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Why, how, and when divergent perceptions become dysfunctional in organizations: A motivated cognition perspective

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Abstract

Decades of research has demonstrated that people can arrive at starkly different perceptions in the same social situations. Divergent perceptions are not inherently dysfunctional. However, if divergent perceptions are not managed effectively, they can have deleterious effects that can undermine functioning in the workplace. Drawing on a motivated cognition perspective, we outline why divergent perceptions may emerge as well as overview the benefits and drawbacks of divergent perceptions in organizational contexts. Next, we highlight the complexities associated with divergent perceptions in the workplace, including why, how, and when divergent perceptions may become dysfunctional. We also showcase theoretical insights from a motivated cognition perspective that can enhance our understanding of how divergent perceptions can be effectively managed. We conclude by outlining key theoretical insights and avenues for future research, including how organizations can use a motivated cognition perspective to manage divergent perceptions related to complex societal issues and issuing a call to adopt a systems approach that recognizes the importance of contextual layers for understanding and effectively managing divergent perceptions in organizations.

Keywords: motivated cognition, divergent perceptions, alternate facts, fake cues, identity protection motives, tribalism, diversity, societal issues

Why, How, and When Divergent Perceptions Become Dysfunctional in Organizations:

A Motivated Cognition Perspective

Over sixty years ago, Hastorf and Cantril (1954) conducted a classic study showing that football fans who watched the *same* game had vastly different perceptions of what happened based on their team preferences. Not only did divergent perceptions emerge, but the divergence was so extreme that "the game seemed to reflect *many different* games, with each version of the events as "real" to one person as other versions were to other people" (p. 132). This divergence showcases that people are motivated processors of information (Kunda, 1990), such that they can "selectively credit and dismiss factual information in patterns that promote some goal or interest independent of the truth of the asserted facts" (Kahan et al., 2012, p. 4).

Within the workplace, organizations often rely on divergent perceptions to enhance decision making and performance (e.g., Roberson et al., 2017). However, divergent perceptions that are not managed effectively can have negative implications, especially when little or no common ground is found. Indeed, divergent perceptions that are not managed effectively can contribute to detrimental consequences, such as enhancing conflict (e.g., Burris et al., 2013), making it more difficult to implement organizational policies (MacLean et al., 2015), and detracting from effective functioning (e.g., performance, work engagement; Matta et al., 2015; Voss et al., 2006). Moreover, organizations are facing new complexities that make managing divergent perceptions more difficult. For example, in the United States, colloquial expressions such as "alternate facts" not only normalize the presence of divergent perceptions, but also the seeming "appropriateness" of maintaining perceptual divides. This is problematic because if people do not perceive that a common perceptual ground is possible (or desirable), they can adopt strategies that enable them to feel psychologically safe (e.g., tribalism) rather than

strategies that enable them to foster empathy, solidarity, and social cohesion by identifying a

common ground (Shapiro et al., 2019).

Drawing on a motivated cognition perspective (e.g., Barclay et al., 2017; Kunda, 1990),

we argue that it is important to revisit why, how, and when people may experience divergent

perceptions to identify how divergent perceptions may become dysfunctional. We begin by

outlining how motivated cognition can shed light on why divergent perceptions occur. Next, we

examine the benefits and drawbacks of divergent perceptions in the workplace. While motivated

cognition is often examined as a within-person or individual-level phenomenon (e.g., by

focusing on how individuals perceive cues and experience motives), we illuminate contextual

factors and emerging societal issues that can make it more difficult to effectively manage

divergent perceptions. In doing so, we shed light on why, how, and when divergent perceptions

may become dysfunctional in the workplace. Importantly, we also highlight insights from a

motivated cognition perspective for overcoming these deleterious effects. Overall, our goal is to

enhance our theoretical understanding of divergent perceptions to promote employee and

organizational functioning. These insights are imperative as employees and organizations

grapple with important yet potentially divisive societal issues that require constructive dialogue

to effectively move forward.

Motivated Cognition

Motivated cognition reflects the notion that people are active and motivated processors of

information (Kunda, 1990). From a motivated cognition perspective, motives (i.e., "any wish,

desire, or preference that concerns the outcome of a given reasoning task"; Kunda, 1990; p. 480),

can influence the way that people attend to and integrate information to inform their perceptions.

More precisely, people's motives can guide how they select, evaluate, and weigh the multitude

of information cues that are available in a situation (e.g., Kuhn, 1989; Kunda, 1990; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). This suggests that people may have divergent perceptions because disparate motives can influence the way that individuals leverage the available cues. Further, the same person may arrive at different perceptions when disparate motives are activated, such as when they evaluate the same situation over time. There are two broad categories of motives (Kunda, 1990): non-directional and directional.

Non-Directional Motives. Non-directional motives reflect cue processing without the desire for a specific conclusion, such as when people are motivated to achieve an accurate conclusion (Kunda, 1990), acquire knowledge (Rokeach, 1960), or find closure (Kruglanski et al., 2006). For example, an accuracy motive assumes that people are motivated to access all relevant cues, evaluate those cues in an impartial way, and actively try to suppress cognitive biases. While this motive can enable people to arrive at more accurate conclusions (e.g., Druckman & McGrath, 2019; Kunda, 1990; Prior et al., 2013), it can also be cognitively costly (e.g., Kunda, 1990). Consider a manager who is working on an employee's performance evaluation. To make an accurate judgment, the manager needs to retrieve all performance-relevant cues, evaluate the appropriateness of each cue, and carefully weigh those cues to generate an overall judgment. Such a reasoning process is likely to take substantial time and significant cognitive efforts. As such, people often adopt cognitive shortcuts by relying on directional motives (e.g., Lord et al., 1979).

Directional Motives. A directional motive reflects people's desire to reach a specific conclusion (Kruglanski, 1999). As such, directional motives guide people to selectively choose, evaluate, and weigh cues in ways that support their desired conclusion, while disregarding or downplaying cues that are at odds with the desired conclusion. The specific conclusion varies

depending on the nature of the motive. For example, people may be motivated by self-interest,

relational, or moral concerns (Barclay et al., 2017), by their desire to maintain the status quo

(Jost & Banaji, 1994), or by their desire to protect their identity (e.g., by affirming their political

ideologies, cultural worldviews, or group attachments; Kahn et al., 2017), to name a few.

Directional motives satisfy a range of psychological needs (e.g., self-enhancement, Sedikides &

Strube, 1997; belongingness, Baumeister & Leary, 1995; sense of control, Leotti et al., 2010). As

such, directional motives are pervasive and may be adopted even when people are motivated to

curtail bias and hold accurate perceptions (e.g., FitzGerald et al., 2019).

