A Self-Categorization Explanation for Opinion Consensus Perceptions

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The public expression of opinions (and related communicative activities) hinges upon the perception of opinion consensus. Current explanations for opinion consensus perceptions typically focus on egocentric and other biases, rather than functional cognitions. Using self-categorization theory we showed that opinion consensus perceptions flow from cognitions regarding the fit between issues and group prototypes. Strong normative fit enhanced perceptions of ingroup opinion consensus (Experiments 1 and 2), and consensus perceptions varied as a function of comparison outgroups (Experiment 3), ingroup prototype salience (Experiment 4), and levels of identity threat (Experiment 5). Self-categorization theory has the potential to integrate a variety of cognitive and motivational processes to provide a comprehensive explanation for opinion consensus perceptions.

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Opinion Consensus Perceptions

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Manstead, 1990). While these explanations provide valuable insights into this perceptual phenomenon, each has important limitations. The motivational and social projection models assume that opinion consensus perceptions are regulated by different goals and needs, but they do not explain how people generate those perceptions in the first place. Expectancy models suggest that people generate opinion consensus perceptions from group norm perceptions, but they do not explain how group norms are perceived and, more importantly, how those two perceptions are connected.

In this article we explicate the role of group norm perceptions in perceiving opinion consensus by developing and testing a self-categorization explanation (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). The core idea is that people perceive public opinions as group norms (Glynn & Huge, 2007; Price, 1989; Scheufele & Moy, 2000), which are cognitive representations of groups defined by prototypes (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Prototypes are fuzzy sets of features that best define a category (e.g., ingroup vs. outgroup) in a particular social context, and do so by capturing the position that best represents shared ingroup similarities and intergroup differences. Self-categorization theory describes the conditions under which prototypes become salient and change in content and extremity, thereby generating novel predictions about opinion consensus perceptions. In what follows, we evaluate current explanations of opinion consensus perceptions, elaborate on and deduce predictions from self-categorization theory, and test those predictions in five experiments. We conclude by discussing the implications of this model for understanding public opinion as a communicative phenomenon.

Current explanations for public opinion perceptions

Motivational models
People have a need for social support, especially when under the threat of social exclusion (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Following this idea, Morrison and Matthes (2011) predicted, and showed, that people high in trait belongingness needs, and those primed with cues of social exclusion, perceived their opinions on an issue of high but not low personal importance to be more widely shared.

There is also evidence that opinion perceptions are affected by informational goals. For example, Nir (2011) showed that people high in directional goals (i.e., a need to maintain personally preferred conclusions) but low in accuracy goals (i.e., a need to uphold correct beliefs) are most likely to overestimate support for their own positions.

But how do people determine issue importance and decide what is “accurate” or “directional”? We acknowledge that individuals differ in such needs and motives, but these processes are likely to have social origins, relying on people’s sense of connection with groups. It would be valuable if a more general model could integrate these effects and explain the conditions under which these (and other) needs and goals take root.

The social projection model
The social projection model (Krueger, 1998) starts with the assumption that personal positions are more accessible in memory, and are therefore more likely to be retrieved
and used as a heuristic to infer others’ positions. The outcome is that people think that most others share their views, resulting in false consensus perceptions (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). This is equivalent to stating that the extent of personal support for a position positively predicts people’s estimates of how many others support that position. This correlation has been found repeatedly, which has led to the conclusion that the false consensus effect is an “ineradicable” egocentric bias (Krueger & Clement, 1994, p. 596).

However, the correlation between personal positions and opinion consensus perceptions is moderated by several factors. When the target is one that perceivers rarely interact with (Sherman, Presson, Chassin, Corty, & Olshavsky, 1983), categorize as an outgroup (Mullen, Dovidio, Johnson, & Copper, 1992), or perceive to be different from themselves (Ames, 2004), personal positions weakly, or do not, predict consensus perceptions. Therefore, the correlation between personal positions and opinion consensus perceptions may not be automatic or ineradicable after all; arguably, its strength depends on how people conceive of their relationship with the target of social comparison. However, because the social projection model emphasizes heuristic processing, it leaves out much of the social context where the perceptions of social connections are formed, and is therefore unable to integrate effectively those factors into a broad, coherent account (Spears & Manstead, 1990).

Expectancy models
Spears and Manstead (1990) argued, and showed, that people perceive strong consensus within groups on issue positions (e.g., being against building nuclear power stations) that are consistent with social expectations (e.g., the group being politically conservative). Similarly, Ames (2004) showed that people (e.g., Columbia students) perceived opinion consensus for dissimilar targets (e.g., UC Berkeley students) based on whether issues were perceived to be consistent with the stereotypes of the target group (e.g., that Berkeley students are more likely to have body piercings than to support capital punishment). Finally, Price (1989) showed that people became more extreme in their positions on contested issues after reading a news report that emphasized opposing views between groups.

These findings suggest that opinion consensus perceptions are based on perceptions of group norms. In particular, Price’s findings indicate that public opinion perceptions (in terms of opinion extremity) are likely to be caused by self-categorization processes. However, no studies have examined how group norms are perceived and, more importantly, how the mechanisms underlying group norm perceptions—notably the fit principles (elaborated below)—influence opinion consensus perceptions. As we will show, group norm polarization is one among several factors that can affect consensus perceptions.

A self-categorization explanation
Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) is a social cognitive account of the processes that govern the functioning of the self-concept. This theory assumes that an
important part of people’s self-concepts are social identities; collective self-definitions that describe the shared similarities between oneself and members of ingroups (i.e., self-categorizations; e.g., by gender, nationality, or political affiliation) in contrast to members of outgroups. Social categories are cognitively represented as prototypes or clusters of attributes that best distinguish one social category from another by maximizing intracategory similarities and intercategory differences. The formation of prototypes obeys the metacontrast principle (Campbell, 1958). Importantly, prototypes are socially shared, and contextually variable; their content and extremity depend on such factors as the target and criterion of intergroup social comparisons.

Prototypes define socially shared cognitive representations of group norms (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Group norms describe (and prescribe) how ingroup members, including the perceivers themselves, should think and behave. Such norms also characterize outgroup members’ thoughts and behaviors. Group norms are thus highly flexible yet reliable cues for assessing the level of opinion consensus. For example, if “party-going” constitutes a major part of an undergraduate norm, students should infer that a majority of undergraduates endorse opinions that are positively correlated with the norm, such as “drinking a lot at parties is okay,” but perceive less endorsement for opinions that are less correlated with the norm, such as “standardized testing should remain a college-entrance criterion.” Simply put, reliable perceptions of opinion consensus are possible when the “public” can be categorized into social groups with distinctive and well-defined norms.

