

Differential Construal as an Explanation for False Consensus and False Uniqueness Effects

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As shown by Gilovich (1990), the False Consensus Effect (FCE, i.e., people's tendency to relatively overestimate the commonness of their own position) can be the result of differential construal. The question addressed in the present research was whether differential construal results not only in a FCE but also in a False Uniqueness Effect (FUE, i.e., the relative underestimation of one's position). This may be due to the match or mismatch between the positive or negative construal of a category and expectations associated with reference groups. Results of Study 1 showed that FCE's occurred for an ingroup and an outgroup for which expectations matched positive construals. A FUE occurred in estimates for an outgroup for which expectations matched negative construals. Study 2, using a different design, replicated these findings. © 1995 Academic Press, Inc.

People tend to perceive their own characteristics, opinions, traits, and preferences as relatively *common* (the *False Consensus Effect*, Ross, Greene, & House, 1977), but this is not always the case. Under some circumstances they perceive their own position as relatively *uncommon* (the *False Uniqueness Effect*, e.g., Mullen, Dovidio, Johnson, & Copper, 1992). The False Consensus Effect (FCE) occurs when a person, engaging in a given behavior, estimates that behavior to be shared by a *larger* proportion of the reference group than estimated by a person engaging in an alternative behavior (cf. Mullen & Hu, 1988, p. 334). The False Uniqueness Effect (FUE) occurs when a person,

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engaging in a given behavior, estimates that behavior to be shared by a *smaller* proportion of the reference group than estimated by a person engaging in an alternative behavior.¹

The FCE has been documented extensively (see Marks & Miller, 1987, for an overview). Explanations tend to fall into two categories: cognitive and motivational. Cognitive explanations that have received empirical support include selective exposure and cognitive availability. The first of these explanations is that people are generally surrounded by similar others, and when asked to estimate the prevalence of a certain behavior, the (similar) positions of these others come easily to mind and will be generalized to a broader reference group, which leads to relatively high estimates for the prevalence of own position (Bosveld, Koomen, & Van der Pligt, 1994; Sherman, Presson, Chassin, Corty, & Olshavsky, 1983). In a similar vein, the availability of own position will lead to relatively high estimates for the occurrence of that position (Marks & Duval, 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). With respect to motivational accounts for the FCE, Marks and Miller (1987) refer to maintaining self-esteem and reduction of uncertainty as possible explanations (see also Agostinelli, Sherman, & Chassin, 1992; Deutsch, 1989; Sherman, Presson, & Chassin, 1984).

Explanations for the FUE are documented less extensively, mainly because this phenomenon has received only limited attention. Mullen et al. (1992) provided evidence for the FUE in estimates for outgroups. They explained these findings in terms of categorization strength, i.e., the extent to which group members are categorized as in-or outgroup members. Mullen et al.'s results show that when this categorization is strong, subjects relatively underestimate the prevalence of their own choices in estimates for an outgroup. A second demonstration of the FUE was provided by Suls, Wan, Barlow, and Heimberg (1990). Referring to the FUE as a "relative uniqueness effect," these authors showed that subjects suffering from anxiety disorders underestimated the size of their own category (phobics) relative to estimates provided by subjects not suffering from these problems. Among the explanations for their findings Suls et al. refer to non-patients' tendency to perceive "false positive uniqueness" ("few people share my mental health", cf. Suls et al., 1990, p. 429), bolstering self-esteem. They further suggest that misunderstanding of the relevant disorders by non-patients may have affected their estimates; non-patients may assume that the social phobic's fears are not very different from their own mild anxieties. Other evidence for a FUE comes from Frable (1993) showing that people with especially culturally stigmatized and invisible conditions, such as gays or incest victims, perceive some of their own preferences (unrelated to these stigmatized characteristics) as relatively uncommon,

¹ As mentioned by Mullen et al. (1992), there is some debate with respect to the term "False Uniqueness". In the present study we will use Mullen et al.'s (1992) definition and refer to the relative underestimation of the prevalence of own choices as a False Uniqueness Effect.

this compared to people with culturally valued or stigmatized but visible conditions, such as the physically attractive or the obese. Frable (1993) argues that because people with invisible stigmatized conditions do not easily see others who share their condition, they must conclude that they are unique.

