

ITS02 – Social norms (1): Norms and deviance

A sociological perspective on norms and deviance (introduction to ITS02 and ITS03)

- **Social norms and deviance: preliminary definitions**

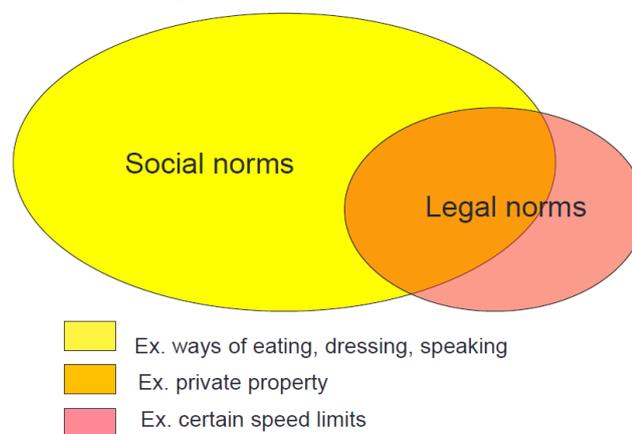
Social norms = « Principles or models of behavior specific to a given social group or society. Social norms are in keeping with what is commonly accepted and legitimized by the value system specific to each society or social group »

• ALPE, Y., LAMBERT, J.-R., BEITONE, A., DOLLO, C., et PARAYRE, S. (2007). *Lexique de sociologie*, Paris: Dalloz, p.204.

Deviance = non compliance or non conformance to a social norm

- **Social norms and legal norms**

Social norms ≠ legal norms



- **Why and how do sociologists study social norms?** → drawing on Durkheim's analysis of social norms as social facts (exteriority and constraint)

Social facts = « social facts » = “manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him” [E. Durkheim, *The rules of sociological method*, 1895]

Social norm as durkheimian "social facts": exteriority

“When I perform my duties as a brother, a husband or a citizen and carry out the commitments I have entered into, I fulfil obligations which are defined in law and custom and which are external to myself and my actions. **Even when they conform to my own**

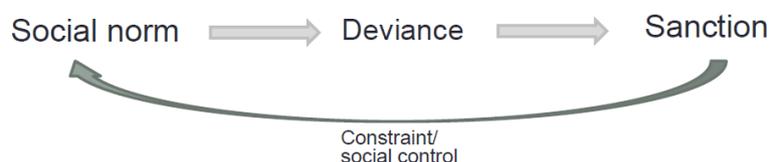
sentiments and when I feel their reality within me, that reality does not cease to be objective, for it is not I who have prescribed these duties; I have received them through education. [...] Similarly the believer has discovered from birth, ready fashioned, the beliefs and practices of his religious life; **if they existed before he did, it follows that they exist outside him.** The system of signs that I employ to express my thoughts, the monetary system I use to pay my debts, the credit instruments I utilise in my commercial relationships, the practices I follow in my profession, etc., all function independently of the use I make of them. Considering in turn each member of society, the foregoing remarks can be repeated for each single one of them. Thus there are **ways of acting, thinking and feeling** which possess the remarkable property of **existing outside the consciousness of the individual**".
E.Durkheim (1895), *The rules of sociological method*, p.50-51.

Social norm as durkheimian "social facts": constraint

"Not only are these types of behavior and thinking external to the individual, but they are endowed with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether he wishes it or not, they impose themselves upon him. **Undoubtedly when I conform to them of my own free will, this coercion is not felt or felt hardly at all, since it is unnecessary. None the less it is intrinsically a characteristic of these facts; the proof of this is that it asserts itself as soon as I try to resist.** If I attempt to **violate the rules of law** they react against me so as to forestall my action, if there is still time. [...] If purely **moral rules** are at stake, **the public conscience restricts any act which infringes them** by the surveillance it exercises over the conduct of citizens and by the special punishments it has at its disposal. In other cases **the constraint** is less violent; nevertheless, it does not cease to exist. If I do not conform to **ordinary conventions**, if in my mode of dress I pay no heed to what is customary in my country and in my social class, **the laughter** I provoke, **the social distance** at which I am kept, produce, even though in a more mitigated form, the same results as any **real penalty**.../...

