

## Social-Cognitive Psychology Social Norms Project

### Purpose

When we violate the unwritten rules for appropriate behavior, we quickly learn the surprising power of even relatively minor and usually invisible social norms. The purpose of this assignment is to make you conscious of how these subtle norms shape our everyday behavior and the consequences of violating norms, and to give you an idea of how psychological research on norm violations is conducted.

### Violating Norms

Choose one of the following behaviors, or choose your own social rule to violate:

- Cut into the middle of a line by yourself; stay in line for at least 2 minutes.
- Ask someone you don't know for his/her seat in a public place (e.g., at the Mall food court); stay in the seat for at least 2 minutes.
- Acting otherwise completely normal, hold hands with a same-sex friend (who is "in" on the project) while you walk through the Ferry Building on a busy Saturday morning.
- Surprise three of your same-sex friends with a kiss on the cheek and stay with them and act as if nothing out of the ordinary happened for at least two full minutes.
- Go to a coffee shop in the Financial District and greet everyone that's in it; say "good morning/afternoon" to them or use other words to welcome them to the coffee shop today.
- Wear unusual clothing in a public place (e.g., your pajamas to a Financial District Starbucks)
- Click [here for more examples](#) from past years.

### Important Disclaimers:

- First, you should not do anything illegal or anything that will get you into serious trouble (a little trouble is okay). *You* are responsible for the consequences of *your* actions!
- Second, you should not try to cause undue pain or anguish to those who care about you (a little anguish is okay). **Do not be a jerk just for the sake of being a jerk!** This is not an episode of *Jackass*. If you saw your idea on YouTube, it's probably a bad idea.
- Third, do not do anything that is morally questionable, or that could bring negative sanctions against yourself, the Psychology program, Saint Ignatius, etc.
- Fourth, you must receive permission from me to break your social norm prior to actually doing it by describing the project on the Canvas discussion board.
- Fifth, the violation should make YOU uncomfortable first and foremost.
- Sixth, you cannot do your project on campus OR at Stonestown mall.

Before, during, and after your norm violations, mentally observe:

- your own reactions (thoughts, feelings, physical responses, behavior), and
- the reactions of the people around you.

## Writing Your Paper

In about 2 double-spaced typed pages, do each of the following:

1. Statement of Problem:
  - a. define the norm you violated
  - b. describe briefly how this norm acts as a mechanism of social control
2. Describe the Setting:
  - a. Physical – where/when is your norm violation taking place?
  - b. Social – how many and what types of persons are observing?
3. Describe the Incident
4. Summary and Interpretation:
  - a. How did you feel as you were violating the norm?
  - b. Why did you feel the way you did?
  - c. Did people react the way you expected? Explain.
  - d. Did you encounter any difficulties in carrying out your assignment?
  - e. What, if anything, did you learn about how norms exercise social control?
  - f. Any other pertinent observation.
5. Evidence: Prove that you actually did this assignment though digital evidence!
  - a. Upload to Canvas a few still photos or a brief video clip of you breaking the Social Norm
  - b. Remember the basic principle of “naturalistic observation”: people behave differently when they know they’re being observed/ filmed

## Alternative Assignment

In 2-3 pages, complete the following reading and reflection.

1. Read the New York Times article, “[Excuse me. May I have your seat?](#)”
2. Summarize the article
3. Reflect on why you were unable or unwilling to accomplish the “Violating a Social Norm” assignment