

## 13

# Culture and Minority Influence: Effects on Persuasion and Originality

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## Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss the role of culture in the minority influence process and develop a theoretical model which proposes contrasting effects for four dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 1984) on two key minority influence outcomes: persuasion and originality (Moscovici, 1976; Nemeth, 1986). Fundamentally, we propose that an individual's cultural values play an important, and underresearched, role in the minority influence process. We suggest that expression of dissent and responses to the expression of dissent are significantly influenced by culture.

Addressing the issue of culture and minority influence is important for various practical and theoretical reasons. From a practical standpoint, two increasingly pervasive phenomena drive the need for a greater understanding of the role of culture in the minority influence process. First, the workforce is becoming more culturally diverse due to a multitude of factors, such as globalization, domestic diversity, advancement in communication technology, and restructuring of businesses (Granrose & Oskamp, 1997). Second, there is growing evidence that conflict may be beneficial to individual, group, and organizational outcomes (Amason, 1996; De Dreu & Van De Vliert, 1997; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Nemeth, 1986; Schweiger, Sandberg, & Rechner, 1989; Schwenk, 1990). However, we contend that although diversity can lead to divergent perspectives, cultural values may be an important boundary condition in determining an individual's response to minority influence. Thus,

exploring how the influence process varies for people with different cultural orientations can aid organizations in effectively reaping the potential benefits of productive conflict.

From a theoretical standpoint, incorporating cultural factors explicitly in models of minority influence can serve as a guide for future research. Even though minority influence studies have been conducted in a variety of countries (e.g., Bohner, Erb, Reinhard, & Frank, 1996, in Germany; David & Turner, 1996, in Australia; De Dreu & De Vries, 1996, in The Netherlands; Maass, Volparo, & Mucchi-Faina, 1996, in Italy; Sanchez-Mazas, 1996, in Switzerland; Nemeth & Kwan, 1987 and Van Dyne & Saavedra, 1996, in the USA.), no research has focused explicitly on cultural differences in the minority influence process. Building on the work of Bond and Smith (1996b), who attributed the lack of consistent findings in the conformity literature to the potential effects of culture in the influence process, we focus our theory building specifically on the role of culture. A growing amount of theory and empirical research describes differences in psychological processes based on cultural differences (Bond & Smith, 1996a; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). Hence, assessing the role of culture will enable researchers to examine the ecological validity of current knowledge regarding minority influence, and to develop more refined models for predicting the effects of minority influence in different cultural settings.

Consideration of the effects of culture on minority influence necessitates the inclusion of two perspectives: the minority influence agent (i.e., the person expressing dissent), and the target of influence (i.e., the person exposed to the dissent). The former perspective deals with how culture affects a person's expression of dissenting views, while the latter focuses on how culture influences a person's reactions when exposed to dissenting views. Although both perspectives are important, in this chapter, we focus on the reactions of minority influence targets – in other words, the degree to which targets of influence change their position (persuasion) and/or express divergent ideas (originality). We emphasize these two potential responses based on their practical relevance to work organizations.

In summary, this chapter examines the role of culture in the minority influence process. We begin our exposition with a brief review of the separate literatures on minority influence and culture, followed by a brief discussion on the influence of culture on the expression of dissent. Next, we propose a theoretical model that explicates the effects of Hofstede's (1984) four dimensions of culture (individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity) on reactions to dissent (persuasion and originality).

### Minority Influence

In the early research on minority influence, scholars modeled the conception of minority influence after the majority influence process where conformity took center stage (e.g., see Latané & Wolf, 1981). Central to the phenomenology of conformity is the distinction between external, or behavioral, consent, and internal consent, which implies personal acceptance of values and beliefs (Moscovici, 1976). For example, Moscovici theorized that external conformity demonstrates compliance, while internal consent indicates conversion. Similarly, Nemeth described this distinction as change at the public (or manifest) level versus change at the private (or latent) level (e.g., Nemeth, 1986).

Thus, most of the research and theory on minority influence differentiates two general responses to influence attempts: An influence target can openly demonstrate agreement with the influence source without necessarily privately accepting the argument (public conformance). Alternatively an influence target can publicly resist the influence but inwardly accept the validity of the argument (private conversion). This distinction is important because past research often demonstrates movement to the minority view at the latent level even though there is no evidence of manifest movement (Moscovici, 1976, 1980; Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969; Mugny, 1980; Nemeth & Wachtler, 1974).

Another important milestone in the minority influence literature was Nemeth's novel focus on the cognitive processes associated with minority influence. Unlike the classical view of minority influence as conformity, Nemeth contended that the conception of influence should be "broadened from 'prevailing' (whether this be public or private) to issues of attention, thought, and 'novel' judgments or decisions" (1986, p. 23). Based on this perspective, the question is not whether individuals move toward (or away from) the position proposed by the minority influence agent, or whether they do this publicly or privately. Instead, the focus is on how they think about the issues and the consequences of their thought processes for the quality of their solutions and decisions. Empirical studies following Nemeth's conceptualization have demonstrated that minority influence agents stimulate divergent and original thinking, which results in more novel solutions (Nemeth & Kwan, 1985, 1987; Nemeth & Wachtler, 1983; Van Dyne & Saavedra, 1996).

