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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INFLUENCE: RELATIONS BETWEEN LAY AND TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVES

DANIEL J. O'KEEFE

This essay urges an appropriately complicated view of the relationship of the actor's and the researcher's perspectives on persuasion and social influence. As a foil for this project, it initially sketches an interpretive-phenomenological approach that takes the researcher's central project to be that of describing the actor's point of view. It then argues that because commonsensical conceptions of how persuasion works contain beliefs that are not well-founded, reproducing the actor's perspective will yield an inevitably inadequate account of social influence. For quantitative studies of persuasion, this points to the importance of assessing actual (as opposed to perceived) message effects; for qualitative investigations, this emphasizes the dangers of unreflective reliance on interview data.

I want to start by considering what might be called a "phenomenological" or "interpretive" image of social-scientific work. What I mean is an image along the following lines. Persons live in a meaningful, made-sense-of, world. The meanings that persons (individually and socially) construct provide the basis for conduct. Thus it is only by understanding the everyday social actor's perspective that one can come to understand the actor's conduct, and hence the researcher's task is precisely to describe the actor's point of view.¹

A classic statement of this outlook is that of Maurice Natanson, in his arguing for an approach that "places major emphasis on the meaning social acts have for the actors who perform them and who live in a reality built out of their subjective interpretation" (Natanson, 1962b, p. 157). In such an approach, "social action is understood as founded on the intentional experience of the actors on the social scene" (p. 158). "The crucial feature of action in every case is its purposive and projective character. Action has its source in the consciousness of the actor" (Natanson, 1962a, p. xxxiv). Persons living "in the paramount reality of everyday life are enmeshed in situations as they define them in the context of their lives. It is idle for the neutral observer to point out to committed actors the 'objective' situation" (Natanson, 1962a, p. xxxvii).

As expressed by Alfred Schutz, "the social world . . . has a particular meaning and relevance for the human beings living, thinking, and acting therein. They have preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life, and it is these thought objects which determine their behavior, define the goal of their action, the means available for attaining them" (1962, pp. 5-6).

Because persons live in this already-meaningful world, the researcher's task (conceived from this perspective) is to understand and reproduce the actor's outlook. "The thought objects constructed by the social scientist refer to and are founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thought of man living his everyday life among his fellow-men. Thus, the constructs used by the social scientist are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene" (Schutz, 1962, p. 6).

This general kind of phenomenological-interpretive view is recognizable as one frequently-seen strand in postpositivistic social science, as a reaction to social-

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scientific approaches that seem to undervalue the perspective of everyday actors. And this general approach is certainly familiar enough to communication scholars, having made an appearance (under various guises) in a number of specific research areas in communication. For example, Trapp and Benoit (1987) have urged the adoption of an interpretive approach in argumentation. In such an approach, "theories are valued for . . . their congruence with the meanings of the participants" (p. 424); thus "interpretive theorists seek to minimize the distance between the first-order constructs of everyday life and second-order constructs of our theories" (p. 424). Something like this general approach is discernible in what Alexander (1993) calls "lay theory," in which the researcher "is interested in people's everyday understanding of the world, themselves, and others" (p. 59).

This sort of interpretive approach naturally has affiliated research methods, and these are sometimes articulated as generalized methodological principles. In Prus's (1989b) ethnography of the ways businesses attract customers, for example, these kinds of ideas appear as a primary methodological dictum: "researchers should at the outset and throughout the entire research and analysis stages of the study exhibit a fundamental concern with uncovering, elaborating upon, and conveying the meaning (of objects) of those they are purporting to study" (p. 41).

MISLEADING LAY BELIEFS ABOUT SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Now some versions of an interpretive approach have come in for some rough handling recently, as a consequence of certain aspects of postmodern thought. A particularly clear case is the status of ethnography in anthropology. On a simple view, the ethnographer's task is to reproduce, re-present, the everyday actor's ways of seeing and knowing and doing, in a fashion that stands independent from these things but is nevertheless faithful to them. But recent treatments of the ethnographer's task provide a more complex picture: this picture is one that "draws attention to the historical predicament of ethnography, the fact that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures" (Clifford, 1986, p. 2).

