

# Appraising the unusual: Framing effects and moderators of uniqueness-seeking and social projection

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## Abstract

In this paper, we examine people's appraisals of unusual objects and their intuitions about whether others will like those objects. Prior work suggests uniqueness motives (e.g., Need for Uniqueness) affect appraisals, but the effect of these motives on projection of appraisals to others is unclear. Contrary to some prior work, we argue that uniqueness motives do not govern projection of appraisals but rather that individual differences in perceived similarity to a target group do. We also show that perceptions of uniqueness are partly constructed and susceptible to framing, holding all other object properties constant. In two studies, we confirm our predictions about the effects on uniqueness motives and perceived similarity on appraisals and social projection of those appraisals.

*Keywords:* Uniqueness; Need for uniqueness; Projection; Framing; Similarity

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## Introduction

When do people like novel and unusual objects? And when do they assume others will like them? Take the imaginary case of Susan and Ted, city planners charged with picking a design for a performing arts center. Susan is drawn to innovative and original things in many aspects of her life and she personally likes a design featuring playful, quirky elements, such as an asymmetric façade. Ted generally prefers more conventional, standard options and he is drawn to a staid, conservative proposal. But as planners, Ted and Susan must move beyond their own preferences and intuit what most city residents would like. Without any direct evidence, what do they assume?

An active tradition of research has examined the nature and effects of "uniqueness motives," a person's disposition to embrace new things, defy convention, and

pursue rare and unusual objects and experiences (e.g., Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). This work suggests that such general motives impact a person's own appraisals: a high uniqueness motive person such as Susan would be more inclined than a low uniqueness motive person such as Ted to like an unusual design. It may also be that those greater in uniqueness motives would be more motivated to expect others would react *differently* (e.g., Kernis, 1984). That is, Susan's unconventional orientation could lead her to assume that her preferences would be atypical—that her taste for the unordinary is itself uncommon (i.e., "I like this radical design, but other people won't").

However, a long line of scholarship on social projection shows that people tend to assume their attitudes will often be shared by others (e.g., Krueger, 2000). Recent work suggests that perceived similarity may govern such projection: those who see themselves as generally similar to a group assume their own specific attitudes are widely shared while those who see themselves as generally different engage in less projection (Ames, *in press-b*). Thus, it could be that someone like Susan would not

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only embrace the unusual but also assume that most others would share her views (e.g., “I like this radical design, and other people will, too”).

Different lines of scholarship are consistent with each of these alternatives, yet the question of how uniqueness motives are linked with inferences about others’ liking appears to be unresolved. It may be that uniqueness motives govern projection (and account for any effects of perceived similarity) or, instead, that perceived similarity governs projection (and accounts for any effects of uniqueness motives). In the present paper, we attempt to resolve this question. We provide evidence for our claim that uniqueness motives will govern people’s own preferences for unusual objects but that perceived similarity (not uniqueness motives) will govern projection of those preferences to others.

To clarify the impact of an object’s perceived uniqueness, we sought to manipulate it while holding other properties of the object constant. As a result, the present work also introduces a new phenomenon: *uniqueness framing*. We show that by drawing people’s attention to the unique or ordinary aspects of an object, their appraisals of the object vary depending on their own uniqueness motives. This effect may be useful for researchers seeking to isolate the impact of perceived uniqueness and also suggests real world phenomena that deserve further study (such as persuasive appeals stressing or downplaying an object’s uniqueness).

We proceed with brief reviews of work on uniqueness motives and social projection and then turn to our predictions and plan of study.

#### *Uniqueness motives*

A quarter century ago, Snyder and Fromkin (1980) offered a pioneering account of conformity and uniqueness-seeking. They observed that most people have a need for seeing themselves as moderately unique, but they also highlighted that individual differences in this motive emerge. Accordingly, they developed the Need for Uniqueness measure (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977) that gauges an individual’s “striving for uniqueness related to a sense of positive self-esteem.” Subsequent researchers have also embraced the importance of individual differences in uniqueness motivations, offering their own constructs and measures. Recently, Tian, Bearden, and Hunter (2001) introduced a Consumer’s Need for Uniqueness (CNFU) measure, encompassing consumer counterconformity and avoidance of similarity, while Lynn and Harris (1997a) have developed a unidimensional Desire for Unique Consumer Products (DUCP) scale.

These constructs have shown an ability to predict counter-normative behavior. For instance, Lynn and Harris (1997a) found that moviegoers at a theater showing foreign and artistic films showed a higher DUCP

than those at a theater showing mainstream films while Tian and McKenzie (2001) reported that those scoring greater in CNFU reported shopping in more non-conventional retail outlets. Just as uniqueness motives appear to predict public deviance and socially risky displays of counter-normative behavior, they may also affect private behaviors and appraisals directed toward unique, novel, rare, or otherwise unusual objects in a way that is distinct from social or conformity-related effects (Lynn & Harris, 1997b). In this vein, Tian et al. (2001) showed that uniqueness motives predict preference for unique rather than common product designs for objects such as home furnishings. Elsewhere, Lynn and Harris (1997b) have shown that uniqueness motives predicted the desire for scarce and customized products distinct from effects of counter-conformity. Thus, emerging evidence suggests that uniqueness motives may moderate both social and non-social uniqueness-seeking.

It is worth noting, briefly, that scholars of uniqueness motives have generally taken an object’s uniqueness as given rather than as an attribute (or meta-attribute) that is at least partly constructed by perceivers. Though scholars have studied the effects of manipulating an object’s apparent scarcity or popularity, judgments of uniqueness have not been manipulated while holding all other object properties constant. The question is of more than methodological importance: to the extent that an object’s uniqueness is a labile construction, the dynamics of how uniqueness relates to appraisals will not be fully understood until this process of construction is explored. If, for instance, attentional focus alters judgments of uniqueness, then appraisals of unusual objects might reflect not only uniqueness motives, but attention as well.

