

Breaching Project

The purpose of this project is to have students explore cultural expectations about gender by violating, or breaching, them. Breaching as a sociological method was developed by Harold Garfinkel, the founder of ethnomethodology, who argued that we can test the existence of cultural expectations by violating them.

For this assignment, you will hypothesize the existence of a rule or expectation regarding gender and then break it in the presence of at least one naïve subject. You may do your breaching in cooperation with classmates as long as you each submit your own paper.

Possible topics of the breaching exercise include clothing, grooming, conversational topics/styles, shopping behavior, and romantic behavior. The breaching activity must be something you do not regularly do. Possible naïve subjects include parents, siblings, roommates, boy/girlfriend, and strangers.

Your paper will cover four topics:

1. Explain your hypothesis about the existence of a cultural expectation regarding gender, i.e., about what men or women are supposed to do or are not supposed to do. Draw from your own experience as a cultural native/observers and/or academic research.
2. Describe your breaching exercise, i.e., what you did or said to violate the expectation. Give a detailed account including any deviations from your plan.
3. Describe the reaction of the naïve subject(s) to your breaching exercise and any interaction you had with them. If you explained the purpose of your exercise to the subject(s) AFTER its completion, explain what happened after that. (Parts 2 and 3 may be combined in a chronological account covering what you and your subjects(s) did and said.)
4. Describe your own reaction to your breaching exercise, e.g. was it uncomfortable, nauseating, exhilarating? Cover your subjective feelings before, during, and after the exercise.

In your summary, you should return to your hypothesis and evaluate it in light of the evidence from the reactions of your naïve subject(s) and your own reaction. You may apply appropriate concepts from course readings and lecture as necessary.

IMPORTANT!!!! Students should abandon the exercise if they suspect that continuing it may result in damage to anyone's physical or psychological health, or to any relationship. If you do abandon the exercise, include an explanation in your report. In addition, your actions must not be in violation of any law or any Iowa State University regulation.