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Social Norms Theory and Development Economics

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Abstract

Social norms affect almost every aspect of people's lives, and can be an obstacle to or support economic development. This paper outlines what social norms are and how they work, providing examples from everyday life and from development case studies. Sometimes not much can be done about changing undesirable social norms. In those cases, development economists need to be aware of how the existence of those norms can impact the effects of the policies they advocate. But of particular importance to development economists is the ways in which social norms can be changed, at least under some circumstances. Understanding of social norm change is still patchy at best, but the paper outlines the theoretical underpinnings of change, with empirical evidence from various policies aimed at changing social norms. However, some of those policies raise ethical concerns that would require attention.

Social Norms Theory and Development Economics

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Introduction

Social norms are a pervasive feature of our lives. They influence almost all aspects of our social interactions, dictating things as disparate as if and how we queue to get on public transport, what counts as a bribe, whether one ought to be impartial when holding public office, how we greet each other, what demands can be made in the name of family or friendship, what should be done if you are insulted (and what counts as an insult), and how we achieve cooperation in the face of partially conflicting interests. No theory of social life can afford to completely ignore the power of social norms.

Their effect is sometimes beneficial, as when they allow us to find cooperative solutions to Prisoners' Dilemma type of situations, or enable efficient coordination. For example, social norms can help us solve environmental problems by restricting littering and excessive use of water in droughts and by preventing overuse of communal resources (Cialdini 2003, Ostrom 1990). They can help us make social interactions smoother, by dictating that we wait for our turn, indicate how we should deal with people in various positions in the social hierarchy, and how we display respect. They can provide us with an insurance system of mutual help and ensure provisions to public goods. They sometimes even help us avoid serious conflict, as in the famous examples of cease fire between Allied and German forces during the trench warfare in the First World War (Axelrod 1984).

Sometimes, however, their effect is not so beneficial. Social norms regarding female sexuality and marriage dictate, in some areas, that female children are subjected to genital mutilation. Social norms regarding honor and revenge dictate, in some areas, that you are required to answer an insult with an even greater insult, possibly resulting in a vendetta that only ends when one of you is dead (and probably many others as well) (Elster 1990). Social norms dictate, in some areas, that bringing a gun to school shows that you are cool and brave. And social norms dictate, in some areas, that binge drinking is not only an acceptable but an expected behavior among college students, and that failure to do so indicates that you are boring and unsocial. (For a discussion of the social meaning of behavior, see Kahan 1998.)

Social norms are equally important for understanding development issues. Following North (1990), there has been a significant focus on the role of institutions for economic growth and on the path dependence and related "stickiness" of such institutions. Although many of the studies have focused primarily on formal institutions such as the law, there is also an increasing interest in *informal* institutions such as social norms. An important characteristic of economic modernization is the replacement of some old norms by new ones: from norms that dictate loyalty to family or group to

norms that dictate respect of contracts regarding labor, insurance, credit, service and so on (North, 1990, Platteau 1994, Fafchamps 2004, 2011). Further, when formal institutions in a country need to be changed in order to promote economic growth or democratization, the success often depends on whether the new institutions fit with existing social norms and moral beliefs. For example, Boettke et al (2008) argue that the reason why efforts to democratize and promote economic growth in Germany and Japan after WW2, and in Poland after the fall of the Soviet Union, were successful, while the efforts to do the same in Bosnia after the civil war and in the post-Soviet Russia Federation failed, were because in the first cases, the new institutions and policies resonated with already existing norms, beliefs and habits, whereas in the latter, they did not. One group of norms in particular has long been recognized as crucial for development, namely, norms surrounding gender roles, in particular the norm about education (or lack of education) of women. Norms that require that women stay at home and devote themselves to child-rearing and household work, and thus discourage parents from sending their daughters to school, are generally acknowledged to be a serious obstacle for economic development (World Development Report 2006). Some norms have also been identified as crucial for a well-functioning market economy. In particular, much work has concerned the need to go from norms of trust and reciprocity to kin and friends to a more generalized morality that requires the fulfilment of, for example, contractual obligations to strangers with whom one engages in market transactions. Henrich et al (2010 a) have shown that market integration is positively correlated with a sense of fairness to people from other groups than one's own, suggesting that norms of fairness do change in response to changes in economic structure. But it takes time: there is no reason to expect the fit to be optimal.

The aim of the paper is to provide an overview of the social norms field, with a focus on why social norms emerge, persist and change and, in particular, on how we can influence social norms. The latter question is obviously the most pressing for policy makers, whether they are working with development issues or not. However, the literature on this particular issue is still in its infancy, with a few exceptions, so the paper is drawing on what has been said about the nature of social norms in order to, sometimes more and sometimes less speculatively, suggest ways in which policy makers might be able to influence social norms in desirable directions.

The rest of this paper is divided into 5 different sections. The first one concerns what social norms are. The second is about what social norms do, that is, the question of their *function*. The third section deals with why social norms emerge, why they are often so persistent, and why they change (sometimes quickly). The fourth section is the one that deals with how we can influence social norms, and it is by far the longest one of the paper. I will discuss several such ways of influencing

social norms, but given that the literature has only identified and explored some of these, some of the sub-sections will be short and more speculative, others longer and more firmly based in the literature and policy practice. However, influencing social norms has consequences that can be ethically problematic. The discussion of how to influence social norms is therefore followed by a short section on the effects of such attempts. The final section concludes.

What are social norms?

Social norms are often defined as common behavioral regularities. And that is certainly an important aspect of what they are: they typically regulate what we do, and they are social norms only if they are *social* in the sense that they apply to everyone or almost everyone in a particular group (although there are cases in which the majority pays lip-service to the norm but violates it in secret). But they are more than just common behavioral regularities. After all, we all have certain behaviors that are common but are not the result of social norms; we sleep, we eat, we fall in love, we put on more clothes when it's cold and less when it's warm. Clearly not all common behavioral regularities are social norms.

Social norms are also characterized by the fact that these behavioral regularities are *normatively* required. It is not just that most people do line up in a queue for the bus, it is also the case that most people believe they *ought* to do so. Social norms are thus, as Bicchieri (2006) emphasizes, characterized by a set of expectations, both descriptive expectations about what others are in fact likely to do, and normative expectations about what others *ought* to do. These expectations also typically concern what others expect of us: we are aware that others expect us to behave in a particular way and that they think we ought to behave that way. And sometimes, norms can exist without there being a relevant actual social practice; what matters is that most people believe that most people behave accordingly, not that most people actually do behave that way.

Most people usually wish to conform to these expectations, but not unconditionally. Social norms differ from other kinds of normative requirements that one might wish to comply with because the desire to comply with the requirement is often conditional upon others also complying. I may prefer to wait for my turn and line up in a queue rather than push my way ahead, but only if (most) others do so too. If they do not, my desire to comply with the requirement disappears. And all this talk of "most people" is of course in turn sensitive to different judgments: the proportion of others who must also comply in order for a given person to wish to comply is very likely to differ from person to person.

Furthermore, compliance with the requirement is not only depending on people's conditional desire to comply, but also, usually, on a *sanctioning system*. If you don't comply with the social norm, others will punish you in some way. The nature and severity of the punishment differs from case to case: sometimes it is nothing but a cutting look, sometimes it is negative gossip or a critical comment directly to your face, and sometimes even violence or complete social ostracism. Standard economic theories have trouble explaining how the sanctioning system works. If third parties are prepared to punish norm violators, any kind of social norm can be upheld (Boyd and Richerson 1992). But why would these third party observers be prepared to punish norm violators? Doing so involves a cost to them: a critical remark against a person who litter in the park might very well give rise to an unpleasant scene where the criticized person reacts with anger or perhaps even violence. Damaging a social relationship might involve the loss of a valued friendship or a potentially lucrative business relationship. Consequently, punishing social norm violators has itself the characteristics of A Prisoner's Dilemma: everyone prefers that norm violators are punished, but everyone prefers that someone else does the punishing. However, solutions are offered both from theory and from experimental data. Brennan and Pettit have argued that since most people want to be thought well of by others, being thought badly of – even if it is not expressed in any way – is itself a form of cost that can function as a punishment. Further, thinking badly of someone you observed violating a social norm is automatic: we don't choose to do it, we just do it. Therefore, it is not something we can choose *not* to do because we'd prefer that someone else did the punishing (Brennan and Pettit 2006. And this is true even if, sometimes, we might wish that we had not observed the behavior so that we could avoid the social awkwardness that follows when the other person knows that we saw them. Experimental psychology supports the claim that sometimes, the fact that you are observed by someone who will think less of you is enough to change behavior. A famous experiment in New York City's public toilets showed that people were much more likely to wash their hands after having been to the toilet if there was someone else in the wash room, even though, given the setting, they were extremely unlikely to ever meet this person again (Munger and Harris 1989).

Further, communication plays a very important role for compliance with norms. When a group talks about and agrees what to do – and in particular, if they make explicit commitments to act in a certain way – they are much more likely to act in that way (Bicchieri 2006).

The importance of communication is well illustrated by the following experiment in the Philippines on the distribution of household income when decisions are private, public or public and subject to negotiation. In the Philippines, as in many other places, wives make the decisions about family savings and monitor husbands' wages. They also often complain that the men do not hand over their

whole income to them. In the experiment, both spouses in married couples were asked to decide about how much – and how – to save for the family or take as private consumption, each spouse making his or her own decision. There were three different treatment conditions: in one, the decision was completely private, in the second, the spouses both knew what income the other person had and what decision they made, but they could not talk to each other beforehand about what to do, and in the third, the decision was again public, but the couple would talk about what to do beforehand. Men turned out to keep more money for themselves than women in the Private case, and committed more of it to consumption (as in personalized gift-vouchers) in the Public case, but deposited their money in the joint account in the Negotiation case. Bicchieri draws attention to the importance of making explicit commitments. However, Ashraf points out a slightly different mechanism: When no communication has taken place, keeping money for private consumption would not go against an explicit statement of the wife's preference, but when the couple has talked about what to do, the wife will have made her preferences clear as the person in charge of the family finances, and keeping money for private consumption would now be a clear case of defiance, and thus much more likely to be sanctioned. This at first seemed like a gender result, but in fact had more to do with who controlled the money. The decision to keep money for private consumption was much more common among men whose wives controlled the family finances, and similar results could be seen among women whose men controlled the family finances. However, it is much more common in the Philippines that the women control the family finances, which means that the effect of information and communication had a larger average effect on men than on women. Although it is not necessarily inefficient that people have their own private accounts, in these cases it is, and therefore policy makers should take the effect of a change in information and communication into account when deciding policy (Ashraf 2009). For example, Cardenas and Carpenter (2008) point out the importance of doing so when making decisions about household grants and cash transfers.

