

The Problem of Behaviour Change: From Social Norms to an Ingroup Focus

Katherine J. Reynolds^{1*}, Emina Subašić² and Karen Tindall¹

¹*The Australian National University*

²*University of Newcastle*

Abstract

Social norms are of increasing interest to public policy experts and those conducting behaviour change interventions (e.g. safe driving, recycling). While there is agreement that social norms play a central role in explaining behaviour, such consensus is lacking when it comes to explaining the process through which this occurs. Economics, social marketing and political science focus on individual self-interest and goal satisfaction and social (dis)approval. In contrast social psychology also incorporates collective interests through its analysis of social identity and ingroup processes. To fully understand behaviour change, it is argued that greater engagement is needed with the links between shifts in social identity, and ingroup norms. As definitions of who “we” are shift, so too does what “we” do. Implications for behaviour change interventions are discussed.

Social norms are a key element of many behaviour change interventions, especially when the goal is en masse, sustained behaviour change. Within the public sector, private sector and academia, the concept of social norms is increasingly being recognised as a crucial component of motivation and behaviour and thus a key to behavioural influence and change. Social norms are argued to be “one of the most central theoretical constructs in the social sciences including sociology, law, political science, anthropology, and increasingly economics” (Kameda, Takezawa, & Hastie, 2005, p. 331). There are unresolved issues, however. In particular the term “social norm” is not used in a consistent way across the social and behaviour sciences (for example, economics, sociology and social psychology), and a systematic analysis of how and when social norms impact on behaviour change is lacking. Without a clear understanding of the concept of “social norms” and a consideration of the underlying mechanisms that explain *how* individuals come to be influenced by norms, it will be challenging to develop effective and efficient interventions directed at behaviour change (for example, safe driving, healthy eating, anti-bullying or anti-racism).

The paper starts by considering and contrasting key (and at times inconsistent) definitions of “social norms” across the social and behavioural sciences. We then turn to a central question for both social scientists and policymakers – how social norms affect behaviour. The final section of this paper focuses on the contribution of the social identity perspective and the central idea that this perspective can offer insights not only into understanding behaviour (which has been the focus to date) but also behaviour change. Given that norms are tied to one’s social identity as social relations and definitions of who “we” are shift, so to does what “we” do. These insights open up new questions and directions for research but also for practice in public policy domains.

What are Social Norms?

The norm concept is ubiquitous in the social and behavioural sciences and is highly impactful in practitioner and public policy settings. An issue stemming from this ubiquity, however, is that

the term “norm” is used in different ways. Along these lines, Bicchieri (2006), for example, states that there is “confusion about what is meant by ‘norm’” (p. 1). According to Bicchieri,

a norm can be formal or informal, personal or collective, descriptive of what most people do, or prescriptive of behaviour. In the same social setting, conformity to these different kinds of norms stems from a variety of motivations and produces distinct, sometimes even opposing, behavioural patterns (p. 1).

Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990) also acknowledge that a key problem that must be solved before one can have confidence in the utility of normative explanations is definitional: “Both in common parlance and academic usage, *norm* has more than one meaning” (p. 1015). Below, we discuss the most commonly used norm concepts (see Table 1) and their implications for understanding behaviour.

Within the descriptions and definitions of social norms, the first point to make is that it is recognised that there are shared societal expectations that impact on behaviour. Etzioni (2000, p. 173) conceptualises these as “narratives” about past events and “traditions, institutions, customs, and habits” which create and transfer social norms. These narratives affect psychological functioning and behaviour through socialisation processes that result in the human mind

Table 1. Table of definitions of norms.

