Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion

A Sociological Reappraisal

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The study of masculinities has not escaped the influence of Judith Butler's writings on gender, performativity, and subversion. However, this article suggests that Butler's formulations of performativity and subversion express a lack of clarity and engender a number of problems with respect to agency, action, interaction, and social change. This article argues for reformulating performativity and subversion in a more explicitly socio-logical frame to render the concepts more useful for examining agency and subjectivity in the study of masculinities. The writings of Erving Goffman suggest ways to reclaim the socially constructed agency of "performance" from the mire of "performativity," with the latter's apparent disappearance of subjective action. This article suggests reworking subversion away from parody and resignification toward a consideration of resources for subjectivity and challenges to prevailing social structures. In this way, performativity and subversion may be set more convincingly within a sociologically informed study of masculinity.

Key words: Judith Butler; Erving Goffman; performance; performativity; subversion; hegemonic masculinity; sociology

Judith Butler's writings on gender, performativity, and subversion have by now attained a wide purchase across a number of humanities and social science disciplines, and the study of masculinities is no exception. For example, Butler's theorizing has been explored in studies of the anxieties induced by the continual and forcible production of masculinity within social interaction (Buchbinder 1998), alcohol consumption in the construction of rural masculinities (Campbell 2000), young men's language use and conversational styles (D. Cameron 1997), the development of heterosexual identities by young men at school (Redman 2001), and masculinity and masochism in cultural production (Savran 1998).

There is something simultaneously enticing and problematic in Butler's theorizing of performativity and subversion and in the ways these have been taken up in a range of writings about masculinities. In this essay, I question whether performativity and subversion, as they stand, are able to perform the intellectual labor often expected of them, both in the study of masculinities and elsewhere. As they have been framed by Butler, both concepts have become mired in difficulties around agency, interaction, and social structure. In contrast, these latter concerns lie at the heart of much of the best sociological theorizing of masculinity. However, performativity and subversion can be (re)thought in a manner that may prove more useful for those studies of masculinities that seek a specifically sociological frame of reference.

The discussion starts with an examination of Butler's conceptualization of performativity and the problems with agency that this represents for her writing and that of others. Subsequent authors have tended to collapse performativity into the related notion of performance, although the two concepts actually imply different understandings of the gendered subject. I suggest that we can retain performativity's antiessentialism and its querying of the order of sex, gender, and meaning while turning to the work of sociologist Erving Goffman to develop an account of masculinities as both (inter)active and performed. A number of authors have already noted some of the resemblances between Butler and Goffman (e.g., Bordo 1993, 289; Campbell 2000, 565; McIlvenny 2002, 118). I want to suggest that Goffman's analysis is compatible with the useful insights from Butler's performativity, while in some respects it offers a more sociologically coherent perspective for considering the performance of masculinities.

In the second part of the essay, I consider Butler's writing on subversion and argue that while suggestive in its potential for challenging hegemonic forms of masculinity, the concept is undertheorized and suffers from some of the same problems that beset performativity. Subversion might be better understood if reinterpreted in light of Goffman's concepts of "frames" and "gender schedules" and integrated with an analysis that pays close attention to the reflexive links between subjectivity, agency, and social structures. Using both Butler's and Goffman's analyses as a starting point, we can consider just what subversive performances of masculinities might involve.

PERFORMATIVITY, AMBIGUITY

Butler's influential analyses of gender-as-performativity and the potential for subversion of the dominant gender order first appeared in an issue of *Theatre Journal* in 1988 and were then elaborated in the best-selling *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, published in 1990. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler rejects naturalistic notions of inherent gendered essence, arguing that distinctions between male and female, homosexuality and het-

erosexuality are symbolic constructions, which, in turn, create an illusion of their own stability. What is more, gender and sexuality are relationally constituted; heterosexuality, for example, is constructed in contradistinction to its abject other, homosexuality. While erroneously regarded as the "original" form of sexuality, with homosexuality as the "copy," heterosexuality holds a tenuous grip on its status as the original and true sexuality—its coherence under threat from the homosexuality "outside." Similarly, the stability of the male/female distinction is always at risk of disruption and subversion by dissident forms of gendering.

While I will later return to the possibilities for subversion with respect to masculinity in particular, it is important to outline in some detail the key concept of performativity, as it underpins much of Butler's analysis. Butler's performativity is derived in part from John Austin's work on performatives—that is, linguistic declarations that perform actions, including calling into being the objects they name (Austin 1962; Butler 1996, 112). Thus, for Butler, *performativity* is "the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed" (1996, 112). In developing Austin's work for a discussion on gender, Butler suggests that gender categories—female/male, woman/man, girl/boy—are brought into being performatively. This is an antiessentialist position; these categories are not imported into culture or society from the "nature" outside but rather are fundamentally shaped through discourse. So, for example, the proclamation "It's a girl!" that is uttered at birth is the initiator of a process of "girling" the female subject (Butler 1993, 232). Further, performativity involves subsequent repetition or citation of gender norms. This citation takes place under conditions of cultural constraint or "regulatory regimes," which compel some appearances of masculinity and femininity while prohibiting others.