#### *Projection*

In cases where a person does not have immediate evidence of what others think or do, what does he or she assume about their behaviors and attitudes? Decades of work on social projection suggests that people frequently assume, often to an unwarranted degree, that others will think and do what they themselves think and do (e.g., Katz & Allport, 1931; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977; see Krueger, 2000 for a review). But when does such projection occur—and what evokes or limits it?

Recent evidence suggests that idiosyncratic perceptions of general similarity to a target person (Ames, in press-a) or a target group (Ames, in press-b) moderate projection. Perceivers who initially believe they are generally similar to a target tend to assume that person or group’s specific attributes resemble their own (such as their competitive intentions during a conflict or their preferences for specific movies). Per-

ceivers who believe they are generally different from a target person or group show lower levels of projection of newly formed attitudes. These effects have emerged for existing individual differences in perceived general similarity as well as for manipulated perceptions. The effects of perceived similarity also emerge when controlling for measures of actual typicality (i.e., how closely a participant's attributes resemble those of the target group), which often correlate only weakly with perceived similarity.

This view departs from other widely acknowledged accounts of projection and false consensus. Notably, Krueger and colleagues' egocentric perception approach (e.g., Krueger, 1998) suggests a process similar to naïve realism, such that people attribute their reactions not to themselves but to the original stimuli and so assume others confronted with the same stimuli would share their conclusions (e.g., "It's not just that I don't like the movie, it's that *the movie is unlikable*, and so no one would like it"). As Krueger (1998) notes, "The perception of consensus is assumed to be part of the initial encoding of the stimulus rather than the outcome of subsequent higher level processes." This view would not predict the inferential moderating role for idiosyncratic perceptions of general similarity that Ames (in press-a, in press-b) has found.

However, these apparent moderating effects of perceived similarity on projection may be accounted for by uniqueness motivations. Kernis, for one, has suggested that uniqueness motives may play a moderating role in false consensus: those motivated to see themselves as unique will be less likely to assume that others share their own attitudes and behaviors. As Kernis (1984) noted, "under some circumstances, and for some people, engaging in particular behaviors may be a manifestation of uniqueness desires, resulting in the estimation that only a minor portion of one's peers would engage in the same behavior. This implies that there may be limits to the generality of the 'false-consensus' bias" (p. 351).

Kernis's (1984) findings involved a three-way interaction of uniqueness motive, self-schema, and depth of thinking about a given behavior. His results suggested that high need for uniqueness individuals appeared to project less (compared with low need for uniqueness individuals) on a behavior when it was important to their self schema *and* when they were encouraged to write in detail about their behavior. However, this effect emerged for only one of the two sets of behaviors Kernis studied (independent behaviors, but not friendly ones); further, the domain of behavior that did show the expected effects (i.e., acts of independence) may have been confounded with the very construct of uniqueness motivation. Thus, Kernis's results seem consistent with the general argument that uniqueness motives may curb projection, but such evidence regarding projection (or

non-projection) of object appraisals has not been reported.

### *Questions and predictions*

Our review suggests that several important questions about liking and assumed liking for unusual objects remain unanswered. We deal with two of these in the present paper. First, do uniqueness motives govern not just liking for unusual objects, but also projection of this liking? Second, in what ways is an object's uniqueness constructed by perceivers rather than a fixed quality of the object? In the sections that follow, we review our two central predictions about these issues.

### *Moderators of uniqueness-seeking and projection*

Some prior work (e.g., Kernis, 1984) suggests that those greater in needs for uniqueness may project less; it is possible that perceived similarity effects found elsewhere (e.g., Ames, in press-a) are accounted for by these uniqueness motives. However, our first prediction is that *uniqueness motives moderate uniqueness-seeking while perceived similarity moderates projection* (see Fig. 1). In the present work, we look at these effects simultaneously and predict that perceived general similarity will account for any effects of uniqueness motives on projection.

In brief, we expect that evaluative processes ("Do I like this unique thing?") rely more heavily on *motives* while inferential processes ("Would other people like this unique thing?") rely more heavily on *beliefs and perceptions*. In the present work, we expect that uniqueness motives will govern liking for unusual objects but that perceived similarity to peers will govern the extent to which this liking is projected. This is not to say that motives and beliefs are unrelated. Indeed, we suspect that uniqueness motives may partly affect perceptions of general similarity—that those greater in needs for uniqueness may also be inclined to see themselves as more generally dissimilar to others, regardless of their level of actual typicality. However, we expect that any effect of uniqueness motives on inferences (i.e., projection) will be accounted for by the beliefs that guide those inferences (i.e., perceived similarity). In terms of our opening example, we predict that Susan and Ted will expect that their fellow citizens share their own like or dislike for the radical design to the extent that they feel generally similar to them, regardless of their own uniqueness motive.

### *The construction of uniqueness*

To isolate the effects of an object's uniqueness on liking and assumptions of others' liking, we sought to manipulate perceptions of uniqueness while holding all other properties of the object constant. No prior work on uniqueness appears to have done this, though recent work by Mussweiler (e.g., 2003) on social comparison

