Chapter 11
The Use of Emotions to Infer Norms and Standards

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Social norms and standards are important forces that guide people's behavior (Berkowitz 1972; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Social norms either indicate what the right thing to do is (injunctive norms) or what most people typically do in a given situation (descriptive norms) (Cialdini et al. 1990). Whereas injunctive norms define socially approved or disapproved behaviors, descriptive norms represent what is perceived to be the actual behavior of most of the people in a given group. Yet, standards may also represent a benchmark or basis for comparison or judgment against which the attributes of a person, of a group, or of a given situation are weighed (Miller and Prentice 1996). That is, standards may define a socially accepted benchmark, which can be represented as a location on a dimension along some discernable range of possible values. This serves as a point of comparison for an individual. For example, the acceptable minimal GPA for admission to college is 3.0 or the average entry level salary of software engineers is around $7800 a month. Thus, injunctive norms, descriptive norms and standards, can be all conceived of as social guides for behavior or, more generally, guides that provide information on how to act according to the prevalent formal or informal social rules or social habits.

In a given situation, each of these constructs can indicate something different. For example, within a given social group there may be an unwritten rule that members of this group should provide monetary help to a friend in need. This would be considered the injunctive norm. Yet, at the same time it may be that people in this group nonetheless rarely provide a group member in need with monetary help. This would be the descriptive norm. Yet, when people do in fact provide monetary help

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to a member in need they donate no less than a 100 dollars. This would be considered the standard. However, there can also be an overlap between injunctive and descriptive norms and standards. For example, the injunctive norm may be to provide monetary help to a friend in need. People in the group tend to act according to this norm and giving any sum of money would be the standard behavior.

Since norms and standards represent social guides, people are generally expected to act in accordance with them. In fact, normative behavior is also often perceived as the morally right behavior (Hall 1959). Yet, in order for people to behave according to norms and/or standards, they must be aware of these. In other words, people must know what the norm or standard of a group is in order to be able to act according to it. Much of what people know about norms and standards comes from interpersonal knowledge and experience (Miller and Prentice 1996). The observed behavior of other people is an important source of information about norms and standards making observers more likely to imitate this behavior (Cialdini 1988; Cialdini et al. 1990; Miller and Prentice 1996). Actually, by just watching what a majority of people do, observers can infer norms and standards (Milgram et al. 1969).

Yet, a more direct way by which other people can serve as a source for information about norms and standards is via the feedback that they provide for one's own behavior or the behavior of others. That is, via signals of approval and disapproval of someone's behavior (Reno et al. 1993). Whereas approval and disapproval of someone's behavior can be signaled in various ways, emotions serve this purpose quite effectively. Indeed, it has been suggested that one important function of expressions of emotions is to sustain norms and foster their learning and adoption (Elster 1996; Hareli and Hess 2012; Hareli et al. 2013; Keltner and Haidt 1999). For example, Elster (1999) has suggested that expressions of emotions such as contempt and disgust can serve as sanctions against norm violators, which may cause the norm violator to behave according to the norm in the future. By contrast, positive emotions such as admiration can serve as signs of approval of others' behavior (Montada 1993). In line with this idea, a study showed that people tended to align their gas consumption closer to the norm when feedback about their monthly consumption relative to the norm was signaled by emoticons showing happy or sad faces than when feedback was missing (Schultz et al. 2007).

The idea that emotions can serve as signals of approval and disapproval of behavior as a function of norms or standards is consistent with appraisal theories of emotions (e.g., Frijda 1986; Scherer 1987). Specifically, according to appraisal theories of emotion, emotions are elicited and differentiated through a series of appraisals of (internal or external) stimulus events based on the perceived nature of the event (Scherer 1987). Negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and fear are characterized by appraisals of goal obstruction/unpleasantness. That is, these emotions occur when something undesirable happened. For anger, one additional relevant appraisal relates to whether the event is congruent with prevalent norms. As observers can reconstruct appraisals as they apply to a situation (Robinson and Clore 2002), they can "reverse engineer" or reconstruct the relationship between the person and the event based on the emotion expressed (see Chap. 6, this book). That is, a person who sees an angry other will know that this person encountered an event that was not only undesirable but likely also incongruent with the person's norms – even if the

observer does not know anything else about the emoter and the situation within which the emotion occurred.