The salience of social identities
Importantly, social identities become salient (i.e., operative) when they are accessible and fitting (Oakes, 1987). Accessible identities are those that are readily used for self- and social categorizations, either due to chronic availability through repeated use (e.g., gender and age categories) or task demands (e.g., being asked a political question would tend to make one’s political party identity salient). Fit is made up of two parts, comparative and normative fit. Comparatively fitting identities are those that best represent the distribution of stimuli under consideration. For example, if one were presented with a transcript of a group of eight people who discussed their attitudes toward social life, one might use attitude statements to form two categories, say conservatives and liberals. Most of the time, however, we have multiple stimuli to form social categories. To continue with this example, imagine instead that we made our judgment on the basis of an audio recording in which half of the discussants were in their 20s, and half in their 50s. If we found that a majority of those in their 20s expressed happy-go-lucky opinions, and a majority of those in their 50s expressed save-for-a-rainy-day opinions, then age would become the salient social categorization. Technically, according to self-categorization theory, age would become salient because it is accessible to social perceivers, there is a strong correlation between age group and opinion expression (i.e., strong comparative fit), and that correlation between age and opinions is consistent with the normative expectation that younger people are more interested in their social life than saving for retirement (i.e., strong normative fit).
When a social identity becomes salient, the fitting category is represented cognitively as a prototype, and people internalize ingroup prototypes to define themselves and others. They see themselves and others as interchangeable embodiments of the ingroup prototype instead of individuals possessing idiosyncratic attributes—the perceptions of self and others are depersonalized in relation to the ingroup norm. Consequently, social categories are perceived to be distinct and homogenous with respect to the criterion of social categorization.

The fit process can be used to explain how people assess opinion consensus when other ingroup members’ opinions are not directly observable. To illustrate, imagine one is trying to assess students’ opinions at College X on two issues, a party-related issue, support for heavy alcohol consumption at parties, and an academic-related issue, support for keeping standardized testing as a college-entry criterion. Further assume that College X has a well-defined party norm, but an ill-defined study-norm. In self-categorization terms, normative fit is strong for the party issue, but weak for the academic issue. Making judgments about the party-related issue produces salient social categorizations in which students are categorized as belonging to the same group, and as holding attitudes consistent with the group norm (i.e., favoring heavy alcohol consumption at parties). Because the normative fit for the academic-related issue is weak, making judgments about this issue should produce less salient categorizations, and perceived consensus on the issue would be weaker as a result.

In general:

H1: Perceived opinion consensus will increase with the strength of the fit between an issue and an ingroup norm.

We test specific predictions derived from H1 in Experiments 1, 3, 4, and 5. In Experiment 1 we test the hypothesis using issues that fit strongly versus weakly with participants’ ingroup norm. In the other experiments, we examine how contextual factors accentuate or attenuate the normative fit between those issues and participants’ ingroup norm and thereby alter opinion consensus perceptions.

The fit principle also specifies the conditions under which social projection should and should not occur. When normative fit is high, people will use it as a basis for perceiving opinion consensus in their own and other groups. In this case, high normative fit provides social perceivers with a compelling explanation for the distributions of public opinion, and this should preclude the use of other estimation methods, including social projections. However, when normative fit is low and does not provide an explanation for the pattern of agreement and disagreement, social perceivers would turn to other heuristics, such as accessibility. Because one’s personal position on an issue is highly accessible, it is likely to be used for opinion consensus perceptions when normative fit is low (Clement & Krueger, 2000).

In general:

H2: Normative fit will moderate the degree to which people socially project; social projection will occur when normative fit is low but not high.

We test H2 in Experiments 1 and 2 with different operationalizations of social projection.
Contextual effects on ingroup opinion perceptions

We consider three ways in which social contexts can moderate the fit between an issue and an ingroup norm, and hence perceptions of opinion consensus. First, the metacontrast principle stipulates that the content of group prototypes reflect the extent to which a group possesses attributes that distinguish it from relevant outgroups. As a result, the content of ingroup prototypes (and hence ingroup norms) depends on the outgroup available for social comparisons. For example, Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, and Hayes (1992) found that Americans were perceived as “industrious” and “scientifically-minded” when compared with Australians and the British, but as “individualistic” and “pleasure-loving” when compared with Soviets and Iraqis.

Similarly, if partying and studying are both components of an ingroup college prototype, social comparison to a school with stronger academic credentials would lead one to perceive studying as less ingroup normative, and partying more (i.e., “we party, they study”). In turn, the increase in normative fit for partying relative to studying would lead to the perception of stronger ingroup support for party-related issues than for academic-related issues. However, when the outgroup is one with stronger party credentials than the ingroup, being scholarly would now be more ingroup normative than partying (i.e., “we study, they party”). Therefore, perceived ingroup support for party-related issues would decrease, and that for academic-related issues would increase. We test the effect of altering social comparison targets in Experiment 3.

Second, prototypes are multifaceted, and attention can be directed to some components over and above others. For example, the task of rank ordering schools based on academic credentials would increase the weight of academic concerns relative to that of partying in the formation of an ingroup prototype, whereas rank ordering the same schools based on party credentials would achieve the opposite. Thus, in a school with a strong party norm and a weak study norm, the perceived support for party-related issues over academic-related issues would be greater after a party-ranking task than after an academic-ranking task. We test the effect of altering the salience of different aspects of ingroup prototype in Experiment 4.

Finally, intergroup competition extremitizes group prototypes because threats increase the metacontrast ratio by polarizing the ingroup from outgroup-norm (i.e., enhancing perceived intergroup differences) and promoting stronger ingroup conformity (i.e., enhancing perceived intragroup similarities; Haslam & Turner, 1992; Mackie, 1986; Price, 1989). Therefore, for a group of students who consider partying to be ingroup normative, a threat to this norm would polarize the norm further in the pro-partying direction and result in perceptions of even stronger support for, and less opposition to, party-related issues.

