

Toward Pepitone's Vision of a Normative Social Psychology: What is a Social Norm?

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Pepitone (1976) has offered an analysis of the "crisis" in social psychology and has urged researchers to study normative influence on behavior. However, there is no conceptual consensus about the definition and measurement of social norms. This article reviews several recent definitions of social norms and identifies six conceptual issues concerning the problems of definition that prevent reaching a consensus, including the basic function, kind and specificity of behavior regulated, explicitness, character of sanctions, and the appropriate theoretical explanation of norms. Future directions for research and theorizing leading to a realization of Pepitone's vision are discussed.

Pepitone (1976) has offered a very influential analysis of the so-called "crisis" in social psychology. Pepitone argued that the crisis is best characterized, not as a crisis of "confidence" (as in Elms, 1975), of methodology, of ethics, or even simply of the focus of research; rather, the crisis is a symptom of faulty theoretical analysis:

The core problem, as I see it, has two interrelated components: the failure to distinguish normative from non-normative social behavior, and the misplaced theoretical unit of analysis. (Pepitone, 1976, p. 641)

His argument might be paraphrased as follows: many topics of social-psychological research (including social exchanges, attitude changes, and aggression) are best understood by relating the actions of interest to the beliefs and values of naturally-occurring groups whose individuals are the "subjects" of current research. The behaviors in question are often affected more powerfully by such cultural factors as sex-typing, class membership, and implicit or explicit patterns of social expectation than by variables defined in terms of situational pressures or an individual's instrumental responses. Indeed, Pepitone argued that such behaviors are "more characteristic (e.g., more uniform) of some socio-cultural collective unit than of individuals observed at random" (Pepitone, 1975, p. 642). When these assumptions are granted, it follows that social psychologists are in error when they focus on *intraindividual* dynamics as the basis of explaining social behavior. The "crisis" in social psychology, therefore, represents the symptom of what

sociologists like Mills (1959) have called "psychologism": ignoring the normative dimension of social behavior and misperceiving the fundamental unit of analysis as the individual. Arguing that the conceptual models guiding contemporary research are incapable of accounting for normative social behavior, Pepitone has called social psychologists to work toward what he characterized as a normative and comparative biocultural social psychology.

Recognizing that redirection of theoretical analysis must lead to a restructuring of the character of empirical research, Pepitone devoted much of his paper to an elucidation of the nature of programmatic research in the normative and comparative biocultural style. The ground broken is extensive, but I wish to concentrate on one facet of the new research, namely the establishment of a "normative" emphasis in social psychological research. Pepitone characterized research on normative behavior as involving three stages: First, there needs to be a stage of descriptive research in which the belief and value systems of naturally occurring groups are catalogued and compared. This step is necessary to identify which social behaviors are actually normative. Second, there needs to be a stage of analysis in which the relationship between structural properties of groups and the behaviors of members are specified:

Social psychologists will need to know something about the organization of value and belief systems, what the components are and how they interact. In the analytic stage, we are also interested in the particular conditions under which the values become prescriptively or proscriptively operative and in the sanctions that are applied when they are violated. (Pepitone, 1976, p. 648)

Finally, the third stage will be concerned to discover the origins of normative values and beliefs, including the environmental, economic, biological, socio-political, and psycho-dynamic forces that contribute to the development of normative regulation of social behavior. This is a far-reaching and challenging vision, indeed!

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the progress of Pepitone's first two stages by considering the contemporary state of conceptualization of social norms. That is, in the process of establishing which social behaviors are normative, social psychologists must first reach a working consensus on the conceptual meaning of normative influence, and, second, follow that consensus with maximally precise operational definitions of normative influence that will allow for a testable analysis of the relationships between structural and individual variables. My thesis is that there is no such working consensus in contemporary social psychology because of the theoretical errors Pepitone outlined, and there exist, therefore, no adequate operational definitions of social norms. However, there is in the variety of conceptions of social norm now in circulation, the bases for building the necessary conceptual and operational definitions. First I will illustrate the current dissensus among social psychologists concerning the conceptual definition of social norms.

Second, I will delineate six conceptual issues that must be solved before a working conceptual consensus can be reached. Finally, I will briefly indicate the direction I believe future conceptualization should take in trying to meet the programmatic needs of Pepitone's second stage.

