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Creating the Perceptions of Consistency and Confidence: A Necessary Condition for Minority Influence*

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In the light of social psychological literature (e.g., Festinger, 1950) stressing the pressures toward uniformity in small groups, we speculated that uniformity could be achieved by the majority moving towards the minority conception, as well as the reverse. Utilizing the theory of Moscovici and Faucheux (1972) and Moscovici and Nemeth (1974), we hypothesized that actions and behavioral styles which foster perceptions of consistency and confidence aid the minority in its influence attempts. Relating this to the literature that links occupation of the head seat at a rectangular table to influence, we hypothesized that it was the act of choosing the head seat that fostered influence, not its simple occupation. Thus, (1) a minority of one who consistently took a very deviant position would be able to influence a majority, particularly if he chose the head seat rather than simply occupying it. (2) This same individual would be more effective if he chose the head seat than if he chose a side seat. The findings confirmed these hypotheses.

Festinger (1950) has stressed the pressures toward uniformity that occur within groups. One reason for such pressures is that people need to validate their own opinions, and agreement from others is one way to achieve such validation. Another reason is that groups often need consensus to move toward some goal. As a result, increases in both cohesiveness of the group and relevance of the

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opinion under discussion to the goals of the group should lead to increasing pressures for uniformity. These contentions have received support from studies such as Schachter (1951). However, both Festinger's theories and Schachter's studies lead one to assume that these pressures are always directed from the majority to the minority (or deviant) and that the way to achieve consensus is by causing the deviant to abdicate his position and adopt the majority position. Such an orientation is also found in numerous studies on conformity (see Allen, 1965) while many fewer studies investigate other processes of social influence in small groups.

Even casual observations indicate that sometimes a minority can sway a majority to its conception. The imposing realities in the political arena demonstrate that a strong and vocal minority can sway majority opinion. To understand the process of social change, rather than social control, we need to invoke the process of influence by a minority. In the social psychological literature, the main evidence in favor of minority influence comes from the area of attitude change. Numerous studies attest to the possible influence exerted by one individual on a number of subjects. However, in these studies, the individual usually is presented as superior on some dimension. He is either an expert in the area, particularly knowledgeable, or has superior status. Little attention is paid to the possibility that an individual or a minority who has no particular knowledge or resources can sway majority opinion.

Recently, there has been some interest in this phenomenon in the psychological literature (Moscovici and Faucheux, 1972; Moscovici and Nemeth, 1974). Attempting to understand why and how the minority can exert influence, these authors have concentrated on the behavioral style of the minority as the source of their influence. The concept of behavioral style refers to the orchestration and patterning of the minority's behavior. One important type of behavioral style is consistency. Moscovici *et al.* (1969), for example, placed four naive subjects and two confederates in a situation where they were asked to judge the simple color of a series of slides and to estimate their luminosity. The slides were all blue in color but two confederates said that they saw green on every trial. Naive subjects exposed to such judgments by confederates said that they saw green as well. When the confederates were not consistent, however (i.e. they said "green" on some trials and "blue" on others), their influence was negligible.

Nemeth *et al.* (1974) emphasized the importance of attributed consistency to the minority rather than consistency in the form of repetition of behavior. The authors reasoned that the minority could vary its responses—provided there was a pattern to the variation—and

still be seen as consistent. It is the perception that the minority is consistent and that it has a viable alternative position in which it is confident, that makes that minority effective. Again using blue slides, Nemeth *et al.* had confederates correlate their judgments to the luminosity of the slides. The confederates either said "green" to the brightest slides and "green-blue" to the dimmest slides (or the reverse), or they made judgments of "green" and "green-blue" *randomly* to the slides. The minority exerted a good deal of influence when they patterned their judgments to the properties of the stimuli but exerted no influence when their judgments were random. In fact, the correlated conditions produced at least as much influence, as did repetitious "green" or "blue-green" judgments by the confederates. Thus, the experiment offers support for the contention that to be effective, the minority must be *perceived* as consistent and confident. The behavioral styles of repetition or patterned behavior can lead to such attributions and, to the extent that such attributions are made, the minority can be effective.

