



Influence of Cultural Norms on Social Behavior

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Abstract

This research investigates the influence of cultural norms on social behavior, emphasizing how shared beliefs and values shape interpersonal interactions within different societies. Cultural norms serve as unwritten rules that dictate acceptable behaviors, guiding individuals in their daily lives and influencing their responses to various social situations. This study reviews literature across anthropology, psychology, and sociology to explore how cultural contexts affect behaviors such as cooperation, communication styles, and conflict resolution. Key findings indicate that cultures emphasizing collectivism foster behaviors that prioritize group harmony and interdependence, while individualistic cultures promote self-expression and personal achievement. The research also addresses how cultural norms evolve over time and their impact on social behavior in increasingly multicultural environments. Furthermore, it examines the implications of cultural norms on social issues, including discrimination, conformity, and the acceptance of diversity. By understanding the intersection of culture and behavior, this study highlights the importance of cultural competency in fostering effective communication and social cohesion. Ultimately, this research advocates for greater awareness of cultural influences on behavior to enhance collaboration and mutual understanding in diverse societies.

Keywords: cultural norms, social behavior, interpersonal interactions, collectivism, individualism, cultural competency, communication styles, diversity.

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1. Introduction

Human society is characterized by shared rules and practices that inform individuals about how to act within a given circumstance. Collectively, these shared rules and practices are known as cultural norms and constitute a unique set of beliefs and values as practiced by distinct groups of people. Broadly understood, cultural norms may be interrogated as a framework for understanding the relationship between normative behavior and cultural expectations among certain groups. They shape the way individuals relate to each other within communities and guide behavior across a spectrum of social situations. Cultural norms dictate acceptable or unacceptable forms of conduct and, more broadly, are capable of informing societal structuring and power dynamics. While cultural norms may go unnoticed by active participants, they are ultimately responsible for shaping the outcomes of social interactions and those who partake within the collective fomentation.

The essence of cultural norms is best grasped in an elucidation of their relation to behavior more generally. Shared beliefs and common practices manifest as social conduct exemplify the underlying principles in a simple, easily observed fashion. Complex permutations of the norm-behavior relationship are, however, equally available for examination. For example, social behavior is curtailed where certain actions transgress expectations held by a group, leading to sanctions against those thus deviating. As part of a discourse on the outlined topic, this essay will probe cultural norms in their function as guideposts toward behavior and how they are implicated in the subsequently diverse roles derived therefrom (Edberg & Krieger, 2020). Through analysis of contemporary society, the interactive relationship between inherited patterns of behavior and conduct of a more normative hue will be laid bare, reflecting a connected “world into which we are born.” Following this foundational discussion, the treatment will proceed along a dual trajectory. At first, a robust examination of how conduct is guided by shared expectations across a spectrum of

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social situations will be taken up. Turning next, cultural norms will be considered in their modal expression, as the hinterland of social action itself, and how expectation transmutes into conduct. (Levin & Mamlok, 2021)

1.1. Definition of Cultural Norms and Social Behavior

In order to build a cohesive argument, it is important to first define cultural norms and social behavior. Culture varies significantly across the world, so what is considered socially acceptable in one place may be frowned upon in another (Bicchieri et al., 2021). As a result, cultural norms in Saudi Arabia will be considerably different from those in Finland or the United States. When cultural norms are discussed, a working definition is that these are shared guidelines or rules dictating appropriate behavior in a given society (Edberg & Krieger, 2020). This does not mean that everyone follows them all the time but rather that there are established expectations. Social behavior may then be defined as the way individuals publicly conduct themselves and engage with others in a social context. Social behavior is heavily influenced by cultural norms: the expectations for appropriate behavior feed into the actions done by individuals. The dynamic relationship between these constructs is underpinned throughout, with lots of examples provided to help demonstrate this fluid, intertwined relationship.

