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Dimensions of Majority and Minority Groups

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Several definitions of majority and minority groups can be found in the social psychological literature. They involve numeric size, power/status, and counternormative position, but size is most commonly used in experimental research to manipulate minority/minority status. Does this practice mirror real-world conceptualizations? To address this question, 77 participants were asked to describe majority and minority groups using a structured open-ended measure. Content analysis of their responses revealed that majority and minority groups were conceptualized along eight dimensions, which included power, number, distinctiveness, social category, group context, dispositions, and being the source or target of behavior. Although these dimensions were relevant to both majorities and minorities, they often were applied differentially. Also, minorities were associated with more divergent thinking and viewed more negatively than were majorities. On the basis of these findings, a new typology of groups was proposed that could be used in future experimental research to advance our understanding of majorities and minorities.

KEYWORDS   group dynamics, indirect influence, minority groups, persuasive communication, social groups, social influence

How do we define majority and minority groups? Across cultures, the words 'majority' and 'minority' traditionally have represented different ends of various group dimensions. Besides denoting numeric size, these terms have acquired socioreligious (minority heretics), sociopolitical (majority rule), socioeconomic (majority share), and sociodemographic (ethnic minority) connotations. The terms majority and minority also reflect positive or negative social conditions and treatment. *Minority* denotes negatively stigmatized, ostracized, oppressed, and outcast individuals or groups (Blanz, Mummendey, & Otten, 1995), or counternormative groups (Moscovici, 1976, 1994), whereas *majority* denotes positively valued or high status groups

(Tajfel, 1981). Across definitions of majority and minority are themes that distinguish these groups in terms of their power, numeric size, group features, opinions, group benefits, and group conditions and treatment. Although these multifaceted views of majority and minority groups have received some theoretical attention (Kruglanski & Mackie, 1990; Moscovici, 1994), no previous studies to our knowledge have focused on

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how people actually define majority and minority groups. That is the aim of our research.

Defining Majority and Minority Groups

Several classic areas of research in social psychology, such as social influence (Asch, 1956), persuasion-based attitude change (Moscovici, 1976), prejudice and discrimination (Allport, 1954), social identity and social change (Tajfel, 1981), group cohesion (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950), social conflict (Lewin, 1948), social movements (Cantril, 1941), and social harmony (Sherif & Sherif, 1961), were generated from considerations of majority and minority group dynamics *as they operate in the real world.* Nevertheless, consensus about how to define these groups has yet to emerge. Moscovici's (1976) pioneering research on minority group influence had the greatest impact in spurring interest in and research on both majority and minority groups (Martin & Hewstone, 2001; Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994), yet the disparity between his multifaceted theoretical conception and the operationalization of these group types (simply in terms of size) has set a research precedent that is still evident. Moscovici (1994) actually distinguished and defined majority and minority groups in terms of their size, counternormativeness, and treatment. Although numeric size may *theoretically* capture all of these variations, that possibility is far from established. Does size alone really imply the counternormativeness of a group's position, or its distinctiveness, stigma, marginalization, or treatment? Small size may be correlated with these features, but many counterexamples suggest that size is a poor proxy for them. Small, yet powerful elite groups (e.g. the British in India in the 1800s) are not subject to the same treatment as other small groups (Aborigines, Native Americans), or oppressed large groups (Blacks in South Africa under Apartheid). Research on real-world conceptualizations of majority and minority groups might help to clarify these discrepancies. It also could bolster the field's capacity to solve real problems involving majorities and minorities.

Laboratory studies of majority and minority groups

In the social psychological literature, majority and minority groups usually are defined in terms of size (Leonardelli & Brewer, 2001), power and/or status (Blanz, Mummendey, Mielke, & Klink, 1998; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991; Tajfel, 1981), or counternormative stance (Schachter, 1951; Moscovici, 1994). Following Asch's (1956) seminal work on social influence processes and pioneering work by Moscovici and colleagues (Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969), the most common operationalizations use numeric size (Gardikiotis, Martin, & Hewstone, 2004). Some studies, however, have suggested other characteristics that differentiate majority and minorities, thereby facilitating broader understanding. For example, studies of persuasion and message-based attitude change have expanded the definitions of majority and minority groups to include such features as opinion deviance (Maass, Clark & Haberkorn, 1982), distinctiveness (Nemeth & Kwan, 1985), and ingroup–outgroup status (David & Turner, 1999; Pérez & Mugny, 1996). The results of these studies suggest that minorities with few members (Gordjin, De Vries, & De Dreu, 2002; Moscovici et al., 1969), deviant opinions (Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997; Moscovici & Personnaz, 1980), power (Crano, 2001; Kameda, Ohtsubo, & Takezawa, 1997), or ingroup status (Crano, 2000; Turner, 1991), can sometimes persuade majorities, albeit indirectly, possibly as a function of message salience (Crano, 2001; Crano & Hannula-Bral, 1994; Moscovici, 1976). These studies suggest that majority and minority groups can vary in terms of power, distinctiveness, opinions, and ingroup–outgroup status, as well as size. A consideration of real-life groups has led some researchers to acknowledge that representations of majority and minority ought to be multidimensional (Crano, 2001; Pérez & Mugny, 1987), and certainly more complex (Kerr, 2002; Lücken & Simon, 2005) than typical laboratory experiments would suggest. Even so, size predominates research on influence (Wood et al., 1994) and relations between majorities and minorities (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992).

