Breaking a Social Norm Assignment

20 points. Due: Friday, October 5th

For this assignment, you must break a norm--i.e., not conform to some social expectation. It is up to you what norm you break. You must break this norm in the presence of others and it should be something that you don’t normally do.

Rules for norm violating:

* Be safe. This rule trumps all other rules.
* You many not harm anyone, including yourself. This includes getting yourself in trouble. It also includes intentionally humiliating someone else.
* You may NOT intentionally disrupt your classes.
* You may NOT break any laws.
* Only break one norm at a time. While violating the norm, act totally normally in every other way. Violating many norms at once simply makes you look like a crazy teenager, thus you aren’t really breaking a norm (people expect teens to act crazy sometimes).

Breaking norms will come with differing levels of embarrassment. Try to get out of your comfort zone and have fun. Go to places where you are not likely to see people you know! You may break norms together, but each student is responsible for turning in his/her own report in order to receive credit.

After you have decided what social norm you will break, pick a couple of situations in which you will break this norm.  These should be situations where other people will witness your behavior.  The kind of situations you pick will depend on the norms you choose.  Pay attention to your feelings and reactions just prior to breaking the norm, how you feel while you are breaking the norm, and also after you are done.  Pay attention to the reactions of other people around you as you are breaking the norm.  Some students have found this easier to do if they have a friend with them who knows what is going on as they break the norm.

The assignment you submit should be about 1-2 pages, double spaced. You will be graded on your thoughtfulness, grammar, and your answers to the following:

1. What social norm did you decide to violate?  Why did you pick this norm?
2. Describe how you felt just before you broke the social norm, during and after violating the norm.  Did you bring a friend with you?  If so, how did affect your reactions to breaking the social norm?
3. What were the reactions of people around you?
4. What did you learn from this assignment about social norms?

Examples of norms you can break:

* sitting with strangers at the same table at the food court in the mall
* going into the revolving door with a stranger
* singing happy birthday in the elevator
* taking items out of other people’s grocery carts
* If you are a girl, put something in your shirt so you look pregnant-Ask someone for a cigarette.
* Go to a restaurant. Order only water. Leave a generous tip, like you had bought an entire meal.
* Skip everywhere you go, instead of walking.
* Sing out loud to yourself in a public place.
* Argue with yourself, out loud, in a public place. Use hand gestures.
* Stare at people you don’t know. Look them directly in the eye. Don’t break eye contact for several seconds, but never say a word.