The starting point of examining the relationship between culture and behavior is an exploration of several cases where behavior has been influenced by social expectations. A well-known and often-cited example is the broken window effect: littered or vandalized public spaces, rather than being left clean and safe, have even more damage done. argue that while norms can provide a sense of cultural identity and social order, they may also lead to discrimination and harm those who deviate from them. There are a number of different ways in which norms may be enforced, such as through scolding, the withholding of opportunities, and the imposition of fines. Using these punishments is thought to make individuals more likely to conform to the

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expectations. At the theoretical level, there are well-established mechanisms explaining why and how social norms are followed. (Ellis et al.2021)

2. Theoretical Frameworks

Social norms are the unwritten rules or “codes of conduct” that prescribe and guide behavior within a society or between people. Norms govern a group's behavior, are manifested in the behavior of most individuals or all group members, and have the ability to change between different individual, social, or collective settings, as well as over time. Adhering to relevant group norms ensures cooperation within a group and makes social conduct significantly more predictable. Failure to adapt one's behavior to the norms prevalent in a particular context may have unintentional, detrimental, or even harmful side effects. Such failures may result from ignorance of the norm, from misunderstandings, from changes in norms, or from being incapacitated, unwilling, or unable to make necessary behavioral adaptations.

There has been considerable effort devoted to the study of mechanisms that permit the learning and adaptation of behavioral responses to rewards, punishments, or to changes in the statistics of the environment. However in comparison, far less attention has been given to the contribution of social cognitive learning mechanisms to the problem of learning and adapting to new social norms. (Achmad, 2021)

2.1. Social Learning Theory

During the course of socialization, beyond verbal advice, children and adult individuals also learn how to behave through observation of surrounding people, imitation, and modeling. Feelings, ideas, attitudes, and behaviors are adapted through these different channels of cognitive learning. Training to adapt to group norms is by several accounts one of the most crucial ways to integrate into a given culture and it can be particularly asymmetric in collectivist societies. It is significant to study the learning mechanisms that account for these asymmetric learning processes through a

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series of laboratory experiments and theoretical work. In exploring the vast literature on group norms within the fields of psychology, social psychology, economics, and other social sciences, one may note a variety of disciplines investigating this critical aspect of behavior and cognition (Hertz, 2021).

Building on seminal work by Bandura, the social learning theory posits that individuals imitate and learn behavior from surrounding role models. The initial ones are usually parents, peers or media representations. Such a learning process of behavioral traits plays a critical function in the transmission work of cultures. Children observe the individuals around them and form beliefs and expectations concerning appropriate and beneficial behavior. These beliefs and expectations are translated into feelings or attitudes on the beneficial behaviors, thus inducing the individual to engage in them or, vice-versa, to stay away from them. As a result, behavioral traits are learned and transmitted from one generation to the next. These transmission processes are at the core of culture modeling exercise. This view is explored within a simple impersonal interaction model. It is reasonable to start with a model that depicts the mere backbone of social learning without going into details that could derange the key features, and possibly prevent an intuitive understanding of the adopted framework. A laboratory experiment is presented that offers a contribution to the understanding of the basic social learning process in the aforementioned context of culture transmission (Adriani et al., 2018).

2.2. Social Identity Theory

One of our most significant social identities is based on our group memberships. According to social identity theory, people define their self-concept to a considerable extent in terms of group processes and group membership. Social identity theory suggests that group behavior is the result of the group's emergent norms, practices, and shared beliefs that guide both the group's behavior and each group member's behavior within the group context (R. Smith & R. Louis, 2013). A key element of the