The question then arises as to whether a minority, without status or resources, can sway majority opinion in a situation where pressures to change are present. In the above judgment situations, a conflict between judgments is apparent. However, subjects are not allowed to discuss their differences or to place any pressures on each other for change; they simply state their own judgment. In a discussion situation, where pressures towards uniformity are stressed, can a minority sway the consensus towards his own position or will the majority, if unsuccessful in changing the minority view, simply derogate the minority and maintain its own position? The Schachter (1951) study offers evidence that the majority will direct its communication to the deviant in an attempt to change his position but, when it becomes apparent that they are unsuccessful, they will stop communication to him and ostracize him. Our approach, however, is that the deviant is potentially influential provided that he appears consistent and confident. We assume that when the minority appears consistent and confident, he defines an alternative position to that of the majority and makes it clear that uniformity of opinion will not occur by his abdication of his position. The majority should then be in a state of conflict. Doubts may begin to arise because the majority wonders how the minority can be so sure of itself and still be wrong. The consistency and confidence of the minority can provide an anchor to which the now uncertain majority can move. In fact, if the majority starts to weaken, a consensus around the minority will be more stable than one around the majority. Thus, minority influence should be a potential outcome.

How does a minority achieve these perceptions? We have suggested

that the patterning of the minority's behavior is a source of such attributions. There are also specific acts that foster perceptions of confidence and consistency—for example, the non verbal cue of choosing the head seat at a rectangular table which repeatedly has been associated with influence (cf. Sommer (1961), Hare and Bales (1963) and Strodbeck and Hook (1961)).

In these studies, there is a confounding of such variables as the personal qualities of the individual, the *taking* of the seat and the *occupation* of the seat. Attempts to understand the relationship between influence and this head seat have focused on the occupation of that chair. Strodbeck and Hook, for example, suggest that occupation of the head chair allows greater visual accessibility. Presumably, such visual accessibility increases the amount of interchange for that person and thus allows for more influence attempts. However, we feel that the importance of visual accessibility has been exaggerated, and that rather, it is the person's behavior and the attributions based on it that render him effective. Our approach would emphasize the *taking* of the head seat, since it is this act that may foster those perceptions of confidence which will aid the individual in his influence attempts.

The present study investigates whether an individual, without status or resources, can take a position highly deviant from the rest of the members of a discussion group and sway that majority to his own conception. To the extent that he resists majority pressure and remains consistent with his position, we assume that he has a potential for influence. Further, we suggest that any action which also causes him to be perceived as confident will aid him in his influence attempts. In the context of a jury deliberation, we suggest that taking the head seat will increase his effectiveness; simply occupying it will not help his position, nor will choosing or occupying a side seat.

METHOD

Subjects were 116 male volunteers from Northwestern University, each of whom received \$1.50 for his participation. Subjects were brought in groups of five into a waiting room. The experiment was a 2×3 factorial design plus a control. Subjects either chose or were assigned a chair, and the chair occupied was either the head seat or one of two side seats. In the six experimental conditions, one of these subjects was a confederate. The same confederate served in all conditions. In the control condition, all five individuals were naive subjects. Four groups were run in each condition, totalling 16

subjects per experimental condition and 20 subjects for the control condition.

When all five subjects were present in the waiting room, they were given a case study¹ to read. The case involved a personal injury sustained by a washing machine repairman in the course of his duties. This individual, Mr. Smith, had already been paid for hospitalization charges and for wage loss during the period of recuperation. However, he was suing for \$25,000.00, the maximum allowable on his particular insurance policy, for "the past and present pain and suffering and the worry and grief which he has undergone as a result of this accident". The facts of the case, as presented, showed that there was some question as to whether the torn cartilage in his knee would ever completely heal; and a doctor stated that there was always the possibility that the knee would slip out of joint if sudden pressure was applied. Further, Mr. Smith's sole recreation was bowling and there was question as to whether he would be able to resume this recreation. The jurors were instructed to consider, "in reaching the amount of your verdict, how much you should award in order to fairly and justly compensate the plaintiff for the pain and suffering, worry and grief, and humiliation that has been endured and will hereafter be suffered." After reading the case study, subjects wrote down their initial opinion on the compensation that should be given to Mr. Smith. Pretesting indicated that the vast majority of subjects gave between \$12,000 and \$20,000 as their opinion. No one gave less than \$8,000.

Subjects were then escorted into a discussion room where they remained standing while the experimenter informed them that for a period of up to 40 minutes they would be discussing the case that they had just read. They were told to attempt to reach a unanimous decision and that they would receive an additional 50 cents if they did so.

