AN “OTHER BASED” APPROACH FOR EXAMINING THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT HYPOTHESIS

Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

The present study is based on the theoretical framework that third-person perceptions are largely influenced by motivational components and cognitive ability, which vary by perceivers (the self-based approach) and comparison targets (the other-based approach), and the relationship between them (the self-other relationship-based approach). Specifically, this study examines how third-person perception differs by comparison targets, called the other-based approach, when a specific group is exclusively relevant or irrelevant to a particular media message. The results of t tests and regression analyses of a survey (n=524) provide substantial support for the other-based approach, which suggests that people account for who comprises the comparison targets, and how the issue is relevant to the comparison targets, when they perceive media effects. Third-person perceptions vary with the comparison targets (those for whom the issue is relevant vs. those for whom the issue is not relevant). Additionally, predictors of the perceptions of media effects and the directions of impacts of the predictors vary with the comparison targets. The results also render support for the self-based approach (i.e., significant effects of issue relevance to perceivers) and for the self-other relationship-based approach (i.e., significant effects of between-group differentiation). In addition to supporting the
three approaches, this study illustrates that communication variables have significant impacts on the perceptions of media effects, which vary with the estimation targets and the issue topics. Finally, the results of question order effects suggest that the third-person effects for a specific group are affected by whether or not the social categorization is salient in the perceptions and that question order can prime the categorization.

The findings have important implications for future studies about the relationship between the perceptual components and behavioral components of the third-person effect. In this discussion the implications are talked about great in detail and some direction for future studies are suggested. In conclusion, communication researchers should account for the variance of the third-person perception by the comparison target when they predict which behavior to examine as a measurement of the behavior third-person effect.
Dedicated to my mother and wife
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 A brief theoretical background of the study

Traditionally, researchers have measured media effects by examining changes in attitudes or behaviors. Early communication researchers believed that media had powerful and immediate influences on audience members with respect to shaping attitudes, beliefs and opinions (e.g., “Magic bullet model,” “Hypodermic needle model,” and “Stimulus-Response” model). However, the bulk of research has indicated that media message effects do not appear to be equally probable for everyone in the audience or in every social context. Rather, research has suggested various conditions under which effects are present, not present or present with varying probabilities based on different types of audiences in varying social contexts (for more details see McLeod & Reeves, 1980). Scholars of media effects have come to suspect that media messages are not processed in the same way for everybody. Their research has focused on how the media may influence individuals’ cognitive processes, such as cognitive learning, construction, and social reality effects (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991). The cognitive processing perspective is based on the idea that people do not literally encode and retrieve information but interpret new information in the context of existing knowledge, beliefs,
and attitudes and the media influence their interpretations (Wicks, 2001). In this perspective, people are affected by cognitively processed media information (e.g., framed or primed concepts in media messages), not just by media information per se (e.g., exposure to explicitly persuasive content of media messages). More recently scholars of the cognitive processing perspective have expanded their interests to include the perceptions that third parties have in processing media messages. For example, some scholars have examined the influence of perceptions of general media effects on the beliefs and behaviors of individuals (e.g., Davidson, 1983; Gunther, 1998; Gunther & Storey, 2003; Perloff, 1989; Price, 1989). These scholars argue that once individuals think that a communication may have some influence on others, this perception can lead to change of attitudes and/or behaviors in the individual. In this case, media effects are indirect rather than direct. That is, media effects are not a direct outcome of exposure to media messages but an outcome of reaction to the perceptions of media effects on other people.

People react to their anticipation of the influence of a message on others and, interestingly, such reactions occur regardless of whether the perception of influence is accurate (Gunther & Storey, 2003). Arguably the most salient instances of such indirect effects take place in an unintended audience, a group that is not the target of a message but, in a roundabout way, is affected by it (Gunther & Storey, 2003). A brief illustration regarding parental television mediation can clarify this point. According to Nathanson, Eveland, Park, and Paul (2002), caregivers frequently take preventive actions to protect their child from negative media effects. For example, caregivers may turn off violent
cartoons if they believe they will harm the child. However, it is not necessarily the children who are most at risk of being negatively affected by the content, but the caregivers because they attribute potential negative effects to the child. In this case the caregivers were affected not by direct media messages, but by the perception that the media would have an impact on a third party, their children.

The term “third-person effect” was coined to describe behavioral influences on unintended targets, which is based on a systematic perceptual bias by which people assume that media messages have a greater impact on others’ beliefs, attitudes, and behavior than on their own (Salwen, 1998). By contrast, some scholars use the terms “first-person effect” or “reverse third-person effect” to describe a tendency of some people to perceive greater media impact on themselves than on others (e.g., David, Liu, & Myser, 2004). Davison (1983) first used the term “third-person effect” to describe his observation of media effects on an unintended target of a message. He described a military unit that consisted of African American troops on Iwo Jima Island in the Pacific during World War II. This predominantly Black troop was led by white officers. The Japanese discovered the location of this unit and sent planes to drop propaganda leaflets over the area. These leaflets stressed the idea that this was a white man’s war and that the Japanese had no quarrel with people of color. The leaflets said: “Don’t risk your life for the white men. Give yourself up at the first opportunity, or just desert. Don’t take chances.” The next day that unit was withdrawn for fear that the African American soldiers would carry out the instructions on the brochures. However, in actuality the
propaganda had no effect on the troops, the intended target, but it did have an effect on the white officers who acted on the leaflets by moving the troops to another location.

This observation suggests that the third-person effect is substantively important not only because it posits an intriguing disconnect between perceptions of communication effects on the self and others, but also because it can have important consequences on attitudes, opinions, and suggest behavior (Perloff, 1999). Corresponding to this two-step process two general third-person effect hypotheses have been proposed: the perceptual third-person effect (third-person perception) hypothesis, which predicts that people will perceive greater media influence on other people than on themselves; and the behavioral third-person effect (third-person behavior) hypothesis, which predicts that as a result of third-person perceptions (or the perceptual third-person effect) people support message restrictions (the behavioral third-person effect) (Salwen, 1998). The present study focuses on the first component of the third-person effect hypothesis, that is, third-person perceptions.

1.2 Importance of the study of the third-person perceptions

Based on an assumed causal relationship between third-person perceptions and behavioral third-person effect most previous studies that examined the behavioral component of the third-person effect used the magnitude of perceptual bias, or the magnitude of the difference in perceived effects on the self and perceived effects on others, as a predictor of support for media restrictions (Perloff, 1999). Results, however, are inconsistent. Although the magnitude of perceptual bias has been significantly
associated with support for the restriction of pornographic materials (Gunther, 1995; Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996), misogynic rap music (McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997), undesirable advertising (Shah, Faber, & Youn, 1999) and electoral campaign messages (Salwen, 1998), they failed to predict support for coverage of O. J. Simpson trial (Salwen & Driscoll, 1997) and external control of political communications (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). Price, Tewksbury, and Huang (1998) even found that the magnitude of perceptual bias was negatively related to support for publication of a Holocaust-denial advertisement.

Perloff (2002) suggests that the reason for the inconsistency is that the behavioral third-person effect hypothesis ignores many processes that mediate the perception-behavior relationship. These processes include the time of exposure (Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999), susceptibility and severity of the impact (Shah et al., 1999), the distance of perceived others (Cohen et al., 1988), the content of the message (Shah et al., 1999), efficacy beliefs to resolve potential threat to themselves and others (Nathanson et al., 2002), and what the message is thought to do to its receivers (Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

Another reason for the inconsistency between the third-person perceptions and behavioral third-person effect is ignorance of crucial components of the third-person perceptions. People may perceive negative media effects on others because of susceptibility of the target of the messages, severity of the consequences, particular relationship with the potential victims (e.g., their child), high exposure, or undesirability of the message. The consequence of the perceptions of media effects, i.e., the behavioral
third-person effect, can vary by a component of the perceptions. However, scholars in the past examined relationship of behavioral third-person effects only by strength of the third-person perception. They have largely ignored the possibility that the presence of a high degree of third-person perception can be derived from multiple components and variability of consequence by each component.

In third-person effect studies, perceptions of media effects on others are measured by averaging the self-reported individuals’ perceptions of media effects on other people. Each individual of the population that contributes to the average varies. Therefore, the perception that a communication would have “a great deal of media influence” should not be interpreted to mean that an individual perceives all people would be influenced a great deal. The average score can be influenced by the belief that a specific group is extremely vulnerable or invulnerable to the media effect. In brief, third-person perceptions can be classified as two types of perceptions. One perception is that the media will affect all other people; the other perception is that the media will affect a specific group of other people (e.g., Eveland et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1997; Meirick, 2004).

Each component of third-person perceptions can influence the types of behavioral outcomes, as well as the magnitude of such behaviors. Applying to the Cohen and Davis’ (1991) study, for a political advertisement geared toward candidate “A” supporters of a rival candidate “B” will perceive less impact on themselves than on people in general. These supporters of candidate “B,” however, may not support restricting the broadcast of the advertisement because they believe only strong supporters of the advertised candidate will be influenced by it. They estimate the advertisement will have no effect on the final
outcome of the election because they think the people influenced by the commercial
would vote for “A” even if they were not exposed to the advertisement. In addition, they
may think that restricting the advertisement will create a boomerang effect because
supporting restrictions could be considered a threat against freedom of expression.
Therefore, supporters of candidate “B” will not support restricting the broadcast of the
advertisement even when there is a huge amount of the third-person perception present.
In this case researchers would not find correlation between the perceptual and behavioral
third-person effects.

However, if supporters of candidate “B” perceive that there would be a great
impact on the undecided voters or other supporters of candidate “B” they are likely to
support for media restrictions to prevent these affected voters from changing their voting
preferences. In this case, a high correlation between the perceptual and behavioral third-
person effects would be apparent.

This hypothetical example suggests that the failure to find a relationship between
the perceptual and behavioral third-person effects in past studies could be explained by
mismatched types of third-person perceptions and measuring behavior or neglecting an
important moderating factor leading to third-person perception. In this case even though
a behavioral outcome resulted from the third-person perception, the researcher might not
find it. For a more accurate prediction of a specific type of the behavioral third-person
effect and its magnitude we should examine why people have third-person perceptions
and which component(s) influence the magnitude of the perception.
1.3 Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide an “other-based” approach that examines the principle components that cause third-person perceptions to occur. The basic rationale of this approach posits that the way in which people perceive media effects is affected by characteristics of the “comparison targets” as well as those of the perceivers (the “self-based” approach) and their relation to comparison targets (the “self-other relationship based” approach). The other-based approach investigates how people construct concepts of comparison targets and whether these concepts have impacts on third-person perception. The present study examines whether third-person perceptions vary by the characteristics of a comparison target (e.g., issue relevance) and if so how these characteristics influence the perceptions.

The other-based approach will fit particularly well when individuals estimate media effects on comparison targets about which they have some information, which suggests a high possibility that a particular media effect will influence the target audience. This information will be used to distinguish this specific target from other audiences, including the perceivers themselves. Understanding this mechanism will be more interesting for those who want to have an impact on a particular group (e.g., changing the opinions of Republicans or Christians) while veiling their actual intention. For example, people who oppose the war with Iraq can disseminate a videotape of U.S. soldiers mistreating Iraqi POWs via the Internet with the expectation of changing public opinion of the war and consequently changing political policy. These people might

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1 For the purposes of this paper, the term comparison targets refers to the group of individuals for whom media effects is being estimated by subjects in the context of comparing perceptions of media effects on themselves.
imagine the following scenario: Watching the footage would arouse concern for the soldiers’ safety, particularly in their parents, who might assume that the activities that they are witnessing in the videotape may provoke Iraqi citizens’ revenge against their children, who are the soldiers in Iraq. Parents then may protest against the Bush administration’s military policy in Iraq in order to get their children home earlier than scheduled. Therefore, without revealing their intention to incite activism against the war and directly persuading viewers, the anti-war group can achieve changes in public opinion and policy.

1.4 Plan of the Study

The present study first examines whether the relevance of an issue to perceivers (the self-based approach), between-group differentiation, (the self-other relationship-based approach) and the relevance of an issue to comparison targets (the other-based approach) have impacts the magnitude of media effects resulting in the third-person perceptions. Next, the study examines how the three approaches are interrelated. It also investigates whether the salience of a particular social categorization influences the perceptions of the conventional comparison target in third-person effect studies, which are labeled “people in general,” “common citizens,” or “the masses.” This approach may help us to understand why people perceive greater (or lesser) third-person perceptions in particular contexts.

In order to examine the salience of a group identity in constructing the concept of the comparison targets in general, the present study alternates two question orders
according to comparison targets. As priming effect research suggests question order can highlight and evoke a particular concept when respondents answer sequential questions. Along with rotating the order of the questions, the study exposes respondents to a priming clue – social categorization in this study – which may cause them to construct people in general as having more or less investment in the issue (issue relevance).

The study examines the third-person effect on two different message topics: the negative media portrayal of smokers in television programs and news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals. These topics are similar in that they each represent a stigmatized group (smokers and Roman Catholics), but they are different in that these stigmatized groups are discernible by the intensity of social categorization, which is assumed on the basis of group formation. For the portrayal of smokers in television programs, respondents are categorized by self-defined smokers and nonsmokers. For news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals, respondents are categorized by self-defined Catholics and nonCatholics. The social categorization designated “Smokers” is based on an identical behavior (smoking), which is presumed weak; and a Catholic identity is based on identical religious beliefs governing certain attitudes and behavior, which is presumed strong.

Methodologically this study takes advantage of a hybrid method of survey and experimental design. This study is based on a statewide telephone survey (n=524). The respondents, randomly selected from throughout Ohio, were asked to give their opinions of two mass media messages (a bogus news story and one based on real story). In addition, they were randomly assigned to two different question order sequences. They
were asked to provide their perceptions of the media effects on themselves, people in
general, those for whom the issue is relevant, and those for whom the issue is not relevant
and the order in which these questions were asked was altered.

The following chapter reviews the literature on studies of third-person effect. The
literature review includes an examination of the following factors: robustness of the third-
person perception hypothesis, underlying process (the motivational perspective vs. the
cognitive perspective), three approaches to components of the third-person perceptions
(the self-based, the self-other relationship based, and the other-based approach), and
effect of question order within the context of the third-person effect. At the end of the
chapter, after a summary of the main points of the reviewed literature, six hypotheses and
a research question are proposed. Next, Chapter 3 explains the methods that were used in
the present study. Chapter 4 summarizes the analysis of results of hypothesis tests and
the examination of research question. Chapter 5, the final chapter, incorporates the
findings from the present study with discussions about the implications for the three
approaches to examining the conditional variables of the third-person effect.
Additionally, some limitations of this study are discussed and future research directions
are suggested.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 A brief review of studies of the third-person effect hypothesis

More than two decades have passed since Davison (1983) reported the observation that people perceive higher media effects on others than on themselves. Since Davison’s initial assertion, a number of studies have tested third-person perceptions both experimentally and through survey methodology. These studies are categorized with three different focuses of research.

The first group of third-person effect studies focused on “what” questions (i.e., What happens when people perceive media effect on themselves compared with the perceptions of media effect on other people?). The bulk of studies supported the hypothesis about the discrepancy between the estimates of effects on the self as compared to estimated effect on others (e.g., Cohen et al., 1988; Gunther, 1991; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Lasorsa, 1989). A meta-analysis conducted by Paul, Salwen, and Dupagne (2000) investigated 121 separate findings that established robust empirical support for the third-person effect hypothesis across many different types of negative media effects and in reasonably varied audience populations.
The second focus of the research was “when” questions (i.e., When does third-person perception become strong or weak?). Various studies examining the conditional variables under which individuals are particularly inclined to expect that media will influence third-persons, reported that the size of third-person effect is modified by demographics, knowledge of the issue, ego-involvement, self-esteem, message type, social desirability, and observers’ relation to the comparison targets (for more details see Perloff, 1989, 2002). These conditional variables were believed to contribute to overestimating the media effects on others or underestimating them on the self (Perloff, 1996).

The third group of third-person effect studies was focused on “how” issues (i.e., How, or through what processes, do the third-person perceptions occur?). Scholars concerning “how” issue extrapolated underlying processes of third-person effects based on the conditional variables found by the studies focused on “when” question. The literature suggests motivational and cognitive components that explain the disparity between perceptions of communication effects on others and on the self, which vary by several conditional variables (Perloff, 2002). That is, underestimating and overestimating media effects result from the influence of several factors on motivation and cognition.

In order to find variables that have impacts on the size of the third-person perception, in the early stage of research scholars examined why some people reveal more third-person effects than others. These scholars began research based on the notion that outcomes of a cognitive task vary by the subject of the task (i.e., who perceives media effects?). Scholars of this approach, called the “self-based approach,” have
examined what kind of individuals (based on their demographics, knowledge, issue relevance, self-esteem, media use) are more likely to have the third-person effect (e.g., Lasorsa, 1989; Rojas et al., 1996; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999).

Another group of scholars questioned why individuals perceive greater media effects on a particular comparison target. These scholars argued that in many cases, people think they can accurately measure media effects on themselves but they cannot for others because they do not have enough information about the others to accurately judge the media effects on them. Given these conditions, people estimate media effects on others based on their perceived media effects on themselves and their relationship to the comparison target (i.e., similar or dissimilar to themselves). Research from this approach, called the “self-other relationship-based approach,” has attempted to pinpoint a more accurate description of these others who are viewed as relatively more susceptible to negative media effects. These scholars differentiate comparison targets by their geographic or social distance from the observers (i.e., the social distance corollary, e.g., Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; McLeod et al., 1997) and social categorization (i.e., self-categorization theory-based approach, e.g., Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1995; Scharrer, 2002).

One question, which is obvious but has been not given adequate attention in previous studies of the self-other relationship-based approach, is how the approach fits when the observers do not have a relationship to a comparison target in terms of social or geographical distance or social categorization. It is highly possible that people can still perceive greater media effects on a specific group even if there is no explicit relationship
between them. For example, Asian-Americans might perceive that Edward Zwick’s suspense thriller, *The Siege*, would have more effect on Arab-Americans than African-Americans. In fact, Arab-American leaders vehemently protested the film shortly after it appeared in theaters in November 1998. As an example, how might Asian-Americans perceive media effects differently on two different comparison targets whose social and geographical distances are not so different from each other and who do not share a social identity with the observers? This question can be related to how observers construct a conception of comparison targets. That is, observers may use some information about comparison targets (e.g., demographics, social background, issue relevance) to fulfill a need to make an accurate estimation. However, this important question has been largely ignored in the past. The present study proposes a new approach, called the “other-based” approach, arguing that third-person perceptions vary with the accessibility of information about comparison targets and with the perceivers’ cognitive efforts to account for information about comparison targets.
Figure 2.1 Summary process of the third-person effect
To summarize findings across focuses of research on the third-person effect hypothesis and the three approaches, I propose a process model which will guide the structure of this paper. Figure 1 presented in page 16 shows that the third-person effect is a type of indirect media effect that occurs when individuals overestimate or underestimate media effects. The overestimation and underestimation are caused by the motivation and cognition individuals have when they estimate media effects on the self and others. Figure 1 also shows that many variables have impacts on motivation and cognition. These variables are classified with self-based, other-based, and self-other relationship-based components.

2.2 Robustness of the third-person perception hypothesis

Studies examining the third-person perception typically expose individuals to an actual message or description of a message. Participants are then asked to estimate effects on the self and others. In some studies respondents are not exposed to a message at all, but instead answer a telephone interviewer’s questions about the effects of a particular type of media fare (Perloff, 1999). The third-person perception is typically operationalized as the difference between perceptions of message effects on others and the self.

In the past a variety of different message types have been tested in the context of third-person effect and results consistently supported the third-person perception hypothesis (Perloff, 2002). The message types include: pornography and sexuality (Gunther, 1995; Rojas et al., 1996), media violence (Fisher, Cook, & Shirkey, 1994;
Hoffner et al., 1999; Innes & Zeitz, 1988), misogynic rap lyrics (McLeod et al., 1997),
dangerous or deviant societal issues (Rojas et al., 1996), campaign messages and political
advertising (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Duck et al., 1995; Gunther & Thorson, 1992), news
coverage (Gunther, 1991; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998), dramatic television
programs (Lasorsa, 1989), advertising (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995;
Price, Tewksbury, & Huang, 1998; Shah et al., 1999), production quality (Duck et al.,
1995), and socially desirable form of communications, such as HIV educational
campaigns (Chapin, 2000).

