COVID-19 and the Grey Zone of Rule-Following*

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The paper deals with the phenomenon of the *grey zone* of rule-following — actions that may be perceived as both corresponding to some rule and as breaking this rule. The pandemic of COVID-19 brought the grey zone into relief because a significant part of the responses to imposed anti-COVID measures consists in following new rules less than completely, with the typical example being a lowered mask that covers only the mouth and not the nose. It is argued here that grey-zone actions, if viewed as public activities, have specific spatial and temporal social organization: they are designed to be flexible and oriented toward the possibility of completing them if necessary. At the same time, they are produced to be observably accountable as actions-according-to-the-rule, to prevent an attribution to the actor rule-breaking. The paper also describes some properties of situations where grey-zone actions produce tension, forcing the actor and other participants to initiate an argument or a conflict. The main point of the paper is that performing actions belonging to the grey zone of rule-following does not testify to the actor's non-observance of the rule. It is better to describe grey-zone actions as rule-*oriented* and not *rule-following* or *not-following*. This suggests that social scientists should abandon dichotomic approach when analyzing rule-following activities, and pay more attention to the participants' own practices of making sense and order of rules.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, rule-following, everyday actions, public activities

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has provoked a rethinking of many sociological concepts and approaches. However, one of the central sociological categories — the "rule" — has so far remained outside the attention of social scientists who considered the social consequences of the pandemic.[1] Perhaps the reason lies in the deeply-rooted intellectual habit of viewing the practice of rule-following as dichotomous: it is assumed that everyday actors either follow the rule or do not follow it. Correspondingly, the reasons *why* actors do or do not follow the rule are of the greatest interest (see, e.g., Clark et al., 2020; Moaddel et al., 2021; Sedgwick et al., 2021; Siz et al., 2021). However, the pandemic also raises broader questions relating to the sociological understanding of "rules". We are witnessing a unique situation when different but overlapping systems of new rules, designed to regulate not only rare events (like flying a plane or crossing state borders) but also the most

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1. Even the discussion of the crucial figure in the debates on the problem of rule-following, Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the context of COVID-19 goes without considering this problem (Malviya, 2021).

ordinary situations (like going to the store or even just going outside), are being introduced simultaneously around the world. This avalanche of rules — moreover, explicitly formulated rules, communicated via stickers in public transport and stores, stripes on the pavement, messages on TV, columns in newspapers, etc., — provides a good opportunity to reconsider some sociological notions of how rules are created, disseminated, enforced, and adopted. At the same time, the pandemic hampers the discussion of the problem of rule-following as it forces us to focus primarily on the sources of rules and the motivations of actors. As a result, researchers ignore how participants themselves make sense of the rules in everyday situations. In what follows, I will try to examine this very aspect, namely, the way in which everyday actors give meaning to the rules which they have not created. I will analyze a phenomenon that, on the one hand, has been the subject of heated public debate during the pandemic and, on the other hand, has been ignored by social scientists even though it is most directly related to the longstanding sociological problem of rule-following. I will call this phenomenon the *grey zone* of rule-following.

While the analysis in this paper will not be a detailed investigation of real-world practices, the purpose is to lay the grounds for further studies into everyday doings and sayings. I will try to outline some *organizational objects* (as Harold Garfinkel called them) that ordinary actors orient to, and which they produce when following pandemic rules. I will provide *reasoned conjectures* (to use another phrase of Garfinkel) about the local order of some practices that emerge in the COVID-19 situation.

What is the grey zone of following pandemic rules?

The Grey Zone of Rule-Following

The pandemic has given rise to a widespread and recognizable social phenomenon, illustrated by such acts as:

— Not wearing the mask fully on.
— Social distancing, but not enough.
— Taking only the first component of a two-component vaccine.
— Using a mask designed to last just a couple of hours over several days or weeks.
— Washing hands without soap after coming in from the street.

The paradigm of these situations is, of course, the mask pulled down under the nose or resting on the chin. What all these situations have in common is that the actor performs an action explicitly oriented toward the rule and following it, but following it "less than fully". This is a grey zone of rule-following.