In the present context, I want to focus on the application of such interpretive ideas to the study of persuasion and social influence. Broadly, the claim I want to advance is that if one wants to understand how and why persuasive messages have the effects they do, it will not be sufficient to just reproduce the naive perspective of the everyday actor. A completely accurate representation of the everyday actor's commonsensical perspective will necessarily be incomplete as a basis for understanding the effects of persuasive messages, precisely because the everyday actor's perspective includes false or misleading beliefs about persuasion.

To put this point a slightly different way: It won't do to privilege actors' accounts, in the way that some versions of phenomenological-interpretive social science might do. Actors' accounts will reflect their commonsensical beliefs, and we have good reason to suppose that at least some of those beliefs are not well-grounded.

In fact, there are now several direct demonstrations of inaccuracies in commonsensical beliefs about persuasion. These demonstrations take the form of studies displaying a discrepancy between the actual persuasive effects of a variable and the expected or perceived persuasive effects of that variable. Rook (1986) compared the effects of two information forms—case history as opposed to abstract information—on women's health practices relevant to osteoporosis; participants perceived

the case history form to have a greater impact on their behavior than did abstract information, but in fact participants' behavior was not differentially affected by information form. Thornton, Kirchner, and Jacobs (1991) found that although people expected that using a photograph would increase the effectiveness of a door-to-door campaign soliciting charitable contributions (Experiment 1), in fact there was no significant effect of including the photograph (Experiments 2 and 3). Collins, Taylor, Wood, and Thompson (1988) found that respondents judged vivid messages to be more persuasive than nonvivid messages, but vivid and nonvivid messages in fact did not differ on measures of actual attitude change.

These three demonstrated cases of inaccurate commonsensical beliefs doubtless only scratch the surface. For instance, one suspects that many people would assent to claims such as these: effective persuasion requires getting and keeping the audience's attention; higher credibility sources are more persuasive than lower credibility sources; persuaders are more effective if the audience likes them (as opposed to not liking them); and so on.

These beliefs have a certain ring of plausibility about them, and surely would receive widespread endorsement. But in fact each of these is false, or has important exceptions, or in other ways is unreliable or potentially misleading as a guide to understanding persuasion. Despite the apparent importance of having the audience's attention, several studies have reported circumstances under which increased distraction (during a persuasive message) can actually enhance the message's persuasiveness (e.g., Kiesler & Mathog, 1968; Osterhouse & Brock, 1970; Petty, Wells, & Brock, 1976, Experiment 1). Although it seems natural to suppose that higher credibility sources will always enjoy some advantage over lower credibility communicators, in fact a number of investigations have permitted identification of situations in which lower credibility communicators are more persuasive than higher credibility sources (e.g., Bock & Saine, 1975; Dholakia, 1987; Harmon & Coney, 1982; Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978; for additional discussion, see O'Keefe, 1990, pp. 142–143). And although it stands to reason that liked communicators should be more effective persuaders than disliked communicators, there are circumstances in which disliked communicators have been found to enjoy a persuasive advantage (Himmelfarb & Arazi, 1974; Jones & Brehm, 1967).

The general point is this. There are any number of plausible, commonsensical beliefs about persuasion that enjoy widespread endorsement, yet these beliefs are false, or misleading, or have important exceptions or qualifications. And hence an interpretive approach to the understanding of persuasion, an approach stressing illumination of the commonsensical perspective of the everyday social actor, will inevitably provide an incomplete and misleading account of how and why persuasive messages have the effects they do, because it can do no more than reproduce those lay beliefs.²

TWO IMPLICATIONS

These inaccuracies of commonsensical beliefs about persuasion point to two constraints on the study of social influence processes. Specifically, greater care needs to be taken both in the assessment of message effects (in quantitative research) and in the use of participant interview data (in qualitative research).

Assessing Message Effects

One implication of this line of argument concerns the assessment of message effects (both in persuasion effects research specifically, and in message effects research more generally). To put the matter broadly, the implication concerns the importance of distinguishing the perceived impact/persuasiveness of a message (or message type) and the actual impact/persuasiveness of the message (or message type). Since what is *thought* to be persuasive may not actually *be* persuasive, it is important to distinguish actual persuasive effects from expected or perceived persuasive effects—and correspondingly important that studies of persuasive effects actually assess persuasive effects, not expected effects or perceived effects.

