

The influence of social norms on health-related practices

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HYGIENE
& TROPICAL
MEDICINE



It all started with an unresolved mystery.



Why did parents practice FGMC in Senegal? UNICEF asked 2000-2010

They all loved
their daughters.

Some knew it's **not** a
religious obligation.

Most knew it's **dangerous**
for their daughters.

Some even
preferred not to!

A forgone assumption hidden in many projects

(Material resources aside)



New
knowledge



New
behaviour

But then **failure** might come
(for the brave ones who embrace it)



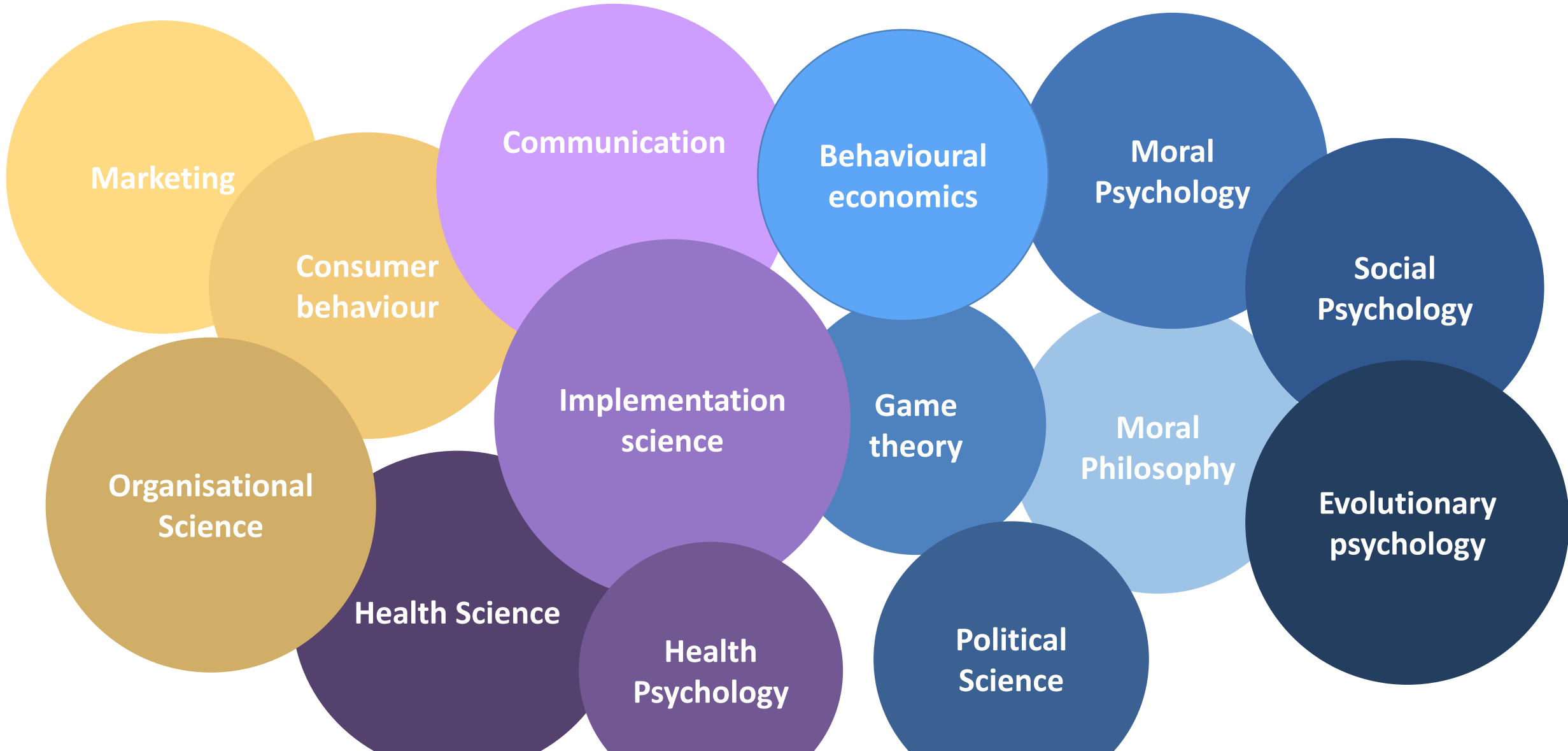
“Despite an extensive promotion campaign **we found only moderate compliance with the intervention**”

Have you
experienced, witnessed or heard of
similar shortcomings?



