

Breaking social norms

[Society](#)



Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of my experience in breaking a social norm, there is a need to define and elaborate some of the types of social norms. Generally, social norms are accepted ways of thinking, feeling, behaving that people in a group agree on and endorse as right and proper. These social norms often take various forms. They can be institutionalized, thus becoming the standard rules of behavior in a society (e. g. law). They can also be manifest rules “ that silently tells someone of the approved forms of behavior” (Light et al. , 1989).

Hence, it can be said that social norms comprised most of the conventional behaviors perceived in a given society (it is generally noted that social norms differ across societies - spatially and periodically). Nonetheless, social norms are enforced differently. There are social norms considered to be rigid in application; that is, all members of the society need to follow such rules. These social norms are called mores. Frequently, mores are transformed into laws, expected to be followed by all members of the society (violation is considered to be a threat to social organization).

There are also norms that are laxly enforced by members of the society. These are called folkways. Generally, folkways are the society's web of cultural or spiritual rituals, traditions, and routines. Deviance (breaking a social norm is synonymous to deviance) is not considered a threat to social organization. Sanction for violating folkways or traditions is less severe than moral deviance. Breaking a Social Norm As part of the requirements in our sociology course, the professor asked us to break a social norm (without contributing physical or mental danger to other people).

A paper will be submitted detailing the specifics of the experience. Initially, I had this fear of social retribution for violating a social norm. Rather than thinking of the form of action I will take in breaking a social norm, I focused more on the consequences. However, since the professor assured us that we were only required to break a “ soft” social norm, that is, a norm laxly enforced by the society, I felt relieved. I began enumerating the possible “ soft” social norms I could remember. I remembered that wearing pajamas in movie theaters usually embarrasses many people.

Usually, you will hear people talking of your “ fashion style. ” Other people usually gossip of the “ strangeness” of the “ person at his/her front” (a person wearing pajamas). However, as a student of sociology, I would never accept such assertions unless validated by experience or empirical research. Thus, for the first time, I became enthusiastic of my forthcoming experience. There were two things I considered before breaking a social norm: the color of the pajama I would be using and of course, the relative number of people in the theater. Usually, people going to movie theaters are embarrassed to see persons wearing yellow pajamas.

I really do not know the reason behind this observation. What I really cared is that it is possible that the people are reacting not on the appropriateness of wearing pajamas in movie theaters but on the color of the pajamas. Hence, I used a white pajama to eliminate this possibility. The relative number of people going to theater also poses another problem. If I chose a theater which is seldom visited by people, then I will not be able to fully substantiate my deviance. Because deviance is partially measure by the degree of

disagreement by the deviant and the society (this is really hard to measure), number is a factor.

Hence, choosing the “right” movie theater (which is observed to be a frequent visiting place for many people) is a factor in executing the experience. I wore a white pajama that day. The movie theater was four blocks away from my residence. I decided to walk. It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. In the streets, I noticed that some people were staring at my pajamas. Some of them laughed; some threw a smile on me (most of the persons who laughed were men). It was clear to me that my pajama was causing the “disturbance” (or more appropriate, the social labeling of a deviant).

Then I entered the entrance door of the theater. I noticed that the guard was somehow reluctant to allow me to enter the movie theater. Because I bought a ticket, he had no choice but to allow me to enter the place. Upon entrance to the theater, I saw some persons staring at me. Definitely, they were thinking that my dress is not an appropriate one when going to movie theaters. After a few seconds, they fixed their eyes on the movie screen. Then, I began to walk in the stairs of the movie theater just to take note of the reactions of the people I passed by.

Some people were annoyed at the “inappropriateness” of my dress. I could trace it on the movements of their eyes. I knew that they were directing their view to my dress. Then, I settled on a seat located on the right side of the movie screen. I noticed that the person at my back was directing a laugh to his date. I guessed my dress was the cause. I felt a little distressed on the reactions of the people on my dress. Added to that, because I was the only

one “wearing a strange dress”, I felt that I was the focus of attention (disregarding the fact that most of the people in the movie theater focused on the movie).

Then, I noticed that almost all people in the theater were back in their usual “business.” The person at my back stopped from laughing. Most of the people fixed their eyes on the big screen. During the climax of the movie, I felt that everything was back in the normal. It seemed that that movie altered the focus of the people. Instead of fixing their eyes on my dress, they directed it to the movie screen. The movie screen (and the movie, of course) was a big help. When the movie was about to end, I noticed that some people were again fixing their eyes to my dress.

Some people passing by my seat just ignored me. I felt a little relieved having observed that many people were ignoring me. I felt a little surprise when one of the movie-goers asked me the reason for wearing a white pajama in the movie theater. I said that it was my custom in when going to movie theaters. The person threw a smile at me. I know the thing running in his mind. He was really struck to see a person wearing a white pajama in the movie theater. Breaking the social norm I chose was not really easy. I knew that people would perceive me as a deviant once I start breaking a norm.

Although it was a “soft” social norm, the propensity of a general reaction from people would surely be manifested in their covert behavior; that is, their “silent” disagreement over the inappropriateness of my dress would surely result to gossip and laughter. These general reactions though were proven (through my experience) to be momentarily. These reactions were the result of initial discomfort or uneasiness to some people going in the <https://assignbuster.com/breaking-social-norms/>

movie theater. Gender difference with regard to the intensity of reaction was significant. Most of the people who laughed at my dress were men.

Since the norm I broke was a “ soft” one, I did not experience any harsh moral sanction. The reason lies on the nature of the norm itself. The norm is part of the routine activities of the people (that going to movie theaters with pajamas is not appropriate), hence does not constitute any moral evaluation. Thus, the sanctions (gossip and laughter) that were directed to me by some of the movie goers were correlated to the type of social norm I broke. Personally, I would really like to repeat this experience (not for experience’s sake) for empirical validation.

Empirical validation is usually effective when multiple points of experiences are examined. In this case, repetition serves as factual and theoretical validation of some elements of social deviance. References Light, Donald. (1989). *Sociology*. NY: McGraw-Hill Companies. *Social Norms*. (2007). Retrieved on October 27, 2007 from <http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:eMCHZe0mVroj:www.buec.udel.edu/kimt/Leading%2520People/10.11%2520Social%2520Norm%2520%26%2520Communication.ppt+definition+of+a+social+norm&hl=tl&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=ph&client=firefox-a>

ppt+definition+of+a+social+norm&hl=tl&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=ph&client=firefox-a.