In the "Chosen" conditions, subjects were then asked to take a seat. In the Chosen Head condition, the confederate took the head chair; in the Chosen Side conditions, the confederate took one of two side chairs (each being chosen equally often). In the "Assigned" conditions, the experimenter assigned subjects to their chairs. In the Assigned Head condition, the confederate was assigned to the head chair; in the Assigned Side conditions, he was assigned to one of the side chairs.

Each seat was labeled with a letter of the alphabet. Subjects were asked to refer to each other only by letter; they did not know each

¹The detailed case studies are available upon request.

other by name. At each place, there was also a copy of the case study to which they could refer during the discussion. They were then shown a timer set for 40 minutes and were asked to discuss the case until they reached agreement or until 40 minutes were up, whichever came first. The experimenter then left but his assistant remained in the room, busily working on some papers. His presence was to insure that the subjects took the task seriously.

During the course of the 40 minute discussion, the confederate took the grossly deviant position of allowing \$3,000 compensation and in defense of his position, gave six arguments from memory.² After reciting his six arguments, he then paraphrased these same arguments, being sure to talk as much as, but not more than, anyone else. The confederate trained for this task for about 25 hours in order to standardize his verbal and nonverbal behavior. He was also unaware of the experimental hypotheses.

Since none of the groups reached consensus by the end of 40 minutes, the experimenter returned and asked subjects to complete a questionnaire. *Ss* were asked their own opinion on compensation for this particular case, and their opinion if specifics of the case were changed. They answered questions regarding their perception of the other participants in their group. They were also given an entirely new case—involving a housewife who suffered injuries in an auto accident—on which to give an opinion.

RESULTS

There were four dependent variables assessing the influence of the confederate. The first was the change score from initial private opinion regarding compensation to private opinion regarding compensation after the discussion (Change Score). For the second dependent variable, subjects were asked their opinion if the maximum allowable compensation had been \$50,000 instead of \$25,000 (\$50,000 Max; again a change score was used). Subjects were told: "Assume the original case situation. However, rather than being a member of a jury, you are the judge and you alone decide the amount of damages to award" (Judge). Subjects' opinions on this question relative to their initial opinions on the case constituted the third dependent variable. The fourth dependent variable was the new case, the housewife in the automobile accident (Generalization). On these four dependent variables, if subjects decreased

² Copies of the arguments are available upon request.

compensation after the discussion relative to their initial opinions we will say that the confederate has exerted influence.

In our original design, the side position was represented by two chairs to test the possibility of a differential effect. However, since there were no significant differences between these two seats on any dependent variable, they were therefore pooled as the "Side Chair" condition.

Since the initial judgment of all subjects on this case was found to have a mean of \$14,670, the confederate espousing a position of \$3,000 was clearly deviant. Analyses of the effectiveness of the deviant showed that it was only when he chose the head seat that he exerted influence. When he was assigned to this head seat or when he occupied a side seat, whether by choice or assignment, he exerted no influence. On the "Change Score", the chosen head condition was significantly more effective than was the control ($t = 1.53$, $p < .07$). No other condition was significantly different from the control. In the condition where the confederate chose the head seat, subjects reduced their initial judgments by a mean amount of \$3,125. While initially these subjects had a mean opinion regarding compensation of \$13,500, their mean opinion after discussion with the confederate was \$10,375.

The same pattern emerged for the other dependent variables. On the "Judge" question, subjects in the chosen head condition tended to reduce their judgment of compensation more than did the control groups ($t = 1.43$, $p < .09$). None of the other experimental conditions differed from the control. On the "Generalization" case, subjects in the chosen head condition gave lower judgments of compensation than did the control groups ($t = 1.79$, $p < .05$). The mean change scores for all dependent variables over all conditions can be found in Table 1.

Comparisons *between* the experimental conditions were made by means of a 2×2 factorial design (Chosen-Assigned; Side-Center), and Analyses of Variance were performed over the four dependent variables. Since subjects cannot be assumed to be independent within a particular group, the group effect was analyzed as a variable and the procedure suggested by Winer (1962:184-185) was used.

On all four analyses of variance, there were no main effects for chosen-assigned or for seat occupied (side-center). A significant interaction was found, however, for the "change" score ($F = 5.24$, $p < .03$), for the "\$50,000 Max" question ($F = 4.28$, $p < .05$), for the "Judge" question ($F = 3.60$, $p < .07$) and for the "generalization" case ($F = 4.28$, $p < .05$).