Motivated Cognition and Divergent Perceptions

Given that people are motivated processors of information (Kunda, 1990), it is perhaps

not surprising that they often diverge in how they perceive actions (e.g., Jones & Nisbett, 1987),

events (e.g., van den Bos, 2003), relationships (e.g., Sin et al., 2009), and even public consensus

(e.g., Sparkman et al., 2022). From a motivated cognition perspective, divergent perceptions may

arise because of differences in the cue set or motives. For example, the availability of cues may

be different across people or people may differently select, evaluate, and weigh the same set of

cues. Moreover, cue-related factors can also differentially influence perceptions, including the

timing of cues (i.e., earlier cues may have greater influence in perception formation; Lind et al.,

2001) or the centrality of cues (i.e., cues that seem more central are more heavily weighted in

perception formation; Asch, 1946). The activation of different motives may also impact how

individuals use the cue set. Consider a layoff—a manager may have access to different cues

(e.g., the financial necessity of layoffs) and/or hold different motives (e.g., self-presentation)

than the recipient of the layoff. This can lead to the differential use of cues on each side, creating

divergent perceptions related to the appropriateness of the layoff decision.

While the activation of disparate motives can differentially focus people's attention on various cues, people may still have divergent perceptions even if the *same* motive is activated. For example, when moral motives are activated, liberals may select and more strongly weigh cues related to the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity moral foundations, whereas conservatives may select cues from a broader range of moral foundations and more equally weigh cues from the various moral foundations including authority and sanctity (e.g., Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007). Further, since motives may not operate in isolation, people may combine the same motive with other motives. Additional factors (e.g., power) may also influence the cues and motives that people adopt leading to divergent perceptions (e.g., Magee & Smith, 2013).

The Benefits and Drawbacks of Divergent Perceptions

Divergent perceptions reflect that "different features of the situation are differently salient" (Bem, 1972, p. 42). More precisely, divergent perceptions reflect differences in how people perceive, select, evaluate, and/or weigh cues in a situation to form a perception (versus divergent opinions that reflect differences in overall evaluative judgments; see Kunda, 1990). Divergent perceptions are not inherently dysfunctional. Indeed, voluminous research highlights that engaging in constructive dialogue with those holding divergent perceptions can be functional (e.g., to expand the cue set, identify areas of similarity and difference, and assess cue credibility; see Figure 1). For example, an underlying assumption of many diversity initiatives is that bringing together employees with disparate backgrounds, experiences, and preferences (i.e., fostering diversity; Roberson et al., 2017) can be beneficial because it enhances the likelihood that employees will bring different knowledge or perspectives that can expand the cue set available in a situation through a process of information elaboration and cue exchange (e.g., Jehn et al., 1999). Employee diversity can also stimulate the exchange of information as well as spur

complex thinking by promoting discussions that prompt cues to be more carefully evaluated and weighted (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2015; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Given these benefits, many organizations have introduced policies and practices to encourage diverse perspectives (e.g., Nishii, 2013) and have heavily invested in diversity programs (e.g., Page, 2007).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The pervasive benefits of divergent perceptions include enhancing decision making by encouraging employees to more closely evaluate cues to determine their credibility (e.g., Bago et al., 2020; Loyd et al., 2013), making fewer inaccurate statements (e.g., Sommers, 2006), fostering complex and innovative thinking (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2015), overcoming groupthink (e.g., Wise, 2014), and encouraging people to consider novel avenues that may not have been revealed otherwise (e.g., Farooq et al., 2021). Yet, these benefits are not always realized; divergent perceptions can bring difficulties and may not always be functional. For example, an implicit assumption of divergent perceptions is that expanding the cue set is beneficial because this expansion highlights more cues, thereby enabling a more realistic or accurate perception of the situation (e.g., Kunda, 1990). However, divergent perceptions that expand the cue set by including non-credible information are unlikely to be helpful, especially since the inclusion of non-credible cues may make it more difficult or time consuming to arrive at a perception that accurately reflects the situation.

Further, when employees fail to engage in information elaboration and cue exchange because of intergroup biases, the above-mentioned benefits associated with divergent perceptions may not be realized and may even be reversed (e.g., van Knippenberg et al., 2004). In these cases, individuals may prefer to emphasize cues that are consistent with their own perspectives (or perspectives of their group). Indeed, in the context of diversity, extensive research has shown that it is critical to combine information elaboration with an appreciation for the value of

divergent perspectives to be effective (i.e., foster diversity beliefs; van Knippenberg & Haslam, 2003). This is because the benefits of divergent perceptions are more likely to be realized if people are open to engaging in information elaboration (e.g., by sharing cues) to create an accurate or realistic perception of the situation. Otherwise, people may lack the motivation to deeply process cues to understand why divergent perceptions are emerging, what commonalities may underlie this divergence, or how they may reconcile these differences.

Complexities for Managing Divergent Perceptions in the Workplace

To foster an understanding of divergent perceptions, we provide a case example of James Damore and Google. In the following sections, we use this example to illustrate why, how, and when divergent perceptions may become dysfunctional as well as the complexities of managing divergent perceptions in the workplace. While motivated cognition is often examined at the individual level, our analysis also highlights how contextual and societal factors are relevant for motivated cognition processes within organizations. More specifically, we illuminate how these factors can expand or narrow the available cue set, impact what cues may be considered credible, or influence what motives become activated.

James Damore was a software engineer at Google. In 2017, Damore wrote a 10-page memo entitled "Google's Ideological Echo Chamber" that went viral. In the memo, Damore noted that Google's diversity training has clear "political bias" and "factual inaccuracies." Rather than accepting the premise that the underrepresentation of women at Google was due to systemic barriers, Damore instead suggested that this underrepresentation can be at least partially explained by "biological gender differences". For example, Damore provided numerous graphs that depicted biological differences between men and women, along with interpretations such as "the lower number of women in high stress jobs" was supposedly due to

women's biological predisposition to higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of assertiveness,

which therefore make women less able to lead. Based on these interpretations, Damore argued

that Google's initiatives aimed at increasing gender and racial diversity were "misguided".

Interestingly, Damore also expressed in the memo that "we all have biases and use motivated

reasoning to dismiss ideas that run counter to our internal values" and that "open and honest

discussion with those who disagree can highlight our blind spots." However, rather than

analyzing the accuracy of the information provided by Google or by his own graphs, Damore

noted that there is an "intolerance for ideas and evidence that don't fit a certain ideology" and

that he was only able to "see evidence that supports my viewpoint". The memo sparked intense

divisive controversy, with some calling Damore a "hero" and others calling him a "sexist pig".

