3/1: VIOLATING A NORM (worth 4 activities)

For this activity, I would like students to violate a social norm of their choice (that is, act in a way that would be appropriate under some situations, but do it in a situation in which it would not be considered appropriate). Complete your norm violation in a public location where strangers can clearly see you doing it, and observe their reactions (if any). Then write about your experience in your activity journal, explaining the norm you chose to violate, what you did (and where), how you felt doing it, how many people could see you, and what reactions you observed.

Restrictions

- You may NOT do anything that involves direct interaction with a stranger. That is, don’t get strangers involved in what you’re doing (other than to observe you). This is not about pulling pranks on other people—it’s about you doing something counter-normative. (e.g., do not stop strangers on the street to ask directions to Egypt.)
- Do NOT do anything that might cause other people harm, discomfort, or embarrassment. (e.g., do not swear in front of young children.)
- Do NOT do anything unsafe, illegal, or expressly prohibited. (e.g., do not walk across the campus nude.)
- Do NOT do anything disruptive. (e.g., do not play guitar during your History class.)

Examples of acceptable norm violations

- Ride a crowded elevator facing the wrong way (better still, face the entire crowd)
- In an uncrowded bus or reading room, sit directly next to another patron
- Go to class dressed in evening wear, beach wear, sleep wear, or a Halloween costume
- Bring a weird object with you to the dining hall (e.g., a brick, an old rotary telephone, a large potted plant, several rolls of toilet paper, jumper cables, a lawn chair)
- Walk across campus backwards, or with your hands above your head, or hopping on one foot
- Sing, dance, or play solitaire in a public restroom
- Browse a store wearing handcuffs, a bridal gown, a surgical mask, or swim goggles

Feel free to be creative and have fun with this, but adhere to the restrictions above.

You may work with a partner from class if it facilitates the norm violation (e.g., feeding your friend at a restaurant, sitting in your friend’s lap on the bus), but you should each write your own entry in your journals.

If you try to do your chosen norm violation but can’t bring yourself to do it, try choosing something else less embarrassing. Don’t falsify your entry—the actual experience is important.

If you find that completing this activity would cause you undue distress, please contact me about it. Most people should be able to think of something they can handle doing, and I want you to at least try. But I don’t want you to put yourself through a painful ordeal.