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theory is the concept of in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. The social identity approach (SIA) emphasizes that this expression of group norms rests on a common specific understanding about the characteristics of a social group, and what it means to be a member of a particular group. In this context, a social group is defined as a collection of individuals who share specific characteristics and also share an awareness of group membership. People navigate their social world according to perceptions of the similarities and differences between their own social groups and other social groups. The perception of similarities produces a sense of belonging and shared cultural traits, which influences behavior toward one group compared to out-groups (that is, in-group favoritism). The perception of differences between social groups engenders behavior that differentiates one's in-group from one or more specific out-groups, or out-group discrimination. Consequently, socially shared beliefs shape reasoning on a large variety of issues. Shared cultural norms form the basis of social identities and groups, which in turn influence behavior patterns and relations within and between groups. Cultural learning directs attention to the comparison of values, norms, and beliefs across cultural contexts, thus establishing the basis for positive or negative evaluations of others and group memberships. The exploration of cultural effects on group norms and social identities holds the promise of yielding new insights into variations in social behavior, especially with regard to behaviors practiced collectively in social institutions like schools, families, workplaces, or within occupations, and which serve to maintain or transform societal relationships and social stratification within and between cultural groups. Behavioral norms are shared expectations across culturally identified groups about how people in a group should, but also usually do, behave. (Allam et al., 2022)

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3. Cultural Variations in Norms

How people are expected to behave in a group varies widely from one society to another. Social norms are deeply entrenched in a culture and dictate its members' values, priorities, and expectations. In collectivist societies, the emphasis is on group harmony and fulfillment of social roles and obligations. Individuals are expected to yield to group norms and needs and to function as interdependent actors in an orchestrated societal symphony. In individualistic societies, the focus is on personal choices and self-expression. Free will and uniqueness are cherished cultural ideals, and people's actions are presumed to emanate from personal volition rather than group intonation (Stamkou et al., 2019). This fundamental divergence in cultural norms intimately shapes social patterns, common practices, and emergent behaviors in group settings. Here I investigate the influence of the culture-level orientation toward individualism–collectivism on how social behavior is observed, inferred, and evaluated, and on subsequent emotional and behavioral reactions.

Because the social constellation is perceived and valued differently across cultures, reactions to the same behavior performed by the same target in identical conditions can vary widely across cultures. In collectivistic cultures, a normative descriptive prototype of a group member is advanced, prescribing how group members ought to behave to maintain group harmony. People derive this normative prototype mostly from culturally shared scripts, axioms, and social texts, and they use it as a standard against which they measure the behavior of group members. In collectivistic cultures, perception of power and influence of an agent who deviates from the normative prototype of a group member is reduced, and, as a result, responses to norm violation are intensified. Norm violators are said to evoke higher levels of contempt, anger, and disgust, and receive harsher punishment and public ridicule. To restore social order and discipline, people actively engage in punishing the norm violator and in reducing their status and influence in the social hierarchy. In contrast, in individualistic cultures,

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adherence to the normative group-member prototype plays a limited role in people's judgments and behavior. Group members are viewed as social atoms who yield to their individual idiosyncrasies. Consequently, deviations from the average group behavior are largely expected and are not severely criticized or punished. In sum, people are more sensitive to normative norms in collectivistic than in individualistic societies, and responses to norm violators are moderated by the match between their behavior and cultural expectations. (Pooley et al., 2021)

3.1. Individualism vs. Collectivism

Cultural norms are a keystone for social behavior, further influencing daily life and social relationships. Predominant cultural frameworks manifest intriguing distinctions in approaching everyday things and life's significant crossroads. As one of the cultural orientations, individualism nominally underscores individual competences, achieving personal autonomy, exact at the expense of others (G. Knyazev et al., 2018). It instruments nonlinear interpersonal relationships, resulting in relatively distressing and opposing situations. The decisions made by individuals are typically based on their self-analysis and personal interest contemplation, valuing opinions and estimations from competent circles. Everyday competitors have a tendency to preserve and enhance personal benefits, meanwhile diminishing benefits for the opposition.

