

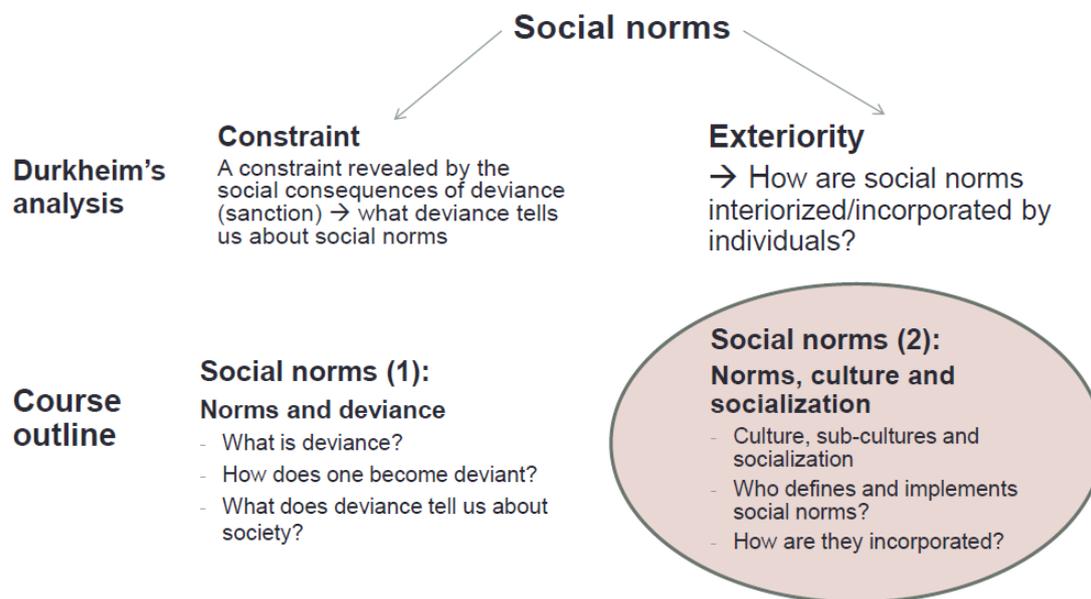
# ITS03 – Social norms (2): Norms, culture and socialization

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## 1. Introduction

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Why and how do sociologists study social norms?



## 2. Social norms: lessons from anthropology

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- Analyzing behaviors and attitudes as socially determined, as opposed to determined by biology, individual will or any other higher power (God, natural Law...)
- Questioning the myth of the « savage » by unveiling the existence of norms and a social order

### A. The social construction of norms: against biological determinism

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**Margaret Mead** on sex and « temperament »: American anthropologist (1901-1978). Conducted fieldwork among several populations of New-Guinea and the Samoa Islands. Based on her observations, questions the common assumption of a biological link between sex and « temperament »:

- Women as gentle, loving, emotional, passive
- Men as violent, aggressive, active

Observation of 3 populations:

- The Arapesh: both men and women are gentle and loving
- The Mundugumor: both men and women are violent and aggressive

- The Chambuli : men are gentle and loving, women are aggressive
- « temperaments » are not biologically but socially determined  
M.Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935)

## **B. Social norms, against the myth of the « savage »**

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- **Bronislaw Malinowski** (1884-1942): Polish anthropologist  
1914-1918 ethnographic fieldwork in the Trobriand Island in Melanesia  
1922 *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge (available online) : a milestone in anthropology.

« As always happens when scientific interest turns towards and begins to labour on a field so far only prospected by the curiosity of amateurs, **Ethnology has introduced law and order into what seemed chaotic and freakish. It has transformed for us the sensational, wild and unaccountable world of « savages » into a number of well ordered communities, governed by law, behaving and thinking according to consistent principles.** The word « savage », whatever association it might have had originally, connotes ideas of boundless liberty, of irregularity, of something extremely and extraordinarily quaint. In popular thinking, we imagine that the Natives live on the bosom of Nature, more or less as they can and like, the prey of irregular, phantasmagoric beliefs and apprehensions. Modern science, on the contrary, shows that their social institutions have a very definite organization, that they are governed by authority, law and order in their public and personal relations, while the latter are, besides, under the control of extremely complex ties of kinship and clanship ».

