5 Multiple roles for minority sources in persuasion and resistance

Zakary L. Tormala
Stanford University, USA

Richard E. Petty
Ohio State University, USA

Victoria L. DeSensi
Indiana University, USA

Research on minority influence over the years has revealed that although sources in the numerical majority tend to be very persuasive on an immediate, public, and direct level, sources in the numerical minority tend to be resisted on this level (e.g., Moscovici, 1980, 1985a; see Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994, for a review). Early theorizing by Moscovici (1980, 1985a, 1983b) and others (e.g., Mugny & Perez, 1991) suggested that people publicly agree with majority messages and reject minority messages out of hand to avoid aligning themselves with deviant groups. That is, public acceptance and rejection of majority and minority messages has been thought to occur with very little issue-relevant thought. Importantly, though, both majority persuasion and minority resistance have also been argued to involve more thoughtful processes. For example, Erb and Bohn (2001) have argued that the majority or minority status of the source of a persuasive message can bias message recipients’ thinking about the attitude issue in one direction or another. Specifically, majority sources are postulated to produce more favourable thoughts (i.e., pro-arguments) in response to persuasive messages, whereas minority sources are posited to produce more unfavourable thoughts (i.e., counter-arguments). These thoughts, in turn, foster relative persuasion and resistance.

In addition to having a direct effect on attitudes or biasing the direction of thought, some researchers have argued that minority/majority source status can influence the amount of thinking that occurs. Moscovici’s classic conversion theory (1980), for instance, proposed that minority sources can sometimes elicit true, lasting persuasion when they stimulate heightened levels of information-processing activity. Subsequent research has broadened this view, revealing that both minority and majority sources are capable of increasing the amount of issue-relevant thinking in which
people engage (e.g., Baker & Petty, 1994; Martin, Hewstone, & Martin, 2003). Increased thinking can lead to either more persuasion or more resistance depending on the quality, or strength, of arguments included in the persuasive message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In short, multiple theories and processes have been put forth in an effort to explain differences in the effects of minority and majority sources on persuasion and resistance. With this in mind, the present chapter has two goals. First, we seek to apply a multiple-roles framework, based on the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (ELM; Petty & Wegener, 1998), in an effort to integrate the numerous mechanisms for minority/majority-source effects in prior research. Second, we propose a new metacognitive effect for minority sources in persuasion settings that has not been identified previously. We focus on situations in which people resist immediate, focal persuasion because the source of a persuasive message is in the numerical minority. Based on our own recent research exploring metacognitive factors in resistance to persuasion (Tormala & Petty, 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Tormala, Clarkson, & Petty, 2006b), we propose that when people resist minority messages, they can perceive this resistance and form specifiable inferences about their attitudes that have implications for attitude certainty (Gross, Holtz, & Miller, 1995). These certainty effects, we argue, have the potential to account for the delayed and indirect attitude change that have often been associated with resisting immediate minority persuasion.

### Multiple roles for variables in persuasion settings

In order to understand the multiple roles minority and majority sources can play in persuasion and resistance, it is worthwhile considering multiprocess theories of persuasion such as the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999; Petty, Wheeler, & Tormala, 2003) and the heuristic-systematic model (HSM; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). According to these models, persuasion and resistance can occur through different mechanisms depending on message recipients' level of elaboration. In essence, elaboration refers to one's extent of thinking or information processing—that is, the degree of cognitive effort one is motivated and able to expend in processing a persuasive message. The ELM, in particular, holds that persuasion variables such as majority or minority source status can impact attitudes through different processes at different levels of elaboration. When elaboration is low, variables often affect attitudes through peripheral route mechanisms—that is, serving as quick heuristics or cues to persuasion or resistance. When elaboration is high, however, variables often play very different roles in persuasion settings. For example, under these conditions variables can influence persuasive outcomes by biasing the direction of thoughts people generate during persuasive messages, by serving as issue-relevant arguments (i.e., information relevant to the central merits of a persuasive message), or by affecting the amount of confidence people have in the thoughts they have generated (Petty, Brifol, & Tormala, 2002). Finally, when elaboration is moderate (i.e., neither high nor low) to begin with, variables sometimes determine the amount of elaboration in which people engage.

Consider research on divergent but classic variables such as source credibility and people's mood states. Research over the years has revealed a number of mechanisms through which credibility and mood produce effects on attitudes, and these mechanisms depend on message recipients' level of elaboration. The most common characterization of source credibility (e.g., Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kiesler & Mathog, 1968; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981) and mood (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Zanna, Kiesler, & Pilkonis, 1970) has been that they operate as peripheral cues (or heuristics) to persuasion when the likelihood of message elaboration is relatively low. For example, people who are unmotivated or unable to engage in extensive message processing might simply accept a message without scrutiny if its source is an expert, because experts are assumed to be correct. Similarly, people who are unmotivated or unable to think deeply might rely on their mood state to reject a message in a cue-based fashion, thinking 'I feel bad so I must not like this idea'.

Recent research guided by multiprocess theories of persuasion has enhanced our understanding of source credibility and mood effects, however, by showing that they can also play a role in persuasion when the likelihood of message elaboration is moderate as well as high. When elaboration is moderate to begin with and, thus, not constrained to be high or low, credibility (e.g., DeBono & Harnish, 1988; Eagly, Chaiken, & Wood 1981; Heesacker, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1983; Priester & Petty, 1995; see also Ziegler, Diehl, & Ruth, 2002) and mood (e.g., Bless, Bohner, Schwarz, & Strack, 1990; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995; Worth & Mackie, 1987) have been shown to influence the amount of information processing that occurs. Receiving a message from a dishonest source, for instance, can boost elaboration for some individuals (Priester & Petty, 1995), thereby increasing persuasion when message arguments are weak but reducing persuasion when message arguments are weak.

