

# The Relationship Between Perceived Violation of Social Norms and Social Control: Situational Factors Influencing the Reaction to Deviance

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A Social control is the generic term for all reactions through which people express their disapproval of someone who engages in a counternormative behavior or who holds a counternormative attitude. Sociological theorizing suggests that the likelihood of a naïve bystander exerting social control depends primarily on the degree of deviance of the counternormative behavior. The psychological literature on helping behavior suggests that perceived personal implication should play an important role in the decision of whether or not to exert social control. A field study involving 5 different experimental settings was conducted in order to test these hypotheses. Confederates engaged in a variety of behaviors that violated social norms. Perceived personal implication was consistently the best predictor of social control behavior, such that the more someone felt that a deviant behavior affected him or her personally, the more he or she was likely to communicate his or her disapproval to the deviant confederate. Perceived deviance of the behavior was a less powerful predictor of social control. These findings speak to the moderating factors of social control behavior and to the circumstances under which social norms protecting public property are likely to be perpetuated. They also speak to the measures that must be taken if decision makers want to facilitate informal social control as a means to combat incivility.<sup>A</sup>

Individuals who violate social norms run the risk of being the target of negative reactions by their social environment (Blake & Davis, 1964; Janowitz, 1975). They may receive an angry look or a negative comment (Chekroun & Brauer, 2004), they may be given less money than other group members (Dedrick, 1978), their point of view may be ignored when the group makes a decision (Janis, 1982), or it may be that attempts are made to exclude them from the group (Schachter, 1951). These negative reactions to counternormative behaviors have been subsumed under the term *social control* (Black, 1984; Collins & Frey, 1992; Gibbs, 1981a, 1981b; Liska, 1997; Meier, 1982).

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*Norms* typically are defined as prescriptions of behaviors and attitudes that are considered acceptable or desirable in a given social unit (Sherif, 1936). Social control is considered to be any behavior whereby an individual communicates his or her disapproval to someone who holds a counternormative attitude or who engages in a counternormative behavior (Gibbs, 1981a).

What attitudes and behaviors are considered counternormative (or deviant) depends on the current norms and traditions of the social unit under consideration. When Elizabeth Cady-Stanton fought for women's right to vote in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s, she was considered a deviant. Nowadays, the attitude that women should have the right to vote is considered normative. In some cultures, guests are expected to finish the food on their plates and failure to do so would communicate to the host that the food was not tasty. In other cultures, emptying one's plate would be considered counternormative because this would signal that the host did not cook enough food. Thus, whereas social control is a universal phenomenon, the kind of behaviors or attitudes that are considered deviant may vary over time and from one social unit to the next.

Psychologists and sociologists alike have emphasized the important role of social control for the perpetuation of social norms and the occurrence of prosocial behaviors (Festinger, 1950; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951; Gibbs, 1981b; Janowitz, 1975). If counternormative behaviors are not sanctioned, the norm is likely to disappear. According to sociologist Kingsley Davis (1948), "It is through them [social controls] that human society regulates the behavior of its members in such ways that they perform activities fulfilling societal needs" (p. 52). Yamagishi (1986) showed that participants' tendency to share money with others was strongest when the experimental procedure allowed group members to set up an effective sanctioning system; that is, a system in which deviant group members could be identified and could be the target of social control. Collins and Frey (1992) showed that informal social control by peers is quite effective in preventing adolescents from driving under the influence of alcohol (Anderson, Chiricos, & Wlado, 1977). These studies have demonstrated that social control is a positive predictor of the extent to which people engage in prosocial behaviors and cease to engage in antisocial behaviors.

The purpose of a recent series of studies conducted by Brauer and his colleagues (Brauer, Chekroun, & Judd, 2001; Chekroun & Brauer, 2002, 2004) is to examine the factors that increase or decrease the likelihood that bystanders will exert social control. Just as psychologists have isolated the conditions under which helping behavior is most likely to occur, it is important to examine the variables that influence social control behavior (e.g., characteristics of the bystander, characteristics of the deviant, characteristics of the situation). Knowledge about these variables not only allows us to predict people's reactions to counternormative behaviors, it also contributes to our understanding of social norms; that is, how social norms function, under what conditions they are perpetuated, and what

factors contribute to a change in social norms in a particular social unit. Given that social norms are among the most powerful predictors of human behavior (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Newcomb, 1961; Sherif, 1936), research on the moderating factors of social control appears to be of utmost relevance for the social sciences. As we will explain, the factors that are being examined in the present article are the degree of deviance of the counternormative behavior and the feeling of personal implication.