What are
social norms?

There are many schools of social norms as beliefs.



Social norms regulate what behaviour is “normal.”



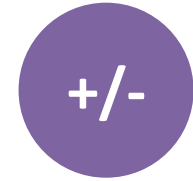
Social Norms defined



Unwritten rules about what is acceptable in a given society or group of people (“reference group”)



Examples: Bring gifts after a travel abroad, offer water to a visitor, leave a tip to the waiter



Often maintained by positive and negative social sanctions

Knowing and complying with social norms is beneficial for one's health.

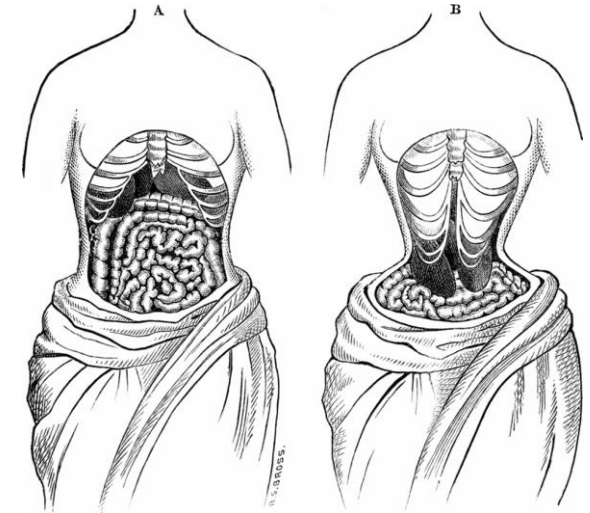


Knowing the social norms of a group (Cultural Consensus) is correlated with normal blood pressure
(Dressler and Bindon 2000)



Being **accepted** in a group (Social Integration) is correlated with physical and mental health
(Berkman et al 2000)

**But complying with social norms
can also result in harm to self or others.**



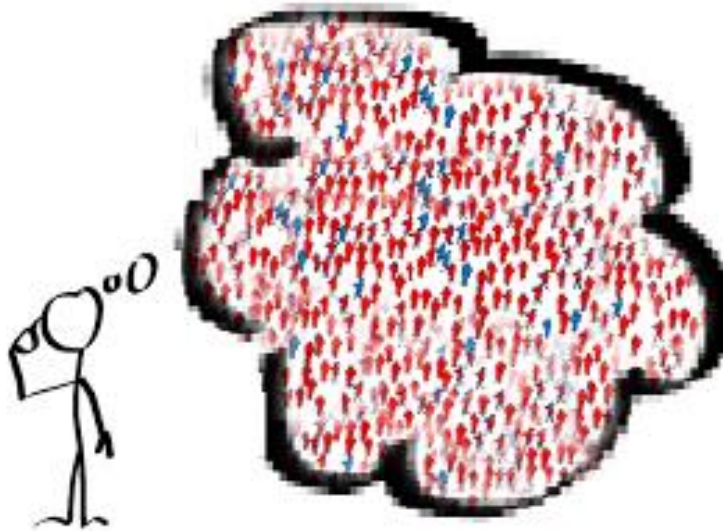
Today we will be discussing the harmful side of norms specifically,
but let's bear in mind many norms also have positive effects.



A working definition of **social norms**

Social Norms as Beliefs

1. What people believe others do



(**Descriptive norms** or
empirical expectations)

2. What people believe others
approve and disapprove of



(**Injunctive norms** or
normative expectations)

Kallgren, C. A., et al. (2000). "A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: When Norms Do and Do not Affect Behavior." Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 26(8): 1002-1012.

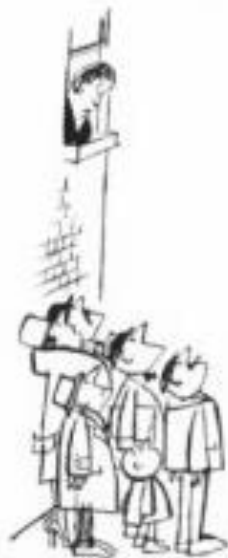


Focus:
Descriptive Norms

Descriptive:

What do people believe others in their group do?

