

Running Head: MINORITY INFLUENCE

An Expectancy-based Explanation for the Role of Minorities in Initiating Changes in Social and Cultural Norms

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Abstract

That sociological and cultural norms change over time has not been accounted for in the use of the concept of expectations in Language Expectancy Theory and Expectancy Violations Theory. This paper proposes a framework in which change in normative practices is accounted for using the concept of violations of expectations and the role of minorities in introducing changes in social and cultural norms. It is proposed that minorities are more likely to introduce change than majorities by virtue of their narrower bandwidths of acceptable behaviors relative to the majorities. A narrower bandwidth is proposed to make minorities more likely to violate expectations and therefore more likely to induce people to think about issues. The paper proposes a research study on the initial effects of violations of expectations regarding minority positions on social issues. The paper suggests further study of the conditions under which the changes that minorities introduce become accepted and established as common patterns of behaving in society.

An Expectancy-Based Propositional Framework for the Study of the Role of Minorities in Initiating Changes in Social and Cultural Norms

Some social psychologists (mostly Europeans) have criticized the dominant paradigm in social influence research as biased toward conformity and indifferent toward innovation (Moscovici, 1976; Mugny, 1982; Moscovici, Mugny, & Van Avermaet, 1985; Mugny & Perez, 1991). For the past twenty years, these researchers have argued for a coherent theory of minority influence, which they believe accounts for most of the innovations in culture and society, in contrast to majority influence which they believe mostly serves to preserve the status quo. However, a search of the literature in the field of communication has brought out research relating to the concept of violations of expectations, which clearly goes beyond conformity to explain unexpected, nonconforming behaviors that may have positive or negative consequences. The concept of violations of expectations has been the focus of research of two communication scholars, M. Burgoon and J. Burgoon. M. Burgoon formulated Language Expectancy Theory and has looked at the effects of violations of expectations in the area of social influence, particularly on expectations about language intensity and gender (M. Burgoon, 1975, 1990, 1995a, 1995b; M. Burgoon, Birk, & Hall, 1991; M. Burgoon, Dillard, & Doran, 1984; M. Burgoon & Miller, 1985). J. Burgoon started looking at personal space violations and has expanded, over the past two decades, the scope of her Expectancy Violations Theory to include other types of nonverbal and verbal communication (J. Burgoon, 1978, 1983, 1992, 1993, 1995; J. Burgoon & Aho, 1982; J. Burgoon & Jones, 1976; J. Burgoon & Hale, 1988; J. Burgoon & Walther, 1990).

This paper attempts to take the substantive issues raised by Moscovici and associates regarding the role of minorities in social and cultural innovations and to explain these within the

general framework of M. Burgoon's Language Expectancy Theory and J. Burgoon's Expectancy Violations Theory (abbreviated as LET and EVT respectively in subsequent references). First, the political and ideological connotation of research in minority influence and the direction of use of the expectancy theories are clarified. Second, this paper takes the assumption that expectations are defined by enduring cultural and sociological norms and expands it to include change over time. Explanations about the nature of social and cultural changes are drawn from research in anthropology and social psychology. Third, the question of who introduces novelties in social and cultural norms is considered, drawing on the research on innovations by Moscovici (1976) and Rogers (1962). Fourth, the basic tenets of M. Burgoon's and J. Burgoon's expectancy theories are presented. Fifth, a framework is proposed for the study of the role of minorities in initiating changes in social and cultural norms using the concept of violations of expectations. The paper concludes with recommendations for further study of minority influence.