The Current Disagreement in Defining Social Norms

A heuristic example of the hidden problems in defining social norms is the divergence of definitions of social norms offered by recent social psychology textbooks. Consider the differences in glossary definitions of social norms offered by Baron and Byrne (1981), Gergen and Gergen (1981), and Lindgren and Harvey (1981):

Rules indicating what is considered to be acceptable or appropriate behavior for the members of some group. Social norms can be either formal and explicit (e.g., traffic regulations) or informal and implicit (e.g., unspoken rules governing how close we stand to others while engaging in a conversation). (Baron and Byrne, 1981, p. 268)

A widely shared expectation about the appropriateness of a given behavior in a given situation. (Gergen and Gergen, 1981, p. 497)

Behavior form that is shared by members of a recognizable group and that may be considered to be "normal" for that group. (Lindgren and Harvey, 1981, p. 536)

One basic difference readily apparent in these three definitions can be identified with Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) distinction between normative and informational social influence. The definition offered by Lindgren and Harvey characterizes a social norm in informational terms, suggesting a statistical, descriptive concept. Presumably in this conception, a social norm exerts informational social influence. However, the other two definitions characterize a social norm as *prescriptive* in nature; these definitions share the features Deutsch and Gerard called normative social influence. This divergence in definition is very important because social psychologists would be likely to call upon different explanatory mechanisms to account for the effects of a social norm depending on the type of definition chosen.

A second basic feature of this set of definitions is that there is no single element of one definition that appears consistently in all three. First, the single noun used to describe a social norm is variously a "rule" (which connotes specificity, explicitness, and the social character of the concept), and "expectation" (which does not carry the same connotations of specificity and explicitness, and emphasizes the subjective, psychological character of the concept), and a "behavior form" (which will surely send the student back to the textbook hoping for exegetical relief!). Only two of the definitions emphasize that a social norm involves evaluation (Baron and Byrne and Gergen and Gergen indicate that norms concern "appropriateness" of behavior; Lindgren and Harvey do not). Only two of the definitions indicate that a

social norm is a consensual agreement (Gergen and Gergen and Lindgren and Harvey note that social norms are shared, but Baron and Byrne do not). Only two of the definitions indicate that social norms are a property of some group (Baron and Byrne and Lindgren and Harvey specify which individuals would be affected by a social norm, but Gergen and Gergen do not). Finally, despite the emphasis on the literature on conformity cited in each text, the definitions in question tended to emphasize *prescriptions* about behavior but not *proscriptions*. Baron and Byrne's definition explicitly identifies social norms only with what is "acceptable and appropriate"; ironically, this definition probably contradicts the concrete examples a student would supply for traffic regulations ("Don't speed") and proxemics ("Don't violate my personal space") that Baron and Byrne intend as illustrations of the dimensions of formality and explicitness that they mention in the second sentence of their glossary entry. Assuming that "normal" carries its usual connotations, Lindgren and Harvey's definition also designates only "acceptable and appropriate" behavior. Gergen and Gergen fail to specify either pole of "appropriateness."

The divergence in these definitions does not, in my judgement, represent conceptual sloppiness on the part of the authors cited. Rather I believe that the divergence indicates a kind of preparadigmatic pluralism. It is not currently possible to say whether a norm is best characterized as a rule or something more general, whether a norm specifies social expectations of all people or only some, and so forth. It is possible, however, to discern in this diversity the truth of Pepitone's contention about the inappropriateness of seeing the individual as the unit of analysis. That is, the areas of disagreement in these definitions precisely concern the variables that relate the structural properties of natural groups to the conduct of the members. From a sociological point of view, social norms most naturally refer to a consensual view of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of behavior which the group administers through the use of sanctions (Birnbaum and Sagarin, 1976; Broom and Selznick, 1973; Jackson, 1960, 1965; Sherif, 1926/1966; Sherif and Sherif, 1969). Yet the inclusion of these factors into social psychologists' definitions is not uniform. The present state of social psychological theorizing includes, I believe, a fundamental irony; social psychologists generally agree about the process of normative influence (the enormity of the literature on conformity attests to that), but they do not agree about the meaning of the parent concept of the social norm! The result is that the current literature on conformity yields little understanding about the relationship of structural properties of natural groups and the behavior of individuals; it cannot because, in the absence of conceptual connections between these two levels of analysis, psychological social psychology has become almost wholly subjective and (in Pepitone's sense) individualistic.

Let me illustrate my point with Fishbein's model of attitude-behavior relations. In the Fishbein model (Fishbein, 1967), the element of "normative"

influence is specifically included, and, to my reading, there is no reason why the measurements used in the prediction equation could not be structurally based. One could, for example, use Jackson's (1960, 1965) techniques to measure the return potential of the intended behavior, and use such measurements to supply the appropriate "normative" term. But most studies using the Fishbein model operationalize the normative component with individual's subjective impressions of how "others" will respond to them if their behavior were observed. For example, in a study intending to predict whether or not women with unwanted pregnancies would choose to have an abortion (Smetana and Adler, 1980), the subjects supplied data for the normative term by answering on a semantic differential scale how they would *expect* significant others in their life (parents, friends, or clergy) to respond to the knowledge that they had chosen to have an abortion. Such a choice of response makes sense in terms of a technology of prediction, and is not without sociological merit—at least from the viewpoint of a symbolic interactionist. But my point is that such a study does not contribute to our knowledge of the interface of structural properties of groups and the behavior of individuals. To use Pepitone's definition of "normative" influence, such a study is not a study of "normative" social behavior despite the specific inclusion of a term by that name.