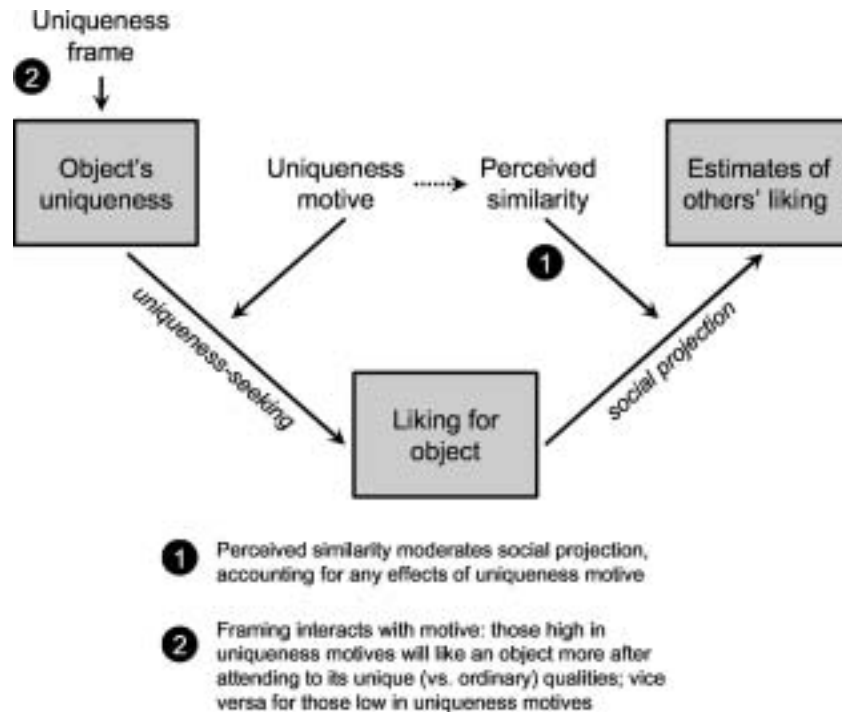


Fig. 1. Predictions regarding moderators of uniqueness-seeking and social projection as well as uniqueness framing effects.

suggests that different kinds of hypothesis testing might draw perceivers toward different judgments. We believe such hypothesis testing could yield a framing effect on perceptions of uniqueness and an interaction with uniqueness motives.

On first encounter, unusual objects are inherently ambiguous and may be construed differently when viewed through a lens of uniqueness (e.g., “What makes this necktie unique?”) vs. a lens of typicality (e.g., “What makes this necktie typical?”). Such differences in attention can affect perceptions of uniqueness: those who focus on unique attributes may conclude that the same object is more unusual than those who focus on typical attributes. This assessment of unusualness would interact with the perceiver’s uniqueness motive in affecting evaluations. Thus, our second prediction is that *high uniqueness motive perceivers who see objects through a lens of uniqueness will like them more than those who see the same objects through a lens of typicality, while the reverse will be true for low uniqueness motive perceivers* (see Fig. 1). We suspect that a main effect of projection would emerge such that high uniqueness motive perceivers who see objects through a lens of uniqueness will also expect *others* to like the objects more than those who see the same objects through a lens of typicality (and vice versa for low uniqueness motive perceivers). In light of our first prediction, we also expect that this effect would be moderated by perceived similarity.

#### Plan of study

We tested our predictions in two studies. In the first, participants were presented with a wide range of ordinary and unusual objects within a category (e.g., 30 neckties) and indicated their own liking as well as assumptions of peer liking. Measures of uniqueness motives and perceived similarity were used to predict liking as well as projection. In the second study, participants rated liking and assumed peer liking for a set of highly unusual objects. Frame was manipulated: some participants first described each object’s unique features, others described typical features. We tested whether frame interacted with uniqueness motive to predict evaluations and whether perceived similarity moderated projection.

#### Study 1

In Study 1, we presented participants with pictures of objects from one of four categories: neckties, women’s shoes, sunglasses, or men’s and women’s first names. Each group (e.g., 30 neckties) contained a wide range of objects, including some seen as highly unusual in pilot testing and some seen as highly ordinary. For each object, participants indicated how much they liked it, how much they assumed fellow students would like it, and how unique it was. Prior to the object rating task, participants completed measures of uniqueness motives and perceived similarity to fellow students. The results

allowed us to test our predictions that (a) those greater in uniqueness motive would show greater liking for unusual objects and (b) perceived similarity rather than uniqueness motive would moderate projection.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

One hundred undergraduate participants (46 women, 54 men) completed materials as part of paid research sessions. Average age was 19.5 ( $SD = 3.4$ ).

#### *Materials and procedure*

Participants began the session by completing a number of individual difference measures, including measures of perceived similarity to fellow students and uniqueness motives. The perceived similarity measure consisted of rated agreement with five items on a nine-point scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (9). These items included, “I do things differently than most Columbia students,” “The groups of people I relate to are mostly like other groups of Columbia students,” “I am motivated by very different things than most Columbia students,” “The people I identify with are a lot different than most Columbia students,” “I would react like almost any Columbia student in most circumstances.”

Uniqueness motive was measured using Lynn and Harris’ (1997a) eight-item unidimensional Desire for Unique Consumer Products scale.<sup>1</sup> Participants rated the items (e.g., “I am very attracted to rare objects,” “I enjoy having things that others do not”) on the same nine-point scale described above.

Participants then completed nearly 10min worth of other survey materials not related to uniqueness or liking for unusual objects and were then randomly assigned to view one of four sets of targets: names, women’s shoes, sunglasses, or neckties. For the last three of these groups, pictures of 30 items were selected for each group from a variety of sources including catalogs, brochures, and books. For the name targets, 20 male

and 20 female names were selected from several books of children’s names. For all targets, half of the objects selected were identified as ordinary or commonplace by our research team (including research assistants unaware of the hypotheses) while half of the objects were identified as unusual (see Fig. 2). The usual and unusual objects were intermingled and counterbalanced: half of the participants saw the objects in one order (created randomly) while the remaining participants saw the objects in the reverse order.

For each object, participants answered three questions. First, participants rated uniqueness (e.g., “Do you think this is a unique pair of shoes?”) on a nine-point scale ranging from “Not unique at all” (1) to “Very unique” (9). Second, participants rated liking (e.g., “Do you like this pair of shoes?”) on a nine-point scale ranging from “Strongly dislike” (1) to “Strongly like” (9). Third, participants rated assumed liking (e.g., “How much would the average Columbia student like them?”) on a nine-point scale ranging from “Strongly dislike” (1) to “Strongly like” (9).