Malinowski, Bronislaw (1932 [1922]) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge, Introduction. Available online : <http://archive.org/details/argonautsofthewe032976mbp>.

- **From anthropology to modern urban sociology:** showing the existence of social norms and a social order beyond common (exterior) images of disorganization and chaos regarding deprived neighborhoods:  
Ex. William Foote Whyte's study of an Italian slum in Boston in the 1930s  
Foote Whyte, William. 1993 [1943]. *Street corner society. The social structure of an Italian slum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
Ex. Philippe Bourgois's study of crack-dealing in East Harlem in the 1980s  
Bourgois, Phillippe. 2003 [1995]. *In search of respect. Selling crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## **3. From social norms to culture**

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### **A. Definitions**

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Tylor (1871): "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"

- Culture as a set of social norms
- A diversity of cultures within a given society
  - Ex. Cultures related to age groups, social classes, occupations, lifestyles, etc.

- A hierarchy of cultures : subcultures, countercultures...
- Relations between group cultures:
  - When cultures meet and influence each other : acculturation, cultural transfers, cultural syncretism
  - Conflict over the definition of social norms

### **B. An example of subculture: the culture of dance musicians (Becker, 1963)**

How to study a subculture? The uses of ethnography

A specific vocabulary and keywords, revealing the group's norms:

- Classification of bands: bars, taverns / « jobbing » bands / « name » bands

Prohibitions: ex. criticizing a colleague

A « us and them » logic :

- Partition of the world between « hipness » and « squareness »
- Defining oneself in opposition to the « square »
- Blaming the « squares » for the group's problems

Isolation and self-segregation

## **4. How is culture incorporated? The study of socialization**

### **A. Definition**

Socialization = the process by which human beings incorporate the social norms pertaining to a certain culture or cultural group → how society shapes individuals

Socialization can be studied on different scales: within society at large, a given social group/community/ occupation...

Complexity of social norms → complexity of socialization processes

- When?
- How?

### **B. When does socialization occur?**

- Throughout the life course

a) A classical distinction: primary and secondary socialization (Berger and Luckman, 1967)

- **Primary** socialization
  - During childhood
  - Imposed + linked to strong emotional ties → deep, long-lasting effect on the individual
  - Learning to behave as a member of society (speaking, interacting, etc.)... and beyond (class- and gender-specific tastes, values, opinions, manners, etc.)
- **Secondary** socialization :
  - During adulthood
  - A diversity of more specialized areas of life (occupation, couple life, hobbies, unions, political parties, etc.)
  - More conscious

### b) An example of primary socialization: the incorporation of gender norms:

Gender as a social system that establishes a distinction and a hierarchy between the sexes and between the practices, values and representations associated to them (definition adapted from Bereni et al., 2012)

→ Gender-based toy marketing : how the marketing of toys plays a role in the incorporation of gender norms by individuals

### c) An example of secondary socialization: how does one become a doctor?

Merton, R. K., Reader, G. et al. (1957). *The student-physician : introductory studies in the sociology of medical education*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Becker, H., B. Geer, et al. (1961). *Boys in white: student culture in medical school*. Chicago University of Chicago Press

Key ideas:

- Anticipatory socialization (Merton)
- Beyond the content of the curriculum, socialization into a social status (Becker et al)

« In our society, among the most desired and admired statuses is to be a member of a profession. Such status is attained not by going into the woods for intense, but brief, ordeals of initiation into adult mysteries, but by a long course of professional instruction and supervised practice. In training for medicine, great emphasis is laid upon the learning of basic sciences and their application in the diagnosis and treatment of the sick. But science and skill do not make a physician; one must also be initiated into the status of physician; to be accepted, one must have learned to play the part of a physician in the drama of medicine »  
Becker, H., B. Geer, et al. (2009 [1961]). *Boys in white: student culture in medical school*. Chicago University of Chicago Press, p.4.