Finally, when elaboration is high, a number of different roles for credibility and mood have been established. For example, these variables can bias the direction of thoughts people generate in response to persuasive messages. In the seminal study examining the multiple processes through which mood can affect persuasion, Petty, Schumann, Richman, and Strathman (1993) found that under high elaboration conditions positive mood increased persuasion by boosting the production of message-favourable thoughts. Under low elaboration conditions, positive mood also increased persuasion, but without influencing thoughts. Similarly, Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994) found that under high elaboration conditions expert sources increased persuasion by increasing the favourability of
message recipients’ thoughts, at least when message arguments were ambiguous. Under low-elaboration conditions, the previously documented cue effect of credibility was obtained. Also under high-elaboration conditions, source credibility (e.g., Kruglanski & Thompson, 1999) and mood (e.g., Martin, Abend, Sedikides, & Green, 1997) can be evaluated as arguments, affecting attitudes when they provide compelling evidence for the advocacy. Finally, under high-elaboration conditions both source credibility (Brinol, Petty, & Tormala, 2004; Tormala, Brinol, & Petty, 2006a) and mood (Brinol, Petty, & Barden, 2006) have been shown to affect the amount of confidence people have in the thoughts they generate about a persuasive message. According to the self-validation hypothesis, thoughts have a greater impact on attitudes when thought confidence is high rather than low (Petty et al., 2002). The thought-confidence effect is especially likely to occur when source-credibility information or the mood induction follows the persuasive message (e.g., Tormala, Brinol, & Petty, 2007a).

Multiple roles for minority-source information

Extending the multiple-roles idea to the current concerns, research on minority and majority influence is consistent with the notion that the numerical status of a source can influence attitudes through different mechanisms depending on message recipients’ level of elaboration. In particular, recent research and theorizing (e.g., Erb & Bohner, 2001; Petty & Wegener, 1998) suggest that the minority/majority status of a source can influence persuasive outcomes by serving as a cue, by biasing thoughts, or by determining the amount of information processing in which message recipients engage. Although participants’ initial level of elaboration has not typically been manipulated or measured in this research, the cue, message processing, and biased-thinking roles for minority sources appear to map onto low-, moderate-, and high-elaboration situations, respectively. After briefly reviewing these and other possible roles that minority/majority-source status might play in affecting persuasion, we will discuss an additional role we believe minority-source information can play in affecting attitude certainty following message exposure.

Low-elaboration conditions

According to the multiple-roles framework of the ELM, majority- or minority-source status is most likely to operate as a simple cue to persuasion or resistance when conditions constrain the amount of thinking to be relatively low. That is, minority/majority status can provide an efficient means by which to assess the validity of a position when one has little personal interest in or knowledge about a message topic, or when one is under high cognitive load (e.g., there are many distractions present). High consensus, or majority support, would imply that a position is valid and should be adopted, whereas low consensus, or minority support, would imply that a position is invalid and should be rejected (e.g., Festinger, 1954). This notion is compatible with a host of studies in the broader persuasion literature indicating that under low-elaboration conditions people sometimes rely on numerosity heuristics as cues to message validity (e.g., Pelham, Sumarta, & Myaskovsky, 1994; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Tormala, Petty, & Brinol, 2002).

In the minority-influence domain, there is some evidence that source status can operate in a cue-based fashion. Moscovici (1980), for instance, argued that although minority persuasion tends to involve elevated levels of information processing, majority persuasion often occurred as a result of simple heuristic inferences. That is, even when people were not motivated to process message content very deeply, they were presumed to accept the majority position without question. Mackie (1987) further explored this notion, and found that even in the absence of any persuasive arguments, people were convinced by a majority position (see also Darke et al., 1998; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1997). Consistent with the idea that majority persuasion was heuristic in nature, it was less stable than persuasion stemming from more thoughtful processing of message arguments (see Petty, Hegtvedt, & Smith, 1995, for further discussion of elaboration and attitude stability). Importantly, although the evidence for this role for minority/majority-source status has focused on majority persuasion, the flipside is that these studies also point to low-elaboration processes leading to minority resistance. That is, just as people can thoughtlessly accept majority persuasion to align with the majority position, they can resist minority persuasion in cue-based fashion to avoid being in the minority and appearing deviant. As described later, however, it has not always been clear whether minority resistance involves genuine rejection of the position in a cue-based manner, or whether it stems from not wanting to be associated with the minority view despite careful processing.

Moderate-elaboration conditions

When the level of elaboration is not constrained to be high or low to begin with, the multiple-roles notion of the ELM suggests that minority/majority-source status should determine the amount of message processing in which people engage. Indeed, this is probably the most common characterization of minority/majority-influence effects in prior studies. As noted earlier, Moscovici (1980, 1985a) was the first to advance the notion that minority influence often involves greater message processing than does majority influence. Moscovici argued that when people receive persuasive messages from minority sources they more carefully scrutinize the content of the message, which can lead to 'conversion,' or private and long-term acceptance of the minority position, even if people show no agreement on an
initial public attitude assessment. Numerous researchers have followed up on this idea and produced evidence consistent with the contention that minority sources often engender greater information processing than do majority sources (e.g., Crano & Chen, 1998; Maass & Clark, 1983; Martin et al., 2003; Moskowitz, 1996). In one demonstration, Martin et al. (2003) presented participants with a persuasive message from a minority or majority source, and then presented another message in the opposite direction from the first. They found that although attitudes were equivalent following the initial message, these attitudes were more resistant to the second message in the minority relative to majority condition. Given the association between elaboration and attitude strength (Petty et al., 1995), this finding is consistent with the notion that the initial minority message was processed more deeply than the initial majority message. Further suggestive along these lines, participants’ thoughts in response to the first message were more closely tied to message content in the minority rather than the majority condition.