Nomenclature	Definition	References
Subjective norm	“An individual’s perception that most people who are important to her think she should (or should not) perform a particular behaviour”	Ajzen (1991), Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) ^a
Descriptive norm	“What is typical or normal ... what most people do”, including “evidence as to what will likely be effective and adaptive action”.	Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990, p. 1015)
Injunctive norm	“Rules or beliefs as to what constitutes morally approved and disapproved conduct”.	Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990, p. 1015)
Social proof	“We use information about how others have behaved to help us determine proper conduct for ourselves”.	Cialdini (1984, p. 149)
Social norm (counterposing moral norm)	An external influence, which is conditional and based on expectations (Bicchieri). “Shared expectations” enforced through external sanctions, such as shame (Elster).	Bicchieri (2006), Elster (2007)
Personal norm	“Feelings of moral obligation to perform or refrain from specific action”.	Schwartz (1977), Schwartz and Howard (1981, p. 191)
Moral norm	Internalised, unconditional and emotional (Bicchieri). Internalised and enforced through self-generated emotions such as guilt (Elster).	Bicchieri (2006), Elster (2007)
Ingroup norm	People who come together in groups develop a perception of what they share in common and the features that distinguish them from other groups. We claim the informational value of a response or its “persuasiveness” is exactly equivalent to the degree that it is perceived to be exemplary of some ingroup norm or consensus.	Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987, p. 154)

^aThis definition is taken from Fishbein and Ajzen (2011, p. 131). In this text the authors explain that the subjective norm of their earlier work referred only to injunctive norms, and in latter conceptualisations of their theory they employ the term “perceived norm” to refer to “the overall normative influence derived from perceived injunctive and descriptive norms” (pp. 131–133).

being socially structured (e.g. Turner & Oakes, 1997). In societies we share language and cultural practices that impact on thinking and behaviour. In this way all norms can be conceptualised as being *social* because they emerge from collective activities and the emergence of shared knowledge and practices (Sherif, 1936; Turner, 1991; Turner & Oakes, 1997).

It is assumed in discussions of the norm concept that people know the traditions and rituals, what is morally (un)acceptable and the consequences of norm violations. Cultural information is transmitted through communication, and the information that is reproduced constitutes a culture (Dawkins, 1999; see Kashima, 2008). Cultural socialisation processes within a society are seen as largely homogenous and that there is a moral consensus. As a result “most others” are viewed as a reference point for people to infer, imitate and learn about behaviour and to measure how far one’s own behaviour deviates from what others do. It is also recognised that people occupy different social positions and belong to different groups and do not necessarily agree on what is (in)appropriate behaviour. It is therefore often not clear whether “others” means those in society-at-large or those who are more closely connected to the target (“important referents”).

Building on these ideas, subjective norms are defined as “an individual’s perception that most people who are important to her think she should (or should not) perform a particular behaviour” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011, p. 131). How likely “important referent” others are to (dis)approve of a particular behaviour informs the subjective norm. The subjective norm is used primarily in relation to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; also see below). It is operationalised as the amount of pressure people feel from important “others” to perform or not perform a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991 p. 188). In measuring subjective norms, a person is asked to consider all important referents and in an additive way calculate the social pressure. According to Ajzen, “a global measure of SN [subjective norm] is usually obtained by asking respondents to rate the extent to which ‘important others’ would approve or disapprove of their performing a given behaviour” (p. 195).

A prominent dichotomy within the norms literature that relates to the impact of “others” concerns the distinction between “descriptive” and “injunctive” norms. According to Cialdini et al. (1990), “the descriptive norm describes what is typical or *normal*. It is what most people do, and it motivates by providing evidence as to what will likely be effective and adaptive action” (p. 1015). It is unclear whether “most” refers to those in society-at-large or those important to the target. Injunctive norms refer to

rules or beliefs as to what constitutes morally approved and disapproved conduct ... That is, rather than simply informing one’s action, these norms enjoin it through the promise of social sanctions (p. 1015).

It is by looking to others that we obtain “social proof” of what is deemed “proper” conduct for ourselves (Cialdini, 1984).

Counterposing this focus on external forces are considerations of norms as being self-defining and upheld through internal forces.

A common emphasis in most definitions concerns the degree to which norms, as rules about human social behaviour, are internalised as part of a person’s sense of self-definition (“who am I”, “who we are”) or are forces external to the person that have impact through peer pressure and conformity (e.g. fear of social sanctions). This distinction is important because whether norms impact on behaviour through internal or external processes has implications for the sustainability of the behaviour and costs of surveillance. There are also implications for understanding behaviour change and the strategies authorities, leadership and institutions pursue in the interests of shaping behaviour. Internal drivers are likely to be more efficient and to come to the fore through different pathways compared to external ones.

