

Social norms essay



**ASSIGN
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The way of behavior of a certain community or society constitutes its social norms (Myers, 1993). Every member of that society strictly adheres to those norms; and any violation is usually received with indifference. In order to investigate the power of social norms, I carried out a rather unusual activity – one that was clearly not a social norm.

The norm is usually to have people putting on clothing that suit the occasion as well as those that are in accordance to weather. For me, however, I put on my night dress and wore pink slippers on my feet. On my nose was a blue dot. Then I headed for the lecture room in full view of everybody. This was a violation of social norms because slippers are meant for the shower and the dress I wore was meant for sleeping.

Besides, the pink slippers and the blue dot on my nose clashed so much so that I looked like a lunatic. Discussion As I went, I did not help feeling rather silly. The guilty was more than I could bear. I was so ashamed of myself and silently wondered what my friends and family could think of me if anyone of them happened to see me.

I was undergoing an inner emotional struggle even though I tried my level best to put on a brave face. I could feel my heart beating very fast and my breath became irregular. The fact that I did this right in a crowded university campus and in broad daylight made me look out of place and extremely odd. The response from the other students was no less than I had expected.

Everyone who happened to see me got so surprised that I could tell the extent of their shock from the manner they opened their mouths and gasped or sighed loudly. Others just could not manage to take their eyes off me as

they stopped suddenly in their paths to stare at me with horror. Some just took a glance at me and walked past fast enough as though they had just met with a lunatic. Wherever I passed a lot of space was left so I could pass without any interference. Within just five minutes of appearing in public, a large crowd had already collected and was following me at a safe distance as I strolled towards the lecture hall. I never reached my destination because one of my friends, probably out of embarrassment, grabbed me by my arm and forced me to go back and dress up properly.

From this experience, I learnt several lessons. First, that norms are so potent and that although this potency rarely manifests itself, it is all because the society hardly ever breaks its norms (Myers, 1993). Only when a social norm is broken can its potency be clearly demonstrated in the manner the rest of the people will react. Another lesson regards cognitive dissonance.

I was so embarrassed of myself and the guilty was unbearable. My thoughts were not in agreement. In my mind I wanted to stop all this and act normally. But I had to carry out this test anyway.

This conflict continued to play in my mind all through that experience. My cognitions were at dissonance in spite of my attempts to downplay them. I was trying to find a reason to justify my behavior but I found none. I learnt; therefore, that adherence to social norms is usually one of the ways that people use in order to reduce their cognitive dissonance (Myers, 1993).

Finally, I learnt that every person subconsciously tries to conform to whatever is generally acceptable in society (social norms). Guilt will always point out to people that they are not conforming to social norms (Myers,

1993). Conclusion In view of this experience and the lessons thereof, social norms are usually held very dear by a given society; and breaking any is treated as nonconformity. Normative social influence - the influence of others that causes one to want to conform to a certain standard or order - plays a critical role in maintaining social norms.