The Leniency Contract and Persistence of Majority and Minority Influence

William D. Crano and Xin Chen
University of Arizona

The leniency contract (E. M. Alvaro & W. D. Crano, 1997) explicates a maxim of social influence: Majorities induce public, temporary change, whereas minority influence is indirect and persistent. The contract holds that minority messages are elaborated without derogation or counterargument; in recompense, direct change is repudiated. This response pattern unbalances the constellation of beliefs containing the critical attitude. It is stabilized by modifying related beliefs. These propositions were tested by uncovering links among a set of attitudes and developing persuasive messages on 1 of them. The messages were attributed to majority or in-group minority sources. Strong messages fostered persistent focal attitude change. When attributed to a minority, strong messages induced indirect attitude change, which was associated with delayed focal change. For the majority source, positivity of cognitive responses was related to focal change; for the minority, it was related to indirect change.

Moscovici's (1980, 1985a, 1985b) conflict theory and the research inspired by his perspective have helped revitalize the study of social influence. Partly as a result of his views, researchers again are intensively examining the conditions under which minorities—and majorities—wield influence. A particularly useful aspect of Moscovici's conflict perspective is his differentiation of conformity and conversion, a distinction that harks back to Festinger's (1953) contrast of public compliance and private acceptance of social influence. Conformity (or compliance, to use Festinger's term) is described as public, temporary, and superficial, whereas conversion is defined as private and internalized attitude change that persists beyond the influence context. According to Moscovici, majorities produce compliance, minorities conversion. This perspective has sparked considerable controversy. Some researchers have challenged the majority-compliance, minority-conversion equation, arguing that conflicting findings of earlier studies are attributable to the failure to specify the psychological and situational mediators of majority and minority influence (Baker & Petty, 1994; Kruglanski & Mackie, 1990; Mackie, 1987; Tanford & Penrod, 1984).

The present research adopted the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) orientation to isolate the factors that affect the persuasive power of majority and minority groups and the persistence of the changes they induce (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986a, 1986b). Although the ELM has been used extensively in the study of persuasion, it is difficult to estimate its pertinence for majority—minority influence because the prototypic minority influence study makes use of experimental tasks of little hedonic relevance and persuasive messages of indeterminate strength (Crano, 1995). In past research, for example, participants have been asked to label slide colors (Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969), find embedded words (Nemeth & Kwan, 1987), or make judgments on such social issues as feminism (Paicheler, 1976), the death penalty (Maass, Clark, & Haberkorn, 1982), abortion policy (Clark & Maass, 1990), homosexuals in the military, or gun control (Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997). The lack of attention to involvement and message strength may have introduced considerable unaccounted variance in the standard majority—minority influence inquiry. Thus, even though the dual process logic of both the ELM and the heuristic—systematic model of Chaiken (1980, 1987) has been applied in studying minority influence (Baker & Petty, 1994; De Dreu & De Vries, 1993, 1996; Trost, Maass, & Kenrick, 1992), the full value of these models has yet to be realized. The present research was built on earlier studies by integrating the systematic manipulation of message strength, outcome relevance, and measurement lag with the theoretical construct known as the leniency contract (Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997; Crano & Alvaro, 1998). The goals of our research were to identify some of the processes underlying majority and minority influence, to delineate the factors that affect the persistence of change brought about by these distinct sources of pressure, and to provide a plausible theoretical account of minority-induced delayed focal change, a consistent feature of the literature (Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994).

The ELM and Minority—Majority Influence

The fundamental axiom of the ELM is that any factor that intensifies message elaboration enhances persuasion if message quality is high. In the typical study, outcome-relevant involvement (Johnson & Eagly, 1989) and the strength of counterattitu-
dinal persuasive communications are manipulated to examine attitude outcomes. In this context, high outcome relevance leads to elaboration. With high relevance, attitude change becomes a function of argument quality. When relevance is low, messages are not well-elaborated, message quality becomes a less important determinant of belief, and attitude is dependent on features of the persuasion context other than message quality (e.g., source characteristics or other heuristics). Ordinarily, source characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, status) are assumed to be peripheral cues. Extrapolating this assumption to the majority influence context leads to the standard ELM interpretation that majority or minority status will not matter in highly involving settings because source status is peripheral and thus uninformative of message quality. Under conditions of high outcome relevance, therefore, message quality should be the critical variable irrespective of source. Conversely, source status should have a strong effect as a peripheral cue when the focal issue is not of high outcome relevance. In this circumstance, the majority should wield more power than the minority (Bohner, Moskowitz, & Chaiken, 1995). This assumes that majority information has heuristic value, as it reflects consensus or reality, and this proposition has received substantial support. Levine and Russo (1987), for example, found that majority members were considered more powerful or attractive than minorities and that their viewpoint was more readily accepted as reflecting objective reality. Mackie (1987) observed that agreeing with majorities was consistent with people’s expectations, whereas disagreeing with the majority violated expectations. Baker and Petty (1994) have argued that in a democracy, where the majority rules, attention to the majority’s position is critical.

The flaw in the standard interpretation is that it fails to consider the central thesis of the ELM; Attribute change is fundamentally dependent on elaboration. With this theme in mind, we propose a modification of the standard ELM extrapolation to the minority influence context. In our alternative, we assume that merely designating a source as representing the majority or a lesser subset of the target’s reference group (Kelley, 1952) triggers an examination of the relevance of the message for one’s social identity. The designation of a source as representing the majority of one’s reference group acts as a motivator for a specific form of elaboration that is concerned with the identity relevance of the issue (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1991). The question “Does the message bear on my status in the group, or the group’s well-being?” is crucial when a majority is the source of the counterattitudinal communication. When the issue is judged not to bear on identity issues, past research suggests two possibilities. If outcome relevance is low, the majority will have no effect (Alvaro & Crano, 1997, Studies 1 & 2); however, under conditions of high outcome relevance, the majority’s effect will be amplified (Baker & Petty, 1994; Mackie, 1987), and change in response to majority influence will ensue. It is important to understand that if the message bears on the well-being of the receiver’s reference group, or his or her place in it, message elaboration will be enhanced irrespective of outcome relevance. Alvaro and Crano (1997, Study 3) and Wood, Pool, Leck, and Purvis (1996) have provided evidence that supports this assumption. In addition to the research data, the logic of this proposition deserves consideration. A counterattitudinal message attributed to the majority of one’s reference group is cause for genuine concern. It demands attention and scrutiny. If, on inspection, the message bears on features of the group that provide the basis for the target’s social identity, the message will be elaborated. If it does not bear on identity, extraneous factors (e.g., outcome relevance) must be present to prompt elaboration.

A counterattitudinal message from an in-group minority does not demand attention but certainly attracts it, and this attraction heightens the probability of elaboration (Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997; Crano & Alvaro, 1998; Crano & Hannula-Brasl, 1994; Legrenzi, Butera, Mugny, & Pérez, 1991; Mugny, Kaiser, Papastamou, & Pérez, 1984; Nemeth, 1986; Nemeth & Kwan, 1987). In these cases, the self-relevance of the information may not be pivotal, inasmuch as the source is not a threat to the target’s group membership (and subsequent social identity). As such, even communications that do not bear on self-identity may be analyzed carefully when authored by an in-group minority. In either (majority or minority influence) context in our model, merely designating a source as being relevant to the target’s identity group is expected to enhance the likelihood that its message will be scrutinized. We were not concerned with out-group minorities in the present research. Much of the earlier research has suggested the relative ineffectiveness of such influence sources except under highly circumscribed conditions (Clark & Maass, 1988; Crano & Alvaro, 1998; Volpato, Maass, Mucchi-Paina, & Viti, 1990). We focused here on in-group minorities, members in good standing of one’s reference group who held a position at odds with that of the majority.