Confidence in the robustness and generality of the third-person effect also is
enhanced by the fact that the findings have emerged from not only surveys (e.g., Chapin,
2000; Neuwirth, Frederick, & Mayo, 2002; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999; Scharrer, 2002),
but also experiments (e.g., Duck et al., 1995; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; Gunther &
Mundy, 1993; Tewksbury, 2002). In surveys respondents are typically asked to estimate
the extent to which certain types of media content will influence their attitudes and the
attitudes of others. In experiments subjects typically read or watch a message and then
estimate the effects that the message will have on their attitudes toward the topic and on
the attitudes of others.

Scholars have suggested that the third-person perception occurs as a result of: (a)
overestimations of message impact on perceived others (Davison, 1983; Gunther, 1991;
Lasorsa, 1989; McLeod et al., 1997; Price et al., 1998); (b) underestimations of message
impact on oneself (Cohen et al., 1988; Duck et al., 1995); or (c) a combination of
overestimations and underestimations (Glynn, 1989; Perloff, 1993). All three of these
proposed reasons for perceptual biases have some empirical evidence that support them. Perloff (2002) explains these biases rather logically, stating, “if you are right that other people are influenced by media, then it certainly stands to reason that you too should be affected; on the other hand, if you are correct that you are not affected and everyone else presumably claims the same lack of media influence, then you exaggerate the impact of media on others” (p. 489).

2.3 Underlying process of incorrect estimation

2.3.1 Self-other relationships as presented in the social psychological literature

The third-person perception is well documented, but less is known about its underlying mechanisms (David & Johnson, 1998). No one has discovered why people overestimate or underestimate media effects. Although various models and explanations have been proposed as potential underlying mechanisms of third-person perception, scholars have not come to a single answer upon which they agree. Most scholars have begun exploring the social psychological literature on self-other relationships to explain these perceptual biases. Social psychologists document that under some circumstances people are prone to conclude their own positions are relatively uncommon (e.g., false uniqueness, Bosveld, 1995) and a common condition for all others (e.g., false consensus, Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). In order to explain these antithetical perceptions of self-others relationship social psychologists account for motivation and cognition.

One explanation of false uniqueness phenomenon, from a motivational perspective, states that humans are motivated to maintain a positive self-image, such as
being a competent or supportive person. This leads individuals to make clear distinctions from comparison others whom they think are better or worse than themselves in some degree. The types and strength of such distinctions are judged by the availability and interpretation of information about themselves and the comparison targets, as well as the relationship between the two components (e.g., pluralistic ignorance in O’Gorman & Garry, 1976; social comparison theory in Festinger, 1954).

Another explanation of false uniqueness sees people separately and judges self and others without considerations of the relationship between them. An individual’s perceptions of self and others is rarely correct because often people do not pay enough attention to interpret information and/or because they do not have enough information required to make an accurate judgment (Kitts, 2003; Tversky & Kahneman, 1982). Additionly, in some cases people can make incorrect judgments even when they have enough information and make correct interpretations because of faulty information.

Social psychological literature discusses two distinct, yet related mechanisms that operate in perceiving self-other relationships. Discussions about these mechanisms have been offered to explain why people underestimate or overestimate media effects. While one explanation focuses primarily on motivational components, the other focuses more on the cognitive roots (David et al., 2004).

2.3.2 Motivational explanations for third-person perception outcomes

The motivational perspective posits that the third-person effect is a subset of a universal human tendency to perceive the self in ways that make one look good, or at
least better than other people (e.g., Brown, 1986; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Perloff, 1989; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). According to Banning (2001), humans are purposefully egocentric and strongly motivated by their egos to make themselves appear better than others. In the same vein, the optimistic bias predicts that people judge themselves as less likely than other people to experience negative events.

In order to perceive one’s self positively individuals make a biased differentiation between self and others when they process media messages. Consequently, once estimation of media effects on one component (either the self or a comparison target) is judged, the estimation plays the role of a reference point for estimating the remaining components with the motivation of maintaining a positive self-image (Gunther, 1991). In the case of a negative or anti-social media message, such as pornography or hate speeches, there is a strong motivation to estimate a small effect on the self and a significant effect on others, which translates into a third-person effect (David et al., 2004).

The self-enhancement explanation is based upon the accumulation that the perceptual discrepancy of media effects on the self and others is created not because individuals perceive more effects on others and fewer effects on the self but because individuals are inclined to perceive themselves as more affected by positive influences and others as more affected by relatively negative influences (Chia, Lu, & McLeod, 2004). If they think being less influenced than others by the media is consistent with the feeling of superiority, believing that they are better than others, they are likely to underestimate the effects on the self or overestimate them on others depending on which
one is the anchor of the social judgments. But if they think it is inconsistent with such a feeling, they will likely estimate oppositely. The former is usually called the third-person effect and the latter is often called the reverse third-person effect or the first-person effect. Literature on the third-person effect hypothesis suggests that the directions of estimation (over- vs. under-) depend on: (a) perceptions of the social desirability of the messages, and (b) perceptions of potential damages to self-control (cf. Perloff, 2002).

First, people believe they can maintain positive self-images by showing socially desirable attitudes or by rejecting socially undesirable attitudes (Peiser & Peter, 2001). They therefore discern whether or not other people regard acceptance of the media messages positively before they make an estimation of media effects on themselves and others. Findings in third-person effect studies suggest that the third-person effect is strengthened when the media message is perceived as socially undesirable (e.g., Duck & Mullin, 1995; Duck et al., 1995; Gunther & Mundy, 1993). The implication of these findings of a self-serving bias is that people are likely to think other people accept socially undesirable messages more than they do. On the other hand, when the media message is socially desirable (e.g., anti-smoking, safe sex) people are more likely to admit being more influenced than other people. However, results of empirical studies do not always support these reverse third-person perceptions; rather many studies report reduced or eliminated third-person perceptions in the context of socially desirable messages (e.g., Duck & Mullin, 1995; Innes & Zeitz, 1988; Eveland & McLeod, 1999).

Second, people also tend to have a negative image of being influenced by external factors (e.g., mass media) when making judgments. Some of the content of the messages
examined in the third-person effect studies were not necessarily socially undesirable or harmful (e.g., a news story, a product advertisement). In this case, being persuaded by the media messages does not necessarily lead to socially undesirable behavior (e.g., violence or sexual harassment). Nevertheless, people tend to reject media messages because they consider resistance to (or acceptance of) media persuasion as an indicator of an individual’s independence or self-control (Perloff, 2002).

In Western societies, at least, many people believe it is socially undesirable to be affected by media messages, particularly “by those of an everyday and trivial nature, such as those on television, radio, and film” (Schoenbach & Becker, 1995, p. 342). Because being influenced by a television program, for example, is considered undignified, particularly among those with a higher level of formal education, it is not surprising that third-person effect shows up more frequently in that group (Schoenbach & Becker, 1995). By the same token, Eveland and McLeod (1999) explain the unwillingness to admit the influence of rap music as indicative of a broader unwillingness to admit effects of mass media content in general on oneself.

A related, though not the same, self-control explanation is suggested by Perloff (2002). He argues that sometimes people are actually influenced by a socially undesirable message but cannot consciously acknowledge the influence of this message. Admitting to media effects would devalue individuals’ self-esteem or reduce their perception of control over external events. As a result, people project media effects onto others but not themselves. In this case, the third-person effect occurs by underestimating
media effects on themselves. This is one reason for findings that reduced third-person perceptions, but for not the reverse third-person effect for socially desirable messages.

For some people the social desirability of messages can offset negative media images, but for others the negative image of being influenced by the media remains even when they receive socially desirable messages. These people are unwilling to be influenced and will not admit the influence even if it is present (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). In support of this explanation, researchers report third-person perception even when people process messages for which socially desirable attitudes are ambiguous, such as campaign messages and political advertising (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Duck et al., 1995; Gunther & Thorson, 1992), news coverage (Gunther, 1991; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998), advertising (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; Price et al., 1998; Shah et al., 1999), and production quality (Duck et al., 1995). In this case, individuals estimate smaller media effects on themselves than they do on others. They expect that other people think they are smart enough to decide their opinions about public issues by themselves, without being influenced by external factors (mass media) when they make a decision. This may help them to maintain positive self-image (Meirick, 2004).

The motivational perspective has been tested by varying three message characteristics: topic (e.g., smoking advertisements and pornography), format (e.g., persuasive messages and news story) and quality (e.g., source credibility) (Perloff, 1999). Eveland and McLeod (1999) and some other scholars report that the third-person effect is greater for socially undesirable messages than desirable messages. They also argue that
formats that are seen as “not smart to be influenced by” (i.e., product advertisements) can lead to greater third-person effect than genres that lack this association (e.g., Public Service Announcements, pro-social campaigns and news) (Perloff, 1999). White (1997) found that participants assumed that others would be more affected than themselves by a persuasive communication with weak arguments and low source credibility. But they also believed that they would be more influenced than others by a message with strong arguments and high source credibility. Although the motivational perspective as an underlying process of the third-person effect has substantial evidence, the perspective cannot explain all the variations in third-person perceptions (e.g., Perloff, 1999), which suggests we should remain open to alternate explanations.

2.3.3 Cognitive explanations for third-person perception outcomes

From a cognitive perspective, people misperceive media effects on the self and/or others when they lack information or incorrectly interpret information. It is important to note that the availability of information about what is going on in others’ minds is much more limited than the availability of information about what is going on in one’s own mind. We know much more about the factors within ourselves, which enables us to deflect undue influence from the outside (Kitts, 2003). In contrast, one can hardly assume that one knows anything about the internal dynamics of others that might protect them from undue external influence (Kitts, 2003). Therefore, one can hardly draw the same conclusions when judging others as one does in judging oneself with respect to media influence.
The discrepancy between estimating media effects on the self and others can be attributed to the use of different information. The impersonal impact hypothesis (Tyler & Cook, 1994) asserts that the information processing procedure for the self on the personal level is different from the information processing procedure for abstract others on the societal level. When asked about others at the aggregate societal level such as “residents in a state” or “citizens of the U.S.,” as Tyler and Cook (1984) suggest, it is impossible to retrieve any concrete personal experience that is related to the abstract others without relying on another information source such as the mass media. Mutz (1998) echoes Tyler and Cook’s (1984) argument that personal experiences on the individual level and media experience on the abstract societal level tend to be separated out.

Incorrect estimation of media effects on others can be explained by a shortage of information used by the observers. The shortage happens when adequate information is unavailable or when observers do not use all the information available. According to the Heuristic-Systematic Model (see more details in Chaiken, 1980) systematic processing involves expending greater mental effort in the pursuit of “a relatively analytic and comprehensive treatment” of relevant information (Chen & Chaiken, 1999, p. 74). Because of its more inclusive and exhaustive nature, systematic processing requires people to have the capacity and motivation to process information on a given message topic. In the absence of either of these two factors people default to heuristic processing or fail to process information at all (Chaiken, 1980). The comparatively effortless heuristic processing mode is characterized by the application of simple decision rules (Chen & Chaiken, 1999) or heuristics (e.g., “Experts are always trustworthy”) when
forming summary judgments. Krosnick (1991) found that when responding to a survey a substantial proportion of respondents used simplistic strategies rather than the systematic optimizing strategies that require more effort.

Applying the heuristic processing mode to the third-person effect, scholars expect that rather than peeping into the minds of others or putting oneself in others’ shoes, one tends to draw conveniently on some readily available social schemata or stereotypes in judging others with respect to media influence (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 2000; Duck & Mullin, 1995; Perloff, 1989, 1999; Scharrer, 2002). Naturally one comes to rely more on the common stereotypes one hears habitually and repeatedly from acquaintances and the media and thus come readily to mind. The most popular stereotype of media audiences is the “passive sheep’ image (Perloff, 2002, p. 494) derived from the time-honored magic bullet model. When asked to estimate media effects on others, respondents activate this stereotype and apply them to survey questions (e.g., Eveland et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1997).

Interestingly, people exclude themselves from the passive sheep stereotype of the general audience and therefore, do not apply this stereotype of the audience to themselves. One explanation for this exclusion would be lack of access to memories of their own experience of media effects (Perloff, 2002). People may easily access the memory of media effects on others (e.g., peers’ imitating celebrities’ clothing or jewelry but they do not). This lack of access can result from the fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error approach assumes that people attribute their actions to situational factors, but believe that others’ behaviors are governed by personality.
dispositions (Kitts, 2003; Perloff, 2002). Applying this to the third-person effect, Gunther (1991) explains that when judging the impact of a message on behaviors or opinions, people take into account their greater awareness of, and discounting of, situational factors like persuasive intent. As a result, they estimate relatively small media influence on themselves. On the other hand, when estimating media effects on others’ behavior and opinions, observers account for others’ dispositional shortcomings, like gullibility. This leads observers to the conclusion that the media have relatively greater impact on others (Rojas et al., 1996).

Scholars advocating the fundamental attribution error might predict the effect of Michael Moore’s recent documentary movie Fahrenheit 9/11 as follows: when estimating the effect of the movie on themselves viewers attribute any influence to their knowledge of the film’s liberal political bias. But when estimating its effect on others they do not account for such knowledge that other people may have. Instead, they may attribute any influence to the other people’s media exposure to the May 22, 2004 broadcast of the 57th Cannes Film Festival awards ceremony wherein the jury gave Fahrenheit 9/11 the Palme d’Or, which is the festival’s top prize and one of the most coveted honors in international cinema. As a result, they estimate greater effects on others than themselves.

2.3.4 Components of motivation and cognition

It is important to note that the motivational and cognitive perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but together explain the third-person effect. Both perspectives have currency and the extent to which one perspective dominates the other in a particular
context is likely to be influenced by a host of factors. These factors include attributes of
the source, stimuli, message, respondent, and one’s relation to comparison targets
(Perloff, 1993). These conditional variables, which predict the third-person effect, can be
examined by three different approaches.

Figure 2.1 presented on page 16 shows that one’s motivation and cognition are
influenced by self-based factors, self-other relationship factors, and other-based factors.
Early third-person perception studies were focused mainly on the self-based factors,
including personal factors (e.g., demographics and personality) and one’s evaluation of
the messages (e.g., social desirability, credibility, hostility, and issue relevance to
perceivers). Later studies examined whether self-other relationship has impacts on the
size of the third-person effect. Variables examined in these studies include social
categorization (e.g., in-group vs. out-group) and social distance (e.g., people in the same
community vs. people in the same state).

2.4 Self-based approach

The self-based approach says that the size of the third-person perception varies
with the properties of perceivers. The rationale of this approach is that, in most cases,
people have more information about themselves than others and therefore think they can
more accurately estimate something about themselves than others. Along with this fact,
in lieu of adequate information to assess something about others, people may rely on self-
assessment as an anchor for their perceptions of others. Social psychologists argue that
the self ordinarily serves as the default value for making judgments and predictions about
others in self-relevant domain. This tendency can rarely be overridden even with concentrated effort (Carniol, 2003). Anchoring may occur automatically because self-referential information is deeply encoded, highly accessible and difficult to suppress (Clement & Krueger, 2002).

Social psychologists found two types of effects that result from anchoring; they are assimilation and contrast. Based on their anchors, people assume others are similar to them (assimilation effect) or differentiate others from themselves (contrast effect). The third-person effect occurs as a result of cognitive effort required to contrast between the anchor (perceived media effects on the self) and the stimulus (perceived media effects on others). In this case the distance between the anchor and the stimulus is subjective rather than objective. Regarding the subjective nature of the distance between the anchor and the stimulus, scholars of the third-person effect have researched how it varies by the characteristics of observers who subjectively judge the distance. They examined what kinds of observers reveal more of a contrast effect between themselves and other people when they estimate media effect.

Accuracy of media effects on the self and on others is influenced by individuals’ ability to gather and interpret information. This ability varies with several properties of the individuals, including gender, education, income, personality, and relevant knowledge on the topic. Many variables of the self-based approach were tested previously. Some of them were consistently related to the size of the third-person perception and some inconsistently.
2.4.1 Personal factors

Scholars have documented varying impacts of demographic variables on perceptions of media effects in the various media message contents and contexts. The variables include age (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Tiedge, Silberblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991), ethnicity (Matera & Salwen, in Salwen & Dupagne, 1999), gender (Hewitt, Driscoll, & Salwen, in Salwen & Dupagne, 1999) and education (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Salwen, 1998; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). Results have been rather mixed, however. Eveland and McLeod (1999) suggest that one explanation for this mixed finding is that individuals’ perceptions regarding the desirability of the message vary with the properties of the perceivers. At this point it seems reasonable to say that demographic variables have an impact on perceptions of media effect, which varies by the content of the message and other contextual variables.

The more robust individual factors influencing third-person perception are personality and perceptions of one’s own cognitive ability. Lasorsa (1989) suggests that self-perceived knowledge is a better correlate of third-person perception than actual knowledge. This assertion was confirmed in Price and Tewksbury’s (1996) study, where they found individuals who perceived themselves as experts, or those having advanced knowledge, demonstrated a greater third-person perception than their peers who perceived themselves as less knowledgeable (for another example, see Driscoll & Salwen, 1997).

More recently, Banning (2001) reports that higher levels of self-esteem result in a larger third-person effect in the context of advertisements about. This result is consistent
with social psychologists’ argument that the self-enhancing self-other bias is more characteristic of persons high in self-esteem than of persons low in self-esteem (e.g., Brown, 1986).

2.4.2 Evaluation of media messages

Self-image is strongly affected by the way people believe others see and think of them (Mead, 1934). People are very concerned about how others judge the way they react to media messages, which will potentially cause attitudinal and a behavioral adjustments (Tsfati & Cohen, 2003). Others may positively or negatively judge the reaction based on their evaluation of the messages. For example, people call accepting media messages or admitting to media influence learning when they positively evaluate the messages. But the same people call it manipulation or being controlled by mass media when they perceive the messages as negative.

Therefore, the evaluation of the media message (i.e., how the media influence in question is perceived) is very important to people when they determine their reaction to the message (i.e., acceptance vs. rejection). If individuals think that the message is good overall they expect they will receive positive evaluations from others by showing their acceptance of the message. In this case they may admit more media effects on the self than others believing that they will be viewed as learning more from the media. On the other hand, when individuals negatively evaluate the message they think they will receive positive evaluation from others by showing their rejection of the message. These people think acceptance of the message will result in being manipulated or controlled by the
media. Scholars have tested varying potential factors, or criteria of message evaluation, including social desirability, issue relevance to perceivers, media bias, and media hostility.

2.4.2.1 Social desirability

The third-person perception is evident when a message has low benefit likelihood or a perceived negative influence. Banning (2001), for example, report that the participants in his research exhibit a trend toward showing a greater third-person effect in regard to negative behavior advertisements (e.g., cigarettes and alcohol) than for neutral, or socially desirable advertisements (e.g., safe sex).

Perceptions of self as less persuaded than others, however, are not inevitable nor the universal response when the media message is socially positive in nature (Perloff, 1993). In past studies the third-person effect disappeared when the message had potentially positive consequences (e.g., Chapin, 2000; Duck et al., 1995; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Innes & Zeitz, 1988; Rojas et al., 1996). Hoffner et al. (1999) explain that the third-person effect disappears based on the observer’s motivation. They argue that people are motivated by the need for self-enhancement and therefore account for how other people evaluate the messages based on this need. If the observer concludes that admitting to media effects on the self is beneficial for self-enhancement the third-person effect should be reduced, eliminated, or reversed (Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Hoffner et al., 1999).
It is worthwhile to note that there are times when the desirability of the issues or the content under study depends on the respondents’ predispositions regarding the issues (Salwen & Dupagne, 1999). In some studies message desirability was confounded with message topic and it is hard to separate out these two variables (Perloff, 1999). Social desirability is subjectively judged and therefore should be understood as “personal” rather than “social” desirability. However, up to now, research has not distinguished social and personal desirability either theoretically or empirically in the context of the third-person effect. The direction of the perceived social desirability of the mass is not measured, but rather assumed in some of the third-person perception research (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). This measurement leaves open to the challenge arguing that subjects’ perceptions of social desirability were incongruent with the researchers’ a priori expectations.