According to our knowledge, social control has not been the object of systematic investigation in the social sciences. Psychologists generally have avoided this topic altogether (for notable exceptions, see Dedrick, 1978; Kiesler, Kiesler, & Pallak, 1967; Kiesler, Zanna, & DeSalvo, 1966; McKirnan, 1980<sup>2</sup>). Sociologists always have been very interested in social control, but generally have not gone further than claiming that social control is essential for social order and the perpetuation of social norms (Janowitz, 1975; Meier, 1982). If they discuss factors that might be related to the production of social control behavior, sociologists most frequently mention the extent of deviance of the counternormative behavior (Gibbs, 1981b). Specifically, they propose that the more deviant the behavior, the greater the likelihood that a bystander will express his or her disapproval to the deviant. In what follows, we review this literature in some detail.

### Sociological Approaches to Deviance

According to the normative conception of deviance (Gibbs, 1981a, 1981b), any behavior that violates social norms is considered deviant. But not all counternormative behaviors are equally deviant because the extent of deviance depends on the characteristics of the norm that is being violated. The more narrow a norm is, the more precisely its boundaries are defined; and the more consensus there is among members of the social unit, the more a behavior violating this norm will be considered deviant in a given social unit (McKirnan, 1980). Sociologists adhering to the normative conception of deviance would predict that people's reactions to a counternormative behavior depend on the extent of deviance of that behavior. The more deviant the behavior, the greater the likelihood that someone will exert social control (Janowitz, 1975; Meier, 1982).

Theorists of the reactive conception of deviance (Kitsuse, 1962; Lemert, 1972) make a similar prediction, but for different reasons. They claim that the causal influence works in the other direction. According to Kitsuse, it is not the norms that determine which behaviors are deviant and, therefore, which behaviors are likely to be sanctioned by social control. On the contrary, it is the social

<sup>2</sup>Recently, social psychologists have started to be interested in the moderating factors of perceived deviance. For example, Abrams, Marques, Bown, and Henson (2000) have shown that perceived deviance depends on the extent to which the counternormative behavior, attitude, or trait serves the group's goal or corresponds to the group's self-stereotypes.

control that determines which behaviors are normative. Behaviors that generate negative reactions in the social environment are deviant, and all other behaviors are, by definition, normative. In other words, norms are characterized by the absence of social control. The more individuals react negatively to a given behavior, the more the social unit considers this behavior to be deviant.<sup>3</sup> As a result, sociologists working within the framework of the reactive conception of deviance also predict a correlation between the degree of deviance of a given behavior and the likelihood of social control.

#### Role of Personal Implication

The psychological literature casts doubt on the preponderant role of deviance for the production of social control behavior. It is rare that people's reactions to a stimulus depend solely on one characteristic of that stimulus. The research on helping behavior is particularly relevant in this respect. The likelihood that a bystander will help does not depend solely on the degree of distress of the victim, but on a variety of factors, such as the gender and the age of the helper (Howard & Crano, 1974; Staub, 1974), the possibility to escape (Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969), the cost of not helping (Schwartz, 1977), the environmental stress (Moser, 1988), the number of bystanders (Latané & Darley, 1968), and so forth.

In order to make predictions about the factors influencing social control, one must consider what psychological processes are involved in this behavior. The research on helping behavior indicates that the feeling of being personally implicated may play an important role. For example, when naïve bystanders were asked to supervise the radio of another person at the beach, they were much more likely to prevent a confederate from stealing the radio than when they had not been asked (Moriarty, 1975). Cramer, McMaster, Bartell, and Dragna (1988) showed that the presence of others did not inhibit the tendency to help an injured victim in an emergency when the participants were registered nurses. Obviously, when people feel competent and have the impression that they are personally responsible for dealing with the emergency, Latané and Darley's (1968) classic bystander effect disappears. Finally, Baumeister, Chesner, Sanders, and Tice (1988) reported that participants helped more when they were assigned a fictitious leader position in a group just prior to the emergency than when they were assigned an assistant position. In sum, these studies show that the feeling of personal implication and responsibility increases people's willingness to help in an emergency situation.

Applied to social control behavior, one might expect that the more someone feels that he or she is personally implicated by a counternormative behavior, the more likely it is that he or she will exert negative sanctions. We define *personal*

<sup>3</sup>Of course, one might wonder what determines whether or not people will exert social control in the first place. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Gibbs (1981a).

*implication* as the subjective feeling that the behavior or outcome has direct or indirect consequences for the self. This feeling of being personally implicated may stem from two sources. First, some deviant behaviors have direct negative effects on naïve bystanders, whereas others do not. For example, consider a bystander who walks through her front yard and observes another person throwing litter in the yard. Given that she is the owner of the yard, she is likely to feel personally implicated by the counternormative behavior. The same bystander will feel less implicated if she visits another town and observes someone throwing litter in the yard of people she does not know. In the first case, the bystander is in the role of the victim, while in the second case, she is in the role of the observer. Quite obviously, victims feel more personally implicated than observers. This source of personal implication is closely related to what others have termed *self-interest* (Miller, 1999; Ratner & Miller, 2001). Given that people are motivated primarily by self-interest (Holmes, Miller, & Lerner, 2002), they feel more personally implicated when they have a stake in the cause than when they do not.