The grey zone of rule-following are those actions that may be presented as conforming to a rule, but may also be perceived as rule-breaking. These actions differ both from "flawless" rule-following (if such "flawless" following is possible at all) and from explicit non-compliance, and can become, therefore, an occasion for conflicts and confrontations.

Actions that fall within the grey zone of rule-following can have several interactional meanings. Firstly, they can express a particular political or public position (e.g., "I don't believe in the existence of the coronavirus" or "These rules are just a whim of the authorities"). While expressing attitudes toward the reason for the rule or toward the institution and the individuals introducing and/or enforcing it, these actions do not take the form of an outright rejection of the rule. The rule is waived only to the extent that its waiving may reflect the position of the actor without creating a reason for accusing her of not-following it. Thus, such actions allow to *express* a certain position without *stating* it, unlike the action of open and direct opposition to the rule. It might be said that this is a way of supporting a view different from one of the rule's adherents, while being reluctant to refuse to follow the rule. Reasons for maintaining this general appearance of following the rule while simultaneously changing some aspects of "full-fledged" following can be the fear of legal punishment, the avoidance of condemnation by others, or the unwillingness to start an argument.

Secondly, actions belonging to the grey zone of rule-following may be the result of situational "contagion" when many people around the actor either follow the rule fully or act in grey zone themselves, prompting the actor to follow it, too. In this case, the actor is oriented towards the actions of others as actions that constitute the normal background of everyday life. Each ordinary actor navigates the situation and understands what is happening at each moment using the actions of others as a resource for understanding and making sense of it (Goodwin, 2018). This is most vivid in crowd behavior where many participants orient themselves to what is happening in a part of space that is invisible to them and to how they should behave through the actions taken by the people immediately present around them. In the pandemic situation, this orientation mechanism could lead to the repetition of some others' actions, thereby producing the grey zone. The grey zone of rule-following shows, however, that such "contagion" is not an exact "imitation". Rather, the actor, in replicating the way others act, relies on others' understanding of what is going on as a potentially assumed sense of the situation. For example, seeing other passengers on the bus begin to pull the masks on, a passenger may also pull on a mask, but leave her nose free to support a shared understanding of the situation without resorting to a more serious form of solidarity expressed in the copying of others' actions. Furthermore, the actor may thereby show "respect" for others, that is, observe the proprieties that are visibly important to those around her. Or, such situational "contagion" may indicate that the actor perceives the actions of others as indications of approaching danger that she does not see coming (e.g., the entering of rule-enforcing officials).

Others who "infect" the actor with rule-following may include people in close relationships with the actor (friends, relatives, colleagues, classmates, acquaintances, etc.). These relationships usually require both a much greater degree of orientation towards the others and a wider demonstration of solidarity, including through the doing of similar actions. In such situations, committing an action belonging to the grey zone allows the demonstration of a sufficiently large measure of solidarity, but not an excessively large

one (presupposed by the copying of the other) which may be appropriate only for specific occasions.

Thirdly, the grey zone can also be a space for expressing disdain for rules imposed by the other(s). In this case, the actor may be responding to the formal characteristics of the rule as something binding. The specific source of the rule, which is crucial when expressing a political or public position, does not matter here because the actor is only responding to a rule as coming "from the outside". A concise formula for this way of rule-following might be "OK, I'll do as you want". Such situation is familiar, for example, to those charged with enforcing a rule. Coercion to comply with it may result in the "viola-tor" performing a grey-zone action (e.g., pulling on a mask, but only over the mouth) that should satisfy the enforcer, but is done in such a way as to show that the actor is only complying with the rule under pressure.

All this points to a key characteristic of the grey zone of rule-following: such actions must be *sufficiently similar* to the rule-following actions to not give observers the impression of rule-breaking, but also *visibly deviate* from the rule-following for observers to be able to refer to the actor's non-compliance with the rule. The very similarity of grey-zone actions to "full" rule-following creates uncertainty in the observer about the extent to which these actions can be attributed to non-compliance to the rule. This uncertainty, in turn, reduces the self-confidence of the one who might want to point out the deviation of a given action from the rule. In this respect, the grey zone is not so much a space for managing the impression, but rather for managing the consequences the action is going to have.