Further, behavioral economics experiments have demonstrated that people are in fact prepared to sanction others for norm violations. Experiments on public goods games demonstrate that a great majority of people punish those who have violated the norm of fairness by contributing less than others, the punishment is often harsh, and is greater the greater the difference between what the norm violator and others contributed. This is true even for altruistic punishment, that is, when someone punishes a norm violator even though they are not going to interact again (Fehr and Gächter 2002). In such cases, the punisher has nothing to gain from punishing, because even if the norm violator begins to cooperate as a result of the punishment, the punisher will not be the one

who reaps the benefits of this cooperation. This is quite crucial, since a social norm depends on third party willingness to punish. Data also shows that 60-70% of people are prepared to punish even those who have mis-treated someone else by violating an important norm (Fehr and Fischbacker 2004). The willingness to punish means that cooperation is stable even into the last rounds of the game, whereas without the ability to punish, cooperation decreases during the game (Fehr and Gächter 2002). Because punishment is costly, the willingness to punish somewhat decreases the overall earnings in short-term games in comparison with games that do not include an opportunity to punish, despite the increased level of cooperation. But in the long run, the opportunity to punish is beneficial (Gächter et al 2008). Most players are also aware of others' willingness to punish, and adjust their behavior accordingly. For example, the behavior of 1st players in Ultimatum games in Western populations is quite different from that of 1st players in Dictator games, since they make higher offers in anticipation of punishment if their offers are seen as too small.

Norms are sensitive to the social context. Whether they apply in a given situation depends on the interpretation of the social situation agents find themselves in. That interpretation usually involves the type of situation it is, the type of interactions that take place in it, and the social roles of the people involved. For example, agents need to determine whether the situation they find themselves in is a case of a market exchange, or of gift-giving between friends. Market exchanges or friendship are broad schemata that involve specification of the various social roles that agents occupy, and the appropriate type of interactions between them. Different social roles make different behaviors appropriate. For example, in a work-place discussion, the manager is required to be impartial, assertive, and tell others what to do, whereas the worker is required to listen and do what is asked. A friend is supposed to be partial to her friends, look after their interests, defend them against criticism, and listen to their problems. A car-salesman, meeting the same people, does not have the same obligations. But sometimes the situation is ambiguous and it is unclear what schema applies. When possible, we then try to clarify the situation, and we are careful to negotiate different possible interpretations of a relationship to avoid clashes between incompatible social norms. For example, we are sometimes cautioned against 'mixing business with pleasure', and lending large sums of money to or entering into business transactions with friends, because different norms apply to friendship and business relationships, and they are often incompatible; for example, a friendship can be destroyed when we demand that a loan is repaid on time.

Schemata can have a great impact on what norms are taken to be appropriate for the situation at hand, which means that general notions of, say, fairness, are very sensitive to local cues. The schema for a competition prize ceremony specifies that fairness is determined by the norm of allocation

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according to merit, not of need or equality, whereas the schemata for sharing a cake among a group of friends specifies that fairness requires that everyone gets an equal share. This highlights an important cause of framing effects: small, seemingly irrelevant, differences in phrasing or game set-up are perceived by participants as giving clues to the correct interpretation of an otherwise somewhat odd situation, and different interpretations will trigger different norms. For example, a hint that the 1st player has received the money as a prize won in a competition or has some other property rights to it changes the behavior in both Dictator and Ultimatum games from quite high offers to quite low ones (Camerer and Thaler 1995, Frey and Bohnet 1995, Hoffman and Spitzer 1985).

The importance of schemata is crucial for understanding some of the cultural differences in behavior. Some of the results researchers have found on the usual research sample of North-American and European undergraduate students may not generalize very well. Recent work has shown that behavior in Dictator and Ultimatum games differs between populations: when researchers studied samples from non-Western but industrialized countries, they found not only a difference in initial willingness to cooperate (many small-scale societies make much smaller modal offers in both games (Henrich et al 2004), but also a quite new phenomenon, namely, *anti-social* punishment. Participants were often willing to punish those who were overly cooperative. This cancelled out the positive effect of punishment of anti-cooperative behavior, and the ability to punish thus did not increase cooperation in those populations (Hermann et al 2008). This should make us cautious about generalizing from studies done on American and European undergraduate university students to the rest of the world; it might be that the universal human traits are fewer than usually thought, or that norms about appropriate behavior are different (see the debate between Henrich et al (2010 b), Baunard and Sperber (2010) and Ceci et al (2010)), or that the interpretation of the situations are different and that that triggers different schemata in which other norms are salient (Bicchieri 2006, ch 2). The latter point is especially important for our ability to generalize: it is quite likely that laboratory experiments of these types, very far removed from ordinary life as they are, will be given somewhat different interpretations in different cultures, depending on what would be the normal most similar situation participants have encountered, and this would then affect behavior. It is thus hard to know if the results indicate a difference in norms, or a difference in interpretation of the experiment situation. For example, Bicchieri points out that some of the subjects in Henrich et al's (2004) study offered more than 50% in Ultimatum games, and that these offers were often rejected. That behavior makes no sense within our standard micro-economic theories of behavior. However, as Bicchieri points out, the participants seemed to interpret the game as a gift-giving game, in which it is appropriate to be generous, and people might

also reject gifts because accepting a gift brings with it an obligation to reciprocate that generosity, which one might not want (Bicchieri 2006, p 74, footnote 19, and p 86). Gifts can be, and sometimes are, used as a matter of establishing dominance and/or force people to owe you, and there are therefore sometimes good reasons to reject them.

What social norms do

(Most) social norms do certain things for us. One of the main things they do is providing a focal point that facilitates coordination. But perhaps more importantly, they ensure socially beneficial outcomes in various types of cooperation games. For example, the social norm of "doing your fair share" means that when a group of friends go out for drinks and everyone takes turns to buy, the last person stays and buys a round too, rather than leaving just before it becomes his turn. Without the social norm that each does his "fair share", the dominant strategy would have been for nobody to buy anyone else any drinks, and if there were just one rational player in the group, he would leave just before it becomes his turn. But everyone knows of the social norm: if he left, the social sanctions against him would be quite severe. It is thus in his interest to stay and buy the others a drink. Examples like these are plenty. Social norms help explain why we contribute to public goods, line up rather than jump the queue when waiting for the bus, avoid littering in the park (and why we tell people off when they litter), influence how we behave towards others in various places in the social hierarchy in the workplace, determine the level of work effort, and so on. Ensuring cooperation in Prisoners' Dilemma type of games is crucial for social life as we know it, and social norms often do exactly that. That makes them indispensable.

Sometimes, the great majority of people involved are conditional co-operators, and their interactions are more aptly described as an Assurance game, in which they would be happy to cooperate if (most) others cooperate, but in which they prefer to defect if they believe (most) others will do so too. A social norm to cooperate in the case at hand provides them with the assurance that most others will in fact cooperate, because the threat of sanctions would provide these others with the incentive to do so, were they otherwise motivated to defect, and with the assurance needed, were they instead conditional co-operators. When conditional co-operators play a repeated public goods game, they tend to become disappointed in the cheaters and punish by defecting. This, however, often punishes also the other conditional co-operators, because there is no way to punish only the cheaters. The conditional co-operators who were willing to tolerate the initial level of defection now face a higher level of defection, which will make some of them start to defect too,

and so on. As mentioned above, the result is a decreasing level of cooperation as the game goes on, but with a sanctioning system, this does not happen (Fehr and Gächter 2002).

Many have focused on these functions of social norms in their account of what social norms are and why they exist, including those who say that social norms are particular types of solutions to Prisoner's Dilemma games (Bicchieri 2006) and those who claim that the function of ensuring cooperation or coordination is a or the main reason why social norms exist (Ullman-Margalit 1977).

But although solving cooperation and coordination problems is one of the major things that social norms do, there are also alternative accounts of the function of social norms. According to one such influential account, social norms function as signaling devices (Posner 2000). By choosing to conform to a social norm, we signal to others that we are a particular kind of person. According to Posner, what we signal is that we have a low discount rate, which makes us more reliable as cooperation partners. But other suggestions in the literature on signaling include that we signal that we possess some sort of pro-social characteristic in general, such as being trustworthy, altruistic, or socially responsible. The key is that compliance is a *costly* signal: those who actually are trustworthy etc. find it less onerous to comply with the social norms than do those who are not.

Signaling is certainly an important part of explaining many types of norm-related behavior. Being seen to obey the rules is often crucial for other's judgments about your reliability and trustworthiness. In fact, when we do violate a social norm, we often go to great lengths to clarify that we are nevertheless reliable and trustworthy people, by explicitly offering excuses and explanations that aim to establish that this is an exceptional case and that we normally wouldn't dream of violating the norm. Similarly, some norm-violations occur because they signal contempt, disrespect or courage in the face of social disapproval.

Signaling is particularly important in social group dynamics. Consider the fashion trends among many groups of teenagers: the more their clothes, jewelry and hair styles set them apart from the rest of society, the stronger the signal they are sending. The signal is double: they are signaling to the rest of society that they are rebellious and independent, and to their peers they are signaling that they are trustworthy members of the group. The latter signal crucially depends on the former: only those who really are committed to their group would be happy to cut themselves off from the rest of society. What social norms we comply with and what norms we violate is often crucial in establishing our group membership, and perhaps some of the often otherwise puzzling social norms may have their base in the need to distinguish between those who belong and those who do not. For example,

many rules of etiquette seem to make no sense apart from how they allow people to tell insiders from outsiders.