So far, so good. What, however, does performativity have to say about the subject, the socially located person who is apparently produced by these discursive processes? Butler is unclear in her answer to this question, and her writings continuously shift backward and forward across a number of not entirely consistent positions. At times, the subject exists only tentatively and, even then, predominantly as a discourse, a "regulatory fiction." In other moments, subjects loom into view and possess something of a "real" existence, but they have little capacity for social action. While acts may exist, they are often abstracted from actors in the sociological sense. Elsewhere, Butler invokes subjects with some capacity for engagement in the social order. These different strands weave through Butler's later writings and interviews as well as among the pages of *Gender Trouble*.

In the first strand, Butler contests "the very notion of the subject" as a "regulatory fiction" to be undermined in the course of political challenges to liberalism and humanism (Butler 1996, 112; 1998, 285). This discursive counterpolitics involves challenging such humanist ontologies "in order to

produce a counterimaginary to the dominant metaphysics," subjecting its terms "to abuse so that they can no longer do their usual work" (1998, 279).

In this vein, Butler sets out to reject the "metaphysics of substance," a phrase associated with Nietzsche that signifies the notion of the individual or person as a "substantive thing" (Butler 1990, 20). For Butler, the notion of the subject is problematic as it implies a being behind "doing, effecting, becoming," and it often leads to a humanist understanding of the subject as autonomous and sovereign (1990, 25). In contrast, what is required is a critique of the subject as an originator of action and a focus on the performative power of discourse. Butler (1990) argues, following Nietzsche, that gender is "not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (p. 25). Therefore, "the 'being' of the subject is no more self-identical than the 'being' of any gender; in fact, coherent gender, achieved through an apparent repetition of the same, produces as an *effect* the illusion of a prior and volitional subject" (Butler 1991, 24; original emphasis).

It follows, then, that there is no coherent "we" who might "do" our gender:

> Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. . . . This repetition is not performed *by* a subject: this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject (Butler 1993, 95; original emphasis).

Here, Butler departs from Austin, for whom performatives are actively and intentionally uttered by speakers (Austin 1962, 8; also McIlvenny 2002, 116). However, a subject does now appear, enabled by repetition, albeit a repetition it does not itself perform. The repetition through language of phrases like "It's a girl" (or "It's a boy") creates the preconditions for the emergence of girls and boys and, subsequently, women and men as subjects who then become invested with meaning.

What might be the connection between this tentative, performatively enabled subject and social action? The doer-deed statement asserts that subjects do not perform deeds but are enabled by them. However, action appears in some form in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, where *gender* is defined as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 1990, 33). In the third chapter, gender is conceptualized as "a kind of becoming or activity", one that ought to be understood as "an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (p. 112), while action is also implied in the suggestion that "bodily gestures, movements and styles constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (p. 139).

The last quotation repeats the earlier suspicion of the subject as a substantive thing. What is constituted is an illusion of self, not self itself. Despite this cautiousness about the existence of a subject, the acts, activity, and action occurring in the definitions of what gender is beg the question of whether we

might understand subjects as doers of some of it. Where otherwise might gestures, movements, and repeated acts originate? Stylization of the body would appear to depend on the existence at some level of a body that may be stylized, even though Butler (1990) argues just three pages earlier that the gendered body "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (p. 136). Precisely which body might then be stylized and at whose instigation?[1]

A degree of conceptual slippage is apparent here. On one hand, the very notion of the subject is problematic for its implicit humanism, while other moments Butler is more prepared to acknowledge the subject as more than only a regulatory illusion while maintaining her antiessentialism. While the volitional or prior subject is ruled out (although the precise meaning of *prior* requires further exploration), the subject per se is seemingly not precluded (Butler 1998, 280). In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), for example, she argues the following:

> Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an "I" or a "we" who has not been submitted, subjected to gender, where gendering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being. Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the "I" neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves. (p. 7)

Here a subject emerges, "subjectivated" within gendered relationships and presumably becoming involved in these relationships. At a later point, I will suggest some directions in which this involvement might be theoretically expanded. However, a lack of clarity exists over the capacity for action held by such subjects relative to the power that enables their existence in the first place. While in *The Psychic Life of Power* Butler (1997) suggests that the subject is "compelled to reiterate" that very power "upon which [he or she] depends for existence" (p. 12), she also argues that "agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled" (p. 15). Such a lack of clarity over the question of agency has resulted in Butler being read as advocating both voluntarism and determinism (see Livia and Hall 1997, 8; Webster 2000, 8).

