cannot be dissuaded, its message is rejected and the in-group minority is seen as out-group (Kerr, 2002; Kerr & Tindale, 2004). The response to turncoats often is extreme (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988).

Such extreme responses are rare, however, probably because in-group minorities seldom propose positions that threaten to destroy the groups from which they derive their identities (Alvaro & Crano, 1996) and in-group attitude variability is an anticipated part of group life (Jones, Wood, & Quattrone, 1981; Worchel, Grossman, & Coutant, 1994), especially in majority groups (Mullen & Su, 1989). In the more common case, in which the minority's message is not seen as a threat to the group's viability, the next decision point concerns the strength of the message itself. With Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the leniency model holds that message strength plays a major role in determining the course of persuasion. Elaborating a weak message will have relatively little effect. The focal attitude will not be changed. Possibly, related issues might be swayed in the direction of the gist of the message, but these changes will be transitory. However, suppose the in-group minority's message is strong and persuasive. In this case, although focal change will not transpire, attitudes associated with the focal issue will be affected. This prediction gives the leniency contract its name. The model holds that by virtue of its group membership, the in-group minority will stimulate relatively open-minded elaboration of its message. For this same reason, it is unlikely that the message source will be derogated. After all, the minority is in-group, part and parcel of one's own identity. To derogate the minority would be to derogate oneself. The research of

Alvaro and Crano (1996) supported this prediction. Counterattitudinal in-group messages generated more thoughts (suggesting high elaboration) in targets than majority or out-group minority messages. The content of these thoughts showed little evidence of derogation toward in-group minority messages. In fact, they were relatively more positive than the thoughts associated with majority and out-group minority messages. Under these conditions – open-minded elaboration without derogation – we might expect immediate focal change to ensue. It does not. The model predicts a lack of apparent effect, the result of an implied contract between the in-group minority and the majority receivers. This leniency contract stipulates a reasonable and courteous (lenient) hearing of the minority's position (Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997). In this way, the viability and cohesion of the group is maintained, much as politeness theory suggests strategies interactants use to facilitate social interchange (Brown, 1990). In recompense (this is, after all, a contract), the majority and minority implicitly understand that change is unlikely. Thus, the minority is accommodated, in that it is given a hearing without derogation, and the majority helps ensure the viability of the group by placating the minority while simultaneously maintaining its position. This leniency contract need not be explicit or even conscious. It is a convention that is a necessary feature of group maintenance. The contract allows considerable in-group variation on all nonvital issues, because in-group deviance is not viewed as a threat. Theoretically, cohesive groups would allow the greatest levels of in-group opinion deviance (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Capozza & Brown, 2000).

Indirect Attitude Change

This is not to suggest that the minority is an impotent agent of change (see Wood et al., 1994). The open-minded elaboration of a counterattitudinal message with little counterargument and no source derogation can create considerable change pressure. Although focal or direct change is contractually precluded, the reality of the pressure cannot be denied. The leniency model holds that this change pressure will spread to other, related, attitudes. Related or indirect attitude change, a common feature of minority influence research (Alvaro & Crano, 1997; Crano & Alvaro, 1998a; De Dreu & De Vries, 1993, 1996; Pérez & Mugny, 1987; Wood et al., 1994), is a result of this spread of effect. This proposition is consistent with considerable research on cognitive structure (Anderson, 1983; Judd, Drake, Downing, & Krosnick, 1991; McGuire & McGuire, 1991), and its plausibility rests on a few easily accepted assumptions. The first is that attitudes are not held in isolation, but are linked in the cognitive system. The second is that changing one attitude might have implications for other beliefs, especially those with which the modified attitude is linked strongly. As such, it seems reasonable to assume that applying change pressure to one attitude

might have implications for linked or proximal beliefs. Even if the targeted attitude does not change, those beliefs that are related to it might. Using multidimensional scaling analysis, Alvaro and Crano (1997) found a close linkage of attitudes toward homosexuals in the military and attitudes toward gun control. When change pressure was exerted by an in-group minority on attitudes toward gays in the military (the focal attitude), the message influenced attitudes toward gun control (indirect change), while leaving the focal attitude relatively unscathed. This indirect change could be both profound and insidious, insofar as one would not raise strong defenses to bolster an attitude that was not apparently under attack.