Although it is hypothetical in nature, we can expect that a message can be socially desirable (or irrelevant) but personally undesirable and that a message can be desirable for a particular group but undesirable for other group. By the same token, news stories are difficult to classify as being pro-social or anti-social, but considering perceivers’ relationships to the content of the stories we can judge the personal desirability of the news stories. For example, news stories about a potential correlation between gun-related accidents and computer games would be socially desirable but personally undesirable for businessmen in the computer game industry. It appears that the size of the third-person perceptions varies with the personal desirability of a message rather than social desirability.
2.4.2.2 Issue relevance to perceivers

Issue relevance of a message to perceivers will determine how much a person thinks about it (Petty & Jarvis, 1996). When a message is relevant to individuals they seek more information and think more carefully about it before making an evaluation. Their attitude change depends on the evaluation of the perceived merits of the message (Petty & Jarvis, 1996). When individuals are involved in, or relate personally to the issue, they find messages about the issue interesting (Tewksbury et al., 2004). If what the media say about them and their lives has an impact on how they believe they are judged by others, then it should also affect how they view themselves and hence impact their behavior (Tsfati & Cohen, 2003). In this vein, issue relevance to perceivers can have an impact on how individuals perceive media effects.

Many researchers document that people who see a message as relevant to them estimate greater invulnerability to mass media messages than those who do not see the relevance (e.g., Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1997; Perloff, 1989; Rojas et al., 1996; Tsfati & Cohen, 2003; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). These studies explain the findings that partisan individuals tend to believe that most news media content is biased against their own position and therefore they are unwilling to accept the messages. But others are not because they do not see the biases (Vallone et al., 1985). One explanation of this finding is suggested by Mutz (1989), who examines variability of the third-person perceptions by interest in the issue. In general, an issue is considered more important to those for whom the issue is relevant than to those for whom it is not relevant. Mutz (1989) found in her
study, which examined attitudes toward protests against racism in South Africa, that the
tendency to perceive others as more influenced by the mass media was most prominent
among those who considered the issue to be very important. This finding can be related
to perceptions of the severity of media impacts. If individuals think a message is
important, they expect a corresponding severity in the media impacts on other people.
Therefore, relevance of message to perceivers is positively related to the size of the third-
person perceptions.

In support of this explanation, Tsfati and Cohen (2003) found that individuals
scrutinized the media messages of a personally relevant issue much more than others, and
that their behavior related to the issue is more affected by media coverage of it. They
investigated whether the perceived mass mediated stigmatization of peripheral
development towns in Israel has an impact on the desire of the residents to stay or leave,
over and above the disaffection with actual living conditions in these communities (Tsfati
& Cohen, 2003). Results suggest that the residents think other people devaluate the
living conditions and therefore have strong desire to leave the peripheral development
towns.

The second explanation of the positive relationship between issue relevance to the
perceivers and the size of the third-person perception is provided by a cognitive
perspective. Researchers document that people strongly interested or involved in an issue
overestimate media effects on others more frequently, or reveal a bigger third-person
perception than those less involved do (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1997; Perloff, 1989;
Schoenbach & Becker, 1995; Vallone et al., 1985). Ego-involvement has classically been
operationalized by identifying the individual’s salient group memberships and then
determining his or her latitude of acceptance and rejection of issues relevant to the group
(Perloff, 1989, p. 366). Thus ego-involved individuals should strongly identify with a
partisan group and should possess extreme positions on the issues relevant to the group
(Perloff, 1989). Gunther and Mundy (1993) argue that highly involved people think that
they know a good deal more than those who are uninvolved and that they are far less
likely to be influenced by information in the mass media. The more one is involved with
a certain issue, the more likely one is to perceive the self to be more knowledgeable than
others, thereby widening the perceptual gap (Perloff, 1989).

The third explanation of the finding of a greater third-person effect on those for
whom the issue is relevant than those for whom the issue is not relevant is hostile media
bias, which refers to a phenomenon in which people with strong attitudes and group
identifications frequently charge that the media intentionally slant stories against their
side (Vallone et al., 1985). When an issue is personally relevant, individuals have an
attitude and/or opinions about the issue. These partisan individuals direct more attention
to the schema-discrepant information presented in the news – that is, events that cast their
side in a negative light — than to schema-consistent information – which is material that
portrayed their side positively (Perloff, 1989). This unbalanced attention leads to
unbalanced retrieval of information when they estimate media effect. The involved
individuals are also “aware of media bias and see others as more vulnerable to the
source’s intent, whereas they consider themselves to be smart enough to discount the bias
and resist undue attitude change” (Gunther, 1991, p. 356). In addition, involved
individuals doubt the reliability of the message source more than uninvolved individuals do. Perloff (1996) maintains that when respondents have high ego-involvement in a message (and/or have strong attitudes about the issue) they are likely to perceive a source as negatively biased. This perception in turn increases the disparity between perceptions of media effects on the self versus on others (Perloff, 1996).

Perceptions of hostile media bias cause partisan individuals to reject the messages more often than their counterparts and to believe that their counterparts accept the messages more than they do (Perloff, 1989). In his experiment, in which subjects watched the 13-minute videotape of news broadcasts about conflict in the Middle East, Perloff (1989) found that Pro-Israeli partisans believed that the news coverage would cause a neutral audience to become less favorable to Israel than did pro-Palestinian or control-group participants. Pro-Palestinian partisans were more likely than the control-group or pro-Israeli subjects to perceive that neutral persons would become less favorable to the Palestinian Liberty Organization.

Later studies echoed Perloff’s (1989) findings. Cohen and Davis (1991) examined the influence of hostile media perceptions in the context of political advertisements. They found that when subjects saw their own candidates attacked, they reported they were not much influenced, but they said others would be. Conversely, when they saw an attack on a candidate they disliked, they reported themselves to be influenced but were less likely to think others would be. Recently, Tsfati and Cohen’s (2003) study, examining perceptions of negative media coverage of development towns
in Israel, documents that those who are more involved in their place of residence perceive
the coverage by news media as more hostile than those who are less involved.

Hostile media bias can occur even when the content of the message is neutral. Perloff (1999) claims that subjects’ perceptions that neutral media content is biased against their side is likely to be found among those who have a stake in the message’s topic. Therefore, some neutral messages are found hostile by perceivers on both sides of a particular issue. It appears that hostile media bias has an implication for perceptions of public opinion regardless of the reliability of the message’s content. If the hostile media perception and perceptions of media effects on others is combined, partisan individuals are likely to perceive media coverage as biased against their own point of view and, as a result, to perceive others’ opinions as more at odds with their own (Gunther & Christen, 2002).

In sum, in regard to issue relevance, two points are drawn from studies on hostile media bias. First, partisan individuals think a neutral audience will be influenced toward the opposing point of view (Gunther & Christen, 2002). Second, the same messages that are judged desirable by one group are found undesirable by the opposing group (Meirick, 2004).

2.4.2.3 Truthfulness and reliability of the media

Davison (1983) suggests that in cases in which a media message appears to be biased the third-person effect will be maximized regardless of its relevance to perceivers. Confirming Davison, Cohen et al. (1988) and Gunther (1991) document evidence
indicating great discrepancy between perceived message effects on others and the self when the source of the message is assumed biased. Cohen et al. (1988) find that when the defamation is attributed to a negatively biased source the discrepancy between perceived media influence on the self and on others is greater. On the other hand, third-person perceptions are smaller when reports come from a trusted source (Cohen et al., 1988; Gunther, 1991; Meirick, 2004). When newspaper readers conceive of the news source as biased, they discount the effects of its message on themselves, while they do not discount the effects as much with respect to others (Cohen et al., 1988; Gunther, 1991). It is important to emphasize that media bias and trustworthiness are not judged objectively; instead, judgment varies due to the dynamics of many variables that emerge in the interaction of source and receiver (Perloff, 1996).

Studies examining the variations of third-person effect by genre render support for Davison’s (1983) argument that when media messages appear to be biased the third-person effect will be maximized. In their study of four media genres (television commercials, campaign ads, radio music programs, and television news), Brosius and Engel (1996) report the least amount of third-person perception with television news. Brosius and Engel (1996) explain that the ostensibly truthful nature of news makes it more desirable (or less undesirable) to believe than other types of communications. Some individuals, therefore, might argue that to be influenced by news coverage is a good thing, since the assumed nature of news stories should be factual, unbiased, highly credible and informative (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). That might be why third-person effect is generally small in that instance. The researchers claim, “Whoever pays attention
to the news and learns from it is considered well informed, and thus well educated” (Brosius & Engel, 1996, p. 158).

In their study of the 1988 U.S. presidential campaign, prior to Brosius and Engel’s (1996) research, Rucinski and Salmon (1990) found that a larger third-person effect exists for political advertisements - particularly negative political advertisements - and polls than news and debates. They note that the size of the third-person effect for each message correspond to the rankings of perceptions of harmfulness of the messages. They also explain that respondents meaningfully discriminate between influence and harm, and while a content type may be judged as having a great influence this perceived influence does not automatically imply a harmful effect. Rucinski and Salmon (1990) argue that the effect of news might be thought of as powerful but not necessarily harmful, and therefore, we might expect the differential (between self and other) effect to be modest or nonexistent (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990).

In general, individuals do not want to be influenced by biased information because they believe other people will judge them negatively based on that influence (i.e., other people will think they are silly because they are manipulated and controlled by unreliable information). With news people are less worried since news is considered the most reliable media genre. Results of the two above studies suggest that when comparing other media genres it is harder to examine third-person effects if the message is presented in the context of a news story. However, if third-person effects are found it may point to the actual robustness of the effect, which can then apply to other media genres.
2.5 Self-Other relationship-based approach

Many studies, which examined the self-based approach, have measured perceived media effects on people in general rather than specifying a particular target. However, it is likely that perceptions of the effects will vary according to the individuals in question. While the self-based approach posits that the third-person perception is an outcome of comparing a varying concept of self and a constant concept of the comparison target (people in general or the masses), the self-other relationship-based approach sees the effect as an outcome of combination of a varying concept of self and varying concept of the comparison target.

Davison has speculated that the differential media effects between self and others seem to be particularly apparent among experts who are inferring effects on “common” citizens. Since Davison put forth his hypothesis, third-person perceptions typically have been demonstrated by comparing people’s judgments about media impact on the self with their judgments about media impact on a single and generalized comparison target (e.g., “voters in general,” Davison, 1983; “other viewers,” Lasorsa, 1989; “most Americans,” Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). This oversimplifies the mechanism in which the third-person effect is likely to occur (Meirick, 2004; Perloff, 2002).

Evidence suggests that the magnitude of the self-other discrepancy may depend, at least in part, on who the comparison targets are (Duck et al., 1995, 2000; Price et al., 1998). Recent scholars have attempted to pinpoint a more accurate description of those others who are viewed as being relatively more susceptible to negative media effects. In these studies, rather than being asked about generally defined groups of “others,”
respondents were instructed to specify which social/demographic groups they deemed more susceptible to negative media message influence (Scharrer, 2002). The self-other relationship-based approach hypothesizes that in the context of third person-effect the comparison targets can vary in terms of the relationship between self and others, such as in- and out-group and close others versus distant others.

Conventional comparison targets in the context of the third-person effect studies described as people in general or the common citizens are not of the primary group or reference group with which the self is identified, but an abstract cognitive category on the societal level. When the comparison targets are defined more specifically than just the “common citizen” or “people in general”, respondents of third-person effect studies might ask themselves the question, “Are people like me or different from me seen as being more affected by persuasive messages?” (Meirick, 2004, p. 235) That is, respondents might process two steps of cognitive tasks, defining comparison targets and estimating media effects on them, before they provide answers to researchers of third-person effect studies.

Acknowledging possible effects of cognitive processes to define comparison targets, scholars began to examine how the definition of the comparison targets influences the size of the third-person effect. These scholars assume that individuals define comparison targets subjectively rather than objectively; and they hypothesized observers’ relation to the comparison targets is critical in the definition process. They examined how the width of the gap between the perceived impact of media messages on oneself on others varied when the comparison targets are defined as part of a more
geographically or socially remote group (the social distance corollary; e.g., Cohen & Davis, 1991; Cohen et al., 1988; Gunther, 1991; Tewksbury, 2002) or as part of an out-group (social identity explanation; e.g., Duck et al. 1995, 1999; Meirick, 2004; Scharrer, 2002).

2.5.1 Social distance corollary

Third-person perception research has often shown that the greater the social distance between the self and comparison targets, the greater the gap in perceived impact, which is called the “social distance corollary” (e.g., Cohen et al., 1988; Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; Gunther, 1991; Meirick, 2004; Tewksbury, 2002). Cohen et al. (1988), for example, found that the perceived impact of a defamatory news story was smallest on “self,” increased for “other Stanford students,” increased again for “other Californians” and was greatest for public opinion at large. Gibbon and Durkin (1995) echoed this finding by showing results indicating a similar pattern for self, family, neighbors, other state residents, other Australian citizens and others in general.

One potential reason for findings that support the social distance corollary is that motivated self-serving biases may extend to include close friends and relatives as an extension of the self (Burger, 1981), and therefore people perceive these friends and family members as less susceptible to media messages than others. The idea of the socially extended self goes beyond perceived similarity and other relational connections between self and others. An extended self means that the boundaries of the self are redrawn and the content of self-concepts is focused on those characteristics that make one
a “good” representative of the group (i.e., the extended self) or of the relationship (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Another reason for the social distance corollary is ignorance about the remote others, which is closely related to a cognitive explanation of the third-person effect in general. The chunk of information drawn to upon is limited when one is asked to make social judgments about media influence with respect to the self and others. One might be able to draw on vivid experiential feelings about the target stimulus (media messages) from one’s own personal history, but apparently one cannot do the same thing in making social judgments about comparison targets (Strack, 1992). According to Carniol (2003), “for familiar others available information about them is used in drawing inferences but for unfamiliar others inferences are ‘simple generalizations’ from one’s own past experiences” (p. 564).

For more socially distant or vaguely defined groups one has less specific information upon which to base perceptions of susceptibility, therefore stereotypical views of the vulnerable population will take on greater importance (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Perloff, 2002; Scharrer, 2002). These stereotypes and simple generalizations lead observers to view comparison targets as the audience delineated in the “Magic bullet model,” or “Hypodermic needle model,” of media effect. It is easier for individuals to assume that a faceless mass audience will be susceptible to media effects than individuated others, who readily conjure up identities in people’s minds (Duck & Mullin, 1995). Similarly, Gunther (1998) explains that more distant others are seen as a passive
and homogeneous group with relatively little variation and no real resistance to the influence of mass media.

However, in some studies the social distance effect has been confounded with other more salient attributes, such as the likelihood of exposure to the message and severity of the message (e.g., Eveland et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1997; Neuwirth et al., 2002). These studies suggest that perceived effects on comparison targets are influenced by perceived exposure to the content in question (McLeod et al., 1997; Eveland et al., 1999) and perceived attention (Neuwirth et al., 2002) of that group to the media messages. McLeod et al. (1997) reported an inadvertent confounding of social distance with perceived likelihood of exposure to media in one study wherein they examined perceived influences and support for censorship of violent and misogynic rap lyrics. In the study, they found two of the comparison groups thought to be more distant from respondents (New York and Los Angeles youth) were thought to have had more exposure to rap music and hence be more receptive to influence.

Note that all the compounding variables, including perceptions of media exposure and social distance between perceivers themselves and comparison targets are context-specific. Groups in the social distance concept are located on a single continuum, like the scales on a thermometer. We may know that 70°C is higher than 40°C and lower than 90°C, but we cannot tell if it is high unless there is a comparison point. In the same vein, we can judge that other community residents in the same state are closer than other state residents outside of the immediate community and but more distant than family members, but we cannot judge whether other community residents are close without a comparison.
point. The dividing point between close others and remote others varies with context. In this vein, as Meirick (2004) argues, it is necessary to account for the message topic and the varying positions of the comparison targets in relation to the message topic.

Individuals may have a sense to detect how a specific content in the media is relevant to comparison targets in a particular context. The detected message relevance to a comparison target can influence perceivers’ perceptions of social distance between themselves and comparison a target, media exposure of the comparison target, severity of the media, and willingness or unwillingness to accept the media’s influence on the comparison target. However, these cognitive components of comparison targets, independent of their relation to perceivers, have been widely ignored in social distance corollary studies.

2.5.2 Social identity explanations

Some scholars examining the variability of the third-person effect by comparison others explain their results with the self-categorization theory (e.g., David, Morrison, & Johnson, 2002; Duck et al., 1999; Neuwirth et al., 2002; Reid & Hogg, 2005). Self-categorization refers to the process of locating oneself, or another person, within a system of social categorizations; and social identity refers to any social categorization used by people to define themselves and others (Turner, 1982). A process of self-categorization (i.e., acknowledging one’s identity to a specific group) “depersonalizes” perception of self and others in terms of relevant group prototypes (norms of stereotypes) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1982). Through this self-categorization process “I” becomes “we,”
and “me versus you” becomes “us versus them” (Duck et al., 2000). Furthermore, the mere perception of belonging to a social category is sufficient to explain group behavior (Turner, 1982).

Once social identity is salient, individuals strive to achieve both a distinct and positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When membership in a particular group is made salient to an individual he or she will attempt to differentiate his or her in-group from an out-group on dimensions that would bolster the in-group’s prestige. Such positively discrepant comparisons would in turn enhance the individual’s self-esteem through social identification. When the in-group provides the frame of reference for interpersonal comparison, information about exceptionally high or exceptionally low performance by an in-group member should result in contrasting self-evaluations. Within the in-group, individuals will move (and claim to be) closer to the group norm and they assert that they are superior to other group members. On the other hand, when social identity is engaged, intergroup comparisons are activated and self-evaluations should be assimilated to information about in-group performance. High performance by an in-group member has positive implications for self-ratings, whereas low performance has negative consequences.

In support of explanations of third-person perceptions based on self-categorization theory, Duck et al. (1995) found that when positive effects of media exposure were examined, the self and in-group were perceived as more influenced, whereas negative media effects were viewed as less influential on the self and in-group. More evidence was reported in recent studies such as David et al.’s study (2002)
exploring gender-based reference groups in determining the influence of magazine ads on body image; Neuwirth et al.’s (2002) study examining the influence of news depictions of a minority neighborhood by race; Duck et al.’s (1995) study investigating a political election in Australia.

Not only did the distance between perceptions of media effect on in-group versus out-group grab the attention of some researchers, but third-person perception within a group did as well. Most studies of third-person effect which are guided by the self-categorization theory report perceptual differences between perceivers and in-group members (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Duck et al., 1995; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995). One explanation of the difference within an in-group is that individuals belonging to a given group do not all share the same world view (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and therefore, at the level of the personal self, individuals seek similarity with significant others but at the same time strive for a sense of uniqueness (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). It appears that collective identities are constrained by the necessity of simultaneously satisfying individual needs for inclusion and distinctiveness (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). These opposing forces of assimilation and differentiation create a dynamic equilibrium that fluctuates with changes in the distance between the self and others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Self-categorization theory provides both motivational and cognitive explanations for the third-person effect. A motivational explanation states that people are motivated to view their groups in a positive light so as to maximize the implication of increased self-esteem that they attribute to being a member of a particular group (Arndt, Greenberg,
Schimel, & Pyszczynski, 2002; Duck et al., 1999; Scharrer, 2002). Positive evaluations and a feeling of liking other individuals can be induced simply by the knowledge that they share a common social identity. They tend to like in-group members more than out-group members even when they know nothing about the out-group member’s personal characteristics (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Therefore, the bias against out-groups (overestimation), or a bias in favor of the in-group (underestimation), in the context of the third-person effect can be interpreted as a self-serving motivational bias that enhances the positions of in-group members (David et al., 2002).