Regrettably, this is no idle point. Past studies of persuasive effects have sometimes involved assessments not of actual effects, but of perceived or expected effects. For example, Struckman-Johnson, Gilliland, Struckman-Johnson, and North (1990) assessed the effectiveness of various condom advertisements by asking respondents to rate “the overall effectiveness of the ad in terms of getting you personally to buy the product” (p. 1402). Garramone (1984) asked persons whether they were influenced by particular negative political advertisements. Edgar, Freimuth, Hammond, McDonald, and Fink (1992) asked participants to indicate the persuasiveness of each of nine different strategies for getting a sexual partner to use a condom. Kettlewell and Evans (1991) examined the effects of a museum’s various donation-solicitation letters by asking respondents “to mark on the scale for each letter how likely it would be that they would contribute to the museum if they received the letter in the mail” (p. 580).

Assessment procedures such as these are naturally vulnerable to the influences of commonsensical beliefs about persuasion. Respondents who are asked whether they would probably be influenced by a given message will naturally base their answers on their (implicit or explicit) beliefs about what persuades. But because these beliefs may be erroneous, respondents’ judgments of the likelihood of influence may not correspond with the actual likelihood of influence. Thus researchers should not assume that a variable’s effect on dependent measures such as these will necessarily correspond to the effect on direct measures of effect. Indeed, the prudent assumption would be that these two are unlikely to correspond perfectly.

The potential influence of commonsensical persuasion beliefs on judgments of perceived or expected persuasiveness is heightened in designs in which each respondent gives judgments of all the various versions of the stimulus message (for examples, see Kettlewell & Evans, 1991, or Edgar et al., 1992). When the respondent can see that characteristic X varies between stimulus messages, commonsensical beliefs about the expected effects of variations in X are likely to influence judgments of differential effectiveness.

There are two more specific implications of this point. First, concerning the interpretation and utilization of existing research: one should not unthinkingly lump together studies that have these two different dependent measures. The factors that influence perceived persuasiveness may well be different from the factors that influence actual persuasiveness, and hence any review of existing research should be sensitive to the possibility of distinguishing studies on the basis of the dependent measure employed.

Second, concerning future research: insofar as possible, researchers ought not

use surrogate measures of effect (such as expected or perceived persuasiveness). Obviously, a straightforward measure of effect (that is, a measure of actual effect) is to be preferred over measures of perceived or expected effect, at least where the question of interest concerns actual effects.

But there is a complication here, because there are some research circumstances in which surrogate measures are about the best one can hope for. Consider, for example, Edgar et al.'s (1992) investigation of strategies for getting a sexual partner to use a condom. It is difficult to envision a research design on this topic that has an entirely direct measure of effect, given the research question; that is, perceived or expected persuasiveness may be the best measure available. In such circumstances, however, it will be important to employ a design in which each respondent sees only one version of the stimulus message, rather than all the versions; such a design does require a larger number of participants, but it reduces the design's vulnerability to the possible contaminating effects of commonsensical persuasion beliefs.

Interviewing and Ethnography

The existence of misleading lay beliefs about persuasion also has implications for the conduct of ethnographic (qualitative) studies of social influence, and specifically underscores the complexities associated with interview data. Interviews provide a straightforward means of eliciting participants' perspectives, and hence the participant interview is a standard and commonly-employed part of the qualitative researcher's methodological arsenal. In fact, in some research areas "qualitative research has largely become synonymous with the in-depth interview" (Kleinman, Steinross, & McMahon, 1994, p. 37).

But participants' views, however interesting in their own right, afford an insufficient basis for a thorough understanding of persuasion and social influence—and as a consequence there is a danger of excessive reliance on interviews with participants as a basis for understanding how social influence works.

Unhappily, this, too, is no idle point. A very instructive example is provided by Prus's (1989a, 1989b) qualitative studies of marketing and sales activities. These impressive studies were motivated by a desire for microsociological understandings of the marketplace. The work is organized around fifteen different vendor activities—seven related to preparing for encounters with buyers (e.g., purchasing products, setting prices; 1989b), eight concerning sales encounters themselves (e.g., presenting products, neutralizing resistance, developing loyalty; 1989a).

This organizing focus on vendor activities is driven, in part, by a belief in the importance of studying "the ways in which people *actually* do business" (1989b, p. 22, emphasis in original). In examining previous work, Prus discovered that "despite the intensive efforts of a great many capable researchers, scant attention had been paid to actual vendor behavior" (1989b, p. 305).