The grey zone includes a rather vast range of actions because numerous variants are possible between the full compliance and the full non-compliance of a rule. Of course, both following the rule and not-following it are not absolute since these characterizations of action are situationally produced and determined. However, what lies "in-between" demonstrates a much greater uncertainty and the possibilities of organization. For example, between the complete absence of a mask and putting it on the nose and mouth, one finds actions differently oriented to the rule: some keep masks in their pockets or bags, some hold masks in their hands or put it on their arms, some have a mask on their chins, and some have masks covering their mouths but not their noses. Each of these actions is a suitable "launching pad" for various other activities, but they all demonstrate an obvious orientation to a rule, that is, they are produced to be able to demonstrate the adherence to a rule at any time or at a particular time.

I will consider the grey zone as a transitional area of conduct which has two components: the preparation for performing an action and the performance of action. The mask should not be held in hand, but if it is, this may indicate that the actor is either about to put it on or is holding it in case it needs to be put on. Social distancing can be prepared for (e.g., by pressing one's bag to one's side) and it can be accomplished (by stepping sideward). This distinction is important because for the actor preparing to perform the action may be a part of the action itself, whereas it may not be so for the observer. For example, the mask held in hand may be evidence of non-compliance with a rule for the

police officer, while for the one holding it, it may be an element of the preparation for the action as well as an excuse for doing the action and a tool for redefining it ("I was about to put it on").

It is also important to note that when we speak of the grey zone of rule-following, we are referring to actions performed not only in the presence of other people. Since society does not disappear when the people around us disappear, solitary actions may or may not fall into the grey zone just as much as actions amidst other people. Just because it becomes easier to disobey a rule in the absence of others, this does not mean that this is going to be the case. Moreover, to the extent that we are able to orient ourselves toward others even when we cannot see or hear them, we are even more likely to maintain this orientation through actions belonging to the grey zone when left alone since they allow us to reduce the rulefulness of our behavior without compromising its sociality. This is why many people, when alone in an elevator, do not take off their mask completely, but lower it below the nose.

In discussing the problem of the grey zone of rule-following, the issue of the intentionality of everyday actions cannot be ignored. Although I will consider grey-zone actions as if they were indicative of the actor's orientation to some rule, it is certainly possible that the actor performs actions belonging to the grey zone because she *does not know* the rule, or misunderstands it. These situations, however, do not refute my observations since here I am interested not in the actors' intentions, but in the *publicly available* meanings of their actions. Even if the actor, for example, has not stepped sideward because she is unaware of the rule of social distancing, her actions are still available to evaluation in regard to the following or the not-following the rule.

Grey-zone actions are not the results of some decision that is made and then rigorously observed. They have a *dynamic* structure which is expressed, on the one hand, in the spatial localizations of such actions and, on the other hand, in the temporal dynamics of entering and leaving the grey zone. Let us consider these two aspects.

The Spatial Structuring of the Grey Zone[2]

Grey-zone actions can be observed more often in certain places that have a number of common properties. First of all, these are public places with a small "population" or, on the contrary, with a mass "population". In the first case, the action may be related to the perceived reduction or disappearance of the actor's danger to others — in the case of the pandemic, the danger of infecting others with COVID-19. In the second case, the grey zone emerges because of the difficulty of identifying an individual action in a stream of

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2. I will discuss space as an *interactional* phenomenon, that is, as something produced *in* and *for* interaction. This approach is closer to the notion of "region behavior" by Erving Goffman (1959: 106–140) than to the more structure-oriented approaches of Anthony Giddens (1984), Henri Lefebvre (1991), or Martina Löw (2016). Such an interactional approach involves an analysis of space as members' achievement, as something created by members for interaction (Mondada, 2009) and related to membership category-relevant practices (Smith, 2017).

similar actions. For example, a person in a subway crowd may quite realistically assess the probability that her partially unmasked face will attract someone's attention as low.