Politics and Ideology in Research and the Use of Theory

While one is drawn to the refreshing arguments of new theories claiming to explain hitherto unexplored areas of research, one is not sure whether the issues driving such research are politically or ideologically-biased or are intrinsically and necessarily part of the broader phenomenon that must be comprehensively studied. This suspicion is especially acute in areas of research where one has to account for social and cultural changes in order for the research to have external validity. In the case of Moscovici's and others' research on minority influence, one becomes suspicious whether the impetus for such research comes from the politics and ideology of social movements promoting the rights of several ethnic, religious and lifestyle minorities or, whether the researchers really believe that minority influence is a necessary but neglected part of social influence research. This is a critical concern for scientific research, as critical as the

concerns of some in the U.S. legal system (Bork, 1984) that the problems of society are being allowed to interpret Constitutional law rather than by a strong theory of the law that can withstand the changes in society as well as the disorders generated within the legal system. M. Burgoon (1995b) has raised a similar concern about communication research.

However, it may also be the case that one's suspicions about the impetus behind some research can obscure one's mind to the reality and necessity of accounting for that which the opposing view is charging the established view of being blind to. While the concept of violations of expectations in LET and EVT was used to explain the consequences of nonconforming behaviors taking into consideration communicator, relational and context characteristics, these consequences have not been tied to the processes of change in social and cultural norms. This author believes that LET and EVT can be used beyond mere references to sociological and cultural norms and actually be used to explain the cycle of innovation of and conformity to these norms.

Whereas previous applications and tests of LET and EVT focused on the functional properties and outcomes of expectations, this paper will use the basic tenets of the theories to explain the innovation of norms on which expectations are based. This amounts to saying that the theories themselves can explain both the antecedents and consequences of expectations. This bidirectional use of the theories highlights the middle position of communication theories that take as their primitive, undefined terms, concepts that are sociologically and culturally defined to explain outcomes that are largely psychological in nature.

That both the antecedent and outcome terms of LET and EVT are still open to reduction into various components and levels of analysis makes the theories open to criticisms of being tautological. Burgoon and Walther (1990) themselves had to define expectations as either

general or person-specific and have gone further back to the sources from which expectations are derived to explain that typicality is a constitutive characteristic of expectations. While the previous applications and tests of LET and EVT have gone forward to predict and to explain the outcomes of the interaction of expectations with communicator and message characteristics, this paper will explore the uses of the theories by going the other direction and explain just how changes in the norms on which expectations are based are introduced.

Expectations and change

If communicative expectancies are primarily a function of cultural norms and sociological norms (M. Burgoon, 1995a), then we should expect these expectancies to change as the norms change. For while communicative expectancies are defined as "enduring patterns of anticipated verbal and nonverbal behavior" (J. Burgoon, 1995 p. 195), the social norms and person-specific knowledge on which expectancies are based are subject to change over time.

Norms evolve as cultures and societies evolve. Murdock (1945) wrote that, "It is a fundamental characteristic of culture that, despite its essentially conservative nature, it does change over time and from place to place" (p. 247). As the norms in a culture change, we should also expect person-specific knowledge about appropriate behaviors to change because individuals define themselves and are defined by others not only in interaction with others. Individuals define themselves also according to the social and cultural categories that they belong to (Tajfel, 1981) and according to the prevailing normative practices in society at a particular time in history. This is not merely shifting the emphasis from the individual to the sociological but recognizing the different levels of analysis and articulation of processes that impact both the individual and society.

Doise (1978) has criticized traditional research in social psychology as putting too much emphasis on the processes in the individual and the immediate relations between two or more individuals. Because many communication studies borrowed heavily from social psychology, it can be inferred that many communication studies followed in that tradition. Mugny (1982) argued for two more levels of analysis: (a) the social position occupied by the individuals whose behaviors are being studied, and (b) the norms of behavior which are most general in a society, and therefore most general also with regard to the dominant ideology at that particular time in its history.

That normative practices and the expectations derived from them are influenced by the dominant ideology at a particular time in history should not be understood in the language of oppression that so politicized the discussion of majority-minority relations. The consideration of a dominant ideology at a particular time in history is as necessary as the consideration of universal principles of conduct that endure through the ages. The former can explain changes resulting from the confrontation of and negotiation among various social agents while the latter explains the common motivations for change among various social agents.