Given this, it is all the more surprising that Prus's own research, the research whose material is organized by a focus on different vendor activities, does *not* involve observation of vendor behavior. Instead, the evidentiary material consists nearly exclusively of interview data gathered from 118 vendors in a variety of different businesses.³

Thus the discussion of each different vendor activity invokes verbatim segments from the interviews as supporting material. These interview segments provide an illuminating look at vendors' perspectives on their activities, and give considerable

insight into the feelings and outlooks of vendors. The vendors are often quite articulate, and their remarks are skillfully deployed to analytic advantage in displaying the vendors' perspectives. But there is a marked absence of direct observation of sales encounters; there is no independent observation of vendor activity.⁴

So, despite an express interest in "actual vendor behavior," Prus does not look at what sellers do. He looks at what sellers say they do, how sellers talk about what they do, what sellers think is effective in selling, how sellers represent their actions, how sellers believe influence processes work. And these representations are largely taken at face value. That is, these interview reports are taken as more-or-less faithfully representing sellers' conduct, as faithfully representing how social influence happens in buyer-seller transactions.

But it surely is apparent that this use of interview data falls rather short of what one might like to see in the way of evidence about sales interactions. Vendors' accounts will inevitably depend upon their own commonsensical conceptualizations of how social influence works, and hence provide an incomplete account. Lay conceptualizations of social influence are an interesting phenomenon in their own right, but these do not substitute for (do not do the job of) analysts' conceptualizations of social influence.

A usefully contrasting use of interview data is provided by van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs's (1993, pp. 142–169) discussion of an interactional forum in which religious witnessing and audience heckling occur. (For a related account, see Jacobs, 1982). The analysis involves, *inter alia*, reconstructing the perspectives of the participants, those doing witnessing and those doing heckling. Various forms of evidence, including interview data, inform this task, and the interviews are an important element in establishing the outlooks of the various parties. But the analysis makes it clear that participants' accounts are not taken at face value, and indeed the analysis seeks to transcend participants' perspectives. For example, the analysis nicely illuminates how, within each perspective, reflexively reasoned accounts preserve (in different ways for different participants) a sense of rationality and objectivity (see esp. pp. 159–164); that is, the analysis lays bare the internal workings of each perspective, in a critical and distanced way. Moreover, the analysis displays how these different perspectives interlock in a fashion that provides continuing internal confirmation for each, in ways that sustain the continuation of the witnessing-and-heckling dynamic (see pp. 164–165). Thus this analysis offers a critical perspective on participants' outlooks, one made possible precisely because the analysis is undertaken with an aim that goes beyond describing participants' perspectives.

FURTHER COMPLEXITIES

The line of argument being advanced here is prone to be misunderstood (especially through assimilation to certain familiar but defective viewpoints), so I want to take some pains to acknowledge and discuss some further complexities in the relationship of the actor's and the researcher's perspectives.

Unconnected Perspectives?

As an entry to these complexities, I want to start by considering an image (that one might think is implicit in the present argument) of the actor and researcher as

somehow distanced, with unconnected or wholly independent perspectives. For instance, the present view might be taken to be unsatisfactory because it emphasizes only the (distanced) researcher's empirical-descriptive aims, and neglects the critical-theoretic aims of empowerment and emancipation that are familiarly associated with (involved) interpretive approaches.

An image of the actor's and researcher's perspectives as unconnected is very much mistaken, for in fact a complex interplay obtains between these. Consider, as a simple example, the finding in persuasion effects research that, generally speaking, examples (case studies) are more persuasive than statistical (quantitative) information (see Taylor & Thompson, 1982). In teaching students about this generalization, one might well have the (latent or not-so-latent) purpose of getting students to be more critical recipients of persuasive messages, to get them to give examples no more weight than they are due. To the extent one is successful in this effort, to that same extent one undermines the soundness of the generalization. This makes plain the mistake of supposing that the researcher's perspective and the actor's perspective are wholly unrelated, do not interpenetrate in any way.