Using this example, we now turn to examining the role of contextual factors and

emerging societal issues in contributing to why, how, and when divergent perceptions may

become dysfunctional. To highlight these processes, we draw on two premises from a motivated

cognition perspective; divergent perceptions may emerge due to access to a disparate set of cues

(and cue sets that may not even overlap) and the activation of different motives that people may

use to select, evaluate, and weigh cues. Below, we showcase the importance of managing both

cue sets and motives. These arguments are also overviewed in Figures 2-4.

<div align="center">[Insert Figures 2-4 about here]</div>

Managing the Cue Set

Divergent perceptions can be beneficial when they provide an expanded cue set that

enables a realistic assessment of a situation (see Figure 1). However, individuals may be resistant

to expanding the cue set, try to narrow the cue set to focus on their preferred cues, and/or include

non-credible cues (see Figure 2). This can undermine the benefits of diverse perspectives.

Whereas a narrow cue set may provide a limited or one-sided view of the situation, cue sets that

include non-credible cues, "alternate facts", or fake cues can allow people to create and exist in

parallel realities that do not intersect with truthful information (Baptista & Gradim, 2021).

Expanding versus Narrowing Cue Sets. Expanding the cue set can be beneficial to

more comprehensively reflect the situation. However, people do not always attempt to *expand*

the cue set when they introduce new information and may instead attempt to *narrow* the cue set.

While narrowing the cue set to only include credible information can be beneficial, narrowing

the cue set by reducing the diversity of perspectives and therefore excluding credible cues that

are offered by these perspectives can be detrimental. For example, rather than assessing the

credibility of the cues provided by Google, Damore's 10-page memo completely dismissed these

cues and attempted to replace them with an alternate cue set that only included those aligned

with Damore's perspective. However, Google also missed an opportunity to combine cue sets as

well as engage in information elaboration and joint cue verification. This missed opportunity

occurred when Damore emailed his memo to Google's diversity division but did not receive a

response. Had both parties engaged in a constructive dialogue to share and jointly verify cues,

this may have reduced the divergence in perceptions and prevented the conflict from further

escalating.

Given that the value of divergent perceptions emerges when people engage in

information elaboration, it is important to engage in these discussions to combine cue sets and

identify which cues from *both* perspectives should be considered. Moreover, by expanding the

cue set to include both perspectives, individuals may be better able to analyze the credibility of

the cues (e.g., conflicting cues can be identified and reconciled). Further, examining the cue sets

in tandem can identify commonalities and differences across perspectives, which can foster a

shared understanding. This also highlights the importance of focusing on cues rather than

perspectives to ensure that individuals are selecting relevant and accurate cues, even if those cues

do not originate from or belong to their perspective. As discussed below, focusing on cues may

also reduce individuals' reliance on directional motives and enhance reliance on non-directional

motives (e.g., accuracy) because their goal is to determine which cues should be included in a

perception rather than justifying a particular perspective. For example, Damore focused on

demonstrating that his perspective was correct rather than showing that the cues that formed his

perspective were appropriate and should be considered as relevant to the overall cue set.

　　　While Damore narrowed the cue set to focus only on cues that were consistent with his

perspective, he also provided an expanded set of cues to support this perspective. This can be

problematic because large amount of homogenous information can invoke decision-making

biases (e.g., overconfidence bias; Moore & Healy, 2008) and persuasion biases (e.g., length-

strength rule; Chaiken, 1987). For example, a voluminous set of homogenous cues may reduce

the tendency for individuals to evaluate the relevance or accuracy of the cues and instead focus

on the volume of cues as an indication of the strength of a position (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken,

1993). In doing so, false perceptions of validity and consensus may be created, including an

impression that the issue was thoroughly researched and there is an abundance of evidence to

support a desired conclusion (e.g., Farrell, 2015).

　　　Moreover, focusing on homogenous cues (e.g., identifying and selecting cues that support

one's perspective) may increase the tendency for individuals to fall prey to "echo chambers" —a

phenomenon that emerges when individuals limit their exposure to like-minded others and

information channels that support a specific perspective without being presented with conflicting

ideas (see Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021). Echo chambers can provide an insular social

microworld that can contribute to overconfidence in decision making by making individuals feel

reaffirmed in their perspectives. This is especially problematic because people typically perceive

their echo-chambers peers as more trustworthy and credible than outsiders, even when the

outsiders objectively have more credibility (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). While echo-chambers

can contribute to biased reasoning processes (Jost et al., 2018), they can also enhance the

tendency to rely on the "social proof" principle, such that people "validate the correctness of

their opinions and decisions" based on how similar others behave in a situation (e.g., Cialdini et

al., 1999, p. 2143). However, when people rely on similar others in an echo-chamber, this

increases the likelihood that erroneous conclusions will be adopted. This can further amplify

dysfunctional divergent perceptions by enhancing the likelihood of creating multiple parallel

realities with each group accessing only a narrow set of sources (Xu et al., 2021).

From a motivated cognition perspective, there are a variety of strategies that can be used

to effectively manage the content of the cue set. For example, ensuring that individuals are

evaluating the cue set rather than relying on similar others can help arrive at an accurate

conclusion (Cialdini, 1993). Further, it is also important to ensure that a diversity of perspectives

is reflected in the cue set. Indeed, Redlawsk et al. (2010) demonstrated that having a "critical

mass" of diverse cues is likely to increase the perceived cost of reliance on directional motives as

it makes it harder to provide plausible justifications (e.g., to justify one-sided perspectives). For

instance, when divergent cues represent 30% in the total cue set, people typically overcome

directional motivated reasoning and adopt perspectives that are in line with the presented

evidence. Similarly, engaging in deliberation strategies with relevant stakeholders can help

ensure that the most relevant cues are included in the cue set and attended to (e.g., Bago et al.,

2020; Grönlund et al., 2015). This may be especially helpful for diminishing echo chambers,

enhancing employees' receptiveness to outgroup members, and fostering a shared understanding.

Similarly, when a broad social or scientific consensus on the issue exists, highlighting this

consensus can contribute to a common perceptual ground that is more reflective of the actual

state of affairs (e.g., Perkins et al., 2011). This is especially important given that people may hold

false perceptions on scientific (Sparkman et al., 2022) or social issues (Perkins et al., 2011).

Evaluating Cue Credibility: The Negative Impact of Shifting Norms and Fake Cues.