However, not every ingroup member would necessarily react to the threat to the same degree. The more closely aligned students perceive themselves to the ingroup prototype, the more strongly they would react to the threat by bolstering their support for the ingroup norm. This is because the threat to the ingroup effectively constitutes
a stronger threat to their self-concept (Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). Therefore, high but not low social identity threat would enhance consensus perceptions for participants high but not low in self-perceived ingroup prototypicality. We test the interaction effect of self-perceived ingroup prototypicality and outgroup threat in Experiment 5.

For all five experiments, we use two issues: the retention of standardized testing as a college-entry criterion, and undergraduates’ views of alcohol drinking practices. These issues correspond to the party- and study-aspects of the undergraduate norms of different schools, including the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB, where the participants were from); the California State University; Chico (Chico State); and Stanford University. With these issues and schools, we assume that: (a) for UCSB partying is more normative than studying; (b) partying is more normative for UCSB and Chico State than Stanford (see “10 Biggest Party Schools,” n.d.), whereas studying is more normative for Stanford followed by UCSB and Chico State; and (c) the drinking issue is perceptually linked with the party norm, and standardized testing with the study norm. Two pilot studies tested these assumptions.

Pilot Studies 1 and 2

In Pilot Study 1, we evaluated whether partying is perceived to be more normative than studying for UCSB undergraduates. As expected, participants (N = 80, with 36 men) indicated on two items (1 not at all, 7 very) that it is more typical for an average UCSB undergraduate to party (M = 6.20, SD = 0.90) than to study (M = 5.61, SD = 1.14), F(1, 78) = 14.12, p < .001, η^2_p = 0.15. Assumption 1 is verified.

In Pilot Study 2, we evaluated whether participants perceptually link the drinking issue with a party norm and the testing issue with a study norm. If the issues are perceived to correspond to norms as expected (i.e., that partying is perceived as more normative for UCSB and Chico State than Stanford; and studying as more normative for Stanford than UCSB and Chico State), then participants should perceive more support for the drinking issue among UCSB and Chico State students, but more support for the testing issue among Stanford students.

Forty-eight UCSB undergraduates (10 males) estimated the percentage of UCSB, Chico State, and Stanford students that would support, oppose, or stand neutral regarding “the drinking habits of UCSB undergraduate students during a typical IV^2 weekend” and “keeping standardized testing as a college-entry criterion” (1 totally against, 7 totally support). The order of the schools was randomized, and the order of issues was randomized within each school.

There was a three-way interaction between issue, perceived support, and target school, F(4, 41) = 35.65, p < .001, η^2_p = 0.78 (see Table 1). For the drinking issue, participants perceived the greatest support among Chico State, followed by UCSB and Stanford (and the reverse pattern for opposition to drinking). For the standardized testing issue, participants perceived the greatest support among
Table 1 Pilot Study 2. Opinion Consensus Perceptions for the Drinking and Standardized-testing Issues for Stanford, UCSB, and Chico State Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stanford</td>
<td>36.44 (18.61)</td>
<td>42.58 (19.06)</td>
<td>20.42 (14.04)</td>
<td>65.44 (18.79)</td>
<td>19.71 (13.38)</td>
<td>14.84 (14.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCSB</td>
<td>54.18 (15.25)</td>
<td>23.76 (9.36)</td>
<td>22.29 (14.02)</td>
<td>40.80 (22.27)</td>
<td>38.40 (21.40)</td>
<td>20.80 (18.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chico State</td>
<td>59.40 (18.22)</td>
<td>18.67 (11.98)</td>
<td>21.93 (14.10)</td>
<td>33.64 (13.87)</td>
<td>45.82 (16.32)</td>
<td>20.53 (17.11)</td>
</tr>
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Note: Standard deviation in parentheses.

Stanford students, followed by UCSB and then Chico State (and the reverse pattern for opposition to standardized testing). Assumptions 2 and 3 are verified.

Experiment 1

In Experiment 1 we test the hypothesis that people perceive ingroup opinion consensus based on the fit between an issue and ingroup norm (H1). Because partying is perceived to be more normative at UCSB than studying, and because the drinking and testing issues correspond to the two respective norms, two specific predictions follow from H1: (a) UCSB participants will perceive more support among their fellow students for alcohol drinking practices than for keeping standardized testing and (b) participants will perceive more support than opposition for drinking than standardized testing.

H2 states that social projection would only occur when the fit between an issue and ingroup prototype is weak. Given that drinking is more normatively fitting than standardized testing, it follows from H2 that (c) personal positions will positively correlate with opinion consensus perceptions for the standardized testing issue but not for the drinking issue. In comparison, the social projection model predicts that personal positions would correlate with opinion-consensus perceptions for both issues.

Method

Fifty-six UCSB undergraduate students (13 men; $M_{age} = 19.62, SD = 1.24$) participated in exchange for course credit. The study followed a within-subjects design which measured support for low- and high-fit issues at their school: 2(Normative fit of issue: high/low) × 3(Perceived ingroup opinion positions on those issues: support/oppose/neutral). We also measured participants’ personal positions on the drinking (i.e., the high-fit) and standardized-testing (i.e., the low-fit) issues as continuous predictors. These measures allow us to compare the predictions from self-categorization theory and the projection model.

Participants first indicated: ‘How much do you endorse the drinking habits of UCSB undergraduate students during a typical IV weekend? (1 totally against, 7 totally support), before estimating the percentages of UCSB undergraduates who
would endorse/oppose/neither endorse nor oppose these drinking habits. Participants provided percentage estimates by filling in blank spaces, and were told that the estimates must sum to 100 percent. Using the same scales, participants responded to items for the standardized testing issue. Participants were asked, “How much do you support keeping standardized testing as a college entrance criterion?” (1 totally against, 7 totally support), followed by measures of their percentage estimates for UCSB undergraduates who would support/oppose/neither support nor oppose standardized testing.

Results and discussion
Following H1, we predicted that participants would perceive (a) more support for drinking than standardized testing and (b) more support than opposition for drinking than standardized testing. The estimates of the proportions of undergraduates who support, oppose, and stand neutral on those two issues were treated as repeated-measures in an analysis of variance (ANOVA). As expected, the interaction between issue fit and position estimates was significant, $F(2, 50) = 9.72, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .28$ (see Figure 1).

