

When you sit in a group of people there are always implicit rules that the group uses. Some people may ask how they are supposed to know these rules if they are not openly stated. The answer is that these norms are often transmitted through behaviors such as body language and facial expressions. Frowns are seen on the faces of others when an individual breaks an implicit norm and when norms are followed there are smiles. People in the group must decide whether these rules are acceptable and if they aren't acceptable, individuals must make a frightening decision. Individuals must decide if they are willing to go along with these norms or risk exclusion from the group. Many people will opt to follow these norms even if they don't necessarily approve of them because many people do not want to feel like outcasts.

From an early age, kids want to be accepted. If you look around in any social group we can see people who have the need to show off or put others down. This is because most people yearn for acceptance and desire to be "popular" or "cool." (Human Needs) In order to be accepted and to feel that approval people must follow social norms. Social norms are so deeply ingrained in the minds of individuals because they are learned at an early age through the process of socialization. As a child, individuals are taught social norms on a daily base in places such as classrooms. For example, if students want to speak in class they are taught to discreetly raise their hands. Students who follow these norms are praised and students who do not receive punishments. Also, students who follow these norms tend to be more successful in school and success is something that is praised in society. If following social norms helps lead to success, why wouldn't people follow these norms?

As a society, people have internalized social norms so well because they are

ingrained into our minds at an early age. Norms are so frequently activated that it becomes normal to follow them. Referring back to the hand raising example, when students are constantly being taught to raise their hands in the classroom it becomes a routine that is hard to break. According to a college professor Bradley Wright, "In ten years, I've only been able to convince one of my classes to just speak without raising their hands." There are such strong associations between situations and behaviors have formed so thinking about those situations makes the appropriate behavior more likely. (Social Psychology: Norms) Not only are norms frequently activated, but they are also enforced by rewards and punishments. Breaking norms can result in a formal punishment, such as being fined or imprisoned, or an informal punishment, such as being stared at or shunned by others. Most people would rather go along with social norms than risk exclusion and punishment.

Although punishments and rewards are used to enforce social norms, they do not stop all people from being deviant. Society cannot afford enough monitors to enforce social norms at all times. This can be seen through the broken window theory. If people see something as small as a broken window on the streets, it gives them the impression that no one cares or that no one is in charge. Before you know it, even bigger crimes are being committed. Not only does deviance occur because of lack of enforcement but it also occurs when a person's ties to society are weakened or broken. (Kendall 219) Most people stick to social norms because they do not want to be the outcasts but people who already have broken ties to society or are labeled as delinquents may engage in deviant and criminal behavior because of these destructive social interactions. As a society we have placed such high importance on achieving conventional goals of status and wealth.

However, not all people have sufficient legitimate means to achieve these goals so they resort to illegitimate activities such as robbery or drug dealing. (Kendall 217)

Social norms are established throughout society and within groups everywhere. In order to maintain acceptance, popularity, and often times success, it is almost essential to go along with these social norms. Since many individuals do not want to be shunned and punished for rejecting social norms, people follow these norms. It almost becomes routine because these norms are internalized in individuals from the day they are born. However, not all people follow these social norms. Some people resort to deviant behavior when they do not have legitimate means of attaining the success and wealth that people in society yearn to have or when they are already labeled as deviants. The pressure that society puts on people to follow social norms and the pressure that society puts on people to attain success is what ultimately drives people to either break or follow social norms.