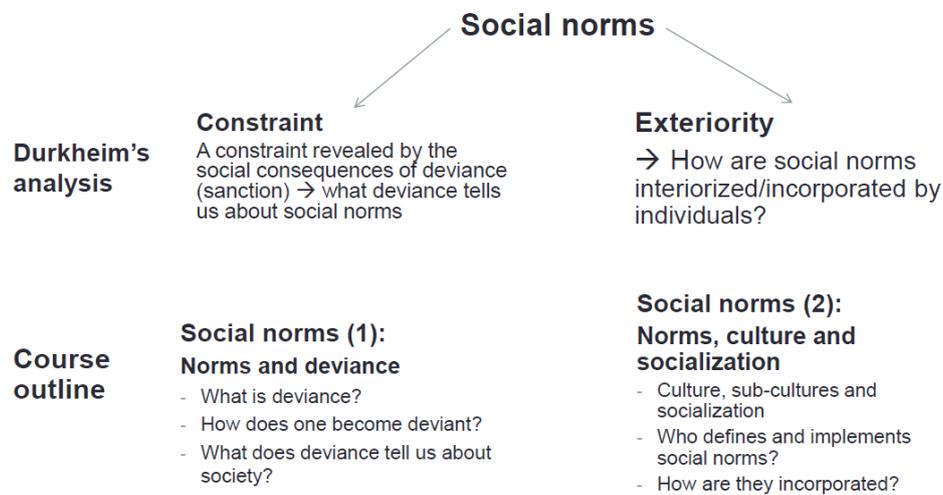
E.Durkheim (1895), *The rules of sociological method*, p.51.

Constraint, from the sanction of deviance to the everyday power of social norms: what Durkheim teaches us



- A major sociological lesson: to study social norms, study deviance and its punishment/social sanction
- Deviance reveals the norm
- Ex. The discovery of the heterosexual norm

Why and how do sociologists study social norms?



- **Deviance : non compliance and non conformance**
- **Deviance as a « normal » social phenomenon**

E.Durkheim : “Crime is not only observed in most societies of a particular species, but in all societies of all types. **There is not one in which criminality does not exist, although it changes in form and the actions which are termed criminal are not everywhere the same.** Yet everywhere and always there have been men who have conducted themselves in such a way as to bring down punishment upon their heads. [...] Thus there is **no phenomenon which represents more incontrovertibly all the symptoms of normality,** since it appears to be closely bound up with the conditions of all collective life” (*The rules of sociological method*, p.98)

Deviance as social fact, deviance as process

General outline:

- **Structural explanations of deviance as a « social fact » : Durkheim and Merton**
- **Analyzing deviance as process: the interactionist perspective: Becker and Goffman**

Structural explanations of deviance as a « social fact » : Durkheim and Merton

Emile Durkheim on suicide

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917): a leading role in the institutionalization of sociology in France:

- University chairs in social science and sociology
- Founded the first French sociological journal : *L'Année sociologique* (1898)

- Major books that present and illustrate his conception of sociology as a science of social facts:

1893 *The division of labor in society*

1895 *The rules of sociological method*

1897 *On Suicide*

1912 *The elementary forms of religious life*

E.Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 1897

Suicide as a social fact : the role of statistics

1. The suicide **rate** as a way to distinguish suicide as a social fact from individual suicide stories

→ Seizing the social part of suicide

2. **Variations** in suicide rates according to several social characteristics and facts:

- Variation in time and across countries
- Religion
- Age
- Sex
- Marital and family status
- Living in urban/rural areas, the size of cities

→ The existence of these variations confirms that social factors help explain suicide

3. Comparing these social factors, he identifies **similar underlying mechanisms** (→ typology of suicide)

→ From a study of the social causes of suicide to an analysis of what suicide tells us about society (in terms of integration and regulation)

- **Integration** (as opposed to egoism) refers to the way « a social group attracts the individual, appropriates them so to say; this process implies frequent interactions between members of the group, the existence of uniform passions within the group and the pursuit of common goals »
- **Regulation** (as opposed to anomie) is the process that aims at « regulating and harmonizing individual behaviors. This process relies on the existence of a social hierarchy, of passions that are socially adapted for each one according to their position in this hierarchy, and finally it implies that this hierarchy be considered just and legitimate by the individuals that are part of the group »
- The contrary of regulation is **anomie**, when society loses its moral authority over individuals, and individual goals diverge from those prescribed by society.

Source : STEINER, P. (1994). *La sociologie de Durkheim*, Paris: La Découverte/Repères, p.44-45

Durkheim's typology of suicide

	Integration	Regulation
Excess of	Altruistic suicide (ex. Soldier)	Fatalistic suicide (desperate husband)
Lack of	Egotistical suicide (ex. Single person)	Anomic suicide (ex. city dwellers)

Robert K.Merton on social structure and anomie

Robert K.Merton (1910-2003)

- American sociologist, influenced by Talcott Parsons
- Functionalism
 - The elements of a society form a whole; insistence on the stability and consistence of the social order
 - Each element has a function and is necessary to the functioning of the whole
 - Merton promotes a moderate functionalism
- Key concepts : middle-range theory, unintended consequences, self-fulfilling prophecy, reference group and role model
- Sociology of science

Robert K.Merton (1938) on social structure and anomie

Goal of the analysis: "determining the nonbiological conditions which induce deviations from prescribed patterns of conduct"