When a social norm is not only “out there” in the social milieu but becomes part of a person’s own belief system, this is often referred to as *personal* norms or moral norms (e.g. Bicchieri, 2006; Elster, 2007; Schwartz, 1977). “Moral norms” are internalised and enforced through self-generated emotions such as guilt. The concept of “personal norms” is related to the idea of a moral norm. Schwartz and Howard (1981) define personal norms as “feelings of moral obligation to perform or refrain from specific action” (p. 191). So, “personal” or “moral” norms often are contrasted with “social norms” that rely on external forces to shape behaviour without becoming part of “who I am”.

As outlined in Table 1, there is also reference to “ingroup norm” which like moral and personal norms is conceptualised as being internal rather than external to the person. This concept is central to the social identity perspective (which incorporates both social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1979; and self-categorization theory, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and differs from other definitions of social norms because ingroup norms are tied to people’s psychology as group members. Ingroup norms “emerge from social interactions between people who are related to each other psychologically as members of a social group” (Turner, 1991 p. xii). The social group is not simply a context for individual behaviour but is part of the psychology of the individual.

The concept of an “ingroup norm” can serve to integrate a number of the aspects of existing definitions. *Social* norms can be deeply personal and affect a person’s behaviour in a given situation when they are no longer external to the self but internalised as “ours”. Second, the social identity perspective provides a specific analysis of how a group norm can become internalised and be transformed into personal or moral norms. As is discussed in more detail in the next section, when people come to categorise themselves as similar to others (ingroup, we-self), the characteristics that define the group become self-defining and shape behaviour.

How Social Norms Shape (Social) Behaviour?

The way in which norms are conceptualised impacts on the explanations that are offered to account for “how” norms exert influence on behaviour. Considering extant theorising regarding the relationship between social norms and behaviour, four key approaches emerge (e.g. Anderson, 2000): rational choice, evolutionary selection, theory of planned behaviour, and internalisation on the basis of social identity. There is not space to review these first two perspectives in detail, but they are briefly outlined as a point of contrast with more psychological perspectives.

The rational choice approach to understanding human social behaviour underpins much of economics and political science. This approach draws on the subjective, descriptive and social definitions of norms where it is argued that it is functional to look to “others” (see Table 1). Put simply it is rational and in one’s self-interest to look to others to infer one’s own behaviour because it is efficient and effective. As Cialdini et al. (1990) note, “if everyone is doing it, it must be a sensible thing to do” (p. 1015). Looking to others also

offers an information-processing advantage and a decisional shortcut when one is choosing how to behave in a given situation. By simply registering what most others are doing there and by imitating their actions, one can usually choose efficiently and well (p. 1015).

It follows that if “what most others do” is already known or accurately communicated (for example, through media advertising), behaviour will align with the norm.

Another prominent idea within the economic approach is that norms impact on behaviour because people act in line with self-interest. Elster (1994) argues that norms are enforced or sustained “by the feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, guilt, and shame that a person suffers at

the prospect of violating them” (p. 24). Interestingly, self-interest has also been used to explain the emergence of groups and social norms. “Grouping” and co-operation between individuals is considered mutually beneficial and social norms are representative of these individuals’ “aggregate preferences” (Geisinger, 2004, p. 617). This interaction between self-interested individuals seeking to achieve individual goals and preferences results in the emergence of social norms. What is being argued here is that group behaviour (co-operation, acting in line with the norm) is an outcome of individual psychological processes. It is simply functional, efficient and in one’s personal interests to look to others to inform one’s own behaviour and to act accordingly.

An evolutionary perspective also assumes norms are functional and for this reason impact on behaviour. The central idea is that social norms go through the process of competition and selection. So norms develop and fade in a “survival of the fittest” model such that the norms that exist are useful. Ostrom (2000, pp. 143–144) argues that which particular norm is “selected” and therefore shapes behaviour is highly variable and situational, based upon culture, families and exposure to particular norms. It is also recognised that the evolutionary forces of interest are those that enable the formation of group psychology and the ability to expand the self and categorise others as like-self.

