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Intro to Sociology

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Norm Violation Paper

For my norm violation, I chose to wear my PJ pants all day around the University of North Carolina at Asheville’s campus, as if I were wearing just normal pants. I had performed this sort of violation previously in a more conservative town, known as Forest City, North Carolina. The results were drastically different, which to me felt expected. When I had worn PJ pants in Forest City, most of the people stared at me, gave me funny looks, shook their heads, and even turned away as I came by. This shows a few things about the culture in a conservative North Carolina mill town, such as Forest City. First of all, this shows that people in a conservative culture such as this one single out people who are different. Not only that, but I noticed that this was the case with even minor differences. It seems that this culture teaches people to conform in order to belong by following more traditional views on subjects. Another thing that has caught my attention is the actual way people seem to react. They tend to stare, yet they say nothing; making faces but turning away. It seems that they judge people in silence, not being vocal about something that is out of the ordinary. Now, there are occasionally special cases with some people being *extremely* vocal. I didn’t have to deal with these sorts of individuals personally, but I have seen many instances of people being quite vocal and even violent towards those who do not conform. These sorts of reactions didn’t seem to change according to age or gender, but it seemed that white people were more prominent in this sort of setting. Although there were people of color around, they didn’t seem to have as much of a reaction. This, in turn, made me quite scared to wear PJ pants in a conservative part of the state.

With Asheville on the other hand, it’s a city that is extremely liberal. So, I predicted that if I were to wear PJ pants on campus, no one would stare, make weird faces at me, or say anything to me. As I suspected, no one really cared, no matter what age, race, gender, or sexuality. Throughout the whole day, no one said a word to me about my PJs, but not because they were silently judging me, but because they honestly didn’t care. There are a lot weirder things that people wear in Asheville, so I was far from being out of the ordinary. I went to all of my classes and everyone seemed to be fine with my PJs. My friends didn’t even seem to comment on my PJs unless I specifically brought it up.

After doing this experiment, it didn’t really change any perspectives, thoughts, or ideas I had about social norms and structures. As suspected, conservative cultures don’t like change, since they are heavily focused on old ideals like religion, and liberal cultures embrace it due to wanting to keep current and adapt. Social norms, however, can be useful as well as restrictive. Societies adopt social norms in order to create a sort of rule set that is supposed to keep people from doing things that are morally questionable in the eyes of society. Although this does help with stopping crimes, acts against nature, violent acts, and people acting in undesirable ways, this can be restrictive. Social norms set a certain way that people have to act. Anything that is outside of that may be strange, frowned upon, or even violently retaliated against. It stops people from being things they may want to be or stopping them from acting the way someone chooses. In general, most people receive an overall benefit from social norms, as it is what keeps us safe (in the extreme case) and lets people agree on behaviors in order to create a flowing society or a machine-like one. Violating these norms can however be a good thing. In our society as a country, people constantly challenge them, more so in certain areas than others because it invokes change. People who think more independently try to push for morals and norms to change in order to be a more socially accepting, diverse, and open-minded society as a whole.