### *Results*

#### *Perceived similarity and uniqueness motive*

The perceived similarity items formed a scale with  $\alpha = .67$  (mean interitem  $r = .29$ ). These items were reversed as necessary and averaged to form a measure of perceived similarity. The eight uniqueness motive items formed a scale with  $\alpha = .71$  (mean interitem  $r = .24$ ) (see also Footnote 1).

#### *Target groups and participant gender*

The name and shoe materials were completed by 25 participants each. The sunglass materials were completed by 24; the necktie materials by 26. As expected, our results emerged regardless of target group and, accordingly, we collapse across these groups in our results. In addition, no gender differences in our predicted effects were expected and none were found. We also collapse across gender in our reported results.

#### *Uniqueness-seeking*

We created a measure of uniqueness-seeking by calculating a within-participant correlation of ratings of uniqueness and ratings of liking across all objects. The more closely liking correlated with uniqueness for a given participant (i.e., they liked things they saw as unique and disliked things they saw as non-unique), the higher this measure would be. The resulting correlations were standardized.

We predicted that higher levels of uniqueness motive would be associated with higher levels of uniqueness-seeking. We tested this by correlating the uniqueness motive construct with the uniqueness-seeking measure across participants. As expected, the cor-

<sup>1</sup> Participants in Study 1 also completed selected items from longer uniqueness motivation scales, including eight items (four in each direction, chosen on face validity) from the Snyder and Fromkin (1977) Need for Uniqueness Scale and six items from Tian et al.’s (2001) Consumers’ Need for Uniqueness Scale (two from each of the three subscales: creative choice counterconformity, unpopular choice counterconformity, and avoidance of similarity). These scales showed results parallel to those reported for the Desire for Unique Consumer Products construct. Moreover, an aggregate scale of uniqueness motive was created by factor analyzing these individual scales and identifying the 12 top-loading items (including items from each of the three scales;  $\alpha = .82$ ). This aggregate construct also showed results similar to those reported. For instance, this aggregate measure predicted uniqueness seeking ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) as well as perceived similarity ( $r = -.39$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As with the reported measure, this uniqueness motive construct was not significantly related to either measure of projection.

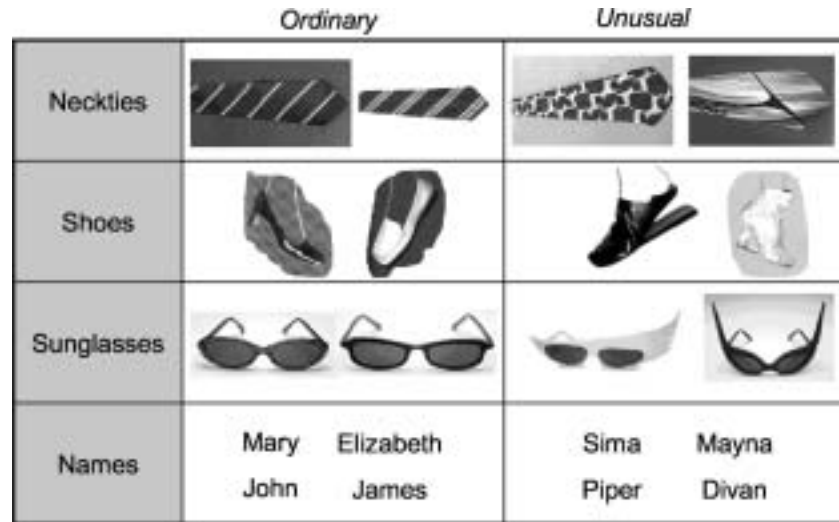


Fig. 2. Selected stimulus materials from Study 1.

Table 1  
Correlations between uniqueness motives, similarity, uniqueness-seeking, and projection (Study 1)

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Uniqueness motive	—	-.36**	.23*	.01	.02
2. Perceived similarity		—	-.29**	.32**	-.36**
3. Uniqueness-seeking			—	-.31**	.15
4. Correlational measure of projection				—	-.72**
5. Discrepancy measure of projection					—

\*  $p < .05$ .\*\*  $p < .01$ .

relation was positive ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see Table 1 for correlations).

#### Projection and similarity

We calculated projection in two ways: within-participant correlations and absolute rating discrepancies. First, we computed a within-participant correlation analogous to our calculation of uniqueness-seeking. For each participant, we correlated their own ratings of liking with the ratings of assumed fellow students' liking across all objects. The more closely self liking correlated with assumptions of others' liking for a given participant (i.e., they assumed others would like the things they themselves liked), the higher this measure would be. The resulting correlations were standardized. As predicted, this measure of projection was positively related to perceived general similarity to the target group ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

We also computed a discrepancy measure of projection, computing each participant's average absolute difference between ratings of liking and assumed peer liking across all target items. This measure was strongly related to the correlational measure described above ( $r = -.72$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As expected, this measure of projec-

tion was also predicted by perceived similarity ( $r = -.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ).<sup>2</sup>

#### Projection and uniqueness motive

As predicted, uniqueness motive was not significantly related to either the correlational or the discrepancy measure of projection ( $r = .01$  and  $r = .02$ , respectively,  $ps > .86$ ).