### Minority Influence and Culture

#### Culture

Hofstede defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (1984, p. 21). A major rationale for examining the effect of culture on minority influence is the notion that culture is a powerful mechanism that shapes social norms (Fiske et al., 1998; Triandis, 1988) and creates "patterned ways of thinking" (Kluckhohn, 1954). These "societal expectations" regarding appropriate and inappropriate behavior are acquired by individuals over time through social learning processes (Bandura, 1986) which, in turn, influence attitude formation and, ultimately, have consequential effects on individual behavior. Eagly and Chaiken defined attitude as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (1998, p. 269). One determinant of attitude formation that is particularly relevant to our discussion is subjective norms. A subjective norm is "the person's perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behavior in question" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 302). Since individuals with different cultural values possess different "patterned ways of thinking," their subjective norms are likely to vary and influence their attitudes about appropriate behavior and their evaluations of others (for a review of attitude-behavior models, see Eagly & Chaiken, 1998). In other words, culture can influence expression of dissent, reactions to the person who voices the dissent, and responses to the dissent process (persuasion and originality).

#### Expression of dissent

The notion that cultural conditions affect the level of conformity (or dissent) in a society has long been held by scholars in the field (Bond & Smith, 1996b). Markus and Kitayama noted a popular adage with relevance to cultural differences in the expression of dissent – in individualistic America, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease," while in collectivistic Japan, "the nail that stands out gets pounded down" (1991, p. 224). Popular stereotypes also portray some nations as more conforming and submissive, and others as more independent and self-assertive (e.g., Milgram, 1961; Peabody, 1985). For

instance, Milgram (1961) found that Norwegian subjects expressed fewer dissenting opinions than French subjects even when the response elicited was not made public, or when the issue of discussion had critical consequences. Commenting on these findings, Milgram suggested that diversity of opinions was characteristic of the French, who place high value on critical judgment. In contrast, he suggested that emphasis on social cohesiveness predisposed the Norwegians to be more attuned to the needs and interests of those around them.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of tightness-looseness (Peltó, 1968) suggests differences in the expression of dissent across cultures. In loose cultures, norms are expressed within a wide range of alternative channels. The lack of regimentation and discipline in these cultures allows more tolerance of deviant behavior. In tight cultures, norms are expressed clearly and unambiguously, and the society is highly disciplined and orderly. Deviation from normative behavior is not tolerated, and severe sanctions are imposed on deviants. We submit that individuals' propensity to express dissenting views is conditioned by their societal norms concerning deviant behavior. Since individuals in loose cultures endorse values such as change, tolerance, risk taking, and stimulation (Chan, Gelfand, Triandis, & Tseng, 1996), they are likely to possess a positive attitude toward voicing a different opinion. On the contrary, individuals in tight cultures emphasize values such as conformity, past tradition, stability, and security (Chan et al., 1996), which predispose them to possess a negative attitude toward dissent. As a result, individuals are more likely to express dissent when they are brought up in a loose culture, than in a tight culture.

We suggest that in addition to influencing the frequency of dissent, culture also affects the manner in which dissent is expressed. Although early work in minority influence has demonstrated the benefits of a consistent and persistent style of persuasion (e.g., Moscovici & Lage, 1976; Nemeth, Swedlund, & Kanki, 1974; Nemeth & Wachtler, 1974), these findings did not consider cultural differences. For instance, negotiation research has shown that although similar negotiation outcomes were obtained in different countries, the process was significantly different. In an experiment, Graham (1983) found that the determinants of business negotiation outcomes were different for American, Brazilian, and Japanese negotiators. Results indicated that for the Americans, the outcomes of the negotiation were primarily determined by information exchange during the negotiation; for the Japanese and Brazilians, the key factor influencing outcomes was the establishment of mutually trusting relationships before the negotiation. Hence, one possible inference from this research is that individualistic and collectivistic individu-

als differ in the manner in which they attempt to persuade the other party to adopt their viewpoint.

#### *Reactions to dissent*

Cultural values can also affect an individual's response to influence attempts. Earlier, we described a causal chain of relationships where cultural values affect subjective norms, subjective norms affect attitudes regarding the appropriateness of a behavior, and attitudes influence behavior in response to others. Here, we propose that the culture-subjective norms-attitudes-behavior process influences the degree to which individuals publicly change their opinions (persuasion) and the degree to which they are stimulated to engage in divergent thinking (originality) when subjected to minority influence. We elaborate our rationale for the effect of culture on persuasion and originality outcomes below.

*Persuasion.* In defining persuasion, we focus on public movement toward the minority stance. When individuals change their opinion and publicly adopt the minority viewpoint, they resist conformity pressure associated with the majority position. We contend that this process of deciding and publicly adopting the minority versus majority position is influenced by cultural values and subjective norms regarding appropriate behavior (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). When cultural values reinforce normative beliefs regarding conformity to the majority, individuals will be less likely to exhibit public persuasion by the minority influence agent. In contrast, when subjective norms place less emphasis on conforming and more emphasis on independent thinking, individuals experience less pressure to adhere to the majority and have greater latitude to agree with the minority view. Consistent with causal models of attitude-behavior relations, attitudes, in turn, influence the persuasion outcome of minority influence.