With respect to the explanations for the FCE and FUE, it is important to note that no integrative mechanisms have been put forward that may underlie both phenomena, that is, most of the factors supposed to underlie the FCE cannot explain the FUE and vice versa. The aim of the present article is to provide such an integrative framework by introducing *differential construal* as a factor mediating consensus estimates (Gilovich, 1990; Ross et al., 1977).

Construal processes (e.g., Griffin & Ross, 1991) can be considered a powerful mediator of social cognitive phenomena. For example, Kunda and Sherman-Williams (1993) showed that judgments on the basis of stereotypes may be mediated by subjects' construal of the relevant behavior. More specifically, they demonstrated that when subjects were asked to judge the aggressiveness of a relatively ambiguous behavior (hitting someone else), they used the source (for example, a housewife or a construction worker), judging this behavior as more or less aggressive depending on the stereotypicality of the source for aggressive behavior. When the behavior was described less ambiguously, no differences were found in ratings of aggressiveness. Studies by Dunning and associates provided evidence for construal processes in other domains. For example, Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg (1989) showed that self-evaluations of abilities were more positive when the relevant abilities provided subjects with more room for construal. Dunning and Cohen (1992) showed that construal may have other self-serving functions. In their study, subjects differed in their definitions of traits and abilities as a function of their own performance related to these traits and abilities. More specifically, these authors found a positive correlation between subjects' performance and the criterion subjects considered necessary to qualify for a specific trait.

With respect to consensus estimation, Gilovich (1990) suggests that the perception of our own preferences, behaviors, etc. as relatively common may be a function of different construals of the relevant stimuli. He argues that people, holding different views with respect to, for example, the general category of "Italian films" may have in mind different types of films. Gilovich illustrates this as follows. When people have to decide whether they prefer French or Italian films, they first have to determine what these categories mean. If *Bicycle Thieves* and *La Strada* become available when thinking of Italian films, people may be more likely to choose Italian films and to estimate that a larger percentage of their peers would choose likewise than if they construe Italian films to mean spaghetti Westerns (p. 623). Gilovich defined differential construal as "*the subset of specific instances or the sample of particular features that come to mind when a person considers a particular object, category or alternative*" (p. 632) and showed that people's estimates about the prevalence of their own position with respect to, for example, recent versus

older films and 60s versus 80s pop music, were mediated by the specific exemplars they had in mind, i.e., their construal of those categories. Whereas Gilovich has pointed at the relevance of differential construal for the occurrence of a FCE, we predict that the same underlying mechanism may also lead to a FUE, dependent upon the reference group for which estimates are provided.

When people give consensus estimates for a certain reference group, they rely on actual knowledge or expectations with respect to that group (Nisbett & Kunda, 1985). Spears and Manstead (1990) also point to the fact that consensus estimates are very sensitive to prior expectations and that both self-generated and sample-based estimates may reflect the operation of "subtle preconceptions or stereotypes" (p. 105).

On the basis of differential construal and this assumed relationship between expectations and consensus estimates for a reference group, we expect the consensus estimates mediated by differential construal may reflect a FCE, but also, depending on relevant group-based expectations, a reversal of the FCE, or a FUE.

A key assumption is that consensus estimates may be affected by the extent to which there is a match between the construal of a category and expectations about the reference group. The main prediction is that higher estimates for the number of others favorable toward a category follow when subject's construal matches expectations associated with the reference group, while lower estimates follow if construals do not match these expectations.