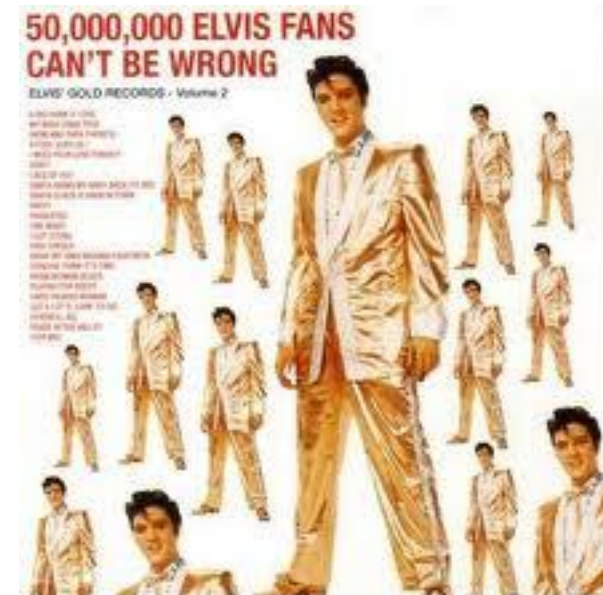




HIDDEN CAMERA SOCIAL EXPERIMENT PROVES



Marketing strategy use the power of descriptive norms: “everyone does it”

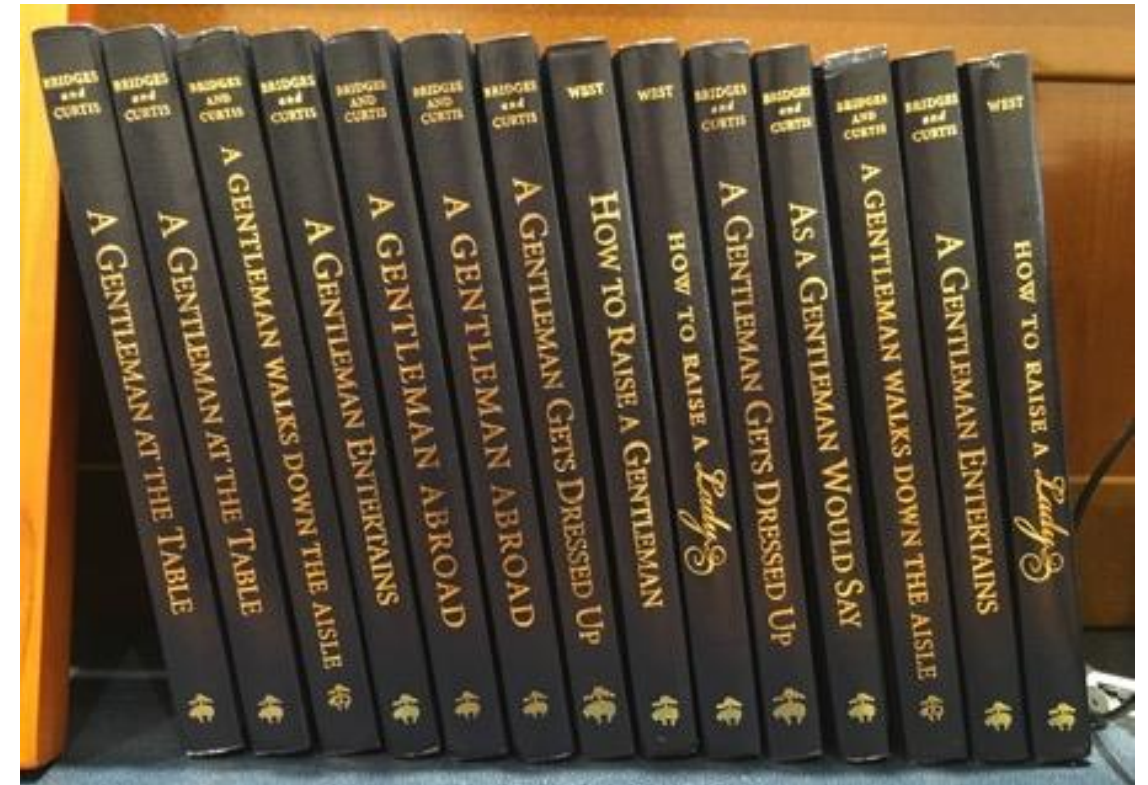
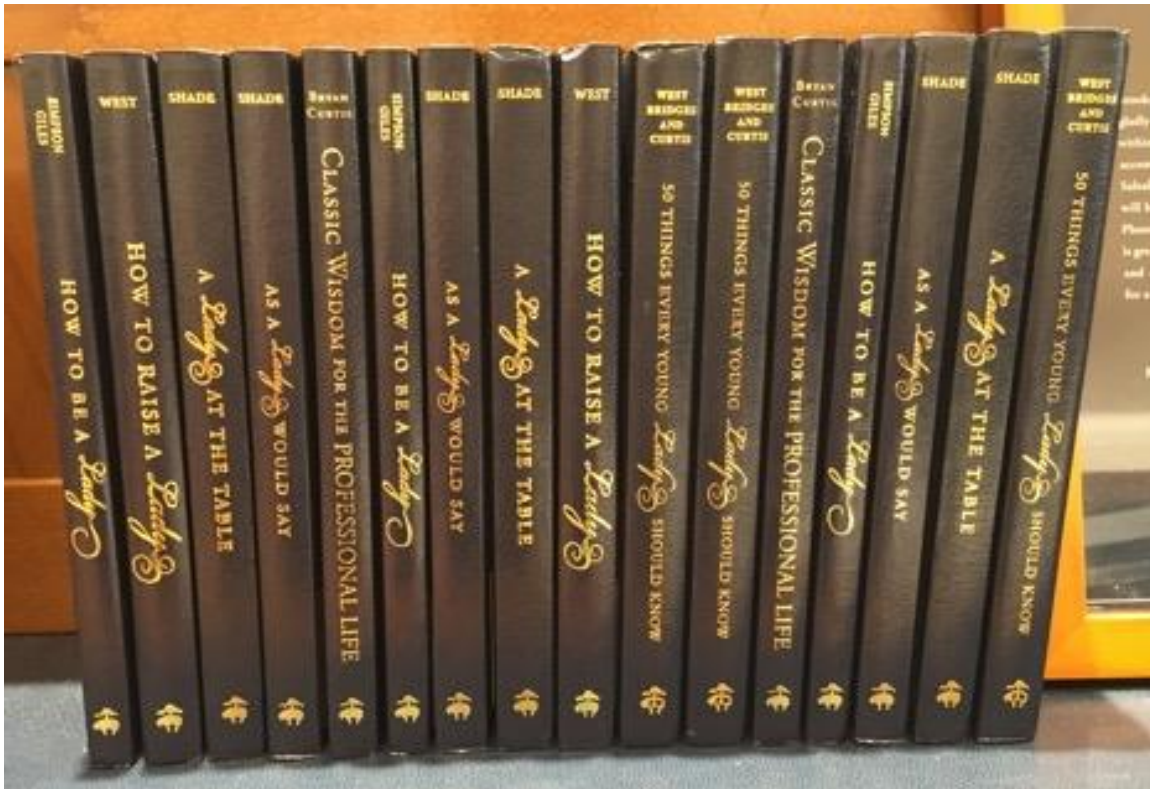