Theoretically more interesting is the second source of personal implication. Bystanders may feel personally implicated by a counternormative behavior despite the fact that they are merely in the role of an observer. This is particularly likely to be the case when they feel responsible for the damaged property (although they do not own it) or when the perpetuation of the norm that is being transgressed is otherwise important to them. Imagine, for example, a bystander who observes another person littering in a small neighborhood park. Although he does not own the park and although there are little direct negative consequences on his well-being (after all, the park maintenance personnel will have cleaned up the litter by the time he uses the park again), there is some chance that he will nevertheless feel personally implicated by the counternormative behavior. This may be because he feels personally responsible for “his” neighborhood park or because he considers the protection of the environment to be an important norm. Thus, even in the role of observers, bystanders may feel personally implicated by certain counternormative behaviors. Independent of where the feeling of personal implication originates—whether it is because the bystander is objectively in the role of the victim or because he or she feels subjectively responsible for norm enforcement—we predict that the more someone feels personally implicated, the greater is the likelihood that he or she will exert social control toward the actor of the counternormative behavior.

The purpose of the present article is to examine the respective influences of deviance and personal implication on social control behavior. According to sociological analyses, one would expect the degree of deviance of a behavior to be the strongest predictor of bystanders’ reactions. According to our theoretical analyses derived from the literature on helping behavior, personal implication should be an equally important, if not more important, determinant of social control.

We conducted a large-scale study involving five different experimental situations in the field. In each of these situations, a confederate violated a social norm:

(a) a confederate taped a publicity poster on top of the bus schedule at a bus stop; (b) a confederate cut in line in front of a bystander in a convenience store; (c) a confederate littered in the entrance hall of a large apartment complex; (d) two confederates littered in a public park; and (e) a confederate drew graffiti on the wall of an elevator in a shopping center. In each of the five situations, we recorded the reactions of the naïve bystanders. In addition, we obtained questionnaire data on how deviant the confederate's behavior was and the extent to which bystanders felt personally implicated by the deviant behavior.

### Method

#### *Participants*

A total of 898 individuals served as participants in the study. Slightly less than half of them ( $N = 398$ ) were in the behavior condition (i.e., they were naïve bystanders and observed a confederate engaging in a counternormative behavior). The remaining participants ( $N = 500$ ) were in the questionnaire condition (i.e., they were approached by a female experimenter in the field and asked if they would be willing to complete a short questionnaire).

All of the participants were recruited randomly in the field at different times of the day and on different days of the week. In each of the two experimental conditions, approximately half of the participants were women. All participants were run individually. For ethical reasons, the confederate did not initiate a trial when a bystander appeared to be under the age of 18 years. Whereas 100% of the individuals in the behavior condition provided usable data (they either exerted social control or they did not), only about 50% of the 1,000-plus individuals who were in the questionnaire condition complied with the experimenter's request to complete a short questionnaire.

#### *Experimental Situations*

*Poster on top of the bus schedule: Situation A.* A female confederate approached a bus stop at which one bystander was waiting for the bus. She walked directly to the board with the bus schedule, took out a publicity poster for a dance party at a discotheque, and taped it onto the board. As a result, the bus schedule was completely obscured by the poster. She waited for several minutes while she put the tape in her bag, rolled up the remaining posters, and left the bus stop on foot. If the bystanders communicated annoyance or disapproval or if they made a comment to the confederate about the inappropriateness of her behavior, the response was coded as social control. In the behavior condition, approximately half of the participants were men (27 male, 34 female). A similar gender distribution was obtained for participants in the questionnaire condition (48 male, 52 female).

*Cutting in line: Situation B.* The experimental situation took place in front of and inside a convenience store. A female confederate waited outside the store and pretended to look at postcards. When a customer entered the store, she followed him or her. If the customer walked to the cashier in order to buy something that can be bought only from the cashier (e.g., candy, cigarettes) and if at least two other customers were standing in line at the cashier, she attempted to cut in line in front of the last customer. If the customer walked to the shelves in the back of the store in order to look at magazines or if only one other customer (or no one) was waiting at the cashier, the trial was aborted. If the bystander did not react to the counternormative behavior, the confederate paid before the participant and left the store. If the bystander reacted, the confederate apologized and let the bystander pay first. There were 98 participants (46 male, 52 female) in the behavioral condition and 100 participants (46 male, 54 female) in the questionnaire condition.

*Litter in entrance hall: Situation C.* A confederate waited in the staircase of a large apartment complex. When she heard the entrance door of the building being opened, she started walking toward the exit and walked by the bystander in the entrance hall of the building. About 8 m before reaching the bystander, she started taking out trash (e.g., a used paper handkerchief, an empty cigarette box, an envelope) and threw them one by one on the floor while walking toward the bystander. She performed these behaviors only when the bystander was alone. When a group of two or more people entered the building, the trial was aborted. There were 98 participants (50 male, 48 female) in the behavioral condition and 100 participants (50 male, 50 female) in the questionnaire condition.