*Originality.* We define originality as enhanced quality and creativity of ideas. Nemeth (1986) theorized that minority influence stimulates divergent thinking (i.e., consideration of multiple perspectives) in contrast to majority influence, which reinforces convergent thinking (Nemeth, Mosier, & Chiles, 1992). Results of empirical studies have demonstrated that those subjected to minority influence develop a wider range of arguments and more original arguments (e.g., Butera, Mugny, Legrenzi, & Pérez, 1996; Martin, 1996; Volpato, Maass, Mucchi-Faina, & Vitri, 1990) as well as more divergent think-

ing and more creative solutions to problems (see, e.g., Nemeth & Kwan, 1987; Van Dyne & Saavedra, 1996).

Applying this to our focus on cultural influence, we propose that one determinant of the amount of divergent thinking is an individual's attitude toward the minority influence agent's role and behavior. Specifically, we contend that when a minority influence agent (in voicing a dissenting view) violates the influence target's normative beliefs about appropriate behavior, this triggers negative cognitive responses (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Negative evaluation shifts attention away from issue-relevant thoughts to assessment of the minority influence agent and the agent's behavior. We propose that cultural values influence the assessment of appropriateness of the minority influence the agent's behavior. When the influence behavior is evaluated as being inconsistent with role schemas and subjective norms, cognitions about the content of the message decrease and cognitions about the source and the source's motivation increase (Fiske & Talyor, 1991). We propose that this assessment of source credibility and validity distracts attention from message content which reduces divergent thinking and originality.

In the sections that follow, we develop specific propositions for the effect of culture on the minority influence outcomes of persuasion and originality. We argue that cultural orientations of individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity influence subjective norms concerning groups, power, ambiguity, and sex roles. Subjective norms influence attitudes toward minority influence and judgments of the appropriateness of the minority influence agent's behavior. These evaluative assessments, in turn, have implications for persuasion and originality. In general, we posit that culture (operating through subjective norms) will have a stronger effect on the public outcome of persuasion than on the private outcome of originality. Figure 13.1 illustrates our overall model and Figure 13.2 summarizes our basic propositions.

Our model is conceptualized as having potential application at both the group and the individual levels of analysis. Although initial research based on Hofstede's framework focused on cross-cultural differences at the national or cultural level (e.g., Bochner & Hesketh, 1994; Chan et al., 1996; Hofstede, 1984), more recent studies have also examined the differences in the cultural values of individuals. Within this group of studies conducted at the individual level of analysis, some emphasized comparisons across cultures (Earley, 1993; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988), while other research focused on within-culture differences (i.e., Chaman & Barsade, 1995; Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997; Wagner, 1995). We believe that there is value in both approaches and the choice of framing should be a function of the particular

research question being addressed in the study. In this chapter, we present our propositions at the individual level of analysis for ease and consistency, and suggest that they could easily be adapted and applied to the group level.

### Minority Influence and Individualism–Collectivism

Individualism–collectivism is the most frequently researched dimension of culture. Definitions for individualism–collectivism include "the relationship

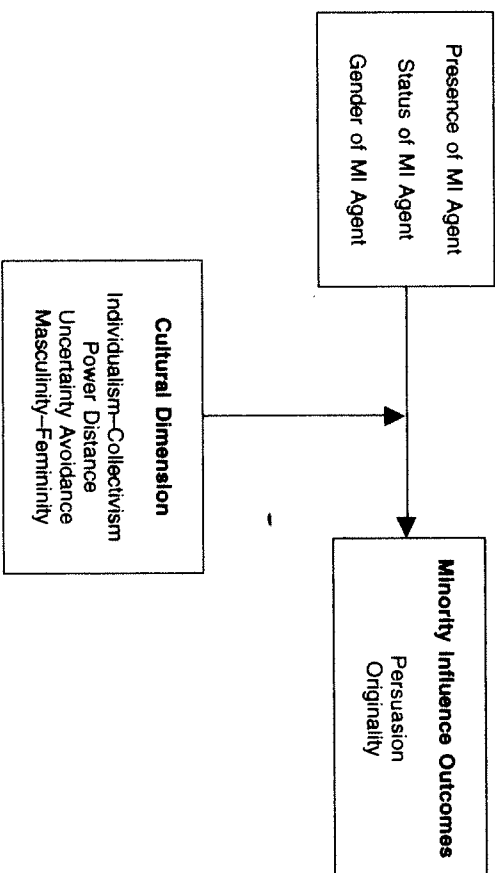


Figure 13.1 Culture and minority influence.