Successful signaling usually requires that the conditions for a credible costly signal are satisfied. The costs and benefits must be such that there is a separating equilibrium that allows senders to signal in a credible way (that is, an equilibrium in which only those who actually have the relevant trait benefit from sending the signal), and obviously receivers must be able to observe the signal and interpret it. In particular, in most cases the signal is aimed at many observers, and that means that the signal must be public it if is to have any value to the sender. Data suggests that this is indeed what is going on in for example many cases of donations to charities, where donations are much higher if the donations are made in public than if they are done anonymously or privately (Berezkei et al 2010). Donating money to charities signal that you are altruistic, and/or take your social responsibility seriously, traits that are likely to make you a reliable and trustworthy partner for personal and business projects. Social esteem might also be an important intrinsic motivator. The fact that people tend to donate more money to charities if others see them do it is of course not an indication that they *only* do so in order to gain social esteem or valuable social interactions. It only shows that some of the motivation stems from such motives. Similarly, the fact that people tend to be more careful about not littering when others can observe their behavior does not indicate that they have no concern for keeping their environment clean, only that they are also concerned with not being observed to violate a social norm.

Posner has argued, in his influential work on law and social norms, that social norms are the signaling behaviors that people engage in to tell others that they are "good " types: trustworthy, cooperative, etc. He points out that many types of behavior that are otherwise puzzling can be explained if they are understood as signals. For example, why do groups often lash out hard against those of their own who cooperate with outsiders even when they do not have very strong negative attitudes towards these outsiders in the first place? Because, Posner argues, the discrimination against outsiders is used as a signal that one is loyal to one's own group. Outsiders may or may not be cooperative and decent people. But insiders who don't send the right signal are definitely not good types, and are therefore sanctioned. Thus, discrimination can become quite wide-spread and much greater than anyone's intrinsic preferences would suggest, simply because failing to discriminate would signal that one is not loyal to one's in-group, and failing to punish those who are disloyal is itself a case of disloyalty that makes one viable to sanctions. Any kind of action can function as a signal, as long as its meaning as a signal is understood. Therefore, if social norms are signals, we can also explain phenomena as varied as gift-giving, where the gift is a costly signal that

one is invested in the relationship and therefore can be trusted, and outrage against those who burn the national flag, where respect for the flag is a signal that one is patriotic, and therefore a trustworthy co-operator for other co-nationals. Interestingly, as Posner points out, social norms as signals also lets us explain the perverse effect of laws against burning the flag: a law that forbids people to burn the flag makes it costly to do so, so even "bad" types will now avoid it. But that means that we now get a pooling equilibrium rather than a separating one: everyone - good and bad types alike - will avoid burning the flag, which means that this action loses its signaling value. As everyone recognizes that respect for the flag is an empty action, just as likely to be a result of fear of government punishment as of feelings of patriotism, refusal to show respect for the flag can become a signal of integrity, and eventually create a social norm against being too respectful of the flag (Posner 2000).

The signaling function of social norms illustrates a more general feature of social norms; the role they play for symbolic/expressive action. Our social life is richly colored by social norms for all sorts of social interactions. For example, the social norm about the proper way of dressing for a funeral dictates that we wear black and conservative clothes. The color black symbolizes grief, and the social norm therefore dictates that we wear black as a way of signaling grief over the death, and respect for the deceased and/or for the others who grieve. Wearing a short red dress or shorts and a colorful T-shirt would send the wrong signal. It is thus *because* of the social norm that one dresses in black at funerals that one can signal disrespect and glee simply by wearing shorts and a colorful T-shirt. Social norms often enables symbolic action in this way: if it were not for the social norm that one lines up in a queue when getting on a bus, pushing ahead would not signal rudeness and a lack of consideration for others. Indeed, in cultures where there is no social norm that one lines up in a queue, pushing ahead to get on the bus does not signal anything negative. Rather, it might be seen as assertive, whereas standing back is seen as shy and passive.

The fact that social norms often make actions carry symbolic meaning in a way they wouldn't had the norm not existed can explain many otherwise puzzling types of behavior. Social norms can dictate what types of actions threaten a person's honor, how important honor is, and what a person who has been insulted is supposed to do. In cultures with strong honor codes, the social norms about what counts as an insult and how important one should take being insulted can imbue a look or tone of voice with offensive meaning, and social norms dictate that the insulted party must restore his (or, more seldom, her) honor by acting in ways specified by the social norm. Usually, this means an even greater insult, sometimes escalating into violence. Experiments show, for example, that a when a person from the South in the US is being somewhat rudely treated by a stranger, they

react with much more anger than a person from the North does, and is more likely to adhere to social norms that specify that they must not give an inch and must avenge any slight in later interactions with others. To the person from the South, the rude behavior meant an insult to their honor, and triggered the social norms of the honor culture of the South that specifies that accepting being treated rudely reflects badly on your honor and that you must stand up for yourself. To the person from the North, in contrast, the rude behavior did not mean an insult to their honor, and the relevant social norms required that they didn't make a fuss over small things. Consequently, the subsequent behaviors in later interactions were quite different (Cohen et al 1996).

The social meaning can differ enormously between physically quite similar actions: just consider the difference between burning a flag and burning a towel. And specific social norms are associated with those differences in social meaning – burning a flag generates moral outrage (or cheer) among observers, burning a towel usually generates curiosity. Resistance to or even outrage at certain, to outsiders quite acceptable, behaviors often have their basis in the social meanings of those behaviors, and this is an important factor for understanding the success (or lack thereof) of attempts to make people change their behavior.

The symbolic nature of norms thus connects some types of norm-related behavior to a larger set of *expressive* behaviors. Expressive behaviors aim to express our attitudes, values, loyalties, etc., rather than about achieving some other goal, to which the behavior could be instrumental. Our social life is full of expressive behaviors, many of which function as important signals that enable us to form cooperative relationships of all kinds.

Why do social norms arise, persist and change?

Standard rational choice accounts of social norm emergence tend to emphasize the functions of social norms, in particular the way social norms can provide solutions to coordination and cooperation games (Ullman-Margalit 1977, Ellickson 1991). And it is definitely true that many social norms do function in this way, and that they become indispensable to us for that very reason. But we should pause before we claim that all or even most of the explanation for their emergence is based on this fact. There are two main problems:

- Not all existing norms seem to have one of these functions. In particular, there are bad norms, norms that seem to cause problems rather than solve them.

- Many coordination and cooperation problems go unsolved, with no norms emerging to solve them.

Advocates of this rationalist functionalist view tend to argue that it is possible to separate the question of *why* a norm has emerged from the question of *how* it emerged. Sometimes they prefer to put this in terms of types and tokens, and like Edna Ullman-Margalit in her early and very influential treatment of the topic argue that we can separate the question of why a *type* of norm has emerged from the question of *how* a *particular* norm has emerged. The type is explained by the function that norms fulfil, and one important job (one that she was focusing on herself) was to reconstruct this function in a way that showed the incentive structures for rational agents. The question about how a particular norm emerged, however, is a matter for historians, she argued (Ullman-Margalit, 1977). However, as my co-authors and I have argued elsewhere (Brennan et al 2013, Eriksson 2009)), given the two problems raised above, it seems the questions of how and why are more intimately intertwined than that.

What makes it so plausible that a norm exists because it solves a particular problem that the people involved have a good reason to want to solve is that people are intelligent enough to often manage to create solutions to their problems. It is therefore quite plausible that sometimes, they manage to create a norm through a collective decision – either by the whole group, or by some key people who have reason to expect others will follow their lead. This, for example, was how the Code Duello came into existence. In the 18th century, duels fought among the aristocracy had become quite destructive. In order to limit some of the worst aspects of the activity, a group of key men with influential positions in the Irish aristocracy came together to find a solution. They drafted a document that specified rules for dueling, rules intended to make duels fought less often, and when fought, at least fought with the least amount of damage. Because of their influential positions, they managed to make the rules the new norm for dueling. The threat of being seen as violating the norm in a society in which the notion of honor was so important was usually enough to ensure compliance. The Code Duello then spread to other countries (Schwartz, Baxter and Ryan 1984).

In cases like that of the Code Duello, there is no obvious conflict of interest between people regarding the choice of solution to their joint problem, and the decision will then be relatively easy to make. But often, the different possible norms have different distributional effects, and the parties involved therefore have a conflict of interest regarding *which* norm to choose, even if all agree that *a* norm should be chosen. The result is often bargaining between parties with sometimes unequal bargaining power over which norm to choose. This, for example, was one of the results found by

Ensminger and Knight in their (1997) study of norms regarding common property, bride wealth and clan exogamy among the Orma people in Kenya.

In cases like the Code Duello, it is obvious how the norm emerged: it emerged as the result of a deliberate decision among people to solve a problem they were faced with. No wonder, then, that it actually happened to be a solution to that problem. But in other cases, it is much harder to ascertain when and by whom a norm was created. It has slowly grown and spread, but nobody really knows where it came from. For example, how come we have the norm that men do not wear pink frilly tops? And what *function* does it serve? Some norms arise as the unintended consequences of interactions. The individual members of the Orma may just have intended to find a solution to their individual interaction problems. But because norms are sensitive to what most people do (or are believed to do), a norm arises as the unintended aggregate outcome of a large number of such bargaining interactions. This shows, I believe, that an explanation of *how* a norm emerges is intertwined with the explanation of why it emerges.

Evolutionary game theorists have produced a great body of work on the spontaneous emergence of norm-like behavior, which spreads in a population through learning mechanisms driven by individuals' interest in acquiring successful behaviors. The full process from a widespread behavior to a fully-fledged norm with its normative expectations and sanctioning system is yet not entirely clear, but at least establishing a common behavior is a crucial step.

The Code Duello could be created because the Irish nobility was a small group with effective communication, and the individuals who made the decision had a social status that made their decision accepted as legitimate. But creating a norm through a deliberate decision is often made difficult by the fact that norms usually involve a great many people, often spread out geographically, with no effective means of communication. Evolutionary game theory is therefore crucial in telling us how a new norm can spread in a population. However, although many evolutionary game theory models of norms begin by assuming a norm-free environment as the starting point, in real life, the situation is usually different. In fact, one of the key problems for norm emergence is that the new norm almost never arises from a norm-free environment. There is almost always a previous norm, and the new norm is not so much a completely new norm, as a change of an old one. Models and case studies of norm entrepreneurs tell us about how key individuals, facing a somewhat different cost/benefit-situation than most others, can play the role of norm entrepreneurs, and take the lead in creating new norms (Ellickson 2001). They are crucial because anyone who deviates from the behavior that is considered appropriate will face sanctions of some sort, and this is an important reason for why norms tend to be stable. Anyone who unilaterally changes behavior incurs costs for

doing so. Consequently, the presence in the population of individuals for whom either those costs are less severe, or for whom the benefits to be gained are unusually large, is often necessary for the first step of norm change to be taken. These individuals are often, although not invariably, people of high social and/or economic standing, as their power and status protects them from some of the sanctions other norm violators would have been subject to. Further, as Ensminger and Knight point out, sometimes a small group of individuals can prefer a different norm for ideological or religious reasons, and by insisting on this norm, they bring it to the attention of others as a possible alternative. Whether it will be adopted by others, on the other hand, often depends to a large extent on bargaining power between individuals who stand to gain or lose from the adoption of that norm.