However, the uniqueness motive measure was negatively linked with perceived similarity ( $r = -.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This relationship was not accounted for by atypicality (i.e., casting doubt on an alternative that

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that perceived similarity simply reflected actual typicality—in which case, its effect may have been artifactual rather than genuinely inferential. We created a measure of actual typicality by correlating each participant's liking for the shoes, ties, sunglasses, or names he or she rated with the average of participants' liking for those items. This measure of typicality correlated with the subjective perceived similarity measure at  $r = .23$  ( $p = .03$ ). While a significant correlation, it does not suggest the measures are redundant. Moreover, in a regression model predicting the correlational measure of projection, both perceived similarity and actual typicality emerged as significant; in a regression model predicting the discrepancy measure of projection, only perceived similarity emerged as significant.

uniqueness motives lead people to actually be different and thus to correctly perceived themselves as less similar to others; indeed, uniqueness motive was not significantly related to actual typicality, measured as a within-participant correlation between participant's reported liking for the objects and the mean level of liking reported by all participants in the sample,  $r = -.09$ ,  $p = .40$ ). A multiple regression predicting perceived similarity with uniqueness motive and actual typicality found that both were significant ( $\beta = -.34$ ,  $t(86) = 3.48$ ,  $p < .01$ , and  $\beta = .20$ ,  $t(86) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ , respectively).

### *Discussion*

The results of Study 1 confirmed our predictions about the moderating roles of uniqueness motive and perceived similarity. As expected, across four different object groups (neckties, women's shoes, sunglasses, and men's and women's first names), participants greater in uniqueness motive showed greater uniqueness-seeking than those lower in uniqueness motive. Also, as expected, perceived similarity moderated projection: those higher in perceived similarity projected more. This effect emerged even when controlling for the effects of actual similarity. While uniqueness motive predicted lower levels of perceived similarity, it was uncorrelated with projection. In other words, those greater in uniqueness motives did not appear to project any less than those lower in uniqueness motives.

### **Study 2**

In Study 1, we asked participants to consider a large and varied set of items and report their evaluations of the items and their judgments of the items' uniqueness. In Study 2, we focused on a smaller set of highly unusual items. All participants judged three pairs of women's shoes, three neckties, and three pairs of sunglasses, rating their own liking for each object, their assumptions of peer liking for each object, and the unusualness of each object. Prior to viewing the objects, participants completed measures of uniqueness motive and perceived similarity.

We wanted to manipulate object uniqueness while holding all other object properties constant to isolate the effect of uniqueness on appraisals by those higher and lower in uniqueness motives. We speculated that by leading participants to selectively test a hypothesis about an object's uniqueness or typicality, we could draw their attention to hypothesis-consistent information and thus frame their evaluations (see [Mussweiler, 2003](#)). Thus, before participants rated their liking for each object in Study 2, some first described the unique aspects of the object (unique frame), while others de-

scribed the typical aspects of each object (typical frame).

As in Study 1, we expected that uniqueness motive would moderate uniqueness-seeking and that perceived similarity, rather than uniqueness motive, would moderate projection of evaluations. Study 2 also allowed a test of our second hypothesis: we expected that frame would interact with uniqueness motive such that high uniqueness motive participants would evaluate the objects more positively in the unique vs. typical frame condition while low uniqueness motive participants would evaluate the objects less positively in the unique vs. typical frame condition.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Fifty-three undergraduate participants (24 women, 29 men) completed materials as part of paid research sessions. Average age was 21.8 ( $SD = 4.2$ ).

#### *Materials and procedure*

In a computer-based survey, participants viewed nine objects in counterbalanced order (three pairs of shoes, three neckties, and three pairs of sunglasses) and answered questions about each in turn. A digital image of the given object was present on the screen while participants answered questions about it. Some objects were selected from those used in Study 1 (those featuring high uniqueness ratings and high variance in liking); these were supplemented by several other objects selected through pilot testing which confirmed that the objects were viewed as unusual, but with divergent evaluations.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: a typicality frame or a uniqueness frame. In the typicality frame, for each object, participants initially rated typicality (e.g., "Do you think this is a typical tie?") on a nine-point scale ranging from 1 ("Not typical at all") to 9 ("Very typical"). Participants then responded to an open-ended question about typicality ("In the space below, please tell us in what ways this is like a typical tie—at least a sentence or two").

In the unique frame, for each object, participants initially rated uniqueness (e.g., "Do you think this is a unique tie?") on a nine-point scale ranging from 1 ("Not unique at all") to 9 ("Very unique") and then responded to an open-ended question about uniqueness ("In the space below, please tell us in what ways this is a unique tie—at least a sentence or two").

In both conditions, participants evaluated the object (e.g., "Do you like this tie?") on a nine-point scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly dislike") to 9 ("Strongly like") and indicated their inference of how much peers would like the object (e.g., "How much would the average Columbia student like this tie?") on the same scale.

Before beginning the computer-based survey session, participants completed a separate experimental session (lasting roughly 15 min) in a different room involving unrelated survey materials. At the beginning of this prior session, participants completed the perceived similarity and uniqueness motive items described in Study 1. In debriefing, no participants identified a connection between the sessions.

### Results

#### Constructs and gender

The similarity and uniqueness motive constructs were created as described in Study 1.<sup>3</sup> No gender differences in our predicted effects were expected and none were found. We collapse across gender in our reported results. Likewise, no object group effects were expected and none were found. We likewise collapse across object groups.

#### Uniqueness-seeking

Before addressing frame effects, we considered the basic relationship between uniqueness motive and uniqueness-seeking. We expected that greater levels of uniqueness motive would be associated with uniqueness-seeking (greater levels of liking for the unusual objects presented in Study 2). As expected, at the object level, the correlation between uniqueness motive and liking was .20 ( $p < .001$ ,  $n = 456^4$ ; see Table 2 for correlations).

