

1 Explaining change

1.1 The illusion of immobility and the reality of change

Influence phenomena refer to the processes through which individuals and groups form, maintain, spread, and modify their thought and action modes during direct or symbolic social interaction. The question of how to approach these processes is a fundamental one, not only for researchers in the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, or like ours, social psychology, but also for groups and societies themselves. These processes form the very basis of how society functions and evolves, for as Touraine (1973, 10) writes, 'Human society is the only natural system known to have the ability to form and transform its functioning on the basis of its investments and of the image it has of its own ability to act upon itself' (our translation). Two conflicting tendencies exist in this respect, both from a scientific point of view and the broader social perspective.

One approach has focused on the reproduction and maintenance of social relations, the status quo. This perspective is a 'conservative' one from the sociopolitical standpoint and a 'functionalist' one from the scientific standpoint. Moscovici (1976) was one of the first to uncover the implicit postulates wherein social systems are conceived as optimal, functional, even ideal, or nearly so. The advocates of this approach essentially look at the adaptation processes through which social systems become long lasting and protect themselves against change, regarded as a social evil. What is implicit here is the idea that there is only one correct, ahistorical, and somehow predetermined view of the world and its values. In short, the functionalist view is based on the illusion that norms and ideas are immobile, using Balandier's (1985) term. Whenever the value a norm takes on is defined in this manner, i.e. in absolute rather than relative terms, the issue becomes searching for the conditions and mechanisms, the (nearly 'natural') laws through which individuals and groups internalize or adapt to that norm, or in the worst of cases, deviate from it. For the most part these studies have dealt with the mechanisms of conformity and obedience, in short, of social control (the adaptation pole) and self-control (the internalization pole). These mechanisms are the constituents of majorities and dominant

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positions, which are both the cause and the effect of social influence, considered to be responsible for maintaining uniformity and consensus by reducing interindividual differences.

Others, including ourselves, are fascinated instead by the question of social change and innovation. Ours is an 'interactionist' perspective from the scientific standpoint, and a 'progressive' perspective from the social standpoint. In the social psychology of influence in particular, researchers working in this perspective in the past twenty or so years have concentrated their efforts on compensating for the emphasis that has been, and still is being, placed on the dynamics of social control. Given that norms are considered here to be relative, i.e. to be the outcome of compromise or submission, emphasis is placed on the mechanisms underlying these transformations, in this case, the processes of innovation and the spread of innovation, viewed as fundamental to social and historical evolution. At the root of such change, we find individuals and groups that are not so inclined to conform to the status quo or to abide by 'universal norms': they constitute the minorities.

From both the scientific and social points of view, then, fundamental tensions exist, as demonstrated in a recent book on perspectives in the study of minority influence (cf. Moscovici, Mugny, and Van Avermaet, 1985). At either end of a sort of continuum, we find two opposing tendencies, one of uniformity, conformity, resistance to change, and the other of differentiation, refusal to become resigned, innovation. On the one side, it is immobility that is desired and sought, and on the other, it is change. For those at the one end, norms are to be abided by, and for those at the other, a good norm is transgressible and transgressed.

The fact that two such types of phenomena are possible, one leading to uniformity and the other, to innovation, forces us to wonder how they actually operate. Here also, research models diverge, some emphasizing the attributes of the dominant entities that exert pressure to maintain uniformity, others stressing the behaviour of the acting minorities.

Researchers focusing on uniformity examine how individuals give up their own view of things in order to go along with the views of the majority, even when they are quite capable of self-affirmation, on the basis either of their own personal characteristics (cf. Crutchfield, 1955) or the characteristics of the situation (cf. Allen, 1965). A good illustration of this is Asch's paradigm (1951) in which 'normal' individuals were shown to conform to the erroneous response of a given majority even though the correct response was perceptually evident and left no room for doubt. Such pressure to maintain uniformity functions through one of the varied forms of *dependence* reflecting the supremacy of a source of influence over a target, in the form of a kind of 'power' (cf. Hollander, 1964). Targets are submissive because

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they feel unsure of themselves, dependent upon others. Sources are influential because they are dominant, powerful, credible, or attractive (cf. Kelman, 1958).

