

Playing with Babies

It took me a long time to figure out what social norm to break for this paper. First I thought about shooting water at the professor but I hear ^{there is} ~~there's~~ an email forward about someone who's already done that. But then I talked to my friend Shawn. He told me that this paper is just an excuse to have fun. So I figured I might as well do something that I enjoy but don't do very much at Yale: Play with babies. I've always found it interesting how people relate with babies.

I started my project outside the Yale Coop on the afternoon of Thursday January 28. I noticed that most people speak to babies in baby talk – “goo-goos” and “ga-gas.” Some people break this norm by speaking to babies like real people, assuming that the baby will mature more quickly. I decided to talk to babies about truly mature things, like my classes and German philosophy. That should make babies really smart! ^{indeed!} The first baby that I met was named “Sheila Sofferman.” Sheila is an extremely intelligent 18-month-old who looked like she might like to discuss current politics. So I walked up to Sheila and introduced myself. “I'm Rob,” I said.

“Me Sheila,” she replied.

“So Sheila, what do you think of the impeachment trial Sheila?”

Sheila shook her rattle with glee.

“So I guess you're a Republican.”

She smiled and laughed a lot.

“So I guess you’re kind of upset about that Henry Hyde’s ‘youthful indiscretion.’

Don’t you think a lot of Republicans are being hypocritical.”

Sheila started to cry. I think she was crying to avoid answering the question but her mother, Sharon, said she just needed to be changed. This conversation went on for about five minutes. Sharon and Sheila seemed quite amused by the whole situation and quite a few passers-by did double takes when they realized I was speaking to Sheila and not her mother.

I agree! I'll have to try this tactic when I want to get out of something.

After saying goodbye to Sheila and Sharon, I talked two other children with very similar results. I know that we were only supposed to break only one social norm for this paper, but I wanted to do something more interesting with babies so I broke another one.

good good

The next day, Friday the 30th, I broke the norm that people are friendly toward babies. When most people go up to a toddler, they smile and are generally friendly. I decided to go up to a child with her mother and play peek-a-boo with her. But instead of being friendly, I would have a very stoic look on my face. I was wondering how long it would be for a mother to think it strange and pull her child away. I performed this demonstration on the lower level of the Yale Bookstore, near the sweatshirts. My first few tries were very unrewarding. Though I tried to seem unfriendly, the babies were really cute and I couldn’t keep from cracking a smile. The mothers didn’t see any problem with me playing with their children.

To make myself seem more fearsome to mothers, I changed into my favorite gang-banger outfit: ripped baggy jeans, a cap with a good old Jolly Roger on it, and a black shirt with white writing that says “Killing police – one man at a time.” When I went back

to The Bookstore this time I got much better results. Part of the reason was that I got into the mood with my rebel garb, I was able to not smile at the babies.

Six seconds after I started playing with young Daniel (in his carriage) his mother quickly stepped in. When she checked on her son, she saw that he was having a wonderful time. Not wanting to upset him, she continued to play with him. Surprisingly, this happened with 4 of the 9 babies I played with. The babies loved me but he mothers were afraid of me. This gave me the idea for my next study.

I realized that peek-a-boo plays on a social norm of babies. Babies believe that if they can't see their mother, their mother isn't really there. When a baby opens his eyes, his mother reappears. I wondered what would happen if instead of peek-a-boo being interesting to the baby, it was somehow interesting to the mother. The mother believes that when her eyes are covered, the baby will reappear when his ^{or her} eyes are opened. But, I reasoned, what would happen if that social norm were broken. So when the mother's eyes were closed, I took the baby and quickly hid him somewhere in the store before the mother opened her eyes.

I figured that the mother would undergo a brief period of consternation but once the experiment was explained to her, she should appreciate the gain I had made to my understanding of psychological principles, and be glad she partook in the experiment.

While this was true with most of the subjects, it was not true for one mother, Terry. She was very upset with me, even after she realized that her son Ralph wouldn't suffer any permanent damage.

I was dressed in my normal student garb, having rid myself of myself of punk outfit, and approached various babies in their strollers. I approached Terry and Ralph and

Perhaps not too surprising.

