



Being there with others: How people make environments norm-relevant

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In two studies we show that people make environments norm-relevant and this increases the likelihood that environments influence norm-relevant judgments. When people see environments without having people on their mind, this effect does not occur. Specifically, when exposed to an environment (a library), people's perceived importance of environment-relevant norms (be silent in libraries) increases, when the concept of 'people' is primed compared to when this is not the case. The impact on normative judgments of priming *significant others* (Study 1) is stronger than priming *people in general* (Study 2). Additional effects on conformism and public self-consciousness are discussed, as well as implications for future studies.

Environments influence people's thoughts, feelings, and actions. A noisy carnival may elicit happy feelings, a run-down cemetery is more likely to induce sadness, and a restaurant may bring back memories of exquisite dinners just like a library may evoke thoughts about world-renown writers. But can an environment also raise the relevance of social norms that apply to that environment? Can a restaurant spontaneously activate table manners? Can a library evoke the norm to be silent? The main goal of the present research is to investigate under what conditions the answer to these questions is 'yes.'

What determines whether an environment will raise the perceived relevance of social norms that apply (to that environment)? It is unlikely that environments by themselves are typically perceived as strong and clear inducers of normative thoughts and behaviors. Environments are complex and multifaceted stimuli that can be perceived in many different ways. A library can be seen, *inter alia*, as a pile of stones, a place to store books, or a place to study and be silent. Which of these interpretations will be most salient is likely to be a function of a host of situational and personality variables. Whether or not perceiving a library will spontaneously activate the norm to be

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silent thus depends on *how* one perceives this stimulus, or what interpretational frame one applies when making sense of it (see Lindenberg, 2006; Stapel, 2007). What type of perceiving is likely to induce normative seeing?

We suggest that an environment will be especially likely to be perceived in a norm-relevant manner when ‘people’ are on top of perceivers’ minds at the time they are exposed to the environment. When this is the case, perceivers are more likely to encode the environment in *social* terms, such that it becomes a social environment; an environment where social norms are relevant. When perceivers look at a library and the construct of ‘people’ (e.g. peers, parents, students, colleagues) is on top of their mind, relevant norms (be silent) are more likely to become salient than when ‘non-people’ constructs (e.g. forks, curtains, or trees) occupy their thoughts.

We base this hypothesis on previous reasoning by Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003). These researchers showed that the likelihood increases that an environment activates normative thoughts and behaviors that apply specifically to that environment when this environment is perceived as *relevant*. An environment is especially likely to be perceived as relevant, according to Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003), when people are planning to visit it. When people intend to visit an environment, it becomes an environment that calls for norm-relevant thoughts and norm-guided behavior. Thus, although the norm to be silent in a library probably is not immediately relevant when one merely sees a library, this norm’s relevance increases significantly when one is entering the library or is planning to go in or is thinking about going in. Or, as Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003) showed: people who are instructed to study a picture of a library and to visit it later in the experiment, soften their voices more than participants who are merely exposed to the pictured library.

Aarts and Dijksterhuis’s (2003) results suggest that when people have the intention to visit a specific place, the likelihood that they will see this environment in a norm-relevant manner increases. In the present article, we investigate a new route to increased norm-relevant interpretations. This new route is subtler because it merely relies on the *social interpretation* of the environment, rather than on a conscious intention to actually be there.

The logic behind our claim is simple: We posit that an environment is more likely to be perceived as norm-relevant when it is interpreted in *social* terms – independent of whether or not one has the intention to go there. Decades of knowledge accessibility research (see e.g. Stapel & Suls, 2007) suggest that such an interpretation is especially likely when ‘the social’ is cognitively accessible. But differently, especially when ‘people’ are on perceivers’ minds, physical environments will be seen as *social* environments where norms matter. After all, people and social norms are intrinsically linked with each other as social norms apply to people and regulate interactions between people.