What is reasonably clear is that performativity itself does not refer to subjects "doing gender," as performativity is primarily a constitutive process. Gender is not a performance that "a prior subject elects to do"; instead, "gender . . . constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express" (Butler 1991, 24). While the term *performance* implies enactment or doing, *performativity* refers to the constitution of regulatory notions and their effects. The repetition that creates the illusion of gendered authenticity is not a subjective action so much as a linguistic interpellation in the Althusserian sense (Althusser 1984).

The vexatious questions are those that address whether the effects of performativity might be subjects with a "real" existence and, if so, whether we can identify acts in which those subjects might engage. A number of unresolved tensions over subjectivity and agency remain, and these have significant implications for Butler's own theorizing as well as its adoption by other researchers and theorists. Indeed, those drawing on Butler's writings both generally and in the masculinities field more specifically can end up tangled or even mired in contradiction (see Allen 1998, 459-60; D. Cameron 1997, 49; Campbell 2000, 565; Lloyd 1999, 196-201). Is the subject a politically problematic effect of the metaphysics of substance, an active originator of gendered acts, or something in between?

One thing a clarification of these questions does not require is renouncing a thoroughly antiessentialist account of masculine subjectivities. Butler's performativity usefully suggests that masculinities appear within language and society as effects of norms and power relations rather than presocial biological essences. What Goffman's writing offers is a way of reintroducing a reflexive, acting subject into this picture without returning to either biological or psychological essentialism or to the autonomous, male, sovereign subject of liberalism and humanism. Butler can then offer a corrective to some of Goffman's blind spots (particularly his heterosexism), while Goffman's work on gender schedules and experience-organizing "frames" offers ways to extend Butler's discussion of subversion in the context of masculinities.

GOFFMAN AND THE REWORKING OF PERFORMATIVITY

While Butler's writings include a number of important innovations, insights from Erving Goffman's work on gender, social organization, and the presentation of self can strengthen an analysis of masculinities, for instance, as sets of socially specific performances. For example, Goffman offers a number of useful interventions into the confusions around subjectivity and agency. He also contributes an analysis of social interaction—important within sociology but generally absent from Butler's theorizing (Jackson and Scott 2001, 16; McIlvenny 2002, 133).

The first point to note is that while Butler employs the notion of the performatively constituted or interpellated subject with a variable capacity for action, Goffman's focus is the self. Butler rarely uses the term *self*, except to highlight the ontological problems with the notion of the "true self"—an aspect of the "authentic expressive paradigm" (Butler 1990, 22).[2] Goffman's notion of self, however, arose within a symbolic interactionist tradition as an active facility of conceptualizing one's internal states and external relationships (Gergen 1971). Within this tradition, the notion of "true self" was regarded not as ontologically axiomatic but as a particular form of account-

ing for one's perception of one's internal states (e.g., Turner 1976). Like the tradition of which he is part, Goffman's self is never transcendental, that is, something that exists outside of social processes. It is never prior to the social. However, Goffman offers selves as both socially constructed and as loci of social action. How does he formulate this position?

Goffman's overall principles of self-performance are laid out in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, written in 1956 (reprinted in 1959). In this work, Goffman grants social interaction a central place and defines it as "the reciprocal influence of individuals on one another's actions when in one another's immediate presence" (p. 15). Performances or presentations of self, then, involve one's management of self-impressions to other participants in the interaction. It is in one's interest to perform in such a way as to guarantee a favorable impression, for this will be assessed by others (pp. 3-4). Individuals attempt to exert influence over others' understandings, with the aim of influencing the "definition of the situation" being collectively formulated in the context in question (p. 3). Insofar as others accept the intended impression, it can be said that a given definition of the situation has been "effectively" projected (p. 6).

Goffman's approach to the presentation or performance of self is a dramaturgical one, employing the metaphor of the theater. Any performance involves "front" and "back" regions, analogous to the relationship between front-stage and back-stage in a theater. The front is where one performs in the presence and judgment of others, while out back, the actor practices impression management and the techniques required to accomplish a successful presentation—that is, a successful manipulation of others' definition of the situation. This dramaturgical metaphor can be applied to many performances in the course of everyday life, whether they involve the preparation for and execution of a walk down the street or an address to an audience.

In his later book *Frame Analysis* (1974), Goffman proposed that performances and the definitions of the situation in which they are implicated take place under constraints in the form of "frames." Frames are not social institutions as such, rather "principles of organization which govern events" and subsequently affect the construction of the definition of the situation in a particular context (p. 10). Frames also organize subjective experience by providing meanings within which social events can be interpreted. Individual subjects are not free to frame experience as they please, for frames preexist interactional situations and govern and constrain the meanings that can pertain.

In addition, one's interactions with others must take place under a set of "felicity conditions"—that is, conventions for speech and interaction that bestow common ground and, therefore, the possibility that individuals might make themselves understood (Goffman 1983, 25). A breaching of these conditions may be seen as indicating either that the speaker is temporarily socially incompetent (e.g., through tiredness) or that he or she is somehow

strange or odd. Each successful utterance presupposes a "jointly inhabitable mental world," and it is commonly expected that these worlds will be inhabited and sustained over a longer period than the particular interaction in question (p. 26). As in the case of frames, the individual acts and is defined within particular frameworks of social organization.