But this example also points up a way in which persuasion effects research findings can be said to serve the ends of emancipation and empowerment. Emancipatory interests and quantitative experimental social-scientific laboratory research are concepts not commonly conjoined, but I want to explicitly draw attention to their connection. The connection exists precisely because the researcher's perspective and the actor's perspective can diverge: researchers may know things everyday actors don't (for a related discussion, see O'Keefe, 1989). Only when research goes beyond a simple goal of reproducing the actor's own point of view can the researcher be in a position to address issues of empowerment and emancipation. In fact, it is in part *because* of misleading commonsensical persuasion beliefs (that is, poorly-grounded beliefs held by naive social actors) that persuasion effects research can have emancipating and empowering consequences; where lay beliefs systematically misapprehend (or fail to apprehend) consequential aspects of social influence, research can point to more useful alternatives.

This is especially clearly illustrated by research on latent social-influence effects such as agenda-setting. The effects of news exposure on perceived issue importance have been demonstrated through a variety of research formats (for general discussions, see Roberts & Maccoby, 1985; Rogers & Dearing, 1988), including laboratory experiments (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The lay actor may well be unaware of these agenda-setting effects, and hence these research findings obviously provide a basis for a certain sort of emancipation.⁵

There is yet another, subtler, connection to be noticed between the actor's and the researcher's perspectives, one that lies in the links between lay concepts and technical ones. Social scientists are people, too; they traffic in lay concepts as much as anyone. And the technical concepts of social scientists do not spring up out of nothing. Commonly, technical concepts are scaffolded off lay ones. It would be surprising if common sense did not provide at least a rough navigational guide to the world, and hence developing technical concepts from lay ones is an entirely plausible way of proceeding.

Of course, technical concepts seek to do different jobs, and so are held to different evaluative standards, than lay concepts. It is possible that technical concepts can end up looking rather different than their origins in lay concepts might suggest, and it is also possible that technical concepts can become absorbed

back into lay vocabularies. This is an especially tricky matter to negotiate, as a glance at the literature on “folk psychology” will confirm (see, e.g., Dennett, 1987; Greenwood, 1991; Stich, 1983). My point here is simply to draw attention to the complex interconnections that exist between the researcher’s perspective and the actor’s: these perspectives are not somehow sealed off from each other.

Naive Epistemology?

Another complexity to be acknowledged here concerns the claim that some lay beliefs about persuasion are mistaken. This claim might be read as suggesting a certain epistemological naivety—as (say) suggesting that investigators possess the timeless Truths about persuasion, while lay actors are mired in falsehood.

But this is not remotely the case. Commonsensical beliefs (as just discussed) are not false through and through, and researchers do not have eternal truths about social influence.⁶ If we like, we can choose to talk in a way that acknowledges “many truths,” and there are certainly purposes and circumstances in which it is useful to talk that way, useful to treat the beliefs of the research community as on all fours with those of the lay community. At the same time, we should not shy away from saying that for a given purpose some beliefs are better than others, or that there are better and worse answers to questions, or that it is possible to provide evidence that bears on claims. There is no epistemological naivety in this, and nothing in this argument commits one to a foundationalist epistemology or to a view of researchers as discovering permanent Truths.

As a way of displaying this, imagine the following circumstance. You face the task of choosing to use one of two messages (advertisements, perhaps) designed to persuade people to take certain actions to prevent the spread of HIV. The two candidate messages have been pre-tested on samples from the target audience, with two different forms of pretest being used. One is a standard experiment in which the actual effectiveness of each message is assessed; in this pretest, message A is judged better than message B. In the other pretest, respondents are asked which message they think would be more effective, and by this standard, message B is judged better than message A.

Faced with this task, everyone, I take it, would prefer message A (and indeed would probably think it morally irresponsible to do otherwise). But choosing message A does not make one a philosophical dunderhead; there is nothing in that preference that commits one to any dubious epistemological doctrines. What’s at issue here is a matter of which pretest provides the better evidence for the decision at hand. Relying on the better evidence does not imply that the evidence is guaranteed to be without flaw, or that the beliefs it supports can never be modified or overturned by later evidence, or that the evidence and claims are impervious to subsequent discovery of defect. But faced with this concrete task of message design, some beliefs are better-grounded than others, and there is no epistemological naivety in recognizing this.

And similarly for generalizations about persuasion: some beliefs are better-grounded than others. And, as a rule, those of the social-scientific community are likely to be better-grounded than those of the lay community. Now we are all sufficiently Kuhnian to recognize not just the openness of social-scientific claims and evidence to subsequent revision, but indeed the continuing possibility of fundamental conceptual transformation in research enterprises. But this does not excuse us from the task of deciding which of several different beliefs seems to best

accord with the available evidence. And rendering such decisions does not require commitments to defective epistemological views.