The consideration of change as marked by historical time periods also highlights the processual nature of change. Lewin (1958) wrote that, "It is important that a social standard to be changed does not have the nature of a 'thing' but of a process" (p.207). It is also important to note that this process of change transcends the idiosyncrasies of individuals or groups in society. In his analysis of cultural evolution, Campbell (1978) argued that, "In social evolution, we can contemplate a process in which adaptive belief systems could be accumulated which none of the innovators, transmitters, or participants properly understood, a tradition wiser than any of the persons transmitting it" (p. 1107). The continuity of tradition and change is also evident in

Moscovici's (1985) characterization of change as a cycle of alternation between innovation and conformity. This cycle starts with the invention of a product or idea differentiating a social category. This product or idea is first resisted, then adopted and becomes commonplace. The cycle ends with total conformity to the product or idea. Uniformity breeds desires in some to be different, which leads to further invention and thus the cycle is repeated. This cycle of change is also evident in Rogers' (1962) analysis of the diffusion of innovations.

Minority Influence

The consideration of change in normative practices invites the question of who introduces novelties and how are these novelties introduced? The other logical question would ask how these novelties are accepted and established as common patterns of behaving, thinking, and feeling in society. This paper, however will be limited to providing answers for the first question by considering Rogers' (1962) and Moscovici's (1976) works on explaining innovations.

Although Rogers (1962) used agricultural inventions as examples of innovations, he characterized the innovator as "may not be influential in his social system but he may set the stage for change by demonstrating new ideas to local opinion leaders" (p. 193-194). Furthermore, he has cited several studies, which showed that innovators are almost always considered deviants by other members of the social system and by the innovators themselves. There is a close parallel with Rogers' (1962) agricultural innovators and Moscovici's (1976) social minorities as initiators of social and cultural changes. Both are opposed by the majority of members in the social system and are accorded a lower status in the social system.

How then can innovators as deviants and minorities in their social systems effect changes in their society and culture? Both Rogers (1962) and Moscovici (1976) recognize that the influence of minorities does not derive from power or dependency relationships but on

minorities' ability to cause people to be aware of new ideas. Moscovici and colleagues (1985) explained that this awareness comes from differences and disagreements, from conflicts of beliefs and ideas. This is different from those situations of doubt and uncertainty which most social influence studies explained as disquieting and unbalancing and therefore motivating people to restore balance through conformity to existing social norms (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958). Moscovici and others (1985) argued that this view of uncertainty leading to conformity presupposes that social norms are absolute givens. They argue that this view of doubt does not allow for creativity and change. They argue that the doubt induced by minorities can lead one to admit that another's idea is better than one's own which can lead to rejection of the prevailing norm in favor of a new idea.

The Basic Tenets of LET and EVT

M. Burgoon (1995a) presents the basic tenets of Language Expectancy Theory as follows:

Change in the direction desired by an actor occurs when positive violations of expectations occur. Positive violations obtain in two ways (1) when the enacted behavior is better or more preferred than that which was expected in the situation, or (2) when negatively evaluated sources conform more closely than expected to cultural values, societal norms, or situational exigencies. Change occurs in the first case because enacted behavior is outside the normative bandwidth in a positive direction and such behavior prompts attitude and/or behavioral changes. In the second condition, a person who is expected to behave incompetently or inappropriately conforms to cultural norms and/or expected social roles which results in an overly positive evaluation of the source and subsequently, change advocated by that actor. Negative violations of expectations result from language choices or the selection of message strategies that lie outside the bandwidth of socially acceptable behavior in a negative direction. The result is no attitude and/or behavioral changes, or changes in the opposite direction intended by the actor (pp. 1-2).

Most relevant to the role of minorities in introducing social and cultural changes is the capacity inherent in violations of expectations to divert attention to the violator and to the meanings of these violations. J. Burgoon (1995) has emphasized that "deviant and unexpected behaviors, by virtue of their novelty or unusualness, are known to be alerting or arousing and to

trigger finer grained information processing. This attention-diverting feature of expectancy violations is posited to intensify responses relative to expectancy confirmations by potentiating communicator valence and activating an otherwise latent interpretation-evaluation process" (p. 202).