Importantly, priming *any* people is unlikely to have the same effect. We think it is important to make a distinction between *significant others* and *people in general* (sometimes called ‘generalized others’). Previous research has shown that significant others can be especially powerful elicitors of normative thoughts and behavior. For example, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) have shown repeatedly that the normative expectations of significant others are strong predictors of behavior. For instance, people are less likely to start smoking when they think significant others will disapprove of this behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Priming significant others may also be a good tool/way to induce norm-relevant interpretations of environments because people primarily learn from their significant others what appropriate normative behavior entails (Haidt, 2001). Furthermore, people tend to use significant others’ opinions as a

heuristic for their own opinions (I agree with the people I like) and behaviors (I act like the people I like). Moreover, thinking of significant others is likely to activate the norms, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors they are associated with (Chaiken, 1980; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003). Especially, the classic results from Baldwin, Carrel, & Lopez, 1990 seem to support the hypothesis that reminders of significant others may enhance the cognitive accessibility of the normative expectations, they hold for us, and ‘socialize’ environments. For example, Baldwin *et al.* (1990) showed that students’ evaluations of an erotic text were less positive after being primed with a picture of their mother compared to being primed with a picture of an unknown person. This supports the notion that priming one’s mother increases the accessibility of mom’s normative expectations (e.g. ‘Thou shall not read pornographic texts’) and affects one’s behavior accordingly.

Previous research on the norm-inducing power of thinking about significant others thus suggests that when people are primed with significant others, they are more likely to perceive an environment (e.g. library) in a norm-relevant manner (You should be silent here) rather than a norm-irrelevant manner (This building was designed by Rem Koolhaas), because these others are strongly associated with normative expectations and proper behavior. In fact, based on this previous research one could argue that merely priming people with significant others (parents, partners, siblings) may, without any contextual cue, be sufficient to increase the perceived importance of norms in general (in addition to the specific, environment-relevant norms). That is, given the intrinsic association between normative behavior and significant others (see e.g. Baldwin *et al.*, 1990; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Joly & Stapel, 2008; Shah, 2003), merely priming significant others may increase the perceived importance of normative behavior in general.

To put our hypothesis that people primes may elicit norm-relevant interpretations of environments to a robust and conservative test, we not only tested the impact of significant others (priming e.g. family, friends, parents) on normative judgments, but also investigated to what extent the more abstract concept of people (priming e.g. others, persons, all) would induce norm-relevant interpretations of an environment. We argue that the abstract concept of ‘people’ is likely to be a weaker elicitor of normative cognitions than significant others. Probably, this concept is too vague to spontaneously induce norm-relative thinking, and too general to increase the accessibility of specific social norms by itself. But when this concept is ‘contextualized’, that is combined with an environmental cue, it may become specific and meaningful and thus induce context-relevant normative thoughts. In other words, by itself, a picture of a supermarket will not increase the perceived importance of supermarket-relevant norms. And by itself, the prime ‘people’ will not amplify normative thinking. But, ‘people in a supermarket’ may evoke environment-specific behaviors (e.g. shopping) and norms (e.g. paying for one’s groceries). Thus, although priming ‘people’ may not affect general normative judgments, it is likely to lead to norm-relevant interpretations of specific target environments.

This conjecture is supported by results from research on observer effects indicating that reminders of people can evoke normative behavior when they are perceived within a specific context. For example, Munger and Harris (1989) showed that women using a restroom washed their hands more often if another unknown person is present in the restroom than when being alone. Similarly, Haley and Fessler (2005) showed that participants playing a dictator game are more generous when they are primed with two Egyptian stylized eyes (observer prime) than when they are primed with the name of the laboratory.

Overview

We tested our hypothesis that the cognitive accessibility of the construct ‘people’ will elicit norm-relevant interpretations of environments in two studies. In Study 1, we primed participants with a strong and specific ‘people’ prime (significant others, such as mother, partner, and friends). In Study 2, we primed participants with a more global ‘people’ prime (generalized others such as people, others, them). In both studies, we tested the hypothesis that to increase the perceived importance of environment-relevant norms when people are exposed to a specific environment, it is necessary to prime ‘people.’ We also explored the effects of relatively strong (significant others) and weak (generalized others) people primes on the perceived importance of general, environment-unrelated norms.