On the other hand, a cognitive explanation argues that when the comparison group is less known people may be more likely to generate a stereotyped image of someone likely to be influenced by the media, particularly when stored knowledge of media effects has been significant (Duck & Mullin, 1995; Scharrer, 2002). Stereotypes are “the cognitive shortcuts used to ascribe assumed attributes of groups, formed due to the limited information about the qualities the groups may have” (Scharrer, 2002, p. 685). It is well known that stereotyping leads to the homogenization and depersonalization of out-group members (Turner, 1982). Through stereotyping, individuals view out-group members as the mass that is the most vulnerable to media messages. Once they believe a message is biased, consistent with a stereotype of themselves, they rush to judgments about media effects on an out-group that are exaggerated and extreme. These judgments lead to the phenomenon of between-group differentiation, which refers, in this study, to the tendency of members of a group to exaggerate the differences between their own
group and a rival out-group. This phenomenon possibly leads to increased fragmentation of social groups, as well as to greater intolerance (Perloff, 2002).

The self-categorization theory suggests that particular social identities become psychologically salient in certain contexts and salient social identities serve as the basis for social perceptions and behavior (Hogg & Williams, 2000; Reid & Hogg, 2005; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, (1987). Salient categories in certain contexts are “ones that cohere with (a) accessibility (e.g., motivations, values, needs, task demands), (b) the distribution of individuals and groups in the social environment (i.e., comparative fit), and (c) the normative content of those groups (i.e., normative fit)” (Reid & Hogg, 2005, p. 131). When the message content is germane to the values of the above stated categories, theses categories are accessible to people belonging to them personally and these people are motivated to accentuate the similarities between self and in-group others in terms of level of impact (an assimilation effect). Conversely, they accentuate the differences between in-group and out-group others in terms of level of impact (a contrast effect), perceiving their in-group as positively distinct relative to the out-group (Duck et al., 2000).

As Perloff (2002) notes, perceptions of media hostility are particularly important in regard to salient social categories or social identities. In any case, when and issue is highly relevant to people they are likely to perceive biased hostility in media messages (Perloff, 1989). The proposition parallels findings from Duck et al’s (1995) 1993 election study that show that us-them distinctions in judgments about political campaign impact are more pronounced when respondents considered the impact of campaign
content that explicitly favored one or other political side. Results of Duck et al’s (1995) study confirm that when media messages provide cues of social categorization, individuals to whom the messages are relevant are more accessible to a particular category and likely to distinguish an in-group and an out-group based on the salient category than those for whom the messages are not relevant do.

Fitting into different categories varies with the distribution of individuals and groups in the social environment (i.e., comparative fit). According to Reid and Hogg (2005) self-categorization does not occur when an individual believes s/he is too distinct from or too similar to other people. Individuals distinguish themselves from other people by self-categorization when they feel it is necessary. When they think other people consider themselves as part of an out-group within a category, individuals categorize themselves and others by means of the other social category. Individuals do not cognitively process self-categorization if they believe they are distinguished enough without self-categorization. On the other hand, if individuals do not find an appropriate social category with which to discern themselves from others, they give up self-categorization. In brief, individuals define themselves by means of social identity when a salient social categorization is believed necessary and effective to distinguish themselves from other people. If not, although a social category is salient in a certain context, individuals do not define themselves by the salient category.

The necessity of comparative fit is confirmed by the findings of various studies. For instance, Meirick’s study (2004), which tests the third-person effect in a political context, uses the difference between the self and a target group in perceived political
ideology instead of assessing general closeness or distance to measure group difference in terms of perceived media effect. Results show that the strongest third-person effect for the out-group candidate’s advertisements appear in the out-group, the most politically distant group. The strongest, and only, first-person effect for the in-group candidate’s advertisement also appear in the out-group. Both the third- and first-person effects were weaker for the general public, the most geographically distant or generalized group (Meirick, 2004). These results indicate that respondents divided other people with respect to in-group and out-group by political distance, but not by social distance.

Self-categorization varies with the normative content of those groups (i.e., normative fit, Reid & Hogg, 2005). According to Turner (1982), magnitudes of assimilation effect within a group and dissimilation effect between groups are a function of normative fit, which is measured by the strength of cohesion within a group. He argues that as category membership becomes more important, behavior becomes more normative and conformist. When a group is cohesive, group norms strongly influence attitude and behavior of its members. They are pressured to conform to the group norms to maintain their membership and to avoid negative sanctions from other members (Duck et al., 2000).

Duck et al. (1999) document that perceptions of media influence vary with the subjects’ level of identification with the in-group. Thus the salience of group membership was an important predictor of whether these groups were deemed susceptible. Later, Duck et al. (2000) report results indicating that the stronger the social identification the more pronounced the tendencies toward perceptions of similarity, or
equivalence, between self and in-group members (in-group assimilation) and toward perceptions of difference between in-group and out-group members (between-group differentiation). These findings accord with the concept of normative fits in the self-categorization process. Based on these findings Duck et al. (2000) suggest that perceived self-other differences in media persuasibility depend not only on how we perceive the relationship to comparison targets in terms of relevant group memberships (i.e., as in- or out-group), but also on the extent to which persuasibility regarding a specific content dimension is considered normative or desirable for the relevant in-group.

Literature suggests that comparative fit varies with the ratio of in-group over out-group. According to Scharrer (2002), dominated group members, that is, those marginalized by a low status in contemporary society, have displayed a consistent tendency to place higher value on group membership than members of non-dominated groups (Duck et al., 2000). Indeed, members of dominated groups define themselves more, and are also defined more by others, in terms of the social categorizations imposed on them (Scharrer, 2002). Similarly, Frable’s (1993) study indicates that people with especially culturally stigmatized and invisible conditions, such as gays and lesbians, perceive some of their own preferences (unrelated to these stigmatized characteristics) as relatively uncommon. Regarding this finding, Bosveld (1995) argues that because people with invisible stigmatized conditions do not easily see others who share their conditions, they must conclude that they are unique. Frable’s (1993) study has important implications for the study of third-person effects among marginalized or traditionally stigmatized groups. There may be a stronger third-person effect among homosexuals
than heterosexuals because homosexuals may perceive that the media content has a greater negative effect on non-homosexuals than on homosexuals (e.g., Banning, 2004).

2.6 Other-based approach

By depending on the social groups, as in the social distance corollary and self-categorization theory, people can save much cognitive effort since they skip very complicated information processing. However, neither approach explains why observers sometimes perceive in-group, or socially close others, more negatively than out-group or socially remote others. One potential explanation is related to a collective group image. When negative aspects of one’s group are salient, people experience collective guilt, even in the absence of any personal responsibility for the transgressions. For example, the ambivalence of many young Germans about their national identity might be at least partially due to their knowledge of their country’s role in the atrocities of the Holocaust (Arndt et al. 2002). The burden of negative information about one’s group and its members may be an especially potent problem for members of minority and other stigmatized groups, both because of the negative stereotypes that exist and because of the tendency for others to believe that the negative behavior of one individual represents the underlying tendencies of the group as a whole (Arndt et al. 2002). It appears that individuals may account for something other than motivation to look good and their relation to comparison targets when they perceive media effects on the target. Both the self-based approach and the self-other relationship-based approach have largely ignored the impacts of negative images of in-group and socially close others.
The self-other relationship based-approach does not explain why a specific group is perceived as being more vulnerable to a media message when the observers do not have any particular relationship with the comparison targets (e.g., in- or out-group, socially close or remote others, geographically close or remote others). Neither approach can explain why people estimate greater media effect on a particular comparison target than on other comparison targets when the social distance of those comparison targets are the same or when all the targets are defined as out-groups. Both the social distance corollary and the self-categorization theory see estimation of media effects on others in a comparison context with oneself. That is, individuals automatically consider whether or not they are more affected by media messages than others when they are asked to estimate media effect. This consideration is linked to the motivation to maintain positive self-image, which is then embedded in the estimation of media effects on others and/or self. It appears that the social distance corollary and the social categorization approach concentrates excessively on the need for positive evaluation, but largely ignores a need to make an accurate estimation, when exploring the estimation process, despite the fact that it is very hard for people to totally abandon the need to be accurate when making a social judgment.

Here we need a new approach to explain variations of the third-person effect by comparison targets that hold constant the variables of the self-based approach and the self-other relationship-based approach. Individuals may take into account demographics, personal knowledge, and stereotypes about the comparison targets, as well as an assumption about how an issue is relevant to the comparison targets in order to fulfill a
need to make an accurate estimation when they make a judgment about others. Of course there is the possibility of situations in which one does not have any relevant information about the comparison targets, or one is extremely motivated to look better than the comparison targets. In most situations, however, people have some information about the target of estimation and have a need to be accurate.

Regarding a need to be accurate, it is reasonable to say that individuals’ perceptions of comparison targets are various, rather than consistent, with a single concept such as “people in general” or “the mass.” Expanding the concept of comparison targets beyond people in general, we can expect the existence of a specific group of more knowledgeable others and more involved others than the observers. When we ask individuals to estimate media effects on such group, they may respond with less estimation than when they estimate media effects on other groups such as others with little knowledgeable and who are uninvolved. In this sense, it is required to take the properties of the comparison targets into account for a better prediction of the third-person effect as well as the properties of the observers and the relationship between observers and comparison targets.

Although there is no third-person effect study explicitly guided by the other-based approach, some findings of previous studies have implications for this approach (e.g., David et al., 2002; Eveland et al., 1999; McLeod et al., 1997; Meirick, 2004; Scharrer, 2002). These studies show that individuals use information about comparison targets beyond the relationship between themselves and the comparison targets when they perceive media effects on others. Scharrer (2002) asks respondents to identify the
characteristics of the groups that they perceive as more vulnerable to negative media influence than others. He analyzes these group-by-group comparisons to determine the role they play in forming the third-person perception of the self as less vulnerable than others. Results of Scharrer’s (2002) study suggest that respondents may not always have a nebulous, unspecified view of those they consider most susceptible to the influence of television violence. Rather, when asked, respondents appear to view members of specific social groups that vary according to status or marginalization, as more or less at risk for television violence influence.

Even when given the option of responding that members of social groups were equally susceptible to television influence, the majority of respondents chose, instead, to identify particular groups as more influenced than others (Scharrer, 2002). These particular groups can be more or less salient depending on the context of the messages (i.e., who the communicator is and who the target is). We might expect people to have real-world knowledge and expectations about how receptive different groups are to certain media messages, even if exposure to those messages did not vary between those groups. It is believed that people are more attentive and receptive to the messages about something that relates to them and to messages delivered by someone familiar or respected (Meirick, 2004). Advertisements, for instance, usually have an explicit target and people may perceive greater media impact on its originally intended target than other groups of comparison targets. Regarding the potential influence of the communicators, it is hypothesized that exposure to pornography with white actors may cause people to estimate greater media impact on white viewers than viewers of other racial groups.
In their study of rap lyrics, McLeod et al. (1997) examined which groups students rated as more vulnerable than the more general group. The results suggest that youth from New York or Los Angeles are perceived as more vulnerable to “gangsta” rap lyrics than the average person. Later David et al. (2002) explain that it is logical to expect youth in New York and Los Angeles to be more vulnerable to “gangsta” rap because of the gang-related reputations of these cities. Their explanation implies that individuals account for how the comparison targets evaluate the content and the communicator of the message.

The challenges to the social distance corollary provide another ground for the other-based approach. Eveland et al. (1999) and some other scholars (e.g., Hoffner et al., 1999) argue that the perceived likelihood of exposure to negative media messages is a more powerful predictor of perceived impact on others than perceived social distance. Recently, by splitting perceived effects according to gender in the use of Internet pornography, Lo and Wei (2002) found that both male and female respondents tended to perceive Internet pornography to have greater negative effects on other males than on other females. But female respondents were more likely than male respondents to perceive greater negative effects of Internet pornography on other males than on other females. They explain that females are more likely than males to perceive that other males are more likely to be exposed to pornographic materials on the Internet than other females and are therefore more likely to perceive such content as having greater harmful effects on other males. These findings suggest that observers account for the
characteristics of the target group (men vs. women in this case), such as interest in Internet pornography and media use of specific content for a message topic.

People also account for the size of the comparison group. Tewksbury (2002) examines the role of the comparison group size in the third-person effect in the context of Internet pornography. Results suggest that as the comparison group size increases so does the difference between effect estimates of self and others. Tewksbury (2002) explains that as people consider the effect of messages on others they equate magnitude of influence with the number of people influenced. That is, the respondent in third-person effect studies may be thinking that many people being influenced is an indication that a large amount of influence has occurred. Thus, it may be that third-person effect research has been tapping into, in part, a perception that part of a message’s ultimate impact lies with the number of people affected (Tewksbury, 2002). From the other-based approach, these findings are understood as evidence that people account for the size of the comparison target when they perceive media effects on them. In sum, people are guided, at least partly, by a need to make an accurate estimation and therefore use some information about comparison targets when they estimate media effects on them. However, this cognitive effort to be accurate has not been the primary focus in the past. The simplest way to apply this approach to a third-person effect study would be to compare the effect size by two different groups of comparison targets in terms of a group characteristic (e.g., issue relevance to comparison targets, normative power of the group).

McLeod et al. (2001) build separate models for assessing media impact on the self and on others and find that people use different factors to generate perceptions of
perceived effect on the self compared to perceived effects on others. They suggest that the process of coming to judgments about perceived effects takes place quite differently depending on whether the judgment is about the self or some group of generalized others. One reason for the difference is that people perceive media effects on others based on a simple, stimulus-response heuristic process while using a more complex, conditional process forms the basis for perceiving the effect on the self. Along with this explanation, it is predicted that models of perceived media effects will vary with who the comparison target is.

2.7 Salience of a particular comparison target and the priming effects

The three approaches – self-based, self-other relationship based, and other based – are not mutually exclusive but interrelated. Therefore, we cannot preclude any of the three approaches from our analysis of the data that explore the third-person effect mechanism. Nevertheless, it would be possible to think of situations wherein “self-based factors” predict the third-person effect better than “other-based factors” and vice versa. As discussed, when the comparison targets are the mass public or people in general, the self-based approach would dominate over other approaches. By the same token, a message focusing on conflict between social groups initiates a process of social categorization: recipients of the message are cued to think of themselves and others in relation to the issue primarily as members of those groups rather than as isolated persons. The salience of message recipients’ group membership is (a) increased (cued or triggered) by the presentation of group conflict in the message, (b) dependent upon the
extent to which a person possesses a relevant group identification, and (c) magnified by higher personal consequences of the issue (Price, 1989).

It seems reasonable to say that there are situations in which the other-based approach fits better than the other approaches. One such situation would be when observers know a characteristic of the comparison targets, which is believed to guide their reactions to the message at hand. For example, if observers know how the message topic is relevant to the comparison targets they will select issue relevance as a primary standard to estimate media effects on the comparison target. This issue salience to a specific group makes a specific social categorization salient. The salience of a specific social categorization, which influences definition of the comparison target, can be explained by the priming effect in social psychological studies. Literature on the priming effect suggests that individuals do not retrieve all of the relevant information available in their memories, or even a representative sample of it, but only that which is most easily accessible (Bishop, Oldendick, & Tuchfarber, 1978; Krosnick, 1991; Schwarz & Hippler, 1995). Wyer (1980) found that how recently the information has been used is an important factor that increases the accessibility of specific domain information. This accords with statements about the priming effect, such as: priming occurs “when previously activated material in memory influences the processing and interpretation of subsequent information” (Petty & Jarvis, 1996, p. 235).
2.7.1 Question order as a mechanism of salience of group property

In most cases, question order effects refer to differences in response patterns that occur as a result of the order in which questions are asked in a structured questionnaire (Herek & Capitanio, 1999; Schwarz & Sudman, 1992). Classically, context effects stemming from question order, wording, positioning, etc., are primarily perceived as errors that should be minimized in order to measure respondents’ true opinions (Wanke, 1997). This perspective assumes that a true score of attitudes always exists. Analogous to psychological testing, this perspective holds that any given response is the sum of the true score and an error. From this perspective, improving data quality is equivalent to reducing errors, in other words, eliminating context effects (Wanke, 1997). For example, in the context of the third-person effect studies, question order effects may be read as an error affecting the “true” third-person effect. Along with the classic perspective, question order effect studies have examined whether the perceived differences in cognitive categories between two stimuli of subsequently-asked questions are pronounced enough to be checked, or trivial enough to be bypassed; and whether or not their importance decides whether the answer to the previous question is contrasted or assimilated to the answer to the preceding one (Schwarz & Hippler, 1995; Schuman & Presser, 1981).

Question order effects in survey research are categorized as either consistency effects or contrast effects (Schuman & Presser, 1981). Consistency effects reflect a respondent’s tendency to give consonant answers to two or more questions. Consistency effects, or what some scholars refer to as “assimilation effects,” are observed when the subjects of the questions are considered as being parts of the same category, and contrast
effects are the opposite (e.g., Schwartz, Strack, & Mai, 1991; Schuman & Presser, 1981). For example, Schuman and Presser (1981) demonstrated that respondents’ willingness to allow communist reporters to work in the United States was significantly affected by whether a preceding question asked if American reporters should be allowed to work in Russia.

On the other hand, contrast effects stem from a conscious rejection of the influence of prior questions when answering later questions (Schwarz, Strack, & May, 1991), thereby leading to greater differences between the responses to various questions. For example, Schuman and Presser (1981) found that respondents reported lower overall happiness when the general item followed a specific question about marital happiness than when the questions were reversed. When a specific question precedes a more general question, respondents often interpret the second question as asking for new information beyond what they have already provided (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Consequently, they exclude information that they have previously reported in their response to the specific item (Herek & Capitanio, 1999; Gaskell, Wright, & O’Muircheartaigh, 1995). It is important to note that contrast and consistency effects are produced as a consequence of respondents’ evaluations of the two items in relation to each other.

In 1990s, however, a group of scholars proposed a new perspective on question order effects (e.g., Herek and Capitanio, 1999; Tourangeau et al., 2000; Wanke, 1997; Wilson & Hodges, 1992). These scholars argue that people do not necessarily hold ready-made attitudes (Tourangeau et al., 2000). Answers to questions may be generated
on the spot (Hastie & Park, 1986) and are therefore unavoidably influenced by the context and setting in which the questions are asked (Gaskell et al., 1995). According to Tourangeau et al., (2000), an answer is often based on a judgment that has been created on the spot and, in any case, the answer is the outcome of a process with multiple components, each one of which may have been carried out unreliably.

In light of this finding, Herek and Capitanio (1999), as well as Wanke (1997), urged that context effects should be considered as a part of the “true” score of attitude instead of as an “error.” They consider attitudes to be a temporary, context-dependent construction. Wilson and Hodges (1992) called this new perspective the “social cognitive process perspective.” From this perspective we cannot measure consistent true attitudes because attitudes are always context dependent (Wanke, 1997). This does not mean that attitude responses are never based on existing evaluations but that under a wide range of circumstances, respondents may retrieve specific considerations rather than a pre-existing evaluation (Tourangeau et al., 2000).

Along with the social cognitive process perspective, some scholars have located the source of question order effects in priming (i.e., the accessibility of a specific reference) (e.g., Bishop et al., 1978; Gaskell et al., 1995; McClendon & O’Brien, 1988; Wanke, 1997). These scholars argue that respondents can be influenced by the accessibility of a specific reference when they interpret the questions, retrieve information relevant to the question, make a decision, and report that decision (for more details see Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988). Moreover, Bishop and associates (1978) argue that respondents do not perform an exhaustive search of their memories, but instead
answer questions based on the first thing that comes to mind. Once we accept priming as an underlying process of the question order effect, it is reasonable to say that one question primes the subject for the next question(s) so that the reference point used by the subject in the previous question is easily accessible for the following question(s).

2.7.2 Application of question order effects in the context of the third-person effect in the past

In studies of third-person or first-person effects, question order effects have also been examined to assure the robustness of the effects. Researchers have examined the third-person effect based on the assumption that the presences of question order effects weaken the robustness of third-person effect; conversely, the absence of question order effects strengthens the robustness (e.g., Dupagne, Salwen, & Paul, 1999).