Delayed Focal Change

If we follow the argument of indirect change, then the leniency contract also provides an explication of delayed focal change as well. Delayed focal change implies that attitude change occurs precisely on the attitude that the persuasive message was designed to alter, but the change occurs with the passage of time. The leniency model, which assumes a structural relationship among beliefs within the cognitive system, presupposes that large changes in one component of the structure will have implications for changes in related components. A major change in one belief will affect the structural integrity of the system, in effect, throwing the system out of equilibrium. How is the system to right itself? Two means readily come to mind. The changed feature may regress to its original position. When change is minor, this seems likely. The inertia of the system would prove difficult to offset. However, when indirect change is profound, such an easy expedient probably is not available. In that instance, the structure itself would adjust. In theory, the attitudes most closely linked to the changed belief would become more congruous with it, thereby reestablishing equilibrium. A process like this could be expected to result in the delayed focal change that is commonly observed, and this is precisely what Crano and Chen (1998) found. Participants who showed the greatest indirect minority-induced attitude change exhibited delayed focal change. Delayed change, however, is not inevitable. It was absent in those whose related attitudes were moved only modestly by the minority. This pattern explains why some studies on delayed focal change produce positive results, whereas others fail to find the effect.

Concluding Remarks

Minority and majority influence is a critical area of inquiry for persuasion, social influence, and intergroup relations, but more importantly, it contributes to the scientific understanding of the dynamics underlying how norms are changed or preserved, how groups evolve or dissolve, and in what ways society innovates or stagnates. Knowledge of how people

respond to minorities (immediate, indirect, delayed) adds to our understanding of why societal innovation or norm changes (e.g., civil rights, gender equality, environmentalism) do not occur overnight and frequently are drawn out over time. It also explains why some out-group minorities may fail or possibly succeed under some conditions (see Crano, forthcoming; Pérez & Mugny, 1987; Pérez, Mugny, Butera, Kaiser, & Roux, 1994). Knowledge of how people respond to majorities – why and how the majority often predominates – speaks directly to mechanisms underlying how traditions, norms, and systems are sustained, to some extent by necessity to ensure some reliable structure in society that promotes a sense of collective security. Taken together, the study of majority and minority influence involves much more than an analysis of influence processes. In terms of its implications, the study of majority and minority influence speaks to the dynamic interplay occurring every day between forces that aim to preserve the status quo and those that summon change.

Thanks to the Moscovici's pioneering work, almost five decades of research has been devoted to unveiling the influence potential of the minority. Still, the field is in its infancy and much remains to be explored. The context/comparison model provides a broad theoretical basis to reconcile inconsistent findings in the literature and draws attention to variables that have been neglected and their complex interplay. The attitude formation versus attitude change context, the subjective versus objective nature of the task, the in-group/out-group status of the majority and minority, the self-relevance and legitimacy of the majority, and the evaluations of the minority and perceptions of threat, all play decisive roles in the persuasion process. As a component of the context/comparison model, the leniency contract is presented to further the exploration of minority (and majority) influence for objective issues that require attitude change. The leniency contract details the conditions under which persuasive messages will be elaborated or not, when and if attitude change occurs, and what types of change ensue. It is our hope that this exposition will provide important insights into the question of what encourages us to change or not and how it is done.

Short Biography

William D. Crano is Oskamp Professor of Psychology at Claremont Graduate University. His work has focused on persuasion, and recently on the development of models concerned with minority and majority group influence. His applied work is concerned with the application of principles of persuasion to prevention of drug abuse in children and adolescents. Outside the academy, he served as the Program Director in Social Psychology for the National Science Foundation, as Liaison Scientist for the Office of Naval Research, London, as North Atlantic Treaty Organization Senior Scientist, University of Southampton, and was a Fulbright Fellow to

the Federal University–Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil. He was founder/director of the Center for Evaluation and Assessment, Michigan State University, and directed the Public Policy Resources Laboratory of Texas A&M University. Crano's research is currently funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. He has written/edited 11 books, which have been translated into three languages, more than 30 book chapters, and more than 200 scholarly articles and scientific presentations. He is the past chairman of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology, and is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the American Psychological Society, and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. He serves on two review panels for the National Institutes of Health, and is on the editorial boards of three journals in social psychology and communication.

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Endnote

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