This analysis has implications for a discussion of agency. It follows that selves cannot fashion themselves according to their whim, as frames and felicity conditions constitute constraining social contexts within which actions and interactions, and understandings and renegotiations of these, must take place. While Goffman understands the self to act and exercise agency within interactions, this is never an unmediated agency or action, for the very form taken by that self arises in the context of the possibilities permitted within the culture.[3]

In terms of gender specifically, Goffman suggests that one "might just as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender" (Goffman 1979, 8). I understand this to mean not that we lack awareness of having to continuously express ourselves as men or women or even that we do not come to inhabit these categories. Rather, what such expression or being means in a given social context is made available from schedules and reinforced by the doing of gender within social interaction. The schedule, then, needs to be continuously cited and employed in interactive settings. One is continuously characterized as a member of a sexed category by others if one displays a "competence and willingness to sustain an appropriate schedule of displays" (1979, 8).

At this point, two interesting observations can be made about Goffman's theorizing of agency and the gendered subject and its pertinence to a consideration of Butler's writing. First, Goffman does share with Butler a reversal of commonsense understandings about the order of causes and effects within gender-constructing processes. Both authors reject essentialism, agreeing that natural differences do not precede social ones; rather, the idea of natural differences is an effect of social distinctions. Goffman argues that our categorization into one of two sexes results from social practices, including naming and talk (1977, 319, 324). The social categories are not expressions of natural differences so much as the means for "the production of that difference itself" (1977, 324).[4] Goffman refers to this reversal of causes and effects as "institutional reflexivity." For Butler (1990), such a reversal is embedded in her theory of performativity in which the notion of the sexes as "natural" can be understood as a discursive effect (p. 8).

Second, Goffman's writing offers to untie the bind of agency that troubles performativity. By separating the capacity for action from the self per se, Goffman ([1956] 1959) is able to adopt a fully social account of the self that avoids essentialism on one hand and the marginalization of the subject on the other. We bring the potential for action to social interaction, although we achieve self—hence subjectivity—only within social, interactional pro-

cesses (p. 252). Self and subjectivity, then, are achievements that result from our interactive, publicly validated performances, undertaken within the organizational frames and felicity conditions provided.[5] This is not to say that these frameworks determine actions and identities so much as govern their inputs and constraints (Goffman 1963, 106).

While Goffman's self is neither sovereign nor presocial, in one sense his self is a prior subject in Butler's terms. Goffman's self is not prior in the sense of existing before language and social interaction; it is not an essentialist concept of self. The self is prior in the sense that it precedes deeds, even as it incorporates those deeds into its continual self-construction. The phrase "there is no doer behind the deed" does not chime with Goffman's writing. Rather, he hints at a reflexive model, where the self is built up through ongoing social interactions and reflections on the social world and the possibilities it offers (Goffman 1963, 106). Garfinkel has criticized *The Performance of Self in Everyday Life* for focusing on individual, discrete episodes in the presentation of self and eclipsing the ongoing processes involved in the accomplishment of a self with a biography (Garfinkel 1967, 166-7). In *Stigma*, however, Goffman (1963) writes of a self with a sense of continuous identity and a moral "career" constructed out of the social resources available (p. 106).

What are the particular implications of this for the study of masculinities? The masculine self can be understood as reflexively constructed within performances; that is, performances can construct masculinity rather than merely reflect its preexistence, and socially constituted masculine selves act in the social world and are acted on simultaneously. Researchers can investigate how masculinities are done and how these performances are received within social interaction; how frames, schedules, and specificities of culture and history condition masculine performances and their reception; how tensions around front- and backstage play out; and how illusions of masculine authenticity are reproduced and congealed.

While one of Goffman's weaknesses for contemporary theorizing concerns sexuality, this is an area where Butler provides a relative strength. Goffman (1963) notes that heterosexuality is one of several prerequisites of an "unblushing" American masculinity (pp. 128, 153), but he generally pays little attention to sexuality. *Stigma* does include references to "the homosexual," who, among others, might attempt to seek therapeutic "correction" for the basis of his [sic] "social failing" (p. 9). In contrast, Butler (writing much more recently, after all) seeks a much more critical and wide-ranging analysis.[6]

Butler (1990) argues that the division between men and women comes to exist only though the invocation of heterosexuality, with the "heterosexual matrix" critical to the gender distinction itself (pp. viii; 18). She argues that an apparently stable and oppositional heterosexuality can be understood as a

precondition of the internal coherence of gender categories (p. 22). This partly reflects the suggestion that male heterosexuality relies on the exclusion of its homosexual other for its existence (Sharpe 2002, 268), although Butler also suggests that homosexuality may trouble the coherence of the gender distinction, at least potentially.