Of course, it is not only the number of people present in the place that matters, but also their institutional role, in particular, the role of the person in charge of enforcing the rules for others. Since the beginning of the pandemic, all public places have been structured according to how strong and constant the surveillance of them is. For instance, this surveillance is expected to be greater in the subway than in the stores, in part because the subway is habitually perceived as the target of more strict "security" measures. And there are subspaces within such spaces that are more or less permeated by surveillance. Thus, some subway passengers pull a mask over their mouths when exiting the car because police officers or subway staff are expected to be on the platform. Similarly, some shoppers pull a mask over their mouths when approaching the cash register in a store.

Due to the specificity of COVID-19, one of the key aspects of actions in the grey zone turns out to be the distance to other people which has been problematized by anti-COVID measures, although it used to be an object of permanent attention for people interacting in public places even before the pandemic. Actors performing actions in the grey zone can employ this distance as a resource — as a cue indicating the possibility or necessity of performing a particular action, or as a "justification" for their actions (for example, by pulling down a mask below the nose after social distancing from others). The requirement of social distancing, in this respect, has a downside: the actor may believe that once she has achieved the prescribed distance, she is in a visibly safer area than before, and thus an incomplete compliance with the rule will be perceived as permissible. Consequently, the grey zone of rule-following will expand as the distance to others increases.

Another aspect of the spatial organization of the grey zone is an institutional character of the places where corresponding actions are performed. Different places in our societies are "assigned" (not only legally, but also socially) to different categories of institutional actors. For example, a doctor's office is "assigned" to a doctor, while the subway is "assigned" to police officers. Some membership categories (like police officers) have the right to "own" a wide range of spaces; other spatial "possessions" are limited to a small number of places. In any case, for the actor who is considered the legitimate "owner" of a certain place, being in that place can become an excuse for committing acts belonging to the grey zone. For example, sometimes police officers, doctors, taxi drivers, or shop assistants wear a mask at work without fully putting it on. This may be due to the fact that being in "their" place gives them more freedom to command that place and choose the line of conduct within it. This freedom of choice may lead to grey-zone actions. However, it should be kept in mind that this tendency is counteracted by the opposite tendency of performers of institutional roles to perceive themselves (when being in "their" place) as a model for others and thus to consider themselves obliged to fully follow the rules, not so much of a fear of sanctions, but because of the perceived need to be an example for others.

The Dynamic Organization of the Grey Zone

The grey zone is a dynamic area of action, i.e., an actor can enter or exit it. It should be fluid and adapt quickly to the circumstances as they arise. When we talk about entering the grey zone, we need to distinguish between two starting points, those of the non-compliance with the rule and the compliance with the rule. A non-compliant actor may enter the grey zone for fear of sanctions (e.g., a fine or dislike from others), or under pressure from others (e.g., police or relatives). It may be a short-term event after which the actor reverts to non-compliance. Thus, some people entering the subway put a mask over their mouths while coming through the turnstiles and then take it off afterwards.

Rule-abiding actors step into the grey zone by weakening the adherence to the rule. There may be several reasons for this weakening. Firstly, as noted above, the configuration of those present may change in such a way that, at some point, there will be few people around the actor, or they will appear to be at a great distance, or they will disappear altogether. This may lead to a lowering of the mask, a reduction in hand-washing time, etc. Secondly, people who are forced to comply with the rule for long periods of time may feel entitled to enter a grey zone. For example, doctors may take their mask down, justifying it on the grounds that they have to sit in a mask for several hours. In this case, the grey zone becomes a "well-deserved" reward for rule-abiding behavior. Getting into the grey zone can also be related to the actor's orientation to the temporal characteristics of the grey-zone action. For instance, an actor may briefly lower her mask during a conversation and then put it back on, assuming that no danger to the interlocutor will arise in such a short time, and that the briefness of lowering the mask will be a sufficient apology to others.