Researchers focusing on innovation are interested in determining how those individuals or minority groups who firmly uphold their own deviant or marginal standpoint can have an impact on the belief systems and behaviour patterns of other individuals. The mechanisms of innovation are rooted in the *conflict* that minorities are capable of creating in others and introducing into the social system. Here, it is no longer a form of dependence that underlies influence, but rather the minority's style of behaviour, which is instrumental to the instigation and management of conflict. Through their consistent, coherent, and committed action along an ever-so-long journey, minorities manage in the end to make 'something' change, in individuals and in society.

Who in all this is right? This is a philosophical question which we do not pretend to be able to answer. Each of them, in some sense or another, must have some fragment of the truth. We shall not answer this question because in attempting to do so, we would be turning a problem that we claim to be approaching scientifically into a normative question.

The idea we shall attempt to prove is that the illusion of immobility is maintained by the fact that, in all innovation processes, conformity with the dominant norm takes place first, and all the more so when it must be displayed publicly. The reality of change, on the other hand, is underground, and is always nearly invisible because of resistance to that change. This fact, rather than leading us to oppose these two normatively unreconcilable perspectives, will lead us to *theoretically interconnect* what appear to be two divergent, yet complementary, focal points. The need to scientifically explain their apparent contradictions and understand their reciprocity in social systems has made this a necessity.

1.2 Majority effects, minority effects

In experimental social psychology, each of these two perspectives naturally has its own repertoire of phenomena which constitute its chosen objects for experimental demonstration both in the laboratory and in the field. The phenomenon of majority influence, the first to have been studied (cf. Asch, 1951, 1956) is above all the concern of the functionalist approach, while minority influence is the terrain of the interactionist approach (cf. Moscovici, 1976).

Recent studies, designed to determine which influence effects are specific to majorities and which are typical of minorities, have revealed that each

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functions quite differently (the reader might refer here to the book *The psychology of conversion* edited by Moscovici and Mugny, 1987), so that in the end, both partners in the theoretical quarrel are right to some extent. Whether we are dealing with perceptual material or aesthetic material, with social judgements or direct interaction between individuals, majority influence systematically takes on the form of compliance: individuals *tend* (we stress *tend*, since this is a general tendency, and other cases do exist) to outwardly accept what the majority advocates whenever that majority is present or psychologically salient. Yet as soon as the majority leaves, or is no longer psychologically salient, its influence disappears. This proves that the influence was only transitory, only serving momentarily to resolve, right there and then, the divergence between oneself and the majority. In the face of a majority, the debated object itself would not be at stake: only the establishment of a 'hedonist' relationship with the majority would count.

Minority influence looks radically different. Indeed, it *tends* to be weak, in-existent, or negative when exerted at the *direct*, manifest, or public level: when people do not refuse resolutely to adopt a minority's idea or action, they at least hesitate to do so, in the eyes of others as well as in their own. A 'positive' relationship with a minority appears to be difficult, if not out of the question. This does not mean, however, that minorities have no effect. It is simply that their *social impact* (understood here to refer to their effectiveness and not to social-impact theory; Latané and Wolf, 1981) tends to express itself in an *indirect*, latent, or delayed manner, in short, in the form of what is conventionally called a *conversion* (Moscovici, 1980). It looks as though when an alternative is introduced by a minority, it is the definition of the debated object that becomes the crux of the issue.

From a methodological point of view, it became necessary to introduce the distinction between influence qualified as direct and that qualified as indirect so that the hidden impact of minorities could be observed. (The lack of this distinction in classical studies on influence and persuasion partially explains the fact that minority influence was not observed.) Minority influence has been assessed in various ways, depending on the experimental paradigm. One way amounts to showing that it appears when responses are given in private, and disappears when they are given in public (the realm of majority influence), which is proof of the magnitude of the social costs incurred by explicitly joining up with a minority source. Another approach is to detect minority influence after a certain lapse of time, once the relationship with the minority source has become less salient and a cognitive activity can take place. Finally, another method consists of demonstrating that a minority source can affect ideas upon which it has not explicitly taken a stand. A prerequisite to such impact is an inferential activity on the part of the targets concerning the content of the ideas set

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forth by the minority. In Chapter 4 we shall discuss the theoretical implications of these distinctions.

The different methodological devices mentioned above are necessary to providing evidence of the impact of minorities, at first hidden, latent. Minority influence is a slow process composed of several stages (Moscovici, 1985a; Levine and Moreland, 1985). The initial stage, when the minority emerges and reveals its views to the majority, is marked by disapproval and rejection. Other moments nevertheless follow. An incubation period sets in soon, and the new ideas are brought up again, spread, and discussed. The minority message is again outwardly refused, but gradually penetrates into, and orients, the belief and behaviour systems of the targets, whose eventual conversion marks a decisive stage in minority influence.