For Butler (1990), the relationship between gender and heterosexuality involves mimesis; particular symbolic invocations of "copy" and "original." She suggests that heterosexuality is erroneously regarded as the original form of sexuality and homosexuality as the copy, but then she queries the equation. The opposition of real and imitation gendering, she argues, is a construct for which there is no real original, merely the idea of an original. Thus, "gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy . . . the original [is] nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original" (p. 31, original emphasis). Butler writes that while all forms of gendering are constructed, only some are privileged as authentic. However, disruptions to the economy of copy and original may reveal and potentially undo the position of heterosexuality and its role in structuring gender relations. The heterosexual economy is potentially vulnerable to subversion.

WHAT IS SUBVERSION?

Butler suggests that while performativity and its enabling power construct illusions of natural and heterosexually constituted genders and compel or constrain the forms these take, these may be subverted in some sense. But what does subversion mean, exactly? Subversion is related, although not necessarily reducible, to a range of other effects, such as parody, displacement, and resignification. In the following excerpts from *Gender Trouble* (1990) and the essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1991), I have marked the operative words in italics:

- Sex, "released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can *occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play* of gendered meanings" (Butler 1990, 33).
- We can "think through the possibility of *subverting and displacing* those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculinist hegemony and heterosexist power, to *make gender trouble*" (Butler 1990, 34).
- "The *parodic replication and resignification* of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames *brings into relief* the utterly constructed status of the so-called original" (Butler 1991, 23).
- "Which possibilities of doing gender *repeat and displace* through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilized?" (Butler 1990, 31).
- "What kind of gender performance will *enact and reveal* the performativity of gender itself in a way that *destabilizes* the naturalized categories of identity and desire[?]" (Butler 1990, 139).

Two forms of ambiguity arise in these accounts. First, the relative weights the terms are meant to carry are not obvious. For example, the term "displacing" appears to be more transforming of the constructions of gender than "subversive play," while "brings into relief" appears weaker than either "displacing" or "subversive play." Although Butler appears to suggest that in a general sense, parody, repetition, and resignification can in some way act to subvert dominant arrangements of gender and sexuality, the relative significance of these different terms is not theorized as explicitly as it might be. She paints a rather impressionistic picture, which lacks conceptual clarity.

Second, while the terms themselves are not clearly defined, neither are the relationships between them. The "and" placed between the terms is always ambiguous. Is repetition the means for displacement of "masculinist hegemony and heterosexist power"? Is subversion the cause of this displacement, the result of it, or synonymous with it? What, precisely, does subversion do? When Butler writes of "parodic replication and resignification," does she intend replication as the means for resignification, with resignification preceding a "bringing into relief" of the constructed status of the original? Once this constructed status is brought into relief, has subversion been achieved? A teleology from replication and parody to subversion is strongly suggested, if not made explicit, but is this really what is meant?

While subversion is somehow related here to repetition, parody, proliferation, replication, displacement, and resignification, their relational specificities and the mechanisms by which these might occur are not fleshed out. It is therefore not surprising that some of those who have taken up Butler's work on subversion are similarly unclear, referring vaguely to the need to "undermine the alignment of sex, gender, and desire" (J. Cameron 1997, 41), "trouble the certainty of heterosexualized coherence among sex, gender and desire" (p. 41), or "disrupt assumptions about gender differences" (Jones 2000, 193).

Butler's ambivalence regarding questions of agency and subjectivity reappear here. If subjects are best understood as performative effects who do not do gender as such, it is difficult to see how they might precipitate subversive action. It is perhaps unsurprising that the excerpts considered above give no clues about the identity of subversion's initiator—permitting subjects to initiate subversion would have been to suggest doers behind the deeds. In Butler's later references to subversion, however, a subject does appear. In *Bodies That Matter* subjects with agency are implied with the suggestion that subversion is a question of "working the weaknesses in the norms" (Butler 1993, 237). Elsewhere, Butler suggests that "we need to pursue the moments of degrounding, when we're standing in two different places at once; or when we've produced an aesthetic practice that shakes the ground" (Butler 1996, 122).[7] But if the existence of a subject in possession of agency is problematic, who or what are "we"?

I have already suggested that Goffman's concept of the socially situated, reflexive self might mediate some of these tensions around agency and subjectivity. His work may also be employed in an effort to introduce some clarity to the discussion of subversion. Goffman's writing suggests simultaneously how subversion may be confounded as well as how it may be effected.