Other research has painted a more complicated picture, however, suggesting that either minority or majority sources can lead to more processing than the other depending on various situational factors (e.g., Baker & Petty, 1994; Mackie, 1987; Martin & Hewstone, 2003). Baker and Petty (1994), for instance, found that processing of a minority- or majority-source’s message depends on the extent to which that minority or majority endorses an expected position. When the position is unexpected—for example, a minority (majority) source endorses a pro-attitudinal (counter-attitudinal) position—message processing is high. When the position is expected—for example, a majority (minority) source endorses a counter-attitudinal (pro-attitudinal) position—message processing is low. Baker and Petty (1994) suggested that when a minority endorses a counter-attitudinal position, this could be more threatening than when a minority does so, thus increasing the need to process carefully.

Similarly, Martin and Hewstone (2003) examined the moderating role of message position, and found that when the message advocated a negative personal outcome for participants, majority sources led to increased levels of processing relative to minority sources. Martin and Hewstone attributed the effect to participants’ defensive urge to protect self-interest upon learning that a majority of people were arguing for a negative personal outcome. Consistent with this reasoning, when the message did not promote a negative personal outcome, minority sources led to greater processing than did majority sources. In sum, then, it appears that both minority and majority sources can spark increased processing, depending on the position advocated (e.g., whether the message is threatening or not) or other moderating factors. It may be that in the absence of strong expectancies, minorities foster greater processing than do majorities because they generate more interest or curiosity, but variations in the specific issue addressed or position taken can attenuate or reverse the typical pattern.

5. Multiple roles for minority sources

High elaboration conditions

Finally, according to the ELM, under high-elaboration conditions in which people are motivated and able to process, minority/majority-source status should play different roles in persuasion. For example, source status might bias the direction of ongoing issue-relevant thinking, especially if the source status is known prior to message processing. Consistent with this notion, one characterization of minority/majority-source effects under high elaboration has been that minority and majority sources engender a different pattern of thoughts in response to persuasive messages. Minority sources, for instance, have been shown to foster resistance by negatively biasing message recipients’ thoughts about the persuasive message or attitude object (e.g., Erb, Bohnet, Schmalzl, & Rank, 1998; Trost, Maass, & Kenrick, 1992). Majority sources, on the other hand, can prompt a positive bias in message recipients’ thoughts, leading to greater persuasion (e.g., Mackie, 1987). In one test of the biased-thinking perspective, Erb et al. (1998) induced systematic processing and then presented participants with a minority or majority message and measured their attitudes toward the topic and the thoughts that they had while reading the message. They found that participants’ thoughts were more negative following a minority message and more positive following a majority message. Moreover, this effect on thoughts mediated the effect of source status on attitudes. The more favourable participants’ thoughts were during the message, the more favourable their attitudes were following the message. Providing further support for the hypothesis that the biased-processing effects are particularly likely under high-elaboration conditions, Trost et al. (1992) found greater evidence of biased processing of minority messages when participants found a message to be high rather than low in personal relevance.

Interestingly, biased thought processes have also been implicated in the minority-influence domain from a slightly different perspective. Wood, Pool, Leck, and Purvis (1996), for instance, examined people’s interpretations of attitude issues in response to minority- versus majority-source information. Most germane to the present concerns, Wood et al. found that when people learned that a disliked minority group (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan) supposedly agreed with them on a personally relevant topic, they changed their attitudes in an effort to distance themselves from this group, and reinterpret the attitude issue to justify the shift.

A biasing effect of source status on thoughts is possible when people are aware of the source before they start processing. However, if people do not become aware of the status of the source until after message processing, source status might have a different impact. Specifically, in accord with the self-validation hypothesis described earlier, minority/majority-source status might affect the confidence or doubt with which people hold their thoughts, as has been shown for source credibility (Briñol et al., 2004; Tormala et al., 2006a). Thus, if people were thinking mostly positive thoughts during a
message only to find out that the position is endorsed by a minority, they might lose confidence in those thoughts (if they lose faith in the validity of the information presented), which would attenuate persuasion. But, if people were thinking mostly negative thoughts during a message and then find out that the position is endorsed by a minority, they might lose confidence in those thoughts, ultimately enhancing persuasion. Alternatively, people might gain confidence in their negative thoughts if the minority source reinforces the idea that the message is invalid. Although these possibilities have yet to be explored in the minority-influence domain, they provide an interesting direction for future inquiry.

One additional possibility for source status under high-elaboration conditions is that it could be scrutinized as an argument and affect persuasion accordingly. Imagine, for example, a product that is designed to appeal to a particular segment of society. The fact that it is liked by only a minority of people might serve as evidence for the exclusivity and uniqueness of the product, and thereby serve as a persuasive argument in favour of the product for some individuals. If the product is liked by a majority, however, this might not be perceived as providing good evidence for the fact that only the discerning favour the product. This possibility is speculative, of course, but future research examining minority and majority influence from a multiple-roles perspective would shed light on this and other intriguing possibilities.

