

Publication

## A Sampling Model of Social Judgment

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Studies of social judgments have demonstrated a number of diverse phenomena that were so far difficult to explain within a single theoretical framework. Prominent examples are false consensus and false uniqueness, as well as self-enhancement and self-depreciation. Here we show that these seemingly complex phenomena can be a product of an interplay between basic cognitive processes and the structure of social and task environments. We propose and test a new process model of social judgment, the social sampling model (SSM), which provides a parsimonious quantitative account of different types of social judgments. In the SSM, judgments about characteristics of broader social environments are based on sampling of social instances from memory, where instances receive activation if they belong to a target reference class and have a particular characteristic. These sampling processes interact with the properties of social and task environments, including homophily, shapes of frequency distributions, and question formats. For example, in line with the model's predictions we found that whether false consensus or false uniqueness will occur depends on the level of homophily in people's social circles and on the way questions are asked. The model also explains some previously unaccounted-for patterns of self-enhancement and self-depreciation. People seem to be well informed about many characteristics of their immediate social circles, which in turn influence how they evaluate broader social environments and their position within them.

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