Evidence for this process underlying consensus estimates comes from a preliminary study (Bosveld, 1994) in which it was shown that men and women tend to construe the activity of "going into town" in different terms. The majority of men construed this behavior in terms of "going out," whereas the majority of women construed this activity in terms of "going shopping." Further, when asked to estimate the popularity of the general behavior (going into town) for both men and women, the majority of men estimated this behavior as more popular among men and less popular among women, whereas the majority of women estimated this behavior to be more popular among women and less popular among men. More importantly, it was shown that a minority of men, construing the general behavior in terms of shopping, estimated this behavior to be more popular among women and less popular among men, whereas a minority of women, construing the behavior in terms of going out, showed a reverse picture in their estimates. Together, these findings suggest an interaction between construal and group-related expectations in consensus estimates. In line with these results, we expect that differential construal (Gilovich, 1990) and the use of group-related expectations (Nisbett & Kunda, 1985; Spears & Manstead, 1990), affect people's estimates of the number of others favorable toward a general category. The key factor here is the match between people's construal of a category and their expectations regarding the reference group. If expectations and construal do not match,

relatively low estimates will follow, whereas relatively high estimates will follow when expectations match construal. Thus, depending on the reference group, differential construal as a mediating factor may affect consensus estimates and result in either a FCE or a FUE.

STUDY 1

Evidence for differential construal was correlational in Gilovich's study (subjects themselves listed exemplars). In the present study, subjects were exposed to different sets of exemplars associated with a general category by asking them to rate these exemplars. It was expected that priming subjects with a set of exemplars would lead them to perceive the exemplars as "capturing" the category and accordingly affect subjects' judgment about that category (Burner, 1957; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Smith & Zárate, 1992; Srull & Wyer, 1979).

Subjects were asked to estimate preferences for the category of "stand-up comedians"² for their own group (students) and for two other groups (elderly and yuppies). One group of subjects was exposed to exemplars of this category that were rated as appealing in a pilot-study and that were associated with their own group and with yuppies. A second group of subjects was exposed to exemplars that were rated as less appealing by students and that were associated with the elderly. Subjects exposed to appealing exemplars were expected to express a more positive evaluation of the general category of stand-up comedians than subjects exposed to less appealing exemplars. More importantly, across conditions subjects were expected to show a FCE in estimates for students and a FUE in estimates for elderly. This is because subjects exposed to positive exemplars would have in mind exemplars that matched expectations for the group of students, leading to higher estimates of the number of students with such a preference. Subjects exposed to negative exemplars, on the other hand, should have in mind exemplars that do not match expectations associated with students, leading to lower estimates of the number of students with a preference for the general category. Thus, subjects with a positive construal will give higher estimates of the number of students with a preference for the general category than subjects with a negative construal resulting in a FCE in estimates for students.

In the elderly condition, a reverse pattern is predicted. Subjects with a positive construal should have in mind exemplars that did not match expectations for this reference group and consequently are expected to give relatively low estimates of the percentage of elderly with a preference for the general category. Subjects with a negative construal were assumed to have in mind exemplars that match expectations for this reference group and therefore

² The Dutch term "cabaret" refers to a general category of performers that combine humorous sketches with musical interludes in programs lasting between 1 and 3 h. This is different from category of stand-up comedians. Since the latter category comes closest to the category of cabaret performers we denote this category as "stand-up comedians."

give higher estimates of elderly with a preference for the general category. Thus, subjects with a positive construal were expected to give lower estimates than subjects with a negative construal resulting in a FUE in estimates for the elderly.

However, one alternative interpretation should be mentioned for these predicted results. Since the second reference group is actually an outgroup, subjects may exhibit a FUE in estimates for this group as the result of identity management strategies (Spears & Manstead, 1990) or social categorization factors (Mullen et al., 1992). As Mullen et al., (1992) showed, especially if the ingroup–outgroup categorization is strong, subjects may exhibit a FUE in estimates for an outgroup, possibly not on the basis of expectations, but merely because they do not want their own preferences to be shared by these outgroup members. In order to control for this competing explanation, subjects were also asked, as noted before, to estimate the preferences of a third group (yuppies), for which the affective evaluation would be similar to (or less positive) than the outgroup of elderly, but for which the relevant expectations were found to be comparable to the expectations associated with the own group. If subjects assess the match between their construal of a category and expectations associated with reference groups, a FCE for the outgroup of yuppies is predicted. Thus, estimates were given for own group and two other groups (elderly and yuppies). For the first outgroup expectations differed from the expectations held for the own group, whereas for the second outgroup these expectations were more or less similar.