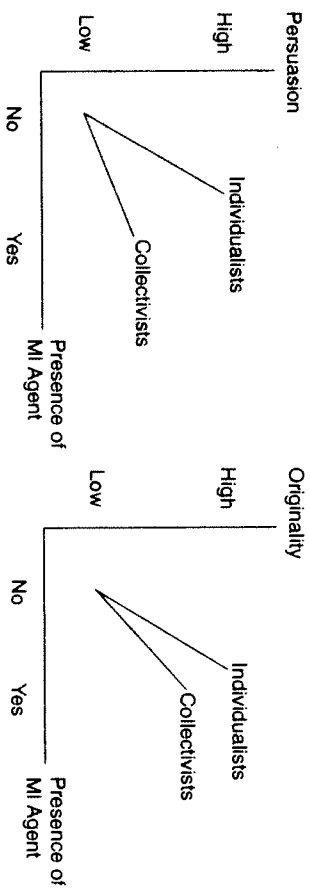


Figure 13.2A Individualism–collectivism and minority influence.

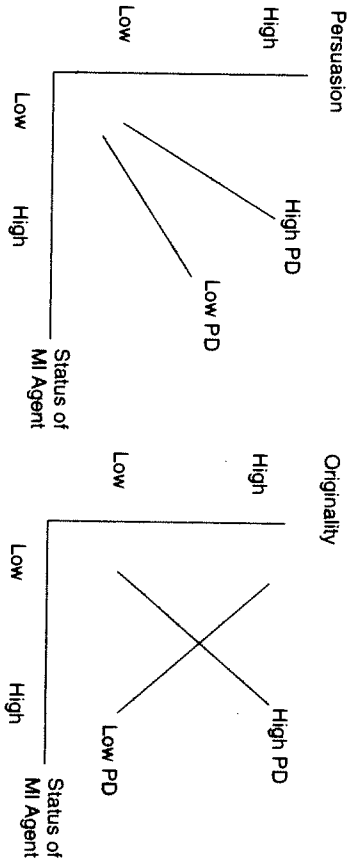


Figure 13.2B Power distance and minority influence.

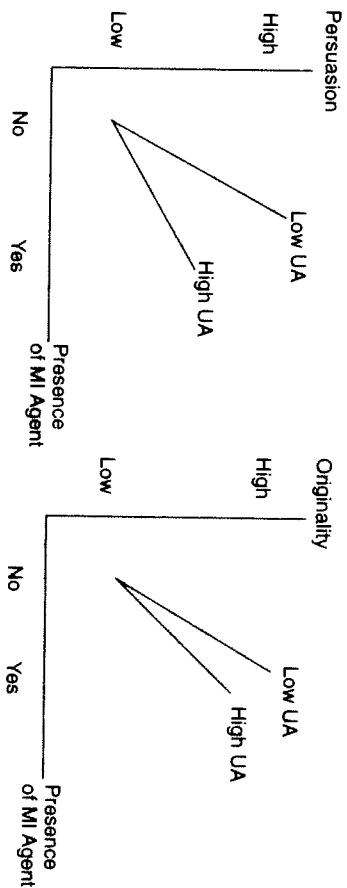


Figure 13.2C Uncertainty avoidance and minority influence.

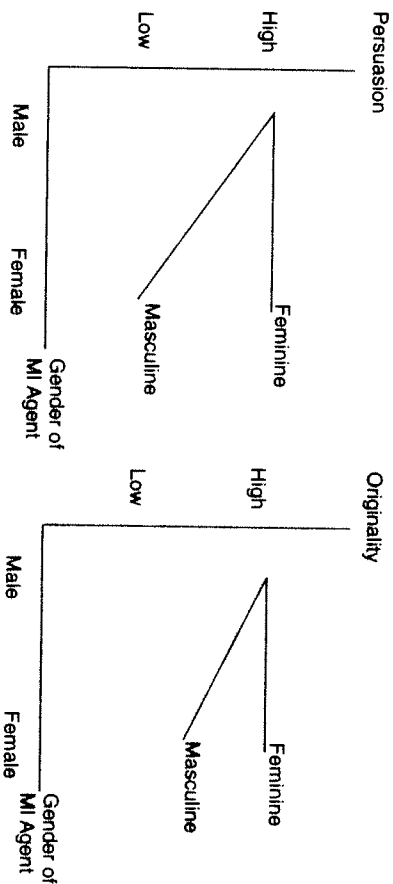


Figure 13.2D Masculinity-femininity and minority influence.

between the self and collectivity" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 148), "the social connectedness among individuals" (Earley & Gibson, 1998, p. 266), and the construal of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). According to Triandis's (1995) summary of attributes of individualism-collectivism, an individualist views the self as independent of others, focuses on personal goals, acts upon personal beliefs and values, and emphasizes task outcomes. A collectivist, on the other hand, construes the self as an interdependent entity, adopts group goals, acts according to social norms, and stresses good interpersonal relationships.

In the following two sections, we propose that a person's degree of individualism-collectivism will moderate the effect of minority influence on the outcomes of persuasion and originality. The key difference that we propose is the magnitude of the effect on the two outcomes, as illustrated in Figure 13.2A.