Although size provides considerable parsimony in analyzing majority and minority influence, that benefit may be achieved at the cost of ecological validity.

Aside from parsimony, another possible reason for operationalizing majority and minority groups in terms of size might be the assumption that size is related to other group variables, such as power/status or counternormativeness. Kruglanski and Mackie (1990) questioned this assumption: 'The correspondence we intuitively assume to exist between numeric size, access to resources, and ability to dominate might be misleading…these three dimensions need not be correlated, making it difficult and perhaps misleading to talk about a uniform "minority psychology"' (p.230). Are there significant correlations between group size and other majority/minority dimensions? Our research investigated this issue as well.

Divergent thinking and group valence

We also sought to explore divergent thinking in majority and minority groups and the perceived valence of those groups. Evidence suggests that minority groups encourage divergent thinking (Nemeth, 1986, 1994), but it is not clear if mental representations also reflect disparate modes of cognitive processing. If minority group representations include divergent thinking, then merely thinking about a minority might lead to divergent thinking as well. In group creativity research, fluency and flexibility are both used as measures of divergent thinking or creativity (Guilford, 1956; Jung, 2001; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002; Nemeth, 1994). Fluency refers to the total number of ideas people generate, whereas flexibility refers to the total number of unique ideas generated. We explored the extent to which minority and majority representations are fluent and flexible. The valence associated with majority and minority groups also was examined. Theory and research both suggest that most people have negative attitudes toward minorities (Voci & Hewstone, 2003) and positive attitudes toward majorities (Wood, Pool, Leck, &

Purvis, 1996). We explored these relationships as well.

Overview and research questions

Our research examined laypersons' representations of majority and minority groups. Descriptions of both kinds of groups were elicited, then compared with the dimensions identified by social psychologists as important characteristics of these groups. We allowed for the emergence of other dimensions as well. Further, we explored the association of salience, fluidity, and flexibility, and participants' own group memberships (sex, ethnicity) with their descriptions of majorities and minorities and with their evaluations of each type of group. Because our research was exploratory, we had no specific hypotheses, but rather posed the following questions:

1. Will majority/minority group definitions include such dimensions as opinions, ingroup–outgroup status, power, and distinctiveness, as well as size? Will other dimensions emerge?
2. Which dimensions are most frequently associated with majority versus minority groups?
3. Are there significant differences in descriptions of these groups? That is, are some dimensions more applicable to majority versus minority groups and vice versa?
4. Which dimensions of majority and minority groups are most salient? Are there significant differences in the salient dimensions of these groups? That is, are some salient dimensions more applicable to the majority or the minority group?
5. Are participants' sex and ethnicity associated with their descriptions of these groups?
6. Are the dimensions of majority and/or minority groups interrelated? Is group size correlated with other dimensions?
7. Are participants more fluent and/or flexible when they describe minority or majority groups?
8. Are majorities evaluated more positively than minorities?

Method

Participants

Seventy-seven participants were recruited from classes at a junior college and a university in Southern California. Approximately 60% of the sample was female. Participants' ages ranged from 18–47 years (M = 26, SD = 7.5). Participants' ethnicity was comparable to California's ethnic distribution, as reported by the United States Census Bureau (2000). European-Americans comprised 40% of the sample, followed by Hispanics/Latinos (29%), Asians/Pacific Islanders (15%), African-Americans (9%), and other ethnicities (7%). Most participants rated themselves as middle class (73%) or working class/poor (24%), with only a few in the upper class (3%).

Materials

All participants completed a survey that asked for descriptors of majority and minority groups, along with standard demographic information about the participants themselves. The descriptors of majority and minority groups were contained in two separate sections of the survey. Each section contained 10 fill-in-the-blank sentence stems. One section was devoted to describing the minority (10 stems), the other section to describing the majority (10 stems). The order of majority and minority descriptors was counter-balanced across participants.[1]

Majority and minority descriptors.   To measure their perceptions of majority and minority groups, participants completed sentence stems that read: 'A majority (or minority) is___because _____ which is a positive/negative thing.' The instructions for completing the majority (or minority section) were as follows:

> This section asks you to fill-in-the-blanks about your views concerning majority (or minority) groups. There are 10 such sentences in this section. Please complete as many as you possibly can. For each one, in the first blank, please write down a word that describes a minority (or majority) group. In the second blank, provide a brief description of why the word appropriately characterizes a minority (or majority) group. Finally, circle a positive or negative

value attached to the description. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer.

Because the current study sought to explore group definitions, only the first part of the descriptor ('A majority is___') was coded and analyzed. The second part ('because_____') provided a coding context that helped to clarify the meaning of the first part (see Crano & Brewer, 2002) when participants' answers were ambiguous or not easily coded (e.g. 'A minority is *an exploited group* because *they are singled out for unequal treatment.*').