Although heightened message elaboration characterizes responses to both designated minority and majority persuasion sources, the motivation for elaboration and the elaboration goals of the target groups vary considerably, and these differences have important implications for belief. Assuming the self-relevance of the issue, targets of majority persuasion attend to (e.g., elaborate) messages out of social identity concerns (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1991). The goal of such elaboration is to determine, and heighten if necessary, the fit of one’s stated beliefs or actions to those of the majority (Moscovici, 1985b). Research suggests that such elaboration may produce temporary or persistent change (Wood et al., 1994). The variables that control persistence have not been specified fully, but a reasonable possibility is that it might depend on the hedonic relevance of the attitude object under scrutiny (the extent to which it impinges on the target’s life; Crano, 1995, 1997; Crano & Alvaro, 1998).

In minority contexts, the novelty and unexpectedness of the counternormative information presented by a subset of one’s own group encourages attention and elaboration (Crano, 1994; Nemeth, 1986, 1994, 1995). In such circumstances, elaboration may be more intense than that involving majority sources (Butera, Huguet, Mugny, & Pérez, 1994) and, importantly, it is focused on the validity of the message rather than with the fit of one’s beliefs with those of the source. Acquiescence to the minority may be actively avoided even when the message is of high quality, but this is not to say that elaboration has no effect. Even when targets refuse to be associated with the minority’s position, its elaboration can have strong, if indirect, effects on attitudes (Moscovici, Mugny, & Pérez, 1985; Pérez & Mugny, 1987, 1990). A predictive model that details the outcomes of
these propositions for majority and minority influence has been proposed (Alvaro & Crano, 1997; Crano & Alvaro, 1998), and it is to this model that we turn.

The Leniency Contract and Social Influence

Immediate Focal and Indirect Influence

When an issue is judged relevant to social identity concerns, variations in elaboration goals inspired by the majority or minority status of a message source result in different outcomes. With majority influence, the leniency contract predicts compliance—the modification of a stated belief or action in a direction consistent with the majority's recommendation. However, these changes are not expected to generalize to related beliefs, given the goal of message processing hypothesized in response to majority influence. Attitude change is the result of elaboration which is enacted to provide information allowing the target to attain a better fit with the majority's position. As such, the modification of the critical belief will not trigger a change of related attitudes. This is not to suggest that the majority always succeeds in its attempts at attitude change. Often, the majority does not prevail (Alvaro, 1999, 1997; Mugny & Pérez, 1991; Pérez & Mugny, 1990; Wood et al., 1994), but when it does, its effects appear limited to the focal belief, the attitude under direct persuasive attack. The variables that affect the success or failure of majority sources have not been specified completely as yet, but the context—comparison model (Crano & Alvaro, 1998; Crano & Hannula-Bral, 1994) suggests that perceptions of the subjective or objective nature of the judgment may moderate the effects of these influences on sources.

The effects on attitude of message-focused elaboration stimulated by the in-group minority are different from those anticipated in response to majority influence. In a meta-analysis of nearly 100 studies, Wood et al. (1994) found that minorities rarely caused the immediate, direct change typical of majority persuasion; rather, when it occurred, minority influence was delayed or indirect. Indirect change is a modification of beliefs that are related to the focal attitude but not identical to it. A good example of indirect change is found in research by Pérez and Mugny (1987, 1990), who exposed Spanish high school students to a counterattitudinal message that argued in favor of abortion liberalization. The communication had little direct impact, but it enhanced tolerance of contraception when attributed to an in-group minority. This indirect change effect was replicated in later studies (Alvaro & Crano, 1997), which found that when attributed to an in-group minority, a message antagonistic to gay soldiers in the military had an (indirect) effect on targets' attitudes toward gun control, an attitude that prior research had indicated as being associated with the majority's recommendation. However, these indirect effects were reversed in a second study, complementary results were obtained: The in-group minority's condemnation of gun control moved targets' attitudes on gay persons in the military in a negative direction. These results held even though data indicated that respondents did not view the critical attitudes as related or interdependent.

Consistent with earlier research, the leniency contract holds that majority-group members are reluctant to be identified with the position of the in-group opinion minority. However, to maintain group cohesion, it is important that in-group members whose opinions are deviant from the majority's not be driven from the group, unless their opinions pose a threat to the group's identity or viability. Research on intergroup relations is congruent with this proposition. People assume greater heterogeneity of beliefs among in-group members, and greater homogeneity of attitudes in the out-group (Jones, Wood, & Quattrone, 1981; Quattrone, 1986; Quattrone & Jones, 1980). Furthermore, members appear willing to entertain diversity of beliefs within their reference group on issues other than those that define the essence of the group (Marques & Paiz, 1994; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). As such, in-group attitude variations on all but the most critical identity issues may not be viewed as vexatious or surprising but rather as a standard and expected fact of life in groups (Worchel, Grossman, & Coutant, 1994). In-group members' reluctance to be associated with the minority position may stem either from self-presentation concerns or from a desire to maintain consistency with (majority) consensus. As both Mackie (1987) and Baker and Petty (1994) have suggested, the majority may be a strong source of social reality or uncertainty reduction, and thus to align with a minority may violate a strong heuristic that holds that the group is usually right. Alvaro and Crano's (1997, Study 3) results support the heuristic explanation. In this research, participants proved reluctant to accept a minority's message even when responses were private and accessible only to the experimenter. When attributed to the majority, the message was strongly influential. Clearly, source mattered, but a manipulation that systematically varied the public or private nature of participants' responses had no effect whatsoever. This pattern suggests that uncertainty reduction, rather than self-presentation, may be responsible for resistance to the minority.

The openness to in-group opinion deviance hypothesized in the leniency contract creates an interesting dilemma for the receiver. According to the leniency model, when a valued (i.e., in-group) message source propounds a counternormative message with which the target does not wish to be identified, the target for reasons of group solidarity may not derogate the source. Furthermore, the target cannot ignore or passively refuse to process the proffered message, for to do so could prove as threatening to solidarity as active derogation. In addition to the problems this communication pattern may create for the influence target, it poses a conundrum for the theorist as well. Years of research have taught that elaboration without counterargument or source derogation is a fine recipe for attitude change (Brewer & Crano, 1994). Yet, considerable research also suggests that minorities do not induce direct attitude change (Wood et al., 1994). The leniency contract offers a means of reconciling this apparent contradiction. It holds that a target will neither derogate an in-group minority source nor refuse to consider its message. In recompense, the target implicitly resolves that no change will ensue in response to the appeal. The in-group minority thus is free to present its position openly and without fear of derogation or contradiction, and the majority target may freely and without fear of influence attend to the message and respond positively (or, at a minimum, not negatively) to its
source. The leniency contract protects the group from interne-
cine warfare while at the same time maintaining belief stabil-
ity—the status quo. The cost of this bargain is subtle but real, 
for it is paid in terms of pressure on the attitudes that are 
associated with the focal issue. The leniency model holds that 
the faithful fulfillment of the contract introduces imbalance or 
tension into the structure of beliefs that encompasses the target’s 
focal attitude. To resolve this tension, one or more of the beliefs 
linked to the focal issue will be pressed to change in a direction 
consistent with the thrust of the persuasive communication. The 
research on which these propositions are based has been con-
ducted in individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1995). Although we 
do not depart from this standard, we could argue on theoretical 
grounds that the magnitude of predicted effects would be ampli-
fied in communal cultures, in which regard for the group 
and concern for the feelings of fellow group members are hypothe-
sized to be greater than in individualistic cultures.