Internal analyses revealed that these significant interactions were

TABLE 1
*Mean Change Scores by Condition (Opinion After the
 40-Minute Discussion Minus Initial Opinion*)*

	Chosen head (N = 16)	Chosen side (N = 32)	Assigned head (N = 16)	Assigned side (N = 32)	Control (N = 20)
Original case	-3,125	+ 1,437	+ 968	-1,968	+ 550
Maximum = \$50,000	- 75	+11,281	+5,687	+3,500	+4,000
Subject as judge	-3,000	+ 1,031	+ 562	-1,719	+ 500
Generalization case	+1,750	+10,313	+8,750	+6,295	+8,800

*The lower the number, the more the influence exerted by the confederate, i.e., subject's own judgment of compensation was less after the discussion. All numbers are dollar amounts.

primarily due to the chosen head condition. On the "change" score, the chosen head condition was significantly more effective than the chosen side condition ($t = 1.97$, $p < .05$). The chosen head condition was also more effective than the assigned head condition ($t = 1.53$, $p < .08$). There were no other significant differences. On the "\$50,000 Max" question, the chosen head condition was significantly more effective than the chosen side condition ($t = 2.48$, $p < .01$). No other comparisons were statistically significant. On the "judge" question, the chosen head condition was more effective than the chosen side condition ($t = 1.71$, $p < .05$). The chosen head condition was also more effective than the assigned head condition ($t = 1.31$, $p < .10$). On the "generalization" case, the interaction was due to the fact that the chosen head condition was significantly more effective than the chosen side condition ($t = 2.27$, $p < .03$); it was also significantly more effective than the assigned head condition ($t = 1.61$, $p < .06$). In summary, we find that when the confederate chose the head chair, he was significantly more effective in causing the majority to adopt his position than when he chose a side seat. Further, he was more effective when he chose the head seat than when he was assigned to that seat.

On the questionnaire, subjects were asked to give their perceptions of the other individuals. For each subject, we computed a difference score for the perception of the confederate and the mean perception of the other three individuals to get an assessment of the relative way

TABLE 2
*Summary of Significant Interactions for the Four
 Dependent Variables (Side-Center x
 Chosen-Assigned)*

	SS	df	MS	F	P
Original case:					
A x B	300.00	1	300.00	5.24	< .03
Group effect	1144.00	20	57.20		
Maximum = \$50,000					
A x B	1078.25	1	1078.25	4.28	< .05
Group effect	5039.40	20	251.97		
Subject as judge					
A x B	212.52	1	212.52	3.60	< .07
Group effect	1179.20	20	58.96		
Generalization case					
A x B	647.90	1	647.90	4.28	< .05
Group effect	3029.80	20	151.49		

in which the confederate was viewed. The confederate, in all experimental conditions, was seen as more consistent, independent, active, central, strong-willed, more of a leader and more confident ($p < .01$) than were the naive subjects. Subjects also said that he made them think more ($p < .01$) and made them reassess their own positions more ($p < .01$) than did the other subjects. However, the confederate was also viewed as *less* reasonable, fair, perceptive, warm, cooperative, liked, admired and wanted ($p < .01$) than the naive subjects.

While the above adjectives represent a general picture of the confederate, we also found condition differences in others' perceptions of him. When the confederate *occupied the head seat*, he was seen as more consistent ($t = 1.60$, $p < .05$), less unfair ($t = 3.18$, $p < .01$), less unperceptive ($t = 3.22$, $p < .01$), less cold ($t = 2.33$, $p < .01$) and more active ($t = 2.06$, $p < .01$) than when he occupied a side chair. Subjects also said that he made them think more when he occupied the head seat rather than a side seat ($t = 2.05$, $p < .01$) and saw him as more of a leader ($t = 1.82$, $p < .05$).

When the confederate *chose the head chair*, he was seen as more consistent than when he was assigned the head chair ($t = 1.68$, $p < .06$). He was also seen as more consistent than when he chose a side chair ($t = 1.74$, $p < .05$) or when he was assigned to a side chair ($t = 2.45$, $p < .01$). Thus, the confederate who chose the head seat

was seen as the most consistent of all. He was also seen as more confident than when he was assigned to the head chair ($t = 1.72$, $p < .05$) or when he chose a side seat ($t = 2.29$, $p < .01$). Thus, the individual who chose the head seat was seen as particularly consistent and confident relative to when he was assigned such a seat or when he chose a side seat.