Approximately 87% of participants completed 5 or fewer descriptors for the majority (M = 3.31) and 75% completed the same for the minority (M = 4.29). In fact, only one participant was able to provide 10 majority descriptors and only three provided 10 minority descriptors. Clearly, future research employing this measure may not need to include as many sentence stems.

Valence   The third part (circling 'which is a negative/positive thing') of the sentence stem measured the *valence* of majority and minority descriptors. Valence was calculated by summing the positive and negative values assigned to relevant descriptors. Composite valence scores could range from –10 (10 negative descriptors) to +10. Each participant produced two valence scores, one for majorities and another for minorities.

Salience   Tajfel and Wilkes (1963) suggested that an attribute is salient to the extent that it is frequent (used often) and prioritized (the first of a series). The salience of majority and minority descriptors was operationalized by considering the *first* descriptors that participants listed for each type of group.

Fluency and flexibility   *Fluency* refers to the number of ideas a person generates. It was operationalized by summing the total number of descriptors each participant produced for majority and for minority groups. Every participant thus had two fluency scores, each ranging from 0 (low fluency) to 10 (high fluency). *Flexibility* refers to the total number

of *unique* ideas someone generates. It was operationalized by summing the total number of *unique dimensions* used to describe majority and minority groups. A participant who listed five descriptors for majority groups, three of which were coded as power, one as number, and one as dispositions, would thus receive a score of 3 for majority group flexibility (1 for each of 3 group dimensions). Flexibility scores could range from 0 (inflexible) to 9 (high flexibility) for each type of group.

Demographic variables   The final measures involved participants' age, sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation.

Procedure
Data collection   Students were recruited from various university and college classes. At the end of each class session, the instructor introduced one of the authors and left the classroom. The investigator gave students the cover story that they were to complete a survey on their personal beliefs related to certain groups. Students were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to leave if they chose not to participate. Only one student (out of 78) opted not to participate in the study. Students who chose to participate were given the option to take part in a lottery to receive a US$25 gift certificate (three gift certificates were allotted for each class). Next, participants were asked if they had any questions about the study. The only question raised in all of the classes concerned the length of the survey, which the investigator estimated would take approximately 15–25 minutes. Students were told, however, that they could take as much time as they needed.

After any student questions were answered, participants were given the survey and those who wished to participate in the lottery were assigned lottery numbers. The investigator stayed in the back of the classroom while participants completed their surveys (working on their own). When they were done, usually after 15 to 30 minutes, participants turned in their questionnaires and returned to their seats. Prior to dismissal, participants were fully debriefed

about the nature of the study and told that the survey was designed to assess definitions of majority and minority groups. No participant was able to identify any of our research questions. Subsequently, gift certificates were raffled and presented to the winning students. All students then were dismissed.

Coding procedure   Prior to examining and coding the descriptors, we established a provisional coding list of possible group dimensions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on prior literature. The provisional list included five dimensions: number, power, opinions, distinctiveness, and ingroup–outgroup status. After an initial review of participants' responses, the provisional list was revised. Six more dimensions were added (social categories, group context, target treatment, source treatment, dispositions, and other), and two of the initial dimensions were dropped (opinions, ingroup–outgroup status). Using the final coding scheme, which included nine group dimensions, one of the authors coded all of the data. A naive independent assistant also coded all of the descriptors. There was substantial intercoder agreement (Cohen's kappa = .88 for majority and .87 for minority descriptors). The first coder's scores were used in all of the analyses.

Results

Majority and minority group dimensions

> *RQ1: Will majority/minority group definitions include such dimensions as opinions, ingroup–outgroup status, power, and distinctiveness, as well as size? Will other dimensions emerge?*

As noted, nine group dimensions emerged from our review of the majority and minority group descriptors (see the Appendix for a detailed overview). Opinions and ingroup–outgroup status did not emerge as group dimensions. Table 1 shows how often each dimension was used overall, and separately for majorities and minorities. *Social category* descriptors referred to particular group types. Examples included gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, level of education, disability, sexual orientation, and age.

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Table 1. Group dimensions: Percentages of all majority and minority descriptors

	Group dimensions									
	Social category	Power	Number	Distinct	Group context	Target	Source	Dispositions	Other	Total % of descriptors
Majority %	12.50	10.79	4.28	1.71	2.40	.51	2.40	7.02	1.88	43.49
Sample %	49.35	49.35	24.68	11.69	14.29	3.90	12.99	29.87	10.39	
Minority %	16.44	5.65	3.94	4.28	4.45	9.42	.00	8.05	4.28	56.51
Sample %	59.74	32.47	22.08	29.87	27.27	42.86	.00	33.77	23.38	
Total % of descriptors	28.94	16.44	8.22	5.99	6.85	9.93	2.40	15.07	6.16	100

Notes: All numbers are percentages. Majority and minority percentages refer to the proportion of majority or minority descriptors for each group dimension. For example, 12.5% of all the descriptors for majorities included social categories. Sample percentage refers to the proportion of participants who used social categories to describe majority or minority groups at least once. For example, 49.35% of all the participants described majorities using social categories at least once. Total number of descriptors = 584. N = 77.

