

Introduction to Sociology

SOCI 10100.14 – Spring 2010

Assignment #3

Social norms are a routine factor in our daily lives. In many cases, we do not even actively think about norms as we decide what to wear, how to talk to our friends, or how to behave in class. However, we become aware of norms when (1) we fail to conform and people react negatively (for example, overdress on a day and have to field comments from everyone about whether it is laundry day); (2) we encounter others who break norms and react strongly (for example, getting very angry at someone who talks on their cell phone in the movie); or (3) encounter a group of people who do not fit in (for example, seeing a person with a terrible scar on their face and fighting the urge to stare). For this assignment, you will work in pairs and break a social norm to see how people respond.

This assignment is designed to meet the following course goals:

- To enable you to articulate the unique perspective of sociologists (as opposed to other disciplines), particularly (1) the types of questions sociologists ask and (2) the ways that sociologists answer those questions;
- To prepare you to describe and examine social phenomena;
- To give you an opportunity to apply sociological insights to your own lived experience and the world around you.

The guidelines for your search are as follows:

1. **Find a partner from class.** You and your partner must coordinate your work because you will be doing the same activities.
2. **Select a norm violation** that interests both of you. You will need to select a norm violation that is “doable” – one you can both reasonably accomplish around campus (or another location you have easy access).
 - a. Norm violations you might consider:
 - i. Violating someone's personal space by standing too near or sitting too near.
 - ii. Facing the people while standing in an elevator.
 - iii. Dressing very formally for a casual event, or vice-versa.
 - iv. Going barefoot in winter weather or wearing heavy winter clothing and boots in hot weather.
 - v. Eating with inappropriate utensils.
 - b. In general, I encourage you to pick fairly minor folkway – one that people do not care about a lot. **You should avoid any norm for which violation results in serious anger or danger (to yourself or others).** For example, you should not jump out of a hidden area to scare people (which could result in serious danger to you) or disrupt a class (which could make a professor angry enough to remove you from a class) or use an illegal substance (which could result in your arrest). If you are unsure if your norm violation is appropriate for this assignment, contact me as soon as possible.
 - c. Both you and your partner must commit the same norm violation.
3. **Observations of normal behavior.** You must know what normally occurs so you can identify behaviors occurring in response to your violation- behaviors that would not have occurred in the absence of a violation. Once you have identified the norm violation and a location, you and your partner should go and observe the normal behavior that interests you for at least 10 minutes (maybe longer). At this point do nothing to disrupt normal processes. Your present goal at this point is to understand normal behavior in order to gain a basis of comparison when you observe others reactions to your norm violation (e.g., standing and facing people in elevator).
4. **Conducting the norm violation.** Each you and your partner must take turns (1) committing the norm violation and (2) observing the norm violation. When it is your turn to commit the norm violation, you will go into the location you have chosen and commit the violation. Meanwhile, your partner will pretend not to know you and what is going on and will observe how others react to you. Then you will switch places. Your partner will commit the norm violation and you will observe what happens in an unobtrusive manner.
 - a. If your violation is a single act (violating a person's personal space or facing people in the

- elevator), then you will each commit the norm violation 5 separate times (you may need to spread this out over a few days).
- b. If your violation can occur over time (like dressing inappropriately or eating with the wrong utensils), then you should each carry out the norm violation for 5 minutes while the other partner observes.
5. **Imagine that you are a field observer** when you write up your summaries of what happened during your observations. Your goal is to describe the events in an objective tone – noting what you observe through your five senses.
- a. For example, if you think that others think your norm violation is funny, it will not be sufficient to say that other people thought what you did was funny. You should instead detail what you observe in their reactions that tells you they thought what happened was funny. Perhaps you saw people talking to each other, pointing at the norm violator, and giggling softly? If so, describe this reaction.

In the assignment that you submit, answer the following questions. For items 1, 2 and 3, you should provide “field notes” to document what you observed in that location. See sample field notes document.

1. The norm:
 - a. What norm did you choose and how did you violate it? Why did you choose this particular norm? Where did you decide to observe this norm in action (and why)? What did you observe (in regard to normal behavior)?
2. Your norm violation:
 - a. What did you notice from other people’s reactions? After talking to your partner, what other significant reactions did your partner observe that you were oblivious too? Discussion should be detailed.
3. Your partner’s norm violation:
 - a. What did you observe in other people’s reactions to the norm breaking? Discussion should be detailed.
4. Reflection on norm violation:
 - a. How did it feel to violate the norm (before, during, and after)? Did it get easier as you repeated the norm violation? What surprised you (about both other’s reactions and your own)?
5. Analysis of norm violation exercise:
 - a. Identify 3 lessons that you learned about norms and social control from this exercise. You may pick any 3 lessons, but you should connect each of your lessons explicitly to lecture and course readings. Be sure to cite all material.

Here are some additional notes on formatting your assignment.

1. You must address explicitly each of the questions above, following the outline provided. It is a good idea to label your answers with the outline numbers provided (1, 2, 3, etc.). All of your answers must be in complete sentences.
2. You should provide a bibliography and in-text citations using a standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.) You are not required to use additional sources, but you are welcome to. *Plagiarism will not be tolerated.*
3. Style, grammar and spelling will be taken seriously. If you struggle with any of these issues, I highly recommend that you visit the Writing Center.
4. The tone of the assignment should be formal and academic (avoid jargon and colloquialisms). Your writing level should be college-appropriate and the final assignment should be fully edited.
5. **The assignment must be double-spaced, printed and handed in. Include your name and the page number in the header of each page. Staple all pages together.**
6. Collaboration is prohibited beyond the field observation. Your analysis and insight must be your own.

7. Late assignments will be penalized 10 points per day, including weekends.

Grading Rubric

Item	Excellent - Student has engaged with the material in a sophisticated and creative way	Good - Student understands the material on a basic level (can repeat/restate ideas)	Weak - Student's understanding is flawed or student did not meet a requirement
1. Norm & Initial Observation (15 points)	Student identified norm clearly, chose an appropriate location for observation, and described field observation thoroughly	Student identified norm clearly and chose an appropriate location, but description of field observation lacks some detail/is occasionally assumptive.	Student's identification of norm, selection of location, and/or field observation is seriously underdeveloped.
2. Own norm violation (15 points)	Student's description of norm violation and others' reactions is thoughtful, engaged, and appropriate	Student's description of norm violation is occasionally underdeveloped and/or assumptive	Student's description is seriously flawed/underdeveloped
3. Partner's norm violation (15 points)	Student's description of partner's norm violation and others' reactions is thoughtful, engaged, and appropriate	Student's description of partner's norm violation is occasionally underdeveloped and/or assumptive	Student's description of partner's norm violation is seriously flawed/underdeveloped
4. Personal Reflection (15 Points)	Student's reflection on norm violation is insightful	Student's reflection on norm violation lacks some development or preciseness	Student's reflection is seriously underdeveloped
5. Analysis:	Analysis is thoughtful and clearly connected to course material	Analysis is somewhat thoughtful and/or somewhat connected to course material	Analysis is seriously flawed or underdeveloped
a. Lesson 1: (10 Points)			
b. Lesson 2: (10 Points)			
c. Lesson 3: (10 Points)			
Writing (10 points)	College-appropriate writing/very few errors	In need of some revision/editing	In need of serious revision/not college-appropriate writing

FINAL GRADE: _____