In the above mentioned study concerning desired level of gas consumption, people received emotional feedback signaling whether their behavior was in line with the norm or not and information about the norm was explicit. Yet, emotions may signal norms and standards even when information about the norm is not explicit. The emotional reactions of witnesses to such behaviors can signal if the behavior in question is normative or not, allowing observers to distinguish right from wrong. Likewise, such emotions can signal where the behavior or its outcome stand relative to a relevant standard. For example, if a person acts in a certain way and bystanders show anger in reaction, the norm violation appraisal evident in this reaction may be used as information that the behavior was undesirable (Hareli et al. 2015).

Conversely, appraisals of positive norm compatibility can likewise provide such information. For example, pride is associated with events or outcomes that are compatible with this appraisal. Another appraisal that can signal how an event stands relative to a norm or a standard is that of vastness. The appraisal of vastness is associated with events or objects that challenge one's usual or ordinary frame of reference. Awe is an emotion that is characterized by this appraisal (Shiota et al. 2007). When an event or situation is perceived to be vast in comparison to a known standard or norm and it elicits awe in its observer, awe will reflect exactly that. Namely, that a standard or norm was considerably surpassed (Hareli et al. 2019). Accordingly, expressions of emotions that are associated with any of these appraisals, can serve as signals of how an event or situation stands with respect to relevant norms and/or standards. When the norm or standard is unknown or vague, such expressions can contribute to perceivers' ability to infer the relevant norm or standard. Indeed, a few recent studies confirmed this idea. In what follows we describe these studies.

Anger as an Effective Signal of Norms

As discussed above, expressions of anger are effective signals of norm violations since anger is associated with an appraisal of norm incompatibility (Scherer 1993). Accordingly, when a behavior is responded to by expressions of anger, observers can infer from these expressions that the expresser considers this behavior as a violation of a norm. This behavior can then be considered as something one ought to not do. Yet, expressions of anger can also be effective in promoting the learning of a norm, when anger signals a norm violating behavior against the background of norm-congruent behaviors.

In principle, observers should be able to assume what a group's norm is when they witness uniform behavior of its members (Milgram et al. 1969). However, the uniformity of a behavior is not always a sufficient cue to the norm, because norm-congruent behaviors are unremarkable and unlikely to be remarked on by others (Miller and Prentice 1996). That is, unless these behaviors stand out in some way, for example, by violating observers' expectations, they are unlikely to become

salient. Another way by which norm congruent behavior may become more apparent to observers is when they also witness a norm-violating behavior and something signals that this behavior is incongruent with norms. Thus, observers are more likely to become aware of the existence of a norm in situations where a minority of the group diverges from what others do. This divergent behavior elicits interest and the feedback from others is then likely to play an important role in enabling observers to capture the norm. Yet, the reaction to the divergent behavior needs to come from someone who is known to be familiar with the norms such as another in-group member. Anger can serve as such a feedback since it signals norm incompatibility, enabling the observer to conclude that the protagonist has transgressed a norm.

A study by Hareli et al. (2013) exemplified this effect of anger. Participants saw a series of three photos depicting four individuals engaged in a fictitious ceremony. In the first picture one group member is shown to drink tea in a certain way, in the second photo a second group member does the same thing. By contrast, in the third picture, a group member now drinks the tea in a different way. The other group members were shown to react to the behavior of the first two individuals with emotional neutrality but expressed either anger or sadness in reaction to the divergent behavior. In a control condition, emotional neutrality was shown in all three pictures. To assess participants' learning of the norm, they were asked to report what another person about to take part in that ceremony would do if they wanted to behave according to the "spirit of the group." Consistent with the analysis suggested above, more participants correctly inferred the norm when group members reacted to the norm violator with anger (26 out of 41; 63%) than when they responded with sadness (11 out of 38; 29%) or with emotional neutrality (10 out of 39; 26%). This effect of anger was shown to be the result of the fact that anger on the part of group members in response to the norm-violation behavior, was perceived as norm-incongruent. In other words, the fact that anger was associated with norm-incongruence, enabled observers to make a good use on this behavior when attempting to make sense of the norm. These findings are in accord with the idea that observers decipher the signal contained in the emotion with the help of a reverse-engineering process in which they reconstruct the appraisals associated with an emotion to make sense of the way the emoter viewed the situation (Hareli and Hess 2010).

