

Breaking a norm essay sample

[Food & Diet](#)



People have their own beliefs and philosophies on what they consider valuable. Every person develops expectations, of what they consider proper. Sociologists call such expectations, norms, rules of behavior that develop out of group's values (Henslin, 2002, P. 45). The norm I chose to break, was the norm of eating certain foods with utensils. On one Saturday evening, I went to a restaurant called Olive Garden. I was dressed properly, and looked well suited for the restaurant standards. I ordered my food from the menu. I ordered a vegetable soup and alfredo fettuccini. Once I got my meal, I took the utensils wrapped in a napkin and put them aside. I started eating with my bare hands, and drank the soup straight from the bowl. While I was doing this, I wanted to see how the people around me would react. Thus, I would make slurping noises while drinking my soup, so I can get people's attention. Also, I would cough really ostentatiously to get people attention while I was eating my pasta and drinking the soup! I wanted to see how people react at different locations. Therefore, I first went to Olive Garden, and then went to a local low profiled restaurant, later that night, called Silver Lake. I elected to break this norm because, I wanted to know how essential eating certain foods with utensils are to people. Moreover, I wanted to see the confines to which others would react if they saw the norms of eating certain foods with utensils being encroached. Also, to see how different cultures and different backgrounds would react to my behavior.

To start with, I was nervous as it is; going to a restaurant and eating with my bare hands. I had no clue what to expect, but I had an idea that many people were going to stare at me. It was in the evening, on a Saturday. The thought of what others might think of me, made me think twice about breaking this

norm. When I walked into Olive Garden, people were eating and having their little conversation among their group. While the waiter was showing me the way to the table, I was thinking on how will I get their attention? When I was ordering my food, I thought of coughing remarkably to get their divine attention. Once the food came, I started continuing with the breaking of my norm. Using my bare hands, I ate my alfredo fettuccini while coughing loudly, and drinking my soup straight from the bowl.

As I was eating, the people around me stopped doing what they were doing and looked at me! Nervous as I was, I kept on eating my food watching their reactions. A couple across from me in their young teens started laughing, and started making gestures at me! Mostly everyone around me started staring at me. After a while the waiter came up to me and asked me, “ Are the utensils dirty or is there anything else I can help you with?” I replied “ No thanks.” Furthermore, I did not see anyone who sanctioned the way I ate my food. However, I noticed mostly that young people were making the comments and laughing the most. Adults gave me strange looks, but some just ignored me and minded their own business. In addition, the entire scenario seemed like an objective, which I could not wait until it was over!

Unlike the Olive Garden, the environment of the low profile restaurant constructed different reactions as I walked in. My apprehensions were proven incorrect; when I did not see anyone looking at me, or laughing the way I ate the food. The people eating at the low profile restaurant were considerate, and minded their own business. Matter in fact; while I was eating rice with my hands, I noticed a couple sitting across from me, who were also eating rice. Suddenly, they put down their forks, and embarked

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eating with their hands! Moreover, instead of experiencing uncivil manners, I was shocked when the couple across from me altered their norms in order to accept mine. Regardless, I was greeted with some strange looks from people, but I did not come across anyone who laughed at me. Others who stared at me did not make me feel bad, because I had expected so many negative sanctions, after visiting Olive Garden. Negative Sanctions are harsh words or gestures, such as frowns and stares that reflect disapproval for breaking a norm (Henslin, 2002, P. 45).

Additionally, the responses I have obtained from breaking the norm represented people's own abstractions, creativity, and feelings of how you should eat properly. However, there is no such rule that says how people should eat. Everyone has their own perspective on table manners; depending on what culture they come from. No one has the right to force his or her own judgments on others. Nevertheless, instead of giving me the freedom to express myself, the people in restaurant, were judging my behavior based on their expectations. Their tendency to use their group's ways of doing things as a benchmark for judging me, is referred to as ethnocentrism. In addition, they used gestures, like laughing and staring, in order to acknowledge me that they disapproved my behavior. Gestures involve using one's body to communicate with others, are useful shorthand ways to convey messages without using words (Henslin, 2002, P. 39). I am aware of the fact that people have their own philosophies, but evaluating others based on those viewpoints is wrong. Such behaviors can often lead to low self-esteem.

Furthermore, the responses I received, made me feel like an alien who was so distinct from others. I was embarrassed, scared, and felt an intense desire to leave. These feelings were provoked by my id, Freud's term for inborn drives that cause us to seek self-gratification (Henslin, 2002, P. 64). I wanted to leave from there immediately and make others aware that my actions were only for class related purposes. On the other hand, my ego, the balancing force between the id and the demands for society that suppress it, made me aware of the fact that I had no option, but to stay and finish the task. However, others negative reactions were getting to me, and I could not take it anymore. My superego, the culture within us, the norms and values we have internalized from our social group, made me realize how ill-mannered it was to break such a norm (Henslin, 2002, P. 64). In addition, when I arrived at Silver Lake, my low self-esteem was reinforced. As I noticed the couple across from me adopt my behaviors. The couple assumed that the proper way to eat at the restaurant was with hands. Therefore, they learned new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors to match their own situation, a process called resocialization (Henslin, 2002, P. 70). I was relieved when I saw the couple act in a similar manner as I did. As a result, I was confident once again, and waited for the conclusion of the operation.

In conclusion, people are peerless in the way they judge and do things. People have their diverse ways of doing things. We all have different approaches of looking at others and arbitrating the way they are. Based on these conceptions, we develop an understanding and a theory of the world around us. Furthermore, when people tend to do things differently, we tend to distinguish them to be infringing a norm. However, these violations will

eventually lead us to the cause of negative sanctions, which will create negative attitudes towards them. This assignment brought out the best of me! I learned many things in this assignment. I learned that different settings will cause different reactions, and how they differ from culture to culture. Also, the outcomes and reactions of violating the beliefs set by others.

If I had another chance to do something different, I would make more of a vivid scene to get people's attention and get better reactions! Additionally, if I had another chance, I would go to a more of a classy restaurant and eat with my bare hands, and wear bright clothing to get their attention! Of course, I would recommend this project for Sociology 100 next semester. This project gives us a chance to understand the extent to how people endure a norm being violated. It also helps us understand, how important norms are to certain people. In general, people's values motivate their weaknesses, direct their alternatives, and resolve what we perceive as most important in life. This assignment gave people an opportunity to go all out, and break a norm that they always wanted to break!