Conceptual Issues in the Definition of Social Norms

A comparison of just three definitions illustrates the point that the conceptual issues at stake in defining social norms are often left *unwritten*. One way of uncovering the breadth and character of the current disagreement is to compare and contrast definitions given by psychologists concerned with normative influence. As a result of doing such a comparison, I have formulated six conceptual issues that are raised by recent attempts at definition. I do not claim to have "discovered" these issues; indeed, all of them have been addressed at one time or another. But I believe that one step in making progress toward Pepitone's goal of understanding normative social behavior is to make implicit disagreements into explicit questions for theoretical debate. Table 1 lists the six conceptual issues that need to be addressed for social psychologists to reach a working theoretical consensus regarding what social behavior is to be treated as normative. I have also named the corresponding conceptual dimensions and their poles, and indicated at least one definition of a social norm which exemplifies the poles of each dimension.

Table 1
Six Conceptual Issues Raised in the Definition of Social Norms

Conceptual Dimension	Conceptual Issue	Roles of the Dimension	Examples of Definition ¹
1. Basic Function of the Social Norm	Norms conceived to exert "informational" or "normative" Social Influence	Descriptive to Prescriptive	(Lindgren and Harvey, 1981)
2. Theoretical Orientation in Explaining Social Norms	Norms conceived as social consensus or as individual perceptions	Collective to Individual	(Spencer, 1976 ² ; Smelser, 1967 ³) (Vander Zanden, 1977) (Triandis, 1977)
3. Domain of Behavior Regulated by Social Norms	Norms conceived to set latitudes of acceptable or objectionable behavior	Appropriate to or including Inappropriate	(Spencer, 1976) (Sherif, 1976 ⁴ ; Triandis, 1977)
4. Specification of the Behavior Regulated by Social Norms	Norms conceived as general direction or as specific guidance	General to Specific	(Goode, 1977) (Krech, Crutchfield and Ballachey, 1962)
5. Articulation of the Social Norm	Norms conceived as unspoken understandings or as verbalized standards	Implicit to Explicit	(Elkin and Handel, 1978) (Homans, 1974)
6. Enforcement of the Social Norm	Norms conceived to include sanctions ranging from unspecified expectations to exact rewards or punishments	Unspecified to Specified	(Goode, 1977) (Krech, Crutchfield and Ballachey, 1962)

Definitions cited in the table are quoted in the body of the paper except for the definitions reproduced in the following footnotes.

¹"A rule prescribing how to behave in a particular situation." (Spencer, 1976, p. 598, emphasis added)

²"Norms refer to expectations and standards that regulate the interaction among people. (Smelser, 1967, p. 7, emphasis added)

³"Social norms . . . refer to mutual criteria or measuring rods for evaluating activities, events, beliefs, or objects as acceptable (even ideal) or as objectionable (even to be stamped out). (Sherif, 1976, p. 83, emphasis added)

The Basic Function

The first conceptual issue concerns the basic function of the social norm. The alternative conceptions consider social norms to either exert informational social influence (and, therefore, have primarily a descriptive character) or to exert "normative" social influence in Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) sense of the term (and be primarily prescriptive in character). Deutsch and Gerard express the distinction in these words:

We shall define a *normative social influence* as an influence to conform with the positive expectations of another. An *informational social influence* may be defined as an influence to accept information obtained from another as *evidence* about reality. (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955, p. 629, emphasis in the original)

They clarify the meaning of the key terms of their definition of normative influence as follows:

By positive expectations we mean to refer to those expectations whose fulfillment by another leads to or reinforces positive rather than negative feelings, and whose nonfulfillment leads to the opposite, to alienation rather than solidarity; conformity to negative expectations on the other hand, leads to or reinforces negative rather than positive feelings. The term *another* is being used inclusively to refer to "another person," to a "group," or to one's self." Thus, a normative social influence can result from the expectations of oneself, or of a group, or of another person. (Deutsch and Gerard, , p. 629, emphasis in the original)

