

Online seminar by Gregg Sparkman
Date: January 25th, 2022
Time: 15,00 hrs

Title;
Perceiving and Misperceiving Social Reality

Abstract;

In this talk, I will share two lines of ongoing research on the perception and influence of social norms and social realities more broadly. First, I will introduce a "Norm Network" approach to examining social influence. Most research on social norms investigates the influence of one (or two) norm perceptions at a time--but in reality we are likely influenced by many related norms at once. Exploring this in the context of energy and the environment, I illustrate how dozens of interconnected norm perceptions relate to each other and to one's own decision making. I then plot these networks, examine features of norms that determine their network structure, and describe their function in terms of how causality operates with them. After, I discuss the possible benefits of this norm network approach in better understanding social influence, and designing social norm interventions. In a second line of research, I examine discrepancies between perceived and actual norms in the context of climate policy attitudes in the U.S. Here, we find a remarkable form of pluralistic ignorance, one where misperceptions are so large as to invert the norm status, and are so prevalent as to be near-universal—a scenario we refer to as a "False Social Reality". Specifically, Americans who support major climate policies outnumber opponents two to one, but the public *nearly universally perceives the opposite to be true*. We granularly investigate these robust misperceptions across regions, policies and demographics, as well as assess potential contributing factors.