*Litter in park: Situation D.* Two female confederates pretended to stroll along a path in a small public neighborhood park. When a naïve bystander walked toward them, one of the confederates drank the remaining water in a large plastic bottle and threw the bottle in the bushes next to the path. The bottle hitting the ground made a noise that attracted the bystander's attention. In the behavioral condition, there were 75 participants (37 male, 38 female). In the questionnaire condition, 100 participants (44 male, 56 female) agreed to complete a questionnaire regarding their perceptions about littering in the park.

*Graffiti in elevator: Situation E.* A male confederate entered an elevator of a large shopping center. When the doors closed, he took out a marker and drew graffiti on the walls of the elevator. While he was drawing, his back was to the bystander. After several seconds, he put away his marker and turned around half-way. If the bystander did not intervene, he stepped out of the elevator on the first floor and pretended to stroll through the mall. If the bystander expressed his or her disapproval, he apologized and asked if he could briefly talk to him or her. He then explained the purpose of the study. There were 100 participants (50 male, 50 female) in the questionnaire condition. Because of a recording error, we could not recover the gender distribution in the behavior condition, but one can assume that there was approximately an equal number of men and women in this condition.



*Comparison of the five situations.* The situations were chosen with the goal of achieving some variability in the degree of deviance of the counternormative behavior, and in the extent to which bystanders felt personally implicated by the deviant's behavior (whether because they were victims or because they felt subjectively responsible). For example, we expected Situations A and B to be weakly deviant (because both situations involve behaviors that involve imprecisely defined norms in France) and Situations C, D, and E to be highly deviant (because these situations involve counternormative behaviors that are forbidden by the law and that are consensually considered counternormative). At the same time, some of these behaviors had a direct negative impact on the bystander who was in the victim's role (e.g., Situation B and to a lesser extent Situation C), whereas this was true to a much lesser extent with other behaviors (e.g., Situations A, D, and E). At the same time, we assumed that even among the situations in which bystanders were more in the role of an observer, there would be some situations in which participants would feel more personally implicated (e.g., Situations D and E) than in others (e.g., Situation A). A systematic comparison of these situations allows us to examine the respective influences of the degree of deviance and of personal implication on social control behavior.<sup>4</sup>

### *Coding Scheme*

The same coding scheme was used in all five experimental situations. That scheme was a 7-point scale, as follows: 0 = *no social control*; 1 = *angry look*; 2 = *loud audible sigh communicating disapproval*; 3 = *comment to oneself* (but loud enough so that the confederate could hear it); 4 = *polite comment to the confederate*; 5 = *comment in an aggressive tone to the confederate*; and 6 = *personal insult in an aggressive tone to the confederate*.

### *Questionnaire Condition*

Participants in the questionnaire condition were recruited by a female experimenter at the same location where the experimental situation had taken place. For example, participants who were asked about their perceptions of someone taping a poster on top of the bus schedule were actually recruited at a bus stop.

After asking participants to complete a short questionnaire, the experimenter described the experimental situation to them. For example, in Situation A (poster

<sup>4</sup>Some of the data in the situations "litter in park" and "graffiti in elevator" already have been published elsewhere (Chekroun & Brauer, 2002). The purpose of Chekroun and Brauer's research was to examine the impact of the number of bystanders on social control behavior; and confederates performed the counternormative behavior in front of one, two, or three bystanders. In order to compare as many situations as possible, the data from the one-bystander condition of Chekroun and Brauer were included in the present study.

on top of the bus schedule), they were asked to imagine a young woman coming to a bus stop and taping a poster on top of a bus schedule. The experimenter gave them a detailed description of the deviant behavior and of the entire situation. The participant was then asked to imagine that he or she was a single bystander while the situation took place. If something was unclear, the experimenter gave additional explanations. Once she was certain that the participant understood the situation fully, she gave him or her a short questionnaire containing four questions.

The first two questions asked about the perceived degree of deviance of the behavior: "To what extent do you consider the behavior to be counter the norms of our society?" which was rated on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much so*); and "To what extent is the behavior appropriate in this situation?" which was also rated on a 9-point scale (reverse coded) ranging from 1 (*not at all appropriate*) to 9 (*very appropriate*). The third question asked about their personal implication: "To what extent do you personally suffer the consequences of this behavior?" which was rated on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*a great deal*). The last question asked about how the participant would react in such a situation. It was an open-ended question, and the participant's description of his or her reaction was later assigned a score from 0 to 6 based on the coding scheme described earlier.

