

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, November 10, 2025

Where: JMHH G50

When: 12:00 – 1:20 pm

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Origins of Bias in Perceived Social Norms from Social Network Formation

ABSTRACT:

Perceptions of social norms affect individual action but are often biased. The extent of such bias may depend on the manner in which people with different attributes come to be connected in social networks. Here, we study 2160 people in 120 experimentally-generated networks while they play a public goods game and observe others' behavior. After each decision, people report their perception of the average community behavior (the social norm), and we measure the actual behavior, locally and globally in the network. We find that when networks are structured with high similarity (propensity to connect with others who contribute similar amounts to the public good) and "main-effect" attraction (propensity to connect with others who contribute a lot to the public good) central individuals form significantly more biased perceptions of the social norm of contribution. In such networks, the most central individuals perceive their community to be substantially more generous than they are. As time goes on, however, their perceptions become more accurate, as information filters from the periphery towards them. Norms may come to be misperceived in communities, especially by individuals in particular network locations and for particular kinds of attributes.