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we put our ideas to a first test by priming participants with a picture of a library and reminders of significant others. To prime significant others, we used words (e.g. parents, family members, teachers, and friends) rather than pictures of people’s faces (see for example Baldwin *et al.*, 1990). This excludes confounds between the impact of facial expressions versus the mere influence of the construct of significant others. Unlike previous studies in which one specific significant other person was primed (e.g. Baldwin *et al.*, 1990; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003), we used several significant others as primes because this is more likely to strongly activate the relevance of normative behavior in general. Whereas each significant other is likely to be associated with different social norms, priming a number of significant others is likely to increase the perceived relevance of norms in general.

We tested the impact of these manipulations on three measures of norm importance: the perceived importance of norms related to the specific environment to which we exposed the subjects (for example, in a library, one should be silent); the perceived importance of ‘norms in general’; and the willingness to conform to well-established norms (conformism). The hypothesis is that exposure to a specific environment is more likely to raise the perceived importance of specific, environment-relevant norms when significant others are accessible compared to when they are not. Furthermore, because of the strong norm-inducing effects of significant others, we also test the hypothesis that priming significant others will increase the perceived importance of more general norms and increase conformism in participants.

Method

Participants and design

Fifty-six undergraduate students participated in this study for partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a 2 (People: significant others vs. control) \times 2 (Environment: library vs. no library) between subjects design.

Procedure and materials

All participants received a paper-and-pencil questionnaire that supposedly tested language skills and personal opinions. First, they completed a scrambled sentence test (Srull & Wyer, 1979) that consisted of 23 sentences. Participants were instructed to

construct correct four-word sentences out of five words that were presented to them in a scrambled order (e.g. *blue the is sky father*) and to underline the word that had to be left out in order to make a grammatically correct sentence. In the significant others conditions, the first and from there on every third sentence, contained one of the manipulation words (*mother, family, colleagues, teacher, parents, father, team members, roommates, and friends*). In the control conditions, neutral words had to be underlined (e.g. *wood, fork, and curtains*).

Next, participants in the library condition were asked to carefully study a picture of an empty library for half a minute. Participants in the no-library condition continued right away with the next task.

In the following task, we assessed the perceived importance of specific, environment-relevant norms (*I believe that it is important to be silent in a library*) and general norms (*I believe that norms and values are important*) by asking all participants to indicate their agreement with statements on 10-point Likert type scales (1 = do not agree at all, 10 = agree completely).

Then, participants indicated their agreement with three statements that assessed conformism (I want to conform to well established social norms, I believe that it is important to conform to well established social norms and I always try to conform to well established social norms on 10-point Likert type scales (1 = do not agree at all, 10 = agree completely). These questions formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$). Finally, participants were asked to write down any ideas they might have concerning the goal of the research. Their answers showed that none of them were aware of the purpose of the study.

Results and discussion

To test our hypotheses, we first performed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with People (significant others vs. no significant others) and Environment (library vs. no library) as between subject factors on the perceived importance of library norms, general norms, and conformism. This revealed a significant People x Environment interaction, $F(3, 50) = 3.24, p < .04, \eta^2 = .16$, and a main effect of People, $F(3, 50) = 9.56, p < .01, \eta^2 = .37$. Next, we performed univariate analyses on the dependent measures.

Library norm

The univariate analyses on the norm 'to be silent in the library' revealed the predicted People \times Environment interaction, $F(1, 52) = 6.13, p < .02, \eta^2 = .11$ and a main effect of Library $F(1, 52) = 4.44, p < .04, \eta^2 = .08$. Other F s < 1 . As the means and pairwise comparisons in Table 1 show, the perceived importance of the library norm was relatively high when participants were primed with a library picture and with significant others ($M = 8.86$). In the other conditions, these norm scores were relatively low: No significant others, no library ($M = 7.87$), No significant others, library ($M = 7.77$), Significant others, no library ($M = 7.64$).