A new role for minority sources

Now that we have reviewed some of the previously articulated roles that minority/majority-source status has been thought to play in persuasion and resistance, the remainder of this chapter presents the possibility of a new role for minority sources in persuasion settings that has implications for attitude certainty (Gross et al., 1995). Our specific interest in this issue has been guided by our own metacognitive framework for resistance to persuasion, in which we have been exploring people's perceptions of their own resistance, and the implications these perceptions can have for the inferences people form about their attitudes (Tormala & Petty, 2004c). In a new line of research in the minority-influence domain, we have been extending our metacognitive perspective on resistance in general to examine the kinds of inferences people might form about their attitudes after they have resisted a persuasive message from a minority source. In the next section, we provide an overview of our general metacognitive framework for resistance to persuasion. Following this overview, we describe some recent studies relevant to the minority-influence domain, paying particular attention to the potential role of metacognitive factors in producing attitudes of differing certainty. Understanding attitude certainty is important because attitudes held with greater certainty are more resistant to change (e.g., Tormala & Petty, 2002), more stable over time (e.g., Bassili, 1996), and more predictive of behaviour (e.g., Fazio & Zanna, 1978) than are attitudes held with less certainty.

A metacognitive framework for resistance to persuasion

Metacognition refers to people's thoughts about or perceptions of their own thoughts and thought processes. Although metacognition research has an extensive history in both social and cognitive psychology, it is only relatively recently that researchers have begun to explore the role of metacognitive factors in attitudes and persuasion (see Petty, Briñol, Tormala, & Wegener, 2007, for a review). Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly clear within this domain that metacognitive perspectives have much to offer. Of particular relevance to this chapter, we have recently developed a metacognitive theory of resistance to persuasion (Tormala & Petty, 2004c; see also Petty, Tormala, & Rucker, 2004). We suggest that when people resist persuasive attacks, they can perceive this resistance and form attribution-like inferences about their own attitudes that have implications for attitude strength, or attitude certainty more specifically (see Gross et al., 1995). Depending on people's perceptions of their resistance and the situation in which it occurs, we have found that attitude certainty can either increase or decrease following resistance to persuasion. The direction of this effect is largely determined by the extent to which people are impressed or impressed by their own resistance.

Increasing attitude certainty

First, we have accumulated a great deal of evidence suggesting that when people perceive that they have successfully resisted a persuasive attack, they sometimes become more certain of their attitudes than they were to begin with. The logic behind this effect is that when people resist an attack on their attitude, they infer that the attitude was already correct (otherwise it would have changed), and this inference gets translated into a feeling of greater attitude certainty. In an initial experiment designed to test this possibility (Tormala & Petty, 2002, Experiment 1), we presented participants with a counter-attitudinal persuasive message and induced them to resist this message by generating counter-arguments. After reading the persuasive message and listing their counter-arguments, participants reported their attitudes and attitude certainty with respect to the message topic. As predicted, people became more certain of their initial attitudes after they resisted the persuasive message.

In subsequent experiments, we (Tormala & Petty, 2002) extended this basic finding in several important ways. First, we found that it was confined to participants who perceived that their attitudes did, in fact, resist persuasion. When participants perceived that they had shown some evidence of
attitude change, even when they were actually just as resistant as the other participants, they became no more certain of their attitudes than they were to begin with. Second, we found that these effects had implications for a variety of important outcomes commonly associated with attitude certainty (see Gross et al., 1995, for a review). Specifically, when people resisted persuasion and became more certain of their attitudes, these attitudes also became more predictive of behavioural intentions and more resistant to subsequent attacks.

Consistent with the notion that these effects are particularly likely when people are impressed by their resistance, however, the increase in attitude certainty uncovered in each experiment was moderated by the perceived strength of the persuasive attack. People only became more certain of their attitudes, and only showed the effects of attitude certainty (on behaviour and future resistance), when they resisted a persuasive attack perceived to be strong. When participants resisted a persuasive attack perceived to be weak, attitude certainty was unchanged. This effect was particularly striking in that all participants actually received the exact same persuasive message. They were simply led to believe it was strong or weak. Our interpretation of this effect is that when people resist messages perceived as strong, this resistance is viewed as more successful, or more diagnostic with respect to the validity of the initial attitude. Resisting weak messages is presumably viewed as less successful or less diagnostic, because ambiguity remains about what would happen in the face of a stronger attack. In essence, perceived message strength can serve as an augmenting or discounting situational factor (see Kelley, 1972). Perceiving that one has resisted a strong message augments the effect of resistance on attitude certainty, whereas perceiving that one has resisted a weak message provides a discounting factor that eliminates this effect.

In follow-up research, the certainty result was both replicated and extended. In some studies, for instance, we manipulated the perceived expertise of the source of a message, rather than the perceived strength of the content of a message, and found that it had similar effects (Tormala & Petty, 2004a). That is, participants became more certain of their initial attitudes after resisting a counter-attitudinal message from an expert source (augmenting situational factor), but not after resisting the same message from an inexpert source (discounting situational factor). As in the earlier research, these differences in certainty had implications for the correspondence between attitudes and behavioural intentions. The more certain people became of their attitudes following resistance to persuasion, the better these attitudes predicted behavioural intentions. In addition, our follow-up work revealed that these processes were moderated by extent of elaboration (Tormala & Petty, 2004a, 2004b). Specifically, the effects of resistance on certainty were found to be confined to high-elaboration situations (e.g., low cognitive load; Tormala & Petty, 2004a) and individuals (e.g., high need for cognition; Tormala & Petty, 2004b). Such moderation makes sense given that metacognitive thought is higher order and, thus, requires greater motivation and ability (see also Petty et al., 2002).

Decreasing attitude certainty

Our framework also suggests that there are situations in which people resist persuasion but become less certain of their initial attitudes. As noted earlier, we have found that this effect is particularly likely when people are for some reason unimpressed by their own resistance. In essence, when people are unimpressed by their resistance (e.g., they have doubts about the quality of their resistance or the manner in which they resisted) they begin to suspect that their attitude might be invalid, which can reduce attitude certainty. We have recently been exploring the factors that can lead people to be unimpressed by, or have doubts about, their resistance, and we have examined the impact of these perceptions on attitude certainty.