What happens next is often referred to as *bandwagon* effects. Individuals differ in their utility functions, and one of the things that differ is how many others need to behave in a particular way for them to want to do so too. The reasons may be several: for example, perhaps it is a difference in preference for conforming to already existing social norms, perhaps it is a difference in the types or severity of sanctions they are likely to face if they violate the existing norms. Either way, when the norm entrepreneurs have begun to behave in a new way, others, who would not have found it preferable at first, may now find it to be so. And once they have changed, yet others find it beneficial to change too. At some point, there might be a tipping effect: enough people have changed behavior that it suddenly is in the interest of the majority to do so too, and there is a sudden general behavioral change. Bandwagon effects can help explain both how the new norms get underway, and how norms might quickly unravel (for example Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, Kuran 1995).

Sometimes norms are sustained because of a wide-spread but false belief that although you don't support the norm, everyone else does. The belief that a norm is widely supported in a community can make people behave as if they, too, supported it, both by complying with it, and by saying they support it, perhaps even sanctioning others who violate the norm. This phenomenon is often referred to as *pluralistic ignorance*. In such cases, bandwagon effects can sometimes happen quickly and surprise everyone involved. For example, Kuran (1995) has convincingly argued that the collapse of communism in many East European countries was the result of such a phenomenon. Before the revolutions, everyone believed that the communist rule enjoyed firm and wide-spread support in the population. Both outside and inside political commentators usually proclaimed that the system was very stable. And yet, it collapsed with a speed that left most people very surprised. What happened, Kuran argues, is that when a few individuals, who were motivated enough to be willing to face sanctions, began to protest against the communist government, the dissidence showed people that there was indeed not such a complete support for the regime. Since the main reason why they had

pretended to support the government was that they thought everyone else did, evidence to the contrary quickly made them decide to protest also. The result was a very fast bandwagon effect with a dramatic tipping point that took everyone by surprise.

Anyone who wants to change a norm faces a set of problems that make norm change difficult. One is obviously that a unilateral norm violation usually incurs a sanction. But another is that your rejection of the norm needs to be interpreted as a move towards the establishment of a new norm and not just a run-of-the-mill norm violation. Norm changers therefore frequently try to influence others' interpretation of their behavior. And those who want to resist the norm change try to cast doubt on the motives of supposed norm changers by questioning whether they were motivated by a desire to change the norm or a desire to get away with a norm violation. Any attempt to change a norm must therefore pay attention to how those efforts are interpreted.

Although norm emergence and norm unravelling usually are both cases of norm change, it is worth saying a bit more specifically about how norms come to cease to exist. As mentioned earlier, it is hard to get the change process started. But once a few people have begun to refuse to comply with the norm, several mechanisms can come into play that each further drives the unravelling of the norm. First, the more people that violate a norm, the more people "should be" sanctioned, and the fewer people are left to do the sanctioning. There is therefore a greater chance of avoiding sanctioning, thus making it preferable to violate the norm for some more people, and so on. Second, one of the key kinds of sanctions for social norm violations is disesteem. It hurts to have others think badly of us. However, when more people begin to violate a particular norm, others tend to view each violator less badly than they did when the number of violators was small. This means that not only is the risk of being sanctioned lower, but even if the sanction were to occur, it still would not be as severe. Third, many norms have the characteristic of being about "doing one's fair share". In such cases, the requirement to comply with the norm is conditional upon others' compliance. If fewer others are complying, the normative requirement becomes less binding. Fourth, our normative environment is often ambiguous, in the sense that norms conflict with each other and trade-offs have to be made without any overarching meta-norm specifying which norms takes precedence and how the trade-offs should be made. In such cases, we often look at others' behavior not just to observe whether they comply with or violate a norm, but for cues about how to resolve the conflicts and make the necessary trade-offs. If fewer people comply with a particular norm, others might thus take that as information that it is acceptable or even appropriate to not comply with that norm (Brennan et al 2013).

Bad norms

 A focus on the functions of norms tends to give the impression that norms are always good. But obviously, some norms are not; some are quite neutral with respect to their consequences for human well-being, and others are outright destructive. A famous example is the vendetta norm, as mentioned earlier. The vendetta norm specifies that the appropriate response to an insult is to answer with an even greater insult, which the opponent – in order to preserve face – must then answer with an even greater one, and so it goes until at least one of the people involved (and often many) is dead (and sometimes it does not even end then). This norm, it would seem, is deeply dysfunctional, and thus function cannot play an important role in the explanation of why that norm emerged (Elster 1990).

However, a general suspicion of function explanations for norm emergence and a concern with bad norms do not necessarily imply that the existence of bad norms completely undermine the claim that function has *something* to do with the explanation of norm emergence, even of bad norms (Brennan et al 2013). The key insight is that norm function is not an all-or-nothing affair, but a matter of degree. A norm can fulfil a function to some degree, without fulfilling it perfectly. What stands in need of explanation is therefore often why *this* norm emerged rather than another. Consider the vendetta norm again. It certainly does not uphold peace perfectly. But it does do it to some extent: the knowledge that an injury or insult will be retaliated often works as a quite powerful motive for people to avoid insulting or harming others. Indeed, many societies with vendetta norms are often characterized by a great amount of politeness in social interactions. The problem is that *if and when* somebody does insult or harm somebody else, things very quickly spiral out of control. The peaceful equilibrium is a Nash equilibrium, and those are quite unstable if somebody were to play an out-of-equilibrium strategy. Unfortunately, there are a number of reasons why people now and then do play such strategies. They might be drunk. They might be very angry. They might want to prove their courage, hoping to be so intimidating that the insulted party prefers to violate the norm and suffer the resulting social shame. Indeed, honor societies such as these often have norms stressing the importance for especially young men to prove their courage by seeking conflict. As noted above, norms don't exist in a vacuum: they are usually embedded in a rich web of other norms. Perhaps the vendetta norm is even the best peace-keeping norm possible given the other norms about honor that often surrounds it.

But we do not have to conclude that all norms are optimal, given the social context. It is not hard to explain why sub-optimal norms might arise. The notion of *path dependency*, for example, suggests that a small initial and perhaps coincidental push towards one norm can lock it in, so to speak, as

more and more people choose to conform to the most common behavior. This can be particularly important in the case of signaling: using certain behaviors as social signals only works if receivers interpret the behaviors in the intended way, and that means the people's choice of behaviors is significantly dependent on what others are doing and the social meaning that is becoming attached to those behaviors. If you are trying to signal that you possess a particular trait, you had better use a signal that others are likely to understand.

Many bad norms are also perfectly functional, it is just that they only suit a small proportion of the population. The norm among Mafia-members that you do not talk to the police is such a norm: it is a normal cooperation-norm, but it has the consequence that the Mafia is able to be more of a menace to the rest of society than they would have been, had they lacked a norm that enabled them to cooperate well. In general, there is no reason to believe that any given norm will serve the interests of everyone equally. Some benefit more from the norm, others less (or not at all). Further, those with power have a vested interest in defending and imposing on others those norms that serve their own interests. Sometimes they even get some of that power from the advantages they get from the norm in question. For example, when a norm requires members of a powerful group to discriminate against members of a weaker group, the powerful group might be powerful partly as a consequence of the discrimination.

Why don't bad norms change? The reason for their stability is often linked to the reason for their emergence. Sometimes it's because of path dependency and transition costs: it's simply too costly to try to change the norm. This might be the case if a norm is sub-optimal but not completely destructive. Sometimes it's because of pluralistic ignorance: everyone would prefer a different norm, but they all erroneously believe that others support the current one, and, believing (perhaps correctly) that they would be sanctioned for refusing to comply with the current one, they all continue to comply with and pretend to support the current norm. At other times, the reason might be that the norms actually serve those in power. And at yet others, it might be because agreeing that a particular norm is bad is easy, but agreeing on and coordinating around a different one is difficult. Another problem is that it often is difficult to change one norm without changing others too. For example, the vendetta norm is tied to other norms concerning honor. It would be difficult to change the vendetta norm into a socially less destructive norm about how to react to insults without also changing some of the norms surrounding the importance of preserving one's honor. This means that the attempts to coordinate on a salient focal point in a coordination problem may be constrained to some norms that are possible given the wider web of norms within which the interactions are taking place.

Finally, we should recognize that many norms are neither particularly good nor particularly bad. This is especially the case of many expressive norms, norms that allow us to express our attitudes and values. Many of these norms do, in some sense, perform a function: it is, after all, much easier to express grief and respect at a funeral by wearing black than by having to find the right words. But the norm to wear black is, as coordination norms usually are, arbitrary: any color would have been just as good, as long as it was widely recognized. But although we can – as I just did – talk about expressive norms as having functions, this is to some extent to mis-represent what is going on. The choice of color probably came about through some process that linked symbolic interpretations already existing in our culture to death and grief, and thereby to funerals. But this was very likely not something anyone involved thought of as finding a coordination solution to the problem of how to express, at low cost, the appropriate attitude at a funeral. No doubt some expressive norms do come about as such a deliberate attempt to find an expressive behavior: only consider the norm of using rainbow colors to signify support for rights for homosexuals. But for most of them, this is not the case.

Further, although our social interactions are full of expressive norms, there are contexts in which we need but do not have expressive norms. This is an obvious case of the problem that not all problems seem to generate a norm to solve them. For example, although we know what color to wear at funerals, we still lack a norm for how to properly express our sympathy with someone grieving the loss of a loved one. Many have testified to how this makes them feel so awkward and afraid of saying the wrong things that they even start to avoid the grieving person altogether. Clearly, there is a need for a norm here, and yet, none has emerged.