Consistent with the first prediction, participants estimated that more UCSB undergraduates support drinking ($M = 53.81\%, SD = 14.53$) than standardized testing ($M = 41.94\%, SD = 22.09$), $t(50) = 3.92, p < .001, d = 0.57$. Consistent with the second prediction, participants perceived that more UCSB undergraduates support ($M = 53.81\%, SD = 14.53$) than oppose ($M = 23.83\%, SD = 9.05$) drinking practices, $t = 10.72, p < .001, d = 1.50$, while similar proportions supported and opposed standardized testing (support: $M = 41.94\%, SD = 22.09$; oppose: $M = 37.56\%, SD = 21.18$), $t < 1$. Both predictions and, hence, H1 were supported.

Figure 1 Opinion consensus perceptions as a function of issue normative fit.
Following H2, we predicted that the correlation between personal positions and opinion-consensus perceptions would be stronger for the drinking issue than the standardized-testing issue. Because these perceptions are not independent, we test this prediction by computing the correlation between participants’ personal positions on the standardized-testing issue and their consensus perceptions while controlling for their positions and consensus perceptions on the drinking issue. As expected, personal support for keeping standardized testing strongly and positively predicts consensus perceptions on this issue, partial $r = .56$, $p < .001$. However, repeating the analysis for consensus perceptions on drinking (this time controlling for personal positions and consensus perceptions related to the standardized testing issue), revealed a moderate and nonsignificant correlation with personal positions, partial $r = .17$, $p = .24$. We compare the size of these correlations using Steiger’s (1980) correction for nonindependent observations. As predicted, the correlation for the standardized testing issue is stronger than that for the drinking issue, $Z = 2.11$, $p = .017$ (one-tailed). H2 was supported.

Consistent with H1, participants perceived greater ingroup consensus for an issue that fits more strongly with the ingroup norm. Consistent with H2, participants’ personal positions only predicted consensus perceptions for the low-fit testing issue, but not the high-fit drinking issue. These findings suggest that people use the perceived fit between an issue and ingroup norm—rather than their personal positions—to estimate opinion consensus; personal positions are used to assess opinion consensus only when circumstances do not produce meaningful social categorizations (e.g., when group norms are diffuse). Experiment 1 thus provided stronger support for the self-categorization explanation than the social projection model.

**Experiment 2**

Experiment 2 provides an alternative test of the hypothesis that normative fit moderates the strength of social projection (H2). In this experiment, instead of estimating how many (ingroup) UCSB undergraduates support different issues, participants were asked to estimate how many of them would share their opinions. Changing the measure of opinion consensus perceptions leads us to change our predictions. Specifically, using the same two issues as Experiment 1, we predict that (a) participants’ personal positions on the drinking issue (i.e., the high-fit issue) would positively correlate with the perception that their opinion is shared, and that (b) this correlation would be stronger than the corresponding correlation for the standardized-testing issue (i.e., the low-fit issue).

Our reasoning is that when the ingroup norm is well defined, people would have a clear sense of their prototypicality relative to other ingroup members (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1998). Highly prototypical members, with their positions closer to the norm, would perceive their positions to be widely shared, because their positions are in close correspondence with the norm. Likewise, the more one’s personal position departs from the ingroup norm, the weaker the sense of opinion sharedness because
less prototypical groups members hold positions less in correspondence with the norm. However, when normative fit is low, the group norm is relatively opaque, and consequently, the ability to ascertain one’s position in relation to other group members would be diminished. The result will be a strong positive correlation between personal positions and opinion sharedness perceptions when normative fit is high, but a weak correlation when normative fit is low.

In comparison, the social projection model predicts no correlation between one’s personal position and opinion sharing. While someone who strongly supports a position would perceive that most others support the position (because of social projection), the same should be true for a person who strongly opposes the position. Therefore, if the social projection model is correct, sharedness perceptions would be a constant function of personal positions.

Method
A hundred and eleven (men = 46; age not measured) UCSB undergraduates participated. The study followed a single-factor (Issue normative fit: high/low) within-subjects design, with participants’ personal positions on the drinking and standardized-testing issues as continuous predictors. Half of the participants first indicated how much they endorsed UCSB undergraduates’ drinking habits during a typical IV weekend (1 totally against, 7 totally support) before estimating the percentage of UCSB undergraduates that would share their positions on the issue: “What % of UCSB undergraduate students do you think would share your opinion regarding UCSB undergraduate drinking habits”? This question was answered on a 10-point scale with increments of 10% (i.e., 1 = 0–10%; 2 = 11–20% . . . 10 = 91 – 100%; Miller & Morrison, 2009). They then completed similar measures for the standardized-testing issue. The order of the questions was counterbalanced.

Results and discussion
Issue order had no impact on the results, so we do not consider it further. As expected, participants’ personal positions on drinking was significantly correlated with their perceptions of how many undergraduates shared their positions, partial \( r = .60, p < .001 \) (after controlling for their personal positions on the standardized testing and sharedness perceptions on that issue). Regression analyses showed that participants who strongly endorsed drinking habits (+1 SD on the personal position scale) perceived that 70.05% of other undergraduates shared their position. In comparison, participants with weak support for drinking habits (−1 SD on the scale) estimated that 50.23 percent shared their position.

Also as predicted, the correlation between participants’ personal positions on the standardized-testing issue and their sharedness perceptions was small and only marginally significant, partial \( r = .17, p = .073 \) (after controlling for their personal positions on the drinking issue and sharedness perceptions on that issue). On average, participants estimated that more than 60% of students shared their position on the testing issue (i.e., the classic false consensus effect). Steiger’s procedure confirmed that
the correlation was stronger for the drinking issue than for the standardized-testing issue, $Z = 3.95$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed).

Experiment 2 further demonstrated that normative fit moderates the strength of social projections (H2). As self-categorization theory explains, a clear ingroup norm and strong fit enable people to assess their relative ingroup prototypicality, which in turn enables them to track how widely their opinions are shared. Yet when the norm is more diffuse and fit weak, assessment of relative ingroup prototypicality (and hence opinion sharedness) is difficult. In contrast, the social projection model predicted a constant correlation between personal opinion and opinion sharedness perceptions across issues, which was inconsistent with the findings. Experiment 2 corroborated the self-categorization explanation, and provided little evidence for the social projection model.