Method

Overview

The study was introduced to subjects as being about “judging comedians.” After a short introduction, subjects saw seven video-clips of Dutch “stand-up comedians.”³ In one condition the comedians shown were generally liked by students and were expected to lead to a positive construal of the general category of Dutch stand-up comedians. In a second condition a more negative construal was expected, because the comedians shown were generally disliked by students. After seeing each clip, subjects rated the extent to which they thought the comedian was *amusing* and *good*. Then, subjects gave their ratings of the general category of stand-up comedians on nine rating scales. After this, subjects generated consensus estimates for three reference groups: students, elderly, and yuppies. The first group was subjects' own reference group, the elderly group was the outgroup matching a negative construal, and yuppies were the outgroup matching a positive construal. Finally, we assessed a general affective evaluation of the reference groups.

Subjects

Eighty-five first-year students (61 women, 19 men, and 5 whose sex was unknown) participated in this experiment. Subjects participated voluntarily and were randomly assigned to conditions.

³ In a second part of this experiment, subjects were provided with exemplars associated with the category of video-movies. This manipulation, however, did not affect subjects' construal of the general category and results will therefore not be reported here.

Construal of the General Category

The manipulation consisted of two sets of seven video-clips of about 1 min, recorded on video-tape, showing performances of stand-up comedians. One set of clips consisted mostly of comedians who were mentioned by subjects in a pilot study when asked to list comedians they considered to be good, whereas the second set consisted mostly of comedians listed by subjects as rather bad. Referring to Gilovich's (1990) definition of construal, we expected that subjects' construal (and accordingly their evaluation) of the general category would be affected by the exemplars with which they were provided.

In order to increase the credibility of the manipulation, the positive condition consisted of five clips that were positively evaluated by students in a pilot study, one negative clip (shown second), and a neutral clip (a comedian, equally referred to as positive and negative, shown fifth). In the negative condition the manipulation contained five negative clips, a neutral and a positive clip. Time between each clip was used to administer a short questionnaire, related to the clip just shown.

Reference groups. Besides the ingroup (students), two other reference groups were selected on the basis of a pilot study. Subjects were asked to list exemplars of the category of stand-up comedians that they considered either good or bad examples of the general category. Further, they were asked "what kind of people" they could think of, in relation to each of the comedians, resulting in the two reference groups mentioned earlier: *elderly* (associated more frequently with negative examples) and *yuppies* (associated more frequently with positive examples).

Rating of clips. Rating of clips was measured by two 7-point scales ranging from not at all amusing (1) to very amusing (7) and from very bad (1) to very good (7).

Rating of the general category. Subjects' construal of the general category of stand-up comedians was measured by their ratings on eight dimensions: "amusing," "funny," "good," "fascinating," "aggressive," "intellectual," "progressive," "boring," and a question in which the general appreciation for the category was asked. All ratings were measured by using 7-point scales, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) or from 1 (very negative) to 7 (very positive).

Ratings of reference groups. Reference groups were rated on three dimensions: "pleasant" (how pleasant is this group), "positive" (how positive is your position with respect to this group), and "sympathetic" (how sympathetic is this group). Subjects rated all three reference groups on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Consensus estimates. Subjects were asked to estimate in percentages how each of the three reference groups thought about stand-up comedians; for example: "What percentage of the elderly do you think likes stand-up comedians?" The order of first and second reference group (students and elderly) was systematically varied.

Results

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the mean evaluations of the seven clips with construal (positive/negative) as a between-subjects factor showed that clips in the positive conditions were rated as significantly more amusing ($M = 5.15$) than those in the negative condition ($M = 4.13$), $F(1, 83) = 41.92$, $p < .001$. These clips were also rated higher on the bad-good scale (positive: $M = 4.96$; negative: $M = 4.29$), $F(1, 83) = 15.56$, $p < .001$. We also expected that presentation of positive and negative clips would affect subjects' construal of the general category of Dutch stand-up comedians. An ANOVA on the mean score of the nine ratings of the general category indicated that subjects were more positive in the positive condition ($M = 4.95$) than in the negative condition ($M = 4.41$), $F(1, 84) = 17.46$, $p < .001$. Thus, the manipulation resulted in differential construal of the general category.