The effects of the valence attached to violations of expectations has been explained by J. Burgoon (1993) as follows:

Positive violations, in which the enacted behavior is more positively valenced than the expected, are theorized to produce more positive interaction patterns and outcomes than conformity to expectancies; negative violations, in which the enacted behavior is more negatively valenced than the expected behavior, are theorized to be detrimental, relative to expectancy confirmation (p.40).

With regard to communicator valence, J. Burgoon (1993) has pointed out that positive violations are not always associated with high-valence communicators nor negative violations with low-valence ones. She reasoned that because of the larger bandwidth of expected behavior granted to high-valence communicators, high-valence communicators may have to engage in more extreme behaviors before their behaviors are considered violations of expectations. Furthermore, J. Burgoon (1993) added that that the "standards of conduct expected from high-valence communicators may be much higher than those for low-valence communicators. If expected and enacted behaviors are placed on a continuum from extreme positive valence to extreme negative valence, then the gap between the expected and enacted behavior might be quite small for a high-valence communicator but quite large for a low-valence one, making it easier for a low-valence communicator to commit a positive violation or a high valence communicator to commit a negative one" (p. 39).

An Expectancy-based Propositional Framework for the Role of Minority Influence in the
Innovation of Social and Cultural Norms

Basic Terms: Norms, expectations, population, change.

Derived Terms: (a) violations of expectations are behaviors enacted outside of expected appropriate behaviors, (b) bandwidth of expected behaviors refers to the range of appropriate behaviors from which an actor can select, (c) minorities are individuals subscribing to and proposing ideas and behavioral styles that do not conform to the dominant norm of a particular situation, social system, place and time, and (d) general population refers to the rest of society who subscribe to the dominant norm in varying degrees.

Basic Assumptions

1. People have normative expectations about appropriate behaviors.
2. These expectations are based primarily on sociological and cultural norms.
3. These expectations change as the sociological and cultural norms change.
4. Changes in social and cultural norms are primarily introduced by minorities.

Propositions

1. Generally, minorities are accorded a lower status in society. As a result, they are generally granted narrower band-widths of expected verbal and nonverbal behaviors, relative to the dominant norms in society, than the general population.
2. Because minorities have less freedom to use a variety of verbal and nonverbal behaviors relative to the dominant norms of society, they are more likely to violate expectations regarding these norms than the general population.

3. Because violations of expectations attract more attention than conformity to expectations, minorities are more likely to initiate change in the dominant norms than the general population. However, change desired by minorities depend on the valence of their violations as perceived/evaluated by the targets such that:
 - 3a. Positive violations of expectations tend to facilitate the desired change.
 - 3b. Negative violations tend to block the desired change.

A Research Proposal

Previous experiments on minority influence assessed subjects' perceptual judgments on perceptual cues such as the color of slides (Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969; Moscovici & Personnaz, 1980). Mugny (1982) criticized this paradigm because "what is being studied are majority/minority relations removed from the context of social power in which minorities are truly enmeshed, yet the study hopes to establish the model of functioning of the minority" (p. 24). Mugny (1982) reasoned that because subjects within a culture most often agree on perceptual judgments regardless of the social positions they occupy, "the use of perceptual materials in experiments largely masks the complexity of the social context of innovation" (p.24). Mugny (1975, 1982) proposed that the use of already existing social issues (e.g. xenophobia, pollution) allows experiments to reason from the starting point of majority/minority relations within a social power context. However, Mugny (1982) recognized that it is not possible to speak of a majority viewpoint on social issues in the sense of a uniform consensus in the general population. Mugny (1982) suggests defining a majority in the context of two social entities: "on one side, there is the power which dictates norms and rules, on the other side, there is the 'population' which submits to domination by this power and which, through its

interiorization of the dominant ideology participates wholly or partly in the norm-and rule-enforcing activities and thus becomes a majority" (p. 29).