This study demonstrated the function of emotion information when people attempt to infer a norm. Even though it is quite possible to infer norms without taking into account the emotional reactions of others, this process is notably less efficient. That is, the reverse engineering of emotions, which alerts the observer to a norm-incompatibility, contributes importantly to people's ability to infer a norm correctly. Given that social norm transgressions are often perceived as a moral fault (Hall 1959) and hence sanctioned in excess of the real damage they may do, humans, as a social species, require efficient means to quickly adapt to new situations and to perform flawlessly in social contexts. Emotion information is one of the instruments that can be used in this quest.

Awe as an Effective Signal of Performance Standards

As mentioned above, expressions of emotions can also contribute to people's ability to pick up the standards that are relevant to situations they are not familiar with. For example, what is considered to be a good performance in a sport's game, the rules of which are unknown or what the standard wage is in a specific job in a foreign country. One emotion that can be conducive to the goal of acquiring information about unknown standards is awe. Awe is elicited by situations or objects that are perceived to be "larger than the self" (Keltner and Haidt 2003; Shiota et al. 2007) or outcomes that are seen as vast in some other sense, for example, an outstanding achievement (Campos et al. 2013). Accordingly, awe can signal that something exceeded expectations or surpassed a standard. Motivated by this idea, Hareli et al. (2019) examined observers' evaluation of a player's quality of performance in an unknown game. Participants saw images depicting the final throw in a fictitious ball game as well as the emotional responses of spectators. The participants' task was to evaluate the performance of the last player. The spectator showed either awe, happiness or neutrality in reaction to the last throw.

In the context of a game, an appraisal of something vast or outstanding as signaled by an awe expression is expected to signal that a player's performance exceeded standards and therefore s/he must have played well. Given the appraisals reflected in awe, a performance that elicits awe should be considered outstanding, regardless of who shows this emotion. By contrast, events that elicit happiness are pleasant and goal conducive but nothing else is specified about them. Neutrality only suggests that nothing particularly positive or negative has happened. That is, both emotions require additional information for us to know whether the performance that elicited the expression was good or bad. Indeed, the results of the study showed that the quality of the player's performance was evaluated as highest when spectators expressed awe. This, regardless of who expressed this emotion. Performance quality was also evaluated as somewhat high when happiness was shown by a supporter of the player and when neutrality was shown by an opponent's supporter. In other words, the signal value of both happiness and neutrality depended on the identity of the expresser. Identity information was needed because in a competition there are clear motivational goals associated with being a supporter of a team and there is a clear negative interdependence between supporters of opposing teams. Thus, a supporter of team A would consider anything that advances that team's chances of winning as goal conducive and anything that advances the opposing team's (team B) chances of winning as goal obstructive. Using reverse engineering (Hareli and Hess 2010) observers who are naïve about the rules of the game, can conclude that when a supporter of team A reacts with happiness, an emotion that signals goal conduciveness (Scherer 1987), the eliciting event is good for team A and thereby bad for team B. By contrast, if the supporter of that team reacts with a negative emotion or neutrality, the converse conclusion should be reached. Thus, only when we know whether a given person supports a given team can we draw

conclusions about a player's performance based on the spectator's expressions of happiness and neutrality.