### *Procedure*

In the behavior condition, the confederates started a new trial whenever they had finished recording the information of the previous trial. In each of the five situations, they performed the deviant behavior, tried to establish eye contact, and continued on their way. All trials on which there was more than the slightest doubt about whether the participant had really noticed the deviant behavior were not taken into account. This aspect was checked by a second person who was present in the experimental situation. The second person was either an observer who stood 10 to 15 m away from the confederate and unobtrusively observed the bystander (Situations A and B), or she was the "second" confederate (i.e., the one who did not perform the deviant behavior; Situation D). Only in Situations C (litter in entrance hall) and E (graffiti in elevator) was the confederate alone with the participants. The second person also recorded the bystander's reaction to the deviant behavior, as well as a number of other characteristics (e.g., gender, approximate age, style of clothing).

## Results

### *Participants' Reactions to the Counternormative Behaviors*

Bystanders' reactions in the behavioral condition ( $N = 398$ ), broken down by experimental situation, are presented in Table 1. In general, the largest group was

those participants who decided not to respond to the deviant behavior (52% of participants). The next most frequent reaction was an angry look (28%), followed by a polite comment to the confederate (9%). Approximately equal numbers of participants showed their disapproval with a loud audible sigh (4%), a comment to oneself (4%), or a comment in an aggressive tone (4%). Only 1 participant (out of 398) reacted in a hostile manner by insulting the confederate (<0.10%).

Whereas relatively few bystanders exerted social control (all reactions except 0 on the coding scheme) in Situation A (poster on bus schedule; 16 out of 61, or 26.2%), the proportion of bystanders who reacted to the norm violation was somewhat higher in Situations B (cut in line; 39 out of 98, or 40.0%), D (litter in park; 30 out of 75, or 40.0%), and E (graffiti in elevator; 28 out of 66, or 42.4%). We observed the highest intervention rate in Situation C (litter in entrance hall; 77 out of 98, or 78.6%). These proportions are reliably different from each other,  $\chi^2(4, N = B) = 53.68, p < .001$ . Post hoc pairwise comparisons reveal that significantly more bystanders exerted social control in Situation C (litter in entrance hall) than in any of the other four situations (all  $ps < .001$ ). Fewer bystanders exerted social control in Situation A (poster on bus schedule) than in Situations B, D, and E, but these differences did not reach traditional levels of statistical significance (all  $ps$  between .05 and .10).

Bystanders' descriptions of how they would react to the different behaviors in the questionnaire conditions are presented in Table 2 ( $N = 500$ ). The most frequently predicted reaction was a polite comment (264 out of 500, or 52.8%). This proportion contrasts sharply with the 34 participants out of 398 (8.5%) who actually made a polite comment in the behavioral condition,  $\chi^2(1, N = C) = 195.78, p < .001$ . Roughly one third of the participants in the questionnaire condition predicted that they would not react at all to the counternormative behavior under consideration (153 out of 500, or 30.6%), much fewer than in the behavior condition (208 out of 398, or 52.2%),  $\chi^2(1, N = D) = 43.24, p < .001$ .

An angry look is not a reaction that many participants in the questionnaire condition imagined themselves having (13 out of 500, or 2.6%), but when they actually experienced the situation, they used this way to express their disapproval much more often (110 out of 398, or 27.6%),  $\chi^2(1, N = E) = 117.55, p < .001$ . The same is true for loud audible sighs (0 participants), difference from the behavior condition,  $\chi^2(1, N = F) = 19.16, p < .001$ ; and comments to oneself (3 out of 500, or 0.6%), difference from the behavior condition,  $\chi^2(1, N = G) = 10.18, p < .01$ . In contrast, people imagined themselves as more aggressive than they actually are. Approximately 13% of the participants in the questionnaire condition (63 out of 500, or 12.6%) predicted that they would make a comment in an aggressive tone or insult the deviant, whereas only 4% of the participants in the behavior condition (16 out of 398, or 4.0%) reacted this way,  $\chi^2(1, N = H) = 20.33, p < .001$ . In general, people thought that they would exert social control more frequently and would express their disapproval more vigorously than they

Table 1  
*Bystanders' Reactions to Deviant Behavior in the Behavior Conditions*

Reaction	Experimental situation					Total (N = 398)
	Situation A: Poster on bus schedule (N = 61)	Situation B: Cutting in line (N = 98)	Situation C: Litter in entrance hall (N = 98)	Situation D: Litter in park (N = 75)	Situation E: Graffiti in elevator (N = 66)	
No social control (0)	74%	60%	21%	60%	58%	52%
Angry look (1)	13%	32%	37%	25%	24%	28%
Loud audible sigh (2)	0%	5%	5%	1%	6%	4%
Comment to oneself (3)	0%	1%	11%	1%	2%	4%
Polite comment (4)	13%	1%	18%	4%	6%	9%
Comment in aggressive tone (5)	0%	1%	6%	8%	5%	4%
Personal insult (6)	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Social control (sum of 1 to 6)	26% <sub>a</sub>	40% <sub>a</sub>	79% <sub>ob</sub>	40% <sub>oa</sub>	42% <sub>oa</sub>	48%

*Note.* Percentages with different subscripts refer to intervention rates that are significantly different from each other.