This proposal will follow along the lines that Mugny has proposed and will take social issues as the bases for specifying *a priori* the dominant norm against which a minority position is assessed as one and against which the bandwidth of expected behaviors for minorities relative to the general population is measured. As previously defined, a minority would be an individual or group of individuals who subscribe to and propose ideas or ways of doing things that do not conform to a dominant norm in a particular situation, place and time. Generally and at least initially, minorities are accorded a lower status because they are perceived to be deviant. To distinguish the term "minority" from the pejorative term "deviant," a minority must be defined beforehand as opposed to a dominant norm but progressive and not merely holding a contradictory view relative to the general population. This definition, which is similar to Moscovici's (1976; 1985) definition of a minority, rejects a numerical characterization of minority status. The importance of numerical characterization becomes apparent only in terms of the needed social support in order for a minority to exert a broader and long-term effect on the population.

The propositions stated in the previous section of this paper deal with the changes in social and cultural norms that minorities could induce and establish in a population. However, changes in social and cultural norms take place over a longer period of time and across wider sections of a population than changes in individual attitudes and behaviors. This paper does not attempt to propose a longitudinal study of the changes induced by minorities over a period of time but will propose a general outline of an experiment that can be modified in a series of experiments and from which one could infer long-term effects. This general outline follows the

general methods used by Mugny and associates (1982) in their series of experiments on minority influence on issues including pollution and the Swiss national army. The concept of violations of expectations (M. Burgoon, 1995a; Miller & M. Burgoon, 1979; J. Burgoon, 1993, 1995) will be incorporated in the design of the experiment.

Previous experiments have shown that along with consistency of position on an issue, the behavioral and message style of the minority is crucial to exerting positive influence on the population (Papastamou, Mugny, & Kaiser, 1980; Mugny, Kaiser, & Papastamou, 1983). One important dimension of the minority's style is rigidity/flexibility and it is along this dimension that the general population often perceives minorities. A rigid style involves refusal of all compromise and blockage of any negotiation. A flexible style is less unilateral and "while not sacrificing any consistency, nonetheless expresses a desire to negotiate, a certain willingness to search for compromise" (Papastamou & Mugny, 1985 p. 114-115). The question that this proposal seeks to answer is "What happens when the expectations of the general population along the dimension of rigidity/flexibility are violated by the minority?"

An experiment by Miller and Burgoon (1979) found that (a) positive violations of expectations induce counterarguing and lead to reversals of initial positive attitudes after receipt of a second message arguing on the same side of an attitude issue, and (b) negative violations of receiver expectations decrease the probability of counterarguing and increase the vulnerability of people to subsequent persuasive attacks. The concept of counterarguing maybe analogous to the conflict on which minority influence hinges. This proposal however does not explicitly address the conflict induced when expectations are violated although it can be argued that contrary to (b) above, a negative violation of expectations in a rigid minority influence situation would only block any further negotiation and therefore would not lead to any subsequent positive change in

targets. Unlike Miller's and Burgoon's (1979) experiment, this proposed study does not involve a time sequence of messages. What is being proposed here would only test the initial effect that minorities have on a population when they violate the latter's expectations. The following hypotheses are proposed to be tested:

Hypothesis I: People who are induced to expect a rigid message from a minority but who receive a flexible message will be initially more positive toward the minority position and the image of the minority.

Hypothesis II: People who are induced to expect a flexible message from a minority but who receive a rigid message will be more negative toward the minority position and the image of the minority.

Method

The study follows a pretest-posttest experimental design. Subjects would answer individually a questionnaire on a social issue to assess their baseline agreement or disagreement with a minority position that is previously determined by the experimenters as a minority position. The researchers would tell the subjects that they are researchers testing a new opinion polling technique. A week later, subjects would be randomly assigned to two experimental groups. The groups would be induced to expect either a rigid or flexible message from a minority source. Those who are induced to expect a rigid message would then be given a flexible text to read. Those who are induced to expect a flexible message would be given a rigid text to read. Immediately after reading the text, the subjects will be asked to give a second response to the opinion questionnaire with the experimenter reasoning that the reading of a related text often allow people to clarify their opinions. The subjects will also fill in an additional questionnaire

about the image they formed of the source of the text they read. The session will end with an interview and a debriefing session during which the reasons for the research will be explained.