Focus:
Injunctive Norms

Injunctive:

To what extent do people believe others in their group approve of something?



(what are others approving of? What do they think I should do?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VbHh4JAzA0>

Not just “good” manners, but the **appropriate** manners
to be considered good members of a group.





Focus:
Sanctions

Sanctions:

What do people anticipate happens to (non) compliers in their group?



A working definition of social norms

(Mostly) unwritten rules of a **group** that group members follow because of

1

what they think others
do (or/and)

2

what they think others
approve and disapprove

...and they anticipate positive and negative **sanctions** for compliers and not compliers respectively

A Social Norm is **NOT** a personal attitude.





What is the state
of the **evidence**?

Social norms influence...



Child Marriage
(Lee-Rife et al. 2010)



Female Genital Cutting
(Mackie and LeJeune, 2009)



Family planning
(Bongardt et al. 2016)



Women's Economic Empowerment
(Marcus, 2018)



Child Vaccination
(Sato and Takasaki, 2019)



Intimate partner violence
(Bass et al. 2016)



Handwashing
(White et al. 2020)



Maternal Health
(Kuzara et al. 2019)

Examples of harmful social norms



I wouldn't like to smoke (attitude), but I ought to do it (norm) to look cool



I wouldn't like to drink that much (attitude), but hey: you have got to fit in so I do (norm)!



I can't wear a helmet when cycling (norm) – that's just for the geeks!



I would like to defend that person that is bullied at school (attitude), but I don't want to be seen with him (norm) because everyone think s/he is a nerd (and would disapprove of me)



I would like to report the teacher that hits the child (attitude) but nobody does it (norm) and I think others would stop talking to me and call me a "policeman"

Solving the mystery

2000-2010 UNICEF asked: **why did parents practice FGMC in Senegal?**

These parents thought that:

- 1) everyone in their group got their daughters cut, and/or
- 2) everyone approved of them getting their daughters cut, and/or
- 3) if they don't they will be considered bad parents, and their daughters won't get married

Three Questions & Clarifications

(15 minutes)

Group Discussion

(15 minutes)

**What harmful norms come to your mind
that are relevant in your work?**

Feedback from Group Discussion

(15 minutes)

What harmful norms come to your mind that are relevant in your work?