TABLE 1
MEAN AFFECTIVE EVALUATIONS OF THE THREE REFERENCE GROUPS

	Students	Elderly	Yuppies
Positive	5.37 ^a	4.72 ^b	3.97 ^c
Pleasant	4.91 ^a	4.04 ^b	3.68 ^c
Sympathetic	5.05 ^a	4.71 ^b	3.95 ^c

Means with a differing superscript differ (within one row) at $p < .05$ (using paired t tests) (scores could range from 1(not at all) to 7(very)).

Table 1 shows the affective evaluations of the three reference groups. As can be seen from this table, yuppies were perceived as less positive, pleasant and sympathetic as compared to elderly, whereas students were rated most favorably on all measures.

The order in which reference groups were presented did not affect the estimates; therefore, this factor was not included in the analyses. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the three reference groups as a within-subjects factor and construal as a between-subjects factor was performed on the estimates. This analysis revealed a main effect for construal: positive construal was associated with higher estimates than negative construal, $F(1, 83) = 12.56, p < .01$, and a reference group main effect: on average, estimates for students were higher than for the other two groups, $F(2, 166) = 5.83, p < .01$ (Fig. 1). More importantly, a significant construal \times reference

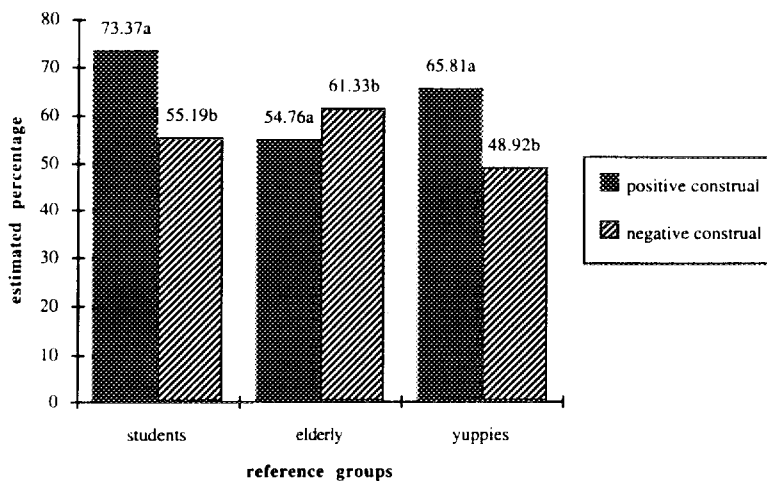


FIG 1. Mean estimates of the percentage of students, elderly, and yuppies with a preference for Dutch stand-up comedians. Within one reference group, means not sharing the same subscript differ at $p < .01$. For the reference group of elderly at $p < .05$ (one-tailed).

group interaction was found, indicating that estimates were a function of the match between construal and expectations, $F(2, 166) = 19.50, p < .001$.⁴

Whereas this interaction supports our predictions, a second test was needed in order to check whether these differences indeed revealed a FCE for students and yuppies and a FUE for elderly. Differences in estimates for students and yuppies were significant, for students $t(83) = 5.24, p < .001$ and for yuppies, $t(83) = 4.43, p < .001$. Thus, subjects who construed the general category in positive terms (and who were more positive towards the general category) estimated a higher percentage of students and yuppies with a preference for that category than subjects construing the general category in negative terms (and who were less positive toward the general category), indicating FCEs. Estimates for elderly also differed significantly, $t(83) = 1.70, p < .05, one-tailed$. Subjects with negative construals (and a more negative evaluation) estimated that a larger percentage of the elderly would have a preference for the general category than subjects with positive construals (and a more positive evaluation), indicating a FUE.

Discussion

Results of Study 1 suggest that the match between subjects' construal of a category and expectations associated with reference groups may result in either a FCE or a FUE. Subjects (students) exposed to positive exemplars favored the general category and estimated a relatively high number of others with a preference, not only for their own group but also for a second group (yuppies) that was associated with these exemplars. In contrast, subjects provided with negative exemplars did not favor the general category and estimated a relatively small number of others with a preference among their own group and the group of yuppies. Thus, estimates for these two groups showed a FCE. For the group of elderly, the predicted FUE occurred. Expectations associated with this reference group matched subjects' construals in the negative condition and did not match construals by subjects in the positive condition.