Considerations of Attitude Structure

This conceptualization of indirect change requires acceptance 
of the idea that attitudes do not exist in isolation but rather are 
structurally interrelated in belief constellations. Change of one 
component of the constellation may affect other related compo-

gents. Research and theory by McGuire (1990), McGuire and 
McGuire (1991), Fink and Kaplowitz (1993), and Judd and 
Krosnick (1988), among others, are consistent with this assump-
tion and suggest that attitudes that occupy the same cognitive 
constellation may all be affected when one member of the set 
is changed (see also Judd, Drake, Downing, & Krosnick, 1991). 
The leniency contract expands on this conclusion by hypothesiz-
ing that even in the absence of direct change, strong pressures 
on one attitude within a belief structure may induce movement 
on related components. The results of Alvaro and Crano (1997) 
were consistent with this interpretation, as was the pattern of 
attendant cognitive processes that occurred in conjunction with 
the hypothesized attitude changes. Alvaro and Crano (1997) 
found no evidence for derogation of the in-group minority in-
fluence source—in fact, it gained stature as a consequence of 
its counterattitudinal message, a result anticipated in earlier the-
oretical treatments (Kruglanski & Mackie, 1990). Furthermore, 
measures of cognitive responses to the persuasive communica-
tion of the in-group minority suggested a generally open and 
noncritical reception. Both of these factors, open-minded mes-
sage elaboration and positive source evaluation, are consist-
tent with the leniency contract processes that have been hypothe-
sized.

The elaboration likelihood of counterattitudinal communica-
tions attributed to the majority appears dependent on the re-
levance of the issue to the target’s social identity vis-à-vis the 
reference group and the importance the target attaches to this 
identity (Wood et al., 1996). An issue that bears on gay soldiers 
in the military, for example, would not appear critically relevant 
to the identity of the typical college student. As such, as Alvaro 
and Crano (1997) argued, being out of synchrony on this issue 
with other students (an identity source) might not pose much of 
a threat to social identity. However, issues that bear strongly 
on the fundamental structure or well-being of the target’s social 
group—for example, a proposed change in university policies 
regarding requirements for graduation—may be considerably 
more relevant to the source of a student’s social identity and, 
thus, more likely to be elaborated carefully. Although not di-
rectly tested in the present research, we conjectured that issues 
of low relevance for self-identity would generate little elabora-
tion of a majority’s message and little consequent influence 
(Alvaro & Crano, 1997, Studies 1 & 2; Chaiken, Wood, & 
Eagly, 1996; Peters & Crano, 1996). We hypothesized more 
intense elaboration when the issue bears on identity concerns, 
so as to allow receivers to determine how best to fit their ex-
pressed beliefs or overt behaviors to the requirements of the 
majority. Variations in issue self-relevance may be in part re-
sponsible for the inconsistent majority effects noted by Wood 
et al. (1994) in their meta-analysis. Although there may be 
no measurable differences in elaboration between majority and 
minority targets when assessed by standard cognitive response 
(i.e., thought listing) techniques (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a; 
Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981), elaboration goals and their con-
sequent outcomes may vary considerably.

Persistence

The persistence of majority-induced change is an interesting 
theoretical issue. Consider a situation in which the majority’s 
message is relevant for self-identity concerns and is elaborated. 
Change should ensue, and it may persist if it is brought about by 
strong persuasive messages, high outcome relevance, or some 
combination of these factors. Results of Mackie (1987), Baker 
and Petty (1994), and De Dreu and De Vries (1996) may all be 
interpreted as consistent with this possibility. However, the 
target will disengage from the interaction if the issue is neither 
identity relevant nor of high outcome relevance, a process de-
scribed in earlier work on structural balance in contexts involv-
ing negative interpersonal attitudes (Crano & Cooper, 1973; 
Price, Harburg, & Newcomb, 1966). As Alvaro and Crano 
(1997) have shown, the majority will not prevail in circum-
stances of this sort.

The problem is more complex in indirect minority-influence 
contexts. The leniency contract holds that indirect change is 
undertaken to dispel the stress introduced into a configuration 
of beliefs through the undefended elaboration of a counterattitu-
dinal message. Should indirect change occur, however, another 
source of imbalance is introduced: The newly changed attitude 
now threatens the original belief structure. Two forms of cogni-
tive readjustment to such structural imbalance appear most prob-
able. On the basis of past research in attitude change, the most 
likely possibility is that the newly changed (indirect) attitude 
will revert to its original position with the passage of time. This 
reversion to the baseline belief state has been remarked on at 
least since Hovland’s (1959) time. Such reversion would rebal-
ance the affected belief configuration. A second possibility, 
which provides a novel but parsimonious explanation of prior 
findings, is that the newly changed belief unbalances the belief 
structure, which pressures the linked (i.e., the focal) attitude to 
be brought into accord with the newly altered indirect attitude 
object. This process of change would produce the delayed mi-

ority effect on focal attitudes, which is a consistent feature of 
the minority influence literature (Wood et al., 1994), but the 
explanation of these delayed effects is decidedly different from
that typically offered. This hypothesized process of delayed focal change is most probable when large indirect change is induced. With small indirect changes, reversion to the original (preinfluence) position over time seems most probable.

We designed the present research to test some of these observations. At its core, the research was concerned with detailing the manner in which majority and in-group minority change pressures operate on targets of majority status. In realizing this overarching goal, the research sought (a) to replicate earlier results with attitude objects that have not been used in prior studies, (b) to consider more closely the cognitive processes involved in majority- and minority-induced change, (c) to determine the temporal stability of such changes once induced, and (d) to investigate the effects of indirect change on focal attitude change, and of focal change on indirect attitudes. The focus on majority as well as minority effects, the investigation of the temporal stability of focal and indirect change, the concentrated focus on mediating mechanisms, and the analysis of the delayed effects of focal and indirect attitude change all augment earlier research.

On the basis of the theoretical considerations detailed to this point, we can summarize our approach as follows. A majority will have a strong and direct persuasive impact in situations in which the issue under consideration is of high identity relevance to targets. Enhanced elaboration of strong messages will be associated with direct, focal change. Changes brought about by the majority’s message will persist if the issue is of high identity relevance, but they will not generalize to linked issues. Effects of outcome (vs. identity) relevance must be approached and interpreted with caution in this approach. The model distinguishes between identity-relevant issues (i.e., those that have to do with the individual’s relationship with an identity group) and outcome-relevant issues, which have to do with gain or loss consequences (Crano, 1995). Circumstances of high identity relevance were expected to render outcome relevance superfluous. For this reason, outcome relevance was not expected to have much impact in the present research. However, it was included in the third study to provide a link to prior studies and to test the possibility that it might moderate the impact of variations in the strength of persuasive messages.