#### *Individualism-collectivism, conformity norms, and persuasion*

Our foregoing explication of individualism-collectivism has implications for an individual's subjective norms. Moscovici (1976) posited that the course of the influence process is determined by objectivity norms and preference norms. Objectivity norms give priority to the validation of consensus, which inevitably entails conformity pressure; preference norms presuppose the absence of pressure and a tendency towards unique individual responses. Extending Moscovici's points about social norms to the cultural context, we contend that those with individualistic cultural values stress preference norms as their subjective norms (e.g., independence, self-reliance, pursuit of personal goals) and experience less conformity pressure. On the other hand, those with collectivistic cultural values (e.g., group harmony, group goals) emphasize objectivity norms which reinforce conformity and adherence to the majority view of the group.

Consequently, we anticipate that when exposed to minority influence, conformity toward the majority will be more prevalent among those with collectivistic cultural values than among those with individualistic cultural values. In summary, the minority influence agent has less persuasion power with collectivists (compared to individualists), due to collectivists' cultural values and subjective norms.

**Proposition 1:** *When exposed to minority influence, those with an individualistic cultural orientation will experience greater persuasion than those with a collectivistic cultural orientation.*

*Individualism-collectivism, divergent thinking and originality*

In contrast to persuasion, which is public, divergent thinking is private (Moscovici, 1976, 1980; Nemeth, 1986). We contend that individualists and collectivists will both experience enhanced thought processes and will produce more original outcomes when exposed to minority influence, compared to situations where no minority influence is present. However, we propose that the amount of divergent thinking differs for individualists and collectivists as a result of their culturally influenced attitudes toward the behavior of the minority influence agent.

Since individualists view creativity as a cardinal value to be championed (see Triandis, 1990), they are more likely to regard voicing nonconventional, dissenting opinions as "positive," "creative," or "brave." Another reason to expect individualists to have favorable attitudes toward the minority influence agent is based on Chen, Chen, and Meindl's (1998) argument that the expressive motives of individualistic people center around actualizing the true self. This is reflected by the terms that individualists often associate with those who speak up, such as "individuality," "independence," "self-direction," and "self-reliance." Indeed, studies conducted in Western cultures have found that others described the minority agent as "confident," "independent," "active," "organized" (Nemeth & Chiles, 1988; Nemeth & Wachtler, 1974; Nemeth, Wachtler & Endicott, 1977), and even "respected" (Wolf, 1979). We suggest that these positive evaluations of the minority influence agent made by influence targets with individualistic cultural values will facilitate divergent thinking in response to minority influence attempts.

On the other hand, a collectivistic influence target is likely to view the minority influence agent as "defiant," "disloyal," or as a hindrance to progress toward the group's goal. We predict that those with collectivistic cultural values will view the minority agent negatively and will consider the agent's behavior to be an inappropriate violation of their subjective norms. This negative assessment will distract attention from the issue as those with collectivistic values attempt to understand the motive behind the influence behavior. This results in less issue-related divergent thinking, and hence less originality.

In sum, although we argue that minority influence will increase originality of both collectivists and individualists, we expect that relative to the collectivists, individualists will exhibit greater originality because they will be less distracted by the minority influence agent's behavior and will experience greater issue-related divergent thinking.

**Proposition 2:** *When exposed to minority influence, those with an individualistic cultural orientation will exhibit greater originality than those with a collectivistic cultural orientation.*

**Minority Influence and Power Distance**

Hofstede defined power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (1991, pp. 28-29). In postulating the role of power distance regarding persuasion and originality, we focus on the status of the minority agent, instead of the mere presence of minority influence (as was the case in Propositions 1 and 2). This is consistent with definitions of power distance which are conceptualized in terms of legitimacy accorded to hierarchical relationships (Hofstede, 1991). Because the relation of power distance and influence is meaningful to the extent that the minority influence agent has a hierarchical relationship with the influence target, we conceptualize the status of the minority influence agent on a continuum, ranging from low to high status. We premise the following discussion on the assumption that agents with higher organizational status possess greater power over influence targets.

In the following two sections, we examine the interaction between the status of the minority influence agent and the cultural beliefs of target individuals regarding power distance. Here, we propose a different form of interaction for the two different outcomes of persuasion and originality. Figure 13.2B illustrates our contrasting predictions for persuasion and originality.

*Power distance, conformity norms, and persuasion*

In our model, we posit that the positive relationship between power (status of the minority influence agent) and influence is moderated by the observer's beliefs regarding power distance. An essential feature of high power distance is the belief that inequality exists between more powerful (e.g., superiors) and less powerful (e.g., subordinates) persons (Hofstede, 1984). In other words, individuals with high power distance hold subjective norms that people with less authority should respect and obey people with authority. For example, studies have found that individuals with high power distance tend to adhere more rigidly to organizational hierarchy and to prefer centralized decision making (Hofstede, 1984; Shane, Venkataraman, & MacMillan, 1995). Accord-

ingly, we suggest that since those with high power distance values hold subjective norms that one should not challenge superiors, they will move publicly toward the minority position (persuasion) when the minority influence agent has high status.