In all cases, whether in the field (see for example Mucchi Faina, 1987) or laboratory, underground influence appears, in a subreptitious and subliminal manner. It looks as though individuals openly oppose the minority *source*, while accepting its *ideas* underneath. One denies its arguments, all the while granting it some degree of truth (hence the title of a prior French version of this book, *Le déni et la raison*). Despite some diverging interpretations, the above effects seem to be the object of considerable consensus among researchers directly interested in this area of study (cf. Moscovici, Mugny, and Van Avermaet, 1985; Moscovici and Mugny, 1987), now one of the favourite topics in social psychology, at least in Europe (cf. Jaspars, 1986). As attested by the number of pages newly devoted to minority influence in the 'bible' of social psychology (Moscovici, 1985b), these effects are now being taken seriously, notably by researchers working in the area of attitude change and persuasion (to give only a few examples: Brown, 1985; Chaiken and Stangor, 1987; Eagly, 1987; Levine and Russo, 1987; McGuire, 1985; Paulus, 1983; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Sorrentino and Hancok, 1987; Wolf, 1987).

Experimental research has shown that majority influence, prototypical of the study of uniformity, functions according to its own specific dynamics, as does minority influence, prototypical of the study of change. In most research, majority influence and minority influence are studied under conditions which are similar, granted, but separate, each being examined in its own right. Just like the conceptual opposition of the general postulates of the functionalist and interactionist models, the privileged objects of each of these models are generally approached experimentally as specific focal points, based on independent conceptualizations. Is this separation legitimate? That is the question. Wouldn't it be better to consider them instead as embedded, as incapable of being captured one without the other, even if during the operationalization process one of the involved causalities is naturally chosen over the other?

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This raises the question of the interpretation of the effects specific to majorities and minorities, for methods are nothing more than reflections of the particular theoretical bases chosen. Attempts to explain these phenomena have been largely marked by contemporary cognitivist models of persuasion and social influence (cf. Zanna, Olson, and Herman, 1987). The explanations given (cf. Maass, West, and Cialdini, 1987) account for majority and minority effects through substantial borrowing from attribution theory (cf. Maass and Clark, 1984; Moscovici and Nemeth, 1974), particularly regarding the inferences made as a result of a consistent behaviour style: the systematic consistency of minority responses across situations and time, added to their social rareness, plus the fact that they do not give rise to social consensus and actively resist conformist pressure – all these result in the attribution of highly salient characteristics to the minority. Minorities are thus viewed as particularly distinct, as *a priori* not very credible, and as resistant to social pressure. Their *distinctiveness* may be what leads to conversion (occurring when an individual privately yields to a minority stance) insofar as their low credibility in conjunction with the recognition of their high degree of resistance to social pressure may engage targets in an intense cognitive activity. Such an activity implies that particular attention be paid to the stimuli, and above all, that the cognitive functioning which sets in be more divergent than convergent, generating a greater number of complex and differentiated ideas (cf. Nemeth, 1986) and a non-defensive mode of thought, i.e. one centered on the search for new arguments rather than on the use of counter-arguments (cf. Maass and Clark, 1983).

Note that although this approach is suited to accounting for part of the cognitive activity of target subjects, which analysis of their argumentation and counter-argumentation indeed reflects, it can nevertheless be too highly dependent upon a one-level analysis assessing only the intraindividual level of social influence processes (cf. Mugny and Doise, 1979). It does not sufficiently account for the fact that these cognitive processes (which of course are to be taken into account) are activated and assume a significance within social relations which we shall see are fundamentally intergroup. In other words, conflict is above all considered in the light of the cognitive information processing it involves, its social nature being somehow set aside. Explanations are given only for certain indirect changes, and are not linked theoretically to the often differentiating dynamics characteristic of direct influence. Finally, this approach opposes direct majority influence, explained by means of a comparison process, to indirect minority influence, explained on the basis of the cognitive activity involved in the validation process, without taking into account their *simultaneous* occurrence, and without applying the appropriate notions to explain their relationships.