**Experiment 3**

In the remaining experiments we test the hypothesis that people perceive opinion consensus as a function of the fit between an issue and ingroup norm (H1)—and hence opinion consensus perceptions—would be altered by different contextual factors. Though UCSB undergraduates consider partying to be more ingroup normative than studying, the perception should polarize in one direction or another depending on the comparison outgroup because of the metacontrast process. In any given intergroup social comparison, people search for and use distinctive attributes to define their ingroup in relation to particular outgroups. Thus, compared with Stanford University, which has stronger academic credentials, UCSB students should perceive partying to be more ingroup normative than studying. However, compared to Chico State, which has equal if not stronger partying credentials, UCSB students should perceive partying to be less ingroup normative and studying more. As the content of the ingroup norm shifts, the normative fit of the issues would change as well. We thus predict that participants would perceive more UCSB undergraduates endorse the drinking issue than the testing issue when the comparison outgroup is Stanford, but that this difference would attenuate when the comparison outgroup is Chico State.

**Method**

Sixty-four UCSB undergraduates (25 men; $M_{age} = 19.44$, $SD = 1.89$) participated. They were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2(Comparison outgroup: Stanford/Chico State; between) x 2(Issue type: academic-related/party-related; within) mixed-factorial design. Among several filler items (e.g., stricter Internet regulation and gay marriage), participants were asked to estimate “Compared to students from Stanford University, ____% of UCSB undergraduates students would endorse UCSB drinking habits during a typical IV weekend” and “support keeping standardized testing as a college-entry criterion.” Separate items repeated these questions with Chico State as the comparison outgroup.
Results and discussion

A 2(Comparison outgroup; between) × 2(Issue type; within) mixed model ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of issue, $F(1, 60) = 25.56, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.05$. On average, participants perceived more UCSB undergraduates endorse drinking ($M = 67.97\%, SD = 18.34$) than standardized testing ($M = 54.66\%, SD = 18.33$). Unexpectedly, there was no evidence for the predicted two-way interaction between comparison outgroup and issue type, $F < 1$ (see Figure 2).

Confirming our prediction, perceived support for standardized testing was greater when the comparison outgroup was Chico State ($M = 60.71\%, SD = 15.62$) than when the outgroup was Stanford ($M = 48.61\%, SD = 19.08$), $t = 2.73, p = .008, d = 0.62$. However, contrary to what was predicted, perceived support for drinking was also greater when the comparison outgroup was Chico State ($M = 71.58\%, SD = 18.06$) than Stanford ($M = 64.35\%, SD = 18.25$), though not significantly so, $t = 1.57, p = .12, d = 0.35$. The effect of altering comparison outgroup on opinion consensus perceptions was partially supported.

We suspect that the estimates of support for the drinking issue were not altered by the changes in comparative context because the propartying norm among UCSB undergraduates is very strong (see Pilot Study 1) in relation to our induction. We had difficulty finding a school with an even stronger party norm to attenuate the normative fit of partying for participants. In comparison, because studying is less normative for UCSB, participants’ position on standardized testing is more susceptible to the influence of the changes in the comparative context. Indeed, as predicted, when the comparison outgroup changed from Stanford to Chico State, the perceived proportion of students who would support standardized testing increased from less than half to become the majority. This is evidence that the perception of

![Figure 2](https://example.com/fig2.png)

**Figure 2** Opinion consensus perceptions as a function of issue normative fit and comparison outgroup.
ingroup opinion consensus changes as a function of the target of intergroup social comparisons.

**Experiment 4**

In Experiment 4, we altered the salience of the propartying and scholarly components of the UCSB undergraduate prototype by having participants rank order their school relative to others in terms of their party or academic credentials. If this induction is sufficiently strong to overcome the influence of the UCSB drinking norm, we should see a respective increase in the perceived normative fit of the partying or studying issue for the ingroup norm. Participants would thus perceive more support at UCSB for drinking than standardized testing after having ranked their school on the basis of party credentials, but this difference will attenuate when the same judgments are made after having performed an academic ranking.

**Method**

Eighty-eight UCSB undergraduates (39 men; $M_{age} = 19.02$, $SD = 1.39$) participated. They were randomly assigned to the conditions of a $2(Norm$ $content:$ party school/academic institution; between) $\times$ $2(Issue$ $type:$ party-related/academic-related; within) mixed-factorial design.

*Group norm manipulation*

To manipulate the salience of norm content, participants ranked UCSB in terms of party credentials or academic standing along with nine other schools: Arizona State University, Florida State University, the University of Iowa, Ohio University, Pennsylvania State University, Stanford University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Southern California. Participants in the party-school condition read that:

> Recently, a well-known magazine ranked a number of schools in terms of how good they are for partying. The number of bars on or near campus, party atmosphere, the number of students who actively engage in the party scene were considered. Read through the following list of 10 schools, and then rank them in terms of standing as a party school as you believe they would have been by this magazine.

Participants in the academic-institution condition read that:

> Recently, a well-known magazine ranked a number of schools in terms of their academic standing. Research output, teaching quality, and the number of people who find jobs within 6 months of graduation were considered. Read through the following list of 10 schools, and then rank them in terms of academic standing as you believe they would have been by this magazine.

After the ranking task, participants in both conditions received further instructions designed to reinforce their attention on UCSB as a party school or an academic
institutions. Participants in the party-school condition read that: “In fact, according to the latest issue of the *Princeton Review*, UCSB is ranked the 3rd among the 10 schools listed above as ‘the best party schools nationwide’—only after the University of Iowa and Ohio University.” They were then asked to “write three to five sentences based on their observations of UCSB undergraduates’ party life that may support this ranking of the school as one of the best party schools of the country.” They were told that they may consider “students’ attitudes towards partying, the number of bars near campus, and the atmosphere for partying.”

Similarly, participants in the academic-institution condition read that: “In fact, according to the latest issue of the *Princeton Review*, UCSB is ranked 3rd among the 10 schools listed above as ‘the best colleges nationwide’—only after Stanford University and The University of Texas at Austin.” They were then asked to write three to five sentences based on their observations that may support the ranking of the school as one of the best colleges in the country. They were told that they may consider “students’ attitudes toward education, standards and competitiveness of admission, and difficulties (or easiness) of getting good grades.”

**Dependent measures**

Participants then estimated what “____% of UCSB undergraduates would support ‘UCSB undergraduates’ drinking habits during a typical IV weekend’ and ‘keeping standardized testing as a college-entrance criterion’ along with several filler items (e.g., stricter Internet regulation and gay marriage) in separate items.

