

Social Movements 464A Paper 1:

The Personal is Political Assignment

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Many of the “old” social movements focused on meeting basic material needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. The “new” social movements were, instead, focused on changing individual beliefs and the wider culture. These movements include the peace, environmental, LGBTQ, student and women’s movements (see Staggenborg 23-26). They require that we change both our attitudes and our behaviours. As those in the women’s movement famously argued, “the personal is political”. These movements called on **individuals to take bold and personally risky actions to challenge inequality and injustice**. These individual behaviors are the focus of this class activity.

Part 1: Pick a social movement that interests you. Given the nature of the assignment, identity movements such as the women’s, civil rights, and LGBTQ movements are good starting points. However, you are welcome to choose any movement.

Part 2: Search for a minimum of 4 academic articles, books or book chapters on your selected movement. The books and articles on your movement should come from sociology, political science, or women’s and gender studies (talk with me if you are unsure about a source). One of your sources should specifically focus on norms and norm violations (this might be a psychology article).

Part 3: Breaking social norms. Based on your movement of choice, think about how individuals might make the “personal political” by challenging cultural attitudes or beliefs. In the third part of this assignment, you will break some personal norm and/or boundary with respect to your appearance and/or your behavior. What this norm is will depend on your own identity in terms of gender, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation (or other identity dimension). Select a norm that you could break that relates to your movement of choice.

You will plan, execute, and write about this experience for this assignment.

Paper

Introduction: 1-2 paragraphs

Introduce the topic, tie it to the academic literature (including some citations) and give a broad overview of your paper so the reader knows what the paper is about and what to expect.

Literature review: 1 page single-spaced

Among the questions you might want to consider are: What does the literature say about your movement and about breaking social norms? What is the on the ground evidence about how activists have worked to ensure the success of the movement? What role does identity play for the movement?

Findings: 2 pages single-spaced

1. Describe what you did. Describe the sequence of events that occurred when you broke the norm. Some questions you might consider: Did you change how you looked? Did you change how you acted? In

what setting did you do this? Who was or was not affected? Who was your target? What was the outcome for others? If you tried it on people you know...After breaking the norm... let some time elapse (e.g. at least a day) and then you could ask people what they thought. You might want to try breaking a particular norm in different settings or with different groups of people. What difference did this make?

2. Describe how it felt to makes these changes. Describe your thoughts and concerns as you anticipated breaking the norm(s). Did people react the way that you anticipated? How easy or difficult was this for you? Were you surprised about any experiences of social control? Was it hard not to discuss what you were doing with other people (think about why)?

Conclusion: half a page single-spaced.

Here you need to tie your experience back to the academic literature. You should reflect on why these micro-level changes in look and behavior may or may not matter for social movements and social change.

Examples:

Please pick a norm that you normally conform to.

Sitting on a bus or in any public area with your legs spread out

Wearing a colour that you wouldn't normally wear

Walking down the street or on campus holding hands with someone of the same or opposite gender

Changing your body hair (to either more or less)

Bringing your own dishes to a take-out restaurant

Making yourself look more or less gender-conforming

SAFETY: Your number one priority must be your safety and the safety of others. Do NOT break a personal norm that would harm another person either physically or psychologically. Do NOT break a norm that might entail any risk to yourself. Do not break any laws. You may want to do this with friends, family or acquaintances. In order to receive a grade you must confirm with me what you plan to do before you do it.

I look forward to reading and hearing about your experiences.