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Approximately the same general impression is obtained from Moscovici's (1980) explanations in which majority influence is said to be governed by a comparison process, reflected by manifest influence with no consequences at the latent level, whereas the typical kind of conversion brought on by a minority (in which case the effects only show up at the latent level) is said to be the consequence of a validation process involving cognitive centering on the object (partially accounted for in the studies mentioned above). In this same line of thinking, the research conducted by Personnaz and Guillon (1985) dealing with the attention subjects pay either to the source or the actual object of a discussion has shown that *majorities* center targets more on the characteristics of the source (*how* the majority says what it says), whereas *minorities* increasingly center targets on the analysis of the object under discussion (*what* the minority says). Maass, West, and Cialdini (1987, p. 60) took up on the same idea in saying, 'Minorities are likely to enhance the amount of attention on the stimulus information at the center of the disagreement between majority and minority group members. In simple perceptual tasks (colour judgements) the attentional focus should be on the coloured stimulus, whereas in paradigms involving opinions the attentional focus should be on the message presented by the minority.'

Our intent is to theoretically integrate these functionings, which are not totally unrelated to some of the other distinctions made in current research on persuasion and attitude change. Indeed, several researchers (cf. Zanna, Olson, and Hermann, 1987) have managed to define the different cognitive activity levels at work in influence situations: the observed changes are thought to result either from the more central processing of message content, or from a more peripheral processing mode involving greater sensitivity to the cues provided by the immediate, or not-so-immediate, environment, in other words, by the context (cf. Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In the same line of thinking, more systematic information processing has been opposed to processing based on the ample use of simplifying heuristics (cf. Chaiken, 1987; Cialdini, 1987). In most cases the prevailing idea is obviously that central, more systematic processing would induce a deeper and more durable change, brought on by a greater capacity and will to cognitively process information in a more elaborate way. Unlike this kind of central processing, peripheral processing based on the use of specific heuristics is assumed to involve an activity of a more superficial nature, one more dependent upon cues, the source, and the message context, thus leading to surface changes which are not indicators of new attitude or behaviour systems. Moreover, only one last step was needed to make the analogy (cf. Chaiken and Stangor, 1987; Maass, 1987; Maass, West, and Cialdini, 1987; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) whereby majority influence may rely on peripheral processing founded specifically on the use of heuristics

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such as source credibility or attractiveness, or the size and consensus of the majority, while minority influence may follow a more central path involving more systematic or elaborate processing of the contents of the message conveyed by the minority.

We do not intend in this book to discuss these approaches, all of which are of undeniable interest and have brought new ideas into research in the field of attitude change (McGuire, 1986). Instead, we shall attempt to define the processes and specific mechanisms underlying (1) the social comparison activity, which can be understood as peripheral relative to the message but psychologically essential to the target subjects, and (2) the validation activity, perhaps more central, i.e. focusing on the systematic elaboration of a minority stance. Above all, however, we shall be led to *interrelate* these 'peripheral' or 'central' activities through our dissociation model wherein these two processes are intricately intermingled in most situations where influence or persuasion occurs.

This raises the question of the reciprocal impact of the social comparison process and the validation process: when, and under what conditions, do activities that might be called peripheral lead to the more central processing of the message and its implications? In other words – this time we shall use our own terminology – when and under what conditions does the progression of social comparison intervene in validation, either by activating it or counteracting it? A corollary is the question of functional reciprocity: when and under what conditions does validation transform the features of social comparison?

The reader may already have guessed the general hypothesis specific to minority influence that we shall set forth here: certain *negative heuristics* resulting from the conflict induced by a minority standpoint are hypothesized to induce more socio-cognitive activity, notably argumentation and/or counter-argumentation, as well as more cognitive elaboration of the minority standpoint, and thus should lead to more conversion. The paradox here is not slight: a source that evokes 'negative' heuristics should challenge subjects more, and should *also* induce them to deny its message at a more central processing level. Indeed, in order to extend the source's negative heuristics to the content of the source message, subjects must more deeply examine the to-be-denied arguments. The work involved in this counter-argumentation may lead to the involuntary, but necessary, assimilation of the minority argumentation with that of the targets themselves, causing the sort of perverted inoculation effect in which the inoculation contaminates instead of immunizing (McGuire, 1964). It is this assimilation, along with the 'accommodations' it involves, that may cause the standpoints so far upheld by the targets to be redefined, resulting in a sort of 'minority-induced self-generated change' so typical of conversion effects (cf. Tesser, 1978, for a review of the self-generated change approach).