Implicit in our above discussion is the notion that people must not only select cues, but they must

also evaluate those cues for their credibility and weigh them accordingly. While Damore

narrowed the cue set to focus on cues that were aligned with his perspective, his cue set also

contained non-credible cues (e.g., false information). However, the weighting of the cues did not

reflect these differences in their credibility. For example, Damore's memo included references to

Wikipedia entries, blogs, internal company documents, and academic research (Matsakis, 2017).

These cues were presented as if they were equally credible, despite empirical evidence to the

contrary (e.g., Grant, 2017; Henriques, 2017; Stevens, 2017). Without carefully evaluating the

credibility of cues, the presence of non-credible cues may undermine the accuracy of perceptions

and contribute to dysfunctional divergence.

While evaluating the credibility of cues is fundamental for accurate perceptions, society

has been experiencing shifting norms for what constitutes a credible cue (e.g., a "fact") and/or

how the credibility of a cue should be determined. For example, a recent study indicated that the

majority of surveyed employees in the United States were concerned about the emergence and

use of the term "alternate facts" in the workplace. This is because "alternate facts" enable people

to discount evidence that they simply disagree with (but that may be credible) and/or to provide

untruthful statements that may be taken as facts (Murphy, 2017). Similarly, there is an increasing

prevalence of "fake cues" including fabricated information that is presented as "facts" and that is

easily posted online for widespread consumption. This proliferation of fake cues supplies a

generous à la carte menu to those driven by directional motives; people can use fake cues that

support their desired conclusion, especially since they may find "evidence" for virtually any

view they want to hold (Kruglanski, 1989). This may instill a sense of confidence and even

enable perceptions that diverge from scientific consensus to be perceived as being objective and

justifiable (e.g., van der Linden et al., 2015).

Deep fake technology represents an extreme version that manipulates audio and video

cues to provide distorted and/or fake cues (e.g., Agarwal et al., 2020). Deep fakes are intended to

provide false input into perceptions and are often used to delegitimize, establish control, and/or

inflict reputational damage (e.g., Guo, 2020). Imagine a deep fake video with the CEO of Google

declaring support for Damore's memo (to the best of our knowledge, there was no such video).

The presence of such a deep fake video is likely to have escalated tensions and made it difficult

for the CEO to manage the situation. With rapid technological advancements, this scenario is

quite conceivable.

These issues with non-credible and fake cues may be especially problematic when

combined with an extensive cue set. Since employees may not have the cognitive resources to

assess the credibility of every cue, they may instead increase their reliance on directional

motives. This can focus people on a reduced set of cues (i.e., those that are highlighted by the

activated directional motives) as opposed to encouraging them to evaluate which cues should be

selected to create an accurate perception of the situation (e.g., Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018).

Similarly, individuals may invoke a closure motive that directs them towards finding the most

expeditious way to formulate a perception. This may again invoke social proof strategies that

focus individuals on what similar others perceive to be appropriate (e.g., Cialdini, 1993). Social

proof strategies may be especially likely to be used when people feel uncertain. However, relying

on similar others is likely to increase the tendency for non-credible and fake cues to persist

because these cues may be perceived as being validated by others, despite not being

appropriately evaluated for their credibility.

From a motivated cognition perspective, several strategies can be used to encourage

people to evaluate and use cue sets appropriately. For instance, the motivated cognition literature

has identified that people are typically subject to the "illusion of objectivity" (Kunda, 1990),

such that they are constrained in the conclusions that they can draw from a particular cue set.

While people may use directional motives to support a desired conclusion, most still want the

conclusion they reach to be credible, objective, and/or justifiable. This sheds light on why

shifting norms for credible cues (i.e., facts) and the increasing acceptance of fake cues is

especially detrimental—both tendencies can enable people to justify their position and seemingly

appear credible, despite the use of non-credible and/or fake cues. This also reinforces the

importance of invoking an illusion of objectivity that focuses people on ensuring that the cues

they use are credible. Focusing on the credibility of cues can encourage individuals to ensure that

the ensuing perceptions or evaluative judgments are based on credible information. For example,

if a cue is deemed credible or if people cannot refute the credibility of a cue, then they can be

prompted to incorporate this cue into their reasoning process to uphold the illusion of objectivity,

even if the cue fails to support their own perspective.

The desire to maintain an illusion of objectivity can motivate people to select, evaluate,

and weigh cues in ways that enable them to provide plausible justifications for their perceptions

(Kunda, 1990). As such, organizations may benefit from establishing norms surrounding the use

of information, such that individuals are expected to contribute and use credible information as

well as be able to justify their evaluations (i.e., ensure that objectivity and accuracy are used as

decision-making criteria). Increasing the cost of overreliance on directional motives may also be

helpful, such as making employees and organizations accountable for the information they share.

For example, Nyhan and Reifler (2015) found that reminding state legislators about reputational

risks of spreading misinformation was an effective deterrent from making false claims and

increased the likelihood of fact checking. In other words, when people realize that they will be

held accountable, they are motivated to ensure accuracy of the information they disseminate.

When fake cues are present, providing strong and unambiguous evidence that contradicts

these cues may also help people overcome their reliance on these cues (e.g., Pennycook & Rand,

2021). For example, Bisgaard (2015) showed that political party members that typically hold

divergent perspectives start to converge in their assessments of the economy during crisis or

economic boom because these states are harder to deny. When it comes to fake cues, corrective

information can also increase accuracy and understanding that a cue is fake (e.g., Clayton et al.,

2019). When exposing fake cues, it is also critical to provide an alternative explanation to enable

people to easily construe plausible explanations with authentic cues (e.g., Ecker et al., 2010).

Given the increasing number of fake cues, it may be impossible to refute each fake cue.

Instead, providing people and organizations with tools that enable recognition of fake cues might

be an effective pre-emptive strategy that helps identify fake cues across different contexts (e.g.,

van der Linden et al., 2021). Studies have demonstrated that teaching people reasoning

techniques (i.e., statistical rules; Fong et al., 1986) and/or fostering skills to critically evaluate

information (e.g., critical thinking interventions; Niu et al., 2013) can improve judgment

accuracy. Moreover, inoculation has also been shown to combat fake cues (see Banas & Rains,

2010). This method involves exposure to small doses of persuasive fake arguments allowing

people to develop skills to recognize fake cues. Similarly, Cook et al. (2017) showed that explaining flawed argumentation tactics used in a misinformation message was effective for neutralizing negative effects of fake cues. As such, organizations may benefit from incorporating these strategies into their employee training programs.

