

Breaking a social norm

Psychology



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Description of the motivation

When visiting someone, it is always essential to ask for permission before using such facilities as the bathroom and television among others. I chose to break this norm as part of my class assignment. I paid a visit to classmate and friend I had never visited before. It was on a Saturday morning, and so the entire family was home. As soon as I got there and greeted the family, I picked the remote control and began flipping the television channels. After a while, I got up and walked to the direction I thought housed the bathrooms. Luckily, I got to the bathrooms, used it and went back to the living room where I continued watching my favorite television channel.

I learned the norm from my parents. My father had always reminded us to show respect by seeking permission before using such basic facilities while visiting other people. My mother would always remind my siblings and me before we left home to visit relatives and friends that it is respectful to seek permission. According to their understanding, asking for permission before using the bathroom and the television is polite. By seeking permission, one would help a host avoid such basic embarrassments as letting one use a dirty or faulty bathroom.

With such a basic understanding, I chose to break the norm because it would provide me with an appropriate platform to investigate and study how people value the norms and react when one breaks them. Furthermore, I believed that breaking the norm would not cause any serious harm to my hosts but would allow me to study their reactions.

Description of my experiences in breaking the norm

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Everyone at my friend's family was excited to see me. They greeted me cheerfully and invited me to the living room where they sat enjoying a television program. When I grabbed the remote control and changed the channel without seeking their permission, the two young children grumbled and shouted their disgust. They called to their parents. The parents sought to explain that they were enjoying the program while my friend and his teenage sister left the room in disgust. They flipped the channel back on, and everyone returned to the living room. When I stood and walked to where I thought was the living room my hosts remained shocked. My friend ran after me and asked where I was going to before he offered to help, by then I had reached the door to the bathroom.

I felt embarrassed in both occasions. The wails from the children and the attempt of the parents to explain to me that the family was enjoying the program made me feel like a bully. On my way to the bathroom, I could feel everybody's discomfort at my uncouth manners. I felt uncomfortable and was too embarrassed to engage the rest of the family members on any social chat. I imagine the others detested my manners while the parents sympathized with me. I annoyed the children in the family and embarrassed my friend. I could imagine his family discussing my inexcusable manners after my departure.

Work cited

Hechter, Michael, and Karl-Dieter Opp. *Social Norms*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001. Print.