Conflicts over social norms

Social norms have real consequences for people. In any given situation, different people will benefit depending on which social norm that they and others take to be appropriate for that situation. Given the ambiguity of most social situations, and the resulting ambiguity in what social norm applies, there is quite often conflict over the interpretation of the situation. The passionate struggle over issues about symbolic value and social norms have been analyzed by rational choice and non-rational choice theorists alike (compare, for example, Chong (2000) and Kerzer (1996)), and despite very different theoretical starting points, they tend to emphasize very similar things: symbolic value and social norms have consequences for people in terms of material benefits and social status, and this can make them the focus of intense conflict. In particular, as Chong argues, the people who will

be most resistant to a change in norms are those that would fare worst under the new norms. This, as we will see in the next section, is an important insight for a successful development process. These strategic attempts to influence what norms others accept is often conscious for some agents, but there is no reason to think that everyone has a strategic attitude towards the norms in question. It might not even be the case that any of the agents are deliberately trying to manipulate the norms. When we are uncertain about which norm that applies in a situation, we often rely on what was done in previous situations similar to the current one. If a particular norm was applied before, we take it to be appropriate in the current situation too. But since people have different experiences, they can differ on what they take the appropriate norm to be, and all feel entirely justified in their insistence on their preferred norm. For example, in a study of competitive decision-making groups, different norms emerged in different groups, depending on the experiences in previous rounds (Bettenhausen and Murnigan 1985). In other cases, obviously, the manipulation is conscious. For example, when a company wants to cut wages, management generally prefers to ascribe the need for cost cuts to a difficult market situation, rather than to management failures. They try to trigger the norm of sharing burdens equally rather than the norm of rewards and punishment according to merit, and they can do so by choosing to ascribe the need for cuts to an external cause rather than an internal management one (see for example Bicchieri 2006, p 78).

How can we influence social norms?

The success of development efforts often depends on whether changes fit with or goes against pre-existing social norms. Therefore, development economists must consider how to influence social norms themselves. Social policy makers are becoming more and more aware of the importance of influencing social norms in order to achieve their goals. Our understanding of how to effectively influence social norms is, however, still very incomplete. This section will outline relevant strategies; some are already used by policy programs that attempt to change social norms, others have not yet been much explored in the literature and by policy makers but seem plausible given the nature of social norms.

Social norms influence our behavior both through our reflective, conscious mind, and through our more automatic, habitual system. Similarly, we can influence social norms by affecting both what people think, when in a reflective mode, and their more automatic, non-conscious responses to choice situations. Most strategies for influencing social norms rely on both, to differing degrees.

The automatic system is responsive to clues from the environment in ways we are often not conscious of. For example, we know that social norm compliance often requires that our attention is drawn to the particular social norm in question and to how it applies in the context at hand. A crucial factor in influencing behavior is the direction of attention. Since social situations don't come with an explicit interpretation sign attached to them, and we are constantly flooded by stimuli that we have to attend to, drawing attention to a particular interpretation and the norms associated with it can have a significant impact. And even if it is generally accepted that a particular norm applies, people's attention to that norm and its requirements will vary, because they have so much else on their mind. Consequently, experiments show that if people are primed to focus on a particular social norm generally accepted in their society, they are much more likely to behave in accordance with it. The famous littering experiments by Cialdini et al., for example, show among other things that most people are sensitive to what others do and refrain from littering in a clean environment but not in one which is already dirty, but if they were primed to focus on the social norm against littering by handbills that drew attention to the normative requirement, they were even more likely to refrain from littering. Further, observing behavior that drew attention to the strong social disapproval of littering had a very strong effect: watching someone (an experiment confederate) pick up someone else's litter and put it in the bin made almost everyone refrain from littering, even in an already very littered one (Cialdini et al 1990).

In contrast, the strategies discussed below are more about the reflective decisions that people make, although some of their impact probably stems from how they affect our automatic responses too. The strategies can be grouped together into different categories, associated with some relevant feature(s) of social norms. I devote a separate sub-section to each category.

Information about what others do

One important feature of social norms is that they are based on expectations and beliefs about what others do. Therefore, information about what others do tend to be important.

The most common strategy is so far probably social norms marketing, which is based on the fact that information about what others do tend to have a great effect on behavior. This strategy has been used to decrease problematic behaviors like smoking (Zhang et al 2010), binge-drinking (De Jong et al 2006, Haines and Barker 2003, Moreira et al 2009, Turner et al 2008, although see also De Jong et al 2009), and domestic violence (WHO 2009). The strategy uses general marketing principles, through posters, flyers, and advertisements in newspapers, magazines and TV. But sometimes more

innovative marketing methods have been used, to good effect. For example, in Brazil, a soap opera on TV was used in attempt to promote gender equality (Ricardo et al 2010). The idea is to affect people's views about what others do and consider appropriate behavior, and information about negative consequences of the behavior itself, both for oneself and for others. This strategy is widely used for changing the social norms that underlie problematic health behaviors, such as smoking and excessive drinking. Learning that, contrary to one's previous belief, a majority have negative attitudes towards being subjected to passive smoking, or that the majority of university and college students don't binge drink, have a powerful effect on people, because that information corrects a mis-formed belief about what the social norm actually is. Campaigns like these have been evaluated with positive results. For example, the 'Most of Us Wear Seat-Belts Campaign' informed people that 85% used a seat-belt. The general belief, as shown by an initial survey, was that only about 60% did so. The campaign was successful in increasing the use of seat-belts (Linkenbach and Perkins 2003, Dolan et al 2010) Other campaigns, like those against domestic violence, are harder to evaluate, because they often take place in conjunction with other measures aimed at reducing domestic violence, and because attitudes towards violence, rather than actual incidences of violence, is usually used as the dependent variable (WHO 2009). However, one of the lessons to be learned from these campaigns and those discussed previously is that information about the negative consequences one's behavior has for others sometimes is particularly effective. Campaigns that highlight the negative health impact of passive smoking have been quite effective, and campaigns against domestic violence were more effective when they emphasized the negative impact on children of witnessing domestic violence (WHO 2009).

There is also a risk of a backlash from increased publicity of norm violations. The normative requirement inherent in a social norm tends to be distinctively social in that people take its normative force to be high partly because others do so too, and because others tend to comply with it. For example, one of the reasons people are happy to pay their taxes honestly is that they believe others do so too (Scholtz and Lubell 1998). But this means that one of the problems with newspaper articles on tax or social insurance cheaters is that they tend to create the impression that most people are cheaters, and that undermines the social norm to pay one's taxes and be honest in ones dealings with the social insurance system. Similarly, Cialdini (2003) report on an experiment about information about wood theft in a national park. Two different signs to encourage people to not steal wood were used: one showed three thieves stealing wood, the other showed one thief doing so. The first sign unfortunately gave the impression that there is a social norm to steal wood, and *increased* the amount of wood stolen with 7.92%, while the other increased it by 1.67%. Informing about or even creating an impression that there is a bad norm can be contra-productive. This,

obviously, poses a bit of a dilemma for policy-makers: if there is a bad norm and they want to change it, how can they do that, if even talking about the bad norm might reinforce it? If there is a wide-spread but mistaken belief that the majority supports the bad norm or behaves that way, information that corrects that mistaken belief can be very effective, as we've seen in examples of binge-drinking and seatbelt use. If most people do pay their taxes, it can thus be efficient to focus on that message, rather than to focus on the tax evaders. But when most people do comply with a bad norm, information about this fact is likely to reinforce rather than weaken the bad norm.

When policy-makers provide information that corrects mistaken beliefs about a social norm, but the norm in question concerns behavior that is hard to observe, the message might often need to be repeated (Dolan et al 2010). For example, a program aimed at making households use less electricity send letters to 80 000 households with comparisons between how much that household used and how much its neighbors used. This reduced the energy consumption with 2%, relative to the baseline. However, it is hard to observe other people's energy consumption, and the comparative information thus became less salient as time went by. As a result, the energy consumption crept back up after a few months, and went down again when households received the next letter, reminding them of the comparative information (Allcott 2011).

Social information – such as informing people about how few actually engage in and support binge-drinking on university campuses – can also be used to make people compare their own behavior against a standard. This is sometimes referred to as *descriptive normative information:* information about how your behavior measures up in comparison with what others do. It is descriptive information because you are told about others' behavior, but it is also normative, in that an explicit comparison is made that is quite explicitly supposed to make you adjust your behavior. For example, in the city of Adelaide, Australia, residents receive letters specifying how much electricity they are using, and how that usage compares with other households of the same type. These letters also contain advice about how one can lower ones electricity costs.

However, research shows that descriptive normative information of this kind often has a boomerang effect. The information is aimed at making those who perform below the average increase their compliance efforts. But those who find out that they perform better than average tend to take this information as a sign that they can *lower* their efforts, which negatively affects the overall outcome. However, when high-performers get social approval for their efforts, this boomerang effect is avoided (Schultz et al 2007). Instead of giving information about average performance, one can also give information about selected other groups, to make their behavior salient as a point of comparison. For example, a study that measured the effect of social information in a public goods

game, found that the most effective information was that from the 90th to the 95th percentile (Shang and Croson 2009).

Social marketing campaigns are part of a broader field called 'entertainment education' – E-E. This field covers for example using tv-fiction to promote behavioral change, like in the pioneering work by Miguel Sabido, who between 1975 and 1985 produced seven Mexican soap operas with social messages for Mexico's largest television network Televisa. These soap operas got large audiences.

They were broadcast at Mexico's largest television network Televisa and were large audience successes (Japhet 1999, Tufte 2000). Another example is the use of telenovelas in Brazil to draw attention to social issues, like in Gloria Perez work, that deals with, among other things, issues like that of street kids and of the muslim world. A recent and very successful case is that of the NGO 'Puntos de Encuentro' who has created the first Nicaraguan telenovela, called *El Sexto Sentido* and thereby put on the agenda several social issues, in particular for young people. The telenovela was enormously successful, to the point where it was the most popular tv program for the youth audience at all (Rodrigues, forthcoming). UNICEF has also used E-E strategically in many places, drawing attention to issues, sending social messages and mobilizing support for change. For example, they have developed regional campaigns that are centered around comic-figures: Sara in Africa and Meena in Asia.

Another, immensely influential example, is that of Soul City in South Africa. Created by two doctors who were frustrated by their lack of influence over the basic health behaviors, the project uses media and connections to various community organizations to promote children's and women's health. The first tv and radio series was sent in 1994, and it was combined with newspaper columns, and then by educational material. This first series has since then been exported to many other countries, including Zambia, Mozambique, Namibia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. The first series was then followed by others. A key feature of the Soul City work process is what the founder Japhet calls a 'cyclical communication strategy': the audience, expert researchers and community and other organizations provide input on the messages and how to promote them in a quite participatory process, and the outputs from the campaigns are then used as further inputs for the next campaign (Japhet 1999).