In third-person effect studies researchers have attempted to address question order effects by randomly alternating the self and the others questions (Gunther, 1995; Price, Tewksbury, & Huang, 1998; Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991). The rationale that underlies the idea of associating third-person effect and question order is that back-to-back self-then-others question order could lead to an underestimation of third-person perception. This would encourage respondents to move the answer to the second question closer to that of the first (Perloff, 1999). Conversely, the others-then-self question order could artificially increase third-person effect if respondents systematically use the others-questions as a baseline for answering the self-questions (Lasorsa, 1989).

Most studies about question order effects have found no significant pattern on the third-person perceptions (Salwen & Dupagne, 1999). Moreover, Price and Tewksbury
(1996) found third-person effects even in the single-question conditions (self-only vs. others-only) wherein the respondents were not required to contrast perceived media impact on themselves with estimated impact on other people. Based on this empirical evidence, scholars have claimed that possible question order effects cannot be addressed by reversing the sequence of the questions and have declared that third-person perception is “a robust observation, occurring in every measurement condition” (Price & Tewksbury, 1996, p. 137; also see Dupagne et al., 1999).

An explanation regarding results of no presence of question order effects on individuals’ perceptions of media effects would be the “automatic comparison process.” People regularly evaluate the likely impact of media messages they encounter regardless of whether or not they are asked to think about them and this evaluation is made in the context of comparison (David et al., 2002). People always have perceptions of the effect of a specific message on themselves and others even before they are asked to make estimation. Therefore, regardless of question order, the order of estimation is always the same at the individual level. That is, individuals habitually estimate media effects on the self first then on others, thus the cognitive order is not affected by the question order of the survey.

Although the order of questions has not been significant in most studies, we are aware of at least four studies in which question order had a significant impact. David and Johnson (1998) report that the size of the third-person effect was significantly lower when the self-question was asked first than when it was asked last. They claimed, “although the role of question order might not be discernible for low undesirable
outcomes, it plays an important role in high undesirability outcomes” (David & Johnson, 1998, p. 52). David and Johnson also report that when they interpret admitting to the influence of media effects on self as an undesirable outcome (e.g., low self-esteem), people are likely to report a low estimate of the effect on self and a high estimate of the effect on others. This study suggests that question order has substantial impacts on third-person perceptions.

Dupagne et al. (1999) investigated whether the sequencing of the questions about self, others, and restrictions affects the perceptual and behavioral outcomes of third-person effect on television violence, televised trials, and negative political advertising. They found that perceived media effects on self were smaller when self-questions followed other-questions than when other-questions followed self-question in the case of television violence. In regard to David and Johnson’s (1998) rationale for the relationship between question order and observed third-person effect, the results in Dupagne et al.’s (1999) study can be interpreted as evidence that people consider it more undesirable to be influenced by television violence than by televised trials or negative political advertising. This suggests question order effects vary with the content of messages.

Slightly different to the two studies above, Price and Tewksbury (1996) examined “moderating” question order effects on third-person perception by focusing on the interaction of question order and general political knowledge. They found that when the others-question was asked first, subjects’ estimates of media impact on themselves decreased markedly with increased levels of knowledge. They explained this as evidence
of subjects’ downward comparison: “More knowledgeable subjects adjusted their estimates of influence on themselves downward after first answering the question asking them to contemplate effects on others” (p. 138). One interesting finding in their study was that the size of the third-person effect was always largest in experimental conditions where the others-question was asked first. Based on this finding, they argue that the first question serves as a judgmental anchor against which the second estimate is then made. More recently, David et al. (2004) replicated Price and Tewksbury’s (1996) between-subject design and found that the third-person effect was weakened when direct social comparison was eliminated in the between-subjects condition.

2.7.3 A new application of question order effects in the context of the third-person effect

Investigating question order effects to assure the robustness of the third-person effect is only one application, which is based on the classic perspective of the question order effects in survey research. If we adopt a newly proposed approach to question order effects, the social cognitive process perspective, we can obtain other benefits for understanding third-person effects. The benefits would be greatest when we account for the priming effects as an underlying process of question order effects and cognitive components of the third-person effect, together. As we have seen in literature on question order effects, the first question can prime a consideration, which then influences the following question(s) in survey research. The cognitive explanations of the third-person effects states that third-person perceptions are derived from differences between estimations of media effects on the self and on others (McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland,
2001). These differences are attributed to what considerations are accounted for and how the considerations are interpreted (Scharrer, 2002; Duck & Mullin, 1995). For instance, when judging the impact of a message on their behavior or opinion, people take into account their greater awareness of, and discounting of, situational factors like persuasive intent (Gunther, 1991; Perloff, 2002). As a result, they estimate relatively small media influence on themselves. On the other hand, when estimating media effects on others’ behavior and opinions, observers account for others’ dispositional shortcomings, like gullibility (Rojas et al., 1996). This leads observers to the conclusion that the media have relatively greater impact on others. It appears that question order can prime a consideration when people perceive media effects on the self and on others, which then influences the size of the third-person perceptions for a particular comparison target.

One of the considerations available to be primed is social categorization. In most cases, comparisons between self and others do not exist in an informational vacuum. Rather, they fulfill a specific epistemic goal and are made to obtain judgment-relevant knowledge about the comparison targets (Paek et al., 2005). To evaluate a given target, judges need to consult knowledge that helps them to make this evaluation. It is one of the fundamental tenets of social cognition research that such judgments are not equally based on all the judgment-relevant knowledge that is potentially available. Rather, the degree to which a particular knowledge unit influences a given judgment depends on its accessibility (Mussweiler, 2003). The more accessible a given piece of information, the more likely it will be used in the judgment process, and the more likely it is to have an influence on the judgment. From this perspective, that the same target is judged
dramatically differently subsequent to a comparison with one standard than when compared with another standard suggests that the respective comparisons render different aspects of target knowledge accessible (Mussweiler, 2003).

Self-categorization theory states that when a particular social identity is made salient, individuals are likely to think of themselves as having characteristics that are representative of that social category (Turner, 1982; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). When we take into account a social identity, we should note that individuals belong to a number of groups at any given time and not all characteristics of the various groups are salient when they make a social judgment (Tajfel, & Turner, 1986). A group can be important in one situation but not in other; and membership in a particular group can strongly influence one’s judgment when it is relevant, but other membership in another group will have a weak influence. Here we have to reconsider the importance of the context of messages as well as the content of messages. In the real world when people receive media messages they also receive clues about which social category is most susceptible, such as the primary sales target of an advertisement for a particular product. Clues about social categorization of a specific target, as a pronounced cognitive boundary, can trigger (or modify) the third-person perception.

In their experiments, Brewer and Gardner (1996) primed the concept of “we” through a set of three experiments on a proofreading task. When asked to engage in a self-definition exercise, participants in the we condition were more likely than others to emphasize collective identities (e.g., “I’m a black woman”). The results of the experiments showed that the overall production of social self-descriptions was greatly
enhanced by the *we* prime, as compared to the baseline proportions found in the *they* and *
*it* conditions. This finding suggests that the context of a survey can prime a particular

group concept without any additional activity, such as an explicit direction to make
decision based on a particular standard.

Applying to the third-person effect study, we can expect that a priming cue can
increase or decrease the size of the third-person effect depending on which social
categorization becomes salient in varying ways. First, a priming cue can define the size
of a comparison target. There is a body of literature that consistently demonstrates that as
comparison targets become more generalized, greater media impact is perceived (Cohen,
Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999). If a
comparison target defined as “people in general” is redefined more specifically, media
effects can be attenuated. For people in general, individuals are not motivated to
scrutinize information which can help them to accurately estimate media effects because
of the invincible image of the mass. On the other hand, if a comparison target is
specified, individuals can retrieve specific information for a more accurate estimation.
This cognitive process can lead to attenuation or accentuation of third-person perceptions.

Second, a priming cue serves as an anchor to identify observers to a particular
group and this self-categorization leads to defining comparison targets as either in-group
or out-group. Literature on the third-person effect shows that individuals’ perceptions of
media effect on themselves are closer to those on the in-group than on the out-group
(Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 2000; Meirick, 2004; Reid & Hogg, 2005). This phenomenon of
between-group differentiations, in terms of perceptions of media effects, is more
prominent when media hostility bias against a particular target is present (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Tsfati & Cohen, 2003; Vallone, Ross & Lepper, 1985). In such cases, a particular social identity of the potentially stigmatized group members becomes salient and members of the group perceive greater media effects on people in general than others do (Duck et al., 2000; Scharrer, 2002). However, if individuals whose social identity becomes salient do not see such media bias against their group identity, they may not present greater third-person perceptions than individuals whose social identity does not become salient.

The priming cues include the identities of the communicator and the target, the content of the messages, and the context of a specific message. Individuals are often aware of the identity of the communicator, as well as the identity of the target of a message. For an advertisement targeting children, people may think of children when they estimate media effects on people in general. For a message communicated by women, the comparison targets can be primed as women when people estimate media effects on people in general. Likewise, when we watch a violent yet comical movie immediately after reading a story about the victims at Columbine High School\(^2\), we may worry about the potential effect of the movie’s violent content on children more than we would if we had not read the story. Consequently, readers of the story may perceive greater media effects of violent movies than those who had not read the story. In this case, the news story can play a role in priming for children, who are generally believed to

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\(^2\) Columbine is a high school in Littleton, Colorado where, on April 20, 1999, twelve students and a teacher were killed by members of the student body. Twenty-three others were wounded by before the assailants took their own lives.
be very susceptible to media messages, when people construct a concept of people in general.

In sum, according to the social cognitive process perspective question order effects should not be understood as a factor that undermines the robustness of third-person effect. Instead, it should be understood as a clue to understand the process of results. That is, if we find evidence of question order effects in a study about third-person effect, we should interpret it as evidence that people’s attitudes on the issue are affected by specific considerations, which lead to a modification of the ensuing outcomes (e.g., the size of the third-person perceptions). If we agree to the proposition that some attitudes are not long lasting or stable, we should consider attitude as a context-dependent construction. In this case, question order effects should be treated as a component of the construction of a temporally true attitude.

2.8 Summary of literature review, hypotheses, and a research question

Through the literature review the following points have been made:

1. Perceptions of media effects can be overestimated, or underestimated for many reasons including needs of a positive self-image or variations in the cognitive process of messages.

2. Motivation and cognition, when individuals perceive media effect, are influenced by various factors. Scholars have found such factors in the characteristics of the perceivers (the self-based approach) and in the relationships between observers
and the comparison targets (the self-other relationship-based approach). However, results of previous studies suggest that by examining the characteristics of the comparison targets, in addition to the two components above, we can predict the third-person effect more accurately (the other-based approach).

3. In the self-based approach scholars argue that people who see a message as relevant to them estimate greater invulnerability to mass media messages on themselves than those who do not see personal issue relevance. When the message topic is personally relevant, people perceive it as being more important and interesting. Therefore they are more involved in the message.

4. Scholars of the self-other relationship-based approach argue that the magnitude of the self-other discrepancy may depend on the relationship between the observers and the comparison targets. The bulk of studies reported that the width of the gap between the perceived impact of media messages on oneself and that on others increased when the comparison targets are defined as a more geographically or socially remote group (the social distance corollary) or as an out-group (the self-categorization explanation).

5. The other-based approach assumes that perceivers are guided by a need to make an accurate estimation when they estimate something about others. Therefore, they make use of available information about others to estimate media effect. According to this approach, when people estimate media effects on others, they account for comparison targets’ demographics, media use, and evaluation of the messages.
6. In order to understand the underlying mechanism of the third-person effect we should incorporate all the three approaches together.

7. Scholars of the self-categorization theory urge that the stronger the social identification, the more pronounced the tendencies toward perceptions of similarity or equivalence between the self and an in-group (in-group assimilation), and toward perceptions of difference between in-group and out-group members (between-group differentiation). However, the level of social identification has been examined only at the individual level in the context of the third-person effect. That is, scholars have investigated whether perceivers’ levels of group identification have impacts on the size of the third-person effect but not the level of group identification of the comparison targets.

8. Properties of comparison targets are not always important for individuals to estimate media effects on them. It appears that when a specific social categorization becomes salient people are motivated to scrutinize characteristics of comparison targets. Social categorization becomes salient in cases of group conflict, group involvement and group threat. In addition, social categorization becomes important when the categorization is methodologically primed.

9. Cognitive process of perceptions of media effect on the self and media effect on others are different because of the fundamental attribution bias. Along with this, the cognitive process for perceiving media effects on a particular comparison target will be different from other comparison targets.
Based upon the above discussion, the following hypotheses and a research question were generated:

**H₁**: The tendency to perceive the effects of the media as having a more powerful effect on others than on oneself (the third-person perception) will be more pronounced among respondents to whom the issue of the message is highly relevant than among those for whom it is not relevant (the self-based approach).

**H₂**: Respondents will perceive the effects of the media on in-group members to be more similar to the effect on themselves than the effects on an out-group (the self-other relationship-based approach).

**H₃**: Respondents will perceive media messages to have less effect on people for whom the issue is relevant than for those for whom the issue is not relevant (the other-based approach).

**H₄**: The tendency to perceive the effects of the media on an in-group to be more similar to the effect on themselves than the effects on an out-group will be more pronounced among respondents to whom the message topic is highly relevant than among those for whom it is not relevant (a combination of the self-based approach and the self-other relationship-based approach).

**H₅**: The tendency to perceive media messages to have less effect on people to whom the issue is relevant than those for whom the issue is not relevant will be more pronounced among respondents to whom the message topic is highly relevant than
among those for whom it is not relevant (a combination of the self-based approach and the other-based approach).

H₆: The size of the third-person effect will vary with whether the comparison target’s social categorization is made salient by question order (a question order effect as a prime).

RQ: Do the directions and the magnitude of effects of the predictors on the third-person perceptions vary by comparison targets with different properties?
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

3.1 Sample

A telephone survey of Ohio adults was conducted by the Center for Survey Research of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the Ohio State University between February 12 and March 21, 2003. The survey was originally conducted for an individual project called “Normative Media Effect Study” by Dr. Carroll J. Glynn, Director of the School of Journalism and Communication. Dr. Glynn allowed the measurements of the present study to be included on the questionnaire.

A total of 2,139 randomly selected telephone numbers were attempted for this study. Among them, 632 numbers were identified as being businesses, disconnected or otherwise ineligible numbers. The remaining 1,507 numbers were presumed to be eligible household numbers. The first twenty completed interviews, with randomly selected Ohio residents, were used for a pilot test in which some items were dropped, other items were added, and still other items were reworded. A total of 524 interviews were completed with the final version of the questionnaire. The average interview length was nineteen minutes.
The response rate for this survey was 34.8%, using the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s Response Rate 1 calculation, which is the most conservative method of calculating response rate.\(^3\) The response rate reflects the increasing difficulty of completing interviews in telephone survey research because of the increased use of answering machines, caller ID and cellular phones. The majority of participants was Caucasian (88%) and ranged from 19 to 90 years old in age, with a mean age of 48. The majority of participants were women (53%, SD=.50). More than 86% of the sample had completed high school and more than 22% of the respondents had a bachelor’s or higher degree (SD= 2.07 on an 18-point scale). The median household income was $40,000. Compared to the general population of U.S. citizens and Ohio residents, women, Caucasians and those with a higher level of education were slightly overrepresented, but the respondents were, overall, very similar to the general demographics of U.S. citizens and the Ohio residents (see Appendix1).

3.2 Operationalizations

The survey instrument used in this study included several different types of scales and questions to measure key variables. These variables included: third-person

\[
RR1 = \frac{I}{(I+P) + (R+NC+O) + (UH+UO)}
\]

- \(I\) = Complete interview
- \(P\) = Partial interview
- \(R\) = Refusal and break-off
- \(NC\) = Non-contact
- \(O\) = Other
- \(UH\) = Unknown if household/occupied HU
- \(UO\) = Unknown, other
perceptions, interest in news, attention to the mass media, perceptions of the truthfulness of the mass media, media use and demographic variables. Each of the indices used is discussed below in greater detail.

To measure the third-person perceptions for four different estimation targets, respondents were asked to indicate separately how strongly they agreed or disagreed that the media content had a powerful effect on themselves, people in general, those for whom the issue was relevant, and those for whom the issue was not relevant. Two items were used to assess opinions about media effects: 1) negative media portrayal of smokers in television programs and movies; and 2) news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals. Based on these responses the third-person perceptions for each comparison target were computed as follows:

\[
\text{The third-person perception for a comparison target} = \frac{\text{Perceptions of media effects on a comparison target}}{\text{Perceptions of media effects on themselves}}
\]

In order to measure the perception of media effects with messages that contained a negative media portrayal of smokers, an introductory statement was given to the respondents as follows: “According to one report, about 95% of gangsters, 92% of murderers, and 87% of rapists in movies and on TV are smokers.” Next, respondents were asked to answer the following four questions: “Using a scale where 1 means no influence at all and 7 means a great deal of influence, how much do you think that watching movies and television dramas influences the image that [people in general have, your own image, smokers have, nonsmokers have] of (other) smokers?”
In order to measure the perceptions of media effects of news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’ sex scandals, another introductory statement was given to the respondents as follows: “According to another report, much of the recent news coverage about the Roman Catholic Church has dealt with scandals such as lawsuits over the sexual abuse of children by parish priests.” After reading these introductory statements, the interviewers asked four questions as follows: “For people in general, how much do you think this news coverage has influenced their attitudes toward Roman Catholic priests?” and “How much do you think this news coverage has influenced [your own attitudes, the attitudes of Roman Catholics, the attitudes of non-Roman Catholics] toward Roman Catholic priests?” The perceptions were measured using a 7-point scale, where 1 = no influence and 7 = great deal.

To measure whether the issues were personally relevant to them, the respondents were asked to identify their religious affiliation and whether or not they smoked after questions about perceptions of the media effect of the two items. When the data were analyzed, those who answered that they smoke or sometimes smoke were coded as smokers to whom the issue is relevant, and the others were coded as nonsmokers to whom the issue is not relevant with respect to the message about the negative media portrayal of smokers in movies and on television programs. Those who identified as Catholic were assigned to the group to which the issue is relevant, and others were assigned to the group to which the issue is not relevant with respect to news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals.
Social categorization was assigned based on respondents’ self-identification. For respondents who identified themselves as smokers (28%), fellow smokers were considered as an in-group and nonsmokers as the out-group. For nonsmokers (72%), the opposite was true. In-group members were those who did not smoke, whereas out-group members consisted of smokers. With respect to Catholicism, 21% of the sample self-identified themselves as Catholic, whereas the remaining 78% did not classify themselves as Catholic. Using the same strategy as the smoker question, in-group and out-group members were based on the self-identification questions. Among the qualified 522 respondents, 112 (21%) were Roman Catholic, 234 (45%) Protestant, 125 (23%) some other religion, and 51 (10%) had no religious affiliation.

In order to examine question order effect, the respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. Questions in the first condition were ordered as follows: people in general, yourself, those for whom the issue is relevant (smokers, Roman Catholics) and those for whom the issue is not relevant (nonsmokers, non-Roman Catholics). This condition was designed as the control condition wherein no stimulus (in this case, no clue of a social categorization) was presented. Since the traditional concept of the third-person effect is computed by the distance between the first two questions, the third and fourth questions, which may prime social categorization, are believed to have no impact on the magnitude of the traditional concept in this question order condition.

On the other hand, questions of the second condition were ordered as follows: those for whom the issue is relevant (smokers, Roman Catholics), those for whom the issue is not relevant (nonsmokers, non-Roman Catholics), yourself, and people in general.
In this case the conventional concept is that third-person effect can be influenced by the first two questions, which might prime social categorization. This condition was designed to be the experimental condition wherein stimulus, in this case a clue of social categorization, appeared. Question order was included in the regression models for perceptions of media effect on respondents themselves and people in general, but not for perceptions of media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant and on those for whom the issue is not relevant.

Several demographic questions regarding, age, gender, household income, and year in school were assessed and these variables were include in the regression models as control variables. In addition, five media-related variables that are potentially relevant to perceptions of media effects were included in the regression analyses for both issues. These variables include: interest in news in general, attention to mass media for news in general, perceptions of the truthfulness of mass media, television use, and newspaper use. These five variables were measured by a single item, respectively.

**Interest in news in general** was measured by asking a question as follows: “On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1=not at all, 2=a little, 3= some, 4= a lot, how much are you interested in the news around you?”