For Goffman, any subversion and its antecedents (including parodic proliferations, replications, and resignifications) would involve interpretation and meaning-making in the context of our interactions with others, and hence, it would require negotiation or contestation over definitions of the situation. Ordinarily, the prevailing definition of the situation involves the achievement of a working consensus among those involved, even if some might suppress their own desires behind statements to which all give lip service (Goffman [1956] 1959, 10). However, disruptive interactions may occur when the assumptions underlying participants' responses to particular performances become untenable. Participants then find themselves lodged in an interaction for which the situation has been "wrongly" defined—that is, defined in a way that causes discredit to a dissident individual and may attract the embarrassment or hostility of others (p. 12). Those attempting to subvert through parody or resignification may find themselves subject to a "frame trap":

> When an individual is misunderstood and others frame his words and actions, he is likely to provide a corrective account. In this way matters get straight . . . What I want to suggest is that the world can be arranged (whether by intent or default) so that incorrect views, however induced, are confirmed by each bit of new evidence or each effort to correct matters, so that, indeed, the individual finds that he is trapped and nothing can get through (Goffman 1974, 480).

It is possible that attempts at subversion through parody, replication, and repetition may predispose their bearers to a frame trap as repetitions of dominant symbolisms are likely to be interpreted in ways that are congruent with dominant social arrangements (Bordo 1993; Hutcheon 1994). After all, the very marginality of oppositional interpretations of a situation places them at a disadvantage to dominant meanings (Morley 1996, 281). Irony or attempts at resignification through repetition can then be neutralized by being reincorporated into the dominant definition of the situation. More recently, Butler has acknowledged that the politics of resignification are complex and that the possibility of recuperation is always present in any attempted subversion, although she has not retheorized subversion accordingly (Butler 1993, 133; 1996, 111, 121).

While on one hand, Goffman's writing on the tenacity of prevailing definitions of the situation suggests how subversive attempts at redefinition may be blocked, on the other hand, his work on frames and gender schedules sug-

gests possibilities for forms of subversion that do not rely on the ambiguities of ironic, parodic repetition of socially dominant terms. Although Goffman was interested in how interaction usually runs smoothly, even to the extent of protecting existing definitions of the situation, he also acknowledged that social organizations and those embedded in them possess a certain fragility and vulnerability (Lemert 1997, xxxvii).

As discussed, Goffman's schedules and frames set parameters within which presentations of self, including gendered presentations, can take place. The forms and content of the frames and schedules direct whether or not particular presentations are bestowed with credibility. These may be amenable to reconfiguration through expansion, adjustment, or replacement of their terms. Subversion, then, may refer to small-scale attempts to reorganize or supplement these frames and schedules in ways that may encourage new forms of subjectivity and social action.

In summary, Goffman's concepts hold at least two implications for a more thorough rethinking of subversion. First, there is a tendency toward conservatism within interactions, including subjects' reluctance to accede to a definition of the situation that challenges the consensus. This raises the possibility that bearers of ambiguous subversive meaning or action (such as irony or parody) may be subjected to frame traps, with subversions unable to take hold. Second, the concepts of frames and schedules suggest the possibility of reframings and, hence, of reorganizing the meanings that influence interactions. There is, however, another level of the social world that needs to be more fully integrated into this analysis, namely, the macrolevel of social structures and the ways they govern selves and interactions.

BEYOND BUTLER AND GOFFMAN: SUBVERSION, REFLEXIVITY, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

An analysis of social structures forms a central focus for sociology, including sociological examinations of masculinities. Theorists of hegemonic masculinity, sexual scripts, and the differences between men, for example, all examine the relationships between individuals and the social institutions that structure their lives (Allen and Worth 2002; Connell 1987, 1993; Gutterman 2001; Kimmel 2001; Whitehead and Barrett 2001). Butler's writing has tended to suffer from a lack of attention to the materiality of social institutions, even though she does theorize power as both productive and constraining (Rahman 2000, 140). It is perhaps her lack of an analysis of social structure that makes her discussion of displacement of dominant arrangements appear overly optimistic. Goffman can be criticized for his lack of attention to power and systematic inequalities, but he was acutely aware of the organizational structures inherent in a given social order and

the mechanisms through which these structures and individual selves are mediated.

Many sociologists argue that we can discern different but interrelating levels of the social world. Most often, these are understood as a macrolevel of institutions or social formations (e.g., gender hierarchy, institutionalized heterosexuality, the State) and a microlevel of interactions, shared meanings, and individual subjectivities (van Dijk 1992, 88; cf. Scott and Jackson 2000, 175). These two levels relate in a dynamic tension. In the everyday settings of our lives, we act against and in concert with others in ways that express support, cooperation, violence, or appropriation. Whether instituted individually or collectively, these actions legitimate, bolster, contest, resist, and/or leave unaltered the power inherent in social structures. For example, hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated or resisted in part by actual men in interactions with women and other men (Connell 1993, 601).[8]

This reflexive view is appealing because it grants subjective agency while refusing an essentialist view of the subject. Structures condition, although do not wholly determine, the production of subjects, while through their action, these subjects are implicated in reproducing or resisting the structures that require continuous reinforcement to remain stable. We need not choose between either macro- or microlevels of analysis here, just as we need not choose between humanism's sovereign subject or a rejection of the subject completely.

