

Diversifying the Meanings of Norms

Another group of commentaries elaborate the intricate meanings of norms, including the comments on classic distinctions between norms and values (Frese, this issue), between descriptive and injunctive norms (Eriksson & Strimling, this issue), between personal and social norms (Peterson & Barreto, this issue), and the roles of “others” and social interactive processes in norm emergence (Postmes, Akkus, & Stroebe, this issue).

Cultural Practices, Norms, and Values

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My starting point of interest and reading the papers in this special issue is the fact that the GLOBE study finds a negative relationships between the “As Is” (cultural practices) and “Should Be” (cultural values) scores in seven out of nine of their culture scales (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Cultural practices are shared perceptions of how people routinely behave in a culture (similar terms used are intersubjective perceptions or descriptive norms) and values are shared ideals of a culture (similar terms are injunctive norms). “As Is” are cultural practices, and “Should Be” refer to values. Moreover, there are clear relationships between the Should Be questions with Schwartz’ value scales (Schwartz, 1999). Hofstede (2001) was not able to differentiate between values and practices when he took IBM’s value survey as a starting point for his cross-cultural work; some of his scales seem to operationalize practices and some other operationalize values (there are high correlations between GLOBE’s and Hofstede’s scales of individualism and power distance, but there is a negative correlation of GLOBE’s uncertainty avoidance and Hofstede’s version of uncertainty avoidance; Hanges, 2004; Hanges & Dickson, 2004; Hofstede, 2001). None of the articles in this special issue discuss the differences between norms, cultural practices, and values in detail. However, the GLOBE study results suggest that we may have to pay attention to differences between cultural practices and cultural values and discuss their (differentiated) functionality. As this commentary needs to be very short, I may not do justice to the intricacies of the meaning of these terms; however, I hope to make a start here in this special issue on norms.

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The concept of descriptive norm as common behaviors in a society helps to get a grasp of the concept of cultural practices (Shteynberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2009; Stephan & Uhlener, 2010). The area of descriptive norms is well developed in social psychology (we use “norms” for short); norms define how people are thinking (shared reality) and behaving, and they control the behavior of people (Shteynberg et al., 2009); they are, therefore, conceptually related to cultural practices (As Is; Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010). Norms are both input as well as output variables in the development of practices: Norms prescribe certain behaviors, and once these behaviors are socially routinized, they become practices. Thus, cultural norms lead to cultural practices and vice versa. Both are inferred by perceptions of common behavior of Others—“how do people think and behave around here?” Some articles in this special issue distinguish between norms and values (e.g., Gelfand & Harrington, Gao et al.). However, other papers may profit from a stronger differentiation between norms and values. For example, at what point is intersubjective agreement about a specific routine a result of values (as suggested by Wan) or a result of norms?

There is an inside–outside differentiation between values and norms; values (I live my values) are inside the person, whereas norms and cultural practices are perceived to be outside the person (I conform to the norms). Consistent outside control of behavior can lead to routines. Once a behavior is routinized, routines can be reinforcing as the Premack principle had shown a long time ago (Premack, 1959). An example is the norm of toothbrushing. At first, toothbrushing is enforced from the outside. After a while, children routinize toothbrushing and may even feel uncomfortable when they are not able to brush their teeth.

A second differentiation is that values are related to what is perceived as morally good or bad, but because they are abstract, they are not directly related to behavior; in contrast, routines are relatively specific. Values may be categorized into systems of thinking about values, as in religions (however, there are also combinations of routines—otherwise one would not find clear factor structures in cultural practices). The transmission process and upkeep of cultural practices and values may be different; for example, Tam in this issue provides ideas of cultural transmissions that are differentiated according to norms as perceived by the parents and their personal values (cf. also Gelfand & Harrington). Norms may be derived from observation of peer groups or aspirational groups (Morris & Liu).

In principle, all types of relationships between values and practices are possible: Values may be aligned to practices or not. It is also possible that people perceive the normative pressures of cultural practices, but are still be critical of them; for example, if they perceive these norms to be too extreme (either too high or too low; Chiu et al., 2010), then a negative correlation between values and practices may appear; this may be the reason why the above-mentioned negative correlation between cultural practices and values appeared in the GLOBE study.

An action regulation perspective (Zacher & Frese, in press) would suggest that the process of the development of cultural practices (cultural routines) may start earlier and is more implicit than the development of cultural values. Norms structure specific developmental tasks that are specific to culture, for example, the developmental task of being a teenager and behave like one in a certain culture (Frese & Stewart, 1984; Havighurst, 1948)—cultural practices as routines can then develop as a result of implicit learning when dealing with these tasks. Cultures will have an impact on developmental tasks as well as on general tasks, for example, tasks that produce norms to deal with a harsh climate (Van der Vliert, 2011). To understand the stickiness and affective quality of cultural practices better, I find the concept of group attention (Shteynberg) fascinating as group attention can help this process of implicit learning. Moreover, I assume that developmental cultural tasks as well as general tasks provide guidance; the higher the homogeneity of a society, the higher is the identification with one’s peer group and the stronger are the cultural practices (Morris & Zhu).

Practices can be rationalized a posteriori moralization, as well as norm activation by identification (Morris & Zhu) and by affective importance that is governed by group attention (Shteynberg). Moreover, stronger socialization tactics by certain cultures (e.g., tight cultures,

Gelfand) and parents (Tan, for example, need for closure, Gelfand & Harrington) may reinforce cultural practices. However, norms and cultural practices may also be understood explicitly, and people may choose to conform or not to conform to specific cultural norms (Gelfand & Harrington, Tan, Morris & Zhu).

There is an additional difference—Values can be distinct from behavior unlike norms that are more prescriptive of concrete behaviors. People usually concentrate on mid-range and somewhat concrete goals (e.g., a manager may think of the increase of the productivity of the group is responsible for); in contrast, values may be on a much higher level and not regulate behavior in the same way as norms (e.g., environmental sustainability values; Zacher & Frese, in press). Practices are typically inferred from behavior, learning of practices is often tacit, and normative pressure on behavior leads to routines; we are, therefore, not always aware of norms (Johnson, Chang, & Lord, 2006; Myers & Davids, 1993). Thus, the effect of practices may be more implicitly regulated (or System 1 regulated; Kahneman, 2003) than the conformity to a system of values.

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Injunctive Versus Functional Inferences From Descriptive Norms: Comment on Gelfand and Harrington

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Social norms theorists make an important distinction between descriptive norms (beliefs about what is the common behavior in a particular reference group) and injunctive norms (beliefs about how one *should* behave to gain social approval and avoid disapproval in the reference group). It has long been argued that descriptive and injunctive norms exert independent motivational forces. Whereas injunctive norms motivate by the promise of social sanctions, descriptive norms have been taken to motivate by inference from what is typical to what is a sensible thing to do (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). This independence is less clear than it may seem at first. In a recent article (Eriksson, Strimling, & Coultas, 2015), we documented a phenomenon that we called the *common-moral association*, which indicates that descriptive and injunctive norms are not processed independently. In a number of studies, we found that information about a behavior being common versus uncommon automatically activates injunctive beliefs and judgments about the behavior being more or less socially approved. The effect also works in the other direction where an indication that a behavior is seen as moral in a community automatically activates the notion that it is common.

An implication of the common-moral association finding is that descriptive norms may motivate behavior by influencing people's beliefs about how one should behave to gain social

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