**Attention to mass media for news in general** was measured by asking a question as follows: “On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1=none at all, 2=a little, 3= some, 4= a lot, how much attention do you pay to television and other mass media for news?”

**Perceptions of the truthfulness of the mass media** were measured by asking a question as follows: “Using a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means not at all accurate and 7
means absolutely accurate, how accurate do you think the following statements is?

Television and newspaper coverage of issues reports the facts the way they really are.”

*Television use* was measured by asking a question as follows: “On an average day, about how many hours do you personally watch television?” Note that this question was not specified as spending time watching the news.

*Newspaper use* was measured by asking a question as follows: “In the past seven days, between [fill day] of last week and yesterday, how many days did you read or look at a daily newspaper?”

People’s interest in, and attention to, the mass media varies by message topic. Therefore, it is important to include some measurement for the given topics, but it is only possible to measure such concepts for a real story. Of the two topics in this study, the message topic about the portrayals of smokers in television programs and movies was a bogus news story while the news coverage of a sex scandal in the Roman Catholic Church was real. Therefore, the present study included measures for level of interest and attention for a particular message topic in the analysis only for the second topic.

*Interest in the news about the sexual scandals of Roman Catholics* was measured by asking a question as follows: “On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=some, 4= a lot, how interested are you in news about issues concerning the sexual scandals of the Roman Catholic Church?”

*Attention to the news of the sexual scandals of Roman Catholics* was measured by asking a question as follows: “On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1=none at all, 2=a little, 3= 
some, 4= a lot, how much attention do you pay to television and other mass media for news about the sexual scandals of Roman Catholic Church?”

In addition to these five (or seven) media-related variables, between-group differentiation computed by the distance between perceptions of media effects on the out-group and in-group, was included in the regression models. Between-group distance for negative media portrayals of smokers was computed by ABS (perceptions of media effect on out-group – on in-group for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals) and that for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals was vice versa.

Three important points justify this cross-matching computation. First, the mathematical share of a component between an independent variable and a dependent variable leads to an automatic correlation between them, which should be avoided in regression analysis. Second, the concept of between-group differentiation in this study refers to a general tendency rather than a concept based on a specific group membership. Therefore, it is expected that the effects of between-group tendency are consistent across message topics. Third, the inclusion of a measurement of between-group differentiation (e.g., In general, how much do you think the group you belonging to is different from other groups?) may be the cause context effects on responses to questions about perceptions of media effects on comparison targets.

4 Between-group differentiations for negative media portrayals of smokers and for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals was significantly correlated ($r = .219$, $p < .001$).
3.3 Data analysis

The six hypotheses were tested by running varying t tests. In addition, to examine the research question I regressed a series of predictors on perceptions of media effects on four different estimation targets, including the subjects themselves, people in general, those for whom the issue is relevant, and those for whom the issue is not relevant. Results of the regression will provide possible reasons for the results of t tests (e.g., underestimating the perceptions of media effects on the self or overestimating the perceptions of media effects on people in general)\(^5\). In addition, by comparing the predictors of each regression model, we should be able to understand how differently people perceive media effects on different estimation targets. The predictors of the regression models included: three demographic variables, five or seven (depending on issue) communication-related variables, issue relevance to perceivers (smoking or Catholic, depending on issue), between-group differentiation and question order. In addition, in order to examine if there are significant interactions between issue relevance to perceivers and between-group differentiation and question order, two interaction terms were included in the models. The interaction terms included smoking (or Catholic) * question order and smoking (or Catholic) * between-group differentiation. The predictors were entered in two steps. In the first step, all except the interaction terms were entered and the second step the remaining interaction terms were entered. For the purpose of this study, question order and its interaction with issue relevance to perceivers was not entered in the regression models to predict perceptions of media effects on those

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\(^5\) Overestimation and underestimation were determined not by comparison with actual media effects on the target but estimation of media effects on the counterpart (i.e., the self or comparison target).
for whom the issue is relevant (Smokers and Catholics) and those for whom it is not relevant (nonsmokers and nonCatholics).
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Five hundred and twenty four adults, of which 32% were smokers and 21% were Roman Catholics, participated in the study. Figure 4.1 shows how the respondents perceived the media effects of negative media portrayals of smokers and news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals on four different comparison targets. For both issues respondents perceived the greatest media effects on those for whom the issue was not relevant (nonsmokers/nonCatholics), followed by people in general and then those for whom the issue was relevant (smokers/Catholics). Perceptions of media effects on themselves are smallest across the issues. These results suggest that people may have different perceptions of media effects on different groups of comparison targets.

Similar to most other studies on the third-person effect, this study supported the third-person perception hypothesis, which states that respondents largely view others as more negatively influenced by media messages than themselves. Respondents perceived greater media effects on people in general than themselves for both negative media portrayals of smokers (t [496] = 17.13, p < .001) and news coverage of Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals (t [501] = 14.96, p < .001). These results suggest that individuals
perceive that the attitudes toward smokers of people in general were more influenced by negative media portrayals of smokers than they themselves were; and that they also perceive that attitudes toward Roman Catholic priests of people in general were more influenced by news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals than they themselves were. These results strongly support the third-person effect hypothesis.

![Figure 4.1 Means of Perceptions of Media Effects on Four Different Comparison Targets](image-url)

**Figure 4.1 Means of Perceptions of Media Effects on Four Different Comparison Targets**
4.2 Results of t tests

Hypothesis 1: The self-based approach

Hypothesis 1 tests whether the third-person effect is affected by issue relevance to perceivers, a variable of the self-based approach. H₁ states that the tendency to perceive that the effects on others are stronger than on oneself (the third-person perception) will be more pronounced among respondents to whom the message topic is highly relevant than among those for whom it is not relevant. The hypothesis was tested by independent samples t tests of the third-person perceptions for people in general, which were computed by subtracting perceived media effects on themselves from perceived media effects on people in general. The results appear in Figure 4.2.

![Third-Person Perceptions by Issue Relevance to Perceivers and Issue Topic](image)

Figure 4.2 Third-Person Perceptions by Issue Relevance to Perceivers and Issue Topic
Results only partially support H$_1$. For negative media portrayal of smokers, there is no significant difference between smokers’ (M = 1.55, SD = 1.94, n = 158) and nonsmokers’ (M = 1.47, SD = 1.95, n = 338) third-person perceptions for people in general. However, Catholic respondents’ third-person perceptions for people in general for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals (M = 1.88, SD = 1.79, n = 104) are, on average, greater than that of respondents who are not Catholic (M = 1.17, SD = 1.99, n = 397), which is statistically significant (t [501] = 3.49, p < .001). These results suggest that the tendency to perceive the media effects on others to be stronger than on oneself (the third-person perception) is more pronounced among those for whom the message is highly relevant than those for whom it is not relevant is issue-specific. The findings imply that the self-based approach works for some issues but not all.

Hypothesis 2: The self-other relationship-based approach

H$_2$ examines whether social categorization, a variable of the self-other relationship-based approach, has impacts on the third-person effect. H$_2$, which states that respondents will perceive the effects of the media on in-group members to be more similar to the effect on themselves than the effects on an out-group, was tested by independent samples t tests of perceptual media effect differences between perceivers themselves and comparison targets that were defined as either in-group or out-group.

Results of the t tests presented in Figure 4.3 render substantial support for H$_2$ except for one test, which only marginally support H$_2$. Smokers perceived media effects on the out-group (nonsmokers, M = 2.40, SD = 1.90, n = 160) with a more marked
difference than the in-group (other smokers, $M = 1.46$, $SD = 1.75$, $n = 152$) ($t [149] = 4.70$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that smokers perceive a greater difference between media effects on themselves and nonsmokers than they do between themselves and other smokers. Meanwhile, nonsmokers perceive media effects on smokers (out-group) with a more marked difference ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 1.76$, $n = 320$) than other nonsmokers (in-group, $M = 1.71$, $SD = 1.68$, $n = 340$), comparing them with their perceptions of media effects on themselves ($t [317] = 1.52$, $p < .10$, one-tailed).

With respect to news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals, Catholic respondents perceived a greater difference between media effects on themselves and other people who are not Catholic (out-group, $M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.90$, $n = 105$) than they did between themselves and other Catholic people (in-group, $M = 1.09$, $SD = 1.25$, $n = 104$) ($t [102] = 8.82$, $p < .001$). Similar results are found among respondents who are not Catholic, indicating that nonCatholic respondents perceive media effects on Catholic people (out-group) with a more marked difference ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 1.70$, $n = 385$) than other people who are not Catholic (in-group, $M = 1.57$, $SD = 1.70$, $n = 398$), comparing them with their perceptions of media effects on themselves ($t [379] = 2.84$, $p < .01$).
Across issues, the results show respondents’ perceptions of media effects on themselves assimilate to those of other in-group members and dissimilate to those of out-group members. These results provide ground for the social distance corollary and the social identity perspective, both of which argue that perceivers view themselves as least susceptible, other in-group members (or socially close others) as more susceptible than they, and out-group (or socially remote others) as even more susceptible to the negative media message. It appears that individuals’ perceptions of media effects on a comparison target vary with how they identify the relationship between themselves and the comparison target, either as in-group or out-group. Based on the findings it is expected that individuals who are more likely to judge a comparison target by means of social identity are also more likely to show in-group homogeneousness and intergroup
discrimination than those who are less likely to judge in such a way when they perceive media effects on a particular comparison target.

**Hypothesis 3: The other-based approach**

H₃ investigates issue relevance to comparison targets, a variable of the other-based approach by paired samples t tests of perceptions of media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant and those for whom it is not relevant. H₃ hypothesized that respondents will perceive that media messages have less effect on people to whom the issue is relevant than for those for whom the issue is not relevant. For the negative media portrayals of smokers, smokers are those for whom the issue is relevant; and for news coverage of the Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals, Catholic people are those for whom the issue is relevant.

The results presented in Figure 4.4 show substantial supports for H₃ across the issues. For both issues respondents perceived greater media effects on those for whom the issue is not relevant than those for whom it is relevant. They perceived that smokers’ attitudes toward other smokers are less influenced by negative media portrayals of smokers (M = 3.53, SD = 2.05) than nonsmokers’ attitudes (M = 4.09, SD = 2.03) (t [473] = 5.16, p < .001); and Catholics’ attitudes toward Catholic priests are less influenced by news coverage of the Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals (M = 4.33, SD = 1.94) than the attitudes of those who are not Catholic (M = 5.71, SD = 1.48) (t [489] = 15.33, p < .001).
These results suggest that individuals perceive less media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant than on those for whom it is not. Moreover, the results establish, rather convincingly, that some groups are viewed as more susceptible to media effects than their counterparts, that is, people’s perceptions of media effects vary by their perception of the potential victims of the messages.

**Hypothesis 4:** Combination between the self-based approach and the self-other relationship-based approach

$H_4$ states that the tendency to perceive the effects of the media on in-group members as more similar to the effect on themselves than the effects on an out-group will be more pronounced among respondents to whom the message topic is highly relevant than among those for whom it is not relevant. In order to test this hypothesis, scores of
between-group differentiation, measured by the distance between perceptions of media effects on the out-group and the in-group, and between perceivers to whom the issue is relevant and perceivers to whom it is not relevant, were tested by independent samples t tests. Results of t tests presented in Figure 4.5 render some supports for H₄, which indicate that the mean of smokers’ between-group differentiation (M = 2.02, SD = 1.85, n = 151) is more than that of nonsmokers’ (M = 1.61, SD = 1.61, n = 322) for negative media portrayals of smokers. This result suggests larger between-group differentiations for those for whom the issue is relevant (smokers) than those for whom the issue is not relevant (nonsmokers) (t [471] = 2.46, p < .05). This relationship is consistent with news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals. The mean of Catholics’ between-group differentiation (M = 1.87, SD = 1.48, n = 107) is more than that of nonCatholics’ (M = 1.78, SD = 1.87, n = 382). However, the difference between Catholics and nonCatholics does not reach the point of statistical significance.

These results suggest that the impacts of social categorization on individuals’ perceptions of media effects (e.g., between-group differentiation) can vary by issue relevance to perceivers. That is, variables of the self-based approach and variables of the self-other relationship-based approach can be confounded with each other; and the more the message topic is relevant to perceivers, the more likely people differentiate the in-group from the out-group.
Hypothesis 5: Combination between the self-based approach and the other-based approach

H₅ examines the variability of influence on issue relevance to perceivers, a variable of the self-based approach on perceptions of media effects on people in general by issue relevance to comparison targets, and a variable of the other-based approach. H₅ states that the tendency to perceive that media messages have less effect on people to whom the issue is relevant than on those for whom the issue is not relevant (effects of issue relevance to comparison targets) will be more pronounced among respondents to whom the message is highly relevant than among those for whom it is not relevant (issue relevance to perceivers). The hypothesis was investigated by independent samples t tests.
of the effects of issue relevance to comparison targets on perceptions of media effects by issue relevance to perceivers.

Results of t tests presented in Figure 4.6 render some supports for H5. When they perceive the effect of negative media portrayals of smokers, smoking respondents (M = 1.09, SD = 2.52, n = 151) are more likely than non-smoking respondent (M = 0.32, SD = 2.26, n = 322) to tend to estimate more media effects on others to whom the issue is not relevant (nonsmokers), as compared to their estimation of media effects on others to whom the issue is relevant (smokers); and this difference is statistically significant (t [473] = 3.37, p < .001). Meanwhile, a marginally significant difference in tendency to estimate more media effect on people who are not Catholic as compared to Catholics exists between Catholic respondents (M = 1.61, SD = 1.77, n = 107) and nonCatholic respondents (M = 1.31, SD = 2.04, n = 382) when they perceive media effects regarding news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals (t [489] = 1.37, p < .10). These results suggest that the impacts of issue relevance to comparison targets on individuals’ perceptions of media effects on the comparison targets can vary by issue relevance to perceivers. That is, variables of the self-based approach can be confounded with variables of the other-based approach; and the more the message topic is relevant to perceivers, the more likely one’s third-person perceptions to be influenced by issue relevance to comparison targets.
Hypothesis 6: Priming effect by question order

H$_6$ examines whether question order can prime a particular consideration of group identity and therefore has impacts on the size of third-person effect. In the experimental condition, the respondents were asked to estimate media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant (smokers, Roman Catholics) and those for whom the issue is not relevant (nonsmokers, non-Roman Catholics) before they estimate media effects on people in general, and themselves. Since the traditional concept of the third-person effect is computed by the distance between the perceptions of media effects on people in general and themselves, the first two questions, i.e., perceptions of media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant and those for whom it is not relevant, may prime a particular social categorization. On the other hand, questions of the control condition were ordered as follows: people in general, yourself, those for whom the issue is relevant (smokers,
Roman Catholics) and those for whom the issue is not relevant (nonsmokers, non-Roman Catholics). In this condition, a priming cue of social categorization was not present before the third-person perceptions.

The hypothesis was investigated by paired samples t tests of the perceptions of the third-person effect by question order. The results indicate that $H_6$ is partially supported. For negative media portrayals of smokers, the mean of the third-person perceptions of the experimental group ($M = 1.40$, $SD = 1.95$, $n = 252$) is smaller than that of the control group ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 1.94$, $n = 244$), but the difference is not statistically significant. Next we examined the potential difference of question order effects between smokers and nonsmoker for negative media portrayals of smokers. The results presented in Table 4.1 show that the primed cues of social categorization decrease nonsmokers’ perceptions of media effect on people in general to 1.24 from 1.73 ($t[336] = 2.31, p < .05$). However, such question order effects do not appear in smokers’ third-person perceptions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nonsmokers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Smokers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T value</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.31*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

Table 4.1 Differences in Question Order Effects by Issue Relevance to Perceivers for Negative Media Portrayals of Smokers in Movies and TV Programs

On the other hand, for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals, the mean of the third-person perceptions of the experimental group (M = 0.85, SD = 1.88, n = 250) is smaller than that of the control group (M = 1.78, SD = 1.96, n = 250) (t [498] = 5.43, p < .001), which substantially supports H_6. Figure 4.7 illustrates the means of the third-person perceptions of media effects for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals between Catholics and nonCatholics. Both Catholics’ and nonCatholics’ perceptions of media effects were affected by the cues of social categorization. For nonCatholics the mean of the third-person perceptions of the experimental group (M = 0.76, SD = 1.93, n = 200) is smaller than that of the control group (M = 1.59, SD = 1.96, n = 197) (t [395] = 4.23, p < .001). The same pattern is repeated for Catholics: the mean of the third-person perceptions of the experimental group (M = 1.22, SD = 1.59, n = 51)
is smaller than that of the control group (M = 2.50, SD = 1.76, n = 53) (t[102] = 3.90, p < .001). However, for Catholics it slopes downward more radically than for non-Catholics.

Figure 4.7 Variations of Question Order Effects on the Third-person Perceptions for People in General by Issue Relevance to Perceivers with Respect to News Coverage of a Roman Catholic Priest’s Sex Scandals

4.3 Regression analysis

Negative media portrayals of smokers

In order to further explore the alleged relationship between the third-person perceptions and variables from three approaches (the self-based-, the self-other relationship based-, and other-based approach), I regressed a series of predictors regarding perceptions of media effects on four different estimation targets.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison targets of the perceptions of media effects</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>People in general</th>
<th>Smokers</th>
<th>Non-Smokers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1=male)</td>
<td>-.474*</td>
<td>-.193</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>-.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.013#</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>-.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking (1=smoker)</td>
<td>-.361#</td>
<td>-.378#</td>
<td>-.504*</td>
<td>.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between-group differentiation&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.154*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in news in general</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to media in general</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-.135</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>-.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthfulness of media</td>
<td>.238***</td>
<td>.148*</td>
<td>.243***</td>
<td>.233***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV use</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.057#</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper use</td>
<td>.104**</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QO&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (1= primed)</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                                                   | 419   | 406               | 419     | 419         |
| R² (F value)                                        | .104  | .053              | .092    | .054        |
|                                                     | (4.04)***| (1.89)*           | (3.62)***| (2.17)*     |
| Smoking * QO<sup>b</sup>                            | .450  | .942*             |        |             |
| Smoking * Between-group differentiation              | -.191 | .220#             | .145    | .295*       |

| R² change (F value)                                  | .006  | .017              | .003    | .011        |
|                                                     | (1.43)| (3.82)*           | (1.16)  | (4.97)*     |

<sup>a</sup>This was measured by distance between perceptions of media effects on Catholics and nonCatholics for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals<br>
<sup>b</sup>Question Order<br>
<sup>p</sup>< .10,  <sup>**</sup>p < .05,  <sup>***</sup>p < .01,  <sup>****</sup>p < .001 note. Coefficients are all unstandardized.

Table 4.2 Hierarchical Regressions of the Perceptions of Media Effects of Negative Media Portrayals of Smokers on Demographic Variables, Issue Relevance to Perceivers, Between-Group Differentiation, Communication Variables and Question Order
The results of the regression of media effects on oneself for negative media portrayals of smokers, presented in the second column of Table 4.2, show that, while holding other variables within the model constant, male ($b = -.474, p < .05$), smoking ($b = -.361, p < .10$), although it is only marginally significant, perceptions of the truthfulness of the media ($b = .238, p < .001$), and newspaper use ($b = .104, p < .01$) are either positively or negatively related to the perceptions of media effect on themselves. These results suggest that the female nonsmokers, who believe the media truthfully report facts and use newspaper for news, perceive more media effects on themselves than male smokers, who do not trust the media and do not read newspapers.

The third column of Table 4.2 shows the results of the regression of perceptions of media effects on people in general. The results indicate that nonsmokers ($b = .378, p < .10$) who believe the media truthfully report facts ($b = .148, p < .05$), and use TV less ($b = -.057, p < .10$) perceive greater media effects on people in general than smokers who trust the media and use TV more.