**Results and discussion**

In both conditions, participants ranked UCSB higher than all other schools combined. The ranking of UCSB and the average ranking of the other nine schools were subject to a 2(Norm content; between) × 2(School ranking; within) mixed-model ANOVA. The main effect of ranking was significant, with the ranking of UCSB \( M = 3.99, SD = 1.62 \) higher than the average ranking of the other schools \( M = 5.67, SD = 0.23 \), \( F(1, 84) = 85.62, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .51 \). There was also an interaction between norm content and school rankings, \( F(1, 84) = 9.04, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .12 \). Importantly, however, participants ranked UCSB significantly higher than the other schools in both the party-school condition, \( t = 8.29, \) and the academic-institution condition, \( t = 4.64, \) both \( p’s < .001 \). The manipulation of norm content was successful.

We predicted that when the pro-partying aspect of the norm was salient, participants would perceive more support for drinking practices among other undergraduates than keeping standardized testing, but that this difference would be attenuated in the academic-institution condition. To test this prediction, consensus estimations for both issues were subjected to a 2(Norm content; between) × 2(Issue type; within) mixed-model ANOVA (see Figure 3).

Consistent with the prediction, participants in the party-school condition perceived that more UCSB undergraduates support drinking practices \( M = 67.70\%, \)
SD = 17.79) than standardized testing (M = 49.90%, SD = 17.66), t(85) = 4.88, p < .001, d = 0.78. Critically, within the academic-institution condition, the magnitude of the difference was attenuated. Relative to the party-school condition, perceived support for drinking practices decreased to 61.28% (SD = 18.62), while support for standardized testing increased to 53.96% (SD = 18.27). The interaction between group norm and issue type tests whether the estimate differentials significantly differed across the conditions, and ANOVA confirms that this was the case, F(1, 85) = 4.46, p = .038, \( \eta^2_p = .05 \). The effect of altering the salience of different components of ingroup norm on opinion consensus perceptions was supported.

Experiment 4 demonstrated that merely ranking one’s ingroup in terms of different credentials was sufficient to change perceptions of support for both drinking practices and standardized testing. When the party aspect of the ingroup norm was made salient, we replicated the findings of our earlier experiments—participants perceived a sharp difference between the proportions of undergraduates who would endorse drinking practices versus keeping standardized testing. However, when the academic aspect of the ingroup norm was highlighted, the difference became significantly smaller. This is evidence that directly manipulating prototype salience influences opinion consensus perceptions.

Experiment 5

In Experiment 5 we tested the effect of outgroup threat and participants’ self-perceived ingroup prototypicality on opinion consensus perceptions. We expect that a threat to the ingroup norm would be felt more keenly by participants who perceive themselves as more prototypical because they would experience greater
self-conceptual threat. As a result, participants who perceive themselves to be more ingroup prototypical would perceive stronger support for an issue that highly fits the ingroup norm, particularly when the ingroup is threatened. Given the drinking issue is ingroup normative, participants’ self-perceived ingroup prototypicality should positively predict perceived support (relative to perceived opposition) for drinking practices, but only when the relevant ingroup norm is under a high level of threat.

**Method**

*Subjects and design*

Eighty-seven UCSB undergraduates (24 men, one participant did not disclose gender; \(M_{\text{age}} = 19.72, SD = 1.39\)) participated. They were randomly assigned to the conditions of a single-factor between-subjects design (threat level: high/low). Participants’ self-perceived ingroup prototypicality was a continuous predictor.

*Procedure*

All participants first read an introduction that focused their attention on UCSB as a party school and the drinking practices of its students:

> Recent studies show that drinking is a common occurrence among undergraduate students at UCSB. Such studies suggest that UCSB is a ‘drinking university’ with higher than average drinking rates for college-age students. Indeed, according to the 2011–12 Princeton Review, UCSB ranks the 5th of the ‘top-twenty party schools’ nationwide.

Participants then completed a measure of self-perceived *ingroup prototypicality*: “How similar are you to an average UCSB undergraduate student in terms of general attitudes, aspirations, and outlook on life” (1 *not similar at all*, 7 *very similar*) (Reid & Hogg, 2005; Spears et al., 1997).

The threat to the ingroup party norm was induced next. Participants in both the high- and low-threat conditions read a fictitious *Daily Nexus* article (the UCSB campus newspaper) entitled “40 oz to Freedom: UCSB an alcohol dry zone?” in its online format. In the high threat condition, the opening paragraph stated that the University Chancellor was seriously considering making UCSB a dry campus:

> A recommendation has been made that the university and surrounding area becomes an alcohol “dry zone.” Chancellor Yang has the final say on whether the “dry zone” policy should be implemented, but he has already expressed his concern at UCSB’s party school image. It is therefore likely that he will bring the policy into effect and ban alcohol from the locality.

In both conditions, the article followed up on this information by adding “Students caught in possession of alcohol, even inside their own house, could be fined up to $500.”

In the low-threat condition participants read an identical article except for the opening:
A recommendation has been made that the university and surrounding area becomes an alcohol “dry zone.” Chancellor Yang has the final say on whether the “dry zone” policy should be implemented, but it is unlikely that he will follow these recommendations. He has previously stated that he has full confidence in the IV foot patrol [the local police force] and how they deal with alcohol-related incidents.

After reading the article, a manipulation check items asked participants to indicate how seriously Chancellor Yang was considering making UCSB a dry campus (1 not at all serious, 7 very serious). They were then asked to estimate the percentage of UCSB undergraduates that would “agree with,” “disagree with,” or “neither agree or disagree with” the drinking habits in separate items. Participants were reminded that their estimates must add up to 100 percent.

Results and discussion
We first checked the threat manipulation. As expected, participants in the high-threat condition \((M = 4.85, SE = 0.26)\) perceived Chancellor Yang as more serious about the dry-campus policy than those in the low-threat condition \((M = 3.37, SE = 0.24)\), \(F(1, 81) = 17.41, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .18\). This effect was independent of participants’ self-perceived ingroup prototypicality (main and interaction effects, \(F’s < 1\)). The threat manipulation was successful.

It was predicted that the perceived ingroup opinion distribution for a normatively consistent opinion position would be extremitized (i.e., more perceived support and less opposition) for participants who perceived themselves to be more ingroup prototypical. To test this prediction, we created an index of perceived opinion extremity by subtracting the estimated proportion of those who oppose UCSB drinking practices from those in support. We then subjected this index of opinion extremity to a multiple moderated regression with self-perceived ingroup prototypicality (mean-centered), threat levels (dummy-coded), and their interaction term as the predictors. Analysis revealed a marginally significant two-way interaction, \(\beta = .28, t(82) = 1.83, p = .07\). Consistent with prediction, self-perceived ingroup prototypicality positively predicted perceived opinion extremity in the high-threat condition, \(\beta = .34, t = 2.29, p = .025\), but not in the low-threat condition, \(\beta = -.05, t = -.31, p = .76\) (see Figure 4).

