

# Good example of research paper on norm breaking experiment and analysis

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



## **Introduction**

People influence the behaviors of those they come in contact with in many different ways. One of the most important ways is that the presence of others set expectations of others. In fact, people's behavioral patterns are not random, but they behave in different ways based on the expected response of the society. Within each social situation, there is a given set of expectations regarding the appropriate ways in which people are expected to behave. These expectations often vary from one group to another. One of the ways in which the expectations of the society become clear is through the changing and varying roles of people in society. Each social role reflects a change in the individuals behavior as it behavior pattern is employed to fit the expectations of people in different spheres. Conversely, the different social roles reflect the different expected behavioral pattern commonly referred to as norms.

The situation within the following pages, take place within the confines of the school room. It is an expected behavior that one enters the room facing those who are already in the room. Society dictates that this is so, yet there are no clear rules as to the acceptance of such a practice. Everybody else enters with their faces turned into the room, as part of the experiment and analysis, the writer decided to do otherwise with the expectation that different people will react in different ways. The norm is that the process of facing those in the room is a common principle or respect for those who are already in the room. The characteristics that make this a normal part of the interaction is that people tend to want to see what is happening before it happens, and in this case, people may want to see who is entering the room

before the person is too far inside to cause any form of disturbance. The individuals who were already in the room, consisted of people of different racial background, age group, social class. In general, no one has ever attempted to walk backwards into the room. Such an action would present itself as a deviation from the normal practice and is likely to evoke different responses. This deviation from the social norm is simple, but shows how observant people are and the consideration that is placed on simple socially accepted behaviors. Conversely, people connect on a deeper level and want to associate themselves with others who share the same ideals that they have. The experiment is simple, but one can be ostracized because the behavior shows a lack of respect for others, negative responses to fear of the unknown, and the effect of wanting to enforce society's accepted norms.

## **Experimental Manipulation**

The experiment consisted of the subject, walking into a classroom of students, and a lecturer with his face turned towards the exit. The subject wore a torn, dirty jeans and a dirty shirt and wore a baseball hat that was pulled all the way down on his face. The subject, further, did not have on any shoes and had one notebook in his hand. The white shirt shows stains from the tomato sauce that was smeared over the shirt. This overall dressing created an image that suggested that the shirt had bloodstains. His hair was dirty and unkempt under the hat. This immediately broke the norm of entering any classroom, as the first variation to the norm was the way in which the writer was dressed. People fear those around them who are not properly groomed. They immediately responded to the behavior in a

negative manner. To compound the fact, those in the room could not readily identify the person who was coming into the room as his face turned outwards. The experiment took place at about nine o'clock in the morning, at the start of the first classes for the day. The room is airy as there are large windows that allow sunlight in from every angle. Therefore, the entrance of the writer was clearly visible. The students are seated in a circular pattern so that they are cognizant of whoever enters the room. There are twenty students in the room of a mixed age group. The ages ranged from twenty to thirty. There is one professor who seated in the center of the room. The atmosphere is calm as students are busy reviewing textbook material as they talked in soft voices. The students already in the room dress casually, but their clothes are clean. No one is wearing hats, because such an action is unacceptable based on the professor's social values. The group is made up of thirteen females and seven males. This gender distribution is likely to influence the overall responses or reaction of the group.

The assumption is that students are to be appropriately dressed for classes and properly groomed. In addition, they should enter in a manner that they can be easily identified by those who are already in the room. In the case of the subject, his dress code presented itself as a deviation to the socially accepted norms. The aim of the experiment was to find out how individuals would respond to this behavior which included the writer being unkempt, walking with stealthy movements, and his face being obscured from view. One could assume that the behavior would elicit negative responses from most of the students who were already in the room and that the professor would be appalled or even upset by this deviation. Based on how the subject

was dressed, the writer realized that those in the room would immediately respond to the behavior in a negative way.

## **Responses of the Subjects**

The subject who entered the room reeked of alcohol and sweat and could pass a thief as he had a bulge under his shirt to suggest that the weapon was there. The foul odor from his body added to the stereotype that he was homeless and had picked up a book to pass as a student who was poor. The stain marks on the shirt was indicative of the assumption that he had a wound or had wound someone along the way. He was short and looked to be about twenty - five years old. He was black, and this added to the fear in the group as he walked stealthily into the room. There was an air of arrogance beneath the surface as he walked into the room. His eyes darted suspiciously at everyone, but he did not look long enough to engage anyone in the room. In any case, it was difficult to see his eyes as the baseball hat was pulled low over his dirt-stained face.