As interaction terms are added in the model in the second step, interactions between smoking and question order ($b = .942, p < .05$) and smoking and between-group differentiation ($b = .220, p < .10$) although only marginally significant, are related to perceptions of media effects on people in general. Plots for the predicted regression lines of interactions between smoking and question order appear in Figure 4.8. This figure shows that cues for self-categorization, made salient by question order, slightly reduce smokers’ perceptions of media effects on people in general, while it increases nonsmokers’ perceptions. The opposite directions of interaction effects between smokers
and nonsmokers explain why there was no difference between the third-person perceptions of the experimental group of question order and those of the control group in the t tests of hypothesis 6. The degree of the slopes suggests that nonsmokers are more influenced by question order than smokers. It appears that cues for self-categorization increase the perceptual gap between those for whom the issue is relevant (smokers) and those for whom the issue is not relevant (nonsmokers) mainly by influencing nonsmokers to whom the issue is not relevant.

![Figure 4.8](image.png)

**Figure 4.8 Significant Interactions of Issue Relevance to Perceivers and Question Order on the Perceptions of Media Effects on People in General with Respect to Negative Media Portrayals of Smokers in Movies and TV Programs**

Figure 4.9 illustrates plots for the predicted regression lines of interactions between smoking and between-group differentiation. This figure shows smokers’ perceptions of media effects on people in general increase as between-group differentiation increases while nonsmokers’ perceptions decrease. The gap between the
effects of between-group differentiation on people in general for smokers and nonsmokers are widest at point 0 of between-group differentiation and becomes narrower, until around at point 5.5 and then wider again. The degree of the slopes suggests that smokers’ perceptions are more influenced by between-group differentiation than nonsmokers’.

Figure 4.9 Significant Interactions between Smoking and Between-group Differentiation on the Perceptions of Media Effects on People in General with Respect to Negative Media Portrayals of Smokers in TV programs and Movies

Results with respect to the perceptions of media effects on smokers, to whom the issue is relevant, presented in the fourth column of Table 4.2, show that smoking (b = - .504, p < .05) and perceptions of the truthfulness of the media (b = .243, p < .001) are related to perceptions of media effects on smokers. The results suggest that smokers who do not believe the media truthfully report facts perceive less media effect on smokers
than nonsmokers who believe the truthfulness of the media. There is no interaction effect between smoking and between-group differentiation on the perceptions.

Results with respect to the perceptions of media effects on nonsmokers, to whom the issue is not relevant, presented in the fifth column of Table 4.2, show that between-group differentiation (b = .154, p < .05) and perceptions of the truthfulness of the media (b = .233, p < .001) are related to perceptions of media effects on nonsmokers. The results suggest that those who have tendency to differentiate between in-group and out-group, and believe the media truthfully report facts perceive greater media effects on nonsmokers than those who do not have the tendency and do not believe the truthfulness of the media.

The regression model including interaction terms indicates significant interactions between smoking and between-group differentiation (b = .295, p < .05). Plots for the predicted regression lines of the interactions appear in Figure 4.10. The figure clearly illustrates that smokers’ perceptions of media effects increase as between-group differentiation increases while nonsmokers’ perceptions remain relatively stable across the level of between-group differentiation. The gap between smokers and nonsmokers, in terms of the effects of between-group differentiation on perceptions of media effects on nonsmokers, is 0 around point 1 of between-group differentiation and biggest at point 6, which is the maximum scale of between-group differentiation.
The results of the four regression models, presented in Table 4.2, shed light on the research question about how the process of third-person perceptions differs by comparison targets. The results show that the predictors and the directions of the effects varied with the estimation target. For example, issue relevance to the perceiver (i.e., smoking) had negative relationships to perceptions of media effects on the self, people in general, and smokers, but no effects on nonsmokers. Meanwhile, perceptions of the truthfulness of media were positively related to perceptions of media effects on all four estimation targets. It is important to note that the regression models for perceptions of media effects excluding interaction effects explain the variance of perceptions of media effects on the self ($R^2 = .104$, $p < .001$) and smokers ($R^2 = .092$, $p < .001$) almost twice more than on people in general ($R^2 = .053$, $p < .05$) and nonsmokers ($R^2 = .054$, $p < .05$).
These differences of the multiple coefficients of determinations (R²s) suggest that components of perception of media effects vary with estimation target.

News coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals

Table 4.3 presents regression analyses with respect to news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals for four dependent variables: the perceptions of media effects on respondents themselves, people in general, those for whom the issue is relevant (Catholics) and those for whom the issue is not relevant (those who are not Catholic). The results in the second column of Table 4.3 show that, while holding other variables within the model constant, nonCatholics (b = -.686, p < .01) who belonged to the experimental group of question order (b = .558, p < .01) perceived greater media effect on oneself than Catholics who were in the control group of question order. The results also indicate that interest in news in general (b = .417, p < .05), attention to the media about the issue (b = .320, p < .10), and perceptions of the truthfulness of the media (b = .193, p < .01) are positively related, while newspaper use (b = -.114, p < .01) is negatively related to the perceptions. These results suggest that perceptions of media effects on themselves increase as interest in the news in general, attention to the media about the issue, and perceptions of the truthfulness of the media increase and newspaper use decreases.
### Comparison targets of the perceptions of media effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>People in general</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>NonCatholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1=male)</td>
<td>-.102</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>-.239</td>
<td>.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-.010#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>-.074#</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>-.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic (1=Catholic)</td>
<td>-.686**</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.348*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between-group differentiation(^{a})</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.109*</td>
<td>-.112*</td>
<td>-.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in news in general</td>
<td>.417*</td>
<td>.287#</td>
<td>.468*</td>
<td>.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to media in general</td>
<td>- .079</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in news of this issue</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>-.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to media for this issue</td>
<td>.320#</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.345**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthfulness of media</td>
<td>.193**</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.198***</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV use</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>-.051#</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper use</td>
<td>-.114**</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>-.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QO (^{b}) (1= primed)</td>
<td>.558**</td>
<td>-.194</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N          | 431 | 425 | 431 | 431 |
| R\(^2\) (F value) | .178 | .077 | .131 | .091 |
|            | (6.16)** | (2.35)** | (4.50)** | (3.07)** |
| Catholic * QO \(^{b}\) | -.669 | -.103 | _   | _   |
| Catholic * Between-group differentiation | .265  | -.152  | .240# | -.028 |

| R\(^2\) change (F value) | .006  | .005  | .006  | .000  |
|                        | (1.53) | (1.07) | (2.83)# | (.07) |

\(^{a}\) This was measured by distance between perceptions of media effects on smokers and nonsmokers for negative media coverage of smokers in TV programs and movies

\(^{b}\) Question Order

\(^{\#}\) p < .10, \(^{*}\) p < .05, \(^{**}\) p < .01, \(^{***}\) p < .001

Note. Coefficients are all unstandardized.

Table 4.3 Hierarchical Regressions of the Perceptions Media Effects of News Coverage of a Roman Catholic Priest’s Sex Scandals on Demographic Variables, Issue Relevance to Perceivers, Between-Group Differentiation, Communication Variables and Question Order
With respect to the perceptions of media effects on people in general, the results presented in the third column of Table 4.3 show that, while holding other variables within the model constant, education in years (b = -.074, p < .10) and interest in the news in general (b = .287, p < .10), and TV use (b = -.051, p < .10) are marginally significantly related to perceptions of media effects on people in general. These results suggest that those who are more educated and use TV for news, and are less interested in the news in general, perceive less media effects than those who are the opposite. The results also suggest that the stronger tendency to differentiate between in-group and out-group, the greater media effects they perceive (b = .109, p < .05). There is no interaction effect between Catholic and between-group differentiation on the perceptions.

With respect to the perceptions of media effects on Catholics, to whom the issue is relevant, the results presented in the fourth column of Table 4.3 show that while holding other variables constant, between-group differentiation (b = -.112, p < .05), interest in news in general (b = .468, p < .05), and perceptions of the truthfulness of media (b = .198, p < .001) are significantly related to the perceptions. These results suggest that the less they have a tendency to differentiate between in-group and out-group; the more they are interested in news in general; and the more they trust the media, the more they perceive media effects on Catholics.

The regression model including interaction between Catholicism and between-group differentiation suggests that the interactions have an impact on the perceptions (b = -.240, p < .10), which is marginally significant. Plots for the predicted regression lines of effects of Catholic and between-group differentiation appear in Figure 4.11. This figure
shows that both Catholics’ and nonCatholics’ perceptions of media effects on Catholics decrease as between-group differentiation increases. However, this effect is more prominent among Catholics than nonCatholics. The effects of between-group differentiation on Catholics’ perceptions are greater than on nonCatholics’ perceptions until at around point 2 of between-group differentiation, at which no difference exists between the perceptions. The effects of between-group differentiation on Catholics’ perceptions are less than on nonCatholics’ perceptions, after around point 2 until point 6, which is the maximum scale of between-group differentiation.

Figure 4.11 Significant Interactions between Catholic and Between-group Differentiation on the Perceptions of Media Effects on Catholics with Respect to News Coverage of a Roman Catholic Priest’s Sex Scandals

With respect to the perceptions of media effects on nonCatholics, to whom the issue is not relevant, the results presented in the fifth column of Table 4.3 show that while holding other variables constant, age (b = -.010, p < .10), although it is only marginally
significant, Catholic affiliation \( (b = .348, p < .05) \), and attention to media for this issue \( (b = .345, p < .01) \) are related to the perceptions. The results suggest that the younger Catholics who pay a great deal of attention to media coverage about the issue perceive greater media effects on nonCatholics than do the older nonCatholics who pay little attention to the media for the issue. There are no significant interactions between Catholic and between-group differentiation.

The results of the four regression models presented in Table 4.3 were consistent with the results presented in Table 4.2 in that they support the other-based approach. The results show that the predictors and the directions of the effects varied with the estimation target. For example, issue relevance to perceiver (i.e., Catholics) had a negative relationship to perceptions of media effects on the self and a positive on nonCatholics, while between-group differentiation had a positive relationship to perceptions of media effects on people in general and a negative relationships to perceptions of effects on Catholics. In addition, the multiple coefficients of determinations \( (R^2) \) varied with estimation target. The regression model, excluding interaction effects, best explained the variance of the perceptions of media effects on themselves \( (R^2 = .162, p < .001) \), followed by perceptions of media effects on Catholics \( (R^2 = .131, p < .001) \), nonCatholics \( (R^2 = .091, p < .001) \), and people in general \( (R^2 = .073, p < .01) \).

However, there are some differences between regression models for negative media portrayals of smokers, presented in Table 4.2, and those for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals, presented in Table 4.3. For example, perceptions of the truthfulness of the media were related to perceptions of media effects on all four of
the estimation targets in Table 4.2, but only related to perceptions of media effects on themselves and Catholics. In addition, issue relevance to perceivers has a positive impact on perceptions of media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant for the negative media portrayals of smokers but no impact for the news coverage of a Roman Catholics priest’s sex scandals. On the other hand, there was a positive relation between issue relevance to perceivers and perceptions of media effects on those for whom the issue is not relevant for the news coverage but such a relation was not found for the media portrayals of smokers. This result suggests that components of perceptions of media effects vary with topic of the message.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The final chapter reviews the major findings of this study, discusses the theoretical implications of the results and limitations of the study, and proposes directions for future research.

5.1 Goal of the study

Scholars of the third-person effect argue that the inconsistent relationship between third-person perceptions and behavioral third-person effect is due to ignorance about many processes and components that mediate the perception-behavior relationship (Perloff, 2002; Shah et al., 1999). Among them variability of the third person perceptions by comparison targets has not received enough attention in the past. The purpose of the present study is to explore variations of the third-person perceptions, which may specify consequences of the third-person effect, such as types and strength of behavioral influence. This study is based on the theoretical framework that third-person perceptions are largely influenced by motivational components and cognitive ability, which vary by perceivers and comparison targets, and the relationship between them. Specifically, this study examines how third-person perception differs by comparison targets, called the
other-based approach when a specific group is exclusively relevant or irrelevant to a particular media message.

In order to examine if the other-based approach works an explanation of variations of third-person perceptions, a telephone survey of Ohio adults was conducted (n=524). The respondents were asked to indicate separately how strongly they agreed or disagreed that media content had a powerful effect on themselves, people in general, people to whom the issue is relevant and people to whom the issue is not relevant. Two items were used to assess opinions about media effects: 1) negative media portrayal of smokers in television programs and movies; and 2) news coverage of sex scandals in the Roman Catholic Church.

I investigated whether the perceptions of media effects vary with issue relevance to comparison targets, a variable based on the other-based approach by t tests. For the sake of comparison with other approaches, I also investigated the influence of a variable from the self-based approach (i.e., issue relevance to the perceivers) and a variable from the self-other relationship-based approach (i.e., between-group differentiation) on perceptions of media effects by t tests. Next, I examined the interaction effects between the self-based approach and the self-other relationship-based approach, and between the self-based approach and the other-based approach by t tests. In addition, to further explore the alleged relationships, I regressed the perceptions of media effects on the self, people in general, people to whom the issue is relevant, and people to whom the issue is not relevant on a series of predictors such as perceptions of the media, media use, between-group differentiation, issue relevance to perceivers, and demographics.
5.2 Major findings

Three approaches

Like most other studies on the third-person effect, this study supported third-person perceptions indicating that respondents perceived greater media effects on others than on themselves for both negative media portrayals of smokers and news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals. The results of t tests and regression analyses reported in this study provide substantial support for the other-based approach, arguing that people account for who the comparison targets are, and how the issue is relevant to the comparison targets when they perceive media effects.

For news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals, the third person perceptions were more pronounced among respondents to whom the issue was highly relevant (Catholic respondents) than among those for whom it was not relevant (nonCatholic respondents), which renders some supports for $H_1$. However such differences were not found for messages of negative media portrayals of smokers. Results of the regression rendered an explanation for the result of the t tests. Issue relevance to perceivers had either significant or marginally significant negative effects on perceptions of media effects on themselves. If perceptions of media effects on people in general are held constant, smokers and Catholics perceive greater third-person perceptions than nonsmokers and nonCatholics respectively because they underestimate media effects on themselves. Underestimation for those for whom the issue is relevant can be explained by the personal undesirability of the messages. Smokers and Catholics might evaluate given messages as personally undesirable but the same messages might be
ambiguous in terms of personal undesirability for nonsmokers and nonCatholics. This explanation is consistent with literature suggesting that the levels of perceptions of message desirability are negatively related to the size of the third-person perceptions (e.g., Banning, 2001; Chapin, 2000; Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Hoffner et al., 1999; Perloff, 1993, 1999; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999).

However, for negative media portrayals of smokers, issue relevance to perceivers was also negatively related to perceptions of media effect on people in general. This effect kept the gap between perceptions of media effects on the self and people in general, which results in no fluctuation of the third-person perceptions. It appears that issue relevance to perceivers has impacts on perceptions of media effects but the impacts vary with issue topic. As seen in the two issues in this study, for some issue topics, issue relevance to perceivers influences perceptions of media effects on themselves but not on others, which leads to size fluctuations of the third-person perceptions. On the other hand, for other issue topics, issue relevance to perceivers influences both perceptions. In this case, parallel shifts of the slopes of perceptions of media effects on themselves and others occur but the slope of the third-person perceptions remain constant.

An ensuing question, then, would be what made the difference between the issues? That is, why did smoking have impacts on perceptions of media effects on people in general for negative media portrayals of smokers, while being Catholic did not have such impacts for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals? One possible explanation for the difference is that individuals are less willing to accept a message they believe is untruthful; and if they think the untruthfulness is obvious they believe other
people can see it too and expect some resistance to the messages. Smokers may think that the report of negative media portrayals of smokers in movies and television programs is not consistent with what really happened. Instead, they account for common sense when they estimate media effects on themselves and others. They may think many TV programs and movies are based on distortion and exaggerate reality and stereotypes and therefore what is on TV and movies does not represent reality. For these people the untruthfulness of the message is somewhat clear and therefore they expect that other people easily see messages’ lack of reality and they resist accepting the messages to some extent.

On the other hand, accounts of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals are news stories based on fact. People consider the scandals a correct basis on which to judge Roman Catholic priests and therefore, using the information to judge the priest does not harm their self-efficacy of judgment. However, these individuals think their attitudes toward the priests are not the result of being influenced by the information alone, but a combination of media influence and additional information. This is how they distinguish themselves from others in terms of self-control in regard to making social judgments. This motivation for self-enhancement by holding self-control varies with issue relevance to perceivers. In short, they might perceive that the messages were correct.

In support of the self-other relationship-based approach, the data indicate that people assimilate to in-group and dissimilate to out-group when they perceive media effects on others (H2); and this tendency was stronger for those for whom the issue was relevant than for those for whom the issue was not relevant (H3). Consistent with the
results of t test, results of the regression showed that the effects of between-group
differentiation on perceptions of media effects varied with perceivers and the comparison
targets.

When people estimate effects of a message on a specific target and on themselves,
personal identity and social identity are involved in the estimation. Sometimes the
estimations are led by motivation for a positive self-image, at other times, by motivation
for a positive in-group image, and at still other times, by cognitive components (e.g.,
susceptibility of the estimation target) desiring accuracy at other times. Plots of
interaction effects between issue relevance to perceivers and between-group
differentiation illustrate that the effects of between-group differentiation on the
perceptions of media effects were greater for smokers and Catholics than nonsmokers and
for nonCatholics, respectively. These results suggest that individuals’ perceptions of
media effects are influenced by social identity more when the issue is relevant or
interesting to them.

When between-group differentiation is held constant at 0, the difference of
perceptions of media effects between those for whom the issue is relevant and those for
whom the issue is not relevant can be explained by cognitive components. Accessibility
and the possibility of retrieving relevant information will determine how much people
rely on cognitive components when they estimate media effects on an estimation target.
It is assumed that those for whom the issue is relevant may have more basic information
about the issue and are interested in information about the issue. As a result, these people
may have more information than those for whom the issue is not relevant and therefore
they rely more on cognitive components. Cognitive components may increase or
decrease perceptions of media effects. As we have seen Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10
account for the untruthfulness of the negative media portrayals of smokers, smokers
perceived less media effects on people in general than did nonsmokers when between-
group differentiation is 0. On the other hand, Catholics perceived greater media effects
on other Catholics than did nonCatholics. This is because the message is assumed factual
and therefore truthful.

At point 6 of between-group differentiation, individuals judge others based on
their social identity more than on personal identity. In this case, individuals’ perceptions
of media effects are influenced by the motivation for a positive in-group image. When
the comparison target is categorized as in-group, individuals perceive less media effects,
as presented in Figure 4.11. However, when comparison target is categorized as in-group
such as in Figure 4.9, or the categorization is ambiguous such as in Figure 4.10,
individuals perceive greater media effects.

Respondents had greater third-person perceptions for the comparison targets to
whom the issue was not relevant (i.e., nonsmokers and nonCatholics) than for the
comparison targets to whom the issue was relevant (i.e., smokers and Catholics) across
the issues (H3). This tendency was stronger for perceivers to whom the issue was
relevant than those for whom it was not relevant (H3). One explanation for these findings
is that people are led by a need to make an accurate estimation when they estimate media
effects on a comparison target and therefore they account for the characteristics of the
comparison targets when they think they will to provide clues for accurate estimation,
such as issue relevance. Regression analysis provided evidence confirming this claim. The predictors of perceptions of media effects, the directions and the influence of the predictors varied with comparison target. In addition, the amount of explained variance of perceptions of media effects varied with estimation targets. These results extend McLeod et al.’s (2001) findings of different path models of perceptions of media effects on the self and on others (more specifically, other University of Delaware students). These findings suggest that the process and components of perceptions of media effects differ not only between self and others but also among other people when they are sub-categorized. One explanation for these findings is that people are led by the need to be accurate when they estimate media effects on a comparison target and therefore they account for properties of the comparison targets when they think the properties, such as issue relevance, provide clues for accurate estimation.

**Question order effect**

Most previous studies examining question order effects in the context of the third-person effect examined whether the order of questions for perceptions of media effects on respondents themselves and others influences the size of question order effect. These studies use question order to investigate the robustness of the third-person effects. The present study, however, investigated question order effect to explore the cognitive process of constructing the perceptions of media effects. According to the priming effect, a question can make salient a specific consideration, which then influences the following
question(s). This study examined whether a question about perceptions of media effects on a specific target influenced the third-person perceptions (H₆).