Power descriptors referred to group dominance, superiority, status, and influence over others, including the ability to make changes that might affect the future. *Number* descriptors referred to the size of the group. *Distinctiveness* descriptors referred to similarities or differences between majority or minority groups and other groups. *Group context* descriptors referred to the social, political, or economic circumstances of a group (e.g. disadvantaged, on welfare). *Target of treatment* descriptors referred to how a group was treated or perceived by other groups (e.g. exploited). Most of these responses focused on how minority groups were treated by the majority. *Source of treatment* descriptors referred to how the group perceived or treated other groups. *Disposition* descriptors were words or phrases (usually adjectives) that indicated traits associated with majority or minority groups (e.g. incompetent). *Other* descriptors consisted of responses that did not fit into any other category (e.g. an asset, me).

RQ2: Which dimensions are most frequently associated with majority versus minority groups?

Across all (majority and minority) descriptors, the social category dimension was used most often. About half the participants used it at least once. Power also was a popular dimension for describing both majority and minority groups. For example, nearly half the sample associated the majority with power at least once. Many

participants assigned specific dispositions, both positive and negative, to majority and minority groups. And many descriptors involved target treatment (how a group was treated by other groups). Almost all of these descriptors, which were listed at least once by 43% of the sample, described negative perceptions and treatment of minority groups. The numeric size of majority and minority groups was mentioned by many participants. As expected, the majority was described as large and the minority as small (see Atuel, Seyranian, & Crano, 2007; Gardikiotis et al., 2004). Group context, distinctiveness, source of treatment, and other descriptors were seldom used by participants.

RQ3: Are there significant differences in descriptions of majority and minority groups?

Nine Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed ranks tests were conducted (Table 2) to assess differences between majority and minority descriptors on each group dimension. The Wilcoxon test is the nonparametric equivalent of a paired-samples *t*-test. A nonparametric test was the most appropriate here, owing to severe violations of normality that characterized nearly all of our variables (see Howell, 1997).[2] To avoid alpha inflation, we employed the Holms test procedure (Howell, 1997) for all analyses. As shown in Table 2, five group dimensions showed statistically significant differences between majority and minority groups. Majorities were significantly

Table 2. Mean scores, standard deviations, and Wilcoxon matched-pair signed-ranks tests for all majority and minority group descriptors on group dimensions

Group dimensions	Majority mean (*SD*)	Minority mean (*SD*)	*T*
Social category	0.95 (1.20)	1.25 (1.38)	−2.67**
Power	0.82 (1.02)	0.39 (0.63)	−3.65***
Number	0.33 (0.64)	0.33 (0.77)	−0.14
Distinctiveness	0.13 (0.38)	0.33 (0.52)	−2.89**
Group context	0.18 (0.51)	0.34 (0.62)	−1.98
Target treatment	0.04 (0.20)	0.71 (1.05)	−4.97**
Source treatment	0.18 (0.53)	0.00 (0.00)	−2.91**
Dispositions	0.53 (1.07)	0.61 (1.17)	−0.60
Other	0.14 (0.48)	0.34 (0.74)	−2.12

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.
Note: $N = 77$.

more likely than minorities to be described in terms of power and being the source of treatment, whereas minorities were significantly more likely than majorities to be described in terms of social categories, distinctiveness, and being the target of treatment.

Salience

RQ4: Which dimensions of majority and minority groups are most salient? Are there significant differences in the salient dimensions of these groups?

Because multiple dimensions (nine) emerged in defining majority and minority groups, it was unclear which dimensions were most easily accessible. We investigated salience not only in terms of what was most frequent (as in RQ2 and RQ3), but also in terms of what was most prioritized and thus cognitively accessible (listed first). Salience speaks to the more prominent dimensions in defining majority and minority groups. We also again investigated disparities in how the dimensions were applied to majorities and minorities, but this time for salient dimensions only. This analysis provides an idea of the most important distinctions between the groups.

Altogether, 144 majority and minority descriptors (see Table 3) were salient. Some missing data were evident: eight participants did not list a descriptor for majority groups, and two did not list a descriptor for minority groups. Social categories were the most salient dimension,

Table 3. Group dimensions: Salient majority and minority descriptors

	Group dimensions									
	Social category	Power	Number	Distinct	Group context	Target	Source	Dispositions	Other	Total % of descriptors
Majority %	13.89	17.36	7.64	0.69	2.08	0.00	1.39	4.17	0.69	47.91
Sample %	25.97	32.47	14.29	1.30	3.90	0.00	2.60	7.79	1.30	
Minority %	18.75	6.25	3.47	5.56	2.78	9.03	0.00	4.17	2.08	52.09
Sample %	33.77	11.69	6.49	10.39	5.20	20.31	0.00	7.79	3.90	
Total % of descriptors	32.64	23.61	11.11	6.25	4.86	9.03	1.39	8.33	2.78	100

Notes: All numbers are percentages. Majority and minority percentages refer to the proportion of salient majority or minority descriptors for each group dimension. For example, 13.89% of salient descriptors for majorities included social categories. Sample percentage refers to the proportion of participants who listed social categories first in their descriptions of majority or minority groups. For example, 25.97% of all the participants described majorities using social categories first. Total number of descriptors = 144. $N = 77$.

