Every society develops norms that reflect the cultural values its members consider important. For society to run smoothly, these norms must be upheld. There are two basic means through which norms are enforced—through internalization and through sanctions.

Internalization of Norms

When people come to believe that a particular norm is good, useful, and appropriate, they generally follow it and expect others to do the same. They do this because they have internalized the norm. Internalization is the process by which a norm becomes a part of an individual’s personality, thereby conditioning the individual to conform to society’s expectations. We require no thought to eat with a fork, spoon, and knife. We drive on the right side of the road. We stop at stop signs and go when the traffic signal is green. We do not do these things simply because we fear being punished. There would not be enough police to enforce the laws if, for example, everyone conformed to them only out of fear of arrest. Rather, we have internalized the laws.

Sanctions

Most members of society follow norms without conscious thought. Not everyone, however, internalizes all of society’s norms. Some people must be motivated by sanctions. Sanctions are rewards or punishments used to enforce conformity to norms.

Positive Sanctions. When a sanction is in the form of a reward, it is a positive sanction. People are introduced to positive sanctions early in life through interaction in the family. Most parents, for example, praise their children for good behavior. Positive sanctions also are common forms of control outside of the family. Teachers react favorably to students who pay attention in class and who do well in school. Employers often give pay raises to workers who show initiative and dedication. Cheers from team members and the crowd are used to spur athletes on to even greater efforts. And throughout life, ceremonies, ribbons, badges, and awards are used to convince people to meet the challenges of conformity and to continually improve their behavior.

Positive sanctions can range from smiles and nods of the head to public ceremonies and financial rewards. We all like to receive praise and personal recognition, regardless of the form they take. Often the more we get, the more we want. It makes us feel good. At the same time, these

With the exception of the family, the school is the most significant agent through which children come to learn the norms of society. Receiving a gold star from a teacher, for example, is a positive sanction that encourages young children to work hard and to obey instructions.
positive sanctions fulfill a vital function by encouraging the upholding of social norms.

**Negative Sanctions.** Positive sanctions are not always enough to ensure conformity. Society also must employ negative sanctions to bring forth desired behavior. A negative sanction is a punishment or the threat of punishment used to enforce conformity. When parents say that coming home late from a date will result in grounding, they are using a negative sanction. The threat of punishment often is enough to ensure conformity. The possibility of having one's car towed away usually is enough to persuade someone not to park in a "no parking" zone. When the threat of punishment fails, however, the actual punishment is there to remind the violator that conformity is expected. Actual punishments can range from frowns, ridicule, rejection, and fines to imprisonment and even death. In general, the more important the norm, the more serious the punishment for nonconformity.

**Formal Sanctions.** In addition to being positive or negative, sanctions also can be either formal or informal. A formal sanction is a reward or punishment that is given by some formal organization or regulatory body, such as the government, the police, a corporation, or a school. Fines, low grades, suspension from school, termination from a job, and imprisonment are examples of negative formal sanctions. Positive formal sanctions include pay raises, promotions, graduation certificates, awards, and medals.

**Informal Sanctions.** While formal sanctions play an important role in maintaining social stability, the majority of norms are enforced informally. An informal sanction is a spontaneous expression of approval or disapproval given by an individual or a group. Positive informal sanctions include standing ovations, compliments, smiles, pats on the back, and gifts. Negative informal sanctions include frowns, gossip, scoldings, insults, and being ignored.
Authority figures set standards for appropriate behavior and thereby reinforce the norms of society. Among the most visible authority figures are political, religious, and social leaders. Contemporary leaders who fulfill this function include (from top to bottom) the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Pope John Paul II, President Bill Clinton, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, the Reverend Billy Graham, and England’s Queen Elizabeth II.

The enforcing of norms through either internalization or sanctions is called **social control**. Agents of social control include authority figures, the police, the courts, religion, the family, and public opinion. The principal means of social control in all societies, though, is self-control, learned through the internalization of norms.

When a society’s methods for ensuring conformity break down, social stability is lost. If people are killing one another, stealing, and fighting in the streets, then social order is in jeopardy. No society can survive for long without an effective system of social control. Individuals must follow certain rules of behavior if society is to function smoothly.

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**SECTION 2 REVIEW**

**DEFINE** internalization, sanctions, social control

1. **Summarizing Ideas** What are the two basic ways in which the norms of society are enforced?

2. **Understanding Ideas** (a) What is a positive sanction? (b) What is a negative sanction? (c) Give several examples of positive and negative sanctions.

3. **Contrasting Ideas** (a) How does an informal sanction differ from a formal sanction? (b) Give several examples of positive and negative formal and informal sanctions.

4. **Analyzing Ideas** Why is it important to enforce norms?