

Norms and Sanctions

This handout is designed to explain the differences between norms, mores, folkways, and sanctions. Read it carefully and examine the examples. You will find it helpful in understanding how society enforces its values.

Before examining this handout, one point must be clarified. Culture is the arbiter of what is right or wrong in a society. Culture creates the norms, and cultures, in time, can change them. Keep in mind that norms are living, changing things.

Part A. Norms

Norms are rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members. They are standards of action expected of members of one's group. Norms consist of what the people "ought to do" in their daily routine. Norms can be divided into folkways and mores.

Folkways

- Folkways are norms which have little moral significance.
- Folkways are routine ways of doing things developed by trial and error.
- Folkways are highly variable from one situation to the other.
- Violation of folkways elicit mild social reaction.
- Folkways often consist of preferences rather than demands.

Examples of folkways

- Smoking
- Wearing heavy makeup
- Sending thank you cards
- Listening to loud rock music
- Learning to play intellectual games
- Using proper etiquette
- Using proper table manners
- Wearing appropriate clothing for the occasion

Mores

- Mores are norms that have great moral significance.
- Mores are identified with group welfare and group survival.
- Mores consist of demands rather than preferences.
- Negative mores—"Thou shall not"—are called taboos.

Examples of mores

- Do not kill
- Pay back borrowed money
- Keep important promises to friends
- Rise for the National Anthem
- Do not cry "fire" in a public place
- Obey traffic signals
- Do not abuse children
- Wear enough clothes to conform to the American standard of decency

Part B. Sanctions

Sanctions are rewards or punishments used to enforce conformity to norms.

Positive sanctions

- Used to reward the individual for desirable behavior
- Examples are as follows: a cheer, smile, pay raise, head nod, thumbs up, badges, ribbons, letters for athletes, trophies, or public ceremonies.

Formal sanctions

- Consist of rewards or punishment given by some formal organization or regulatory body
- Examples or organizations are as follows: government, police, school, or corporations.

Positive formal sanctions

- Promotions, pay raises, bonus gifts, rewards, smiles, and pats on the back

Negative formal sanctions

- Fines, low grades, school suspension, job termination, imprisonment

Negative sanctions

- Consist of punishment or the threat of punishment to enforce conformity
- Examples are as follows: grounding for being late, towing your car, frowns, public ridicule, rejection, fines, imprisonment.

Informal sanctions

- Spontaneous expressions of approval or disapproval given by an individual or a group

Positive informal sanctions

- Smiles, compliments, praise, standing ovations

Negative informal sanctions

- Frowns, gossip, scoldings, insults, being ignored