To begin with, an individual might be unimpressed by his or her resistance after perceiving that he or she struggled to resist persuasion. This struggle could stem from several sources such as the perception that it was difficult to generate counter-arguments or the perception that one's counter-arguments were specious. Under these conditions, we have found that attitude certainty is indeed undermined. In one study, for instance, Tormala et al. (2006b, Experiment 2) presented participants with a counter-attitudinal message that they were induced to resist using counter-arguments. Participants were then given false feedback about the quality, or strength, of their counter-arguments, after which they reported attitudes and attitude certainty. As expected, given that all participants were focused on generating counter-arguments, everyone (on average) resisted persuasion. Furthermore, when participants were led to believe they had resisted using strong counter-arguments, they maintained a relatively high degree of certainty in their initial attitudes and these attitudes predicted subsequent behavioural intentions. When participants were led to believe they had generated weak counter-arguments, however, they became significantly less certain of their initial attitudes, and these attitudes became poorer predictors of behavioural intentions. Consistent with the predictions of the Tormala and Petty (2004c) framework, then, attitude certainty was undermined when people had the perception that they had done a poor job resisting a persuasive message.

In a follow-up study (Tormala et al., 2006b, Experiment 3), we found that like the increase in certainty examined in Tormala and Petty (2004a), this decrease in certainty was also moderated by source credibility. That is, attitude certainty was particularly likely to decrease when people perceived that they had generated weak counter-arguments against an inexpert source. When people perceived that they had generated weak counter-arguments against an expert source, they did not lose certainty. Thus, following the same attributional logic as before, source credibility served as an augmenting or discounting factor for the decrease in attitude certainty.
(see Kelley, 1972). In this case, low credibility augmented the decrease in certainty caused by struggling to resist persuasion. High credibility, on the other hand, served as a discounting factor that eliminated this effect.

In more recent research in this area, we have been exploring other factors that might lead people to be unimpressed by their resistance, thus reducing attitude certainty. Of particular relevance to the current concerns, individuals might be unimpressed by their resistance when they perceive that they have resisted by illegitimate means (e.g., by ignoring a message or derogating its source). In other words, people might sometimes resist persuasion but have the subjective assessment that their resistance strategy is invalid, which could cast doubt on their perceived ability to resist using more valid approaches. Past research is consistent with the notion that people can assess the validity of their processing mechanism, and that these assessments have implications for subsequent information processing (e.g., Mazursky & Schul, 2000) and feelings of confidence or doubt (e.g., Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, & Rocher, 1994). Mazursky and Schul (2000), for example, found that when people perceive that relying on source information has produced an erroneous judgement following an initial message, they switch to more elaborate modes of processing on subsequent messages. Furthermore, Jacks and Cameron (2003) recently surveyed people's perceptions of their own resistance strategies, and found that people tend to view some strategies—particularly source derogation—as socially undesirable relative to others, such as counter-arguing. In short, people have been found to assess and reflect upon their processing strategies, and resistance strategies more specifically, in past research. We suspect that when people have the perception that they have resisted persuasion by illegitimate or invalid means, they will be unimpressed by their resistance, which should undermine attitude certainty.

**Applying metacognitive principles to the study of minority influence**

Where does minority influence fit into this framework? We argue that when people resist minority messages, they can become less certain of the 'unchanged' focal attitude if they believe they have resisted by illegitimate means. In the classic minority-source situation, people have been thought to resist immediate focal persuasion to avoid being aligned with deviant minority sources (e.g., Moscovici, 1985a, 1985b; Mugny, 1982; see Wood et al., 1994, for a review). Moreover, it has been argued that when people dismiss minority sources in this fashion, they can perceive this action as a judgemental bias (Moscovici, 1980, 1985a, 1985b; Moskowitz, 1996; Moskowitz & Chaiken, 2001). In other words, past research suggests both that people do tend to be concerned with potential bias when they receive (and presumably resist) messages from minority or other stigmatized sources (e.g., Petty, Fleming, & White, 1999), and that this concern can have important implications for subsequent thought and judgement.

Following this logic, we postulate that when people perceive or acknowledge that they have resisted persuasion largely on the basis of a source's minority status, they may feel that this is a biased or invalid resistance strategy. Furthermore, we posit that when people perceive this bias, or acknowledge that their attitudes have been influenced by minority-source information, they might have doubts about the validity of their attitudes and their ability to defend those attitudes using a more reasoned strategy (e.g., counter-arguing). Such doubts should be particularly likely to emerge when people have the subjective assessment that relying on minority-source information as a basis for their attitudes is illegitimate, or invalid. Again, research from other domains suggests that 'writing off' or derogating the source of a message tends to be viewed as socially inappropriate (Jacks & Cameron, 2003; see Mazursky & Schul, 2000, for related findings). It follows naturally, we think, that perceiving that one has relied on this strategy would spark some attitudinal doubt. Moreover, by resisting persuasion using a mechanism that essentially ignores message content, people might be uncertain as to whether they could have resisted persuasion if they had more thoughtfully engaged the message.1

Importantly, we submit that this perspective on minority resistance could help explain the kind of hidden success that has been one of the hallmark findings of the minority-influence literature. For example, it is well documented in the minority-influence domain that after showing immediate public resistance to minority messages, people's attitudes often prove susceptible to delayed private change or even indirect change (e.g., Crano & Chen, 1998). As we will discuss later in the chapter, a drop in certainty with respect to the target attitude would be consonant with and have potential bearing on both of these findings.