In this book, the fundamental distinction between the comparison and validation processes will be redefined in our own manner, without the assumption that the former is necessarily specific to majority influence, the latter, to minority influence. In a line of reasoning analogous to Chaiken and Stangor's (1987), it must be assumed that multiple cognitive processes play a part in both majority and minority influence. Indeed, these two basic processes, social comparison and validation, may act simultaneously in both the majority and minority forms of influence. And even if we sometimes give the impression, though only illusory, that we are developing the latter in particular, our aim is indeed to theoretically interrelate the two, and in accordance with Maass and Clark (1983, 1986), to consider them whenever possible in the framework of paradigms involving the *simultaneous* influence of both majority and minority groups.

In our approach, it is assumed that, through the social comparison process, target subjects resolve conflicts at the interpersonal or intergroup level (between two individuals or between an individual and a group). What is stated and displayed by the targets depends on the relationship they hold with those who are making the statement. Through the validation process, subjects are assumed to resolve conflicts in terms of the relationship they have with the debated object (i.e. in terms of what they perceive or think).

Our proposed theoretical interconnection is also based on the assumption that any relationship (interpersonal or intergroup) subject to a target-source comparison can have an effect upon the definition of the debated object, and may introduce new points of view likely to modify the terms of the validation. Thus, even upholding the status quo can force an individual to seek new arguments (cf. Billig, 1985), since in the end, the minority has the power to establish the terms of the conflict. As a corollary, it must be assumed that all new reflection upon, or definition of, the object undergoing the validation process is likely to lead to the redefinition of the field of social relations themselves, and hence is apt to modify the terms of the social comparison. These two aspects are assumed to be interleaved in a sort of spiral of reciprocal social and cognitive causalities, constituting the source of the social impact of majority-minority conflict and the origin of the tensions existing between dominant and innovative positions.

One of the implications of this conception is that social comparison can no longer be considered as solely responsible for direct influence. Both processes must be assumed to play a part in direct and indirect influence. By interconnecting them, we should be able to explain the dynamics linking direct and indirect influence, in other words, linking what targets claim, or claim to believe, and what they actually believe.

The purpose of this book is to develop the main lines of a psycho-sociological model to account for both resistance to change and innovation. To do so, we must view the dynamics of intergroup comparison as influence

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dynamics and at the same time view influence dynamics as dynamics of intergroup comparison, while attempting to explain the complex links relating the manifest effects of influence to its hidden effects. This indeed means applying new notions to define the interrelationships between intergroup approaches, which are supposed to account for the dynamics of direct influence, and approaches based on the minority influence model, which are supposed to account for the dynamics of indirect influence.

Establishing such a psychosociological articulation (cf. Doise, 1986; Mugny and Doise, 1979) between the effects, the processes underlying those effects, and the models accounting for them, is necessary for two good reasons. First, as we shall show, although intergroup approaches undeniably contribute to understanding part of the dynamics of direct influence, they do not suffice to explain all of its manifestations, and in their current state, can provide no explanation of indirect influence. Second, current models of minority influence still have not answered the question of whether or not minority generated conflict induces direct *and/or* indirect influence, and, if so, what conditions and what specific mechanisms are responsible for that influence. The *integrating model* that we are proposing in this book is aimed at explaining the various possible relationships between direct or immediate influence *and* indirect or delayed influence, for we must admit, as we shall illustrate below, that depending on the circumstances, minorities can obtain manifest influence alone, latent influence alone, both latent and manifest influence, or finally, none of the above.

In order to grasp the complex dynamics of conversion, we must also admit that, given the resistance the spread of minority innovation generates, one of the four impact patterns stated above is particularly typical of minority influence, as most of the studies in this field have indeed shown: minority influence is usually inexistent (or even negative) at the direct level, yet positive at the indirect level. The crucial problem today, however, is accounting for *all* possible cases, even those which are 'ecologically' less frequent. It is at this cost that a strictly psychosociological model can actually account for existing social 'reality', or even better, theorize the realities...of tomorrow. We now have the theoretical notions and experimental support needed to validate a model which accounts for all of these diverse cases.

1.3 Searching for the social impact of minorities

Within the past fifteen or so years, our research team has conducted several dozen experiments on minority influence. These experiments progressed through various theoretical and methodological stages, starting from the