Information about what others think

Given that information about what others do can be so effective in changing a social norm, one would expect that information about what others think could be equally effective. However, it is not so easy to start the process of unravelling an equilibrium based on pluralistic ignorance. To do that, we must somehow have access to information about what people actually think. But the main problem in such cases is exactly that it is hard to know what people think unless they express those thoughts in words or behavior. If nobody dares to say what they think or act in the way they prefer, then it is very hard to identify when we do have a case of pluralistic ignorance. This is why the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union was such a surprise to everyone, people on the ground as well as political experts. So although it might have been good to be able to identify cases of pluralistic ignorance and initiate the change process by revealing what people actually think, the best we can hope for is usually just to understand what is happening when the process has already spontaneously started. However, if people do reveal their actual values and preferences to policy makers or representatives in contexts of anonymity or protection, then this might allow policy makers to identify cases of pluralistic ignorance. Given the taboo against even raising the question of whether the norm is right, it might actually be easier for outsiders to raise the topic, since they are not bound by the norm. Policy makers can also strengthen people's ability to withstand sanctions for violations of the perceived norm – by providing them with better outside options, greater anonymity, etc. – and this is likely to lead to a greater number of norm violations. If the level of sanctioning expected is not forthcoming, then the mistaken beliefs are revealed as such, and the norm will quickly unravel. However, the number of norm violations might have to be quite substantial in order for people to stop sanctioning out of their need to be seen to uphold the norm they believe to exist.

Utilizing social pressure

Social norms are upheld by various sanctions of violations. When one group member's behavior is likely to cause trouble for the others, it is quite likely that they will put pressure on that member to change behavior. This can be used by policy makers, although it involves ethical issues that need to be addressed carefully from case to case.

Social pressure sustains good and bad norms alike, and can be used against bad norms. A traditional and often effective form of using social norms to change behavior is to use collective punishment: one group member misbehaves, the whole group is punished. This obviously makes the group

members exert pressure on each other to behave in the desired way. For example, Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit uses a US program called The Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV), which says that if a gang member commits a murder, the police will target the whole group for a whole set of offences, often unrelated to the murder, like drugs, parole probations, and weapon possession (Dolan et al 2010). Sometimes the ethical concerns associated with using peer pressure in this way can be quite weighty. One criticism of the otherwise widely acclaimed micro-loan system in developing countries is that since loan-takers often don't have anything to put up as security for the loan, a group takes a joint loan, and if one member is tempted to renege on their commitment, the others will put pressure on him or her not to, since they would be responsible for the loan. As a result, people can be pressured into paying back a loan even in desperate circumstances when they really need the money for survival.

The sanctioning system can be strengthened in other, and perhaps more direct, ways as well. This can be done by making norm violations easier to detect, and/or by increasing the publicity of having been caught violating a norm, for example by making names of violators public. Of course our decisions must reflect whether we think increased publicity of social norms violations would be effective, and whether it is desirable, all things considered. Some forms of public shaming that were considered quite efficient are also nowadays considered cruel and inappropriate, and others questionable, such as the publicizing of names of convicted sex offenders on websites, either by the government or by private individuals. We should also bear in mind the possibility of crowding out effects (Frey and Jegen 2001) that actually decrease overall compliance when violations are sanctioned more heavily.

Changing the symbolic meaning

The symbolic nature of social norm behavior provides another way of influencing such norms. Somehow change the symbolic meaning of a behavior, and you manage to change the social norm. When complying with a social norm is costly to those involved, it is sometimes enough to make the interpretation of the social meaning ambiguous. If people have the opportunity to invoke an alternative social meaning, according to which the behavior in question is not desirable, they may be able to violate the norm without incurring sanctions. When social norms conflict, people are much more hesitant to sanction violations of one of them, since what violates one of the norms can be a case of complying with the other. The social norm that men of the Irish nobility defend their honor after an insult by fighting a duel was obviously destructive, even after the Code Duello had managed to limit some of the worst aspects: after all, people still fired guns at each other. One thing that contributed to the end of duels in the American South, where a similar honor culture required that

men fight duels to defend their honor, was a rule that men who had fought duels were not allowed to hold public office. As holding public office was seen as part of what a responsible male aristocrat was supposed to do, men could now claim that they refused to fight a duel not because they lacked the courage to do so, but because they had a responsibility to their title and social position to hold public office. However, it should also be noted that since the rules were seldom enforced, it is uncertain how much of the change in the duel norm that was caused by this particular rule (Lessig 1995). But in Britain, a somewhat similar rule was more effective in changing the tendency among military men to fight duels: military pensions were not paid to widows of military men who had died in duels. A military man could therefore credibly argue that he did not want to fight a duel because of his concerns for his widow, in case he was killed (Shoemaker 2002).

The literature on social norms in relation to law also stresses the symbolic meaning, in this case, of giving a particular behavior the status of being legally prohibited or legally required. Doing so can have a powerful symbolic effect in that it shows social approval or disapproval of the behavior. For example, giving subsidies to voluntary contributions to public goods, as in the example of some green taxes, can crowd in a social norm of environmentally friendly behavior (Rege 2004). Another example is that of how a change in the Norwegian anti-smoking law had a greater effect on smoking behavior than anticipated, because it crowded in a social norm against smoking. The law change concerned forbidding smoking in many public places, but resulted in a significant change in smoking behavior in private homes as well, where the law didn't apply. Nyborg and Rege speculate that non-smokers' negative attitudes towards being subjected to passive smoking depends partly on how used they are to this, that is, to whether they perceive it as normal. When smoking was forbidden in many public places, it no longer was normal for non-smokers to be subjected to passive smoking, and that resulted in stronger negative attitudes to being subjected to it. After a while, that negative attitude became outright disapproval. As a result, behavior in the home changed, so that people are much less likely to smoke among non-smokers (Nyborg and Rege 2003). A norm is crowded out when a policy gives people external incentives for norm compliance, with the result that people who originally were willing to comply with the norm because they had internalized it and felt normatively obliged to, instead become focused only on the external incentives, to the extent that they are willing to comply only if they gain financially or otherwise from complying. People generally have a need for a reasonably good self-image, and are reluctant to act in ways that conflict with that self-image. This means that they are motivated to comply with norms that they have internalized. However, external reward or sanctions can change the symbolic meaning of actions, so that an action that was previously considered in conflict with that self-image no longer is. For example, a tax on or fee for a behavior that was previously condemned as a violation of a social norm can make

that behavior take on the meaning of a simple market exchange (Nyborg 2003). One example is that of a child care center that had trouble with parents picking up their children too late, and therefore introduced a fine for late pick-ups. The fine was intended to decrease the number of times child care staff had to stay after hours to look after children whose parents were late, but had the opposite effect. Before the fine, parents felt guilty about arriving late, and did their best to avoid it. The fine, on the other hand, was seen as just another fee for child care services: you can have your children at child care a little longer if you pay an extra fee. Parents were happy to pay the extra fee, and thus made less of an effort to arrive on time (Gneezy and Rustichini 2000). Other studies have shown that it is critical whether people perceive the fees to cover the extra cost their behavior causes or not. If the fee is perceived to cover the cost, people pay it whenever they find it worthwhile to do so. If the fee is not perceived to cover the cost (for example, when people are told that it does not), then people are no longer inclined to behave in the way that incurs the fee. It is thus not the fee itself, but the symbolic importance of it, that drives behavior (Nyborg 2003).

Conflicts between norms

The case of dueling illustrated how a conflict between norms could be used to change behavior by making the meaning of a supposed violation of one (undesirable) norm ambiguous in that it could mean either a violation of that norm and compliance with another, also accepted, norm. Norm conflicts like these are common, and difficult. For example, gender norms sometimes conflict with norms about the "good worker", as when a good worker is supposed to be able to work long hours on short notice, which is impossible for people who are also expected to have child care responsibilities, or when employees are expected to negotiate about their individual salaries, but women who do so are judged to be un-feminine and aggressive. Quite often, failure to consciously acknowledge some of the norms in play – like those of femininity – mean that some people are trapped between the norms - damned if they do, damned if they don't.

One option would be to try to redefine what one norm requires: for example, if good workers are supposed to use collective bargaining, or if negotiating about one's salary was seen as supporting one's family, then salary negotiations would perhaps not pose such a problem for women. If the norms about fatherhood were to require that fathers spent time with their children, then the norm about good workers would have to change to accommodate the fact that all employees who were also parents have care responsibilities. This is indeed one of the goals of policies about parental leave rather than just maternity leave: by including the father in the care of the child from the

beginning, policy makers are both encouraging a caring bond between father and child, and sending a message to employers that parents of both sexes are expected to be actively involved in the care of their children and sometimes absent from work for that reason. These types of policies change the incentives involved for all involved agents: fathers who have been involved in caring for their children from an early stage tend to find it more costly to be away from their children, and when other fathers are also home more, they face less sanctions from their employers; employers no longer have such a strong incentive to discriminate against women because both men and women are likely to stay home with children; women have stronger incentives to work since they both face less discriminatory expectations and are no longer carrying the whole burden of managing both work and care for children.

But sometimes the focus is on the norm itself, rather than changing the incentives for different types of behaviors related to the norm. Some of the work against domestic violence illustrate this problem. Campaigns to change the norms that males have a right to "correct" women's behavior through violence and that sexual violence is part of masculinity have focused on the fact that norms are determined by people's expectations about what others do and think and what they take others to expect of them. By making men take a public stance against violence they change the view that most men use violence or think it is justified to use it. Campaigns such as Women's Aid's "Real Man" (Women's Aid 2013) target the norm of masculinity explicitly, by trying to redefine what a "real" man does and does not do. These campaigns have unfortunately not been as thoroughly evaluated as the campaigns about health behaviors, partly because the dependent variable in surveys tend to be attitudes towards violence rather than actual incidences of violence, and partly because these interventions tend to be part of larger campaigns and thus hard to evaluate separately.