In short, we propose that when people perceive that they have resisted a persuasive message largely because the position is endorsed by a minority source, they can under some conditions become less certain of their attitudes than they were to begin with. We predict that this effect will occur when people (1) perceive that they have used the minority status of the source as a basis for resisting persuasion, and (2) think this is an illegitimate thing to do. When people perceive that they have used minority status as a basis for their attitude and think this is a legitimate thing to do (e.g., they believe if very few people support a position it truly is not worthwhile), we would not expect them to lose certainty.

**Empirical evidence**

In a recent line of studies we explored the tenability of the metacognitive perspective on minority influence (Tormala, DeSensi, & Petty, 2007b). In each study we exposed undergraduate participants to a counter-attitudinal persuasive message. We induced some of these participants to resist the message by attributing it to a minority source. Across studies we measured...
and manipulated various perceptions related to reliance on the minority status of the source as a basis for one's attitude, and then assessed attitude certainty. Our prediction was that participants' self-reported attitude certainty would decrease when they perceived that they resisted persuasion because of the minority status of the source. When participants perceived that they did not use the minority information to resist, or perceived that they did and that it was legitimate to do so, we expected no decrease in certainty.

As an initial assessment of this notion, we replicated some of the key conditions from past minority-influence studies (e.g., Baker & Petty, 1994; Crano & Chen, 1998). Specifically, we presented undergraduates with a persuasive message promoting the implementation of a new mandatory service programme at their university. This message argued in favour of requiring undergraduates to complete several hours per week of unpaid work as a graduation requirement. Participants were led to believe that either a minority (14%) or a majority (86%) of students on campus endorsed this policy, and that they would read a proposal in favour of it that had been prepared by a representative of this group (i.e., the minority or majority). We also randomly assigned a third group of participants to a control condition in which they learned about the service requirement, but did not receive a persuasive message or any information about the percentage of students who supported it. This condition was included to provide a baseline for determining whether persuasion or resistance occurred (resistance being indicated by attitudes that did not differ from the control condition) and whether attitude certainty actually decreased relative to baseline. Immediately following the persuasive message (or after learning of the policy in the control condition), participants reported both their attitudes toward the policy and the extent to which they felt certain of these attitudes.

To begin with, we replicated the classic effect of minority- versus majority-source status on focal attitudes. As illustrated in the top panel of Figure 5.1, attitudes toward the service requirement were more favourable in the minority condition than in the minority condition. In fact, including the control group in the analysis, majority-condition participants were persuaded to endorse the service requirement (i.e., their attitudes were more favourable than control attitudes), whereas minority-condition participants resisted persuasion (i.e., their attitudes were no more favourable than control attitudes). Interestingly, though, there was a different pattern with respect to attitude certainty. As illustrated in the bottom panel of Figure 5.1, participants were less certain about their attitudes in the minority condition than in the control or majority conditions, which did not differ from each other. In other words, after resisting persuasion due to a source's minority status, which was the only thing that differed between the minority and majority conditions, people held their attitudes with less certainty. This finding provided initial support for the predictions of the metacognitive framework for resistance in the minority-influence context.

In subsequent studies, we sought to address the notion that these effects would be strongest when people perceived that they had relied on the percentage (i.e., minority source) information in determining their attitudes, and perceived that it was illegitimate to do so. In one study, we directly manipulated these perceptions. In this experiment, all participants received a persuasive message about the mandatory service programme from a minority source, after which they reported their attitudes. Immediately following the attitude responses, participants answered a series of questions designed to affect the extent to which they perceived that they relied on the
minority status of the source as a basis for their attitudes (see Salancik & Conway, 1975). After completing these questions, participants were told that the computers running the experiment were programmed to analyze their responses and provide feedback regarding the extent to which people’s attitudes were influenced by the minority-percentage information. Participants were then given false feedback that their attitudes did or did not show evidence of having been influenced by the percentage information. After the false-feedback procedure, we manipulated the perceived legitimacy of being influenced by the percentage information by telling participants that most other students in our studies did (legitimate condition) or did not (illegitimate condition) report being influenced by the percentage of students in favour of the service programme.

The results were consistent with our expectations. Although there was no difference in attitude ratings across conditions, participants had significantly lower attitude certainty when they had been led to believe they relied on the minority status of the source in forming their attitudes, but not many other students had done so. In other words, participants appeared to have reduced attitude certainty when they had the perception that they had illegitimately relied on the percentage information in forming their attitudes. When participants believed they had not used the percentage information, or believed they had but thought it was legitimate to do so because many other students did as well, they maintained a higher degree of attitude certainty.

Of course, our metacognitive perspective suggests that the decrease in attitude certainty that occurs in minority-resistance situations might have implications for delayed attitude change and other ‘hidden’ effects associated with resisted minority messages in past research. In a final study we tested these ideas by directly measuring perceived reliance on minority-source information and the perceived legitimacy of relying on minority-source information, and then assessing a consequence of attitude certainty. We presented all participants with the same counter-attitudinal persuasive message as in the earlier studies, and we led all participants to believe it was endorsed by a minority of students on campus. After they had read the message and reported their attitudes, we asked participants to report the extent to which they based their attitudes on the percentage of students who supported the university service programme. We then asked questions designed to tap the perceived legitimacy of this resistance strategy. Specifically, participants reported the extent to which they believed it was legitimate or illegitimate to base opinions on the kind of percentage information provided in this experiment, as well as the extent to which it was valid or invalid to disagree with an idea simply because a small number of people supported it. Following a brief delay and filler task, we then exposed participants to a second persuasive message about the service programme issue. This message argued in the same direction as the first, but it contained new arguments. We then measured attitudes a final time.