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followed by power. Once again, social categories were more likely to be associated with minorities than with majorities, whereas power was more likely to be associated with majorities than with minorities. Numeric size was the next most salient dimension for both majority and minority groups, followed by target of treatment. Interestingly, target of treatment was salient only for minorities. Although dispositions often were used as descriptors by participants, they were not very salient for either majorities or minorities. Distinctiveness, group context, and source of treatment were low in salience for both types of groups.

To assess significant differences between salient majority and minority descriptors, we conducted Wilcoxon matched-pair signed-ranks tests with majority and minority groups as pairs on each of the nine group dimensions. The Holms procedure was again used to adjust alpha-levels. As shown in Table 4, power was again used to describe majorities significantly more frequently than minorities, and once again, minorities were significantly more likely than majorities to be described as the target of treatment. No significant differences emerged between majorities and minorities on any of the other dimensions.

Demographic differences

RQ5: Are participants' sex and ethnicity associated with their descriptions of these groups?

Nonparametric analyses were conducted to assess whether the participants' own ethnicity or gender were associated with their perceptions of majority and minority groups. For these analyses, nine difference scores were computed by subtracting the frequency of majority from minority descriptors for each group dimension. In each analysis, the difference score for one of the group dimensions was the dependent variable and group membership (sex or ethnicity) was the independent variable. Mann–Whitney tests, the nonparametric analogue of an independent samples *t*-test, were first conducted to assess possible sex differences on each group dimension. None were found. For ethnicity, nine Kruskal–Wallis one-way analyses of variance were conducted with ethnicity (European-American, African-American, Latino and Asian-American) as the independent variable and the difference score for each group dimension as the dependent variable. Again, no significant differences were found. Apparently, sex and ethnic group membership were not associated with differences in perceptions of majority and minority groups.

Relations among dimensions

RQ6: Are the dimensions of majority and/or minority groups interrelated? Is group size correlated with other dimensions?

Using all 584 descriptors, intraclass correlation coefficients were computed among all of the group dimensions using Spearman's rho, the nonparametric analogue to Pearson's correlation

Table 4. Mean scores, standard deviations, and Wilcoxon matched-pair signed-ranks tests for salient majority and minority group descriptors on group dimensions

Group dimensions	Majority mean *(SD)*	Minority mean *(SD)*	*T*
Social category	0.26 (0.44)	0.34 (0.48)	−1.28
Power	0.33 (0.47)	0.12 (0.32)	−3.14***
Number	0.14 (0.35)	0.07 (0.25)	−1.60
Distinctiveness	0.01 (0.11)	0.10 (0.31)	−2.33
Group context	0.04 (0.20)	0.05 (0.22)	−0.58
Target treatment	0.00 (0.00)	0.17 (0.38)	−3.61**
Source treatment	0.03 (0.16)	0.00 (0.00)	−1.41
Dispositions	0.08 (0.27)	0.08 (0.27)	0.00
Other	0.01 (0.11)	0.04 (0.20)	−1.41

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.
Note: N = 77.

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(Howell, 1997). Correlations were computed first across majorities and minorities (Table 5), then separately for majorities (Table 6) and for minorities (Table 7). Several of these correlations are noteworthy. Power was positively correlated with being the target of treatment *and* the source of treatment across majority and minority groups, but the relationship between power and the treatment dimensions was not the same for majorities and minorities. Among majorities, power was unrelated to either of the treatment dimensions. Among minorities, power was positively related to being the target of treatment, but unrelated to being the source of treatment. In fact, source of treatment was never used as a minority descriptor.

Dispositions were positively related to power, distinctiveness, and being the source of treatment across majority and minority groups, but again, some of these relationships differed for majorities versus minorities. Among majorities, dispositions were related to power, but dispositions were unrelated to being a source of treatment and distinctiveness. Power was negatively related to distinctiveness for the majority, albeit marginally. Thus, for the majority, power may be one reason why the majority position is considered normative and not distinctive. Among minorities, dispositions were related to distinctiveness, but not to power. Social categories were negatively related to power and being the target of treatment across majority and minority groups, but

Table 5. Correlations among group dimensions across minority and majority descriptors

Group dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Social category		−.31*	−.20	−.06	−.12	−.24*	−.17	−.09	.07
2. Power			.16	.05	.04	.37**	.26*	.28*	.01
3. Number				.20	−.08	.06	.06	−.14	−.07
4. Distinctiveness					.13	−.04	.12	.33*	.15
5. Group context						.20	.11	−.05	.17
6. Target of treatment							.42***	.09	−.02
7. Source of treatment								.24*	.10
8. Dispositions									.26*
9. Other									

*** *p* < .0001; ** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05.
Notes: All Spearman's rho intraclass correlations are two-tailed.
N = 77. Total number of descriptors = 584.