Although these results confirm our predictions, one could object that the estimates for the three groups were asked in a within-subjects design, whereas estimates for yuppies were always asked last. As a result, differences between the preferences ascribed to the three groups may have been exaggerated or diminished (see for example Spears & Manstead, 1990; Wilder & Thompson,

⁴ Strictly speaking, since the construal manipulation, instead of subjects' preferences was used to establish relationships, we cannot refer to these results as demonstrations of a FCE and a FUE. Using (a median split on) subjects' preferences showed the predicted interaction, $F(2, 166) = 5.79, p < 0.5$ in Study 1, and $F(2, 281) = 3.76, p < .05$ in Study 2, but the mean estimates, although in the predicted direction, were somewhat less clear-cut than the mean estimates on the basis of the construal manipulation. This of course because preferences (and estimates) may be have been also based on other factors than construal. Since we were mainly interested in the effect of construal on estimates, we therefore will elaborate on the construal \times reference group interaction, instead of the effect of subjects' preferences.

1988). Although statistical efficiency may be greater in a within-subjects design, context effects may interfere with hypothesis tests (see Greenwald, 1976). We attempted to avoid these possible anchoring effects in Study 2 in which we used a between-subjects design.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was aimed at replicating and extending the results of Study 1, by using a between-subjects instead of a within-subjects design. Furthermore, instead of exposing subjects to clips of the comedians, they were exposed in this study to the written names of these comedians. This was done because Study 2 was run in groups of about 75 subjects, making the use of video clips difficult.

Method

Overview

Subjects received a booklet on the first page of which the materials were introduced as a "judging comedians" task. They then read the names of seven Dutch stand-up comedians and, after reading each name, were asked to report the amount of money they would spend on a performance by each comedian. Because these comedians were the same as the comedians used in Study 1, we expected the manipulation to affect the construal of the general category. Next, subjects were asked to estimate the percentage of a specific reference group (students, elderly, or yuppies) with a preference for Dutch stand-up comedians. Following this question, subjects were asked to rate the general category on eight specific scales and one general scale, the same as those used in Study 1.

Subjects

Subjects were 280 first-year psychology students (93 men and 187 women) at the University of Amsterdam. They participated voluntarily and were randomly assigned to conditions. The questionnaire was included in a large set of questionnaires and answered in groups of about 75 subjects.

Construal of the general category. Construal was manipulated by presenting subjects with the names of seven comedians, the same names used in Study 1. Thus in the positive condition, names of five appealing comedians, an unappealing comedian, and a comedian equally referred to as positive and negative were presented. In the negative condition, five not-appealing names and an appealing and a neutral name were presented.

Reference groups. As in Study 1 the three reference groups were students, yuppies, and elderly.

Rating of comedians. Evaluation of comedians was measured by the amount of money subjects reported they would spend on each of the comedians' performance.⁵

Rating of the general category. Subject's construal of the general category of Dutch stand-up comedians was measured by their ratings on eight dimensions similar to the dimensions used in

⁵ Within this measure, response alternatives were manipulated (see Schwarz, Strack, Müller, & Chassein, 1988). In one condition five alternatives were presented, ranging from 1 ('0–10 Dutch guilders') to 5 ('over 25 Dutch guilders') (low alternative condition), whereas in the second condition alternatives ranged from 1 ('0–30 Dutch guilders') to 5 ('over 45 Dutch guilders') (high alternative condition). Our aim was to affect the evaluation of the general category, expecting subjects in the low alternative condition to infer from their choice more positive evaluation of the general category. Since this manipulation, however, did not affect the evaluation, nor did have any effect on the other measures, this measure was left out of the analyses and discussion of Study 2.

Study 1: amusing, funny, good, fascinating, aggressive, intellectual, progressive, and boring and a question in which the general appreciation for the category was asked. All ratings were measured by using 7-point scales, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

Consensus estimates. For one of the three reference groups, subjects were asked to estimate the percentage of this reference group with a preference for Dutch stand-up comedians.