Some advanced
key points


1

Group Norms and Societal Norms

Sometimes the norm exists in a **specific reference group**...



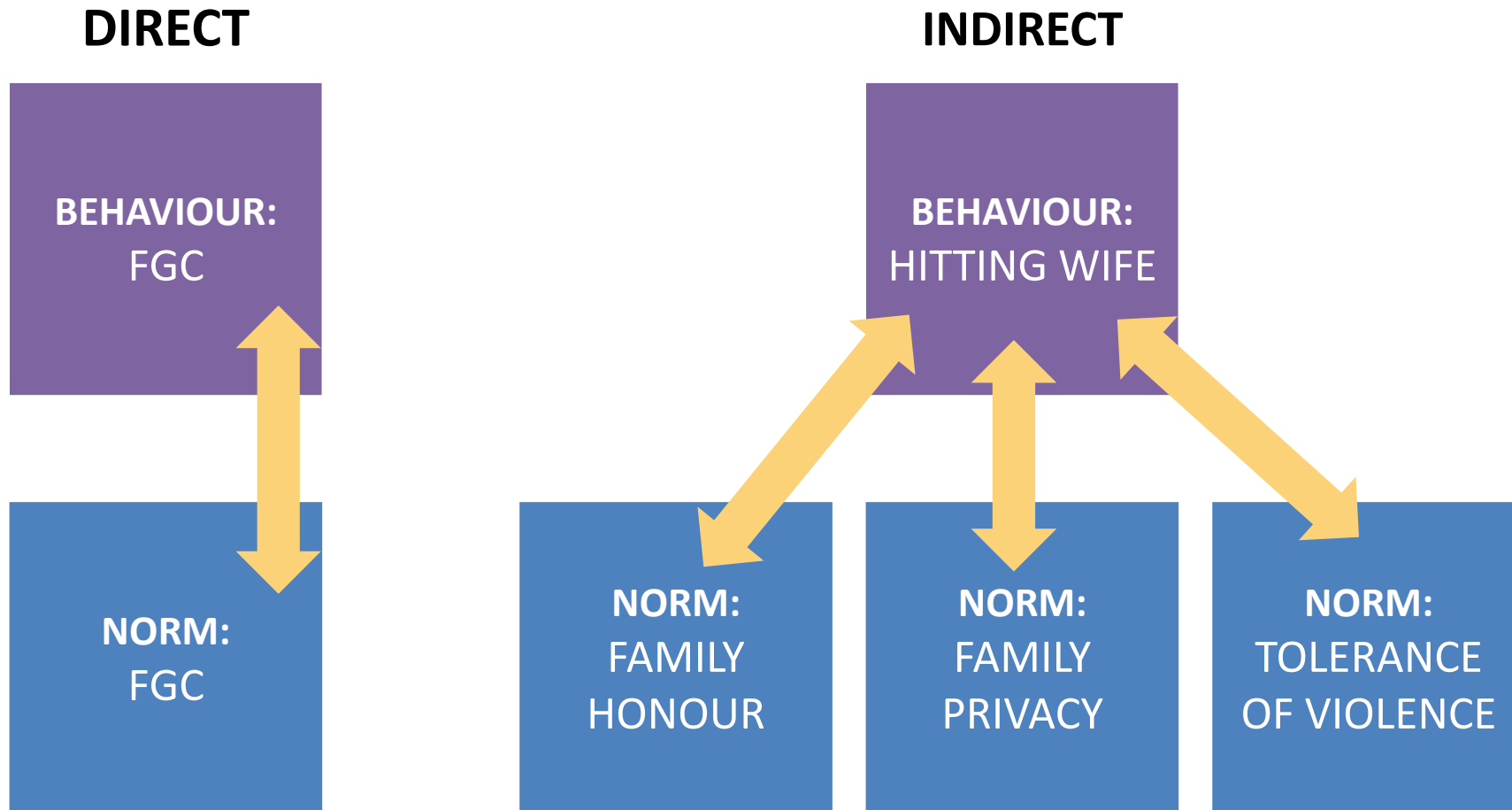
...and sometimes they are in the “**society**”

A young boy with short, light brown hair is shown from the chest up, looking slightly to his left. He is wearing a dark blue t-shirt. In the background, a white banner with the word "Poké" in large, stylized yellow and blue letters is visible. The scene appears to be outdoors, possibly at a school event. Two thin red vertical lines are positioned on either side of the text overlay.