#### Framing effects on liking and assumed peer liking

We expected that frame would interact with uniqueness motive such that high uniqueness motive participants would evaluate objects more positively under the uniqueness frame while low uniqueness motive participants would evaluate objects more positively under the typical frame. A regression model was run to test this interaction, predicting liking with frame (coded as 0 for unique, 1 for typical), uniqueness motive, and an interaction of frame by uniqueness motive. Both frame and uniqueness motive showed main effects ( $\beta = .27$ ,

<sup>3</sup> As in Study 1, participants in Study 2 completed other uniqueness motive items (see Footnote 1). Again, these specific constructs, as well as an aggregate uniqueness motive construct, showed results parallel to those reported. For instance, the aggregate measure predicted liking for the unique objects in Study 2 ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and also predicted perceived similarity ( $r = -.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, the aggregate measure showed the same pattern of regression results, with a significant and negative interaction term suggesting that uniqueness motivation led to greater liking (and assumed liking) in the unique frame condition than the typical frame condition.

<sup>4</sup> Twenty-one of 477 total cases at the object level were withheld because participants did not record a response to the open-ended typical/unique question; 12 of these were blank responses to “unique” questions while nine were blank responses to “typical” questions.

Table 2  
Correlations between uniqueness motives, similarity, uniqueness-seeking, and projection (Study 2)

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Uniqueness motive	—	-.51**	.20**	.10*
2. Perceived similarity		—	-.13**	-.19**
3. Liking			—	-.07
4. Projection				—

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

$t(452) = 1.76$ ,  $p = .08$ , and  $\beta = .31$ ,  $t(452) = 4.59$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively). As expected, the interaction term was significant and negative ( $\beta = -.34$ ,  $t(452) = 2.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that the typical frame had a negative effect on the relationship between uniqueness motive and liking. This effect is highlighted in the top-half of Fig. 3.<sup>5</sup>

The results concerning judgments of peer liking parallel those noted above. A regression analysis showed main effects for both frame and uniqueness motive ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $t(454) = 2.16$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $\beta = .30$ ,  $t(454) = 4.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively) and the expected negative interaction effect ( $\beta = -.40$ ,  $t(454) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .01$ ). This is consistent with our expectation that the typical frame would have a negative effect on the relationship between uniqueness motive and assumed liking (i.e., a main effect of projection from own liking to assumed other liking). This effect is highlighted in the bottom-half of Fig. 3.<sup>6</sup> We defer our analyses of whether this effect was moderated by perceived similarity until we review our basic findings related to projection.

#### Projection and similarity

We computed a discrepancy measure of projection, parallel to that used in Study 1 (the absolute difference between self-liking and assumed peer-liking). As expected, this projection measure was related to perceived similarity: those greater in perceived similarity showed smaller self-other gaps ( $r = -.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

#### Projection and uniqueness motive

As in Study 1, uniqueness motive predicted perceived similarity ( $r = -.51$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Uniqueness motive was also modestly but significantly predictive of projection ( $r = .10$ ,  $p = .03$ ). In a multiple regression model predict-

<sup>5</sup> Under the unique frame, uniqueness motive has a positive and significant link to liking ( $\beta = .30$ ,  $t(229) = 4.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ) while under the typical frame, the link was marginally significant ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $t(223) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .08$ ).

<sup>6</sup> Under the unique frame, uniqueness motive has a positive and significant link to assumed peer liking ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $t(229) = 4.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ) while under the typical frame, the link was not significant ( $\beta = .07$ ,  $t(225) = 1.04$ ,  $p = .30$ ).



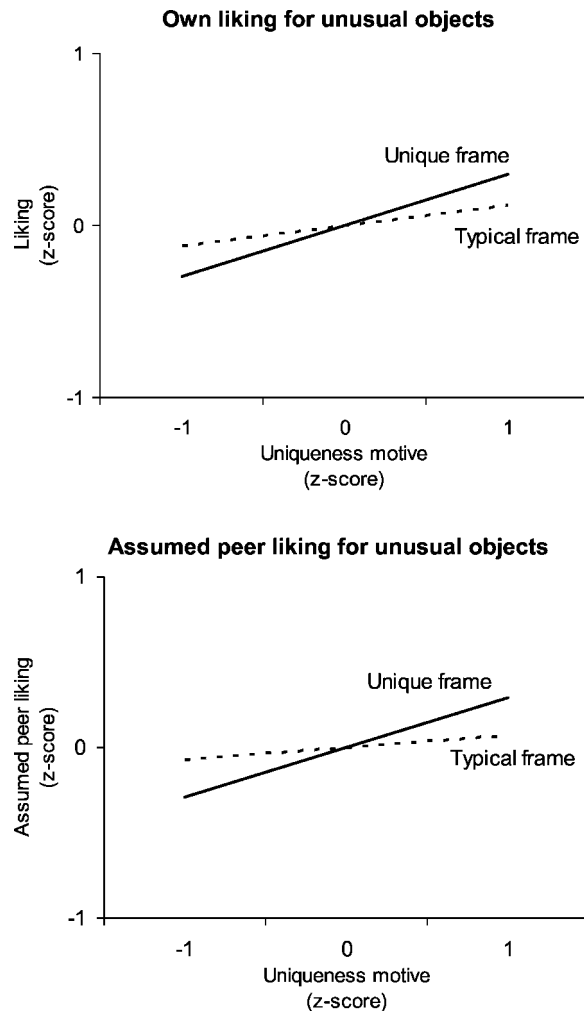


Fig. 3. Effects of frame and uniqueness motive on liking and assumed peer liking (Study 2).

ing projection with both perceived similarity and uniqueness motive, perceived similarity remained predictive ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $t(453) = 3.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ) while uniqueness motive was not significantly predictive ( $\beta = .00$ ,  $t(453) = 0.01$ ,  $p = .99$ ). Thus, perceived similarity appeared to account for the effects of uniqueness motive on projection, rather than vice versa.