As Deutsch and Gerard use their distinction, the problem of defining normative influence is tied to the problem of drawing a conceptual line between group-related behavior and collective behavior (Buys, 1978; Shaffer, 1978). In a modern nation-state where citizens share a common language, understanding of established social institutions, and a general pool of common knowledge, transitory situations can galvanize social interaction among strangers in what Muzafer Sherif called "togetherness" situations (Sherif, 1967). Individuals who were strangers in the beginning of such episodes, may even remain anonymous at the end of the episode. However, Deutsch and Gerard argue that strangers can exert an "informational" social influence in that a person may look to strangers to define the situation or confirm the definition they have tentatively adopted; strangers may make or break one's understanding of "social reality." In such cases of ambiguity, a person's *description* of another's actions may be taken as a *prescription* of what is appropriate, valuable, or even what is safe. This analysis is in line with the thinking of many sociologists such as Thomas (1976) and Schutz (1962), to name only two.

However, Deutsch and Gerard argue that a stronger source of influence is one's peers; even when identifications with a social group are weak, the individual experiences a stronger pressure to conform based not only upon

caring what another thinks, but also upon a realization of the possible long-range consequences of behavior upon an enduring relationship. Both theoretically and empirically, Deutsch and Gerard argue that this influence is qualitatively different, and they reserve the term "normative" for the influence of a social group upon an individual member.

It should be noted that among social psychologists who maintain a distinction between group-related and collective behavior, the conceptual relationship between normative influence and the group is so strong that normative influence is often taken as a necessary condition for identifying some collection of individuals as a group (Shaffer, 1978). While collective behavior has referred to relatively spontaneous, transient, and concerted action by a collection of individuals with no history of interaction, group-related behavior implies the presence of stable role and status relations that define a social structure, and beliefs and values that serve as a basis for social control (Berk, 1974; Sherif and Sherif, 1969). My concern here is to make the point that the decision to use the term "norm" to refer to "informational" or "normative" social influence is a conceptual, not an empirical issue! No one doubts that these two types of influence exist, but as Deutsch and Gerard pointed out long ago, it is conceptually confusing to refer to both processes as social "norms." It is clear that psychometric use of the term "norm" gives an "informational" definition of social norms some legitimacy. But the differences are so striking that they must be maintained and not confused, and I believe that the current practice of using the term "social norm" to refer to both processes will impede the realization of Pepitone's goal of distinguishing normative from non-normative behavior.

Theoretical Orientation

In arguing that the individual was not the appropriate theoretical unit of analysis for social psychology, Pepitone wrote: "We may assume that a sufficient explanation of normative behavior cannot be derived from properties that are conceptually located in independent individuals" (Pepitone, 1976, p. 642). But precisely because of the tendency to commit this theoretical error, social psychologists have differed in describing social norms. Consider the following pair of definitions of social norms:

Standards for behavior that *members of a social group share*, to which they are expected to conform, and that are enforced by positive and negative sanctions. (Vander Zanden, 1977, p. 442, emphasis added)

Norms are *beliefs* that certain behaviors are correct, appropriate, or desirable and other behaviors are incorrect, inappropriate, immoral, or undesirable. (Triandis, 1977, p. 8, emphasis added)

Put simply, the issue illustrated here is whether norms are best conceived as a social consensus (making the group the appropriate theoretical unit of analy-

sis) or as individual's perceptions (making the individual the appropriate theoretical unit of analysis).

Social psychologists doing empirical research recently have often relied on assessing each individual's perceptions; the previous discussion of the "normative" term in the Fishbein model is one illustration. Sometimes the perceptions collected were, like Triandis' definition, beliefs about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of some behavior, and the influence of the social group was assumed to have been operative in the individual's formation of those beliefs. On other occasions, the perceptions concerned how others would respond to the individual, as with the procedure used by Smetana and Adler (1980). But neither approach is informative about the impact of natural groups on individual behavior. There is, I believe, one overridingly important lesson to be learned from the current disagreement: social psychologists will not learn anything about the relationship between structural properties of a group and individual behavior unless the perceptions of the individuals who are subjects in the research and the consensual evaluations of the group as a whole are *congruent*. When they are not, we can learn something about *normative influence*, in that individuals may be inhibiting their actions in conformity to supposed standards, but we are not learning much about *social norms*.

The truth of this proposition is easily seen, I believe, from what is already known about the complexities of natural groups. I will cite just two examples. Newcomb, Turner, and Converse (1965) describe a state they call pluralistic ignorance, in which individual members may actually have fairly uniform attitudes toward some issues, but the individuals involved do not recognize the uniformity. Their attitudes are uniform, but not shared, because they are not yet aware enough of other's attitudes to legitimize a consensus. If a researcher took individuals' perceptions in such a case, and assumed that they were studying the influence of a social norm on behavior, they would be mistaken. Surely in a modern, pluralistic society such a state occurs frequently, and only a clear survey of the structural features of a group would prevent erroneous conclusions from being made.