The temporal organization of any action includes not only "absolute" characteristics like its duration (which, of course, does not correlate with astronomical time but with local social practices that determine whether an action can be considered "short" or "long") but also the structural characteristics associated with the sequence of the acts within this action. For instance, any conversation has a beginning and an end which cannot be random, but involves particular sequences of cooperative actions (like greetings/response greetings and farewells/response farewells). In this regard, we may ask at what point in the course of the action the transition to the grey zone takes place. Although it is unlikely that one can give a generalized answer to this question, we can make a preliminary assumption applicable to various types of practices that the grey zone occurs more often not at the beginning and end of actions, but in the middle of them. For example, passengers entering a subway car pull their mask down only after some time, and may then wear their mask in this manner until they exit the subway. Similarly, passengers passing through the turnstiles with masks completely on pull it down only when they are at some distance from the turnstiles. These examples show, however, that on the organizational scale, grey-zone actions are placed closer to the beginning of the action than to its end. The end of the action is more often used for exiting the grey zone.

Actions that fall into the grey zone are ordered in such a way that they already contain some elements of ruleful behavior, or these elements can be quickly added. Therefore, the actors exit the grey zone more often into fully rule-following conduct than into non-compliance with the rule. In the first case, the strategy of completing an action is used when an action is brought to a finished form: a mask is lifted to the nose, a step is taken to the side, etc. This completion is sufficient in itself since it does not require any special justification, and, in the majority of cases, is initiated by the actor. In some cases, however, it may be initiated by the other, e.g., a salesperson may ask a customer to put a mask fully on or a train conductor may ask a passenger to do the same.

In contrast, exiting the grey zone into non-compliance often requires an overt justification and is fraught with serious dangers, unless it takes place in a safe environment. A safe environment may be a group of people who do not comply with the rule in the presence of whom a person may, for example, remove a mask that is not fully on without threat of being blamed (or even with expectation of being praised by others). Such an exit from the grey zone is likely to be accompanied by certain utterances and/or sounds (such as "phew"), demonstrating relief due to getting rid of the need to perform actions in the grey zone or justifying the necessity of performing them.

Exiting the grey zone into non-compliance with the rule is eased if the action is short and if the actor steps into grey zone from non-compliance. However, the difficulties associated with such an exit still discourage many actors, motivating them to stay in the grey zone as long as possible. Thus, for example, a taxi driver who puts the mask over her mouth immediately after a passenger gets into the cab finds it easier to keep it that way until the end of the trip (unless the passenger makes a request to put the mask on completely) than to remove it after some time. Similarly, the mask that has been pulled down while talking during a subway ride will often remain there for the rest of the trip.

Arguments and Conflicts over the Grey Zone

The grey zone comprises actions that overtly demonstrate a rule-orientation, but are open to criticism as not conforming to the rule. The actor is aware that there is a rule that concerns a certain aspect of her behavior, but, from the observer's point of view, either misinterprets the rule or does not comply with it. Therefore, the persons doing the action in the grey zone sometimes either needs to justify her action, or is forced to take part in the conflict initiated by someone who accuses her of not complying with the rule.

As for justifications, they can be initiated either by the actor or by others. The actor may find it necessary to accompany the action with arguments justifying it. In doing so, the actor may appeal to circumstances such as health ("I have trouble breathing"), fatigue ("I can't take it anymore"), accident ("Oh, I forgot"), or preparation for the action ("I was just about to put it on"). In all of these cases, it is assumed that the actor understands that her action does not conform to the rule, but considers the proposed account strong enough for its addressee to take the account as satisfactory in the current circumstances. Such reasoning can accompany both the entrance to the grey zone from a situation of full

compliance with the rule and the opposite transition from the grey zone to a situation of full compliance with the rule. It is much less common in the transition from non-compliance with the rule to the grey zone, since, in this case, such an action is often performed to demonstrate rule-adherence, although it remains available to further accusations.