Experiment 5 supported the hypothesis that levels of intergroup threat and self-perceived ingroup prototypicality interact to affect the perception of ingroup consensus on a highly fitting issue. Perceived opinion extremity (i.e., perceived support relative to perceived opposition) for drinking practices was enhanced as participants’ self-perceived ingroup prototypicality increased and the relevant ingroup norm was threatened by a powerful outgroup. This finding indicates that perceptions of ingroup opinion consensus not only reflect the content (as our previous experiments have shown) but also the perceived extremity of ingroup norm.
General Discussion

We deduced two general hypotheses regarding opinion consensus perceptions from self-categorization theory. According to H1, an issue that has strong normative fit with an ingroup norm enables people to judge the extent of opinion consensus within their group, but when normative fit is low, the ability to form this judgment is decreased. Confirming this hypothesis, Experiment 1 demonstrated that participants perceived stronger opinion consensus (i.e., more perceived support and less opposition) for an issue that was higher in normative fit.

Self-categorization theory further predicts that normative fit is contextually variable—it reacts to changes in comparison outgroups, task demands, and threats to the ingroup. In Experiments 3 and 4, the perceived consensus on a previously low-fit issue was increased when intergroup comparisons or task demands made salient the corresponding component of the ingroup prototype. In Experiment 5, threats from a powerful group extremitized opinion consensus perceptions on a highly fitting issue for participants who perceived themselves to be more ingroup prototypical.

According to H2, when perceiving opinion consensus, people socially project only when an issue has low normative fit. Consistent with this hypothesis, but contrary to the social projection model, Experiments 1 and 2 showed that personal positions only predicted the level of opinion consensus in conditions specified by self-categorization theory.
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Implications for public opinion as a communicative phenomenon

People rely on different modes of communication (e.g., mass and interpersonal communication) to form and express their opinions, and opinion consensus perceptions are likely to mediate these processes. To begin with, media messages are important sources for people to gauge the distributions of public opinions and form their own opinions. This can be achieved by accessing news reports that explicitly describe the views of different social groups on an issue (Hayes et al., 2011; Price, 1989).

This research suggests other subtle but powerful ways in which mass media can influence opinion formation. For example, media messages could change one’s perceived consensus on an issue by comparing audiences’ ingroup with different outgroups, by highlighting particular ingroup characteristics, or by emphasizing threats from powerful outgroups. In these cases, such media messages do not contain information about public opinion distributions, but they can nonetheless act on the cognitive mechanisms underlying self- and social categorization and group norm perceptions. In this sense, our research provides a more detailed description of how mass media can “create” public opinion (cf. Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

Further, if opinion consensus perceptions affect opinion expression (Miller & Morrison, 2009), and if the self-categorization process underlies opinion consensus perceptions, the same set of cognitive mechanisms should also influence opinion expression. Our research suggests that social identity salience is a necessary condition for opinion expression. A salient social identity would transform people’s self-definitions by perceptually conforming to the ingroup prototype, particularly for people who perceive themselves to be highly prototypical. As Experiment 5 showed, highly prototypical ingroup members perceive more ingroup support for their positions and react more strongly to threats from a powerful outgroup. In addition, they also hold normatively consistent positions more strongly (Price, 1989). These should be people who are most likely to publicly announce their positions in spite of their minority status (i.e., the “avant-gardes”; Noelle-Neumann, 1993). Indeed, research has shown that perceived social support (Miller & Morrison, 2009) and attitude certainty (Matthes et al., 2010) promote public opinion expression.

Self-categorization theory also makes predictions about information seeking behavior regarding public opinions. The theory suggests that, to the extent that fear of isolation drives information seeking, people should specifically fear being excluded from their ingroup. The best way to fit into a group is to behave according to the group norm (Hogg & Reid, 2006), and this can be effectively achieved by finding out what other group members think about issues that are important and distinctive (i.e., normative) for the group. Therefore, when the threat of social exclusion is high, we predict that people would not seek just any poll-related information but information about issues that are ingroup normative.

Self-categorization theory has the potential to inform several other important issues in public opinion research. For example, researchers have recently emphasized the importance of studying political communication from an interpersonal perspective (e.g., Eveland, Morey, & Hutchens, 2011). Previous research suggests
that interpersonal communication (e.g., discussing ingroup-defining attributes) can increase the salience of ingroup identity and facilitate self-categorization (Haslam et al., 1998). Given evidence that the self-categorization process underlies opinion formation and perception, political discussions in either a face-to-face context or online environment should enhance people’s opinion certainty and consensus perceptions, particularly when the topic of conversation is ingroup normative concerns.

Implications for previous explanations of opinion consensus perceptions
Consistent with Spears and Manstead’s (1990) findings, we showed that participants perceive stronger consensus for positions that are consistent with the stereotypical expectations of a group. Also consistent with Price’s (1989) findings, we showed that intergroup conflicts extremize opinion consensus perceptions. However, we extended their work by showing that the perceptions of group norms are not fixed but contextually variable and that group norm perceptions influence opinion consensus perceptions following the fit principle. Opinion consensus perceptions are not influenced by social expectations per se, but rather by the perceived connection between these expectations and different issue positions that influence.

Our findings have implications for the social projection model as well (Krueger, 1998). Specifically, while corroborating previous findings that social projections are not inevitable (Mullen et al., 1992; Sherman et al., 1983), our research went a step further by showing that even when the target is an ingroup (for which social projections have been found most robust), people only project in conditions specified by self-categorization theory—when normative fit is low. Our research thus challenges the notion that “the surest way to eliminate projections is to ask people to estimate social consensus for a group to which they do not belong” (Krueger, 2000, p. 334; italics our own).

The similarity-contingency model (Ames, 2004) posits that, depending on the perceived similarity between oneself and a social comparisons target, people alternate the use of projection and stereotyping to estimate opinion consensus. People project when perceived self-other similarity is high but stereotype when perceived similarity is low. Though the hypothesis receives support, it remains unclear why perceived similarity would moderate inference strategies.