The lack of majority effects on associated attitudes, even in the face of strong focal change, occurs because targets’ central motivation in majority influence contexts is not to be “right” (i.e., to understand the issue and its implications) but to be consistent with the reference group. Thus, a strong message merely indicates the position of the group more clearly and forcefully than a weak one, and greater elaboration facilitates the target’s understanding of the group’s position. More certain knowledge of this position will lead to persistence of change but will not affect related beliefs because the information that is internalized is concerned with the expression of the ‘‘proper’’ belief or action, not the substance or gist of the persuasive message.

Because of targets’ reluctance to be identified with a minority position a minority will not effect direct change. However, indirect change—the modification of attitude(s) linked to the focal belief—will occur in response to in-group minority persuasion. Message strength in this circumstance will affect elaboration, but the elaboration outcomes differ from those expected in majority contexts. Greater elaboration of the minority’s message will not be associated with focal change, as in majority influence, but rather with change on the indirect attitude. Persistence of indirect change is not expected unless the indirect belief is changed substantially. In that circumstance, the change will persist and will pressure the focal attitude to change in a complementary fashion. Delayed focal change of this sort has been found in prior research; the leniency model provides a theoretically credible process explanation for it.

Three studies were conducted to explore the validity of this view of majority and minority influence. Although the first two were important and necessary, they were undertaken principally in the service of the third. Study 1 was developed to establish focal and indirect attitudes. It made use of correlational and multidimensional scaling (MDS) analyses to allow a choice of linked attitude objects for use in later studies. Having established the focal and indirect attitude objects, we move to Study 2, which we designed to develop the strong and weak messages necessary for research that makes use of the ELM. Study 3, the critical experiment, extended the typical ELM study. It tested the effects of outcome-relevant involvement, message strength, and source status on susceptibility to direct and indirect attitude change and the persistence of such change.

Study 1

There is no generally accepted method of defining or assessing indirect attitude change. In a meta-analytic review of minority influence studies, Wood et al. (1994) used the label indirect influence to describe the generalization of persuasive effects from one topic to another. Consistent with this view, Alvaro and Crano (1997) made use of a psychometrically oriented approach to identify indirect attitude objects. In this approach, objects were considered indirectly linked if they were positively correlated and proximal in multidimensional space. Ideally, linkages among objects are not accessible to the attitude holder. This renders implausible the possibility that indirect change is a response to pressure on the focal object. In Study 1, a set of attitude objects were rated by respondents whose assessments served as the input in both a correlational and MDS analysis. The results allowed identification of the focal and indirect issues that we used in Studies 2 and 3. Insofar as this was an exploratory study, no hypotheses regarding possible interrelationships were postulated.

Method

A group of undergraduate students (N = 76) from the University of Arizona completed a questionnaire that tapped attitudes toward 11 proposals concerned with the implementation of new university policies, such as a mandatory health insurance program, senior comprehensive examinations, a tuition increase, core course requirements, and so on. These topics were chosen for study because they all bear on a potentially important aspect of participants’ self-identity, that of students at the same university. All of the proposals were rated using five 7-point semantic differential scales with endpoints good–bad, right–wrong, beneficial–harmful, wise–foolish, and desirable–undesirable. The purpose of this study was to determine the associations among a set of attitude objects and, thereby, provide the basis for a choice of focal and indirect attitude objects for later study. This determination could have been made safely
Results and Discussion

We examined the intercorrelations between the scaled attitude objects in advance of any testing (as in Pérez & Mugny's [1987] use of abortion and contraception), but in the present instance, testing and analysis were deemed necessary.

The internal consistencies of the 5-item scales constructed for each of the 11 proposals were all very high (mean $\alpha = .95$). We examined the intercorrelations between the scaled attitude indexes, as well as their locations in multidimensional space. The correlational analysis revealed that attitudes toward the mandatory service program, the issue that ultimately was to serve as the direct attitude item, were correlated significantly with two other proposals: switching from a two-semester to a three-semester (trimester) academic year ($r = .31$, $n = 75$, $p < .01$) and the desirability of a tuition increase ($r = .27$, $n = 75$, $p < .05$). The wording of these potentially critical items was (a) the university should employ a mandatory service program in which all students must commit to a certain amount of university service as a condition for graduation, (b) the university should switch from the two-semester system to a trimester (three-semester) system, and (c) the university should increase student tuition to maintain the quality and diversity of programs offered.

The MDS analysis made use of the standardized correlation coefficients between all attitude objects as indicators of similarity. MDS is a mathematical approach in which similarities among a set of objects are represented spatially. The ideal of the approach is to minimize the discrepancy (stress) between the spatial representation and the observed data, using as few dimensions as possible in the interest of parsimony (Schiffman, Reynolds, & Young, 1981). In the present case, the MDS analysis yielded a two-dimensional solution with satisfactory goodness of fit (stress = .18, $R^2 = .78$). The analysis revealed that attitudes toward a tuition increase and the mandatory service program were proximal in multidimensional space. The mean interpoint distance between the attitude objects was high ($M$ distance = 1.38) relative to the distance between the two chosen for further study ($M$ distance = 0.66). On the basis of these findings, the issue of a mandatory university service requirement was chosen as the focal issue, and an increase in tuition at the university was chosen as the indirect issue. Many earlier studies in the ELM tradition have made use of a tuition increase as a focal issue (Johnson & Eagly, 1989). The earlier research was based on the reasonable assumption that few students relish the idea that they will be forced to pay more for their education. Clearly, on this issue, change should prove difficult. Past ELM research was undertaken to identify factors that enhanced the persuasiveness of communications that argued in favor of this clearly counterattitudinal issue. In this article, we detail the conditions under which attitudes toward a tuition increase become more positive as a consequence of a message in which tuition is never mentioned.

The analyses of Study 1 disclosed three important results. First, the study confirmed that beliefs on issues of high relevance can be measured reliably. Furthermore, the correlations that were obtained suggested that attitudes toward university service, the trimester system, and tuition were potentially useful objects for examining direct and indirect attitude change. As these issues did not appear to be related on any necessary basis, it is improbable that participants were fully aware of the relationships between them. Put differently, it is unlikely that participants would intentionally change one attitude in the attempt to defuse change pressure brought to bear on another. Finally, whereas trimester and tuition increase attitudes were both significantly correlated with attitudes toward the service program, the MDS analysis suggested that the tuition increase was more proximal to the direct attitude object. On the basis of these results, the university service proposal was adopted as the direct focal issue, and a tuition increase was adopted as the indirect object. The objects identified in this study satisfy the criteria discussed earlier: Their correlation is statistically significant, and they are proximal in multidimensional space. Although not formally tested, and not critical for theoretical purposes, their relationship does not seem highly accessible. Given these results, we proceed to Study 2, which was undertaken to develop the strong and weak messages required to investigate variations in the strength of messages attributed to majority and minority sources.