Results and Discussion

An ANOVA with construal (positive/negative) as a between-subjects factor showed that subjects would spend significantly more money on the comedians in the positive condition ($M = 2.55$) than in the negative condition ($M = 1.91$), $F(1, 281) = 34.18$, $p < .001$, indicating that this manipulation was successful.

We next tested the extent to which the construal (positive/negative) manipulation affected the evaluation of the general category. As in Study 1, an ANOVA on the mean score of the nine ratings of the general category revealed that subjects were more positive in the positive condition ($M = 4.66$) than in the negative condition ($M = 4.27$), $F(1, 283) = 23.80$, $p < .001$.

The effects of the construal manipulation on consensus estimates were analyzed in a 3(reference group) \times 2(construal) ANOVA. No main effects were found; the reference group main effect did not reach significance, $F(2, 276) = 2.69$, ns, and neither did the construal main effect, $F(1, 276) < 1$, ns. As in Study 1, however, the predicted interaction was significant, again suggesting the predicted patterns in subjects' estimates, $F(2, 276) = 6.40$, $p < .01$ (see Fig. 2).

T tests further revealed that the differences in estimates for students and elderly were significant, $t(99) = 2.67$, $p < .01$ for students, indicating a FCE,

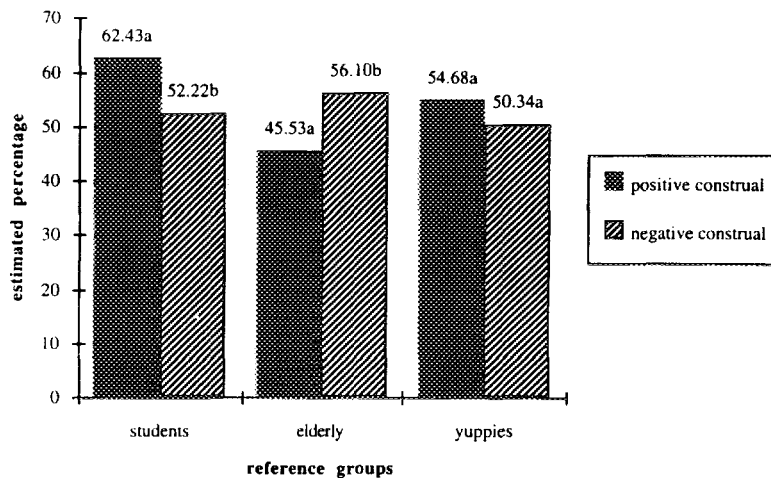


FIG. 2. Mean estimates of the percentage of students, elderly, and yuppies, with a preference for Dutch stand-up comedians. Within one reference group, means not sharing the same subscript differ at $p < .01$.

and $t(76) = 2.38$, $p < .05$ for elderly, indicating a FUE. The difference in estimates for yuppies, although in the expected direction, did not reach significance, $t(101) = 1.10$, ns. Thus, although Study 2 generally replicated the findings of Study 1, the predicted effect on estimates for yuppies was less pronounced than in Study 1. A possible explanation for this lack of significance may be that, although subjects' estimates were in the direction of a FCE on the basis of construal processes, social identity or categorization factors (Spears & Manstead, 1990; Mullen et al., 1992) may have also affected their estimates. Since yuppies are generally perceived as less positive these estimates may reflect a more general tendency to perceive less consensus for this group than for the own group. However, as argued in Study 1, yuppies were added to the design in order to provide evidence that a mere negative evaluation of a group does not lead to a FUE per se, and this conclusion seems justified, regardless of this nonsignificant FCE in estimates for yuppies.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main question addressed in the present research was whether differential construal can result in either a FCE or a FUE due to the match or mismatch between the construal of a category and expectations associated with reference groups.

These two studies suggest that the FCE and the FUE indeed were the result of the extent to which the construal of a category matched expectations associated with reference groups. Subjects who construed the general category in terms associated with their own group, and a second group for which similar expectations were held gave high consensus estimates. Subjects construing the general category in terms not associated with these groups estimated low consensus, leading to a FCE in estimates for both groups. On the other hand, the pattern in estimates reversed when estimates were given for a reference group associated with construals by subjects that did not favour the general category, and not associated with construals by subjects that did favour this category, together leading to a FUE. Both studies show that evaluating a category as positive per se does not lead to high estimates of the number of others sharing one's view, independently of reference group. If subjects would have used their evaluations instead of their construals and expectations, a FCE would have occurred for all three groups (or at least the estimates for both outgroups would have been in a similar direction).

