

GENDER TRANSGRESSION PAPER

Sociology 316 Gender & Society, Mary Virnoche, Ph.D., Humboldt State University

For this assignment I would like you to investigate the social organization and maintenance of gender through the act of breaching, or violating, a norm. You should focus on a particular norm, such as presenting yourself as female and pregnant and ordering a drink at a bar (if you're of age of course), tweaking your body posture, placing yourself in an environment not common for your gender (a knitting group; a computer club etc.). Another option is to assume another gender identity and try to pass.

This assignment will draw heavily on your skills in participant observation and your field noting. You will need to keep note of your own feelings and actions, as well as observations that you make about those you encounter. You should enlist a co-conspirator that can be on the sidelines and help in mentally noting actions and reactions. You should debrief and make physical detailed notes as soon after the transgression as possible.

The first thing I want you to do is to select a gender norm that you will violate. Just acting weird in and of itself will not necessarily give you the best type of experience to write about and analyze sociologically. It must be a new activity done for this assignment, not something you did in the past. Please do not select anything that will hurt another person (either physically or emotionally) or break the law. You will have to pick something that you can either do a few times (in order to collect good data on the experience), or one that can only be done once, but which will generate a lot of data the first time. Remember that gender is contextual: your transgression will be specific to the subculture and/or the situation. Make sure it is a "gender" violation in which you are engaging. Ask yourself, "Would it be o.k. in this situation for a man/woman/transgendered person to engage in this behavior?" *For example, if you present as a woman and belch in a setting where it would be inappropriate for anyone to belch – then you are violating a general norm – but not a gender norm.*

Once you have my "full approval" on your transgression proposal, you can go to work. Document on your proposal my responses to additional conversations that we have and our final agreement (For example, some proposals raise "safety" issues. I may write "safety" and ask you to clear the location with me before proceeding. Be sure you/we document our decision on your proposal).

As you carry out your transgression, you should be looking for, and your paper should address the following.

1. Describe the gender norm that you are violating. Please identify exactly what this norm is and how you have violated it.
2. How did it make you feel?
3. How did others react? Did they try to normalize (pretend you were acting normally)? How? Did they treat you like a creep? How? Was their reaction somewhere in between? In just what way? How did they communicate to you (if at all) that you violated some norm(s)?
4. What does your transgression teach us about gender? What did your behavior, your feelings, and the reactions of others tell you about the norm that you have violated? How is it important? Why is it important? How does this norm relate to particular configurations of gender maintenance and power in society?
5. Connect your analysis with some of the readings or discussions we have had in class about gender and doing gender. Make explicit these connections.
6. Staple to the back of your paper the original approved proposal with my comments and your notes on our final agreement.

The papers will be graded according to the following four criteria:

1. How well you have conceptualized your gender transgression and described your actions and feelings and the reactions of others (points #1 and #2 and #3 above)
2. How well you have related this norm to gender maintenance and power in society (point #4 above)
3. How well you have related this norm to the readings (point #5 above)
4. Organization, writing, spelling, grammar, typing/proofreading, etc., of your essay.
5. Only papers with an approved proposal (my initials) attached will receive credit. Note: If you change the parameters of your transgression, you **must** submit a new proposal.

Gender Transgression Contract

Sociology 316 – Gender & Society
Mary Virnoche, Ph.D. Humboldt State University

Your participation in this project should consist only of actions described in this agreement. If any changes are considered necessary after the project begins, you should clear them with me before proceeding further.

In your description, provide the following information: gender norm violated, what you are going to do, how you are going to do it, where it will take place, who the participants are, and what you hope to accomplish.

You will receive credit for this project only if it follows the specifications of this approved contract.

Description of project:

Student name (printed) and Signature

Student telephone number

Student email address

Date