On the contrary, we predict that those with low power distance values will be more resistant to influence even when the influence agent has substantial power (high status). For example, people with low power distance favor participative approaches to management and are less submissive to authority (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994). Compared to those with high power distance, they experience less pressure to conform to the views of the powerful. In fact, succumbing to the views of a higher authority is sometimes interpreted as an indicator of fear or cowardice. Hence, we expect individuals with low power distance cultural values to exhibit less public persuasion than those with high power distance, when subjected to minority influence by agents who have high status.

*Proposition 3: When exposed to minority influence agents with high organizational status, those with a high power distance cultural orientation will experience greater persuasion than those with a low power distance cultural orientation.*

#### *Power distance, divergent thinking, and originality*

We propose a different type of influence for power distance cultural values relative to originality. For persuasion, we proposed an overall positive effect for the status of the minority influence agent. Here, we suggest that the effect of subjective norms regarding status will differ for those with low versus high power distance cultural values. To be more specific, we argue that influence targets with low power distance beliefs tend to perceive powerful minority influence agents as dominating and imposing. These perceptions of negative behavior violate the targets' subjective norms about equality of power, and as a result they will focus on evaluating the negative social behavior and trying to uncover potential vested interests. Consequently, these target individuals will engage in less issue-related divergent thinking.

Conversely, the legitimacy of differential power for those with high power distance beliefs leads to a genuine respect for power. For example, Shane et al. (1995) found that those with high power distance prefer innovation channels to gather support from those in authority before pursuing innovation projects. Hence, influence targets with high power distance tend to view the

influence attempts by powerful minority influence agents as legitimate and credible. Since their normative beliefs about appropriate behavior are not violated, influence targets with high power distance beliefs, when faced with a powerful minority influence agent, pay greater attention to the message, and hence engage in greater divergent thinking on the issue.

When an influence agent has low status, we predict the opposite response compared to those above. Since individuals with high power distance values regard less powerful minority influence agents as less legitimate, they focus on negative evaluation of the minority influence agent, are distracted by the influence behavior, and experience less divergent thinking related to the issue. We reverse our prediction for those with low power distance. Here, individuals view less powerful minority influence agents as confident and independent (Nemeth & Wachtler, 1974; Nemeth et al., 1977), and respected (Wolf, 1979). These positive attitudes lead to greater attention to the minority message. In summary, we postulate a cross-interaction between the status of the minority agent and the power distance of the influence target, relative to originality.

*Proposition 4: When exposed to minority influence agents with high organizational status, those with a high power distance cultural orientation will exhibit greater originality than those with a low power distance cultural orientation. At the same time, those with a low power distance cultural orientation will exhibit greater originality than those with a high power distance cultural orientation when exposed to minority influence agents with low organizational status.*

#### **Minority Influence and Uncertainty Avoidance**

Hofstede (1984) defined uncertainty avoidance as discomfort with situations where the outcome is uncertain, and operationalized the construct as willingness to take risks. At one extreme, those with low uncertainty avoidance are comfortable with ambiguous situations; at the other extreme, those with high uncertainty avoidance value certainty, security, and structure. Pelto's (1968) concept of tightness is theoretically relevant to the uncertainty avoidance construct. A tight culture requires members to conform to norms, while a loose culture allows greater latitude in behavior. This contrast parallels the distinction between those with high and low uncertainty avoidance. In other words, individuals with a high need for certainty possess subjective norms that reinforce conformity to conventions and avoiding the unknown. On the other hand, individuals with a low need for certainty hold subjec-

tive norms that being more adventurous and open to novel experiences is appropriate.

In the next two sections, we describe our predictions regarding uncertainty avoidance, and suggest that culture will have a greater effect for persuasion than originality. Figure 13.2C illustrates our predictions.

*Uncertainty avoidance, conformity norms, and persuasion*

Based on the above definition of uncertainty avoidance, we propose that individuals with high uncertainty avoidance (or tight culture) are less likely to adopt the minority position publicly because they possess subjective norms that characterize appropriate behavior as conforming to conventional views and adhering to the majority position. This is consistent with research on uncertainty orientation (as another form of individual difference) which demonstrates that those who value certainty stay with the familiar and predictable (Sorrentino, Bobocel, Gira, Olson, & Hewitt, 1988). On the other hand, individuals with low uncertainty avoidance (loose culture) have greater latitude to deviate from the majority position because their subjective norms view the adoption of unconventional opinions as acceptable and, at times, desirable. Hence, they are more likely to agree publicly with the minority position.

*Proposition 5: When exposed to minority influence, those with a high uncertainty avoidance cultural orientation will experience less persuasion than those with a low uncertainty avoidance cultural orientation.*

*Uncertainty avoidance, divergent thinking, and originality*

For originality and uncertainty avoidance, we propose a similar interaction compared to that described above for persuasion. Individuals with low uncertainty avoidance beliefs are more receptive towards the minority influence agent because they embrace ambiguity and view the risk-taking behavior of the minority influence agent as congruent with their subjective norms. Hence, we propose that influence targets with low uncertainty avoidance are less distracted by the behavior of the minority influence agent (because it is consistent with their values), pay greater attention to the content of the minority message, and consequently experience more divergent thinking and demonstrate greater originality.