Provided accounts may also be designed to justify continuing to be in a grey zone in the future. For example, sometimes in response to the salesperson's request to put the mask on completely (when it covers only the mouth of the customer), the customer says indignantly, "I already have my mask put on!" In such cases, the actors purposefully use the always-present ambiguity of rule's formulation to justify the continuation of their line of conduct. Although such situations are much rarer than situations of changing the direction of action accompanied with justification, they show that the *similarity* of grey-zone action to an action that fully follows the rule is a systematic achievement and exploits the possibility of identifying the action through the details of its situational configuration. An action in the grey zone is an action that can pass as fully rule-following, although this does not necessarily imply that those who present will accept it as such. For example, in the above situation, the salesperson may remain silent in response to the customer's outraged remark, although this does not mean that the salesperson has now "seen" that the customer is wearing a mask, although previously thought the opposite.

One of the reasons why actors' counter-statements pointing to the inapplicability of the criterion of rule-following to their action (because it already conforms to the rule) do not meet with an objection is the reluctance of possible "objecter" to initiate a conflict. The unreasonableness of the accusation, presumed by such counter-statements, makes the person who requires following the rule a slanderer, and the requirement itself an offense. This is easily recognizable by any competent member of society as fertile ground for conflict, especially because such counter-statements have specific wording and intonation and are often accompanied by emblematic gestures. It is easy to avoid such potential conflicts, of course. However, it should be understood that conflict avoidance can occur even before there is occasion for the conflict. For instance, if the customer whose mask is hanging on her chin puts it on her mouth but not over her nose in response to the salesperson's request, the salesperson may be satisfied with such an action. This is because the insistence on a required action becomes the more difficult, the more cooperative was the previous action in response to the previous request. The very fact that the request, albeit not executed fully (from the requester's point of view), is executed in some way complicates the start of a conflict, for which, of course, there is a formal reason, because, as can be shown, the rule is still not fully followed.

Potential conflicts over grey-zone actions do not become actual primarily because the initiator of the conflict must either rely on the self-evident basis for the request — which, like every self-evident basis, can be met with a demand for the explication ("Why should I do this?"), — or provide arguments strong enough to compel full compliance with the rule. The person who points out the impropriety of some action will appeal, for example, to such things as institutional rules ("This is an order from the mayor's office"), negative consequences ("Otherwise our store will be closed"), morality ("You don't want to infect

anyone, do you?"), or health ("You don't want to get sick, right?"), etc. All of these appeals will contain justifications for rule-following conduct and show that they are provoked by the actor's "violation". These appeals will also remove the personal responsibility from the initiator of the conflict for initiating it: they will show that the demand is advanced not because the one advancing it wants so, but because "these are the rules" or "this is how it is".

Conflict, of course, requires communicative actions from both sides (if there are two parties to the conflict). If the person who calls attention to non-compliance of an action with the rule insists on her claim, the actor can assert her right to the action, not only by accusing the creators of the rule or its enforcers (in a pandemic situation, these are almost always different people) of making inappropriate demands, but also by questioning her own ability to follow it fully or in principle. For example, the actor may cite poor health or well-being, or claim that the rule is not doable at all ("I have nowhere to back off!"). In this case, the initiator of the conflict is put in the position of a person making an unjustified claim, which should outweigh any justification for this claim she can provide.

The Significance of the Grey Zone for the Problem of Rule-Following in Social Sciences

Of course, the problem of rule-following is not new to social sciences. To the extent that all fundamental sociological categories can be reduced to the category of "rule", one can argue that the problem of rule-following constitutes the main problem of sociology. It is possible to show that, for example, the notions of "role", "value", "group", "solidarity", "status", "gender", and "inequality" refer to the rules to be followed by everyday actors. However, this point requires an extensive justification that cannot be provided here. If we address the problem of rule-following as a special issue within sociological theory, we can suggest that the existing answers to this question are not quite satisfactory when dealing with the phenomenon of the grey zone of rule-following. It requires a certain refocusing of the social sciences' approach to the problem. The reasons are following.