In summary, evolutionary and rational choice approaches to normative behaviour focus on social learning and socialisation, conformity (to gain social approval/avoid disapproval) and individual self-interest where it suits one’s own individual goals to co-operate. As such, there is an assumption that norms exist, they are known to most members of a social system and because they are functional or are reinforced through social sanctions, they are followed. In contrast, in social psychology there is a set of theories that focus specifically on explaining the *process* through which norms affect behaviour.

First, the theory of planned behaviour (TPB, Ajzen, 1991) has had a major impact within and outside the field in explaining behavioural intentions and behaviour. TPB is grounded in the assumption that intention to perform a behaviour drives behaviour (e.g. Ajzen, 1991). Intention is governed by the relationship between people’s attitudes towards the behaviour (favourable or not), their perceived behavioural control (his or her confidence in performing the behaviour and certainty it will produce certain outcomes; Bandura, 1986) and normative beliefs. As outlined earlier, subjective norms (how likely ‘important referent’ others are to (dis)approve of a particular behaviour) is a central aspect of the construct of ‘normative beliefs’. In latter conceptualisations, the term ‘perceived norm’ is used to refer to ‘the overall normative influence derived from perceived injunctive and descriptive norms’ (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011, pp. 131–133).

Another perspective focuses more specifically on group psychology and group processes in explaining behaviour. Within the social identity perspective, it is argued that people can define the self in terms of personal identity (“I”) and social identity (“we”). Further, self-definition can shift from the personal to social level of self-categorisation and as such it is variable, dynamic and context-dependent. When people come to categorise themselves as similar to others (ingroup, we-self), they internalise the characteristics that they have in common and define the group as being distinct from comparison outgroups. The dimensions that come to define the ingroup shape behaviour because they become self-relevant and self-defining (Turner, 1982, 1985; see also for example, Hogg & Reid, 2006; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999).

The value of the social identity perspective, then, is that through the concept of social identity, it helps to explain how narratives, expectations and rules become internalised and self-reinforcing. It introduces the group as a basis for conformity and a motivating force for feelings of pressure and guilt. It also serves to clarify which “others” will impact on behaviour under certain conditions. Because the norms define who “we” are as a group, when people identify with the group, their behaviour will become more normative.

Aspects of these two psychological perspectives have been integrated through the construct of ingroup norm. Terry and Hogg (1996) sought to improve the efficacy and predictability of the intention-behaviour link by redefining the subjective norm component of the model. They argued that in the TPB, attitudes are understood as being internalised cognitive constructs but subjective norms are placed external to the person and separated from attitudes. Through conceptualising subjective norms as ingroup norms, they argued the TPB model would be better able to explain the relationship between intentions and behaviour. Terry and Hogg also point out that the additive model that underpins TPB and the idea of subjective norms, whereby social pressure is a function of how many others (dis)approve of a given behaviour, does not help explain *which* “others” emerge as referents in a given context. From a self-categorization perspective, “norms of a behaviourally relevant reference group will influence intentions to engage in a particular behaviour, but only for people who identify strongly with the reference group” (Terry & Hogg, 1996, p. 781).

Along these lines, Terry and Hogg (1996) demonstrated in the area of health behaviour (e.g. sun protection, exercise) that the relationship between attitudes and behavioural intentions can be strengthened through use of “ingroup norms”. When an ingroup message was congruent (rather than incongruent) with the initial attitude of the participant, the relationship was stronger, and this was particularly so when identification with the ingroup was high compared to low (see also Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008; Smith & Louis, 2009).

These findings support the central tenets of the social identity perspective and reinforce that people’s psychology as group members (and not only as individuals) can be important in explaining behaviour. It is argued that engaging specifically with social identity processes serves to improve the explanatory power of TPB and focuses attention on those “others” who are members of reference groups. The social identity perspective, however, can also be used to develop a more systematic and specific analysis of behaviour *change*. Through careful engagement with the analysis of social influence within this perspective, it becomes clear the social identity is important not only in understanding people’s behaviour in certain contexts but also in shaping it. In the next section the focus is on social identity and behaviour change and implications of this analysis for wide-scale behaviour change interventions (e.g. tax compliance, binge drinking).