DISCUSSION

We started with the assumption that the behavioral style of the minority is an important source of their influence. They can be effective in swaying the majority towards the minority position to the extent that their specific acts and behavior patterns are interpreted as a reflection of the consistency and confidence with which they present and maintain their position.

The reasons for such thinking were two-fold. First, the perception that the minority is consistent and confident makes the majority question their own position and puts that position into direct conflict with the minority. Secondly, when shaken in their own position, the consistency and confidence with which the minority holds its position provides an anchor, a stable way of viewing the world, to which the majority may move.

The present experiment sought to demonstrate the importance of such a conception. Previous studies linking influence and the nonverbal cue of occupation of the head seat at a rectangular table have tended to focus on occupation of the seat. The explanation of this linkage focused on the "geography" of the situation, utilizing concepts such as visual accessibility. However, there was often a confounding of the taking of the head seat with its occupation. While the previous authors concentrated on its occupation, our focus was on the taking of the seat. The act of taking the head seat could be interpreted by others as a sign of confidence, and such an attribution could aid the minority in his influence attempts. Occupation of that seat, if not by choice, would reveal no information about the actor regarding such traits.

The results of the present study bear out our thinking. Studying simulated jury deliberations, we found that it was the *choosing* of the head seat, rather than the occupation of it, that rendered the individual effective. Further; it was the choosing of the *head* seat rather than the choosing of a *side* seat that was effective. Even when the individual choosing the head seat proposed a very deviant position, he was influential. In fact, it was *only* in the condition where this initial act was taken that he was influential. It was in this condition that the subtle cue of taking the head seat provided him

with particularly strong perceptions of consistency and confidence, perceptions that aided him in his influence attempts.

Given that the confederate discussed the case by means of memorized arguments for 40 minutes, it may seem surprising that the subtle cue of taking the head seat, an action that occurred at the very beginning of the experiment and lasted for approximately four seconds, could have such an important effect. It is particularly interesting in the light of the fact that his *occupation* of the seat was apparent for the whole 40-minute session. Yet, our position places a great deal of emphasis on the attributions made to the individual on the basis of his behavior. To the extent that such behavior as taking a head seat accords the actor perceptions such as confidence, these perceptions may well color all of his ensuing behavior and arguments. And, in this study, it appears that it did.

It was *only* when the confederate took the head seat that he was effective in swaying majority opinion. This demonstrates that the maintenance of a deviant position, consistent though it may be, is not a sufficient condition for minority influence. We take the position that it is necessary, however. Inconsistency, in the sense of abdicating a prior position, will render the minority ineffective, a conclusion which finds support in the Moscovici *et al.* (1969) study. However, it does raise the point that the majority will not accede easily to the demands of even a consistent minority. In our study, the majority was often resistant to the views of the confederate, even in the face of rather convincing arguments, and on numerous occasions harassed or ridiculed the confederate for his deviant position. One subject even threatened to break the confederate's leg after the experiment was over to demonstrate the pain and suffering involved in such an injury. Thus, while the power of the majority to resist minority opinions is evident, they were influenced. However, they were influenced *only* when the consistency of position was coupled with an act indicating particular confidence—taking the head seat. It is possible, that if the confederate had maintained a minority opinion that was not so extreme (e.g., if he had espoused the position of \$7,000 instead of \$3,000), he might have exerted influence in all the conditions. However, the important point is that the act of taking the head seat enhanced his effectiveness.

A second point that should be mentioned is the lack of relationship between liking and influence. Many of us tend to assume that the way to influence people is to first gain their affection. One first wins friends—then influences people. Such an orientation can be found in Hollander's (1961) work on leadership, which found that one first needs to conform and to prove his competence before

successful deviation. Our position is that this need not be the case. A person can influence and yet not be liked. Our confederate was never liked. He was considered unreasonable, unfair, nonperceptive, cold, uncooperative, unliked, and unwanted. When he chose the head chair, he was still seen in all these unfavorable terms (though more favorable on some items than when he chose a side chair or was assigned to a chair). While not liked, he was seen as independent, consistent, confident, and as making others think. He had stability and he had strength. We suggest that it is this stability and confidence that rendered him effective, not whether he was liked or disliked.

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