- "certain phases of social structure generate the circumstances in which infringement of social codes constitutes a "normal" response"
- "culture goals" : "culturally defined goals, purposes and interests" → "aspirational references"
 - "institutional norms"/"institutionalized means" : The "acceptable modes of achieving these goals"

(Merton, "Social structure and anomie", ASR, 1938, p.672-673)

5 "modes of adaptation"

	Culture goals	Institutionalized means
I.Conformity	+	+
II.Innovation	+	-
III. Ritualism	-	+
IV. Retreatism	-	-
V. Rebellion	+/-	+/-

+ acceptance

- Elimination

+/- rejection and substitution of new goals and standards

(Merton, "Social structure and anomie", ASR, 1938, p.676)

Deviance as process: the interactionist perspective (Becker, Goffman)

The Chicago tradition in American sociology

- First generation : R.Park, H. Blumer, E. Burgess, N. Anderson, G.H. Mead...
- Second generation (50s-60s) : E. Hughes, H. Becker, E. Goffman, A. Strauss...

Deviance as process: H.Becker

« Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a

consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an « offender ». The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label ».

Becker, H. S. (2008 [1963]). *Outsiders. Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York, Free Press p.9

- Role of « moral entrepreneurs » in the definition of certain behaviors as deviant/definition of social norms

- Four types of deviance

	Obedient behavior	Rule-breaking behavior
Perceived as deviant	Falsely accused	Pure deviant
Not perceived as deviant	Conforming	Secret deviant

- Deviant careers

Deviance as process: E. Goffman

- Symbolic interactionism :
 - A microsociological perspective : focus on face-to-face interactions
 - The symbolic dimension of social life : framing processes
- Dramaturgy and social action as performance
- Stigma and social interaction
 - Social interactions are ruled by normative expectations the people in contact have toward one another; we assign each person we meet with a « virtual social identity »
 - Stigma = a negatively perceived discrepancy between this virtual social identity and the person's « actual social identity »

« **an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated** »

→ Hence social reactions to stigma reveal our more common « identity assumptions » :

« [...] it would seem that exotic differentness is most useful merely as a means of making one aware of identity assumptions ordinarily so fully satisfied as to escape one's awareness »

E.Goffman, *Stigma*, p.126-127

→ In the broader sense, a very common social experience: « in an important sense **there is only one complete unblushing male in America**: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. [...] Any male who fails to qualify in any of those ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least – as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior [...] » (*Stigma*)

- From stigma to stigmatization: the reactions of « the normals »

« The attitudes we normals have toward a person with a stigma, and the actions we take in regard to him, are well known, since these responses are what benevolent social action is designed to soften and ameliorate. By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances ». (*Stigma*, 1963, p.5)

- From stigmatization to stigma management

Conclusion

What are social norms?

- Social norms = principles or models of behavior specific to a given social group or society.
- A non-normative perspective on norms
- Social norms \neq legal norms
- Durkheim: exteriority and constraint

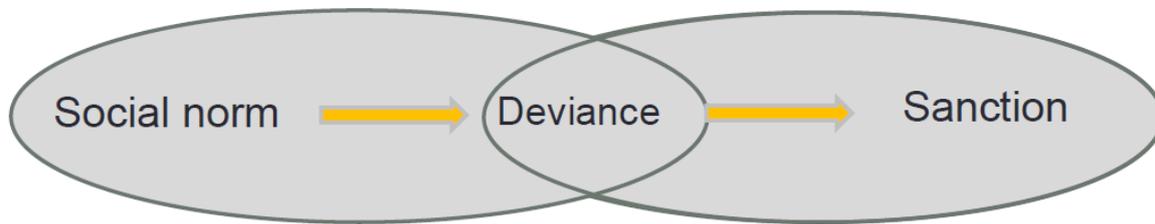
What is deviance?

- Durkheim, Merton : Deviance = non compliance or non conformance to a social norm
- Becker : Full deviance = non compliance + labelling

Why and/or how do people deviate?

- Macro explanations: because of the level of social integration and regulation (Durkheim); because of one's location within the social stratification (Merton)
- From why to how: from macro to micro perspectives (processual, interactive) : labelling, stigmatization

Two different theoretical perspectives on norms and deviance addressing different questions:



Durkheim, Merton
 Structural, macro perspective
 How characteristics of society/the social structure explain deviance → what deviance tells us about society and social norms

- Too little or too much integration or regulation (Durkheim)
- Discrepancy between cultural goals and legitimate means (Merton)

Becker, Goffman
 Processual, interactive, micro perspective
 How do people deviate and what are the consequences of deviance?

- Labelling processes and moral entrepreneurs (Becker)
- Stigmatization (Goffman)

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