Table 2  
*Bystanders' Predictions Concerning How They Would React to the Deviant Behavior in the Questionnaire Conditions*

Reaction	Experimental situation					Total (N = 500)
	Situation A: Poster on bus schedule (N = 100)	Situation B: Cutting in line (N = 100)	Situation C: Litter in entrance hall (N = 100)	Situation D: Litter in park (N = 100)	Situation E: Graffiti in elevator (N = 100)	
No social control (0)	42%	28%	22%	32%	29%	31%
Angry look (1)	4%	3%	1%	1%	4%	3%
Loud audible sigh (2)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Comment to oneself (3)	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	1%
Polite comment (4)	50%	56%	58%	49%	51%	53%
Comment in aggressive tone (5)	4%	12%	16%	18%	13%	13%
Personal insult (6)	0%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%
Social control (sum of 1 to 6)	58% <sub>a</sub>	72% <sub>ab</sub>	78% <sub>b</sub>	68% <sub>ab</sub>	71% <sub>ab</sub>	69%

*Note.* Percentages with different subscripts refer to predicted intervention rates that are significantly different from each other.

actually do. This finding is similar to the intention–behavior discrepancy that is often found in the attitude literature (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

In order to assess participants' perceptions of the five different situations in the questionnaire condition, we took the average of Question 1 (behavior counter to the norms) and Question 2 (appropriateness of behavior; reverse coded) to produce a single perceived deviance score. The mean ratings of perceived deviance indicate that our intuitive ranking of the five situations was quite correct: Taping a poster on a bus schedule and cutting in line were perceived as the least deviant (both  $M_s = 7.22$ ). Littering in the entrance hall of an apartment complex was seen as slightly more deviant ( $M = 7.42$ ). And littering in a small public neighborhood park and drawing graffiti in an elevator of a shopping center were seen as the most deviant ( $M_s = 8.12$  and  $8.24$ , respectively). Note that all mean ratings are above 5 (the scale midpoint), which indicates that all five behaviors were seen as violating the norms of French society. These deviance scores for the five situations differ significantly from each other,  $F(4, 495) = 12.03, p < .0001$ . Post hoc comparisons reveal that the deviance scores in Situations D (litter in park) and E (graffiti in elevator) were reliably higher than the deviance scores in Situations A (poster on bus schedule), B (cut in line), and C (litter in entrance hall; all  $ps < .02$ ).

The mean personal implication ratings were simply participants' responses to the third question in which they indicated the extent to which they would personally suffer the consequences of the different deviant behaviors. Participants gave relatively low ratings of personal implication for Situations A (poster on bus schedule;  $M = 4.02$ ) and E (graffiti in elevator;  $M = 4.65$ ). Somewhat surprisingly, Situation B (cut in line) also received a relatively low rating of personal implication ( $M = 4.73$ ). Situation D (litter in park) was characterized by a relatively high personal implication rating ( $M = 5.94$ ). And Situation C (litter in entrance hall) had the highest personal implication ratings ( $M = 6.62$ ). When the deviant behavior affects the building in which the participants live, they have the impression that they are very much personally implicated. The means in the five situations were reliably different from each other,  $F(4, 494) = 14.77, p < .0001$ . Post hoc comparisons reveal that the personal implication scores in Situations C and D were reliably higher than the personal implication scores in Situations A, B, and E (all  $ps < .05$ ).

### *Role of Perceived Deviance and Perceived Personal Implication*

*Predicted social control.* The primary goal of this research was to examine the relationship between social control, perceived deviance, and perceived personal implication. For this purpose, we combined the questionnaire data of the five situations into a single data set, and performed correlation analyses on all 500 observations. Predicted social control (coded as 0 = *no social control* and 1 = *social control*) was correlated more highly with perceived implication ( $r = .33, p < .0001$ ) than with perceived deviance ( $r = .24, p < .0001$ ). In order to examine

I the relative influence of perceived deviance and perceived personal implication, we also performed a logistic regression analysis in which we regressed predicted social control on both perceived deviance and perceived personal implication. Both independent variables reliably predicted social control, but the effect of perceived personal implication was somewhat stronger,  $\chi^2(1, N = I) = 34.35, p < .0001$ , than the effect of perceived deviance,  $\chi^2(1, N = J) = 10.10, p < .002$ .

J *Actual social control.* How do perceived personal implication or perceived deviance affect people's real reactions to deviant behaviors? The imagined reactions in the questionnaire conditions provide some insight, but the more relevant comparison is the one in which participants' perceptions in the questionnaire conditions are compared to the actual reactions in the behavior conditions. In the top panel of Figure 1, the percentages of participants who exerted social control is shown as a function of the mean perceived deviance scores for each of the five situations. In the bottom panel of Figure 1, the abscissa also represents the percentage of participants who exerted social control, but this time these values are graphed as a function of the perceived personal implication scores. Both panels also contain the regression line that describes the link between the two variables.