General norms

The univariate analyses on the general norms showed a main effect of People, $F(1, 52) = 26.43, p < .01, \eta^2 = .34$ (Other F s < 1). As can be seen in Table 1, general

Table 1. Mean (SD) library, general norm, and conformism scores as a function of people (significant others) and environment (library) primes (Study 1)

| | Environment | People | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | None | Significant Others |
| Library norm | No library | 7.87(0.83) ^a | 7.64(0.84) ^a |
| | Library | 7.77(1.48) ^a | 8.86(0.66) ^b |
| General norms | No library | 7.20(1.15) ^a | 8.64(0.75) ^b |
| | Library | 7.00(1.68) ^a | 8.71(0.83) ^b |
| Conformism | No library | 7.11(1.43) ^a | 8.43(0.70) ^b |
| | Library | 7.08(1.78) ^a | 8.10(1.38) ^b |

Note. Means are on a scale ranging from 1 to 10 with higher numbers indicating higher attributed norm importance or higher conformism. Means with different superscripts differ significantly (at least $p < .05$).

norms were rated as more important when participants were primed with significant others ($M = 8.66$) than when they were not so primed ($M = 7.10$).

Conformism

The univariate analyses on the conformism measured also revealed a main effect of people, $F(1, 52) = 10.14$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$ (Other F s < 1). As can be seen in Table 1, participants' willingness to conform to normative expectations was higher when they were primed with significant others ($M = 8.27$) than when they were not so primed ($M = 7.10$).

These results nicely support our main hypothesis that mere exposure to a specific environment is probably not enough to raise the perceived importance of environment-specific norms. Specific environment-relevant norms are more likely to be salient when significant others are mentally present. Interestingly, our results also show that the cognitive accessibility of significant others alone is sufficient to increase the perceived importance of more general norms and the tendency to conform. In our view, this differential effect of our manipulation on *general* versus *specific* norm judgments makes sense when taking into consideration the level of specificity of these dependent measures. The norm-inducing power of significant others may be too general to affect specific situational norms such as 'In a library one should be silent.' The concepts *white* and *horse* may evoke all sorts of associations with *white* (e.g. snow, toothpaste) and *horse* (e.g. stable, saddle) when they are perceived separately, but only when they are presented in combination will they activate a representation of a *white horse*. Similarly, significant others may evoke a general normative mindset (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), but only when they are mentally present in combination with a specific environmental cue (a library picture) are they likely to raise situation-specific normative thinking.

STUDY 2

In Study 1, by priming participants with a picture of a library and significant others, we demonstrated that environments are more likely to activate environment-specific normative thinking when perceivers 'have people on their mind'. In the current

experiment, we put the same hypothesis to a more conservative test. Whereas in Study 1 we primed people with a picture of a library and ‘significant others’, in the present study we primed participants with a picture of a library and the much more vague and abstract construct of ‘people’ (others, all, persons). If we are correct in claiming that environments are interpreted in a social, norm-relevant manner when perceivers have people on their mind, then simply priming ‘people’ should be enough to evoke environment-relevant normative thinking. Priming the more abstract constructs of others, all, and persons, we also make it less likely that the effects of our people primes could be explained in terms of positive mood. Whereas priming significant others such as ‘friends’ and ‘family’ may induce positive feelings, it is less likely that priming abstract constructs such as ‘others’ and ‘all’ will do so, especially when these constructs are hidden in a relatively boring puzzle task (see Methods section).

As in Study 1, we also investigated the impact of our primes on general normative judgments and the willingness to conform to normative expectations (conformism). Because of its non-specific nature, ‘people’ primes should have a weaker impact on general normative judgments than significant others (who are often associated with clear and specific norms and expectations). One way to test whether or not ‘having people on one’s mind’ really ‘socializes’ an environment is to include measures of public and private self-consciousness. When people think about environments in social terms, their level of public self-consciousness (their public self) should be relatively high and their level of private self-consciousness should be relatively low. Previous research has shown that when people enter or are exposed to social environments, their private self-consciousness typically goes down, their public self-consciousness typically goes up, and their behavior is driven more by social norms. Being a social person (being a person who is aware of his/her social environment) does often mean defining oneself in terms of ‘we’ rather than in terms of ‘I’ (see Stapel & Van der Zee, 2006) and being publically self-aware (see Wiekens & Stapel, 2008).