The mother would have taken into account the fact that I was not really violating a social norm either, I don't think. (Baby not being there when mom opens eyes.)

Yikes! Scary for mothers. Not really violating a social norm either, I don't think. (Baby not being there when mom opens eyes.) I'm not so sure about this...

Yes.

soon gained Terry's goodwill. She would cover her eyes for 15 seconds at a time. I after a few minutes I used those 15 seconds to take Ralph to the second floor, where he was supposed to be watched by my friend Jimmy. Jimmy had watched the other children perfectly, but then again, that was before Monique showed up. Jimmy has had a huge crush on Monique since he was in high school. Even so, I can't bring myself to forgive him for walking away from Ralph. As Jimmy walked away, Ralph started to explore the store, crawling near the books, the carpet, and unfortunately the stairs. Stairs and 10 month olds don't mix very well, as I found out as Ralph tumbled down the stairs, knocking his head on the ground floor and then starting to bleed slightly from the head. ☹

*goodness,
though out*

Though Terry was livid at first, Ralph quickly regained consciousness and no charges were pressed. Terry's hugely excited state when she thought that Ralph had been harmed gave me an idea for the last study.

After seeing how startled mothers can be when their children are in danger, I wanted to test this in a controlled demonstration. I had a came up with a series of theatrics that would surprise a mother and convince her that her child was in danger. Some of these ideas included pretending to cut and mutilate the baby (using fake blood), replacing the baby's bottle with something that looked poisonous and would make the baby convulse, and setting the baby's carriage on fire (after removing the baby without the mother's knowlege). I finally settled on pretending to throw the baby in front of a moving car.

I'm having a difficult time believing you did that.

I walked down Chapel Street looking for women with baby strollers. I quickly spotted my first subject. The baby was dressed in a pink one piece very similar to a doll that I was concealing underneath my jacket. I walked parallel to her carriage for a few

blocks. Then, without warning, I pretended to grab the baby from the stroller (what I really did was take out the doll from under my coat.) Then I threw the "baby" in front of a green Volkswagen that was coming up the street. The mother became extremely excited when she'd seen what I had done, thrusting herself in the path of the oncoming car, only to realize that her own child was safe in his stroller. She quickly called for police to arrest me. I was surprised at her reaction. I felt that this experiment was at least as valid as the Stanford Prison Study and didn't understand why anyone would get that upset about it.

Really.

Good lord.

Was it really worse than simply stressing students by giving them exams and grading them? I don't think so. *I do.*

Robert -

By this point you're probably thinking there's something wrong with this paper, and that's because there is. The entire paper was a farce, perpetrated to break the social norm that if people hand in papers that are similar to the assignment that they are given for a class, the reader will assume that the paper actually fulfills the assignment.

Yes.

Yes, a reader might assume the assignment was done.

I gave this paper up to that point to four of my friends to read, telling them that I wanted them to look it over. The responses from these people were very similar. One of my friends, Valerie Wolrich, said that the paper was very much like me. By this she didn't mean that I cause people emotional distress for fun but that I often do things in ways different than other people. I guess this means that I often break social norms.

Nothing wrong with that.

The most common reaction I got was something like "You made a baby bleed to do your experiment?" or something like that. Actually one person said "You spoke to a random person for five minutes, Wow." It was funny because once they asked me if the story was real they didn't anymore. After all of them finished reading they said they really liked it and though that it was very funny.



How do you feel about having broken the social norm you did? Why did you do it? What did you learn from doing it? - Anything about social norms? Clever idea - you had me pulled in at first - until it got too outrageous.

Good work

thx

93 A-

Robert -

You scared the heck out of me! I was ready to call you up + have a very serious conversation. I'm so relieved no mothers actually went through this anguish!!!

Godwit!
Prof. London.

P.S. This was a total attack on a random person for five minutes. Wow, it was funny because once they asked me if the story was real they didn't anymore. After all of them finished reading they said they really liked it and though that it was very funny.

Good love

Yes

Let's see how the conversation was

holding water with love

