

I am sure at this point we are all painfully aware of the ever-growing, out-of-control culture of public nudity and raunchiness. One can witness public indecency everywhere, in some cases even to the extreme. Near-naked men and women, and young adults too, casually walk around grocery stores, on college campuses, and everywhere in between. Our culture has become so open, accepting, and tolerant that the most abhorrent displays of perverse public indecency are now considered normal. This level of public obscenity, slowly becoming a common part of daily life, is grotesque, rude, and impolite. The amount of near-nudity I see almost daily is unwarranted and seems illegal. Now that I am in New York City, I see it even more so: in coffee shops, at the park, at the bodega, or just casually walking down the street.

Can we bring back the "good old days" of getting completely dressed before showing one's face in public? At one point, it was simply the norm; it was a way of saying to others, "I am not an antisocial maniac who could care less about myself and those around me." It was a way of communicating to others, "I am a kind and friendly person, I am approachable, and I won't be vulgar around you and yours." In other words, it was a mark of good home training and solid social graces. It was simply the expected behavior, both for oneself and for others. Showing up for yourself enough to not have the most intimate parts of yourself on display was a way of saying to others, "I respect myself." There is such a thing as a "public personality," the personality we wear when we face the public. This public personality is not forced upon us because Western society is oppressive and rigid. It is a voluntary act of interpersonal social exchange. I believe every person should voluntarily adopt this public personality because it is the polite thing to do; it is how we signal to others that we are decent people, not entirely self-concerned and oblivious. In polite society, we have consideration for our neighbors, a kind of "love" for our neighbors, if you will, an unspoken respect for others outside ourselves. The person who says to themselves, "screw everybody else, I'm going to do what I want," is a sick individual who doesn't understand the obligation we each owe to one another as participants in society. This crass, unconcerned attitude is antisocial in nature. People who have so little respect for themselves and for others, no empathy, no regard, strike me as potentially dangerous individuals. The clear lack of regard for others, I think, is telling of the kind of person you are dealing with.

It's kind of laughable watching the tantrum grown people throw when you say, "Put on some clothes." Surprise! Grown-ups have to follow rules too. Having the freedom that comes with being over 18 does not warrant reckless abandon of all basic social rules. Rules aren't just for kids to follow to give them structure while they grow up. They are a very important part of the process of socialization. If you want a child who won't grow up to be a strange "other" on the fringes of social margins, or you know a child who won't think doing "what they will" is acceptable behavior in civilized society (because it is usually followed by a pattern of destructive behavior), then you may want them to understand the importance of social exchange protocols.

We have these social protocols in place, not because our society is oppressive, but because in polite society, they are simply customary, and they are basically how you impart on others that you are a sane individual. To not expose people to the nudity of your body without their consent, to do these things in public around others with no regard for them and their personal space, is rude. You are being an impolite person, and the repercussion for it is (well, used to be) social distance. Impolite people are alienated, not by the people they were impolite to, but by themselves. They make it their goal to be socially unapproachable, in order to make some kind of statement. Therefore, the result is not being

approached. The impolite person is not rejected by their peers; they socially reject themselves from their peers.

Some may say that's the issue with norms and normativity. It oppresses and suppresses people's self-expression. It makes you the "other" for not following the social order, blah, blah, deconstructionist blah, but I beg to differ. Norms protect us from committing untoward harm to each other. In any social group anywhere in the world and throughout history, there is a social expectation of following the social group's rules as laid out and consented to by the group as a whole. In order to be a member of the group, you ascribe to the customs of the group. This is what makes ethnic, cultural, and social groups a homogenous group; they share a social commonality. A uniform front. This implies "obligation" or "social contracts." When the social group removes the importance of having that uniformity, the social group ceases to exist and it simply becomes a group of individuals living in close proximity to each other. Since they have no uniformity, no connection, or obligation to each other, it usually also follows that they owe each other no regard or respect. This is where infighting ensues. Members of the group begin warring with each other. They have no tie that commands any interpersonal regard or arbitration in times of conflict. Norms in any social group have their immense benefits; they protect each member of the group from violence by other members of the group.

Group adherence to the group custom is a kind of unspoken contract that says, "You are my like kind, you I cannot hurt or hate, you I have to be considerate of." With the deconstruction of norms and structures, even the ones that are good for us, comes a deconstruction of relationships and basic consideration for each other. Each person living for themselves, within but detached from the group. It is a precursor to chaos. The more you see this level of blatant disregard in public, the complete lack of scruples, the more you should tell yourself society as we know it is going to hell in a handbasket.