

1.3: Social Norms- Folkways, Mores, Taboo, and Laws

Social Control Exercise

Assignment: We rely on informal social control to influence people's behavior, such as giving the stink eye, cold shoulder, or correcting someone's behavior in order to ensure people conform. Think about a time when a parent, guardian, coach, employer, or teacher (agents of social control) used informal social control to respond to your behavior. What did the agent of informal social control do? Provide an example when informal social control was applied to another person. What were they doing and how was their behavior controlled through informal social control?

Example: Talking on the phone with a work-related matter and kids start bickering over slime. I am unable to put the phone down, so I relied on hand motions to show them it was unacceptable. There was no need to hang up or say anything at all. The eye actions indicated they were acting inappropriate and their behavior changed

Norms can be internalized, which would make an individual conform without external rewards or punishments. There are four types of social norms that can help inform people about behavior that is considered acceptable: folkways, mores, taboos, and law. Further, social norms can vary across time, cultures, place, and even sub-group. ^[1]

Think back to your first experiences in school and surely you can identify some folkways and mores learned. **Folkways** are behaviors that are learned and shared by a social group that we often refer to as "customs" in a group that are not morally significant, but they can be important for social acceptance. ^[2] Each group can develop different customs, but there can be customs that embraced at a larger, societal level.

Folkway Example

Imagine sitting in the college classroom with sixty other people around. As a professor who teaches early morning classes, it is always encouraged to eat if hungry. However, everyone must be considerate of those around them. You should not chew loudly. That would be considered rude, and it is against class 'customs' to do so. To make it worse, imagine burping without saying 'excuse me.' These would be folkway violations. Remember, this may not be disrespectful in all cultures, and it is very subjective.

Perhaps stricter than folkways are more because they can lead to a violation of what we view as moral and ethical behavior. **Mores** are norms of morality, or right and wrong, and if you break one it is often considered offensive to most people of a culture. ^[3] Sometimes a more violation can also be illegal, but other times it can just be offensive. If a more is not written down in legislation, it cannot get sanctioned by the criminal justice system. Other times it can be both illegal and morally wrong.

More Example

If one attended a funeral for a family member, no one would expect to see someone in bright pink clothes or a bikini. Most people are encouraged to wear black clothing out of respect. Although there may not be specific rules or laws that state expected attire to wear to a funeral, it would be against what most of American society views as right and wrong to attend a funeral in a bikini or be in hot pink leotards. It would be disrespectful to the individual people are mourning. Both mores and folkways are taught through socialization with various sources: family, friends, peers, schools, and more.

A **taboo** goes a step farther and is a very negative norm that should not get violated because people will be upset. Additionally, one may get excluded from the group or society. The nature and the degree of the taboo are in the mores. ^[4]

Taboo Example

A student once gave the example of a man in their neighborhood in Colorado that had multiple wives and also had ten different children from the women. In most of American culture, it is seen as unacceptable to have more than one spouse/partner. However, there are instances where having children with multiple people would not be seen as taboo. Specifically, if a man or woman remarries and then has another child with their new partner. However, again, this is more acceptable today than in the past because of the greater societal acceptance of divorce and remarriage.

If one is religious think of something taboo in that specific religion? How about a sports team in college? Band? Any ideas?

Lastly, and most important to the study of crime and criminal justice, our laws. Remember, a social norm is an obligation to society that can lead to sanctions if one violates them. Therefore, **laws** are social norms that have become formally inscribed at the state or federal level and can laws can result in formal punishment for violations, such as fines, incarceration, or even death. Laws are a form of social control that outlines rules, habits, and customs a society uses to enforce conformity to its norms.

Law Example

Let us go back to our example of having multiple wives for a moment. It is illegal, a violation of law, to have multiple wives in American culture. It has not always been this way, and it is not true in every country, but in the United States, it was viewed as so taboo, morally and ethically wrong, that there are laws that can punish people for marrying more than one person at a time. However, there may be some people that do not think it is wrong or some groups, but regardless, it is still illegal.

The following link is for Oregon statue ORS 163.515 Bigamy <https://www.oregonlaws.org/ors/163.515>

Remember our previous discussion on being the new person to Oregon and trying to figure out if it is allowed to be nude at an ultimate frisbee practice, but they do not feel morally or ethically wrong. The first thing one may do is go home and look up some rules and see if they are violating ultimate frisbee rules. Next, one may check out Oregon laws governing clothing to see if they are violating laws by being nude. In the end, one finds out that it is not 'illegal,' so you cannot call the cops, but you certainly did find a case in Eugene, Oregon that determined not wearing clothes can be a violation of rules on the college campus.

https://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2009/04/uo_board_says_no_clothes_no_ul.html However, this is a recreational league, and it does not appear to have any formal rules established. Now one has to make a decision that is hard: Does one want to be part of a subculture that endorses nudity? Does this go against one's morals and ethics? Alternatively, is one willing to be part of the team and encourage acceptance of a new norm? The criminal justice system cannot act for merely violating norms, but at times, what feels like a norm can lead to criminal justice involvement. For example, walk a town or city, and many may be found jaywalking because it may be safer, faster, or more accessible. A person can get a ticket for it in most communities because it is technically violating a law. That is the thing with the line between deviance, rule violations, and criminality—it does not allow mean we agree. There are many examples of laws that are not deviant and things that are deviant some subcultures may wish to be illegal. Most, but not all crimes are deviant, and not all deviant acts are criminal. The question then becomes: well, how then do we as a society decide who does and does not have the opportunity to make law?



Jaywalking

Adam Ruins Everything: Why Jaywalking is a Crime? www.trutv.com/shows/adam-ruins-everything/videos/why-jaywalking-is-a-crime.html

1. Goode, E. (2015). *Deviant Behavior*, (10th ed.). New York: Pearson, Education. ↩
2. Augustyn, A., Bauer, P., Duignan, B., Eldridge, A., Gregersen, E., Luebbering, J.E., etc..., (N.D.). *Folkway, Encyclopedia Britannica*. ↩
3. Sumner, W. (1906). *Folkways*. ↩
4. Sumner, W. (1906). *Folkways*. ↩

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