Yet, expressions of awe in response to a throw lead to inferences that the performance of the player is excellent–independent of the question who shows the emotion. In fact, expressions of awe on their own suggest that the performance was outstanding. This was shown by Hareli et al. (2019) in an additional study. Participants saw the same game as in the previous study but only reactions by unaffiliated spectators were shown. In addition to the manipulation of spectators' emotional reaction, across conditions, additional information about the game was added gradually. In a benchmark condition, three slides were added prior to the throw by the last player, which showed the results of another player and were described by an unaffiliated observer as typical for this game. The performance was worse than that of the last player. In an additional condition, a slide indicating that participants are about to see a typical performance for the game preceded the slides depicting the target performance. For a previous record condition, a slide was inserted right before the last throw, which indicated the farthest distance recorded for a game on this field. The record was clearly below the last player's performance. Finally, for the appraisal condition, the slide showing the reaction of the spectator was modified by adding a speech bubble saying "Unbelievable … This is a far better performance than I have ever seen in all the years I have been following this game. "For awe expressions, which already contain this information in its appraisal, the added information had no effect. By contrast, when additional information congruent with the appraisal typical of awe was provided, performance ratings improved for happiness or neutrality so that they reached or came close to performance ratings for performances reacted to with awe expressions.

Overall, this suggests that emotions can signal to others which behavior is normative or how a specific performance stands relative to a standard. This, when the emotion contains not only an appraisal of valance, as is the case for sadness and happiness, for example, but also a relevant appraisal such as norm congruence in the case of anger or vastness in the case of awe. This difference between emotions in terms of the appraisals associated with each of them refers to the situative informativeness of the emotion (Hareli et al. 2019). Situative informativeness of the emotion reflects how detailed the message conveyed by the emotion is. When the situative informativenes of the emotions is low, as is the case for sadness or happiness, the information conveyed by the emotion is more ambiguous hence situational information may be needed to make sense of the event. By contrast, emotions high in situative informativeness convey a clear message about the situation.

The studies mentioned above exemplify this difference. Specifically, reactions of anger to the norm violating behavior with norm congruent behaviors in the background made it easier for observers to learn the norm than reactions of sadness to the same behavior. Likewise, reactions of awe to a performance indicated clearly that it was outstanding unlike reactions of happiness, which required additional information about the expresser. Even then, the performance was considered good but not as good as when it was reacted to with awe. This means that in some situations, in order to decipher the meaning of the emotion the observer must consider

contextual information. Obviously, this does not mean that emotions that are high in situative informativensss always provide the "full story." Also, the information that such emotions provide is not always taken at face value. This is also true of situations in which emotions serve to signal norms. One important factor that may determine when and if an emotion will be an effective device indicating normative behavior is culture. Cultures differ in terms of the extent to which they endorse certain emotions and this may affect the effectiveness of emotion expressions as signals of the normativeness of a given behavior. This, because the degree to which a specific culture endorses a specific emotion is often also reflected in the ability of perceivers from that culture to decode it (Hess 2001). Another reason for differential effectiveness of emotions as social signals in different cultures may be related to the differential use of emotions in different cultures. Hareli et al. (2015) examined these ideas in a study attempting to replicate the study on norm learning, described above (Hareli et al. 2013) in Germany, Greece, the US and Israel. In the original study, anger was more effective to convey norm information. As expected, Hareli et al. (2015) found cultural differences in norm learning such that Germans were most accurate in norm learning and Greeks the least with Israel and the US showing an equal intermediate level of norm learning accuracy. The different cultures also differed in terms of decoding the emotions. These differences explained the cultural differences that emerged in norm learning and perceived norm violation. The study also found that Greeks, unlike participants from other cultures, saw sadness as signaling a norm violation to the same extent as did anger. This, however, did not translate into a good understanding of the norm. Yet, it suggests that sadness for Greeks has a somewhat different social meaning. Interestingly, however, despite absolute differences in norm learning, which were related to differences in anger perception, regression analyses showed that in all four cultures, to the degree that people recognized anger, they also understood the norm. This suggests that the same underlying mechanism of norm learning was at work.

We have seen that the emotions expressed by people who are assumed to be familiar with a norm or a standard, contribute to the ability of observers to infer norms or standards unknown to them. This, however, does not mean that others' expressions of emotion can't affect people's judgments of norms and standards that they are familiar with. Judgments of norms regarding the morality or politeness of a specific behavior are an example for that. Within a given social group, people tend to agree on what is moral and polite and what is not. Accordingly, one may expect that observers of another's behavior would not be affected by the reactions of others to this behavior when they judge the morality or politeness of that behavior. However, this is not the case.