Table 6. Correlations among group dimensions for majority descriptors only

Group dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Social category		−.14	−.18	−.05	−.03	.04	−.12	−.06	−.06
2. Power			−.04	−.22†	−.05	.10	.18	.30**	.08
3. Number				.18	.02	.03	.04	−.14	−.01
4. Distinctiveness					−.04	.13	−.03	.11	.01
5. Group context						.10	.16	−.01	.24*
6. Target of treatment							.11	.13	−.07
7. Source of treatment								.17	.12
8. Dispositions									−.12
9. Other									

*** *p* < .0001; ** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05; †*p* < 0.10.
Notes: All Spearman's rho intraclass correlations are two-tailed.
N = 77. Total number of descriptors = 584.

Table 7. Correlations among group dimensions for minority descriptors only

Group dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Social category		−.27*	−.24*	−.04	−.13	−.21†	−	−.09	.11
2. Power			.15	.09	.12	.38**	−	.04	−.08
3. Number				.20†	−.12	.02	−	−.08	.03
4. Distinctiveness					.03	−.01	−	.34**	−.02
5. Group context						.16	−	−.09	.11
6. Target of treatment							−	.04	−.07
7. Source of treatment								−	−
8. Dispositions									.20†
9. Other									

*** $p < .0001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; $^†p < .10$.
Notes: All Spearman's rho intraclass correlations are two-tailed.
$N = 77$. Total number of descriptors = 584. Note also that there were no minority definitions listed for source of treatment. Thus, no correlations are listed for source of treatment.

differences again emerged when majorities and minorities were analyzed separately. Social categories were negatively related to power among minorities, but were unrelated to power among majorities. Perhaps social categories were negatively related to power among minorities because categorizing a minority conveys information about its power, making it unnecessary to say anything more. Social categories and being the target of treatment were unrelated for majorities, and only marginally related (negatively) for minorities.

Was size indeed related to other group dimensions, as some theorists have suggested? By and large, the answer seems to be 'no'. There were no significant correlations between size and the other dimensions when majorities and minorities were analyzed together. And when the two types of groups were analyzed separately, the only significant correlation was a negative relationship between size and social categories among minority groups. Again, it may be that categorizing a minority group conveys information about its size, making it unnecessary to say anything more. There also was a marginally significant positive correlation between size and distinctiveness for minorities, implying that size may be associated with uniqueness.

Divergent thinking

RQ7: Are participants more fluent and/or flexible when they describe minority versus majority groups?

Two paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted to assess the fluency and flexibility of descriptors related to majority or minority groups. For fluency, all 584 descriptors were used (254 majority descriptors and 330 minority descriptors). Participants provided significantly more minority ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 2.31$) than majority descriptors ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 2.21$) (t (76) = −4.23, $p < .0001$). For flexibility, 206 different minority descriptors and 157 different majority descriptors were used. Participants provided more varying types of minority descriptors ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.44$) than majority descriptors ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.27$) (t (76) = −3.67, $p < .0001$). These results suggest that not only do minority groups actively influence divergent thinking in terms of fluency and flexibility (see Nemeth, 1986, 1994), but that merely thinking about such groups may encourage divergent thinking.

Valence

RQ 8: Are majorities evaluated more positively than minorities?

Using all 584 descriptors, a paired-samples *t*-test revealed that majority descriptors ($M = −0.49$, $SD = 2.05$, *range* = −8.00 to 4.00) were rated more positively than minority ones ($M = −1.34$, $SD = 1.95$, *range* = −5.00 to 3.00) (t (76) = 2.72, $p < 0.05$). However, the means for both groups were significantly lower than zero (the scale midpoint) (t (76) = −2.11 and −6.02, $p < .05$, respectively). Apparently, neither majorities

nor minorities were evaluated very favorably by our participants.

Discussion

Our results suggest that when left to their own devices, people's representations of majority and minority groups are multidimensional (Crano, 2001; Pérez & Mugny, 1987). They reflect power and status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social categories (Crano, 2000), numeric size (Kruglanski & Mackie, 1990), distinctiveness (Moscovici, 1976), internal dispositions (Mugny, 1982), group context (Reicher, 2004), and being the source (Asch, 1956) or target of treatment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Moscovici, 1994). The most frequently listed group dimensions for majority and minorities (in order of frequency) were social categories, power, dispositions, being the target of treatment, and numeric size. Although groups of both types were described using these dimensions, there were some differences in participants' descriptions of majorities and minorities. Majorities were associated with power and being the source of treatment, whereas minorities were associated with social categories, distinctiveness, and being the target of treatment. The salience analyses showed that the most accessible dimensions for describing majority and minority groups were (in order of frequency) social categories, power, number, being a target of treatment, and dispositions, but again, the results were not the same for the groups. For majorities, the most salient dimension was power; for minorities, the most salient dimension was being the target of treatment. Analyses of the correlations between dimensions showed that across both groups, power was positively related to treatment (target and source) and dispositions, and negatively related to social categories. Dispositions were positively related to distinctiveness and being the source of treatment, and social categories were negatively related to being a target of treatment. Once again, the results were not the same for majorities versus minorities. Among majorities, power was positively related to dispositions and marginally (negatively) related to distinctiveness. Among minorities, social categories were negatively related to group size and to power. Social categories also were marginally (negatively) related to target of treatment. Power was positively related to being the target of treatment and dispositions were positively related to distinctiveness. Finally, group size was unrelated to almost everything, except for a negative relationship with social categories and a marginally significant positive relationship with distinctiveness among minority groups.