Managing Directional Motives

To benefit from divergent perceptions, it is also important to foster an appreciation of diverse perspectives (e.g., promote diversity beliefs; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). That is, people may be more likely to benefit from divergent perceptions if they recognize that creating an expanded set of cues and participating in information elaboration can add value. However, fostering an appreciation for diverse perspectives has increasingly come under fire and some diversity initiatives have experienced backlash (for a discussion, see Devine & Ash, 2022). As discussed below, a motivated cognition perspective can inform our understanding and ability to curtail these negative reactions by effectively managing system justification motives, identity protection motives, and tribalism. Figures 3 and 4 provides an overview of these arguments.

Protecting the Status Quo. Divergent perceptions often bring new information or ways of doing things. However, if people are resistant to changing the status quo in the organization, this may prevent them from leveraging the benefits of divergent perceptions (e.g., recognizing novel cues or selecting cues from divergent perspectives that imply change). Instead, the introduction of divergent perceptions may activate system justification motives that focus people on justifying and/or protecting the status quo in the organization. System justification motives enable individuals to fulfill fundamental psychological needs (e.g., enhance their sense of control; Rankin et al., 2009). As such, system justification motives may not only be activated for those that benefit from the status quo, but also those that may be disadvantaged by it (e.g., Jost &

Banaji, 1994). These motives may be especially likely to be activated when there is dependency

on the organizational system, an inability to escape, a perceived threat to the organizational

system, or low personal control (e.g., Proudfoot & Kay, 2014). Moreover, system justification

motives can prompt people to perceive the status quo as desirable and legitimate, even when it is

flawed or inequitable (e.g., Jost & Hunyady, 2003). That is, system justification motives may be

especially detrimental when the organizational system is creating a status quo that perpetuates

inequalities or aversive experiences.

Referring back to our example, there were several credible cues to indicate that Google

had problematic and discriminatory practices in its organizational system (e.g., multiple

allegations of sexual harassment and "systemic compensation disparities"; Elias, 2020; Levin,

2017). Google's diversity initiatives were intended to make positive changes to the

organizational system. However, these initiatives were likely perceived as a threat to the status

quo by Damore and others, thereby activating system justification motives. Studies have

demonstrated that people are more likely to "deny and rationalize away system injustices",

including pervasive and detrimental gender disparities, when system justification motives are

activated (Laurin et al., 2010, p. 1080). Beyond rationalizing the underrepresentation of women

by pointing to supposed biological differences, Damore also justified gender pay inequity by

arguing that "women generally having a harder time negotiating salary" because of their higher

levels of agreeableness. In doing so, Damore attempted to justify and legitimize systematic

gender pay inequities by endorsing gender stereotypes (e.g., see Jost & Kay, 2005). Given that

organizations represent systems and that system justification motives are likely to be activated

when people perceive that the system is under threat (e.g., Proudfoot & Kay, 2014), it is

especially critical to manage system justification motives in the context of divergent perceptions

to reduce inequities and support positive change that can enhance social justice.

A motivated cognition perspective points to several strategies that may be helpful for managing system justification motives. For example, replacing system justification motives with system change motives can help prevent inequities from being justified or legitimatized and therefore reduce resistance to change (e.g., Johnson & Fujita, 2012). Organizations can invoke system change motives by characterizing the organizational system as flexible and constantly moving towards positive change (e.g., Proudfoot & Kay, 2014) or by highlighting that the changes can improve the system (i.e., system-sanctioned change; Feygina et al., 2010; Friesen et al., 2018). Moreover, framing the change as being in service of the *system* (rather than individual members) may be especially critical to benefit from system change motives (and to avoid identity protection motives, as discussed below).

Defending Group Interests. While system justification motives focus on protecting the status quo, individuals may also experience motives that can focus them on defending their group's interests. More precisely, identity protection motives focus people on processing information in ways that are consistent with their political ideologies, cultural worldviews, and/or group attachments (e.g., Kahn et al., 2017; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). These motives are rooted in the notion that individuals are motivated to promote and defend the interests of the groups to which they belong (Kahan et al., 2007). As such, identity protection motives can prompt individuals to more strongly weigh the needs of their own groups as well as treat the views of those in their group as more accurate and credible.

Damore's memo pointed to how Google's initiatives made him feel discriminated against because the company was offering "programs, mentoring, and classes only for people with a certain gender or race". By limiting the initiatives to certain demographics, Google's strategies

may have invoked identity protection motives that can motivate people to protect the interests of

their own group (e.g., by preventing or mitigating perceived harm to one's own group). Indeed,

studies have demonstrated the importance of framing diversity initiatives in inclusive ways that

reduce perceptions of exclusion for majority group members while also highlighting benefits for

both minority and majority group members (e.g., Jansen et al., 2015; Stevens et al., 2008). Said

differently, minimizing identity threats may enable people to consider a broader cue set by

selecting cues from other perspectives, assess the accuracy of cues by facilitating the use of non-

directional motives (e.g., accuracy), and shift the weighting of cues to reduce the dominance of

their own perspective. By contrast, invoking identity threats may activate strong directional

motives that may induce biased processing, even when individuals are motivated to create an

accurate perception (Kahn et al., 2017).

     While Damore's arguments highlighted his belief that Google's diversity initiatives

created reverse discrimination that targeted male employees, his arguments also sparked identity

threats to those that did not share this social categorization. For example, one female employee,

Lauren, highlighted how the memo constructed an "us vs. them" mentality and that to "have us

all lumped into one sort of category like that and to have such a baseless claim made about who

we are, and to have it positioned as fact—as scientific fact—I don't know how we could feel

anything but attacked by that" (Kovach, 2017). This highlights the polarization that can emerge

as both groups attempt to affirm beliefs and ideologies that support their identity or group

affiliations (Kahan, 2017). Further, the signaling that can emerge from this biased processing

may be especially detrimental for those in the outgroup. For example, comments such as those

offered by Damore may discourage women from pursuing promotions and/or lower their

performance (e.g., Schmader et al., 2008). In fact, some research suggests that highlighting

gender differences (even in a positive way) can have negative implications for self-stereotyping, confidence, and agency (e.g., Martin & Phillips, 2017, 2019).

Mitigating Tribalism. While identity protection motives can reflect individuals' desire to affirm their own political ideologies and/or group affiliations, a more extreme version can occur with tribalism in which people become fiercely loyal to their own ingroups (i.e., "tribes"). Tribes can emerge as people categorize themselves and others into groups to fulfill psychological needs (e.g., to foster a sense of belonging with others; Kahan, 2015; Turner et al., 1987). Because the categorization process serves a palliative function (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), people may seek to maximize distinctions by emphasizing dissimilarities with other groups (e.g., Iacoviello et al., 2017), while also affirming or validating their own tribe (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994). As such, tribalism can motivate people to adopt perceptions that align with their own tribe, regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions (e.g., Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). Further, tribalism can also encourage people to accept perceptual divides with other tribes since it enables them to recognize distinctions across groups and more closely identify with their own ingroups (e.g., Fiorina et al., 2008). This divergence of perceptions can enhance tensions between groups (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2012; Levendusky, 2010), which has been associated with increasing radicalization, extremism, and violence in the society (Benevento, 2021).