Study 2

Method

This study followed the typical ELM approach to developing strong and weak messages. Two essays justifying the implementation of the university service program were composed and administered to 107 undergraduate students at the University of Arizona. The messages were titled "The Case for a University Service Program" and were attributed to the chairperson of a University of Arizona student organization. The text outlined the major reasons why the organization felt the service program should be implemented. Approximately half the participants read the presumably strong message, and the other half read the weak one. The central arguments for the strong message were that student service would reduce the costs of administrative operations, improve the quality and diversity of programs and services offered, and provide students with hands-on experience and training that would be beneficial for their future careers. The weak message suggested that the service plan would keep students busy so that they would not have energy or time to get into trouble, and that by working for the university, students would have less free time and, thus, fewer problems deciding what to do for leisure time activities.

After reading one or the other communication, participants were given 3 min to list the thoughts they had while reading the message. They then rated each thought as positive, negative, or irrelevant to the message. Finally, they rated the message on 7 Likert measures, which tapped participants' estimates of the extent to which the message was well-written, clear, coherent, strong, persuasive, understandable, and convincing.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) on cognitive responses disclosed a significant effect of message strength. Participants exposed to the weak message produced significantly more negative thoughts than those exposed to the strong message ($M$s = 3.24 and 1.96, respectively), $F(1, 105) = 15.95$, $p < .001$. (Unless stated otherwise, all averages reported in this article are adjusted least squares means.) The weak message also induced a significantly higher proportion of negative thoughts as a percentage of total (positive + negative) thoughts (72% vs. 58% for weak vs. strong messages, respectively), $F(1, 103) = 5.96$, $p$
pants to a weak or strong persuasive communication that argued in favor of a university-sponsored service program. In the program, we explained, students were required to contribute their time, without pay, to university service. The message was attributed to an in-group source, whom the message’s introduction placed in the majority or minority of students. To manipulate outcome relevance, we told some that the proposal would take effect almost immediately and others that it may be implemented in the distant future. We took measures before, immediately after, and 1 week after the messages were delivered. This design was meant to provide insight into the way majorities and minorities persuade and the stability of attitude change, should it occur.

On the basis of the theoretical rationale developed to this point, we expected that the majority would have its greatest impact on the focal attitude. We expected this impact to persist given the identity relevance of the issue and the consequent likelihood of elaboration. We expected no direct effects in response to the minority’s message. Rather, the minority’s impact was expected on the indirect attitude object, tuition, but persistence of the effect was not anticipated. We expected message strength to affect both focal and indirect attitudes on immediate measurement and, for the focal attitude, we expected its effects to persist on the delayed posttest. We made no strong prediction with respect to message strength on persistence of indirect attitude change, but it seemed unlikely that message strength variations would persist on the indirect issue unless, as discussed, very large changes on the indirect attitude were evident. In such a case, the logic of the ELM would lead to the hypothesis that change attributable to strong messages would persist.

We did not expect attitude variations that were attributable to outcome involvement because the focal issue would be highly identity relevant for participants. Motivated by concerns with self-presentation, majority-source targets elaborate the message. Owing to its novelty and unexpectedness, the minority-source targets, too, elaborate the message irrespective of outcome relevance. Therefore, with either source, the manipulation of involvement should have little effect, and a significant interaction of this variable with message strength, a staple of ELM research, was not expected. In short, the self-relevance of the focal issue renders the manipulation of outcome involvement superfluous, thereby attenuating the interaction.

Method

Participants. Freshman and sophomore students (N = 186) from the introductory communication course at the University of Arizona served as participants. They were recruited for extra credit to serve in studies on “university policy issues” and “the effectiveness of various forms of presentations (e.g., face-to-face, telephone, print, and e-mail).” Although drawn from the same pool, no participants from the first two studies served in this experiment.

Procedure. Participants were told that the experiment was designed to gather information on their attitudes toward various policy proposals anticipated to affect students at the university. It was pointed out that their responses were important because of their potential utility in formulating future university policies. After this introduction, participants were prompted to begin the University Policy Questionnaire, which consisted of 6 of the 11 proposals on university policies investigated in Study 1, including the critical focal topic, the university service program, and the indirect object, a tuition increase. In the high manipulated-outcome-relevance condition, the questionnaire began with the following statement: “The University of Arizona administration will discuss the following proposals in October 1996. If passed, the proposals will be effective at University of Arizona from August 1997” (approximately 1 year from the time of administration). For the low outcome-relevance group, the introduction stated that the proposals would be enforced from fall 2005, if passed.

Following completion of the questionnaire, participants were told that they were to begin a second study comparing the effectiveness of different forms of communication (face-to-face dialogue, telephone conversation, print, or e-mail) in conveying information. The experimenter explained that the topics were chosen from policy issues currently under debate. Participants were led to believe that they were randomly assigned to different communication forms and different discussion topics. Following random assignment to conditions, participants were provided with bogus information attributed to a university-wide survey of 1,536 students, to help them develop better understanding of the issue. Those assigned the majority source were told that 84% of the 1,536 respondents supported the university service proposal (which they were about to read); in the minority source condition, participants were told that only 14% supported the proposal. The information was presented in both statistical and visual (bar graph) format. Participants then responded to two questions designed to assess the success of the source status manipulation. Then, all participants read a 1-page, single-spaced essay that argued in favor of the program. The introduction to the essay read as follows:

Some members of this university’s administration have suggested that students take part in a university service program, in which they contribute their time and efforts to needed university tasks. They would not be compensated for this work, and participation would be mandatory. The material you will read is the summary section of the report written by a chairperson of a student organization...[who] outlines the major reasons why the organization feels the service program should be implemented beginning in the fall semester 1997 (2005) at the University of Arizona.

These essays outlined a series of reasons why the policy should be implemented. The arguments had been developed in Study 2 so as to be either very strong or very weak. Then, measures of focal and indirect attitude, cognitive responses, and outcome involvement were taken. At this point, the experiment ostensibly was over. However, attitudes were assessed again, approximately 1 week after the laboratory session. No communications were delivered in the intervening time period (see Kaplowitz, Fink, Armstrong, & Bauer, 1986); thus, any systematic extraneous historical influence would be expected to affect all participants equally (Crano & Brewer, 1986). In the delayed posttest session, an
experimenter who was not identified with the earlier study visited stu-
dents’ classrooms and solicited volunteers to complete a short question-
aire that contained the critical focal and indirect attitude issues along
with five filler topics not assessed earlier.

Measures. After the source manipulation, participants indicated the
extent to which their position was in accord with the majority or minority
of their fellow students. The items assessing this perception read “Do
you consider your position on the university service program to be in
the majority or minority among students at the University of Arizona?”
and “What proportion of university students oppose your position on
the university service program?” All participants then read the message,
after which they completed four items designed to tap the outcome
relevance of the critical university service issue. The items were con-
cerned with the extent to which participants found the proposal worris-
some and threatening, whether they cared about the issue, and whether
they thought the program would affect their lives. These items serve as
a manipulation check for the involvement treatment. Participants then
indicated their positions on the direct (service) and the indirect (tuition)
attitude objects. The indirect-object measure was justified by informing
participants that others had read arguments concerning a tuition increase,
and the experimenter was interested in their feelings on this issue as
well. Five semantic differential scales were used to assess attitudes. The
positive poles of the first four items are valuable, favorable, acceptable,
and fair. The fifth item required participants to note the extent to which
they agreed with the university service and tuition increase proposals.
Endpoints ranged from do not agree at all to agree completely.

