SOCIAL NORMS (1): NORMS AND DEVIANCE

Introduction to sociology – session 2
Anne Revillard
Outline

• Introduction to social norms:
  • Definition
  • A non-normative perspective on norms
  • Social norms ≠ legal norms
  • Why and how do sociologists study social norms?

• Social norms (1): Norms and deviance
  • What is deviance?
    • Defining deviance
    • Deviance as a « normal » social phenomenon
  • Sociological theories about deviance
    • Structural explanations of deviance as a « social fact »: Durkheim and Merton
    • Analyzing deviance as process: the interactionist perspective: Becker and Goffman
What are social norms?

A general definition of 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 »


Deviance = non compliance or non conformance to a social norm

ABSENCE OF JUDGMENT : A sociologist’s perspective on norms is non-normative
Reminder : Sociology is not about judging society or saying how it should be, it is about describing, analyzing and explaining how society is.
What are social norms?

Social norms ≠ legal norms

- Ex. ways of eating, dressing, speaking
- Ex. private property
- Ex. certain speed limits
Why and how do sociologists study social norms?

Why are sociologists interested in social norms? What questions do they address?

Exploring sociological questions around social norms: drawing on a Durkheimian analysis of social norms as « 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]

→ 2 main characteristics:

• Exteriority
• Constraint/coercive power
E. Durkheim on social norms

• 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 on social norms

- Constraint:

“Not only are these types of behavior and thinking external to the individual, but they are endued 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.../...”

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.

Ex. The discovery of the heterosexual norm
Why and how do sociologists study social norms?

Social norms

**Constraint**
A constraint revealed by the social consequences of deviance (sanction) → what deviance tells us about social norms

**Exteriority**
→ How are social norms interiorized/incorporated by individuals?

**Durkheim's analysis**

**Social norms (1):**
Norms and deviance
- What is deviance?
- How does one become deviant?
- What does deviance tell us about society?

**Social norms (2):**
Norms, culture and socialization
- Culture, sub-cultures and socialization
- Who defines and implements social norms?
- How are they incorporated?

**Course outline**
Defining deviance

- Deviance = non compliance or non conformance to a social norm
- Deviant behavior/deviant characteristics (stigma)

Examples:
- Crimes of interpersonal violence (assault, domestic violence, rape)
- Nonviolent crime (theft, vandalism, organized crime)
- White-collar and corporate crime
- Drug use and addiction
- Drunkennes and alcoholism
- Suicide
- Heterosexual deviance (extramarital sex, prostitution, pornography)
- Homosexuality
- Physical disabilities
- Mental disorders
- Laughing out loud at a funeral
- Spilling a glass of wine on a white tablecloth at a formal dinner

The definition of behaviors or characteristics as deviant always depends on context
A diversity of scales and degrees → a very common social experience

(adapted from Ogien, 1995; Clinard & Meier, 2011)
Defining deviance

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)
Two main sociological perspectives on deviance

- **Structural explanations of deviance as a « social fact »**:  
  → From suicide to a theory of the social order (integration and regulation) (E. Durkheim)  
  → Deviance and social structure (R. Merton)

- **Analyzing deviance as process : the interactionist perspective**  
  → From marijuana to a theory of social control (H. Becker)  
  → From stigma to stigmatization and stigma management (E. Goffman)
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

→ A Durkheimian tradition (or « school ») in French sociology
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)
Durkheim on suicide

- **Integration** (as opposed to egoïsm) 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.

Durkheim’s typology of suicide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excess of</td>
<td>Altruistic suicide (ex. Soldier)</td>
<td>Fatalistic suicide (desperate husband)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of</td>
<td>Egotistical suicide (ex. Single person)</td>
<td>Anomic suicide (ex. city dwellers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

5 “modes of adaptation”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Culture goals</th>
<th>Institutionalized means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Conformity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Innovation</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Ritualism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Retreatism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Rebellion</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ acceptance  
- Elimination  
 +/- rejection and substitution of new goals and standards

(Merton, “Social structure and anomie”, ASR, 1938, p.676)
Howard Becker (1928- )

• 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…

• Howard Becker
  • Examples of fieldwork : the subculture of jazz musicians, the deviant careers of marijuana users
  • Sociology of deviance → labeling theory
  • Sociology of art → « art worlds »
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 ».

## Deviance as process: H. Becker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obedient behavior</th>
<th>Rule-breaking behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived as deviant</td>
<td>Falsely accused</td>
<td>Pure deviant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not perceived as deviant</td>
<td>Conforming</td>
<td>Secret deviant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The role of « moral entrepreneurs » in the implementation of social norms and the sanction of deviant behavior

- Deviant careers

E. Goffman (1922-1982)

- Chicago school

- 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

- Total institutions

1959: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
1961: *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*
1963: *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*
1967: *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*
1971: *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*
1974: *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*
1979: *Gender Advertisements*
Deviance as process: E. Goffman

- 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
Deviance as process: E. Goffman

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 » (next slide)

• From stigmatization to stigma management
Deviance as process : E. Goffman

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)
To sum up…

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 ≠ 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
To sum up…

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)
References


PPT illustrations


Howard Becker : Howard Becker’s photo gallery, [http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/photos_63rd.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/photos_63rd.html)