Given that tribalism is increasing around the world (Fukuyama, 2018), it is perhaps not surprising that its effects can trickle into organizations. Consider the term "woke" in reference to diversity initiatives. Depending on one's perspective, this term can have opposite meanings. While the term "woke" was initially used to reflect an acknowledgement of perspectives that have historically been underrepresented and become "awakened to a different way of thinking", those challenging social justice movements have "weaponized the word 'woke' as a backlash

against these socially just policies and practices" (Zavattaro & Bearfield, 2022, p. 586). Some

scholars have even argued for "anti-woke" diversity strategies (e.g., Waldman & Sparr, 2022).

Such polarizing terminology may not only create and validate perceptual divides but may also

make it more difficult to promote the value and positive benefits of divergent perceptions.

Moreover, this can contribute to tribalism by emphasizing differences rather than similarities in

perspectives.

The notion of tribalism is well-illustrated in Damore's memo that referred to diversity

initiatives as "veiled left ideology". For example, Damore presented a table with two columns

describing left versus right biases (e.g., "compassion for the weak" vs. "respect for the

strong/authority", respectively). The memo went on to suggest that Google had a left bias and

needed to "stop alienating conservatives." This divisive discourse created further conflict among

employees at Google. For example, some (liberal) employees organized walkout protests

whereas other (conservative) employees sued Google for suppressing their speech and

discriminating against conservatives. Moreover, Google was forced into a heated tribalistic battle

after Damore's memo became public. Google executives found themselves in a bind. On the one

hand, Google praised itself as a company that values openness, discussions, and differences in

opinions. On the other hand, the divergent perspective offered by Damore contributed to

criticisms that Google was fostering a hostile work environment. Two days after the memo was

released to the public, Google fired Damore for "perpetuating gender stereotypes" (Reuters,

2017). In doing so, Google signaled that divergent perceptions need to be based on credible

evidence. Yet polarized and tribal reactions promptly ensued, including characterizations of the

decision to fire Damore as "a heretic hunt" (Dreher, 2017).

A motivated cognition perspective also highlights strategies that may mitigate the

negative effects of tribalism. At the core of tribalization is the presence of directional motives

that focus on supporting the tribe. Since tribalism is driven by relational and social identity

motives (i.e., the desire to belong to a group), interventions aimed at lessening the importance of

tribe-related identities may lessen the detrimental effects of tribalism on decision-making. For

example, it may be helpful to increase the saliency of cues that showcase commonalities between

groups (see Hartman et al., 2022), invoke higher-order shared identities (e.g., "Google

employees"), or appeal to superordinate goals (e.g., "decision making at Google should leverage

diverse opinions and make decisions based on credible evidence"). Further, since identity-based

directional motives may be activated by perceived threats to a particular group identity, affirming

other identities may be beneficial (e.g., Sherman, 2013). However, affirmation strategies need to

be detached from a threatened aspect of one's identity to be effective. For example, self-

affirmation strategies that affirm the same aspect of identity that has been threatened can lead to

an increased rather than decreased escalation of one's initial commitment (e.g., Sivanathan et al.,

2008). By contrast, affirming other individual identities (e.g., moral identity) or social identities

(e.g., Google employee) may reduce the salience of the threat and increase the individual's

receptivity to arguments from outgroup members (Sherman, 2013). This may be especially

important when the threatened identity is likely to focus on extreme perspectives or perspectives

that rely on non-credible or fake cues.

When communicating with people from another "tribe," the framing of cues may alter

whether people attend to the cues and how they evaluate and weigh those cues. For example,

matching message framing with people's motives can be effective for shifting attitudes. Bayes et

al. (2020) found that inducing accuracy, moral values, or social identity motives can increase

people's pro-environmental attitudes, but *only when* those motives were paired with a congruent

message framing. For example, a message emphasizing group members' normative values significantly increased environmental-friendly attitudes when people had a social identity motive, but not when they were in another motivational state.

Activating disparate directional motives (e.g., moral motives) may also supplant motives that can foster divisive divergent perceptions. For example, Wolsko et al. (2016) found that portraying environmental issues as a matter of patriotism (i.e., ingroup/loyalty moral foundations) and defending the nature's purity (i.e., purity/sanctity moral foundations) substantially shifted conservatives' environmental attitudes making them more likely to display conservation intentions and more concerned about climate change. Moral framing might be especially suitable for promoting corporate social responsibility and equity, diversity, and inclusion. For example, stakeholders and organizations might leverage moral framing by evoking a moral principle that is equally applicable to different groups or encouraging a group to consider a broader set of moral principles (see Haidt & Graham, 2007).

Recognizing the Impact of Cultural Values on Cues and Motives. Although multi-national organizations have access to a diverse workplace and an opportunity to leverage this diversity to bring about its beneficial effects, these opportunities may be lost if the impact of cultural values on motivated reasoning processes are not recognized and effectively managed. Said differently, cultural values may also be an important source of influence that can impact the cue set as well as the motives that may be activated. Consider collectivistic cultures that emphasize common goals, group binds, and mutual obligations (Oyserman et al., 2002). In countries with high levels of collectivism, the similarity of perspectives (as opposed to divergent perceptions) is valued and desired. As a result, employees might be hesitant to offer diverse cues and instead focus on a select set of similar cues. Similarly, cultural differences in power distance

(i.e., people's acceptance of power inequality; House et al., 2002) are likely to influence how

employees assess cue credibility or weigh cues from different perspectives. In countries with

high power distance, employees accept and even expect power imbalances, and those who have

higher formal position are perceived as more credible and influential (e.g., Tyler et al., 2000). As

such, cues supplied by managers or those in high power positions are likely to be weighed as

more credible and prioritized.