Jackson (1960, 1975) has provided a model of the structural properties of the norm systems of natural groups that further illustrates my point about congruence between structural properties and individual perceptions. Jackson has characterized three distinct states of normative structure: normative power, conflict potential, and vacuous consensus. Starting with a definition of a normative system that I believe to be compatible with Pepitone's discussion of belief and value systems, Jackson postulates that a norm system has potential to regulate the conduct of group members (that is, "has normative power") when members care deeply about the behaviors in question and when the group is in agreement about their evaluation of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of that behavior. However, the strength of individuals'

feelings and the degree of consensus are variables, and when either of those variables takes on a low value, the character of normative impact is altered. When group members all feel strongly about a behavior, but disagree in their evaluations, the system has what Jackson calls "conflict potential." In such a circumstance, the members' deliberations in either acting or sanctioning others' actions goes well beyond the usual accounts and some account of existing conflict must be made in explaining members' behavior. Another possibility is that group members do not care about the behavior in question, yet can agree about their indifference. Jackson calls such state "vacuous consensus," and the impact of a vacuous consensus on a member's behavior must be different from that of normative power. In applying Jackson's concept of norm systems to the definitions of social norm provided by Vander Zanden and Triandis, both definitions would probably lead researchers to the same conclusions when studying behavior of members of a group that was high in normative power. However, in a system with high conflict potential, Vander Zanden's more collective definition would probably lead a researcher to recognize more of the complex dynamics of "conforming" behavior than a researcher employing Triandis' definition. And neither definition clearly covers the case of a vacuous consensus.

It seems that Pepitone's touchstone of conceptual progress, differentiating normative from non-normative behavior, cannot be carried out until these first two issues, naming the basic function of a social norm and the appropriate theoretical orientation to its definition, are settled. And it also seems clear that research methods that expect to yield useful generalizations must explicitly explore normative systems of the groups and the perceptions of the individual subjects being studied.

Domain of Regulated Behavior

Many definitions of social norms are careful to point out that social norms specify both appropriate and inappropriate behavior; but many do not. Like the definitions presented by Baron and Byrne (1981) and Gergen and Gergen (1981) cited previously, many definitions merely name the dimension of appropriateness as a conceptual element of the definition. Such differences may often represent nothing more than the level of explicitness the author has chosen for framing the definition. But I believe that there is also a theoretical issue here as well.

Muzafer Sherif has argued that all social norms specify *both* appropriate and inappropriate behavior; his well-known generic names for the measurement of these are "latitudes of acceptance" and "latitudes of rejection," respectively (Sherif, 1967; Sherif and Sherif, 1969). In conformity, members must know both what they can do with approval and what they do only at the risk of sanction. Thus, a very important figure in theorizing about social norms has

clearly indicated belief that a single norm must specify both poles of evaluation. However, Shaffer (Note 1) has recently argued against this view for a specific subset of social norms. In Shaffer's taxonomy, a statement of group evaluation of a *single behavior* (or narrowly defined class of behaviors) is called a canonical norm (following Sherif's 1967 use of the word "canon"). There are two subtypes of canonical norms: prescriptive norms (that is, statements of the form "thou shalt") and proscriptive norms (that is, statements of the form "thou shalt not"). Violations of the norm (that is, behaviors open to negative sanctions from a group) vary with the two norms; violations of a prescriptive norm are acts of omission, whereas violations of a proscriptive norm are acts of commission. However, there is a fundamental asymmetry between the two subtypes. A prescriptive norm specifies what behaviors constitute both conformity and deviation (for example, one is in conformity in filing a tax return, and in violation when one does not), but a proscriptive norm specifies only what is deviant; for example, a murderer is clearly in violation of the proscription "thou shalt not kill," but no behaviors are *specified* as conforming responses. This line of reasoning leads Shaffer to reject Sherif's assertion that norms specify both latitudes of acceptance and rejection for the case of canonical norms.

