

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, November 25, 2013

Where: JMHH 255

When: 12:00 noon to 1:20 PM

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CHANGING CLIMATES OF CONFLICT: SOCIAL NETWORK EXPERIMENTS ON INFLUENCE, NORMS, AND BEHAVIOR

Abstract from presentation's related paper "The Salience of Social Referents: A Field Experiment on Collective Norms and Harassment Behavior in a School Social Network"

Elizabeth Levy Paluck and Hana Shepherd, Princeton University

Abstract: Persistent, widespread harassment in schools can be understood as a product of collective school norms that deem harassment, and behavior allowing harassment to escalate, as typical and even desirable. Thus, one approach to reducing harassment is to change students' perceptions of these collective norms. Theory suggests that the public behavior of highly connected and chronically salient actors in a group, called *social referents*, may provide influential cues for individuals' perception of collective norms. Using repeated, complete social network surveys of a public high school, we demonstrate that changing the public behavior of a randomly assigned subset of student social referents changes their peers' perceptions of school collective norms and their harassment behavior. Social referents exert their influence over peers' perceptions of collective norms through the mechanism of everyday social interaction, particularly interaction that is frequent and personally motivated, in contrast to interaction shaped by institutional channels like shared classes. These findings clarify the development of collective social norms: They depend on certain patterns of and motivations for social interactions within groups across time, and are not static but constantly reshaped and reproduced through these interactions. Understanding this process creates opportunities for changing collective norms and behavior.