Lay Beliefs as Objects of Study

It should be quite plain that there is nothing in this argument to suggest that interpretive work is not worthwhile, or not defensible. All the argument shows is that at least some forms of an interpretive approach will be incomplete, in the sense that they will be unable to address certain research questions satisfactorily. But this will be no surprise to carefully articulated versions of an interpretive outlook.

Indeed, it would be erroneous to suppose that "since the actor's perspective is mistaken, it can safely be ignored." After all, the actor's beliefs *do* form a basis for making certain sorts of judgments, and hence are a natural object of study. In fact, the existence of commonsensical beliefs like these about persuasion gives rise to phenomena that are of independent interest. One such phenomenon is the so-called "third-person effect." A third-person effect is said to occur when a person believes that (particularly mass) communications will or do have a larger effect on other persons than on the person himself or herself. (For a review of research on third-person effects, see Perloff, 1993.)⁷ The relevant point in the present context is that an understanding of third-person effects will inevitably involve some grasp of the actor's commonsensical perspective. Thus the social scientist can hardly dispense with the everyday actor's perspective, even if reproducing that perspective leaves some research questions unaddressed.

CONCLUSION

Issues connected with the relationship of actors' and observers' perspectives in social-scientific work are notoriously complicated ones, and the present discussion does not pretend to be complete. I have elsewhere discussed some other facets of this relationship, arguing that researchers' fears of "cognitive elitism" (fears of thinking they know things actors don't) are misplaced (O'Keefe, 1989), and arguing that researchers should not be misled (particularly by certain conceptions of "representational validity") into thinking that theorists' categories must (or should) be transparent to naive perceivers (O'Keefe, 1987, 1994). There are, that is to say, quite a number of other aspects to the relationship of actors' and researchers' perspectives.

In this essay I have argued for an appropriately complicated view of the relationship of the actor's and the researcher's perspectives on persuasion and social influence. Because lay conceptions of how persuasion works contain beliefs that are not well-founded, reproducing the actor's perspective inevitably provides an inadequate account of social influence. For quantitative studies of social influence, this suggests the importance of actually assessing message effects; for qualitative studies, it underscores the danger of unreflective use of participant interviews. But one should not suppose that this view of the relationship of the actor's and researcher's perspectives treats these as utterly unconnected, or that it attributes to researchers some mystical grasp of eternal truth, or that it suggests lay beliefs are without interest. The relation of the actor's and researcher's perspectives is much more complex than that.

NOTES

¹There are a great many complexities and complications here, because there are many different versions of phenomenological-interpretive social science. My intention here is to paint in broad strokes, and nothing in my argument turns on finer points.

²In a way, what's been suggested here is that there is no more reason to privilege actors' perspectives and accounts concerning persuasion and social influence than there is to privilege such perspectives and accounts in the various other domains in which lay views have been found wanting (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980).

³Prus also mentions attendance at trade shows and participation in a craft enterprise as contributing to the data base (1989b, pp. 50–53), but these do not figure significantly.

⁴One way of reading the problem here is to say that buyers' perspectives—the other half of the story—are not adequately represented. Although there is surely a basis for that complaint (as Prus is aware; see 1989a, p. 320n1), my point is that reliance on participants' representations (whether of buyer or seller or both) will not provide an entirely adequate basis for illuminating these social influence processes, precisely because such representations will inevitably rely on commonsensical understandings.

⁵One might notice, too, that these research examples confound any simple opposition of critical theory and quantitative research. Discussion of critical-theoretical research commonly seems to presume that such work will be qualitative or ethnographic in character (e.g., Mumby, 1993), but in fact the ends of critical theory might also be served by quantitative—and even quantitative experimental laboratory—research. A helpful discussion of this general issue is provided by Grossberg (1987).

⁶If nothing else, the very fact that our social-scientific understandings of persuasion have changed over time is an indication that researchers' beliefs are liable to alteration.

⁷Third-person effects, notice, may also be a case of ill-founded lay belief. After all, the larger the number of persons who display a third-person effect, the more likely it is that at least some of them must be mistaken.

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