Perhaps the most parsimonious way to indicate that the domain of regulated behavior is a theoretical issue is to explore the relationship between a conception of a social norm and its verbal expression. If socialization involves verbal transmission of norms, how do such expressions as proverbs and commands translate into the analysis of social norms? Gouldner's "norm of reciprocity" (Gouldner, 1960) illustrates this problem. Gouldner sets forth a general principle of reciprocity as a cultural universal, but cannot express its content in less than *two* statements:

Specifically, I suggest that a norm of reciprocity, in its universal form, makes two interrelated minimal demands: (a) people should help those who have helped them, and (b) people should not injure those who have helped them. (Gouldner, 1960, p. 171)

To state Gouldner's point in Shaffer's terms, his "norm" of reciprocity needs at least two canonical norms to verbalize; the first is parallel to the proverb "do unto others . . .," and is a canonical prescription, and the second is parallel to the proverb "don't bite the hand that feeds you," and is a canonical proscriptive. It seems that neither proverb satisfies Sherif's dictum, and that Gouldner, to express his "norm" of reciprocity, must express it in terms of more elementary statements, which are also norm statements—perhaps they should be called "protonorms." In any event, there is a conceptual issue here; if all norms specify Sherif's latitudes of acceptance and rejection, then proverbial statements and commands are not norms. But if they are to be considered norms, then their specifications of Sherif's latitudes must be

implicit rather than explicit. At least for the sake of clarity in discussion of verbal transmission of social norms in socialization, the issue of the domain of regulated behavior must be addressed.

Level of Specificity in Normative Regulation

It has always been clear that the specificity with which any group regulates conduct is a variable. Older attempts at developing taxonomies of social norms have included this dimension (see for example, Linton, 1936; Morris, 1956; Sorokin, 1947; Williams, 1970), although the distinction between specificity and the degree of formality has often been blurred. Although this issue has always been apparent, it does contribute to the current disagreement, as the following pair of definitions suggests:

Any standard or criterion by which behavior is defined as appropriate, right, good, or aesthetically pleasing; social expectation backed by some punishment or reward meted out by the group. (Goode, 1977, p. 527, emphasis added)

These are the rules or standards, accepted by the members of a society and by the typical occupants of a position, *which specify the details* of appropriate or inappropriate behavior in a standard behavior event. The norms may also specify the reward for appropriate behavior and the punishment for inappropriate behavior. (Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey, 1962, p. 35, emphasis added)

There are at least three facets of normative regulation which can vary in specificity: first, the population to which the norms apply; second, the behaviors actually regulated, and third, the potential sanctions which can be imposed. These three aspects of normative activity raise a number of conceptual issues. When the applicable population is not clearly specified, it is difficult to tell whether or not an actor is in active nonconformity to a norm. Similarly it is difficult to understand the actions of witnesses who ignored an ostensibly contranormative event; the witnesses may consider the actor to be outside the scope of the norm, they may consider the behavior to be outside the scope of the norm, they may be unclear about the sanctions to be employed, or they may consider *themselves* to be outside the scope of the norm, and, thus, not obligated to respond to another's behavior at all. Unless these questions are concretely answered in any situation, Pepitone's goal of distinguishing normative from non-normative behavior cannot be achieved.

In addition to difficulties in assessing concrete situations, disagreement concerning the level of specificity of a social norm makes it impossible to determine the relevance of existing literature to establishing the character of normative influence. Let me use altruism as an example. Darley and Lantane (1970) found no concrete evidence that altruism affected the behavior of bystanders to emergency situations. One might argue from this and similar work that norms stated in general language and taken as general guides for

action have insignificant consequences in concrete situations. But is altruism a norm? Darley and Latane spoke of altruism as a *value* rather than a norm; is any standard (as Goode suggests) a norm, or does a standard need the specificity to designate the detail of proper performance (as Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey suggest) before it becomes a norm? The concept of reciprocity previously discussed is just as abstract as altruism; and Gouldner had to suggest some prototypical, and more specific, rules in order to state how that "norm" became operative. It will surely take more theoretical precision than presently exists to distinguish norms from beliefs, values, roles, institutions, and other related sociological conceptions, and such specificity will be necessary to differentiate normative and non-normative behavior.

Articulation of Norms

Consider the following pair of definitions:

Statements about how their (a group's) members ought to behave. (Homans, 1974, p. 2, emphasis added)

A norm is an *implicit rule* defining the appropriate pattern of behavior in a recurring situation. (Elkin and Handel, 1978, p. 10, emphasis added)

The issue here is whether norms should be conceived as unspoken understandings or as verbalized standards, and, as the two definitions suggest, an investigator operating on one definition would ignore precisely what another investigator would consider primary data. Of all the issues raised in this article, the issue of articulation is the one least explored.