## C. How does socialization occur?

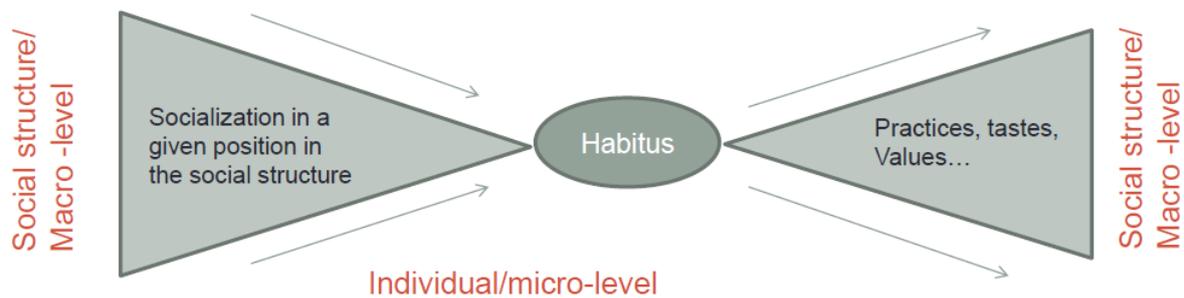
### d) Manifest and latent socialization

(Drawing on Merton's distinction between manifest and latent functions):

- **Manifest** socialization results from a deliberate, systematic educational effort (ex. school teachers teaching kids to be « well-behaved », parents reading educational books to their toddlers)  
→ Cf Durkheim on the role of education
- **Latent** socialization results from more a more diffuse, un-intentional influence (ex. school teachers reacting differently to boys' and girls' misbehavior, images of male and female characters conveyed by books for toddlers)  
→ Bourdieu's concept of habitus

### e) Bourdieu's concept of habitus

Habitus = A **system** of dispositions that results from an individual's socialization and determine this individual's practices, values, beliefs... (1980, *Le sens pratique*; trad. 1992 *The logic of practice*)



#### f) Agents of socialization

- Family : parents, siblings and extended family, partners...
- Caretakers (nannies, kindergarden instructors)
- School teachers and counselors
- The media
- Peer groups
- Higher education institutions
- Workplace culture
- Political groups/social movement organizations/political parties
- Total institutions (cf Goffman's *Asylums*)

#### The example of total institutions

In *Asylums* (1961), Erving Goffman defines total institutions as “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life”.

Ex. prisons, concentration camps, mental hospitals, boarding schools, monasteries

- ➔ **Primary and secondary adjustments:** primary adjustments refer to inmates' general compliance to institutional norms in these highly controlled environments; secondary adjustments refer to the micro-tactics by which inmates can step aside from institutionally prescribed behavior : they are “habitual arrangement by which a member of an organisation employs unauthorised means, or obtains unauthorised ends, or both, thus getting around the organisation's assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be”.

#### g) Socialization as a complex, conflictive process: the example of French “lolitas” (Mardon, 2011)

- « Hypersexualization » and the norms of femininity incorporated by young girls
- Identified agents of socialization that favor a sexualization of clothing:
  - Peer group (cf interview excerpt on next slide)
  - Pop culture: music, TV
  - Clothing industry
- Social dynamics resisting the sexualization of girls' clothing :
  - Initial perception of sexualized clothing as inappropriate (cf interview excerpt)
  - Opposition from mothers of the middle and upper classes

#### Interview excerpt:

“When I was in second year of Junior High School, there were some saying : ‘Yes, I wear

thongs'. I was shocked. 'What? You wear thongs already?'; 'Yeah, sure'. And I go 'Your mother, she ok with this?'. Me, I hadn't asked because it hadn't come to my mind. [...] and I was really shocked and then, little by little, well, it is perfectly normal and I asked my mother"

(14-year old girl in 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Junior High School, personal translation from Mardon, 2011, p.117)

- ➔ When mothers resist (middle and upper classes)
  - Reasons for opposition :
    - Physical danger
    - Fear of an impact on school results
- ➔ Result = a postponement of the adoption of the criticized clothing
- ➔ How mothers yield:
  - Belief that it won't last
  - Imposing their terms on the details : shape, fabric...

## 5. Conclusion

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- Sociologists study culture as a set of social norms specific to a given society or social group
- Socialization is the process by which social norms are incorporated by individuals
- Contemporary western societies are characterized by a high level of *complexity* regarding cultures and social norms (different cultures coexisting, with a plurality of – sometimes conflictive – social norms)
- Hence socialization must be analyzed as a complex process: different agents of socialization carrying potentially contradictory norms and values /individual reflexivity

## 6. References

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