Fafchamps (2011) has drawn attention to how norm conflicts affect the market economy and how it can be a cause of corruption. Studies of the changes in social norms as a society goes from a self-provision farming economy to a market economy with large firms show that the social norms have to change several times, and there are likely to be contradictory norms existing at any given time. For example, the first step from self-provision to that of small entrepreneurial businesses involves changing norms of delayed reciprocity and loyalty to kin to norms of contract obligations, immediate reciprocity (payment for goods and services), and opportunism. The next step to large firms involve yet another change in social norms: as important as opportunism and individual initiative are to entrepreneurship, following rules and discipline are to wage employment in a large firm (Fafchamps 2011). There are thus many opportunities for norm conflict, and it is not necessarily straight-forward to move people from one type of work to another. When workers in large firms are not used to the

way work is organized in a modern economy, they require much more supervision and control, which increases the costs for the employers. As a result, firms have spent more on managing their workers in sub-Saharan African manufacturing companies than they do in similar companies in middle-income countries (Fafchamps and Soderbom 2006). The fact that different norms are appropriate and expected in different economic work conditions can give rise to confusion and corruption. Fafchamps (2011) offers the following example: as an entrepreneur, it is essential that you are good at identifying possibilities for mutually beneficial exchanges: spot a market for some good or service you can provide, and swiftly move in to offer that good or service. But if a person who are used to such norms take a job as a civil servant, and is faced with a businessman in need of an import license quickly, the civil servant will spot the opportunity to provide that license with extra speed for a small fee, by putting that license application at the top of the queue. As a small business entrepreneur, this is natural behavior, but for a civil servant, it is corruption. The corruption thus stems from applying norms from one domain to a different one. Nepotism is another example: it relies on the use of social norms about gift exchange and loyalty to kin instead of those of fulfilling your assigned tasks impartially. For public service integrity, the schema governing the understanding of the situation has to change, so that a refusal to use one's office to benefit kin is seen as a virtue of public service rather than as a failure to discharge ones family duties. As Fafchamps points out, during a development process, people must thus not only learn new norms, but also which norms apply when and where, and they need to do this in a changing environment in which they don't have access to a lot of role models. Given the strong norms of sharing, there is also pressure on those with high-income jobs to use that income – and sometimes to abuse office to generate more money – for gifts to kin and friends. These gifts are in line with the objections to unequal living-standards that generally characterize communities with egalitarian, gift-giving norms, and the redistributive effect of such sharing serves an important function as social insurance in societies in which the government does not provide much in terms of security. It might therefore be the case that in order to combat the corrupting sharing norms, the government must provide greater social security, so that the sharing is not as important. As noted, the more that is at stake for those who stand to lose from a change in norms, the greater their resistance to norm change is likely to be.

Changing the signaling function

Another way to influence social norms is to influence the signaling function of norm-related behavior. A particular behavior serves as a signal only if there is an audience that observes the behavior. By broadening or shrinking the audience, one can therefore affect the value of a particular

behavior as a signal. For example, some American schools that want to stop students from bringing guns to school increase the sanctions against those found out to have brought guns. Standard economic theory suggests that increasing the costs of bringing guns to school would mean fewer students would engage in that behavior. But these measures are often found to have a limited effect (Blumstein and Cork 1996). Bringing guns to school is often seen as desirable in the first place because it signals that you are brave and defiant against authorities. If you are willing to risk the punishment, you are a hero among your peers. Increasing the sanctions thus increases not only the costs, but also the signaling value, of bringing a gun to school. The signal depends on the symbolic meaning of the behavior, and increased sanctions reinforce the symbolic meaning of bringing a gun to school (courage and a willingness to defy authorities) and of not doing so (fear), rather than undermine those meanings (for a discussion of the social meaning of bringing guns to school, see Kahan 1998). A different strategy is to offer money for information about who had brought a gun. This has turned out to be more effective (Kahan 1998). Students who before had had no incentive to dub in their heroes suddenly posed a threat to said heroes, because of their financial incentive. The only way for students who brought guns to be reasonably safe from detection would therefore be to limit the number of students who know about the guns. And that, of course, means that the signal loses a lot of its value: if it can no longer be made widely known that you were brave and rebellious enough to bring a gun to school, you will no longer enjoy the reputation that such behavior would previously have earned you. (Note also that as those with guns no longer can show them to others, others do not feel such a need to arm themselves in response (Blumstein and Cork 1996).

In general, policy makers can change a particular signaling equilibrium by either increasing the cost of sending the signals (in which case fewer people will signal), or by decreasing the cost of failing to signal (that is, making it less likely that people who fail to signal will suffer ostracism or other sanctions because they are thought to be "bad" types). For example, the existence of welfare payments can allow people to escape a situation in which they have to comply with community norms in order to not suffer ostracism and as a result lose all their income and employment opportunities. In fact, if enough people realize that they have an escape route and make decisions that violate the community norms, the sanctions disappear, and they retain opportunities for beneficial relationship without anyone even using the welfare payments! (Posner 2000, p 210).

Changing incentives

Norm entrepreneurs are also often crucial for attempts to change norms. One way to change a social norm is therefore to change the incentive structure that these individuals face so that they prefer to engage in norm-changing behavior. This can be done by offering help against sanctions, or by

offering rewards. What will work obviously depends on the case at hand, and the kind of sanctions the potential norm entrepreneurs risk. One thing that is important is of course that there is safety in numbers. The risk of sanctions – and often the severity of those sanctions – is much higher if only a few people change their behavior. One possibility is therefore to facilitate collective action among a big enough group of would-be norm entrepreneurs. This strategy has for example been used in the case of female genital mutilation: the first few girls who were not circumcised would not be able to find husbands. But if enough of families pledged that they would not circumcise their daughters, and would refuse to let their sons marry circumcised girls, there would be a "marriage market" for uncircumcised girls, and the terrible sanction of remaining unmarried could be avoided (Mackie 2000).

As the previous example illustrated, it is not only the incentives of the norm entrepreneurs that need to be considered, but also – indeed, especially – the incentives of the people whose behavior one is trying to change. Just as it sometimes is a waste of time and money to try to implement policy changes without considering how the current social norms could hinder those efforts, it is often important that policy-makers consider the broader context in which the target group lives and acts. If people are relying on a particular way of life and doing things, expressed in and upheld by a set of social norms, then they are likely to resist attempts to change those norms. Some people gain and others lose when social norms change. Successful social norm change requires that we pay close attention to the losers, and sometimes, we should consider what can be done to make the change less costly to them.

Indeed, a quite detailed understanding of the target audience is often necessary. People differ with respect to the incentives they face, their attitudes, beliefs and values. Therefore, a successful attempt to change social norms often depends on understanding exactly whose behavior it is one is trying to change, what reasons they might have for resisting that change, and what can be done to lessen that resistance.

Getting the message across

People are often sensitive to *who* it is that delivers a message. The message is much more likely to be listened to if it is delivered by someone they respect or can relate to. Sometimes that means an authority figure or an expert, in other cases, it might be friends, family members, or someone with the same background or experiences.

The Ceasefire program and other similar programs, for example, target gun violence among gangs by exposing the gang members to the wider norms in their community and drawing attention to how their behavior affects others and clash with these norms. But the message would not be effective if given as a lecture by a policy or other government official. Instead, gang members have to come to face-to-face meetings with people from their community, relatives of the victim, and ex-offenders, who talk about the effects of gang violence. It works best when the participants are people the offender respect or can relate to, as when a mother of another killed gang member talked about her grief and pointed out that if the offender didn't stop, he would cause his own mother that grief and she would be the one standing there talking about her dead son. The Ceasefire program was first introduced in Boston in 1996, and a later evaluation found that the program had reduced the average number of monthly youth homicides by 63%. More recent evaluations also show a great impact: shootings and murders dropped between 41% and 73% in Chicago and Baltimore, and although not all of that was attributable directly to the Ceasefire program, a reduction of about 17% - 35% was (see Kennedy et al 2001, Skogan et al 2008). Further, the improvements don't seem to be temporary, but long-lasting. There really is a new, less violent norm.

Other examples of features policy-makers might consider when deciding who should function as a messenger to a particular group includes whether the messenger is of the same ethnic back-ground, or has similar experiences (like having been members of or associated with criminal gangs), as the target audience. In cases where people are suspicious of government interventions, results might also be more successful if a non-governmental organization took the lead in the implementation of the intervention (Dylan et al 2010).

Who delivers the message matters, but so does the audience to whom the message is directed. Attempts to make people change behavior by using social norms work best if the norm is related to the audience in question. When a hotel room had a sign that asked people to save the environment by re-using their towels, only 35.1% did so. But when the message was more closely targeted towards the audience (e.g., most people in my situation), the result was better. If the sign said that most guests in the hotel re-used their towels, 44.1% complied, and if it said that most previous guests of *that particular room* had done so, 49.3% complied (Cialdini 2003, also cited in Dolan et al 2010). In general, as Dolan et al point out, it's important to identify just whose behavior you are trying to change. Different segments of the population are likely to have different attitudes, beliefs and behavior. Furthermore, they are likely to differ with respect to the choices they face, the structural circumstances that affect what they can reasonably do and what would be very costly or difficult for them.

Connecting the new norm with other norms and history

It is often hard to make people accept a new norm if the norm in question seems very alien to them. We often prefer the familiar to the new, and a new norm is also much more likely to be accepted if it "fits" with other norms and historical context. It can thus be important to invest time and effort into considering how a new norm that policy makers want a group of people to adopt fits both with what the group considers normatively justified in general, and with behaviors that group members have already experience of. For example, when the Communist Party in China wanted to change the previously common practice that public officials held office until they died or were ousted, in favor of a system in which people retired, peacefully, at a certain age, they paid particular attention to how a new norm of retirement fitted with other norms and historical context (the retirement norm is a legal rather than a social norm, strictly speaking, but to be successful it needed to become a social norm too) (Manion 1993). On the basis of this case study, Manion lists 5 factors as particularly important for the success of attempts to create a new norm through policy. The first one is that the new norm must be shown to be associated with some already existing norms. The second is that policy makers provide an argument for the new norm: this, obviously, appeals to the rational, deliberate capacity for norm change. The third and fourth factors concern the use of an example: the use of exemplary rules that tie the new norm to history by showing how the new rule has been used and accepted in various contexts before, and the use of exemplary conformers, widely esteemed people who have behaved in the way the new norm dictates. Finally, it is important to tie the new norm to a meta-norm, that is, to present it as fitting with the already generally accepted normative framework. All of these factors concern the importance of lessening the impression that the new norm is alien to the way of thinking that is already prevalent in the community. The extent to which each factor is necessary will obviously depend on the context. But the Chinese Communist party used all five, and the new norm was quite quickly established and accepted.