The Experimental Design

Group	Induced Expectancy	Message Style Received
I	Flexible	Rigid
II	Rigid	Flexible

Subjects

Subjects will be drawn from the general population to which the social issue is most relevant and which the minority wants to persuade to its position. Again this will rest on an *a priori* determination of a minority position on an issue and the general opinion of the targeted population. For example, one can assume that the proposition that any department (academic or non-academic) of public universities should not be endorsing commercial products is a minority position on campus based on the general apathy of students towards the issue. The apathy of the general population makes it part of the dominant entities on campus who can decide about contracts made by the university with private corporations. One can also look at issues regarding laws regulating the use of alcohol and substance abuse. The population from which subjects are drawn is defined by the change a minority position/source on a social issue wants to obtain.

Questionnaire Construction

To be able to assess change based on the differences between pretest and posttest scores, one must construct the opinion questionnaire around some dimensions or categories that would give a measurement of the movement toward or away from the minority position. For example,

the issue of university-corporate relations can have categories of practicality/intellectualism, social responsibility and administration/student population relations.

Expectancy Induction

To induce an expectation of a rigid message, subjects will be told that other people who had read the message thought it highly ideological, dogmatic, uncompromising, unrealistic. For the flexible message expectation, subjects will be told that others who had read the message thought it realistic, principled, socially responsible, progressive.

Influence Text

Text is used as the source of influence in this simple experiment so as to avoid confounding target-source interaction and social support among targets with rigidity/flexibility of position on an issue. The experimental manipulation of rigidity/flexibility in the text would require that the focus of negotiation between the minority and majority be identified. The example of the issue of university-corporate relations would have the question of whether or not universities should display corporate logos in exchange for corporate funding of academic or athletic programs. A rigid message would advocate that under no circumstances should universities display and promote corporate products and universities should not even be accepting funding from private corporations because doing so compromises the integrity of academic learning. A flexible message would maintain that universities should not be promoting corporate products because that would compromise the integrity of learning. However, a flexible message would qualify that principle to point out alternative ways by which universities and corporations can work together to improve academic standards, job training, community relations, etc.

Suggested Statistical Tests

A 2 (flexible and rigid expectancy) x 2 (flexible and rigid message) analysis of variance is suggested.

Conclusion

This paper has touched on the introduction of changes in social and cultural norms and has explained the role of minorities in introducing such changes using the concept of violations of expectations in Language Expectancy Theory and Expectancy Violations Theory. There is much more to be accounted for, particularly how minority ideas and communicators are evaluated and interpreted over time in order that the changes they introduce become accepted and established as common patterns of thinking, behaving and feeling in society. One can draw on the substantial tests and applications of LET and EVT for principles on how communicator, relational and context characteristics interact to effect attitudinal and behavioral changes. One can draw principles from Moscovici's (1976) theory of consistency, which posits that the influence of minorities takes hold depending on the consistency of the behavioral styles of minorities. One can also draw on Asch's (1951, 1952, 1956) experiments on conformity to show the importance of allies in overcoming one's conformity to group norms. That social support is crucial to minority influence was also forwarded by Doms and Van Avermaet (1985). Mugny's (1982) psychosociological theory of minority influence offers a theoretical framework in which minority influence can be tested at the individual as well as the sociological level.

The use of theories and findings from different disciplines and areas of research that are applicable to minority influence helps us look at the phenomenon from different levels of analysis. We may find that explaining a phenomenon within the frameworks of theories that have not previously accounted for it may not only contribute to a better understanding of the

phenomenon but may also lead to an expansion of the theories such that historical and sociological factors can be richly accounted for without sacrificing the internal processes in the individual and the dynamics of interaction between dyads and small groups.

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