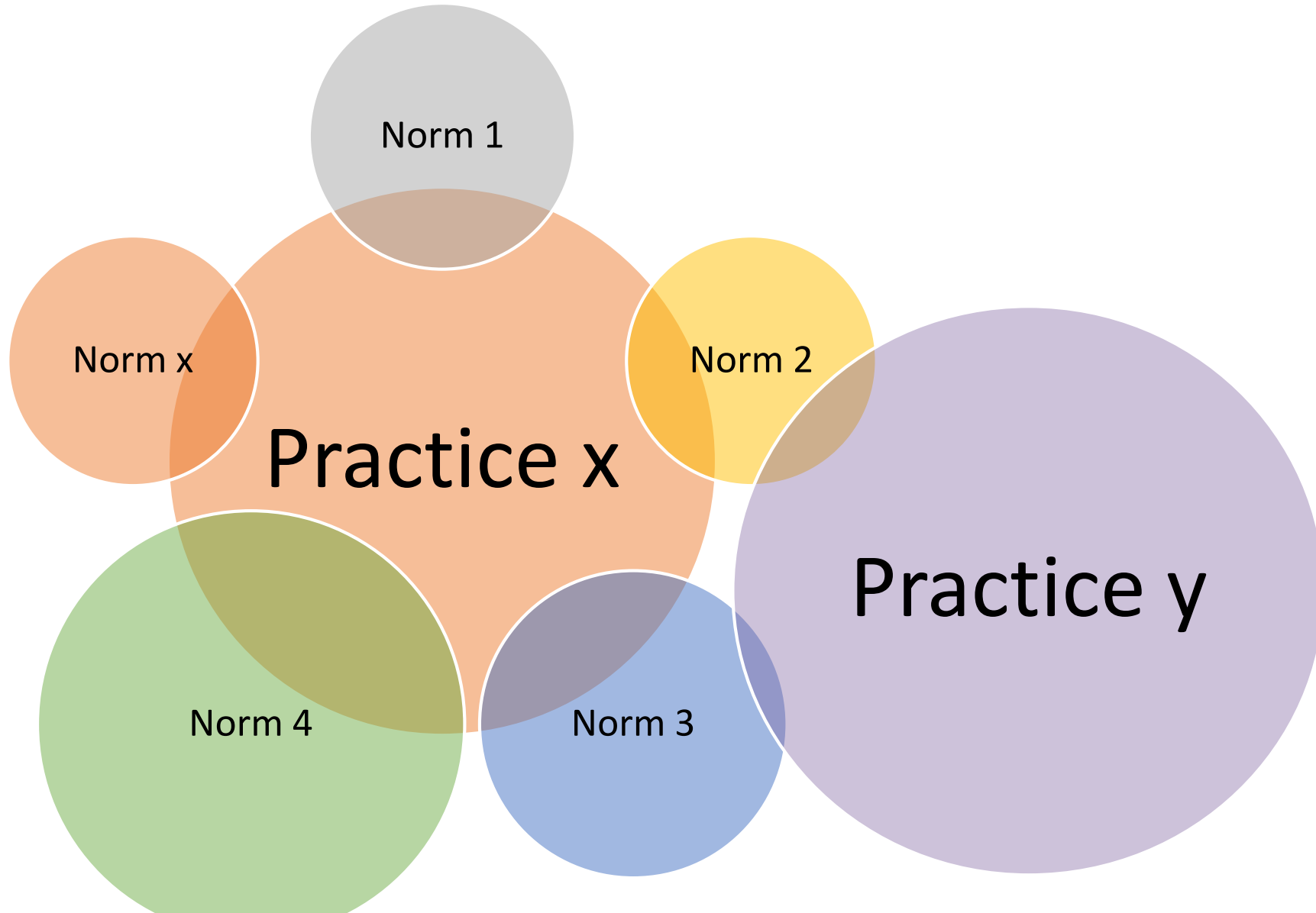
"If you can't get one,
you're not part of the
gang. Definitely."

2

A practice can be sustained by “indirect” norms.