Cognitive responses were assessed through a thought-listing task. Par-
ticipants were given 3 min to list the thoughts they had while reading
the message. Then, they rated these thoughts as being positive, negative,
or irrelevant to the persuasive message. They were also instructed to
assess the effectiveness of the arguments on the seven Likert message-
rating scales used in Study 2. The ratings helped rationalize the request
that participants read and attend to the persuasive communication. As
in earlier ELM-based investigations, these data were not deemed critical
d and thus were not analyzed.

The delayed posttest tapped attitudes toward the critical university
service and tuition issues, along with attitudes toward student financial
aid, a campus transportation system, health insurance, student intern-
ships, and core courses. Five semantic differential scales using the same
endpoints as the pretest were used to assess attitudes.

To recapitulate, outcome involvement, message strength, and source
status were all manipulated as independent factors in an experiment that
used a posttest–posttest–delayed-posttest factorial design. All experi-
mental materials of the laboratory portion of the study were assembled
in advance and distributed randomly. The delayed posttest was identical
for all, and experimenters were always unaware of participants’ treat-
ment condition. The laboratory sessions were conducted in groups of
5–15 participants. The delayed posttest was conducted in participants’
classrooms. After the delayed posttest, all were fully debriefed and
thanked.

Results

Pretest attitude distribution. As expected, the pretest re-
vealed that the bulk of participants held attitudes antagonistic
to the university service proposal. Pretest attitude scores on the
critical attitude (α = .94) could have ranged from 5 to 35; the
nominal neutral point on the scale was 20. Of 184 participants,
123 scored below this total, and another 14 were at the nominal
neutral point. Given this extreme skew, and the relative paucity
of respondents who expressed a favorable attitude on the critical
issue, only those who fell below the nominal scale midpoint
were included in the analyses. Thus, the persuasive message
advocated a counterattitudinal position for all of the participants
included in the following analyses.

Manipulation checks. We conducted a 2×2 (Source X Out-
come-Relevant Involvement X Message Strength) ANOVA on
the sum of the four items used to assess participants’ self-
reports of outcome relevant involvement (α = .79). The analysis
revealed a significant main effect of only the involvement ma-
nipulation, F(1, 115) = 31.20, p < .001. Those in the high-
involvement condition perceived significantly greater outcome
relevance in the university service program than those in the low-involvement condition (Ms = 20.3 and 14.4, respectively;
scores could have ranged from 4 to 28). We conducted a similar
analysis to assess the success of the manipulation of source
status. The two items that focused on perceptions of status were
strongly correlated (r = .88, n = 123, p < .001). A 2×2 ANOVA
on their sum revealed a significant main effect of the manipula-
tion, F(1, 115) = 387.65, p < .001. Clearly, participants could
identify the majority or minority status of the source of the mes-
gage they received. The manipulation check analyses re-
vealed that both treatments were perceived as intended.

Focal attitude: Immediate posttest. A 2 (source) × 2
(involvement) × 2 (message strength) analysis of covariance
(ANCOVA) was conducted on the 5-item scale (α = .94) of
attitudes toward the focal issue, the university service program,
with pretest attitudes toward the program serving as the covari-
ate. The analysis revealed significant main effects of source,
F(1, 114) = 10.00, p < .005, and of message strength, F(1,
114) = 43.19, p < .001. Table 1 presents the unadjusted (raw)
mean scores across source and message strength conditions.
Mean posttest focal attitudes revealed that those exposed to the
majority source were more influenced by the communication
than those whose message was attributed to the minority (Ms
= 17.3 and 13.7, respectively; scores could range from 5 to 35,
with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes). Parici-
pants presented with the strong message were more persuaded
than those who received the weak communication (Ms = 19.2
and 11.8, respectively). No other effects were statistically
reliable.

Indirect attitude: Immediate posttest. We performed a com-
parable 2×2 ANCOVA on participants’ attitudes on the indirect
issue, the tuition increase, which Study 1 indicated as being
linked to attitudes toward the service program. As before, pretest
attitudes on the focal issue served as the covariate in this analy-
sis. The same results would have obtained if we used the pretest
attitude on the tuition increase as the covariate, either alone or
in conjunction with pretest attitudes toward university service.
Table 2 presents the unadjusted (raw) mean indirect attitude
scores across source and message strength conditions. The
ANCOVA on the indirect attitude scale (α = .91) yielded sig-
nificant main effects of message strength, F(1, 112) = 17.08,
p < .001, and source, F(1, 112) = 4.14, p < .05. Variation in
n between this and the focal change analysis reflects minor
differences in the pattern of missing data. As predicted on the
basis of the leniency contract, mean differences within condi-
tions revealed that those whose source was presented as ex-
pounding a minority position on the service program were sig-
nificantly more in favor of a tuition increase than when the same
message was ascribed to the majority (Ms = 16.0 and 13.7 for
minority and majority sources, respectively; higher scores reflect
more positive indirect attitudes). The significant message strength effect revealed that participants exposed to the strong message on university service were more positively disposed to a tuition increase (Ms = 17.1 and 12.5 for strong and weak messages, respectively).

The model suggests that when a strong message is delivered by a minority, it will affect the positivity of cognitive responses, which in turn will affect indirect attitudes; no such effect on indirect attitudes is assumed when a strong message is delivered by the majority (also see the mediational analyses below). For theoretical purposes, therefore, the Message × Source interaction was decomposed. The analysis revealed results consistent with expectations. Analysis of simple effects revealed a significant source effect in the strong message condition, \( F(1, 112) = 4.16, p < .05; \) when the strong focal message was attributed to the minority, it had significantly greater impact on indirect attitudes than the same message attributed to the majority (Ms = 18.7 and 15.6, respectively). Source variations had no effect on indirect attitudes when a weak message was delivered, \( F(1, 112) = 0.82, n.s. \)

**Cognitive response analyses.** Analyses of the cognitive response data revealed significant effects of message strength on production of both positive and negative thoughts. Participants exposed to the strong message produced significantly more positive thoughts than those who read the weak communication, \( F(1, 115) = 25.71, p < .001 (Ms = 1.63 \text{ and } .43, \text{ respectively}). \) Consonant with this result, the strong message resulted in significantly fewer negative thoughts, \( F(1, 115) = 18.39, p < .001 \) (Ms = 2.26 and 3.72 negative thoughts for the strong and weak message conditions, respectively). An ANOVA on the proportion of negative thoughts to total thoughts revealed a significant message strength main effect, \( F(1, 113) = 28.21, p < .001; \) among recipients of the strong message, 59% of total thoughts were negative, whereas among those who received a weak message, the proportion of negative thoughts was 88%.