As such, the problem of rule-following was formulated in the most concise and essential manner by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, where he points out that any pattern of actions can be brought into correspondence with any rule (2009: 87). For the social sciences, this is a paradox that needs to be resolved because, unlike all other sciences, the social sciences deal with behavior that is rule-governed or evaluated based on rules.[3] Social scientists (e.g., Peter Winch [2007], and David Bloor [1997]) who

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3. Weber's well-known definition, postulating as a basic characteristic of social action an orientation toward another person (". . . behaviour is 'social' action where the meaning intended by the actor or actors is related to the behaviour of others, and the action is so oriented" [2019: 79]), also essentially relies on the idea of rule, since orientation toward others implies an orientation not only toward directly present others, but also toward a wide range of absent others ("These 'others' can be individual and familiar, or indefinitely numerous and quite unfamiliar . . ." [Ibid.: 99]) who can present only in the form of rules: ". . . collective constructs . . . are ideas in the heads of real people. . . ideas in part about what exists, in part about what should exist, and ideas to which they *orient* their action" (Ibid.: 90). This does not mean, of course, that, for Weber, there can be no

took Wittgenstein's paradox literally tried to find a mechanism that ensures a correspondence between rule and action. From their point of view, which was called "skeptical" (Kripke, 1982), such a mechanism is social convention: the members of particular communities agree collectively on what conduct should be considered as following rules and not-following rules, and institutionalize these agreements.

However, the skeptical solution to the problem of rule-following faces an irresolvable logical difficulty related to the application of conventions. If we connect a rule to an action through a convention, how do we know when a convention is or is not applicable? If we need rules for applying the rules, then this regress would be endless. Two ways of overcoming this difficulty have been proposed in social sciences. The first (its proponents are G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker [1986], Michael Lynch [1992], and Wes Sharrock [Sharrock, Button, 1999; Greiffenhagen, Sharrock, 2009], among others) is to remove the grounds for said difficulty altogether by showing that there is no gap between rule and rule-following that requires being filled with "social glue".[4] Rule and rule-following are one and the same. It is from rule-following behavior that we infer which rule an actor follows, not the other way around. The second way involves a complete redefinition of the rule-following problem, as D. Lawrence Wieder [1974] did, for example. It is proposed to consider the matter not in terms of the relationship between a rule and an action, but in terms of the functions performed by rule formulations in social situations. Rules are always given to us in the form of some formulations, and these formulations not only have a particular verbal character, but are also employed to achieve certain interactional goals, e.g., teaching, praising, or story-telling. In this case, the question of rule-following is posed as a question of conditions, practices, and consequences of formulating a rule. The action of following a rule is seen as an action that is produced and can be talked about in the context of its rulefulness.

All three outlined solutions to the problem of rule-following have shortcomings when applied to the phenomenon of the grey zone. The skeptical solution misses the phenomenon by introducing social conventions as an answer where, for actors, this is a question: they should simultaneously *follow* the rule and build a line of conduct *in relation* to it. "Social convention" is not what they are acting *by*, but what they are acting *toward*. An anti-skeptical solution introduces a binary approach to the rule-following: you inevitably either follow the rule, or do not follow it. As we have seen, grey-zone actions fall somewhere in-between these extremes. The "formulaic" solution (compatible with the anti-skeptical one and, to a great extent, an extension of it) narrows the focus of attention to

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differences in meaning that individuals give to their own and others' actions. He defines social relationship as a "...*chance* that action will be social in a (meaningfully) manifest sense..." (Ibid.: 103) and suggests that the content of social relationship "... can be quite various: conflict; enmity; sexual love; friendship; piety; market exchange; 'fulfilment,' 'evasion,' or 'breach' of an agreement; economic, erotic, or other forms of 'competition'; or communal relations based on social rank, nation, or class ..." (Ibid.: 104).

4. As Sharrock and Dennis suggest, "... *nothing* is involved in conjoining the steps in a rule-following series beyond having learned the rule, for 'having learned the rule' is the same as having understood how to go on, how to make the connections between steps in a sequence, having — in other words — grasped what it is the rule tells one to do" (2008: 44).

the situations when rules become a topic of interaction. However, this is just one type of situation where rule-following is relevant. The existence of the grey zone shows that an ordinary actor can envisage and avoid the situations where formulations of rules have to be employed.