Although regression coefficients tend to be biased with a small number of observations, we nevertheless conducted two regression analyses in which we regressed the social control rates on the mean perceived deviance scores (first regression analysis) and on the mean perceived personal implication scores (second regression analysis). The unit of analysis in each of these regression analyses was the situation ( $N = 5$ ). The results of the first regression analysis show that the unstandardized regression coefficient associated with perceived deviance was very close to zero ( $b_1 = -1.6, \eta^2 < .005$ ),  $F(1, 4) = 0.005, p = .95$ . However, in the second regression analysis, the coefficient associated with perceived personal implication was positive ( $b_1 = 15.9, \eta^2 = .71$ ),  $F(1, 4) = 7.52, p = .07$ .<sup>5</sup> The mean perceived personal implication scores explained 71% of the variance in the social control percentages, illustrating the predominant role of personal implication in people's reaction to counternormative behavior.

### Discussion

The purpose of the study reported in this article was to examine whether personal implication increases or decreases the likelihood that bystanders will exert social control when they observe a counternormative behavior. Although quite

<sup>5</sup>The inferential statistics are as follows:  $F(1, 4) = 0.005, p = .95$ ; and  $F(1, 4) = 7.52, p = .07$ , for the first and the second regression analyses, respectively. Because of the small number of observations ( $N = 5$ ) these inferential statistics should be interpreted with caution. However, one should not forget that the problem with a small number of observations is measurement error in both the dependent and the independent variable. In the present case, the variable values are the average of a large number of observations and, therefore, relatively free of measurement error.

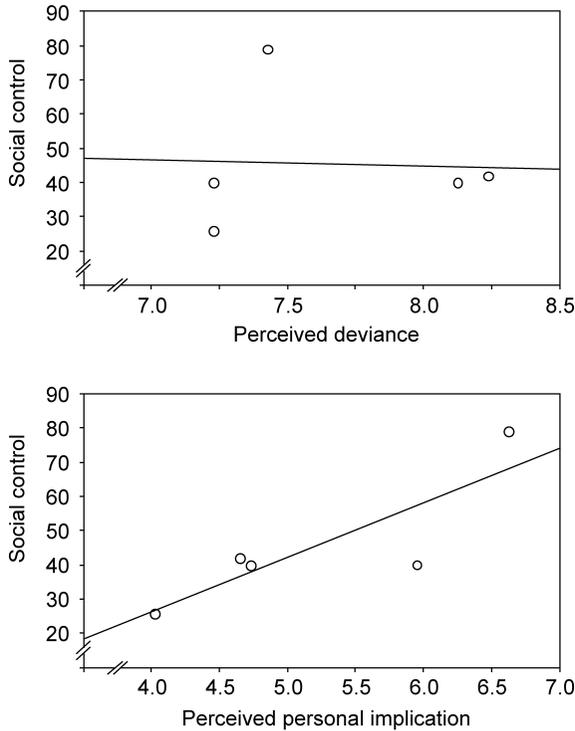


Figure 1. Social control rate as a function of the mean perceived deviance scores (top panel) and as a function of the perceived personal implication scores (bottom panel) in QStudy 2.

Q

central to our understanding of how social norms are enforced and perpetuated, this research question has not received much attention in the social sciences. The question of which factors might facilitate or inhibit social control is seldom discussed in sociological theorizing and if it is, theorists generally claim that the extent of deviance of the counternormative behavior is the major determinant of social control. With few exceptions, psychologists also have not been interested in the topic of social control. To our knowledge, the present research, together with other studies we conducted recently (Brauer et al., 2001; Chekroun & Brauer, 2002, 2004), is the first systematic empirical examination of factors related to social control.

#### *Deviance and Personal Implication*

The sociological hypothesis, according to which the extent of deviance of the counternormative behavior is positively related to people's tendency to express

their disapproval, has received mixed support at best. It is true that the perceived deviance ratings were reliably related to participants' predictions of how they would behave in the different situations. The more participants saw a behavior as deviant, the more they considered it likely that they would exert social control if they were to experience such a situation. However, perceived deviance was unrelated to people's actual social control behavior.

We suggested the hypothesis that social control depends a great deal on the extent to which people feel that the deviant behavior implicates them personally. This hypothesis has received support consistently. First, perceived personal implication was related to participants' predicted social control behavior. This relationship was stronger than the one between perceived deviance and predicted social control. Second, perceived personal implication predicted participants' actual reactions in the behavior conditions quite well. This finding is supplemented by results from other studies on social control (Chekroun & Brauer, 2002, 2004). In these studies, we examined the *bystander effect*, or the extent to which the number of people present decreased the individual probability of exerting social control. We found that the presence of others inhibited the occurrence of social control behavior when personal implication was low (a typical bystander effect), but that this effect disappeared when personal implication was high.

