Introduction to Sociology  
Instructor: Williams  
Breaching Assignment (100 pts.)  
Doing Sociology Assignment #1  
Due Thursday, September 30 at the beginning of class

You are to conduct a “breaching experiment.” This “experiment” will require you to violate a social norm and to record what happens in response to your norm violation. You will need to collect data, describe your data collection process and discuss your findings.

**Data Collection:**
You are to select a norm that interests you (but not a norm whose violation would require you to commit a criminal act). Preferably this will be a norm that is part of your ongoing social routine. You should complete the following components of the assignment:

1) Go out and observe normative behavior. That is, do nothing. Simply observe the way this norm operates in everyday life. Pay attention to details in order to understand how this norm functions to regulate some type of behavior. This will enable you to make a thoughtful comparison when you violate the norm and observe others’ reactions. Record what your norm is and how it regulates behavior in the particular setting you observed.

2) Violate the norm (be sure to do so without harming another person). Record how you chose to violate the norm.

3) Observe the response of others in the social setting. Describe the reactions of those around you. What types of sanctions were incurred for violating this norm?

4) Reflect on how this norm serves to regulate behavior in the social world.

The final paper you turn in will consist of three elements: description, analysis and discussion. Be sure in your paper to include all of the elements described below:

**Description:** (24 pts.)
- A description of the setting which should include details such as: location, time of day, number of people present, race, gender, age, weather conditions, general atmosphere. The goal is to be able to reflect on whether any of these variables may give us insight into the social order and reactions to the norm violation.
- Describe both the normative behavior in this setting and your subsequent normative violation. You should describe your norm violation in detail.
- Describe the responses of those who witnessed your norm violation. Indicate how these responses were a departure from the normal behavior you initially witnessed in this setting.

**Analysis:** (32 pts.)
In this section you should analyze what happened when you violated the normative order of this social setting. You should use sociological concepts from the textbook chapter as well as those discussed in lecture.
- What is a social norm (put in your own words)?
- What function does this social norm fulfill for society?
- Why did people respond the way that they did?
- Were there sanctions for this norm violation? What kind(s)?
Discussion: (32 pts.)
Reflect on the degree to which you think this norm functions to regulate social behavior. In doing so, answer the following questions:
• Did you experience any personal difficulty in purposefully violating a norm? Why or why not?
• Do you think a person of a different race, class, or gender than yours would have had the same experience? Why or why not?
• What would be the consequences for social order if you continuously violated this norm?
• In the event that you receive no responses to your norm violation, indicate why you think this was the outcome (NOTE: it doesn’t count if no one sees your norm violation).
• How does this “experiment” shed light on the power of social norms?

Grammar and Organization (12 pts.)

Examples of Norm Violations:
• Violating someone’s personal space by standing too near.
• Eating with one’s hands and/or in a piggish manner.
• Standing at the front of the elevator, facing backwards, and/or making conversation with others in the elevator.
• Dressing very formally for a casual event, or vice versa.
• Going barefoot in an inappropriate social environment.
• Sitting on the floor at a coffee shop.

The final paper should be 3-5 pages long. Use proper sentence structure and paragraph formation (do not use bullet points or an outline form!). All papers must be typed double spaced using 12 point, Times New Roman font.

*Assignment adapted from Ann Martin, Edmonds Community College and Suzanne Slusser, University of Akron