A Social Identity Perspective on Behaviour Change: Key Insights and Implications for Interventions and Research Practice

The concept of social norms and its role in explaining behaviour is recognised across the social and behavioural sciences. What is being argued here is that through using the social identity perspective it is possible to gain conceptual clarity, better integrate existing theory and research across disciplines and move forward in a more unified way by using insights from this perspective to study behaviour *change*. The social identity perspective makes three unique contributions to understanding behaviour change. First, as highlighted above, it is the only analysis that precisely explains which particular “others” will shape what “our” norms are and the extent to which they are reflected in behaviour (see discussions of Terry & Hogg, 1996 above; Hogg & Reid, 2006). Second, through the analysis of context-dependent social identity salience and social influence inherent in self-categorization theory, a link it made between forming, strengthening and changing meaningful groups and behaviour *change*. Identity-based self-transformation is important in explaining behaviour change. Third, it has the potential to integrate many existing strands of work within a more parsimonious account and offers new directions for research and practice.

Social identity, social influence and behaviour change

When people's social identity is salient, they perceive themselves and others as an ingroup – as cognitively grouped as “us” who are more alike than contrasting others or “them”. This similarity creates an expectation that “we” ought to agree and respond in the same way (in reactions, judgement, attitudes, behaviour) and motivates people to bring about such agreement (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Turner, 1991). Such motivation for agreement enables mutual influence to occur opening up the possibility that one's theories, expectations and beliefs about oneself and the world can change. Knowing that those in the same psychological ingroup do X rather than Y, or do more of X, is motivating and can affect one's own behaviour.

What this means is that social identity offers a path towards better understanding the process of behaviour *change*. If people's group memberships and associated social identities change, so too can behaviour (e.g. Reynolds et al., 2010). It is also possible that the meaning of existing groups (e.g. women, members of organisation X) – what “we” value and believe in – is redefined, requiring a change in expected and accepted (i.e. normative) patterns of behaviour. Put simply, as definitions of who “we” are and who “we” are not shift, so to does what “we” (should) do. Further, it is those group members that best represent the group and its interests (i.e. leadership) that have the most impact in influencing the normative trajectory of the group. There is a role for leadership in helping to clarify what it means to be a group member (e.g. through social comparison that highlights what makes the group special and distinctive), in building consensus around definitions of who “we” are, and embedding these in structures, rituals and practices (e.g. Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Turner, Reynolds, & Subašić, 2008).

Although more research is needed that systematically examines social identity processes in the context of behaviour change interventions (as discussed further below), there are a number of findings demonstrating the usefulness of the social identity perspective in explaining the relationship between identity, norms and behaviour, and in some instances behaviour change. For example, Jones, Haslam, York, and Ryan (2008) found that higher identification with ingroups in which bullying was not the norm was associated with a significantly less favourable view of the bully and a belief that those who bullied should be punished as their behaviour threatened group norms and shared social identity. Livingstone, Haslam, Postmes, and Jetten (2011) also demonstrated that the impact of a psychology student induction programme on awareness of descriptive norms was mediated by increased ingroup identification as a psychology student. Furthermore, Cruwys et al. (2012) showed that observing the amount of food consumption (low or high) of an ingroup or outgroup other had an impact on one's own eating behaviour. Where there was a perceived shared group membership that was psychologically salient individuals conformed to the ingroup (but not outgroup) norm.

With respect to behaviour change specifically, Duffy and Nesdale (2009) found that while incidence of bullying was higher in children belonging to groups with a norm supporting bullying in comparison to groups defined by an anti-bullying norm, rates of bullying increased the more strongly members identified with the group. Another example comes from interventions designed to address heavy or binge drinking at university. Social norms marketing campaigns have been used to communicate the number of drinks “most” students at a particular university consume on a night out which is fewer than the consumption pattern for heavy drinkers. Because people judge their own behaviour by looking to others, this accurate norm is expected to reduce consumption levels among binge drinkers at the university. Integrating a social identity perspective, Neighbors et al. (2010) measured the perceived drinking norms for four groups of students on their campus, identification with each group, as well as participants'

own drinking behaviour. In line with predictions, they found that group identification, as defined by feeling closer to specific groups, moderated the associations between perceived drinking norms in the specific group and one's own drinking behaviour.

