When I think of a norm, I usually don’t think of myself. What others may consider unacceptable behavior, I find exiting. I feel sad when I observe people being mistreated solely because they don’t fit societies mold.

Most of the time, when I’m in a professional atmosphere such as school or work, others assume that I am just like everyone else. I look, dress, and act with the same mannerisms as expected of others. But, I must say, violating a norm creates some very interesting reactions.

For example, I was dressed up like the typical student in Ybor City one Saturday night. I had on the high heels, a nice dress, and the usual accessories that make up an outfit. It was a girls night out on the town. My four girlfriends and I were just looking to have a few laughs. We were in one of the bars for a time when a few of the younger looking men began talking to us. The beer had started to kick in, but I just wasn’t having a good time.

I wanted to do something different. I wanted to see if the young men would still talk to us if I began to look or act differently. To test this, I went to the bathroom and painted one of my teeth black with my eyeliner. I figured the tooth was just enough without going overboard. One could not even notice the tooth unless I smiled. Upon inspection, it looked as though I was missing a tooth. I just had to laugh at myself.

I then went back to my table and ordered a beer. One of the guys came over and started up a conversation. We had been talking for awhile, but he had not noticed the
tooth. In the next moment, he said something funny, and I just had to laugh. It was at that time, that I saw the change of expression on his face.

He started to look around for his friends, even though he did not seem to care about them the minute before. I believe he was scared of them seeing him talk to the “toothless girl”. Our conversation ended with an excuse about his having to leave. I did not see him again for the rest of the night. The acceptable norm is for pretty women to have a full set of teeth, among many other things. My eyeliner affected the norm and the conversation as well.

Another example is the time my mother and I went to see my younger brother and his band. There was a good crowd and many people were dancing. After a while, my mother and I decided to dance also. I consider myself a fairly decent dancer, though I may be an impartial judge. I was having a good time and decided to dance in a style all my own. It was a funny mix of the 50’s and breakdancing. My mom did not know what to think. She knew that I usually did not dance like that, so she just started laughing. People started to scatter away from me. It seemed like no one but my mom wanted to be anywhere close to where I was dancing.

After the band is done playing, my brother usually introduces me to his friends. On this particular occasion, he just acted embarrassed. He did not introduce me to his friends but told me and my mom that he would catch up to us later. Usually, we all hang out and have a couple of beers together. The next day, my brother apologized. He was simply embarrassed. It was a new band, and he did not want the other members to get the wrong impression right away. He realized how wrong that was. If he had just introduced
me, as he did the next time, they would have met the “weird dancer” and shared a couple of laughs.

I believe that too much time and energy is put into what other people might be thinking. These types of experiences have helped me to become a more “open” person. Norms might identify certain types of typical and acceptable behavior within large, diverse population, but the diverse people must define for themselves who they are.