Method

Participants and design

Seventy-eight undergraduate students participated in this study as a course requirement. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a 2 (People: generalized others vs. no generalized others) \times 2 (Environment: library vs. no library) between subjects design.

Procedure and materials

Except for the scrambled sentence task and the measurement of public and private consciousness, the procedure and materials of Study 2 were identical to those of Study 1. The scrambled sentence task was designed to subtly prime the construct of people in general. Thus, in the generalized other condition, the target words were: *others, persons, group, people, everyone, everybody, together, all, and them*.

Public and private consciousness were measured directly after the social norms questions. We used four items of the public consciousness scale (e.g. *I am concerned about what other people think of me*) and three of the private consciousness scale (e.g. *I am generally attentive to my inner feelings*; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each of the statements on a

scale ranging from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 10 (I agree completely). In the present study, public consciousness proved to be a reliable subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$), and/while private consciousness proved to be less reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .58$). Next, participants filled in the conformism questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$). Finally, participants were asked to write down what they believed to be the aim of the research. None of the participants was aware of the research goal.

Results and discussion

To test our hypotheses, we first performed a MANOVA with People (generalized others vs. no generalized others) and Environment (library vs. no library) as between subject factors on the perceived importance of library norms, general norms, conformism, and consciousness measures. The multivariate test revealed a People \times Library interaction, $F(5, 70) = 4.75$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .25$, a main effect of People, $F(5, 70) = 4.16$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .23$, and a main effect of Library, $F(5, 70) = 5.79$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .29$. Next, we performed univariate analyses on the dependent measures.

Library norm

The univariate analyses on the norm 'to be silent in the library' revealed a main effect of People, $F(1, 74) = 4.21$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$, a main effect of Library $F(1, 74) = 6.39$, $p < .02$, $\eta^2 = .08$, and a marginally significant People \times Library interaction, $F(1, 74) = 3.60$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .05$. As the means and pairwise comparisons in Table 2 show, the perceived importance of the library norm was relatively high when participants were primed with a library picture and with generalized others ($M = 8.79$). In the other conditions, these norm scores were relatively low: No generalized others,

Table 2. Mean (SD) library norm, general norm, conformism, public consciousness, and private consciousness scores as a function of people (generalized others) and environment (library) primes (Study 2)

| | Environment | People | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | None | Generalized others |
| Library norm | No library | 7.70(1.22) ^a | 7.74(1.37) ^a |
| | Library | 7.85(0.81) ^a | 8.79(0.63) ^b |
| General norms | No library | 7.30(1.17) ^a | 7.00(1.67) ^a |
| | Library | 7.50(1.15) ^a | 8.42(1.07) ^b |
| Conformism | No library | 7.55(1.22) ^a | 7.42(1.69) ^a |
| | Library | 7.35(1.2) ^a | 8.56(0.68) ^b |
| Public consciousness | No library | 7.74(0.88) ^a | 7.65(1.18) ^a |
| | Library | 7.85(0.72) ^a | 8.74(0.64) ^b |
| Private consciousness | No library | 7.95(1.06) ^a | 7.88(0.94) ^a |
| | Library | 7.95(0.69) ^a | 7.00(1.79) ^b |

Note. Means are on a scale ranging from 1 to 10 with higher numbers indicating higher attributed norm importance, conformism, and consciousness. Means with different superscripts differ significantly (at least $p < .05$).

no library ($M = 7.70$), No generalized others, library ($M = 7.85$), Generalized others, no library ($M = 7.74$).