The results of t tests showed for negative media portrayals of smokers, the third-person perceptions of nonsmokers were influenced by cues of social categorization but those of smokers were not. On the other hand, for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals, question order effects were found for both Catholics and nonCatholics. These findings suggest that cues for self-categorization can serve as an anchor of estimation of media effects on themselves and/or others when individuals perceive media effects. However, such priming effects depend on issue topics and issue relevance to perceivers.

Regression analyses showed the locus of the question order effects. The results of the regression for negative media portrayals of smokers suggest that question order per se does not have a significant relationship to perceptions of media effects, either on the self or on people in general. However, as the interaction terms are added in the model in the second step, interactions between smoking and question order are related to perceptions of media effects on people in general. On the others hand, the results of the regression for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals indicate that question order per se is positively related to perceptions of media effect on perceivers themselves. It appears that variations of the third-person perceptions by the priming cues can be attributed to impacts on perceptions of media effect on themselves or people in general depending on the issue topic. At this point, it is hard to explain why the locus of question order effects on the third-person perceptions varied with issue topic. One explanation is
that the role of question order varies with the level of desirability or undesirability of outcome of the issue (David & Johnson, 1998). When the level is high, individuals are likely to be interested and involved in the issue topic. In this case, they are more (or less) susceptible to cues of priming. However, this is not conclusive explanation for the variation of the question order effects. Finding other explanation or finding evidence to confirm this explanation could be the focus of future study.

Interaction effects between smoking and question order effects on perceptions of media effects on people in general recall Price and Tewksbury’s (1996) study where they found a relationship between interaction of question order and general political knowledge. Not for all issue topics but for some, personal issue relevance, which may be correlated with knowledge, interest, attention, and involvement are related to question order effects. The implication of this finding for cognitive explanations of the third-person effect is that individuals’ cognitive efforts to access information vary with personal issue relevance. More generally, the cognitive explanation applies to some individuals, but not to others.

Lastly, expanding the findings of the question order effects in this study, future studies should examine a news report’s ability to trigger social categorization in field research. The present study suggested a theoretical ground for priming effects on the third-person perceptions. Future studies should empirically examine how priming cues embedded in the context of the messages (e.g., a page where the news story is posted, a news program where the news story is told) influence the third-person perceptions. News reports about public conflict between groups place issues within a defined social context.
If this news is accompanied with target messages regarding the third-person perceptions, consequences of the exposure to the messages could be different.

### Effects of communication variables

Effects of communication variables on perceptions of media effects varied with issue topic. Perceptions of the truthfulness of the media were positively related to perceptions of media effects on all four of the estimation targets for negative media portrayals of smokers but it did only on perceptions of media effects on themselves and Catholics for news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals. Meanwhile, newspaper use had positive impacts on perceptions of media effects on themselves for the former issue but negative impacts for the latter. In order to explain the variations, differences between the two issues should be discussed.

Negative media portrayals of smokers are not based on negative facts about smokers but media activities against smokers. Therefore, some people may suspect the truthfulness of the messages and refuse to accept the way the media portray smokers, believing that what most people think of smokers is but a media bias. However, the media will influence people who highly trust it and use it a lot even if the content of the message is suspicious. Furthermore, these people may project their views about the message onto others, and therefore, expect other people to be influenced also. On the other hand, news coverage of a Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals was based on what really happened and therefore, the messages were considered highly truthful. In this case,
perceptions of media effects are influenced by how much people are interested in the news, exposed to the news, and pay attention to the news.

The different slants of the information provided by newspapers can explain the opposite directions the effects of newspapers have on individuals’ perceptions of media effects on themselves by issue topic. Stories of smoking or smokers in newspapers are usually framed negatively and some stories are about anti-smoking campaigns, which highlight the negative impacts of smoking on society. Exposure to this information can cause individuals’ perceptions regarding the severity of the messages. The severity has impacts on the perception of media effects on themselves. On the other hand, many newspapers framed the priest’s sex scandal as an individual affair rather than a problem with the Catholic Church. In this case, exposure to the information increases individuals’ agreement with the way the issue is framed. Once they perceive the issue as a personal affair, then they do not worry about its impacts on themselves or other people as much as if it were framed as a societal affair.

These findings regarding the different patterns of effects of communication variables on perceptions of media effect, depending on issue topic and estimation target, have implications for the underlying process of third-person effects. People account for the properties of the messages’ contents and the quality of the messages’ deliverer, though they might be motivated to show less susceptibility to any kind of media messages than others. That is, at least some portion of the size of the third-person perceptions is attributed to cognitive components.
5.3 Significance of the other-based approach

This study made several theoretical and methodological contributions toward explicating the third-person effect, including supports for the other-based approach. This approach claims that an individual’s perceptions of media effects partially depend on who the comparison targets are. The results of this study confirmed that the perceivers’ images and knowledge of comparison targets affects their perceptions of media impact on the target.

The different process models suggest that the size of the third-person perceptions for people in general marked “3” can be interpreted in three different ways when a message is exclusively relevant to a particular group of people. First, individuals think most other people are more susceptible to the messages than they are as much as “3” units. Second, individuals think the message has especially strong impacts on those for whom the issue is relevant than others, and the average third-person perceptions for people in general is marked “3.” Third, individuals think the message has especially strong impacts on those for whom the issue is not relevant compared to others and the average third-person perceptions for people in general is marked “3.” It seems then reasonable to say that the effects of the third person perceptions on the behavior third-person effects are affected by variance of the third-person perception by group as well as its mean.

Inconsistency between the perceptual components and the behavioral components of the third-person effect in past studies can be explained by ignorance of the variations of third-person perceptions by group, which can be examined from the other-based
approach. In the case of a large variance of the third-person perception by group (i.e., exclusively stronger third-person effects on one group and much weaker effects on the confronting group) people may not support actions that restrict all people, including themselves. For example, regardless of the relatively large third-person perceptions of the sexual content of a movie, people may not agree to restrict presentation of the movie. In this case, the high third-person perceptions are mainly attributed to perceptions of harmfulness to children. If the ensuing restriction is applied exclusively to the potentially susceptible victims people will be more supported (e.g., disallowing the presentation of the movie to those who are under 18 years old). If people believe groups of varying size are differentially affected by media messages, then popular support for restricting those messages may, in turn, be affected (Tewksbury, 2002). That is, they will not support media restrictions in general when they perceive the media effects will not have an impact on a large number of people.

People, however, may change their behaviors in cases of perceiving media effects on an out-group (or geographically distant others) but not on an in-group (or geographically close others). For example, if caregivers believe that sexual content affects other children, they may fear that peers will either persuade their child to engage in sexual behaviors, or will provide inaccurate information to their children. In this scenario, caregivers not only imagine that television sex influences other children but also envision that other children influence their child. Television generates influence on some children and these children influence peers who are not susceptible to the original messages from television.
Perhaps the most important contribution of this study is the preliminary steps it takes understanding media roles in the dynamic of social conflict and public opinion. When a message is based on an existing conflict between groups (e.g., women vs. men or Caucasians vs. African American), third-person perceptions can widen the gap between the confronting groups or substantiate a conflict existing only in people’s minds. For example, Arab-Americans advocated for restricting the presentation of movie, *The Siege*, because of their perceptions of the effects the movie would have on Caucasians’ attitudes toward them. The protest might bother some Caucasians who think that they would not be that influenced by the movie. These Caucasians did not agree with the protesters’ perceptions about their susceptibility to a movie. They disliked the protesters because the protesters underestimated their self-control and because the protest produced, for example, traffic jams. For these people, the protest was no more than a social disruption. These Caucasians then dislike Arabs, not because they are Islamic, but because they cause social disorder. Consequently, the gap between Caucasians’ and Arabs’ attitudes toward PLO’s liberation movement would widen. On the other hand, as Stephan (1985) argues, in-group homogeneity increases when intergroup contacts involve personal opinions among Arab-Americans. That is, the third-person perceptions can integrate members of a group, increasing their sense of affiliation with a particularly in-group. In sum, third-person perceptions that are consistent with an existing group conflict or stereotype can increase intra-group integration and intergroup discrimination, causing society to go in further polarized directions.
Applying this concept to the public opinion process, if the variance of third-person perceptions by comparison target is low, or the perceptions are mainly from an in-group, the third-person perceptions can serve as an underlying process in the spiral of silence (Price, 1989). That is, the third-person perceptions for the in-group, or people in general, can silence people’s opinions. However, if the variance is high and perceptions of media effects are mainly attributed to effects on out-group, people may not feel socially pressured to be silent. They will speak their personal opinions regardless of the third-person perceptions.

In the context of political elections, political advertisements against a Democratic candidate by the Republican camp may provoke corresponding advertising from the Democratic camp, if supporters of the Democratic candidate have third-person perceptions for others. This may increase tensions between the camps, which could result in increased funding for advertising regardless of its impacts on voting behavior. The competition may increase internal coherence among participants in both camps. That is, although the advertisements may not have strong impact on changing non-partisans’ voting behavior, it may have strong impact on specific partisans’ voting turnout. As such, the third-person perceptions can lead to varying behavioral outcomes beyond support for restricting the media when the messages are differently relevant to different groups. By accounting for the relationship between comparison targets and the content of the messages, as argued in the other-based approach, we can predict more accurately the effects of perceptions of media effect.
One feature and characteristic of stereotyping is the exaggeration of the difference between one’s own group (the in-group) and the “other” group (the out-group). Third-person perception can contribute to this exaggeration. For messages relevant to or targeting a specific group of people, people’s perceptions of the messages’ effects on the group vary with issue relevance to the group. Therefore it is important whether or not individuals have a sense that allows them to catch which group is being targeted by the messages. Often people think a message is for people in general, but actually it is for a specific group of people. Once they see the relationship between the target group and the message, they estimate effects of the messages on groups differently based on issue relevance. This difference in susceptibility to media messages leads to anxiety about an ensuing increase of gaps of opinion, attitude, and behavior between groups. Such anxiety can provoke a group’s reaction, which causes counterpart group response. Finally, a submerged group conflict is substantiated and deepens. In sum, differentiation of perceptions of media effect by group can cause social problems rooted in group conflict.

5.4 Limitations of the study and directions for future studies

The present study has limitations on the above referenced implications because of the measurement methodology. First, between-group differentiation was not measured but computed by the distance between perceptions of media effects on the in-group and the out-group. Although there are some advantages in use of these computed scores to measure the concept, it is possible for us to obtain different results if we actually measure the concept. In future studies, it will be necessary to compare results between the two
methods. Between-group differentiation can be measured in a general context (i.e., how much do you think opinions (or attitudes) of your own group is different from other people in general or how much do you rely on group membership when you judge others?). One thing we have to keep in mind is that when we measure between-group differentiation we have to control potential context effect.

Another limitation derives from the measurement for TV use. Unlike newspapers TV can be used for many other purposes besides just news. Therefore, we cannot interpret TV use as equivalent to the amount of time spent watching TV only for news or information. This may be the reason why we did not detect a significant relationship between TV use and the perception of media effects. In future studies, TV use should be measured with specifications regarding the purpose, which will allow us to examine the variations of effects of the messages by medium.

A third limitation of this study is the internal validity of the results, which is an intrinsic weakness of survey research. Although regression technique allows us to control variables statistically, the results of the method are mainly based on correlation. In order to examine causal relationships, a more systematically controlled research method (e.g., experiment) is required. By combining the results of survey and experiment we may obtain a balance between internal and external validity. In order to examine the robustness of the other-based approach to the third-person effect hypothesis, experimental research designed from the approach is highly recommended for future studies.
Given the number of issues and the genre of the messages tested under the theoretical framework of the other-based approach, replication of the present study is suggested for future studies. It is hard to tell whether the results found in the present study are unique to the two issues tested or represent a more general pattern of the third-person perception. All the findings in this study are suggestive rather than conclusive. It is possible that some of our findings would not be not supported when issue relevance to comparison targets is ambiguous or when the content of the messages is positively related to the comparison targets. This question reserves for future studies.

The present study suggests that behavioral components of the third-person effects vary with comparison targets. If we analyze the patterns of variations in the behavioral components with regard to patterns of variations of the third-person perceptions, we can understand the process of the third-person effect better. More specifically, we can predict a specific behavioral outcome for a specific type of third-person perceptions. Future studies should examine the relationship between perceptual and behavioral components from the other-based approach.

In future studies, I recommend incorporating the properties of intergroup relationship to examine different outcomes of the third-person perceptions by comparison target. In some contexts, individuals may not cognitively assimilate to in-group and dissimilate to out-group. They may consider the power relationship between in- and out-group and decide to which direction to assimilate or de-individuate. The salience of social identity by contextual stimuli may lead to self-categorization and therefore individuals may not adhere to group norms and standards. Instead, they stick to personal
norms and standards. Between-group differentiation cannot be interpreted as the direct consequence of social categorization alone; power relationship between groups may be involved (Ng & Reid, 2001). In the presence of such power relations, individuals may strategically decide their behavior (e.g., normative for in-group, normative for out-group, or individuation). In order to examine the variations of behavioral outcomes, future studies should account for third-person perceptions by the comparison target, relationships between perceivers and the comparison target, and intergroup power relations.

Comparing behavioral outcomes of the influence of presumed media influence (Gunther, 1998) with behavioral third-person effects would be a good topic for future study. The influence of presumed media influence explains what we call behavioral third-person effects, which are triggered by perceptions of media effects on others regardless of perceptions of media effects on the self. However, accounting for the relationship between the content of the messages and the comparison targets, and between the content of the messages and the subjects can lead us to the domain of difference between outcomes of perceptions of strong media effect on others and self (i.e., strong influence of presumed media influence and weak third-person perceptions) and outcomes of perceptions of strong media effect on others and weak effect on the self (i.e., strong influence of presumed media influence and strong third-person perceptions).

Last, expanding the findings of the question order effects in this study, future studies should examine a news report’s ability to trigger social categorization in field research. The present study suggested a theoretical ground for priming effects on the
third-person perceptions. Future studies should empirically examine how priming cues embedded in the context of the messages influence the third-person perceptions. For example, news reports about public conflict between groups place issues within a defined social context. If this news is accompanied with target messages of the third-person perceptions, consequences of the exposure to the messages could be different.

In conclusion, the most important implication of this study is that it provides a new theoretical framework in which to explore the process of media effects based on individuals’ perceptions of said media effects. The present study theoretically reviewed previous studies from three different approaches and explored the other-based approach in the context of two different issue topics. Findings in the present study suggest that communication researchers should account for the variations of third-person perceptions by the comparison target when they predict which behavior to examine as a measurement of the behavior third-person effect. Methodologically, the present study suggests that we can interpret evidence of question order effects not only to challenge against the robustness of the third-person effects, but also to explore the process of the effects. Analyzing the patterns of question order effects found in systematically designed research would help us to understand what components individuals accounted for and how these components influence their perceptions of media effects. By replicating the other-based approach in varying contexts and contents of messages we can better understand the linkage between perceptual components and behavioral components.
APPENDIX A.

COMPARISON OF SAMPLE WITH POPULATION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Ohio (^c)</th>
<th>United States (^c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>52.7%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong> (^a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older than 85</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI/ AN</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median House Income</strong> (^b)</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$40,956</td>
<td>$41,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational attainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9(^{th}) grade</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9(^{th}) to 12(^{th}), no diploma</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\). Compared respondents of samples and populations include only those who are older than 19
\(b\). Populations of Ohioans and United States’ citizens include only those who are older than 24, while the sample includes those who are older than 18.
Influence of negative media portrayals of smokers

I am going to start with some questions about how the media portray different kinds of people. For example, according to one report, about 95% of gangsters, 92% of murderers, and 87% of rapists in movies and on TV are smokers. I’d like to know how much you think this will affect people’s perceptions of smokers.

Q1 Perceptions of media effects on the self
Using a scale where 1 means no influence at all and 7 means a great deal of influence, how much do you think that watching movies and television dramas influences the image that people in general have of smokers

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Q2 Perception of media effects on people in general
How much do you think that watching movies and television dramas influences your own image of smokers?

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)
Q3 Perception of media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant
Using a scale where 1 means no influence at all and 7 means a great deal of influence, how much do you think that watching movies and television dramas influences the image that smokers have of other smokers

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Q4 Perception of media effects on those for whom the issue is not relevant
How much do you think that watching movies and television dramas influences the image that nonsmokers have of smokers?

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Influence of news coverage of Roman Catholic priest’s sex scandals

According to another report, much of the recent news coverage about the Roman Catholic Church has dealt with sexual scandals such as lawsuits over the sexual abuse of children by parish priests.
Q5 Perception of media effects on the self
For people in general, how much do you think this news coverage has influenced their attitudes toward Roman Catholic priests?

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Q6 Perception of media effects on people in general
How much do you think news coverage has influenced your own attitudes toward Roman Catholic priests?

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Q7 Perception of media effects on those for whom the issue is relevant
How much do you think this news coverage has influenced the attitudes of Roman Catholics toward Roman Catholic priests?

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)
Q8 Perception of media effects on those for whom the issue is not relevant
How much do you think this news coverage has influenced the attitudes of non-Roman Catholics toward Roman Catholic priests?

<1> NO INFLUENCE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> GREAT DEAL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Communication-related questions

Now we are going to ask you some questions about media use.

Q9 Interest in news in general
How much are you interested in the news around you? Would you say . . .

<1> a lot,
<2> some,
<3> a little, or
<4> not at all?
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Q10 Attention to media in general
How much attention do you pay to television and other mass media for news?

<1> A LOT
<2> SOME
<3> A LITTLE
<4> NONE AT ALL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)
Q11 Interest in news of a specific issue
How interested are you in news about the issues concerning the sexual scandals of Roman Catholic Church?

<1> A LOT
<2> SOME
<3> A LITTLE
<4> NOT AT ALL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Q12 Attention to media for a specific issue
How much attention did you pay to television and other mass media for news about the sexual scandals of Roman Catholic Church?

<1> A LOT
<2> SOME
<3> A LITTLE
<4> NONE AT ALL
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)

Q13 Perceptions of the truthfulness of the media
Using a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means not at all accurate and 7 means absolutely accurate, how accurate do you think the following statement is? Television and newspaper coverage of issues reports the facts the way they really are? Remember, you can use any number from 1 to 7.

<1> NOT AT ALL ACCURATE
<2> 2
<3> 3
<4> 4
<5> 5
<6> 6
<7> ABSOLUTELY ACCURATE
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> DK, NO OPINION (coded as a missing case)
Q14 TV use
On an average day, about how many hours do you personally watch television?

Q15 Newspaper use
In the past seven days, between [fill day] of last week and yesterday, how many days did you read or look at a daily newspaper?

Demographics
Now, I'd like to ask you some other background questions for statistical purposes.

Q16 Smoking
Do you smoke?

<1> Yes
<2> No
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)

Q17 Age
In what year were you born?

Q18 Religion
What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion or no religion?

<1> PROTESTANT
<2> CATHOLIC
<3> JEWISH
<4> SOME OTHER RELIGION (SPECIFY) [specify]
<5> NO RELIGION
<8> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<9> UNCERTAIN (coded as a missing case)
Q19 Education
Now we'd like to ask you about your education. What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?

<1> <2> <3> <4> <5> <6> <7> <8> ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
<9> <10> <11> <12> HIGH SCHOOL
<13> SOME COLLEGE
<14> ASSOCIATES CERTIFICATE/2 YEAR PROGRAM
<15> BACHELOR'S DEGREE
<16> SOME GRADUATE SCHOOL
<17> MASTER'S DEGREE
<18> DOCTORATE/ADVANCED DEGREE
<88> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<99> DON'T KNOW (coded as a missing case)

Q20 Household income
Approximately what was your total household income from all sources, before taxes for 2001?

- If the interviewees refuse to answer then go to

Q20-1
Well, then, would you please tell me if it was...

<0> more than $10,000?  NO
<1> more than $20,000?  NO
<2> more than $30,000?  NO
<3> more than $40,000?  NO
<4> more than $50,000?  NO
<5> more than $60,000?  NO
<6> more than $75,000?  NO
<7> more than $100,000? NO
<8> more than $150,000? NO
<9> MORE THAN $150,000?  YES
<88> REFUSED (coded as a missing case)
<99> UNCERTAIN (coded as a missing case)
LIST OF REFERENCES