#### *Interaction of frame, uniqueness motive, and similarity on assumed peer liking*

Above, we reported that the frame by motive interaction showed a main projection effect: high uniqueness motive perceivers liked the unusual objects more in the unique frame and assumed others would as well, and low uniqueness motive perceivers liked the objects more in the typical frame and assumed others would as well. However, we also found that perceived similarity appeared to play its expected moderating role on projec-

tion: those who assumed they were more similar to peers engaged in greater projection. These two sets of effects can be combined to predict a triple interaction of frame by motive by perceived similarity on assumed peer liking. That is, we expect that high uniqueness motive perceivers will like the unusual objects most under a uniqueness frame and will infer that their peers will as well *when they assume high levels of similarity*. Likewise, low uniqueness motive perceivers will like the unusual objects most under a typical frame and will infer that their peers will as well *when they assume high levels of similarity*.

This triple interaction was tested with a regression predicting assumed peer liking with frame, uniqueness motive, perceived similarity, and the related two- and three-way interaction terms (frame by motive, frame by similarity, motive by similarity, and frame by motive by similarity). As expected, the three-way interaction term was significant and negative ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $t(450) = -1.11$ ,  $p = .03$ ), indicating that the relationship between similarity, motive, and assumed liking reversed for the typical vs. unique frame. This interaction is highlighted in Fig. 4.<sup>7</sup> Consistent with our prediction, those greater in perceived similarity appeared to engage in greater levels of projection (e.g., high uniqueness motive perceivers in the unique frame condition thought peers would like the objects *more* when they saw themselves as similar to their peers whereas high uniqueness motive perceivers in the typical frame condition thought peers would like the objects *less* when they saw themselves as similar to their peers).

#### *Discussion*

As expected, the uniqueness framing manipulation interacted with uniqueness motive: high uniqueness motive participants evaluated the highly unusual objects in Study 2 more positively in the unique vs. typical frame condition while low uniqueness motive participants evaluated the objects less positively in the unique vs. typical frame condition. Participants' assumptions about peer liking followed a similar general pattern.

Further, as predicted, perceived similarity appeared to moderate projection. Uniqueness motive also had a significant yet modest effect on projection, though this effect appeared to be wholly mediated by perceived similarity. As in Study 1, uniqueness motive predicted per-

<sup>7</sup> Under the unique frame, high similarity (median split) participants had a positive and significant link between uniqueness motive and liking ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $t(155) = 4.99$ ,  $p < .01$ ) while low similarity participants showed a directionally negative link ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $t(72) = 1.16$ ,  $p = .25$ ). Under the typical frame, high similarity (median split) participants had a directionally negative link between uniqueness motive and liking ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $t(87) = -1.37$ ,  $p = .17$ ) while low similarity participants showed a directionally negative link ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $t(136) = 1.88$ ,  $p = .06$ ).

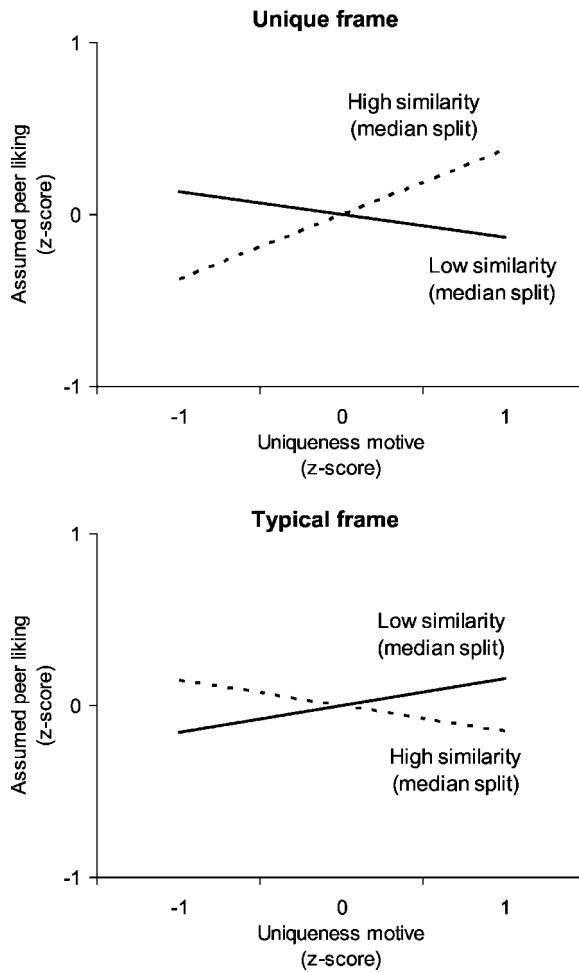


Fig. 4. Frame by perceived similarity by Uniqueness motive effects on assumed peer liking (Study 2).

ceived similarity. In sum, the results suggest that the predominant driver of projection was perceived similarity, not uniqueness motives.

## Conclusions

How do perceivers evaluate unusual objects, and how do they intuit whether others will share those appraisals? Returning to our opening example of Susan, Ted, and the building designs, our results echo the notion from earlier work that Susan's high uniqueness motive would lead her to be more inclined than Ted to like an unusual design. Our results also seem to resolve the question we posed at the onset about whether Susan and Ted would project their appraisals onto others. The present findings cast doubt on the notion that high uniqueness motives lead to substantially lower levels of projection. Rather, we found that perceived similarity governed projection:

if Susan or Ted felt similar to their fellow citizens, they would likely project their personal appraisals onto others, regardless of their own uniqueness motives. If they felt different, they would likely project less.

Our results also highlight that uniqueness judgments seem to be at least partly constructed by perceivers rather than simply "apprehended" from objective attributes. In Study 2, we framed people's thinking, asking them to describe the ways in which unusual objects were unique or typical. This frame interacted with uniqueness motive: those greater in uniqueness motives liked the objects more when seen through a lens of uniqueness than a lens of typicality; those lower in uniqueness motives showed the opposite effect.