Kerr (2002) and Crano (1993, 1994) have noted that although numeric size is the focus of most experimental research on majority/minority influence, few psychologists would argue that size is the only feature that distinguishes these groups. Yet there are no consensual definitions of majorities or minorities in social psychology. Our results suggest that standard experimental practices do not mirror real-world perceptions, so perhaps those practices should be reconsidered. The multiple dimensions of majority and minority groups that emerged in our study suggest that social psychologists have been overly preoccupied with *group size* and not mindful enough of other aspects of majorities and minorities. As a result, it may be risky to generalize findings from past research to real groups. The complexity suggested by the dimensions we found may raise doubts about whether social psychology can ever reach a consensual definition of majority and minority groups, and thus create a unified minority (and majority) group psychology (but see Crano, in press). We remain hopeful, however. Arriving at consensual definitions is valuable because it allows for a more coherent social psychological literature, rather than one fragmented by conflicting definitions or definitions that only partially represent the construct at hand. Another advantage is that claims that minority groups can induce attitude change (Moscovici, 1976) or incite social change (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) become more applicable to issues outside the laboratory (e.g. marketing or politics) when majority and minority definitions mirror real-world realities. This is especially true if the social behaviors between and within majority and minority groups are investigated and analyzed at the group level (Levine & Kaarbo, 2001).

Our results suggest that any consensual definition of majority and minority groups must account for multiple group dimensions. To enhance the ecological validity of their results, future researchers should thus seek to portray majority and minority groups along at least *some* (i.e. more than one) of these dimensions, rather than focus exclusively on size.

A proposed typology

Because salient dimensions are arguably the most prominent and accessible dimensions (frequent and prioritized), they can be combined to create a majority/minority group typology. The most central salient dimensions were (in order) social categories, power, number, target of treatment, and dispositions. We began to construct a typology by assuming that all other group dimensions were nested within social categories, the most salient dimension in our study. For example, within the social category of gender, males and females are attributed specific levels of power, size, treatment, and dispositions. We crossed the next two most salient group dimensions, power/status and numeric size, creating four types of groups (two majorities and two minorities) with varying levels of power and size. Because our results indicated that the majority was associated with power and the minority with being the target of treatment, we surmised that both types of majority groups would have high levels of power (regardless of numeric size) and that both types of minority groups would be the target of treatment and possess low power. We also assumed that each group type would be associated with dispositions. Based on the positive correlation between dispositions and distinctiveness for the minority, we presumed that distinctiveness may be viewed as a type of disposition for the minority group types. For the majority, dispositions were positively correlated with power. Thus, not only are majority group types seen as possessing high levels of power, but majority group power may potentially be viewed as a type of a disposition. Finally, since being a source of treatment was positively correlated with dispositions (across majority and minority groups)

and was used only in reference to the majority, we also surmised that source of treatment may be viewed as a majority group disposition. In all, the main factor distinguishing the two forms of majority and minority group types is their numeric size.

We term the four group types the *Moral Majority, Elites,* the *Powerless Populace* and the *Subjugated.* The *Moral Majority* is powerful and large. It is characterized as a dominant and powerful majority that often serves as the source of treatment for other groups. Examples include European-Americans (in the United States), heterosexual people, men, and people without a disability. *Elites* also are powerful, but they are small in number. However, because of their power, Elites are perceived and treated as if they were dominant, powerful majorities that serve as a source (not a target) of treatment toward other groups. Examples include the Apartheid rulers of South Africa, the British in 19th century India, leaders of political regimes, and the highly educated. The *Powerless Populace* has little power, but is large. Despite its size, it often is perceived as a minority and exploited, serving as the target of treatment by other groups. This group also can be characterized as distinctive, or counternormative. Examples include women and members of the untouchable caste in India. Finally, the *Subjugated* is small and has little power. As a result, it often is the target of treatment (e.g. expulsion, subjugation, discrimination) by other groups, and also can be characterized as distinctive or counternormative. Examples include homeless people, the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community in many countries, and people with disabilities. We believe that this typology is potentially useful, and suggest that people who study majority and minority groups consider operationalizing them in light of the distinctions we have drawn. For example, persuasion-based minority influence studies may be extended to include comparison of the two minority group types in their persuasive efforts. In this way, influence may be studied in the context of groups. This typology also may be used to organize majority/minority studies for meta-analyses or review papers.

Divergent thinking and valence

Our results extend Nemeth's (1986; Nemeth & Kwan, 1985) work by showing that merely thinking about the meaning of a minority group can elicit divergent thinking. Perhaps the counternormative nature of minorities provokes attention and interest (Crano, 2001; Crano & Hannula-Bral, 1994; Moscovici, 1976; Maass et al., 1982; Turner, 1991) as well as more intense cognitive attention and elaboration (Crano, 1994; Crano & Chen, 1998; Nemeth, 1994). Although the participants in our study viewed minorities more negatively than majorities, majorities were not viewed very positively either (see Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997).