Norms in general

The univariate analyses on general norms scores revealed a significant People \times Library interaction, $F(1, 74) = 4.41$, $p < .04$, $\eta^2 = .06$ and a main effect of Library $F(1, 74) = 7.78$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .1$ (other $F < 1$). As Table 2 shows, general norm scores were relatively high when participants were primed with a library picture and with generalized others ($M = 8.42$). In the other conditions, these norm scores were relatively low: No generalized others, no library ($M = 7.30$), No generalized others, library ($M = 7.50$), Generalized others, no library ($M = 7.00$).

Conformism

The univariate analyses on the conformism measures revealed a People \times Library interaction, $F(1, 74) = 5.61$, $p < .03$, $\eta^2 = .07$ and a marginally significant effect of People, $F(1, 74) = 3.66$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .05$ (other $F < 1$). Again, as Table 2 shows, conformism scores were relatively high when participants were primed with a library picture and with generalized others ($M = 8.56$). In the other conditions, these norm scores were relatively low: No generalized others, no library ($M = 7.55$), No generalized others, library ($M = 7.35$), Generalized others, no library ($M = 7.42$).

Public consciousness

The univariate analyses on the public consciousness scale revealed a People \times Library interaction, $F(1, 74) = 6.06$, $p < .02$, $\eta^2 = .08$, a marginally significant effect of People, $F(1, 74) = 3.63$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .05$, and a main effect of Library $F(1, 74) = 3.98$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .11$). Again, as Table 2 shows, public consciousness scores were relatively high when participants were primed with a library picture and with generalized others ($M = 8.74$). In the other conditions, these norm scores were relatively low: No generalized others, no library ($M = 7.74$), No generalized others, library ($M = 7.85$), Generalized others, no library ($M = 7.65$). This result provides the first empirical evidence that public consciousness is raised when people are exposed to an environment with a people focus. This makes people self-aware in a way that is similar to more traditional mirror, camera, or television circuit manipulations that are usually used in self-awareness research (see for example, Beaman, Klentz, Diener, & Svanum, 1979; Carver, 1975; Diener & Wallblom, 1976; Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1998; Wiekens & Stapel, 2008).

Private consciousness

The univariate analyses on the public consciousness scale revealed a marginally significant People effect, $F(1, 74) = 3.63$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .05$ (other $Fs < 1$). Although the interaction did not reach research significance, the pattern of means (see Table 2) clearly suggests that private consciousness scores were relatively low when participants were primed with a library picture and with generalized others ($M = 7.00$). In the other conditions, these norm scores were relatively high: No generalized others, no library ($M = 7.95$), No generalized others, library ($M = 7.95$), Generalized others, no library ($M = 7.88$) (see Table 2). This result shows the mirror image of the public

consciousness effects: private consciousness is lowered when people are exposed to an environment with a people focus.

These results provide further support for our main hypothesis that mere exposure to a specific environment is typically not enough to raise the perceived importance of environment-specific norms. The perceived importance of specific, environment-relevant norms is more likely to increase when the concept of generalized others (people, persons, all) are cognitively accessible. Thus, not only significant others (see Study 1), but also people in general can 'socialize' environments and thus make norms more relevant. Interestingly, in this study, this interaction effect (increased normative thinking when participants were exposed to both environment and generalized people primes) occurred also on the general norm, conformism measures and the public and private consciousness measures. This suggests that when by themselves, norm-relevant 'environments' as well as the construct of 'people' are not strong enough to evoke normative thinking. When presented together, that is when one is exposed to a 'socialized' environment, then (both specific and general) normative cognitions become relatively salient.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Social norms are valued cultural products that regulate social interactions and guide how needs and goals can be pursued in an appropriate manner (Lindenberg, 1994; Sherif, 1936/1965). It is therefore important to know more about what the preconditions are for social norms to come into action. Previous research has shown that norms are more likely to predict behavior when they are accessible (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) and relevant for immediate behavior (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003). The accessibility of social norms can be raised with lexical priming techniques using norm-related words (e.g. Epley & Gilovich, 1999) and by perceiving other people's behavior (see e.g. Cialdini *et al.*, 1990; Latane & Darley, 1970; Sherif, 1936/1965). Up until now, there has been only little research on the normative effects of environments (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003) and on the normative effects of people primes (e.g. Baldwin *et al.*, 1990; Munger & Harris, 1989). And, to the best of our knowledge, there has been no research yet that explicitly and systematically tested the hypothesis that environment-relevant normative thinking will be elicited mainly when people perceive environments in a social manner, that is with 'people on their mind.' In this article, we presented two studies that supported this hypothesis. We demonstrated that by itself an environmental cue (picture of an empty library) is insufficient to raise the perceived importance of environment-relevant norms (be silent in the library). Environments do not spontaneously or automatically elicit relevant normative thinking. However, when environments are perceived and interpreted with a 'people-focus,' the perceived importance of environment-relevant norms increases considerably. That is the main and most important finding of these studies. Furthermore, our results suggest that when significant others are salient, the normative effect is relatively strong. The normative impact of the (vague and more global) concept of 'people in general' is weaker. Future research may want to delve into this phenomenon more deeply.