I think that the phenomenon of the grey zone requires considering the problem of rule-following from the perspective of *rule-orientation* exhibited by everyday actors. The notion of rule-oriented behavior is better suited for the purposes of analyzing phenomena related to pandemic rules because it allows the examining of not only situations where a rule is formulated, but also situations where people demonstrate a consideration of a rule in their actions. Rule-orientation does not imply that the actor follows the rule or does not follow it. Rather, it implies that an actor has to identify and demonstrate the possibility to explain her action as related to particular rule. The rule here is not a formulation or a template for action, but a resource for making things intelligible.

Conclusion

The observations presented in this paper are only a first approximation to the problem of the grey zone of rule-following. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the grey zone plays a significant role in the mass adoption of new rules, and understanding of how it is ordered will provide answers to some questions about human conduct in such situations. It will also shed light on some characteristics of rule-following in a variety of everyday situations, not only in pandemic settings. The study of actions in the grey zone shows that rule-following is a *public* activity much clearer than the studies of rule-acceptance or rule-rejection. Although today the clashes between those who oppose pandemic rules and those who support them attract the main attention of observers and analysts, the "social work" most important for the future is accomplished in the grey zone where ordinary actors do not *take a stand* on the rules, but *adapt* to them and *tailor* them to themselves. The way this social work is done will determine the effectiveness of sanitary measures taken by the authorities.

The obvious shortcoming of observations in this paper is that they are overgeneralized. Further research on the topic should be conducted on a broader empirical basis, and should include a detailed description of the ways in which the organizational objects outlined in the paper are produced in the observable details of actions. Since acting in the grey zone is a continuous process involving a constant orientation to the emerging configuration of the details of current situation, it is necessary to investigate how ordinary actors monitor their own and others' actions and what procedures they use to do so. The situation of the pandemic forces all of us to re-learn how to live our daily lives. In doing so, we are relying on a huge array of ordinary competences that we have already learned. Of course, the pandemic did not radically alter existing societies and make the everyday world completely unfamiliar to us. Nonetheless, insofar as many important aspects of our routine are transformed (some permanently), we find ourselves engaged in a process of rule-making that is not predetermined by any single authority but involves the alignment

(and misalignment) of the efforts of many social actors. The study of grey-zone actions can provide insights into how everyday life in general, and pandemic everyday life in particular, is reconstituted.

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COVID-19 и серая зона следования правилам

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В статье рассматривается феномен серой зоны следования правилам — действий, которые могут одновременно восприниматься как соответствующие какому-то правилу и как нарушающие это правило. Пандемия COVID-19 заставила обратить внимание на серую зону, поскольку значительная часть ответов на вводимые антиковидные меры заключается в неполном следовании новым правилам, типичным примером чего является опущенная маска, закрывающая только рот, но не нос. В статье утверждается, что действия в серой зоне, если рассматривать их как публичную деятельность, имеют специфическую пространственную и временную социальную организацию: они должны быть гибкими и ориентированными на возможность их завершения в случае необходимости. В то же время они производятся для того, чтобы быть наблюдаемо объяснимыми в качестве действий, соответствующих правилу, чтобы предотвратить приписывание актору нарушение правила. В статье также описываются некоторые свойства ситуаций, в которых действия в серой зоне вызывают напряжение, заставляя актора и других участников инициировать спор или конфликт. Основная идея статьи заключается в том, что совершение действий, относящихся к серой зоне следования правилам, не свидетельствует о несоблюдении актором правила. Лучше описывать действия в серой зоне как *ориентированные* на правила, а не как *следующие* или *не следующие* правилам. Это значит, что социологам следует отказаться от дихотомической логики при анализе следования правилам и уделять больше внимания практикам осмысления и упорядочивания правил, осуществляемым самими участниками.

Ключевые слова: COVID-19, пандемия, следование правилам, повседневные действия, публичная деятельность