

0.0.1 Rational Choice Model

The rational choice model is similar to the socialized actor theory in that they both assume that there is a rational basis for people conforming to norms. The two theories differ about what the rational basis is however. While the socialized actor theory focuses on guilt and self conflict associated with acting in ways that do not conform to social norms, the rational choice model states that social sanctions imposed on non-conformers by other members of society is the primary cause for conformity [?]. The sanctions might take on different forms such as shaming, ostracism, or in the case of Donald Trump’s rallies, punches administered to protestors. Since no one wants to be subjected to such sanctions, it is more beneficial to conform.

Clearly, sanctions can only be enacted against observable behaviors. Thus, this is a highly behavioral approach to thinking about social norms and proponents of this approach have mostly been interested in why people coordinate their efforts, particularly in the equitable and sustainable use of public goods. Due to its utilitarian emphasis, it is also easy to adapt this model to cost-benefit analyses. For these reasons, economists, political scientists, and philosophers have been very attracted to this way of thinking. Brian Skyrms, Peyton Young, Cristina Bicchieri, and many others have used game theoretic methods based on this model to explore questions of coordination in the use of common pool resources and to explore the evolution of social norms more generally [?, ?, ?]. While this approach has been informative, the tendency has been to define the utility for individuals in the model in terms of money. There is ample experimental evidence to show that even if utility maximization is the driving force for conforming to social norms, utility defined in terms of monetary payoffs is extremely inadequate [?]. Ernst Fehr has argued vehemently against using game theoretic approaches based on monetary utility functions using a number of different lines of evidence to cast doubt on this approach.

One of the requisites for social sanctioning to be effective is repeated interactions. If there is very little probability of two people ever meeting again, there is little incentive for them to cooperate. There is also very little incentive to sanction cheaters in one-off interactions. However, Fehr and his collaborators have shown through a series of clever experiments that people do cooperate and that they do punish cheaters even in interactions where there is a negligible possibility of interacting with the same person again. In fact, people punish cheaters even if the actions of the cheaters do not directly affect them [?, ?, ?].

Chapter 1

Can Norms Make a Difference?

Chapter 2

Models

Chapter 3

Field Studies and Experiments