A recent study by Hess et al. (2017) showed that when an immoral or impolite behavior was witnessed together with a reaction of anger or disgust expressed by another witness to this behavior, participants viewed the behavior as less moral and more impolite, respectively than when the reaction was neutrality. Similarly, when participants read about a morally elevating or polite behavior, they rated the moral behavior as more moral and the polite behavior as more polite when they saw a witness to the behavior expressing happiness then when the witness expressed neutrality

or awe. Expressions of awe also increased perceived morality and politeness but to a lesser degree than did happiness. This may be because awe suggests that something rare and outstanding happened and unusual events may be perceived as less polite and moral than events that are approved of with a smile of happiness. Overall, these findings indicate that judgments of norms and standards of morality or politeness, which are quite clear within a given social group, are still influenced to some degree by the emotional reactions of others.

Finally, the same study included judgments of unusual behaviors. An example of such behavior is someone who walks on the street with a big bouquet of roses and decides to hand over a flower to each passerby. The strongest effects of witnessed emotions were found for judgments of unusualness of positively unusual behaviors. Such behaviors were judged as less unusual when they were seen to be reacted to with happiness than with awe or neutrality. Again, happiness can be seen as a stamp of approval, making the behaviors appear less unusual. Overall, it seems that when observers judge the normativness of a behavior either in terms of moral or politeness norms or in terms of how standard (i.e., usual) this behavior is, the emotional reactions of others to these behaviors has an impact on them. In other words, others' opinion about these behaviors still affects people's judgments even when they themselves are expected to already have a rather strong view on them.

Note that in all the examples discussed in this chapter, emotions shaped judgments of norms and standards only when: (1). The perceiver was not familiar with the norm or standard, and/or, (2). The behavior that was the target of judgment deviated either in a negative or positive way from a norm or a standard. In all of these cases, the effect of the emotions was informative in that it could have served the goal of holding an accurate view of the situation (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). Even when the person holds a clear view about the situation, as in the last example, others' opinions can still be perceived as contributing to the person's sense of holding an accurate view of the situation. This, in particular when the behavior deviates a norm or standard, a situation that by definition is relatively rare and hence its judgment may be susceptible to others' opinion.

The question arises if and under what conditions, observed behavior which is considered to be normative or according to standards by the observer, can still be judged in a biased way due to someone's expressed emotions. For example, can it be evaluated as more polite when it is reacted to with happiness or awe? In other words, if the emotion expressed by a witness in response to someone's behavior does not provide additional information, can it still influence an observer's assessment of the behavior? As mentioned above, normative behaviors are unremarkable and unlikely to be remarked on by others (Miller and Prentice 1996). Accordingly, the fact that a person behaved according to expectations and someone else reacted to it positively, is unlikely to be judged differently than if the same behavior were not reacted to at all. But what if the reaction of the witness questions the normativeness of the behavior? One may assume that negative reactions to normative behaviors are more likely to draw special attention since this is an unexpected reaction. Such a reaction may influence the judgment of the observer particularly when the expression comes from someone who is high powered. This suggestion is in line

with the notion of bases of power (French and Raven 1959). According to this notion, people may gain power to influence another person based on the influence that they can bring to bear in the situation.

One important source of influence is expertise. In the present context, an expresser may be considered as more versed in group norms by virtue of being, for example, a senior group member. Or, be considered as someone who knows something about the situation which is not known to the observer. Expressions of emotions on the part of this person that criticize the normative behavior of the object of evaluation may cause the observer to judge the behavior as less normative than it would have been otherwise. In other words, observers may trust the expert as knowing better what went on and shape their evaluations of the behavior accordingly. This can be seen as another way by which the emotions of the authority figure serve the informative function motivated by the observers' wish to get an accurate sense of the situation (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). Yet, observers' judgments of the normativeness of such a behavior may also be shaped by the emotions of a witness due to other sources of power. For example, an observer may be motivated to gain the approval of another person (Deutsch and Gerard 1955) and the influence of the emotions of a witness may serve this goal. These suggestions still wait for research as very little is known about how others' expressions of emotions affect learning of norms and standards and/or judgments of others' behaviors in terms of how these stand in relation to norms and standards.

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