

Deviant act project: visit to a grocery store

Law



For my act of deviance I chose to go to a grocery store and attempt to pay for my groceries ignoring the line at the checkout counter. So one day I went to my local grocery store. After filling my shopping cart I headed towards checkout area. The closer I was getting there, the more vulnerable and hesitant felt. I was almost ready to give up this whole idea when I got to the line, but then I heard: " Next person in line! " from a cashier on the right who has just opened her checkout station. I quickly pushed my cart to that register and noticed a person (who was next in line to check out) also going to that newly-opened register.

I got there faster and put my first item on the counter. Nobody said anything to me. Several other people from the line moved to this cash register and formed a new line. I was putting my groceries on the counter. In the middle of me taking the groceries out of the cart I looked at the person standing next in line after me. This was a middle-aged woman. With a frown on her face she stared straight back at me but did not say anything. I have also noticed that a person behind her was staring too. They both were not just looking at me, they were staring in disapproval. I just smiled and turned back.

I made sure I took my time at the register: I had a lot of groceries in my cart. I paid and left. Waiting line itself has been recognized to be a social system. The leading rule for this social system is the First In First Out (FIFO) rule and all intrusions are deviations from the norm. (Allan, Gad and Hanna, Reran. 2010. Cutting in Line: Social Norms in Queues.) When waiting in line, we expect people also to wait their turn. When someone decides to cut in line: they violate a social norm. All those people in line must have an interest in enforcing conformity to the norm.

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Nobody likes to wait in lines and I am sure that they all would prefer to check out and leave the store faster. They clearly saw that I have jumped the line but those stares and a frown were the only sanctions I have got for breaking the norm. I did not feel comfortable breaking the norm. It was hard to predict how exactly people would react to me and what kind of sanctions I would have to face. I am not sure what I would do if I got sanctioned in some other way, other than getting those stares and a frown. I don't know if I would just tell the truth about my school assignment or if I would try to justify my actions by lying.

Now, if somebody would try to behave the same way in a country, where lines etiquette is different or does not exist at all, than this behavior would not be normal for people in a queue to let an old person go and check out first and not wait in line. Also, there was an example in our text book where author told us about his experience at one of the African countries where people would just push or shove toward the ticket man if they needed to buy a ticket for a bus or train. (Heinlein, James M. 2011. Essentials of Sociology. A Down-to-Earth Approach.)