If I can choose a metaphor, I believe that the current state of theorizing about normative influence is like the state of psycholinguistic theorizing prior to the development of Chomsky's work on grammar. Until there was a distinction between the surface structure of natural languages and the deep structure of the "thought" and transformation rules to link them, the child's acquisition and generation of language was very poorly understood. The relevance of the comparison is that there is a syntactic quality to social norms; no verbal expressions state all that a socialized member of a natural group must know in order to act out the consensual expectations of the group! In the mundane world, verbal transmission is often limited to proverbs, aphorisms, statements of "dos and don'ts," and so forth, and many phenomena like personal space, which fit Elkin and Handel's definition of a norm, are almost wholly unarticulated. The content of verbal expressions may specifically prescribe or proscribe a behavior and omit specification of sanctions entirely, or statements may specify the sanctions and only allude to the character of the behavior (as with the *lex talionis*). It seems clear that social learning is something like language acquisition in that a new member of a natural group must

be aware *at some level* of the group's definitions of behavior (if it proscribes incest, what constitutes incest?), the group's consensus concerning the appropriateness or inappropriateness of behavior, the potential sanctions that attend conformity or nonconformity, the bounds of the population that is obligated to observe the norm, and so forth. But it does seem credible in terms of contemporary research that members can conform to expectations that they can articulate barely if at all, and that members must know much more than they do, for example, when they engage in verbal transmission of norms. Formal systems do, of course, attempt to articulate their norms as concretely as possible; but it is also true that rank and file members often know less about norms than do leaders (Chowdry and Newcomb, 1952), and that even laws are still subject to adjudication in their application to concrete situations.

To summarize, I believe it is clear that the degree of articulation in verbal expressions of social norms is, like the degree of specificity, a variable. And, as with the issue of specificity, the theoretical question of specifying which behaviors are normatively regulated is currently overdependent on the vicissitudes of semantics; is the phenomenon called personal space the result of normative influence or not? But beyond calling attention to current disagreements on this issue, I wish to suggest that this issue may hold the key to future progress. I believe social psychology needs something like a set of syntactical rules that relate verbal expressions of norms to the structural properties of the group in ways that predictably specify the behavioral obligations of the members. Such a system would contribute greatly to the problem of distinguishing normative from non-normative behavior.

Enforcement of Norms

The final conceptual issue contributing to current disagreements involves the enforcement of the social norm by group member. Sherif and Sherif (1969) have argued that the best evidence that a behavior is normatively regulated is the presence or absence of definite sanctions for misbehavior. Indeed, in the conception of the norm as an element in the system of social control, norms must be accompanied by sanctions (Broom and Selznick, 1973). Laws, of course, specify the character of sanctions, but other norms may be attended only by general, "disapproval." The definitions by Goode (1977) and Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey (1962) cited previously illustrate the underlying dimension: norms may be conceived to include sanctions ranging from unspecified expectations to exact rewards or punishments.

There is an additional problem related to the specificity of rewards and punishments, and that is differential enforcement. Differential enforcement is a well-documented phenomenon, and its interpretation is problematic. Non-enforcement may indicate anomie, and a literal interpretation of anomie would mean that existing standards no longer govern member's behavior.

Thus, the application of the label "anomie" would invalidate any serious claim that an articulated "rule" represents a norm. But nonenforcement may represent a more complicated adjustment to social change or cultural pluralism (Blake and Davis, 1964; Williams, 1970), where the norms may be recognized and articulated by members, but not accepted by a substantial number of members. This is the kind of situation previously discussed where the presence of a norm, according to Jackson (1975), contributes more to conflict potential than normative regulation. In order to clarify the relationship of structural dynamics (such as social control) and individual behavior, the character of enforcement must be considered in addition to the specificity of rewards and punishments. Social psychologists must eventually agree about whether an articulated rule that is unheeded in conduct and unenforced in social practice should qualify as a social norm.

Future Directions for Clarifying Normative Influence

As I have indicated previously, I believe that the touchstone in Pepitone's analysis for making progress in studying normative influence is to define social norms in such a manner as to allow a researcher to distinguish normative from non-normative behavior. In order to make progress toward this goal, Pepitone has delineated a new approach to doing social-psychological research which I have summarized in the introduction. I wish to close this paper with some observations and suggestions which I believe to be in keeping with Pepitone's approach.

The current use of the concept of social norm is paradoxical because it can be claimed with reasonable justification both that the social norm is universally accepted as a source of influence on social behavior and that it is also generally ignored in research (Pepitone, 1976; Shaffer, Note 1). Since the cues for modern data retrieval are to be found in the key words in an article's title, one can use the presence or absence of a term in titles as a rough index of the accumulation of literature. Using that index, there seems to be relatively little recent activity on social norms. On the other hand, it is hard to read much in the social-psychological literature without encountering the term in the body of an article. This observation seems to square not only with Pepitone's analysis, but also with Steiner's (1974) observations about breaking through the so-called "crisis" in social psychology. It seems that social norms have not been "lost," rather, they have gone from foreground to background in contemporary social-psychological thinking. They have not been often used as independent variables in our research, because, as Pepitone argued, recent social psychology has not studied group members but individuals at large; norms have not even been specified as boundary conditions for studies, because they were subsumed under statistical control through the random assignment of individuals to experimental treatments. Norms have not quite

suffered the fate of old soldiers or the incumbents of the graveyard of "soft psychology" enumerated by Meehl (1978), but they also do not fully merit being classified among the terms that fit the old saw about "the best fate of scientific ideas is to fit unobtrusively into the working vocabulary of the scientific community." Social norms are currently in limbo.