Conversely, people with high uncertainty avoidance cultural values view risk taking and the introduction of uncertainty as inappropriate behavior. They are likely to channel greater attention to the source of the nonnormative social behavior in attempts to understand the motives of the minority influence agent. As a result, they engage in less divergent thinking targeted at the issue and more divergent thinking directed at the source. Hence, they exhibit less originality.

*Proposition 6: When exposed to minority influence, those with a high uncertainty avoidance cultural orientation will exhibit less originality than those with a low uncertainty avoidance cultural orientation.*

**Minority Influence and Masculinity–Femininity**

Hofstede defined masculinity–femininity as “what, in a given environment, is deemed suitable for members of one sex rather than the other” (1984, p. 190). Masculinity–femininity is also an index of sex–role differentiation. In this chapter, we adopt Hofstede’s (1984) conceptualization of masculinity–femininity as a bipolar construct and view masculinity and femininity as the two ends of a continuum. Those high in masculinity believe firmly in gender-based roles where men and women are assigned different tasks, rights, and privileges, and are subject to different rules of conduct (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Paralleling this division of labor, men tend to develop independence, self-reliance, and other instrumental skills; women, on the other hand, usually develop nurturant and expressive characteristics. In contrast, those high in femininity view gender roles as fluid and flexible. They favor equality and believe that the roles of men and women are not fixed. Instead, each individual develops his or her own set of characteristic behaviors. A person who is high in femininity puts less emphasis on gender–role differentiation than a person who is low in femininity (i.e., high in masculinity) (e.g., Hofstede & Associates, 1998, p. 103).

In theorizing about the role of masculinity–femininity cultural values, we focus on the gender of the minority influence agent. We predict that the gender of the minority influence agent will interact with the degree of masculinity–femininity of the influence target and that the effect will be stronger for persuasion compared to originality. These predictions are illustrated in Figure 13.2D.

*Masculinity-femininity, conformity norms, and persuasion*

Those with a masculinity cultural orientation believe that it is appropriate for men to occupy dominant, powerful positions where they routinely attempt to influence others (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). These individuals hold subjective norms that specify gender-role differences, resulting in stereotypical expectations for men and women. This perspective is consistent with social role theory (Eagly, 1987), which asserts that men and women are socialized to exhibit different gender-specific role behavior. Within this framework, agential behaviors such as assertive attempts to persuade others are more appropriate for males and less appropriate for females (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Thus, we propose that those with a masculinity cultural orientation will be more open to influence or public persuasion when the minority influence agent is male (compared to female) because this behavior conforms to their subjective norms.

On the other hand, individuals with a feminine cultural orientation (i.e., low masculinity) view gender roles as flexible. They emphasize the community and the collective (Currits, Grabb, & Baer, 1992; Rothschild & Whittr, 1986) and rotate leadership roles from person to person without regard for traditional gender-role stereotypes. This more fluid approach to roles and behavior is based on the absence of rigid gender-role norms. Thus, those with a femininity cultural orientation should be equally influenced by male and female minority influence agents since their subjective norms suggest that attempting to persuade others is equally appropriate behavior for males and females.

In summary, we posit that the gender of the minority influence agent will influence persuasion for those with masculinity cultural values but not for those with femininity cultural values.

**Proposition 7:** *Those with a masculinity cultural orientation will exhibit greater persuasion when exposed to male minority influence agents than when they are exposed to female minority influence agents. At the same time, those with a femininity cultural orientation will exhibit equal persuasion when exposed to male and female minority influence agents.*

*Masculinity-femininity, divergent thinking, and originality*

As with the persuasion outcome, we propose that the gender of the minority influence agent is important to those with a masculinity cultural orientation

but not to those with a femininity orientation. Those who are high in masculinity possess subjective norms that men should be more independent, dominant, aggressive, and rational than women (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Since they perceive the role of a minority influence agent to be appropriate for a male and not for a female, a female minority influence agent violates their normative beliefs, and triggers negative source evaluation. This negative evaluation shifts attention away from issue-relevant thoughts and toward assessment of the source. As such, less divergent thinking is aimed at the issue, resulting in less originality.

We also suggest that the gender of the minority influence agent will be less salient to those who are high in femininity (i.e., low masculinity). Since individuals with high femininity are flexible in their views of the roles of men and women, the gender of the minority influence agent should be less likely to trigger evaluation of the source. Hence, we do not expect divergent thinking to differ according to the gender of the influence agent for those with femininity subjective norms.