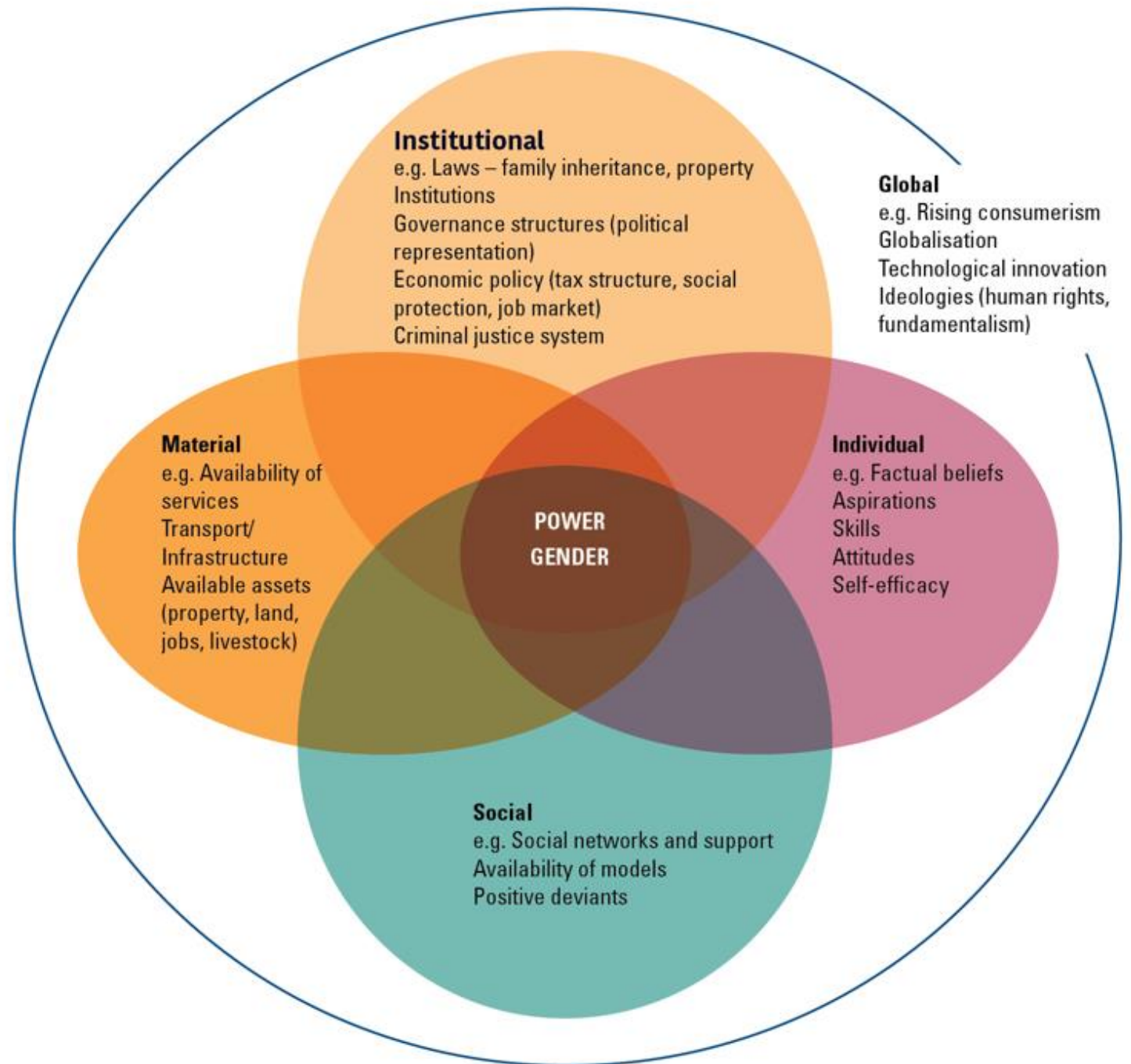


A practice can be sustained by multiple indirect norms.