## Implications for other work

What do the present results imply about Kernis's (1984) work and other accounts that suggest uniqueness motives would curb projection? Kernis's results suggest that people high in uniqueness motives may believe they are unique in their uniqueness-seeking (i.e., they believe they'd be more likely than the average person to act independently or counter-normatively). The current results, though, suggest that this effect may be limited: high uniqueness motive perceivers may show diminished projection of overtly "independent" behaviors, but they may be quite willing to project their appraisals of objects.

The present findings have implications for our work elsewhere on projection (e.g., Ames, in press-a, in press-b). First, the current studies compared the moderating effects of perceived similarity and uniqueness motives. The findings echo earlier results suggesting that perceived similarity moderates projection. The current findings also show that this effect was not accounted for by uniqueness motives, suggesting the effect may be largely inferential (hinging on beliefs about similarity) rather than largely motivational (hinging on motives to be unique). A second important implication, though, is that uniqueness motives were significantly predictive of perceived similarity: similarity beliefs appeared to play the key moderating inferential role, but motives shaped these beliefs. Indeed, in Study 1, both actual typicality and uniqueness motives were significantly explanatory of perceived similarity in a combined model. Prior work (e.g., Ames, in press-b) has observed that perceived similarity is often only weakly linked with actual similarity; the present results show that uniqueness motivations account for at least some of the remaining variance.

Finally, the present results have several implications for work on uniqueness motives. First, we think the finding that both low and high uniqueness motive perceivers generally project their appraisals onto others (i.e., that uniqueness motive does not moderate projec-

tion) makes uniqueness motives even *more* interesting as a topic of research. This is so because it extends the stakes from personal preferences to assumptions about others' preferences. Such assumptions can be right or wrong and can have consequences beyond choices regarding one's own behavior. This may encourage scholars to look beyond the perceiver as shopper and consider the perceiver as decision maker and planner (organizational leader, marketing manager, political figure, etc.) whose motives affect key assumptions they make about others' appraisals.

A second implication of our work for scholars of uniqueness motives revolves around our framing results. Our results raise questions about how people and situations affect the activation of such frames. For instance, persuasive messages—whether an advertisement for a car or a leader's description of an organizational change—might frame an object in terms of similarities to or differences from the status quo. The present findings suggest the effect of such persuasive approaches would depend on the perceiver's motivations. Future work on uniqueness motives might fruitfully explore not only the consequences of perceived uniqueness, but also the ways in which perceptions of uniqueness are constructed.

#### *Accuracy in intuiting others' attitudes*

These examples raise the question of accuracy: who is the best (or worst) judge of what others will like? While our predictions focused on process rather than accuracy, we reviewed our results with this question in mind. Prior work (e.g., Hoch, 1987) suggests that those who are typical of a population tend to do best at judging that population's attitudes and behaviors. We found this to be true: in our data from Study 1, typicality predicted accuracy but perceived similarity did not (even though perceived similarity appeared to moderate projection). This yields several images of good and bad judges. Good judges may be typical population members who recognize their similarity and project as a result, or atypical population members who recognize their dissimilarity and, accordingly, curb their projection. Bad judges, meanwhile, might be typical population members who fail to recognize their similarity and fail to project or atypical population members who mistakenly believe they are similar and project when they should not.

#### *Other issues and directions*

We believe our results are provocative, but they have a number of shortcomings and leave some questions unresolved. One limitation concerns our dependent variables of liking and assumed others' liking. Behavioral measures would help clarify the impact of

these effects on both self-directed behavior (e.g., purchasing) and other-directed behavior (e.g., pursuing the production of an option based on anticipated public reactions).

While we have focused on cases where others' attitudes are unknown (projecting from the inside out), our work might be fruitfully brought together with work where others' attitudes are known and guide one's own preferences (working from the outside in). Just as we surely sometimes project, assuming others share our attitudes, we also surely sometimes conform or rebel, bringing our attitudes in line with, or in opposition to, others' attitudes. Charting the interface of these processes seems worthwhile. Indeed, our work raises a puzzling question about this interface: if high uniqueness motive perceivers tend to like unusual objects and also assume that others will like those objects (i.e., they project their appraisals), are they then bound to double-back and dislike those objects because they are seen as having mass appeal? The result could be an endless and frustrating loop of appraisals and assumed appraisals. One resolution might lie in the distinction between preferences and behavior: high uniqueness motive perceivers may desire unusual objects, and assume others do, too, but may base their *behavior* (e.g., purchasing, wearing) on information about others' behavior. In short, they may do the rare thing they assume most everyone likes (but few people do) or buy the novel thing they assume most everyone will want (but few people own).

Another relevant issue concerns culture. Kim and Markus (1999) highlighted how cultural norms differ, arguing that those in collectivist cultures may view adopting widespread behaviors in terms of *harmony* and rejecting those behaviors in terms of *deviance* while those in individualist cultures may view adopting widespread behaviors in terms of *conformity* and rejecting those behaviors in terms of *uniqueness* (see also Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Elsewhere, Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, and Sugimori (1995) found that need for uniqueness was lower in collectivist cultures. We believe that our effects (that uniqueness motive affects uniqueness-seeking and that perceived similarity moderates projection) would likely emerge across cultures, but that levels of uniqueness motive and perceived similarity would vary, creating cultural differences in preferences and assumed preferences. We also expect that our framing effects could be reflected at the cultural level. Indeed, Kim and Markus (1999) argued that advertisements in Korea stress themes of conformity while those in the United States stress themes of uniqueness. In some sense, then, marketers have already taken advantage of the effects we have described here: perceivers will evaluate objects more positively when those objects are framed in a way that matches the perceivers' underlying motivations.

### Final thoughts

The psychological processes of appraisal and projection pervade much of everyday life. In this paper, we have sketched some ways in which these processes are related and presented evidence on how these processes may work. We believe our specific findings help us better understand these main effects as well as their moderators. Our work also points toward new questions and, we hope, will prompt researchers to pursue the implications of the moderation and framing effects we've identified.

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