In accord with our metacognitive framework, and the findings of the aforementioned studies, we predicted that participants’ attitudes would be most susceptible to later change when they reported both that they had used the percentage information and that it was illegitimate to do so. This is exactly what we found. In fact, participants who met these specifications were the only ones to evince significant attitude change in response to the second message. All other participants were essentially resistant to the later attack. Based on this pattern, we can infer that people had reduced feelings of attitude certainty when they perceived that they had illegitimately resisted the initial minority message. When participants either denied being affected by the minority-source information, or reported that it was legitimate to base attitudes on this kind of information, they appeared to maintain a relatively high degree of attitude certainty, and were more resistant to later persuasion.

Summary

In summary, several recent studies (Tormala et al., 2007b) are compatible with the current metacognitive perspective on minority resistance. In general, the findings suggest that when people perceive that they have resisted persuasion because of the minority status of a message source, and perceive that it is illegitimate to do so, they become less certain of their attitudes. In other words, their attitudes are weakened under these conditions. This finding also appears to have consequences for other important evaluative outcomes such as susceptibility to later persuasive attacks. Under conditions in which we expect initial message recipients to experience attitudinal doubt, they show increased vulnerability to later persuasion. What remains to be determined is whether these findings can map onto the most intriguing effects from the minority-influence literature. We turn to this matter next.

Implications for classic findings in minority influence

The metacognitive framework and findings discussed in this chapter highlight what we hope will be viewed as a new and useful direction in minority-influence research. We believe that much can be gained in the minority-influence domain by considering people’s perceptions of their resistance against minority sources, and by exploring the impact such perceptions might have on attitude certainty, or attitude strength more generally (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). Consideration of these processes and outcomes has great potential to shed new light on the subtle yet dynamic effects of resistance in the minority-influence domain. Of course, particularly important for follow-up research will be the task of using the current metacognitive perspective to account for both the delayed and the indirect change effects that have been revealed in some past minority-
influence studies. In this section of the chapter we offer some speculation along these lines.

Delayed change

We think the present perspective speaks directly to the issue of delayed focal attitude change following initial resistance to a minority message. Past research on minority influence suggests that when people publicly resist focal attitude change from minority sources, they sometimes show evidence of delayed persuasion (i.e., ‘conversion’) when their attitudes are measured at a later point in time (e.g., Crano & Chen, 1998; Moscovici, 1980; see Wood et al., 1994, for a review). Importantly, attitude certainty has a well-established association with attitude stability, or attitudinal persistence over time (e.g., Bassili, 1996). The less certain someone is of an attitude, the more susceptible that attitude is to change as time passes. Given our finding that resisting a minority message can decrease feelings of attitude certainty, we see the current results as highly compatible with the delayed-change effect. Specifically, we argue that when people perceive that they have resisted a minority message solely on the basis of the message’s minority support, they can lose attitude certainty, which destabilizes the attitude and opens it up to delayed change.

It is important to note that our perspective’s emphasis on attitude certainty predicts not only the enhanced likelihood of delayed change in response to resisted minority messages, but also increased persuasion in response to subsequent messages (as illustrated in one of our studies) and decreased correspondence between initial attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, as noted earlier, attitude certainty has been linked with each of these outcomes in past research (e.g., Bassili, 1996; Fazio & Zanna, 1978; Tormala & Petty, 2002). The less certain people are of their attitudes, the more vulnerable those attitudes are to persuasive attack and the less predictive those attitudes are of future behaviour. Thus, the effects of resisted minority messages could ultimately prove much more expansive than anticipated by prior minority-influence work. The present framework takes a step in the direction of understanding these effects.

Indirect change

We also see the present framework as having implications for indirect attitude change. Past research on minority influence (e.g., Alvaro & Crano, 1997; Crano & Chen, 1998) has revealed that when people resist minority messages on one issue (e.g., gays in the military), they sometimes show evidence of attitude change with respect to other issues (e.g., gun control). Various explanations for indirect change have been offered in prior work (see Crano, 2001), but we submit that the metacognitive processes suggested by our own studies might also speak to this effect. For example, it could be that when someone resists a message because its source is in the minority, and this person feels doubt about his or her attitude, this feeling of doubt might spread to other, related attitudes. Those attitudes, in turn, would be opened up to change, according to the same logic outlined above (i.e., reducing certainty destabilizes attitudes, increases their vulnerability, and so on). Interestingly, an effect of this nature would indicate that associative networks for attitudes contain not only attitude objects and their evaluations, but also confidence or doubt assessments (e.g., ‘tags’) for attitudes that can be altered through a kind of metacognitive spreading activation (see Petty, Tormala, Brinol, & Jarvis, 2006, for a related discussion of confidence and doubt tags).

One challenge for this explanation of indirect attitude change would be to accommodate Crano and colleagues’ (e.g., Crano & Chen, 1998) finding that indirect change happens more quickly than, and can be at least partly responsible for, delayed focal attitude change. Our explanation for this effect would parallel the rationale offered by Crano (2001). That is, although people experience doubt with respect to the focal attitude after resisting a minority message, they still resist it in the immediate situation because they do not want to align themselves with the minority position (see also Moscovici, 1985a; Wood et al., 1994). They do not erect defences around attitudes toward other issues, however, so as the doubt spreads to those attitudes they change more readily. This puts pressure back on the focal attitude in order to maintain a coherent system of beliefs and opinions. This time around, the focal attitude is more feeble (i.e., it is held with less certainty), so it is more susceptible to change. The basic sequence of events in this scenario would be quite similar to what transpires according to Crano’s leniency contract, but feelings of doubt are posited to be the driving force behind both indirect and delayed change. One interesting implication of this interpretation is that the doubt experienced with respect to the focal attitude following initial resistance must be sufficiently diffuse that it can spread to other attitudes. If true, this would suggest that any concept (e.g., the self-concept) can become doubtful if it is activated during this feeling of attitudinal doubt. Obviously, this possibility awaits further empirical scrutiny. It is simply worth noting that the implications of the present perspective on minority resistance could prove far reaching in the long run.