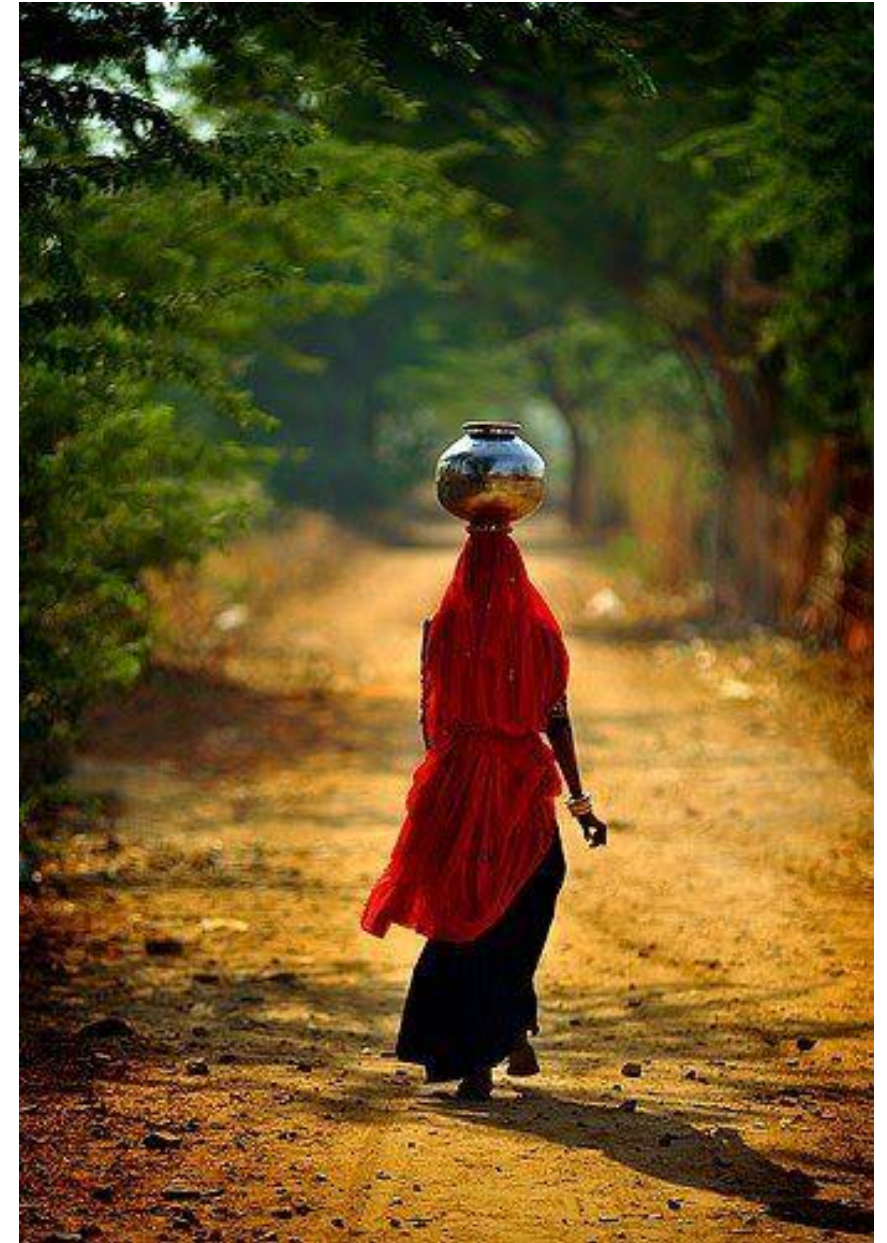
3

Norms are in a system of structural factors that intersect and sustain action.



4 Gender Norms

- Gender norms are **social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men** in a given group or society.
- **They are embedded** in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction.
- They **play a role in shaping women and men's (often unequal) access** to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power and sense of self.





“Numerous studies ... show that men’s attempts to prove their masculinity ... marginalize women workers ... and alienate men from their health, feelings, and relationships with others. **The price of men’s striving to demonstrate their masculinity is high, and both individuals and organizations pay it**”.

Key Takeaways

1

Social norms are beliefs of two types: descriptive (what one believes others do) injunctive (what one believes others approve of)

2

Different social norms apply across different groups.

3

Different social norms can together sustain a practice (not necessarily 1 practice – 1 social norm)

4

Social norms can be the main driver, or not (they can intersect with other non-normative factors).

5

Some norms specifically contribute to defining men's and women's place in the group, structuring hierarchical relations. These are called gender norms



Reflection Task

In preparation for the next webinar

Select one practice that you are working on and note up to three norms that you think protect from and/or sustain the practice.

Use the following model:

Practice:	Child Marriage
Norm # ... :	Respectable women marry early
Function:	Contributing / Protective
Subject:	Adolescent girls who reached puberty
N or P Sanctions:	(N) Less desirable marriage prospects at age 18...
Reference Group:	Community members (future in-laws and husbands)
Active in:	Communities in the North of the Country



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