**Mediational analyses of cognitive responses.** The leniency contract suggests different patterns of elaboration and change as a function of message source. Elaboration positivity, the proportion of positive to total thoughts, should be more strongly associated with focal change among those exposed to the majority source, whereas it should be more strongly associated with indirect change in the minority source condition. These predictions were investigated in a series of correlational analyses. The first of these revealed a strong association between positivity of cognitive responses and focal change in the majority source condition \( (r = .54, n = 57, p < .001). \) The relationship between these same variables was attenuated for those exposed to the minority source \( (r = .23, n = 63, p < .08). \) As predicted, the strength of association between positivity and focal change in the majority condition significantly exceeded that found in the minority treatment group \( (z = 1.97, p < .01). \)
As may be expected, elaboration positivity of the focal communication was less strongly related to change on the indirect attitude. It is interesting, however, that the relationship pattern of these variables in the indirect change analysis was opposite to that found in the analysis of focal change. In the majority source condition, response positivity was inversely related to indirect attitude change \((r = -.23, n = 57, p = .10)\), whereas in the minority source condition, the relationship was positive \((r = .20, n = 63, p = .12)\). The difference between these correlations was statistically reliable \((z = 2.33, p < .01)\).

**Focal and indirect attitudes: Delayed posttests.** The analyses that follow focused on the persistence of effects and its mediation. In the first persistence analysis, we investigated attitudes toward the focal issue in a 2\(^2\) (Involvement \(\times\) Source \(\times\) Message Strength) ANCOVA, in which the delayed posttest focal attitude served as the dependent measure and initial posttest focal attitude score served as the covariate. The ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect of source, \(F(1, 100) = 4.35, p < .05\). Even after accounting for differences on the first posttest, the analysis disclosed that the attitudes of those exposed to the majority source remained significantly more positive toward university service than those whose message was attributed to a minority \((M_s = 15.0\) and 12.6, respectively). No other effects were statistically reliable.

We analyzed attitudes on the indirect issue, tuition, in an analogous 2\(^3\) ANCOVA, with attitude toward tuition on the first posttest serving as the covariate and the delayed posttest attitude serving as the dependent measure. We observed no significant effects.

**Delayed effects of indirect change.** This is not to say that the modified indirect attitude had no lasting impact. Earlier, we theorized about the delayed effects of indirect change on targets’ belief constellations and suggested that large minority-evoked changes on the indirect attitude might over time come to affect the focal belief. We tested this possibility in a delayed-change analysis in which participants in the minority source conditions were split into two groups on the basis of the magnitude of their indirect attitude change from pretest to posttest. This blocking variable was entered as a factor in a 2\(^3\) (Message \(\times\) Involvement \(\times\) Magnitude of Indirect Change) ANOVA on delayed posttest focal attitude change (i.e., change from pretest to delayed posttest). The analysis revealed a significant Message Strength \(\times\) Magnitude of Initial Change interaction, \(F(1, 46) = 4.93, p < .05\). Simple effects analysis disclosed that participants in the minority source condition who exhibited the greater indirect attitude change from pretest to posttest showed greater delayed focal change when the message they received was strong rather than weak, \(F(1, 46) = 6.41, p < .015\) \((M_s = 2.71\) and \(-2.75,\) respectively). No message strength differences were found among those who proved resistant to indirect change, \(F(1, 46) = 0.56\) \((M_s = -3.10\) and \(-1.22,\) respectively), for strong and weak message groups, respectively. This pattern confirms and extends the theoretical expectations presented earlier. The model holds that greater (immediate) indirect change in the minority source condition will result in greater (delayed) focal change. This expectation was confirmed but only when the indirect change came about as a result of a strong message. This qualification to the model is sensible and consistent with the logic of dual process theories. Large indirect changes brought about by (unexplained) factors other than message elaboration did not influence delayed focal change.

We undertook an analysis to determine whether the relationship between indirect and focal change was temporally dependent. This analysis is comparable with the earlier one, except that it investigated the effects of magnitude of indirect change on focal change on the immediate posttest. This 2\(^3\) (Message \(\times\) Involvement \(\times\) Magnitude of Indirect Change) ANOVA revealed that the magnitude of indirect change was not associated with focal change when both were assessed concurrently on the first posttest. The main effect of magnitude of change was nonsignificant, and it entered into no significant interactions with any other factor in the analysis. Apparently, some temporal delay is necessary before change on an indirect belief affects the targeted focal attitude.

We conducted a final analysis to determine the effects of majority-inspired focal change on delayed indirect attitude. A focal change effect was not expected because of hypothesized differences in processing motivation in the majority source condition. In this analysis, participants who received a message attributed to the majority were split into two groups on the basis of the magnitude of focal change from pretest to initial posttest. This variable was used as a factor in a 2\(^3\) (Message \(\times\) Involvement \(\times\) Magnitude of Focal Change) ANOVA on delayed posttest indirect attitude change. As predicted, the analysis revealed no significant effects.

**Discussion**

The leniency contract proceeds from the assumption that merely identifying a reference group member as the source of a counterattitudinal message triggers an examination of its assertions. If the source represents the majority of the reference group, the focus of the examination is the issue's relevance to the target's standing in the group, which is an important source of social identity. If the issue is irrelevant to identity concerns, majority pressure may be dismissed as illegitimate, and no influence will ensue. Earlier research suggested that the majority may be devalued in such circumstances (Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997). However, the message will be elaborated if it is adjudged as relevant to identity. In theory, the principal objective of this process is to determine the points of difference between source and target and to minimize these discrepancies by fitting beliefs or behaviors to those of the group. Message elaboration in this circumstance may be quite thoughtful and intense, but it is not focused on understanding or extracting the gist of the message; its primary goal is the discovery of features of the message that bear on discrepancy with the majority and that may be used to facilitate self-presentation. This social comparison process is similar to that postulated by Moscovici (1985a, 1985b; see also Allen & Wilder, 1977; Festinger, 1954; Suls, 1977) in his discussion of majority influence, but the motivations thought to underlie the process are different. In his work, Moscovici stressed the power to coerce and ostracize as the basis of majority influence. In the leniency contract, the importance the target attaches to the social identity derived from group membership is critical. This emphasis has been buttressed in research by Wood, Crano, and colleagues (Alvaro & Crano, 1997, Study 3; Wood et al., 1996).
In majority influence contexts, variations in message strength were also expected to moderate focal influence. More powerful messages are more clearly informative of the locus of discrepancy between the individual and the group and thus should prove more influential. In theory, a strong message would help rationalize the search for, and development of, commonalities between the target’s position and that presented as representing the majority. As such, with majority message sources, strong messages should result in more positive message elaboration, which should be associated with greater and more lasting social influence. The analyses of Study 3 provide powerful support for these theoretically derived expectations. The analyses disclosed a significant effect of source status on focal attitude change and a significant message strength effect. Those participants who were exposed to a counterattitudinal message that was attributed to a majority of their reference group peers were significantly more influenced than those whose (identical) message was attributed to a peer-group minority, and strong messages expedited persuasion as well. The cognitive response data facilitate interpretation of these outcomes. Consistent with considerable prior research (and the results of Study 2), examination revealed that those exposed to the strong message generated a significantly greater proportion of positive cognitive responses. Subsequent mediational analysis revealed that positivity of cognitive response was significantly associated with magnitude of change on the focal attitude. It is important to recall that this association was significantly stronger in the majority than the minority source condition.

