

A taboo is an "unthinkable" action that even the thought of violating it triggers social punishment. We consider a model in which deliberating over breaking a taboo provides information on possible private benefits but entails social costs. The strength of the taboo is endogenously determined. We examine how taboos can change and disappear over time and analyze the relationship between social heterogeneity and the effectiveness of taboos. We extend our model to societies in which individuals may choose among several identities, characterized by different taboos and characterize the conditions that give rise to a multi-identity society.