Final thoughts and questions

Past research suggests that minority sources can play multiple roles in persuasion settings. They can serve as simple cues, they can bias thoughts, and they can affect the amount of message processing that occurs. Furthermore, although it has not been investigated yet, we have suggested that under some conditions minority sources might serve as persuasive
arguments or serve to cause doubt in people's minds in response to a persuasive message. Perhaps of greatest interest, we have also described how minority sources can affect the strength of people's attitudes. Based on our metacognitive framework for understanding resistance to persuasion, we propose that when people resist messages because those messages are endorsed by minority sources, they may perceive that they have based their attitudes on the minority-status information. To the extent that people do perceive this, and they believe that it is illegitimate to base their attitudes on such factors, they can become less certain of their initial attitudes. This lack of certainty, we argue, could be responsible for intriguing effects in the minority-influence domain such as delayed and indirect persuasion. Our position is not that this is the only mechanism for such minority-influence effects, but rather that it represents an additional means by which minority messages, though resisted in the immediate context, might have some hidden effects on persuasion.

From our initial findings, several questions remain. For instance, where does this metacognitive role for minority sources fit within the multiple-roles framework of the ELM? In general, our research points to high-elaboration (or thoughtful) conditions for these effects. In prior research exploring our metacognitive perspective on resistance, we have found that resistance affects attitude certainty primarily in high-elaboration situations (e.g., low cognitive load; Tormala & Petty, 2004a) and high-elaboration individuals (e.g., high need for cognition; Tormala & Petty, 2004b; see Petty et al., 2002, for related findings). The rationale for this moderation is that metacognitive reasoning demands not only thoughts, but also thoughts about thoughts, which is a higher-order level of processing requiring greater motivation and ability. The results summarized in this chapter are consistent with the notion that these are high-elaboration effects, as all participants were led to believe a new counter-attitudinal policy was being considered for implementation at their university. The clear personal relevance of this issue for our student sample likely created high-elaboration conditions across the board (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979a).

The interpretation of our effects as involving thoughtful processes is consistent with a great deal of past research in which minority influence has been described as involving extensive information-processing activity (e.g., Moscovici, 1980; Martin et al., 2003). Importantly, though, in the present research it is possible that even under less-thoughtful circumstances people could realize that they have resisted persuasion because of the minority status of a source. In fact, perhaps people who are not processing deeply would be more acutely aware of basing their attitudes on minority-source status as that is precisely the kind of information they would be seeking to facilitate quick decision making. In any case, it remains to be seen what impact resistance to minority sources would have under low-elaboration conditions. We see this as one useful direction for future research in this area.

Another question pertains to how we would reconcile the current perspective and findings with the Martin et al. (2003) research in which it was found that people had stronger attitudes after processing minority messages. Martin and colleagues found that because people processed minority messages extensively, their attitudes following such messages were quite strong and resistant to counter-persuasion. The key difference between the present perspective and the Martin et al. perspective is that in the Martin et al. work, participants were persuaded by the minority message, so their attitudes were equivalent to attitudes in the majority-source condition. In our own research, participants have been resisting the minority message, presumably because in addition to being supported by the minority these messages have been highly relevant and counter-attitudinal, conditions well-known to encourage resistance (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979b).

It could be that the direction of the attitude-strength effect depends on whether people initially resist or succumb to the minority message. Moreover, if true, this effect might not depend on processing differences. Rucker and Petty (2004) have taken a metacognitive perspective on these kinds of issues and found that when people try to resist persuasion but are nonetheless persuaded, they become highly certain of their newly changed attitudes. Extending this finding to the current concerns, perhaps when people are persuaded by minority messages despite presumably not wanting to be, they become highly convinced of the validity of the new attitude, making that attitude strong and resistant to counter-persuasion. In brief, our proposal is that when people resist minority messages (e.g., Tormala et al., 2007b), they might perceive that they have done so illegitimately, thereby undermining certainty in the unchanged attitude. When people are persuaded by minority messages (e.g., Martin et al., 2003), they might be more likely to assume they have been legitimately influenced (after all, they are not going along with the position on the basis of its source), thereby boosting attitude certainty. In fact, heightened processing (as in Martin et al., 2003) might contribute metacognitively to the effect if people feel more certain when they perceive that they have changed their attitudes through thoughtful processing, which is likely viewed as a legitimate way to be influenced (Barden & Petty, 2006). In any case, this metacognitive resolution is speculative, but it might prove useful to future work in this area.

**Conclusion**

As reviewed in this chapter, minority/majority-source status can influence persuasive outcomes by serving as simple acceptance or rejection cues, by determining the amount of processing in which people engage, by biasing message recipients' issue-relevant thinking, or by influencing the certainty with which people hold their attitudes after being exposed to a persuasive message. It is our hope that the present chapter will spark an interest in the multiple roles through which minority sources influence both persuasion...
and resistance, and the attitude-strength consequences of each. Of particular emphasis in the present chapter are the metacognitive factors at play when people receive and defend their attitudes against minority-supported messages. We believe that metacognitive perspectives have much to offer in general, and that they have great potential to shed new light on issues of classic import in the minority-influence domain. In some ways, we see the metacognitive perspective as raising as many questions as it answers, but we hope new perspectives like the one we have presented can lend support to the effort to understand the hidden persuasive effects resisted minority sources have often been observed to have.

Note

1 Although there is ample evidence suggesting that people do sometimes process minority messages rather thoroughly, there is also reason to believe that people often do so under the assumption that they will ultimately resist the minority point of view to avoid being aligned with a deviant group (e.g., Crano & Chen, 1998; see Crano, 2001).

References