The symbolic is important here too. Socially available meanings and discourses can be understood as resources or materials with which selves are constructed (Crespi 1989; for examples, see Brickell 2002; Hollway 1996). These symbolic resources inform the self as a reflexive project, a continuous "interrogation of past, present and future" (Giddens 1992, 30), and they engender possibilities for emergent forms of social action. Those performing masculinity are therefore constructs and constructors of symbolic orders; simultaneously productive and produced, loci of action and participants of interaction, they may perpetuate and/or resist hegemonic social arrangements.

How, then, might we reformulate subversion? Subversion might represent those symbolisms and performances that present resources and materials for reconfiguring subjectivities and, hence, action and interaction. Subversion would open up possibilities for new means of understanding and enacting masculinity, for example, both individually and collectively.

At the microlevel Goffman's writing on frames, schedules, and felicity conditions is useful here. If gender is best understood as a schedule for gendered enactments or performances, then subversive attempts to add to and subtract from the schedules may be possible. Successful attempts would adhere to felicity conditions by expanding the schedules without disrupting the "jointly inhabitable mental world" that is collectively presupposed, so those engaging the new possibilities would ultimately retain their status as

competent actors. Therefore, subversion may seek to add and proliferate newly permissible ways of being gendered. If the ways in which we understand ourselves as gendered subjects are conditioned at least in part through particular frames that structure social interaction, then subversion may consist of nudging these accepted frames. We might seek to reframe the predominant definitions of the situation that govern performances and understandings of masculinity. These new symbolic resources and reframings may be then taken up, disseminated, and further modified through interaction.

It is at the macrolevel that subversion is likely to prove more of a challenge. Hegemonic masculinities, male dominance, and the possibilities for their displacement are not conditioned by the availability of cultural resources alone. While subjectivity is informed by symbolic resources, it is also conditioned by power and social structures. To do gender is often to do power and may involve men doing dominance and women doing deference (West and Zimmerman 1991). Insofar as the new opportunities opened up by subversion do provide inspiration for resistance, struggle, and changes to the ways power is done in everyday life, microlevel change may filter upwards in a set of capillary movements. Subversive performances of masculinity, then, may involve sets of actions that refuse or challenge the dominance/deference pattern that West and Zimmerman identify.[9] Power relations may be transformed, in part, through "local struggles against the different forms of power exercised at the everyday level of social interactions" (Pease 2000, 9).

One example might be provided by considering Redman's study of young men who engage discourses of romantic love as they negotiate their own identities in relation to masculinity, heterosexuality, social class, and the disciplines of schooling (Redman 2001). The young men in this study draw from the cultural repertoires of (often male-) dominant understandings of romance and heterosexuality as they conceptualize and perform their gendered selves, individually and in interaction with young women and with each other. The young men are constituting and constituted simultaneously as they negotiate the frames and gender schedules delimited by the cultural context in which this negotiation takes place. As these frames and schedules condition masculine selves and the actions undertaken by these selves, they filter upward into hegemonic masculinities and, hence, wider social processes of resistance and accommodation to male domination. In such a context, subversion may involve the introduction of new discourses of romance and (hetero) sexuality that challenge this domination and encourage the young men to resist or work against it. In other examples, subversion may take the form of spectacular street parades to reclaim public spaces from male violence or heteronormativity (Brickell 2000); the introduction of feminist discourses into male-dominated spheres, where previously they were excluded (Gutterman 2001); or challenges to hegemonic forms of masculinity in educational settings (Schacht 2001). Subversion may involve the facilitation of women's involvement in reshaping the institutions of public life or

men's greater involvement in domestic labor accompanied by a commitment to domestic equality (Gerson 1993). While there are complex structural and economic impediments to reorganizing work and public life, these are dependent to some degree on our acting in compliance with and bestowing legitimacy on them.

In this way, more is asked of subversion than resignifications propelled by ironic repetition (McNay 1999, 187; Deutscher 1997, 16). Subversion becomes a potentially productive force, introducing oppositional knowledge, reconfiguring public and private spaces, and opening new possibilities for challenging old patterns of gender performance, including the performance of masculinity. The effects of subversion may for a time be uneven across social contexts and interactions. For example, subversive performances and resistances may initially occasion the empowerment of subaltern groups before diffusing outward into wider social settings (Allen 1998, 466).

CONCLUSION: MASCULINITY'S SUBVERSIVE PERFORMANCES?

It may be that as it stands, Butler's theorizing of performativity and subversion proves rather more well-suited to literary analysis than to social theory. One might investigate how particular texts interpellate masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality or homosexuality and may or may not subvert the logics of prevalent symbolic forms and conventions. Following the "cultural turn," it has been implied that strategies for reading texts may be employed in reading social life more generally. Once we concern ourselves with agency, action, interaction, and institutionalized social practices, however, the inadequacy of a culturalist perspective becomes apparent (Edwards 1998).