Managing motivated cognition processes may also be more complex in the context of

multinational companies. Cross-cultural teams that are geographically dispersed may also be less

likely to share cues and/or engage in information elaboration due to perceived psychological

distance (e.g., Matveev & Nelson, 2004). This effect may occur even when communication can

be easily facilitated. Indeed, Damore acknowledged that his memo specifically focused on one

branch of Google's offices and did not include perspectives from "other offices or countries". In

doing so, Damore missed an opportunity to expand the cue set and leverage potentially divergent

perspectives. Similarly, it may also be more complicated to manage motives. Consider system

justification motives. Although employees may be motivated to justify the status quo in the

organizational system, those that are embedded in different cultures may also be motivated to

maintain these broader cultural or national systems. This may create complexities when the

perceived status quo in the organizational system conflicts with broader systems. Moreover,

multicultural teams might be especially prone to the activation of social identity motives, leading

to tensions between groups, intergroup conflicts, and behavioral disintegration (e.g., Gratton et

al., 2007; Li & Hambrick, 2005). These processes are likely to further amplify tribalism in multi-

national organizations, unless superordinate shared identities are also activated.

A motivated cognition perspective also highlights valuable strategies for managing

cultural differences. For example, multicultural teams are especially likely to benefit from

opportunities to engage in information elaboration and build connections that reduce perceived

psychological distance as well as strategies that reduce identity protection motives and tribalism.

Encouraging intergroup contact with "cultural outsiders" (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998) and providing

cross-cultural training to employees (e.g., Fischer, 2011) may also help expand cue sets and

foster appreciation for diversity beliefs.

General Discussion

While organizations can benefit from bringing together and drawing on divergent

perceptions (e.g., enhanced decision making and performance; Nishii, 2013; Roberson et al.,

2017), managing divergent perceptions effectively in the workplace is becoming increasingly

difficult, especially in light of contextual factors and emerging societal trends. By adopting a

motivated cognition perspective, we highlighted how these complexities can be better understood

and more effectively managed. In doing so, we shed light on why, how, and when divergent

perceptions may become dysfunctional in the workplace as well as how to mitigate these

detrimental effects. Below, we outline key theoretical insights and avenues for future research.

The Importance of Understanding Context for Effectively Managing Cue Sets and Motives

A motivated cognition perspective highlights the importance of managing cues and

motives. However, our analysis stresses that effectively managing cue sets and motives is not

simply an individual-level phenomenon. Instead, it is important to consider how contextual

factors and emerging societal trends may impact employees' cue sets and motives within

organizations. For example, contextual factors may expand or narrow the cue set, change what

cues are considered credible, or influence what motives become activated (e.g., system

justification motives, identity protection motives, tribalism). This suggests that it may not be

sufficient to examine individuals' motivated cognition in isolation. Indeed, as Hackman (2003, p. 907) explained, "it makes sense to strip away the context to see how things really work only when the context is not itself a key part of how things work—which, in group and organizational studies, it usually is". Moreover, contextual factors are not limited to those originating from *within* organizations but may also include *external* factors, such as emerging societal trends and issues. Recognizing this provides the opportunity to generate novel insights that can enhance our understanding and ability to manage divergent perceptions within organizations. Further, it is consistent with recent calls to "broaden our conceptualization of the factors that may serve as antecedents for workplace behavior beyond the strong emphasis on factors internal to the organization" (Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2022, p. 14).

A Systems Approach to Motivated Cognition

Beyond recognizing the importance of individual contextual factors, it may be helpful to adopt a "systems" approach—a multilevel perspective that recognizes the "interconnected system of contextual factors that can exert powerful influences over employees' behaviors and social interactions" (see Bies et al., 2016, p. 247). More precisely, a systems approach can be especially helpful when the *interplay* of contextual factors has the potential to fundamentally alter and shape the meaning of and relationships between variables (see Mowday & Sutton, 1993). The interplay between contextual levels may be crucial for effectively managing divergent perceptions and motivated cognition processes in the workplace. For example, there is some evidence in the motivated cognition literature that eliciting anxiety can motivate people to seek out information and more carefully evaluate cues that contradict their beliefs (e.g., Marcus et al., 2000). However, it is important to explore these effects within broader contexts. For example, anxiety may also invoke identity protection motives (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2018), which

can motivate individuals to protect their group's interests rather than carefully evaluate

credibility of cues. Similarly, individuals that perceive a threat to the system in which they are

embedded may activate system justification motives to reduce anxiety (e.g., Vargas-Salfate,

2018). The simultaneous activation of both identity protection motives and system justification

may further exacerbate the tendency to protect the interests of one's group and the status quo,

while also further dampening the effects of accuracy motives. Further, these effects may be

amplified by tribalistic contexts in which people are fiercely loyal and protective of their

ingroups and ingroup interests. In this example, the intrapersonal context (i.e., intrapersonal

emotions, motives) and the interplay of the situational context with broader contextual layers

(e.g., organizational systems, tribalism) may impact motivated cognition processes. This

showcases the importance of exploring how contextual layers *and* their interplay may alter and

inform motivated processes.

Developing and Contextualizing Interventions for the Workplace

        While organizations are unlikely to solve the issues of fake cues or tribalism, our analysis

highlighted numerous interventions that organizations can use to reduce the influence of these

factors. These interventions showcase that organizations may be well positioned to use top-down

processes and strategies to reduce the negative effects of these societal issues within the

organization. For example, organizations can set norms for accuracy, fact checking, and

constructive exchanges through their policies. Similarly, organizations can promote diversity

beliefs by embedding these values in their culture and by ensuring that polarizing terminology

(e.g., "anti-woke" diversity policies) is not accepted in the organization. Further, endorsing

system change motives may not only help the organization avoid resistance to change but may

also focus employees on fostering continuous positive change. These strategies are likely to help

employees recognize the types of cues that should be perceived as credible as well as the motives that are appropriate for the workplace. In doing so, organizations are likely to manage divergent perceptions more effectively, thereby creating a plethora of benefits for employees and the organization. Leveraging the unique contextual factors associated with the workplace may also create additional opportunities for developing effective interventions. As such, further exploring the mechanisms and boundary conditions of existing interventions as well as tailoring and creating new interventions for the workplace may be especially helpful (e.g., Lambert et al., 2022).

Concluding Comments

Divergent perceptions can bring a host of benefits to organizations, but they must be managed effectively to do so. A motivated cognition perspective can shed light on why, how, and when individuals may hold divergent perceptions as well as how to effectively manage divergent perceptions to avoid dysfunctional effects. These insights are especially important as organizations face increasing pressure to overcome systematic inequalities, promote social justice, and foster inclusive environments. Bringing together diverse voices, especially those that have been historically underrepresented, is important for enhancing employee and organizational functioning and effectively promoting social justice and navigating emergent societal issues. As such, we encourage scholars to continue exploring motivated cognition within the organizational context and through a systems approach. We believe that this will provide a deeper theoretical understanding as well as evidence-based guidance and interventions that can positively contribute to employee, organizational, and societal functioning.