The professor is about fifty years old, and one could say that he is from an era where people were afraid of colored people and presently lives in a society where people know of the horrible tales of a black man with blood stains on his clothes. His face mirrored fear as he obviously tried to figure out the new addition to the room. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat as he tried to get a clear view of the subjects face and to be sure of the stains on his shirt. His own attire is clean, and his shirt hangs neatly over his pants and could leave one to assume that he was judging the subject based on his personal perception of the appropriateness of a student's attire in the

classroom. The students are appropriately dressed based on societal standards. They all had on clean and fresh clothes. There were eighteen white students and two colored students. The reaction to the subject was slow as only three of them saw the respondent as soon as he entered the room. However, the chain reaction that ensued represented the typical ways in which people view the dirty and homeless individuals who plague the streets and especially when they are dark-skinned. The fear was clear on these three faces, and the writer anticipated the reaction. One can easily understand the fear that presented itself in the minds of these students as they carefully observed the tomato sauce which looked like blood, the dirty clothes, and the bulge under the shirt. It was clear that they had overlooked the book in his hand as the whispers grew as the news spread across the room. The students in the room responded with utter alarm as soon as they became aware of the subject's presence.

At least five of them, including the two colored students, scrambled towards the door and looked towards an escape. The appearance of the subject was disturbing, to say the least, as he was not appropriately dressed for a class and he looked as though he had been in a fight prior to his appearance in the room. Of the remaining fifteen students who remained seated, seven of them (females) moved their chairs quickly as they inched closer to the males who had remained seated. This response could be attributed to the fact that they see men as protector of women, or this was a result of that they simply needed to be closer to someone in case of an attack. Another logical reasoning would be that they were too afraid to move towards the door, lest the subject attacked them on the spot. They stared at the subject from

behind their books while glancing at the professor, to see his reaction. He appeared to be frozen to the spot and tries to speak, but his fear only allowed incoherent speech. Three females look helplessly at the door, and one could assume that they were overcome with fear so much so that they could not move.

## **Analysis and Conclusion**

The deduction here is that the reaction of the group is understandable as history, society on the whole, the mass media, and the social media are tools that promote stereotypical reactions in people. In many cases, blacks are perceived as negative characters that kill on a whim. In addition, if these blacks are dirty, then the typical assumption is that they are likely to be criminals or killers. The subject added to this stereotypical view with his stealth, and he slinked across the room towards the professor. The fear in the room heightens as he reached under his shirt with his back still turned to those in the room. With this action, another eight students run from the room. The implication is that he is likely to react violently. One of the expected responses did not occur as the students were expected to scream at some point in the experiment.

The students' reaction is an expected social norm as most people display the "flight or fright" reaction in an unknown situation. The social norm broken represents the fact that society on the whole does not react positively to changes or deviations to the norms. It proves also that the reaction to a norm will vary according to individual perception and society's perception of others. In this particular experiment, the influence of the wider society

played an important role in how the students perceive the subject. With the number of school shootings by young people and the perception of negativism associated with the black race, it would have been impossible for the students to react in any other way. From a sociological perspective, the fear of the colored students could be attributed to the fact they are cognizant of the stigma attached to colored people, or they may have been exposed to the violence of colored on a broad spectrum. One can assume that the reactions of the white students represents a chain reaction where it followed that if colored students decided to run away in fear from their own color, then it is only fair to follow suit. Either way, both ethnic groups responded in a similar fashion to the deviation of the normal behavior in the experiment. However, one could say that the reaction to the subject was a result of the fear of “ knowing” that deviation from the norm could result in negative behavior.

In concluding, the experiment achieved the desired results. The researcher realized that society has its standards about how people react to norm breaking situations. The effect is that people in general have their own views on socially accepted behaviors as three of the students showed no signs of fear and were indifferent to the events in the room. This logic could be based on the reality that the students had no fear of the person entering the room in any form or fashion or that upon closer inspection of the subject, they recognized him. In reflecting on the experiment, it can be deduced that people frown upon how people present themselves - either in the way they dress, walk, or speak - and as such they do not want to associate themselves with those who break the social norms of the society.