Among cultural norms, collectivism specializes in overarching group efforts, establishing social interaction inclined by mutual assistance and commiserate (Leigh Creamer, 2019). Responsibilities and performances are evenly distributed amid group necessities and regarding personal proficiency, keeping pace with discussions that bring an inclusive agreement; inspiring the top creativity and effectiveness. The logical consequence of emerging cohesion, effort, and job sharing has a peculiarity in fewer disputes and rifts, alleviating imminent hazards to the group. Evident in daily

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life are customary habits that underlie collectivistic norms, like shared family apartments, communal gatherings, tradition trade, and much besides. By scrutinizing diverse cultural orientations, apparent differences and distinctive practices come into light, peculiar to personal cultural belongings, however engrossing and informative in an exogamic aspect. In a broader perspective, it sanctions alternate cultural fraternization or group engagements to more extensively view the contingent manifold and edify reconciliation instruments. (Bibri & Allam, 2022)

4. Impact on Interpersonal Relationships

Cultural norms significantly shape society and the human interactions that occur within it. This influence is seen in a wide variety of formats, from family relationships and friendships to professional collaborations and romantic partners. Cultural norms are a set of beliefs, behaviors, and expectations that determine how an individual should act in social situations. While people have a somewhat stable set of personal characteristics, cultural norms greatly dictate how these personal characteristics manifest in the context of interpersonal relationships. For example, cultural norms structure what types of interaction are appropriate between different people, set expectations for those interactions, and dictate the analysis one places on them. In sum, cultural norms provide an external context that defines those social relationships themselves (Edberg & Krieger, 2020). Cultural norms also shape personal characteristics, such as communication style or level of expressiveness, in ways that directly influence how relationships are perceived and maintained by individuals, leading to a feedback loop between cultural norms and relationships themselves. For example, in terms of communication style, people raised in one culture might be dramatically more expressive or reserved compared to people raised in another, which will greatly influence the tenor of their relationships and the misunderstandings that arise within them. Moreover, especially in conflict situations, cultural norms instruct

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grounding practices for the resolution of misunderstanding or differences between two parties, setting up institutions that interact with how conflicts play out in relationships (Seth et al., 2022). Different cultural norms also dictate which practices to ground in, leading to conflicts in space, time, or argumentation.

With respect to relationship dynamics, cultural norms vary dramatically in terms of reading and expressing intimacy, as well as social obligations. These variances in perceptions of relationships lie at the root of misunderstandings between people from different cultures when it comes to friendship or familial structures. Moreover, as societies evolve, so do relationship norms, although not always in the same direction. Recent anthropological work highlights the change to western norms of friendship alliances in early-childhood Thailand led to negative educational outcomes for those not engaging with those relationships. Even in more multicultural settings, cultural norms can lead to disparate social outcomes. For example, language proficiency and cultural competence in Japan were found to greatly improve health outcomes for elderly Chinese patients in Tokyo, who face a vastly different system of social care from that in their home countries. As important as building strong relationships with patient-facing care providers themselves also means understanding their cultural background, and the expectations about how relationships should be conducted. (Darder et al.2021)

5. Practical Implications and Future Research

Social norms structure and support social behavior to align with understood or expected mixed actions practiced by a social group or culture. Social beliefs shape social norms. Social sanctions play a significant role in social norms. This can be seen in a precipitation and amplification effect in which even small initial differences in behavior or beliefs can grow into larger differences. This is reinforced by the community wanting in-group cohesion.

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Behavior, usually through multiple evaluations, subsequently encouraged preservation of the kind of recognition; wrong, unpopular individual in the group is in a possible means of emotional abuse. Specifically, a treatment condition that increased perceptions of the prosocialness of cultural norms for sharing was most successful in reversing recent norms revisions based on unjustified social norms theory.

Understanding cultural norms holds significance for educators, psychologists, social workers and other helping professions as social behaviors are strongly influenced by perceived norms. Cultural norms guide a wide range of pro social behaviors among those in the same cultural group, such as conforming to cultural styles of dress, observing cultural customs, and showing respect to cultural symbols. The need for ethnically and culturally sensitive interventions is increasingly important for professionals in various fields in response to growing population diversity. Many societal issues, including educational engagement problems within schools, are culturally filtered. Imported teaching and psychological interventions fail to show the same positive impact on these problems in other countries as has been seen within the US. Whitehouse, 2021)(Bibri, 2022)

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