The studies reported here could be placed in the relatively modern tradition of 'behavioral priming' research, which shows that people's judgments and actions can be affected relatively easily by making behavior-relevant constructs cognitively accessible.

Or, to put it differently, *thinking* about X is sometimes enough to *act* X. Thus, behavioral priming studies have shown that thinking about ‘rudeness’ makes people act impolitely, thinking about ‘intelligence’ makes them smarter, and thinking about how your muscles work actually makes you physically stronger (e.g. Dijksterhuis *et al.*, 1998; Marchant, Clough, Crawshaw, & Levy, *in press*; Stapel & Blanton, 2004). What differentiates the present studies from these behavioral priming studies is that our research suggests that there may be some boundary conditions to direct priming effects: When it concerns normative behavior, simple environmental cues or environment-relevant constructs (e.g. a picture of a library) are in themselves not sufficient to automatically elicit the relevant mode of thinking. Only when such cues are ‘socialized’ or ‘humanized’ will they lead to normative effects. Future studies may want to investigate whether similar boundary conditions exist for other types of ‘direct’ priming effects (for a similar perspective on this issue, see Stapel & Blanton, 2004).

In the present studies, we used a paradigm similar to that reported by Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003), who showed that a location can prime a situational norm if perceivers intend to visit it. We extend the Aarts–Dijksterhuis findings by showing that even when people have no intention to go somewhere, this environment may prime (situational as well as non-situational) norms – given that this environment is socialized by means of an enhanced accessibility of *people*. One-way to interpret these results is that as long as people are, or feel they are, not alone in a given environment, they are more likely to conform to social norms. When people have a ‘people focus,’ they are more likely to think and act normatively – even when they are *physically* alone. Of course, this is a *ceteris paribus* finding: Whether people indeed conform to norms in less controlled situations than the ones we used to test our hypotheses ultimately depends on many other factors as well, such as the costs of complying with or deviating from the norms.

Results from research by Kay, Wheeler, Bargh, and Ross (2004) might be interpreted as contradicting the present findings. Kay *et al.* (2004) showed that *objects* that are characteristic for a business context (e.g. a briefcase, fountain pen) prime stereotypical business constructs (such as ‘competitive’) and can increase competitive behavior. Although it may appear as if the Kay *et al.* (2004) effects could be obtained without inducing a people-focus, we would argue that the objects they used may in fact be seen as a combination of situational cues and people cues as they not only suggest a business context, but they may also prime people and behaviors associated with this context or object. For example, a briefcase is likely to be associated with a business context, but also with the manager carrying it around.

In conclusion then, we have argued and demonstrated that social norms are essentially about ‘people’ and that therefore reminders of people *socialize* environments in the sense that they change physical locations into social contexts where social norms matter. When we think of other people while ‘perceiving’ an environment, social norms begin to matter more; that is how *being there with others* makes environment norm-relevant.

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