The importance of ensuring that the new norms or life-style do not conflict too much with pre-existing norms is also pointed out in work on the transition from traditional rural communities. For example, Platteau (2000, 2009) drew attention to the fact that traditional rural communities often have strong egalitarian norms. These norms usually involve communal ownership of land and strong reciprocal relationships where people help each other and the community functions as a social insurance system. The social and material status among members is quite equal, and since most things are shared, gains to one member tend to be thought of as simultaneously a loss to someone else. If a member got too strong or rich, they would no longer be potentially in need of assistance,

and could therefore no longer be counted on to assist others. Behavior that threatens the equal status of members is therefore sanctioned. A proportion of the population have generally internalized the norms as genuine moral requirements, so norm violations tend to evoke feelings of guilt and shame in violators and moral outrage among observers, and violations are often sanctioned both in order to protect the existing system, and from a sense of justice (Frey 1997, Henrich et al 2001, 2006). However, when attempts are made to transform the economy towards a system where land is owned privately by individuals, and employment opportunities open up outside of the traditional farming sphere, these egalitarian norms become a serious problem. As Haagsma and Mouche (2013) argue, when outside employment opportunities become available to some but not all, the egalitarian norms are likely to be an obstacle, because making use of those opportunities is seen as violations of the egalitarian norms and violators are sanctioned. Whether there will be a shift towards a new way of life or whether the traditional way of life will hold strong depends on two factors: a) how strongly attached the more traditional members are to the egalitarian norms and how severely they will sanction norm violators, and b) how large the proportion is to whom these new opportunities are open. If a majority have access to the new opportunities and begin to take advantage of them, the need to lessen cognitive dissonance will decrease the attachment to the old norms (Haagsma and Mouche 2013). This suggests one way of influencing the transition: namely, by making sure the new opportunities are available to a majority and to ensure as much as possible of a fit between the new way of doing things and already existing norms. This was indeed what happened in the Samburu district of Kenya, where traditional pastoralists transformed their land tenure from a communal system to a system of private property. The first people to push for such a move were people with education and employment experience outside of the traditional community, and they wanted land as a way of making money. The traditional elders resisted, first by social sanctions such as gossip and criticism, but, when that didn't work, even by threatening that the norm violators would be cursed or killed if they didn't stop. The government, however, intervened and distributed land equally to all community households (Lesorogol 2003). Note that the government's solution was more in line with the egalitarian norms: instead of benefiting those who had wealth to buy land rights and threaten the egalitarian system, they divided the land equally. This solution fitted much better with the existing norms, and was indeed accepted as a compromise by all parties. The equal distribution also meant that everybody stood to benefit from the transition. Today, the majority of the people in the district are positive to private property and modernization (Haagsma and Mouche 2013).

The effects of laws

Creating a law against a particular behavior can influence behavior in several different ways. The obvious one is of course that people avoid behaving in the way made illegal in order to avoid punishment by the criminal justice system. But a long list of lawyers, social scientists and philosophers writing on the relationship between law and social norms have recently begun to emphasize also the complicated effects that laws have on social norms, and through them, on behavior. For example, McAdams (1997) argue that many norms arise when a) there is a consensus that a particular behavior is desirable, b) there is a risk that the behavior can be observed by others, and c) the consensus and the risk of detection are both common knowledge. When there is consensus about the desirability of a behavior, people will get esteem for performing that behavior (or disesteem for failing to do so). If others can observe your behavior, you therefore have an incentive to perform the behavior. If you didn't know about the consensus, or didn't realize that others could find out what you do, you would however not have that incentive. A law about the behavior can have a crucial expressive function in that it communicates to everyone that the consensus exists, and/or that there is a risk of detection (McAdams 1997). However, it is important to note that the effects of expressive law can be more complicated than this story suggests. For example, if a particular behavior was a signal of being "a good type", a law that mandates that behavior will destroy its signaling value, and can therefore in the long run undermine the norm (Posner 2000).

Facilitating reflection on the negative consequences of bad norms

As mentioned above, when you are trying to change an undesirable norm, it can be very important to make others aware of and reflect on the negative consequences of the norm in question. In the discussion of how the Communist party in China managed to change the norm about retirement, one of the key points was that the party officials were open with and drew attention to the reasons why the norm needed to be changed.

The need for reasons and reflection was a key feature of the Program H Initiative, developed by Instituto Promundo, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, together with other Latin American organizations. The crucial part of the program is to help young men reflect upon – and question – the traditional masculinity norms. The program has been shown to increase safe sex behaviors such as condom use and decreased men's violence against women as well as the number of unplanned pregnancies, among other things. The program aimed at changing both individual attitudes and community

norms. For the former, it built on research showing that three factors were important for young men's attitudes about relationship between men and women: having important relationships to men who modelled more equal gender relations, having a peer group that supported more equal gender relations, and reflecting upon the negative consequences of the norms of *machismo*. As a result, the project concentrated on offering young men opportunities to interact with men who modelled more gender equality, promoting these attitudes in both small groups of young men, and in the wider community, and on creating activities that promoted reflection on the negative consequences of machismo, for example, by sharing and listening to the experiences of young men who have observed domestic violence in their own homes. The last point illustrates the importance of promoting a discussion of the consequences of the bad norm, thus affecting the perception of a normative requirement to comply. But the project obviously also illustrates other issues discussed earlier in this paper; for example, the importance of the messenger (a woman would not have been as effective).

Program H used two different types of interventions: an education-focused campaign, and a social marketing campaign. The first was based on small group sessions led by men who could serve as role models, and had as a central aim the discussion and awareness of the effects of machismo norms. The second was focused on what they called a "lifestyle social marketing" process, aimed at promoting a life-style characterized by more gender equality. This involved working together with the men themselves to identify how they would prefer to receive information, and from where. It was crucial to manage to make it "cool and hip" to have more equal relations with women. Together with SSL International, who makes Durex condoms, PROMUNDO has used these ideas to create a social marketing campaign aimed at changing lifestyle choices (Barker 2003)

The effects of attempting to influence social norms

The team behind the MINDSPACE report on how to influence behavior through policy point out an important ethical issue (Dylan et al 2010). On the one hand, governments influence social norms all the time, so the idea that governments should be neutral towards norms is unrealistic. But governments are usually not aware of how their actions and policies affect social norms, and so the consequences can be the reinforcement or even creation of bad norms. Further, money and effort spent on a democratically decided policy are wasted if the implementation does not take into account existing social norms that prevent a successful implementation. This suggests that governments should pay close attention to social norms, and should attempt to influence them in desirable ways. On the other hand, though, the team points out that this type of subtle manipulation

of people's behavior and use of social pressure can pose a serious ethical issue. They recommend that, as far as it is practically possible, efforts should be made to determine public support for the intervention, for example through public deliberative fora.

However, they also point out that most campaigns to change behavior tend to rely on providing information that allows people to make cognitive, deliberate decisions about whether to change. The people who usually respond well to such campaigns are well-educated and confident about seeking out and assessing new information, that is, people at the upper-end of the socio-economic scale. When the behavioral change concerns something that benefits the individual him-or herself, as in the case of various health-related behaviors, such campaigns therefore have the unintended effect of disproportionately benefiting people from already privileged socio-economic groups. This can increase social inequality. Campaigns that focus on changing the context of choice and which affects social norms can help also those who don't take the traditional type of information on board. Such campaigns can therefore increase equality. In general, whether attempts to influence social norms are seen as legitimate depends on the trust in the policy makers, the way it is done and who is targeted, among other things. It also depends on the perception of fairness. Most people tend to have a strong sense of reciprocity, and attempts to influence behavior are often much more successful if framed as a case of reciprocity: both parties do something for each other. The policy-makers' contribution can for example be about changing the structural conditions that used to make the behavior much more costly, or in providing help to those who want to make the change.

Dylan et al focus on the ethics of policies that concern behavioral changes that would benefit the targeted individuals themselves. Such policies are mostly open to the accusation of manipulation and paternalism. But there are policies about social norm change that pose additional ethical problems. Many cases of social norm change concern changes in behavior that mostly benefit others than those who are supposed to change, or when some are left worse off by the social norm change because the previous norm provided them with important resources. Social norms often have winners and losers. Sometimes, those who lose from a social norm change have a reasonable claim for some sort of compensation. This could in particular be the case if the change has occurred by providing some, but not everyone, with new opportunities that break up old cooperative relationships in favor of new ones, in which not everyone involved in the former ones are included. If, as in the case of egalitarian norms in many traditional farming communities, the old norms provided people with social insurance against poverty, then it may not only be efficient to offer alternative social insurance in order to reduce resistance against the norm change, it may also be ethically important to do so. This argument is not assuming that the status quo is morally neutral in

any way. But it is pointing out that the question of how different people are affected by a social norm change is morally important. Sometimes fairness demands that special care is taken to ensure the well-being of the losers and perhaps measures to provide them, too, with good options.

Concluding remarks

Social norms are everywhere, and have a great impact on human behavior. They can be both a hindrance and a help for development, depending on whether or not changes necessary for development fit with existing important and salient norms. Norms can hinder the education of women or promote it, they can prevent people from taking opportunities for paid employment outside of traditional farming communities or they can help them do so, they can generate corruption or prevent it. Sometimes, norms themselves have to change for development to be possible.

This paper has discussed what norms are and what they do. The key features of social norms thus identified have then been the basis for a subsequent discussion both of how we can explain why and how social norms emerge, persist and change, and of how we can influence social norms. Although knowing how to influence social norms is crucial for policy-makers, the literature only provides very limited suggestions. The paper discusses those ways in which we already do influence social norms and the associated policy practices. However, the paper also identifies, in a more speculative way, possibilities that are not yet explored in the literature, and which might turn out to be useful. But it is also important to keep in mind that influencing social norms can have effects that are ethically problematic.

A few points made are particularly important for those interested in development issues. It is crucial to note that the impact of the new opportunities on pre-existing economic and social relationships will be an important factor for predicting whether norms will hinder the development process or not. We should also be aware of the potential, and often quite likely, struggle over the right to define the interpretation of a situation and the appropriate norms. This involves paying attention to the importance of conflict between norms and of ambiguity with respect to the correct schemata for a situation. These power struggles both often have their roots in and consequences for economic relationships, processes and outcomes.

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