The fact that personal implication plays a decisive role in social control behavior is important for the perpetuation of social norms. We argue that there are two types of social norms, each of which regulates a different type of behavior. One set of social norms facilitates day-to-day interactions among members of a social unit. For example, the norm that one should avoid standing with others in narrow passages that are being used by many people simply makes life easier for those who go through these narrow passages. A violation of this norm has a direct impact on those going through the passage: They must squeeze along the wall or they must say something and wait until the norm violators move out of the way. They are victims of the counternormative behavior. In these kinds of situations, people are obviously quite effective in exerting social control since they simply defend their self-interest. The same reasoning applies to norms regulating other interactions among members of the social unit, such as reciprocity, politeness, and so forth. As such, norms that regulate day-to-day interactions among members of a social unit are perpetuated quite easily.

Another set of social norms regulates behaviors that affect places or objects that are used by many members of the social unit. Counternormative behaviors that involve degradation of the places or objects do not have direct measurable consequences on the bystanders who observe these behaviors. A priori, people feel less personally implicated when these types of norms are being violated. After all, they do not own the damaged property (they are "observers," rather than "victims"), and it is likely that someone will have fixed the problem by the

next time the bystander returns. As a consequence, the norm to protect public places or objects is likely to be enforced relatively ineffectively, and norm violations are quite frequent. The same reasoning applies to norms that prevent people from destroying the environment, public institutions (e.g., libraries), and other public property (e.g., public transportation). It appears, then, that the perpetuation of norms protecting the interests of the community is less self-evident than the perpetuation of norms that regulate day-to-day interactions among members of the community.

However, our research also shows that norms protecting the interest of the community are not necessarily doomed to disappear. The default response of not getting involved is less frequent when people feel that they are personally implicated by the deviant behavior. This feeling of being personally implicated does not come from the direct negative effect on the bystander (there are none), but from a feeling of responsibility for the damaged property or for the norm that is being transgressed. People may even feel more personally implicated—and exert more social control—when they are in the observer role than when they are in the victim role. For example, in our study, the perceived personal implication was higher in Situation D (litter in park) than in Situation B (cutting in line).

The practical implication of this finding is quite important. Norms that regulate behaviors in places or toward objects that are being used by many members of the social unit are more likely to be respected if people feel personally implicated by behaviors that degrade these places or objects. And the feeling of being personally implicated can be changed by government intervention programs. For example, imagine a bystander walking on a hiking trail in a national forest and observing another hiker throwing trash in the bushes. If he has the impression that it is *his* national forest, he feels responsible for that forest, the trash in the bushes implicates him personally, and he is likely to exert social control. If everyone thinks similarly, norm violators will be sanctioned systematically, and relatively few people will leave their trash in the national forest. However, if the bystander has the impression that he is hiking in *a* national forest, he will only consider his personal well-being and come to the conclusion that he will probably never use the same hiking trail again. Therefore, he will not feel personally implicated by the deviant behavior, and he probably will not exert social control. If everyone thinks similarly, norm violators will not be sanctioned systematically, and trash in the bushes may become a frequent occurrence. Thus, decision makers may be advised to target the feeling of being personally involved, rather than try to influence deviant behaviors directly.

### *Desirability of Social Control*

- K People in the questionnaire conditions in Study 2<sup>K</sup> predicted that they would exert social control more frequently and more vigorously than participants in the

behavior conditions actually did. This finding reveals something about the extent to which people in France consider social control to be desirable or undesirable. One may wonder whether exerting social control is seen as something negative. After all, there is always the danger that individuals who exert social control are seen as troublemakers who are intolerant of those who behave differently than they do. If we assume that people overestimate the frequency with which they engage in behaviors that they consider desirable and that they underestimate the frequency with which they engage in behaviors that they consider undesirable (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), we may tentatively conclude that exerting social control is considered a desirable behavior in France. Spontaneous comments made to the confederates during the debriefing in the behavior conditions and to the experimenters in the questionnaire condition seem to corroborate this conclusion. If people decide to not exert social control, then it is because they want to avoid conflict or “don’t have the guts” to confront the deviant, not because they are afraid that other bystanders will evaluate them negatively.

The research reported in this article raises many questions. Is it true that personal implication is one of the most important determinants of social control behavior? The data reported here are correlational and do not allow us to draw causal influences. However, they reveal a strong link between personal implication and social control. We are currently exploring the same issue in a study in which we manipulate the amount of personal implication experimentally. Is it true that norms protecting places and objects that are being used by members of the social unit are more likely to be perpetuated when individuals feel personally responsible for the places and objects? If so, then what is the mechanism? Is it social control, as we have claimed in the present article?

In the present studies, the perceived degree of deviance was unrelated to people’s tendency to exert social control. This finding contradicts sociological conceptions of counternormative behavior and social control. Our studies revealed the preponderant role of personal implication for social control. People may feel personally implicated because the deviant behavior has a measurable negative impact on their time or their well-being. Or they may feel implicated because they feel personally responsible for the damaged property. Independent of where the feeling of personal implication comes from, the more someone feels personally affected by a deviant behavior, the more she is likely to exert social control.

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