From the perspective of self-categorization theory, perceived self-other similarity essentially indexes how likely people are to categorize themselves and others as belonging to the same or different groups (e.g., Mackie, 1986; Spears et al., 1997). The more similarities people perceive between themselves and others, the more likely they would categorize themselves and others as ingroup members with a shared ingroup prototype. Because the ingroup prototype describes how ingroup members would think and behave, increased similarity perceptions would lead to opinion consensus (see our Experiment 2).

In contrast, people are more likely to categorize dissimilar others as outgroup members and perceive them as conforming to outgroup norms. As this happens, one can no longer use personal positions but has to rely on outgroup stereotypes.
to perceive opinion consensus. Therefore, while the similarity-contingency model assumes that people use two different strategies (i.e., social projection and stereotyping) to assess opinion consensus, self-categorization theory suggests a single mechanism (i.e., perceptual assimilation to group prototypes), and thereby provides a more parsimonious explanation.

**Boundary conditions and theoretical integration**

Our research extends previous work on the cognitions involved in opinion consensus perceptions, but we did not directly test any of the current motivation models. Nonetheless, self-categorization theory offers opportunities for integrating cognitive and motivational mechanisms. For example, Morrison and Matthes (2011) showed that belongingness needs motivate opinion consensus perceptions. To the extent that people perceive opinion consensus primarily based on the fit between an issue and ingroup norm, people who are chronically concerned with social exclusion or primed with exclusion threats would be more likely to perceptually enhance the normative fit of an issue, and thereby perceive greater opinion consensus. Self-categorization theory further predicts that the effect of social exclusion on opinion consensus perceptions should depend on people’s self-perceived ingroup prototypicality. Compared to marginal group members, highly prototypical group members should be more responsive to threats of social exclusion and perceive stronger consensus (so as to bolster their own position).

The self-categorization mechanism may also interact with informational goals (Nir, 2011) to influence opinion consensus perceptions. From a self-categorization perspective, informational goals may be part of accessibility. To the extent that people who are high in directional goals but low in accuracy goals seek information that confirms their existing views, they should be particularly sensitive to issue positions that are consistent with their ingroup norm, and ready to self-categorize—and categorize others—based on opinion positions. Therefore, the combination of high directional and low accuracy goals should motivate people to perceive even stronger opinion consensus for issues with high normative fit. In summary, the integration of the cognitive, self-categorization mechanism, and motivational mechanisms generate predictions that cannot be made by either explanation alone.

**Limitations**

To assess participants’ consensus perceptions for the drinking issue, we used the item “___% of UCSB undergraduates will endorse the kind of drinking habits of UCSB students during a typical IV weekend,” and to assess their consensus perceptions for the testing issue, we used the item “___% of UCSB undergraduates will support keeping standardized testing as a college-entry criterion.” Compared to the testing-issue item, the item for the drinking issue may have suffered from a certain degree of ambiguity. First, the word “endorse” could mean “to support” or “to recommend,” and thus the two items do not exactly parallel each other. However, even if participants had interpreted the word “endorse” as “to recommend,” the
item should still have captured their estimations of UCSB students’ general approval of the drinking issue—arguably, a supportive attitude precedes the action to recommend. Although a more consistent word choice would be desirable, we doubt that the validity of our findings was compromised.

As another potential limitation, the phrase “the kind of drinking habit” in the drinking item does not specify the level of alcohol consumption and is therefore open to interpretation. While this may be true, the level of alcohol consumption among UCSB undergraduates is stereotypically high, and the phrase “during a typical IV weekend”—the usual time and location for partying—should have reinforced this impression. In fact, specifying the drinking habit (e.g., 10 bottles of beer per party) might not be as effective as our item because people are likely to disagree about the specific level of alcohol consumption that they believe best represents the UCSB drinking norm. If we adopted this approach, we would need to control for participants’ personal views on the drinking norm, which would introduce more error variance. Further, by keeping participants’ interpretations of the item general, we actually provided a more conservative test of our predictions, rendering our findings all the more surprising.

Third, the connection between the issue about retaining standardized testing and the “study” norm deserves comment. While the policy itself may not be a part of the study norm, keeping or abandoning standardized testing should reflect the competitiveness of entering a school and thus concern the school as a reputable academic institution. Supporting this notion, Pilot Study 2 showed that the level of perceived consensus for this issue increased as the target school changed from the Chico State to UCSB to Stanford. Further, we showed that the level of perceived support for the issue increased when UCSB was compared with another party school (Experiment 3) and when participants’ attention was drawn to the academic credentials of UCSB (Experiment 4). These changes would not have occurred if participants did not associate the testing issue with a study norm.

Finally, we used single items to assess opinion consensus perceptions. While to use multiple items increases measurement reliability, this should not be an issue for our experiments. Compared to attitudinal or personality-trait items, percentage estimations are more transparent in meaning. Indeed, previous research on consensus estimations has mostly used single items (e.g., Miller & Morrison, 2009; Morrison & Matthes, 2011; Wojcieszak & Price, 2009).

**Conclusion**

The perception of public opinion consensus mediates many communicative activities (e.g., opinion formation and expression) and is key to understanding public opinion as a communicative phenomenon. Previous explanations of opinion consensus perceptions either assumes that these perceptions are inherently biased or suggest they follow directly from group norm perceptions. Drawing on self-categorization theory, we showed how opinion consensus perceptions result from group norms perceptions as a dynamic process involving the features of the issues under judgment, the context...
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in which the judgments are made, and perceivers’ own characteristics. This self-categorization explanation has the potential of integrating a diverse array of cognitive and motivation processes into a coherent account of public opinion formation, perceptions and expressions. Together with previous research on self-categorization explanations for third-person perceptions (Reid & Hogg, 2005), language and social influence (Reid, Palomares, Anderson, & Bondad-Brown, 2009), and the hostile media effect (Reid, 2012), this set of experiments continues to demonstrate the utility of self-categorization theory to the explication of communication phenomena.

Notes

1 Although many schools are regarded as having strong party norms, we chose Chico State because it is located in northern California, as is Stanford (our other target school). This choice makes these target groups geographically comparable, and decreases the possibility that participants would categorize schools based on their location.
2 IV, or Isla Vista, the local student enclave.
3 Although there were more female than male participants in all five experiments, there was no evidence for effects of gender on the perception of school norms, or the fit between the issues and school norms in the pilot studies. There was also no evidence that adding gender alters statistical conclusions in any of our main experiments.

References


