

PROJECT: SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

"In many countries today, moral and ethical norms are being reconsidered; national traditions, differences in nation and culture are being erased."

—Vladimir Putin

Have you ever wondered why it is considered polite to place your napkin in your lap at the dinner table? Or, why it is socially unacceptable to stare at someone?

Have you ever wondered why being late is considered rude in some cultures and not others?

Defining Normalcy

Socially acceptable rules are usually created over time based on a particular culture and its beliefs. Therefore, what be socially acceptable in one setting may not be socially acceptable in another setting. Take, for instance, the act of shaking hands. In most Western cultures, it is socially acceptable and even encouraged that, when you first meet someone, you look them in the eye, give them a handshake, and introduce yourself. In most Eastern cultures, this practice would not be normal. Rather, you may avoid eye contact as a form of respect, and, perhaps, bow in an effort to greet them. In some European cultures, you may kiss a person on the cheek, which would not be the social norm for a first-time meeting in America.

Social acceptability of a behavior is usually dependent on what a culture has deemed appropriate or normal. These traditions may be rooted in history and may also change as a society changes.

Consider the era of the 1960s in America. As you know by now, the country was erupting with social change and revolution. Some of the socially acceptable behavior that is present in society today is because of those changes.

Directions

Complete the attached worksheets and then answer the following questions:

1. Which items gave you difficulty in identifying the cultures or circumstances in which such behaviors are normal?
2. Which common behaviors in our culture might people from other cultures find strange or abnormal?
3. How did this activity change how you think about what is culturally normal?
4. Explain at least two socially acceptable behaviors that you exhibit today and that will benefit your future, but that would not have been socially acceptable in the past.

What is Socially “Normal?”

Directions: Respond to each of the following items by putting a check in the column that best fits how you feel. Descriptions range from “horrified” to “love it.”

	Horrified	Uncomfortable	Accepting	Love It
Talking with someone who does not look you in the eye:				
A woman refusing to shake hands with a man:				
Interacting with teachers on a first name basis:				
A man wearing Bermuda shorts to a fine restaurant:				
Eating a formal meal without utensils:				
A man who stands so close you can smell his breath:				
People who will not eat the food in your home:				

Reflecting on the activity you just finished, now consider where you might find some of those behaviors normal, or socially acceptable. Complete this worksheet as you identify locations for socially acceptable behavior. If you can't think of a specific geographic location for some of these behaviors, feel free to do some Internet research to find out where some of these activities occur today, and, then, note their location on your handout.

Where would talking with someone who does not look you in the eye be normal?

Where would a woman refusing to shake hands with a man be normal?

Where would interacting with teachers on a first-name basis be normal?

Where would a man wearing Bermuda shorts to a fine restaurant be normal?

Where would eating a formal meal without utensils be normal?

Where would a man standing so close that you can smell his breath be normal?

Where would people not eating the food in your home be normal?