**Proposition 8:** *Those with a masculinity cultural orientation will exhibit greater originality when exposed to male minority influence agents than when they are exposed to female minority influence agents. At the same time, those with a femininity cultural orientation will exhibit equal originality when exposed to male and female minority influence agents.*

### Conclusion

The globalization of businesses, diversification of the workforce, and the increasing use of productive conflict in organizations provide practical impetus for research on minority influence to include the role of cultural differences. We propose that culture can affect the minority influence process in two ways: first, by affecting the manner and/or frequency in which the minority influence agent expresses dissenting views; second, by affecting the reactions of the minority influence target when he or she is exposed to dissenting views. Our chapter highlights the role of culture from the minority influence target's perspective, and in particular, focuses on how public persuasion and originality of subsequent ideas can be affected by cultural values. Adopting Hofstede's (1984) four cultural dimensions, we presented eight propositions suggesting that individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity moderate the effect of minority influence on persuasion and originality. We base our arguments on

the rationale that culture is one basis for the formation of subjective norms about appropriate behavior, and that judgments of appropriateness affect individuals' public conformity (persuasion) and private divergent thinking (originality) in response to minority influence.

To recapitulate, we propose that collectivists are less likely to adopt the minority position publicly and will exhibit less originality than individualists. With regard to power distance, we posit that status of the minority influence agent enhances persuasion for those with high and low power distance, albeit in different magnitudes. However, influence targets with high power distance beliefs demonstrate greater originality (than low power distance influence targets) when interacting with a high status minority influence agent, but exhibit less originality (than low power distance influence targets) when the minority influence agent has low status. We also contend that influence targets with high uncertainty avoidance are less likely to adopt the minority position publicly, and generate less original solutions when compared to influence targets who possess low uncertainty avoidance beliefs. Finally, we argue that the gender of the minority influence agent affects the degree of persuasion and originality for individuals with high masculinity, but that it will have no effect for individuals with low masculinity (i.e., high femininity individuals).

Our propositions suggest contrasting moderating effects of culture on the minority influence outcomes of persuasion and originality. These initial steps toward developing a cultural model of minority influence should add value to research in two important ways. First, we can enhance the predictive power of minority influence models by considering the role of culture. Second, we can assess the generalizability of the minority influence model in a variety of cultural settings. In conclusion, we recommend empirical examination of our proposed model. Such research could provide valuable practical insight regarding persuasion and originality. In this time of globalization and diversity, such research can enhance managers' sensitivity to the cultural idiosyncrasies of their employees and heighten awareness that psychological processes can be influenced by cultural characteristics (Fiske et al., 1998).

#### NOTE

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## Author Index

- Abramov, I. 33, 37
- Abrams, D. 138, 140, 128, 240, 251
- Adamopoulos, J. 186, 198
- Ajzen, I. 161, 180, 287, 304
- Aldag, R. J. 272, 277
- Allen, V. L. 234, 251
- Allison, G. 244, 251
- Allport, G. W. 70, 84, 86
- Altnk, W. 261, 278
- Alvaro, E. M. 18, 37, 117, 93, 107, 109, 116, 130, 131, 133, 136, 138, 139, 146, 153, 157, 230, 251, 266, 267, 277
- Amabile, T. M. 271, 277
- Amason, A. 284, 303
- Anderson, E. M. viii, 9, 10, 144, 195, 202, 200
- Anderson, J. E. 136, 138
- Anderson, N. R. 276, 282
- Anderson, P. 231, 251
- Argyris, C. 269, 270, 276, 277
- Arkes, H. R. 192, 197
- Asai, M. 290, 306
- Asch, S. E. 3, 13, 15, 40, 55, 60, 70, 83, 84, 86, 94, 117, 128, 138, 183, 197, 217, 258, 277
- Atkin, R. 206, 225
- Au, W.-T. 249, 252
- Axson, D. 7, 13, 103, 117, 152, 157
- Baer, D. E. 300, 303
- Baker, S. 208, 224, 267, 277
- Baker, S. M. 42, 44, 48, 55, 66, 67, 86, 104, 116, 117, 130, 133, 138, 146, 153, 154, 157
- Baldwin, J. 86
- Bales, R. F. 223
- Bandura, A. 287, 303
- Bantell, K. A. 273, 277
- Bargh, J. A. 83, 86
- Barnett, W. 273, 280
- Baron, J. 259, 281
- Baron, R. S. 10, 13, 16, 37, 202, 224, 231, 254, 264, 272, 277
- Barrick, M. R. 263, 277
- Barsade, S. G. 280, 290, 303
- Bazerman, M. H. 245, 251
- Beasley, R. K. 247, 248, 253
- Beersma, B. viii, 9, 10, 12
- Berry, P. A. 242, 251
- Billing, M. 124, 142
- Blackstone, T. 7, 14, 36, 39, 41, 59, 64, 90, 128, 143, 144, 183, 200, 202, 228, 234, 257, 268, 283
- Bless, H. 48, 55
- Blumer, C. 192, 197
- Bobocel, D. R. 298, 306
- Bochner, S. 290, 296, 303
- Bodenhausen, G. V. 47, 57, 79, 84, 88, 89
- Bohner, G. viii, 8, 12, 41, 42, 45, 47, 50, 53, 54, 55, 56, 62, 65, 67, 69, 76, 86, 87, 146, 153, 157, 245, 251, 285, 303
- Bond, R. 285, 287, 303
- Bontempo, R. 290, 306
- Borrill, C. S. 275, 282