The results of the delayed focal attitude change analysis revealed that the majority source effect on attitude persisted for at least 1 week. If conversion is defined in terms of temporal persistence (Crano, 1970; Festinger, 1953), then it may be said that the majority caused conversion. In fairness, we admit that this construal of conversion may be antithetical to Moscovici’s understanding of the term, insofar as observed change might not have been based on an acceptance of communication content but rather, as hypothesized, on a thorough understanding of the best means of appearing to “fit in” with one’s reference group. The adoption of this “keeping-up-appearances” strategy, that is, not message acceptance, may be responsible for change and its persistence. Would the observed changes have occurred if the issue were deemed irrelevant to students, a group that serves as an important source of participants’ social identities? This question was not addressed here, for to do so would have doubled the size of an already large experiment. However, the majority was completely unpersuasive in earlier studies in which the issues were irrelevant to most participants’ social identities but that, in most other respects, were identical to the pretest–immediate-posttest portion of the present study (see Alvaro & Crano, 1996, 1997, Studies 1 & 2).

The leniency model assumes a very different response pattern to the persuasive attempts of in-group minorities. In this circumstance, the persuasive message attracts attention because of its novelty and unexpectedness. There is little need to seek ways to maximize the apparent fit of one’s beliefs with those of the minority. Indeed, research suggests that association with the minority’s position often is avoided (Pérez & Mugny, 1987, 1990). However, to maintain cohesion and steady group functioning, it is important to refrain from alienating the minority. This suggests that the in-group minority’s position not only will be considered (owing to its unexpectedness) but, for purposes of group maintenance, will be considered open-mindedly and without derogation. The essential feature of the leniency contract is that this generous deliberation is accompanied by the implicit understanding that no change will occur, a proviso that functionally nullifies direct minority influence. Although this response arrangement maintains the status quo, it introduces considerable change pressure into the system of beliefs that are associated with the focal attitude. The most proximal beliefs are expected to be affected by this pressure.

The analysis of indirect attitude change that was developed to test these possibilities provided strong support for the leniency model. It disclosed that source effects in the immediate-posttest–indirect-change analysis were the reverse of those observed on the focal attitude: The minority was the stronger source of influence on (indirect) attitudes toward a tuition increase. In the minority condition, participants’ attitudes toward tuition increase became more favorable. It bears repeating that this topic had never been mentioned in the persuasive communication, although it had been established (by MDS) as linked to the focal issue (Study 1). The analysis revealed that although those whose message was ascribed to the in-group minority were not swayed by the direct persuasive appeal, they were influenced on an issue correlated to the focal attitude and proximal to it in multidimensional space. This result is consistent with earlier research (Alvaro & Crano, 1997) and with expectations derived from the leniency contract.

As in the examination of focal belief change, the indirect-attitude analysis disclosed a significant message strength effect. Strong messages on the focal issue caused greater change on the indirect attitude when attributed to the minority source. These results are compatible with leniency contract expectations: In the absence of direct change in response to the minority’s appeal, the elaboration of more powerful messages is expected to cause greater imbalance in the constellation of beliefs, thus resulting in greater pressure on proximal indirect-attitude objects.

Analysis revealed that the strong message generated more positive (and fewer negative) cognitive responses, but these responses affected focal and indirect attitudes in different ways. When attributed to the majority, positive responses were positively associated with change on the focal issue. And, the induced changes persisted. When attributed to the in-group minority, however, the positive responses that were the result of strong message elaboration were associated with greater change on the indirect attitude. Clearly, the mediational patterns exhibited in the focal and indirect-attitude analyses were quite different, but the pattern variations make theoretical sense. The strong relationship between elaboration positivity and focal change in the majority source condition is consistent with the leniency contract and earlier ELM-based work. Furthermore, it is reasonable that this strong relationship would attenuate the association between positivity and indirect change among these same participants. The change pressure that results from the elaboration of the majority’s message was resolved through change on the focal issue. The strong relationship between elaboration positivity and indirect change in the minority source condition is also consistent with leniency contract expectations. Although this relation-
Although results disclosed that persistence of indirect change was not affected by message source or message strength, these findings should not be taken to suggest that indirect change had no lasting effect. As shown in the internal analysis, minority-inspired indirect influence had a strong impact on delayed focal change. Over time, those whose indirect attitudes were strongly affected by the minority’s potent message were more likely than those who resisted change, or those who received a weak message, to bring their focal attitudes into congruence with the changed belief. An explanation of this change pattern consistent with the leniency contract would hold that those exposed to the minority source were reluctant to be associated with the minority position and, thus, did not change; however, processing the strong message introduced considerable tension in their belief structures, and an attitude linked to the focal issue was modified to alleviate it. This modification of attitude, in turn, created another imbalance, as the indirect belief now was inconsistent with the (unchanged) focal attitude. To rebalance the system, the focal attitude was altered so as to become more consistent with the recently changed indirect attitude—and, thus, with the thrust of the persuasive message. This process occurred only among those exposed to, and strongly changed by, the strong persuasive message presented by the minority source. No such pattern was found among those who did not succumb to the minority’s strong communication, or among those exposed to a weak message. This interpretation is speculative but consistent with theory. The analysis on which the explanation is based is correlational, and, as such, the causal sequence suggested here must be viewed as suggestive. Even so, the results of the analysis are not only striking but logically consistent with theory. It is important to note that the reverse pattern did not occur. Majority-inspired focal changes did not produce delayed indirect change. This null result is also consistent with the leniency contract. In majority influence contexts, change reflects the motive to fit in and to match one’s beliefs or actions with those of the reference group. As such, it is not expected to affect related beliefs, and, in this experiment, it did not. In theory, it is conceivable that in the process of searching a message for clues as to the best means of accommodating to the group, a target could incidentally elaborate enough of a message’s content to provoke indirect change. This seems unlikely but not impossible. It was not observed in Study 3.

The temporal dependence of immediate indirect change followed by delayed focal change also deserves mention. The changes in indirect attitudes that were apparent on the first posttest did not have an immediate effect on focal attitudes. However, effects of indirect attitude change on the focal attitude were apparent in the delayed posttest, which was administered 1 week after the first. This result suggests that some time was necessary to complete the cognitive readjustments required to offset the imbalance brought about by large changes on the indirect attitude.

Our final observations concern the absence of a strong involvement effect in either the focal or indirect-attitude analyses. The failure of outcome relevance may at first appear puzzling, especially to proponents of the ELM who might have expected a strong Message × Involvement interaction. It is important to note that the involvement manipulation did not fail. Differences were detected between groups, suggesting that participants were sensitive to treatment variations in involvement. However, we believe that the manipulation was superfluous. By virtue of the topic’s relevance for their social identities, participants were already involved in the university service issue well in advance of the manipulation. In this case, the manipulation would not produce differences. Natural involvement was already high, thereby rendering the manipulation inconsequential. This is not to suggest that involvement does not matter but rather that it is difficult to enhance perceived outcome relevance experimentally in participants who are already involved in an issue, as Koch and Crano (1996) have demonstrated.

Conclusion

The results of this investigation have relevance to prior research, and have clear implications for the application of the ELM to minority influence research. The impact of the majority on focal attitudes and of the minority on indirect attitudes have been compelling features of this field from the earliest days. The model presented here has the potential to explicate the mechanisms that underlie majority-inspired direct and minority-dependent indirect attitude change along with delayed focal change. We hope that these findings will promote research leading to a more complete understanding of these processes.

References