Integration of existing stands of research on behaviour change

In offering insights into a more unified analysis of the psychology of behaviour change, it is possible to reconsider through the lens of the social identity perspective existing behaviour change findings that do not explicitly derive from this perspective. Three widely known studies are particularly relevant as they already (if implicitly) engage a social identity-based process with consistent results. First, Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius (2008) found that a descriptive normative statement that the majority of guests “in this room” versus “in this hotel” reuse their towels, was more effective in increasing reuse. Second, in relation to energy use, Nolan, Schultz, Cialdini, Goldstein, and Griskevicius (2008) found that energy consumption was reduced the most when people were presented with a descriptive normative message (“most people in your community are finding ways to conserve energy”) compared to messages that highlighted self-interest (“the time is right to save money on your home energy bills”), environmental protection (“the time is right for reducing greenhouse gases”) or social responsibility (“we need to work together to save energy”). Third, in research examining tax compliance behaviour, providing information that “nine out of ten people in an area had already paid their taxes” (Behavioural Insights Unit, 2012, p. 16) was more effective in increasing tax compliance compared to information that highlighted penalties for non-compliance or national (UK) compliance levels.

From a social identity perspective, the effectiveness of these types of interventions relies upon the perception that “others” who stayed in the hotel room previously, or who are living in one's community or town, are fellow ingroup members. “They” influence “my” behaviour precisely because “we” share the same beliefs and values when it comes to protecting “our” environment or paying “our” taxes. Put slightly differently, if in a given context those around us (the “others”) are seen as part of the outgroup (as “them” rather than “us”), influence is likely to be limited. It is possible to imagine a very different outcome if in the Goldstein et al. (2008) and Nolan et al. (2008) studies those in the hotel room or “your” community were considered to be different from self (outgroup) on other dimensions the target felt were relevant (e.g. were exceptionally noisy neighbours; rented rather than owned their house).

Implications and a research agenda

It is also possible to envisage new directions for social identity research that are more directly oriented to behaviour change. This perspective has made a major contribution towards understanding societal change as collective efforts to address unjust or otherwise unsatisfactory aspects of *intergroup* relations (e.g. Subasic, Reynolds & Turner, 2008). Just as the social identity analysis helps explain the emergence of collective behaviour at the intergroup level, it has an equally important (yet underexplored) contribution to make when it comes to shifts in norms and behaviours at the more intra-group level, where changes in the meaning of a given identity – what it means to be “us” – shape individual group members' actions (e.g. exercising more; drinking less; Reynolds & Branscombe, 2015). For this contribution to be realised, however, research practices that focus on (longitudinal) field and behavioural data are needed (e.g. see Reynolds, 2011; Stott, Adang, Livingstone, & Shreiber, 2007). If this perspective is to have the kind of policy impact, relevance and vibrancy that is currently evident in fields such as behavioural economics it is necessary to work with practitioners in the design and evaluation of behaviour change interventions and to study more closely the contexts where shifts in identity and behaviour are most likely (e.g., fault-lines in people's lives, entering and exiting organisations, points of role and identity transition; Reynolds & Branscombe, 2015).

On the basis of current knowledge though, it is possible to highlight two practical implications for policymakers and those engaging directly with attempting to bring about behaviour change. The first implication of the social identity perspective is that there is a need to ensure that there is a focus on *ingroup* “others”. To be influenced by neighbours or others in the same town, there must be a perception of self–other similarity. Such a perception is based on defining one’s self in terms of the relevant social identity and associated norms, values, beliefs and therefore behaviours. The more the (social) norm information is connected to people’s (social) self and identity, the greater the impact on behaviour.