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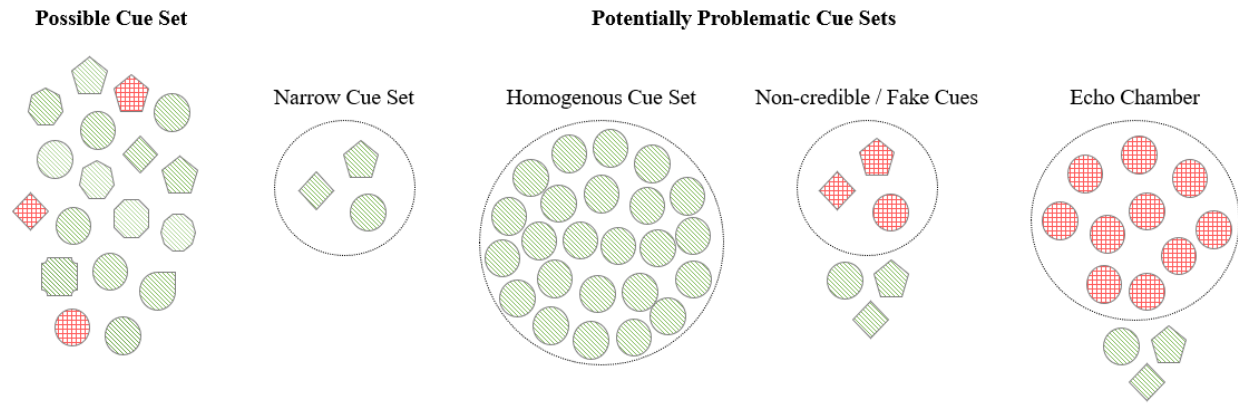
Figure 1

Functional Divergent Perceptions
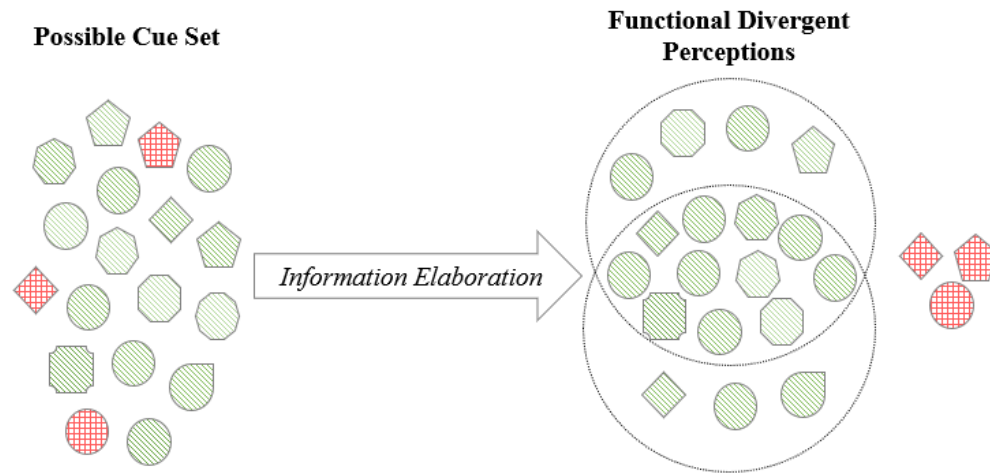
Note. We use different shapes to denote diversity of cues; colors (patterns) represent credibility of cues: green (diagonal stripes pattern) = credible cues; red (small grid pattern) = non-credible/fake cues.
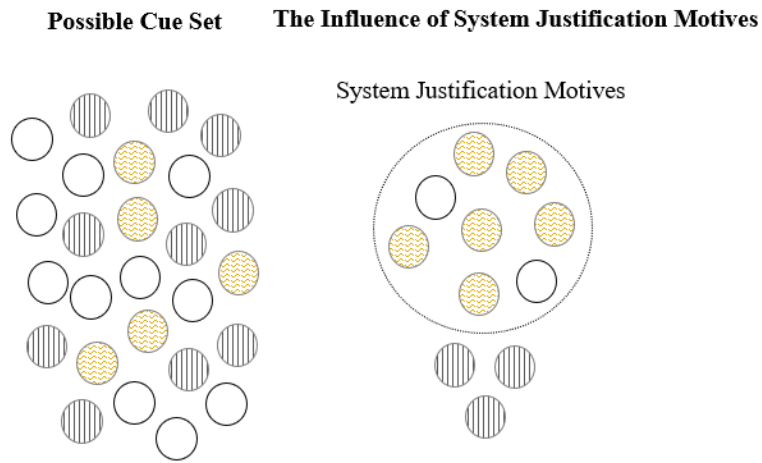
Figure 2

Potentially Problematic Cue Sets

Note. We use different shapes to denote diversity of cues; colors (patterns) represent credibility of cues: green (diagonal stripes pattern) = credible cues; red (small grid pattern) = non-credible/fake cues.

Figure 3

The Influence of System Justification Motives

Note. Colors (patterns) represent cues: orange (wave pattern) = system justification motives; grey

(vertical stripes) = system challenging cues; no color (no pattern) = neutral cue.

Figure 4

The Influence of Identity Protection Motives
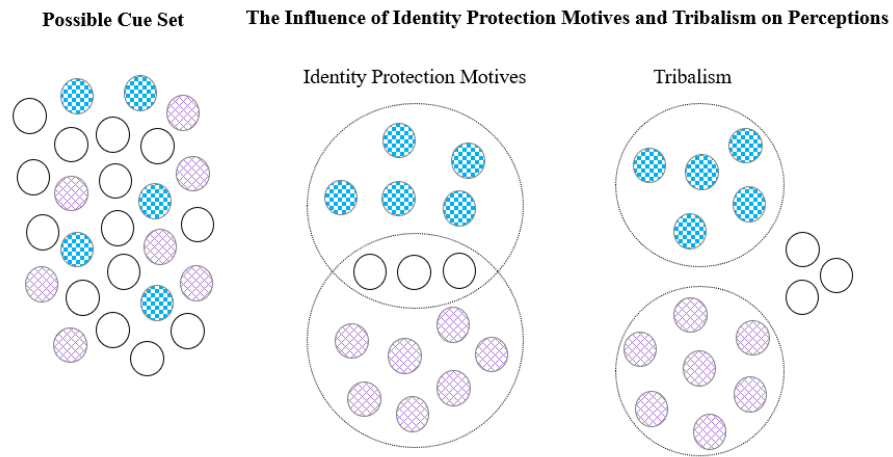
Note. Colors (patterns) represent identity-related cues: blue (checkerboard pattern) = identity

motive A; purple (diamond grid pattern) = identity motive B; no color (no pattern) = neutral cue.