At the root of some of the trouble lies the question of agency and subjectivity. Butler's writing displays a range of responses to this question. Performativity generally refers to the discursive mode through which the acting subject is installed. In places, there is "no doer behind the deed" but merely an illusion of a subject constituted by discourse. Agency, including subjective performances of gender, is disallowed. Elsewhere, the subject comes into view and appears to possess a real existence on some level and occasionally exercises varying degrees of agency.

I have argued that we need to move beyond such ambiguity toward an understanding of performance informed by Goffman's writing. Performances are always performed by some one(s), although those ones' selves are reflexively constructed with reference to others and to the symbolic resources provided by the surrounding culture and social structures. The capacity for action does not depend on a self that is already fully existent, so our sense of ourselves as gendered in particular ways is both constituted and constituting simultaneously. In this way, we can reclaim the social action and

interaction central to the notion of gender performance without slipping back into essentialist assumptions about the performers. Meanwhile, we can draw on Butler's writing as we investigate how particular constructions of gender are systematically taken as authentic and immutable and, subsequently, ontologically privileged on that basis.

While Butler's account of subversion includes various constellations of parody, repetition, resignification, displacement, and destabilization, it is rather impressionistic. The omission of an account of social action and structure allows no real understanding about the contexts and constraints under which subversion might take place. Instead, if we understand the symbolic in terms of the cultural resources and materials with which selves are constructed, we can explore its influence on subjectivity, action, interaction, and social structure. The possibility of subversion arises within the dynamic interplay of these aspects of social life, where each influences the others. Strategic breakages or disruptions in the recursive chains linking subjectivity, social structure, action, and social interaction may effect what we can call subversion, and in this sense, we might talk of subversive performance.

Meaningful subversion of dominant forms of masculinity will remain difficult, given their privileging within current social arrangements. However, fissures within hegemonic patterns do permit acts and cultural forms that leave the way open for a reconfiguring of selves and their contexts, initially at the microlevel of society. What we do in our own particular social settings may be capable of ultimately picking at loose threads in the tapestry of domination. There are varying politics at our disposal here, some of which may be said to be subversive.

NOTES

1. The materiality of the body remains a problem for Butler, despite her attempts at rectification in *Bodies That Matter* (Butler 1993).

2. It is not uncommon for other authors to use the terms *self* and *subject* interchangeably as if they were synonymous (e.g., Bordo 1993, 283). That Butler and Goffman use different terms is significant, given their differences on this topic.

3. Goffman recognized that the rejection of the sovereign subject does not necessarily require the rejection of the acting subject—as Marx also noted in his statement that people make their histories although not in circumstances of their own choosing (Hekman 1992, 1099). Insofar as we act, we do in fact "do deeds," contra Butler; there is, indeed, "*one* who takes on a gendered norm" (Butler 1993, 23), albeit a socially contingent and contextual "one."

4. Goffman's most famous example is perhaps that of the segregation of men's and women's public toilet facilities. "Toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex classes, when it is in fact rather a means of honoring, if not producing, this difference" (Goffman 1977, 316). A reversal of causes and effects with respect to sex differences is also expressed in a number of feminist perspectives, including some radical feminism (MacKinnon 1987) and materialist feminism (Leonard and Adkins 1996).

5. Goffman's account of selves in context was elaborated in following decades by a number of ethnomethodologists, including Garfinkel (1967), Kessler and McKenna (1978), and West and Zimmerman (1991). Like Goffman, West and Zimmerman argue that gender is a routine, me-

thodical, and recurring accomplishment, which is undertaken in the virtual or real presence of others, usually in ways that demonstrate our competence to appear as a culturally correct member of our gender. We self-regulate because we "do" our genders under the risk of being assessed as doing them incorrectly and being held to account. For further discussion of the ethnomethodologists on gender performance, see Brickell (2003).

6. While Goffman employs what Sedgwick (1994) has termed a "minoritizing" analysis, which is concerned with a small, and relatively fixed, homosexual minority, Butler adopts a "universalizing" view where the "homo/hetero definition" is an issue of importance to those right across the spectrum of sexualities.

7. While these thoughts on subversion as involving critical reflection contradict another strand of Butler's theorizing on the subject, they also refute Deutscher's suggestion that subversion might refer to nothing more than an instability internal to regulatory systems (Deutscher 1997, 26).

8. Some have expressed reservations about the concept of hegemonic masculinity, claiming it implies fixity and a monolithic understanding of power (e.g., Worth 2002, 121). However, this does not accurately reflect Connell's work in which hegemonic masculinity is a historically and situationally specific state of play that is open to contestation (Connell 1987, 184). It is Connell's original definition of hegemonic masculinity I follow here.

9. These shifts need not be intended. While historical changes in gender relations may result from conscious political struggles, unintended consequences of other shifts are also significant (Segal 1990). One example is the effect on gender relations of increasing women's labor force participation following World War II (Brickell 2002).

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