The second implication is that there needs to be a recognition that the group or social identity that becomes salient is variable and context-dependent. As a result attention needs to be directed to making the “right” group identity salient and to presenting ingroup normative information in contexts where this identity is most relevant to behaviour. The effectiveness of a social norm intervention campaign could be impacted by considerations of when and where the subject or targeted audience views or hears the message, and whether the relevant identity is salient at the time. Whether and how all aspects of the campaign align with the social identity that is being mobilised – including its normative content – should be a central concern for those designing behaviour change interventions.

Along these lines, Perkins, Linkenbach, Lewis, and Neighbors (2010) study of a campaign designed to correct misperceptions of drinking-and-driving norms among young people living in US state of Montanan used phrases such as “Most Montana young adults (4 out of 5) don’t drink and drive”. Over a period of 18 months, the researchers found an increase in the use of designated drivers and a decrease in drinking-and-driving among the target population. However, one of the issues identified by Perkins and colleagues was the need to advertise through mediums that would reach the target sub-population. Embedded in this issue is the need to advertise in a manner that makes salient an identity associated with the targeted demographic (in this case, Montana young adults) and to communicate the message at a time when this salient identity will lead to the desired behaviour change (i.e. while drinking or while driving). For the behaviour change messages to be influential, they need to be displayed when and where the relevant group-based identity is contextually relevant and likely to be salient.

The social identity perspective offers new insights into developing more effective and better targeted behaviour change interventions and ones that may have greater success in addressing entrenched social issues. As Lewin’s (1951) recognised early on, “It is usually easier to change individuals formed into a group than to change any one of them separately” (p. 228). The value of working via identity is in its capacity to affect large numbers of people (for whom the identity is meaningful) effectively and efficiently. What is being argued here is that to change individuals formed into a group, it is necessary to understand and affect social identity – its content and salience in the context relevant to the behaviour. These processes enable the emergence of new sources of social influence (leadership) and ingroup norms which are fundamental to behaviour change. Further research is needed in investigating the potential and limits of identity processes and identity change in bringing about behaviour change. In many instances behaviour change is not necessarily easy or straightforward but starting with a model where the (a) person is understood as both individual and group members and (b) impact of the group on the individual is recognised, opens up new avenues for policymakers and practitioners.

Conclusions

It is critical to understand how and when social norms impact on behaviour and to move towards greater consensus in terminology. Public policymakers and multiple disciplines are familiar with the idea of norms, groups and social influence. Despite this familiarity there is confusion in what is meant by the term “norm” and also, importantly, disagreement about

the process through which norms impact on behaviour. Until recently theory and research on the “norm” concept has focused on norms as being external to the person and the idea that their power lies in the dynamics of social (dis)approval, peer pressure and conformity.

Much of policy work (e.g. health, environment, education, employment, immigration) continues to struggle when it comes to creating actual changes in people’s behaviour “on the ground”, and ultimately societal-level change (e.g. Australian Public Service Commission, 2007). When policymakers look to social science, the current state of the field offers fragmented, inconsistent and largely impractical (i.e. individualised) “solutions” to their needs. What the social identity analysis offers, in contrast, is a far-reaching, integrated and parsimonious analysis of a single process through which change at both the level of the “individual” person and the level of society takes place. With psychological change that redefines who “we” are – our social selves – behaviour change also becomes possible.

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Short Biographies

Dr Kate Reynolds is a social psychology academic at the Australian National University. Her research focuses on the social self or social identity in affecting and shaping people’s attitudes, affect and behaviour. She formerly was Associate Editor of *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* and is currently a member of the Governing Council of the International Society of Political Psychology and Co-Editor of the journal *Political Psychology*.

Dr Emina Subasic is a social psychologist and an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Newcastle. Her research investigates the dynamics of self-categorisation, influence and leadership in social change contexts.

Dr Karen Tindall was a Research Fellow in the Research School of Psychology, ANU. She has held research positions in both Political Science and Psychology at ANU and is interested in behaviour and behaviour change in the context of emergency management.

Note

* Correspondence: Research School of Psychology, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, 0200, Australia. Email: Katherine.Reynolds@anu.edu.au

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