These studies suggest that a factor often neglected in research in this field, namely expectations with respect to reference groups, may contribute differentially to consensus estimates. An important reason for neglecting this factor may be that, until Gilovich's (1992) study, hardly any attention was paid to the fact that differences in evaluation may reflect differences in construal (Asch, 1952). If judgmental differences merely reflect differences in the "judgment of the object," then expectations should have a *main effect* on subjects' estimates.

If we like comedians or do not like comedians, but have in mind the same subset of comedians, then our shared expectations with respect to a specific reference group should affect consensus estimates in a similar way. If, on the other hand, judgmental differences reflect differences in the "object of judgment," as Asch suggested long ago, expectations associated with different groups of people may not produce a main effect, but instead, as was shown in the present studies, may *interact* with subjects' construal or the specific exemplars they have in mind.

Both studies provided experimental evidence for the FUE. Whereas construal processes have been suggested as a mediator of the FUE (Suls et al., 1990) they were not related to expectations. The present studies not only established the relationship between construal and expectations but also demonstrated the casual role of construal. These findings also suggest a reason for the fact that only a few studies have shown a FUE. In general, people in a specific group or social category tend to have shared preferences. Accordingly, these preferences may act as expectations with respect to their own group by a process of selective exposure (Bosveld et al., 1994; Sherman et al., 1983). Thus, for subjects with a preference for a category, their construal of this category matches expectations with respect to their own group, leading to relatively high estimates of the number of others in their own group with the same preference. In a similar vein, subjects not favorable with respect to this category may have in mind exemplars that are not associated with expectations or their own group, leading to relatively low estimates of the number of others with a preference for this category. Together, these estimates lead to a FCE, which, as may be clear from this example, seems the obvious result when preferences are group-related. This also explains why the FUE may be expected predominantly in estimates for an outgroup, since for an outgroup expectations do not necessarily mirror the preferences and construals of the own group. Interestingly, the most clear-cut example of a FUE on the basis of subjects' own choice or preference reported so far (Mullen et al., 1992) was found in estimates for an outgroup. Taken together, the present analysis may point to some of the processes underlying the FUE and suggests that this finding is most pronounced in estimates for an outgroup for which issue-related expectations differ from those held for the ingroup.

The present studies provided evidence for the interaction between differential construal and expectations about social categories as a moderator of False Consensus and False Uniqueness Effects. Elaborating on Gilovich's (1990) findings, it was shown experimentally how these processes affect consensus estimates. This relationship between expectations about social categories or groups and construal processes may provide other interesting avenues for future research. Groups such as environmental activists, the religiously or politically active or members of other social groups, may construe their own group membership in rather narrow terms (see Dunning & Cohen, 1992). As Dunning and Cohen (1992) showed, people scoring high on a criterion may set

high inclusion values. Consequently, a process in which one's own position is compared to expectations (or social knowledge, see Spears & Manstead, 1990) with respect to a general population, may lead people to perceive their own position, for example with respect to environmentally responsible behavior, as relatively unique. Evidence for such a process was provided by Bosveld, Koomen, and Van der Pligt (in press), showing that involved Christians perceived the general category of Christians as relatively small compared to estimates by less-involved Christians and non-believers (indicating a FUE with respect to the estimated percentage of Christians). It was also shown that involved Christians construed "a Christian" in relatively narrow terms and, as in the present study, it was subjects' construal, together with their expectations (or social knowledge) that mediated their consensus estimates.

In conclusion, the present studies have shown the relevance of differential construal as a factor in consensus estimation as was suggested by Gilovich (1990). We extended Gilovich's hypothesis by suggesting that people may not merely generalize a positive construal to "most people," but instead give their estimates based on a match between their construal of a category with expectations associated with the relevant reference group, resulting in either a FCE or a FUE.

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