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Risk, responsibility, rudeness, and rules: the loneliness of the social distance warrior

We have a responsibility to obey COVID-19 rules, in order to minimize risk. Yet it is still seen as rude to challenge people who do not respect those rules, when in fact the opposite is true; it is rude to increase risk to others. In this paper I analyse the relationship between risk, responsibility, and rudeness by analysing the evolution of the main governmental slogans and rules and explore the complex relationship between simplicity, safety, and perceived fairness of these rules, and how these features in turn influence the extent to which we act responsibly. I begin by exploring the relationship between rudeness and risk in our interactions about coronavirus, before going on to analyse the importance of clear rules in minimizing tension between us, illustrating the argument with various slogans including "stay at home," "stay alert," and the now infamous "rule of six," which is actually at least three different rules. Ultimately, we are faced with a paradox: people annoyed about complex/unfair rules are less likely to obey them, even if that means rules will apply for longer and even though it was noncompliance with earlier simpler rules that means new rules are necessary. And if rules make less or no sense it is harder to try to get people to follow them in your own capacity as a citizen; it is hard to police rules that are seen as arbitrary or unfair.