Limitations and concluding remarks

Several limitations of our study should be noted. First, although the sample was representative of the people of California, it is possible that the results are not more widely generalizable. Second, descriptors involving power or status were coded as the same group dimension. Although power and status are related concepts, they may be qualitatively different. Third, ingroup and outgroup identification were notably absent from our typology, yet they clearly merit inclusion when it comes to relationships between groups. We surmise that people from any of the four types of groups identified in the typology would view the other group types as outgroups, and identify primarily with members of their own groups.

Our research adds to the scientific understanding of what comprises a majority or minority group. To our knowledge, no one has assessed lay perceptions of majority and minority groups before. The results highlight the complexity associated with defining these groups. Although our findings warrant replication, they may benefit the field by providing preliminary guidelines for incorporating the real-world complexity of groups into research. If indeed, 'Psychology is out to conquer this continent, to find out where its treasures are hidden, to investigate its danger spots, to master its vast forces, and to utilize its energies' (Lewin, 1951, p. 2), then our scientific conceptions should reflect the phenomena we seek to understand.

Notes

1. To see whether presentation order affected the results, statistical tests (nonparametric and parametric, as appropriate) were later run, using order of majority and minority measures as the independent variable and difference scores between majority and minority groups as the dependent variable. No significant order effects were found.
2. To check the stability of these nonparametric results, we also ran nine paired-sample *t*-tests. Identical results emerged. Equivalent parametric tests for all the other nonparametric analyses (RQ4, RQ5, RQ6) were run as well. When the variables were normally distributed, parametric analyses were used (RQ7 and RQ8). In general, these alternative analyses produced results similar to those reported in the article.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Overview of majority and minority groups coding scheme

Construct	Description	Sample words
Social category	Group types in society, usually nouns	
Education	Phrases concerning education or level of education	Mostly uneducated, typically less educated, have an education, educated
Ethnicity	Phrases expressing race, ethnicity, culture or ethnic/racial features	Hispanic, Black, Latino, Asian, black person, dark, pacific islander, ethnically diverse, "black, brown, or yellow", darker skinned, African-American, Caucasian, white people, brown-skinned, different ethnic group, culturally diverse, non-white, people of color, Mexican, diverse group
Disabled	Phrases associated with disability	Disabled, disability, learning disabilities
SES	Phrases referring to people's socioeconomic status, wealth or lack thereof, or social class	Poor, rich, low income person, lowest class in community, working class, poor person, in the ghetto, "very, very rich", millionaire
Gender	Phrases concerning gender or sex	Women, any woman, certain sex, men, male
Sexual orientation	Phrases referring to sexual orientation or sexual preference	Homosexual, heterosexual
Age	Phrases alluding to people's age	Children
Other	Phrases denoting groups in society which are not listed above	Urbanite, government official, straight A student, alien, non-Christian faiths, sports fans immigrant, gangsters in the house, republicans
Power/status	Phrases that refer to group dominance, superiority, influence, status, and the ability to make changes that might impact the future	Powerful, overpowering, most power, with power, superior, leader, king of the world, more influential in the community, likely to persuade, weak, often not in power, less or no power, ruled, subordinate
Number	Phrases that refer to the numeric size of a group	Small, smaller group, a lot of people, larger group of people, largest number, mass amount, more than half
Distinctiveness	Phrases that describe majority or minority as relatively similar or distinct including distinguishing these groups in terms of distinct or similar opinions and evaluations	Different, labeled different, special, unique, same, closer, united, group of people that act the same, bunch of people with same features, who think independently, group that disagrees with mainstream ideology, believes in war in Iraq, people against President Bush
Group context	Phrases that refer to social, political, or economic circumstances of the group. These words might provide an 'objective' framework for the inequitable distribution of power (Tajfel, 1981)	Disadvantaged, economic struggle, on welfare, lower group in society, given equal opportunity employee rights, becoming less of stigma, stuck in lower position, needing more assistance, in compromised position politically

Construct	Description	Sample words
Target of group treatment	Phrases describing how one group (target) is treated or perceived by another group. These phrases mainly apply to minority terms	Sometimes starts with 'believed to be…', exploited, discriminated, stereotyped, oppressed, believed to be incompetent, mistreated, group singled out, considered marginal, treated inferior, looked after, outcast, ignored, often discouraged, seen as threat to majority, looked down upon
Source of group treatment	Phrases describing how one group (source) is treating or perceiving another group. These phrases mainly apply to majority terms	Sometimes discriminatory, 'insensitive to minority culture, beliefs or values', often ignorant about minority concerns, they force rules, think they are superior, think they are better than minority, incapable of understanding minority
Dispositions	Phrases pertaining only to traits, usually consisting of adjectives. These traits may also be interpreted to be group stereotypes	Incompetent, good, problematic, ignorant, whiny, negative, rude, smart, more focused, arrogant, hopeless, interesting, more violent, more understanding, naive, pompous
Other	Phrases that do not fit into any other coding category or that do not make sense	Me, myself, a cat, football, not necessarily numeric, bad way to describe a person, dancing, food, unlucky, an asset, add color, interracial marriage

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