There is another way to look at the current predicament of the social norm. I have been concentrating, as Pepitone did, on *psychological* social psychology. But when sociology and anthropology are included into one's view, the situation changes a bit. As a unit of analysis in the study of social organization and social control, the norm is ubiquitous, and empirical work on organizational and institutional norms is flourishing (Erickson, 1979; Jackson, 1975). However, whether one reads the classical statements on the social norm (for example Gibbs, 1965; Linton, 1936; Morris, 1956; Sorokin, 1947; Summer, 1906/1940), or qualitative analyses of particular norms such as Gouldner's (1960) work on reciprocity, this literature does not seem to offer what is needed to revitalize psychological social psychology. The reason is that the bulk of the research is concerned with what Wertheimer (1972) called methodological *richness*, when I believe that we currently need methodological *precision*.

Wertheimer described methodological richness versus precision as an essential tension in psychological research. Methodological richness strives to capture the subtleties of the behavior studied and strains to avoid oversimplification, falsification (of the description of the phenomena of interest), and "destroying by the very process of studying it the complex essence of what is being studied" (Wertheimer, 1972, p. 174). Precision, on the other hand, strives to embody the law of parsimony by giving statements of theory and measurement that are as rigorous as possible. Methodological precision strives to avoid the unspecifiable, the intuitive, and the untestable. While all scientists appreciate insights that are both rich and precise, it is Wertheimer's contention that most of the time researchers can only direct their efforts toward one goal or the other.

It is my belief that with regard to social norms it is time for researchers to concentrate on precision rather than richness. The current disagreements described in this article are in part a testimony to the richness with which the concept of social norm has been used. The six conceptual issues elucidate many subtleties of normative influence, and by including literature from sociology and anthropology there is an abundance of qualitative work from which any new theoretical work can draw illustrative data. What seems necessary now are sufficiently precise formulations which are testable and falsifiable (in Popper's sense of that term) so that a researcher can state with some degree of confidence whether or not a particular behavior episode is normatively regulated (Wills, 1981).

In terms of the issues previously raised, I will venture an opinion about

what working definitions of social norms will prove most fruitful. We should concentrate on *prescriptive* definitions of social norms; where groups have articulated canons of behavior we are on safer ground to infer normative influence. We should concentrate on prescriptions which have achieved a collective consensus of group members; following this suggestion should help avoid errors such as pluralistic ignorance and it would bring our definitions into conformity with the central point of agreement in sociological and psychological theorizing about social norms (Gibbs, 1965; Jackson, 1960, 1975; Sherif and Sherif, 1969). We should concentrate on definitions of social norms which specify both latitudes of acceptance and latitudes of rejection (Sherif, 1967); such definitions seem to specify guidelines which would be less problematic for the members to apply to the situations we would want to investigate. We should concentrate on definitions of social norms that specifically prescribe or proscribe particular behaviors or tightly defined classes of behavior; abstract principles such as reciprocity may qualify in some sense as norms, but researchers will have to know precisely which behaviors are appropriate dependent variables and they need to be able to specify behaviors as conforming to or violation of social norms. We should concentrate on norms that natural groups have articulated for themselves; until there is a "grammar" that translates principles of conduct into propositions to be tested, the group's own verbalizations should provide the clearest cases of normative influence. Finally, we should concentrate on definitions of social norms which specify positive and negative sanctions for conformity and nonconformity of members' conduct; such cases seem to be the clearest cases of normative influence (Sherif and Sherif, 1969).

The study of social behavior today is nowhere near William Graham Sumner's famous assessment of the scope of the "folkways":

In the present work the proposition to be maintained is that the folkways are the widest, most fundamental, and most important operation by which the interests of men in groups are served, and that the process by which folkways are made is the chief one to which elementary societal or group phenomena are due. The life of society consists in making folkways and applying them. The science of society might be construed as the study of them. (Sumner, 1906/1940, p. 46)

Perhaps, in the near future, Sumner's vision can again characterize social-psychological research.

Reference Note

1. Shaffer, L.S. *Toward a meaningful taxonomy of return potential curves*. Unpublished manuscript, 1981. (Available from the author: Department of Psychology, West Chester State College, West Chester, Pennsylvania, 19380).

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