Performativity or Performance? Clarifications in the Sociology of Gender

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Abstract

The suggestion that gender can be understood in terms of performance or performativity is common within New Zealand sociology, as it is overseas and in other disciplines. This article critically examines the theoretical background to these metaphors: ethnomethodology (Goffman, Garfinkel and others) and the writings of Judith Butler. A close reading of these theorists' work reveals the differences between Butler and the ethnomethodologists, while a number of useful similarities emerge. A synthesis of these authors' strengths allows us to create an integrated checklist which can be taken to specific studies of gender performance.

Introduction

Suggestions that "gender" can be understood as "performative" or "a performance" are now commonplace within sociological discussions on gender, just as they inform work within a range of other (sub)disciplines – literary studies, anthropology, critical psychology, sociolinguistics, women's studies and cultural history. Various recent antipodean examples include Cameron (1996/7) on household labour; Campbell (2000) on alcohol and rural masculinities; Jones (2000) on gender relations within organisations; and Plumridge, Fitzgerald, and Abel (2002) on smoking, youth and gender. Despite the popularity of performativity and performance as metaphors for exploring gender, the two terms are themselves often confused and their theoretical first principles elided. This confusion arises in part because performance and performativity have quite different theoretical antecedents, even though the terms themselves are often regarded as synonymous.

In this article I attempt something of a clarification by critically exploring the two theoretical strands which underlie the use of these

metaphors. Most popular is that exemplified by Judith Butler's writing on performativity. The less popular strand hails from ethnomethodology, and understands gender as a performance or accomplishment achieved in everyday life. The most prominent authors here include Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel, Suzanne Kessler, Wendy McKenna, Candace West and Don Zimmerman.

A close intertextual reading of the work of these theorists reveals the differences between Butler and the ethnomethodologists, demonstrating that performance and performativity differ markedly in the ways they account for social action and gendered selves. At the same time a number of similarities emerge, particularly with respect to the social construction of sex and gender. In the following sections I work through these authors' writings chronologically in order to tease out a number of relevant insights, differences and interconnections. After comparing Butler with the ethnomethodologists, I conclude with an attempt at an integrated theoretical position that adopts the strengths of each theoretical strand and attends to the weaknesses. I propose a checklist for studying gendered enactment which can then be taken to specific studies of gendered identities, milieux and histories.

Erving Goffman and the presentation of gendered self

Goffman's book *The presentation of self in everyday life*, written in 1956, offers the underlying principles which inform his analysis of gender as a performance. For Goffman, there is no authentic core self and no "natural" maleness or femaleness. Fundamentally, the self is an outcome of actors' management of self-impressions to those in their immediate presence (Goffman, 1971, p. 26). Those involved in social interactions will develop their own sense of self as they are influenced by others' impressions on the one hand and seek to manage their own self-impressions on the other. Goffman suggests that we all seek to perform in ways that will gain a favourable impression from others, in the hope of influencing the "definition of the situation" being collectively formulated in the context in question (1971, p. 15).

In this dramaturgical scenario, performances involve "front" and "back" regions, analogous to the relationship between front- and back-

stage in a theatre. The public performance takes place up "front" under the scrutiny of others, while impression-management and performance techniques are practised out "back", screened from the view of others. While an actor might "appear" as a coherently gendered man or woman in the public street, he or she would prepare appearance, emotions and deportment in the privacy of the home, for example.

These performances of self are not voluntaristic, however. Goffman's frame analysis suggests that performances are always constrained by "principles of organization which govern events" in a particular context (Goffman, 1986, p. 10). According to Goffman, individual actors are not free to frame experience as they please. Frames are properties of the social order and organise subjective experiences by providing the meanings governing interpretations of social events. Thus, frames set the parameters within which presentations of self can take place. In his work on gender and advertising, Goffman suggests that gender schedules frame gendered performances, to the extent that gender identity is an illusory artifact of the available "schedule for the portrayal of gender" (Goffman, 1979, p. 8). This schedule is continuously cited in interactive settings, with one's continued characterisation as a member of a given gender category dependent upon displaying a "competence and willingness to sustain an appropriate schedule of displays" (1979, p. 8).

For Goffman there is no natural truth to gender or to "sex", and to this end he rejects the "sex/gender distinction". This distinction was proposed by Robert Stoller in 1968 and adopted for feminism by Ann Oakley in 1972, and it was argued that "sex" could be understood as the biological distinction between male and female, and "gender" the cultural overlay that created men and women, boys and girls (Jackson & Scott, 2002, p. 9).[1] Goffman eschewed such a distinction, arguing that any division of bodies into one of two sexes is itself a product of social practices such

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1. This move sought to open up a space for the criticism of biological determinism and a consideration of the social and cultural arrangements of gender. See Delphy (1996, pp. 1-2) for an interesting discussion of the concept of gender 'role' as an even earlier means of clearing a space in the thicket of biological determinism. Delphy suggests that gender 'role' hails from the sociology of the 1940s, an example of which is Klein (1946).

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as naming and talk in the first instance (Goffman, 1977, p. 319). For Goffman, these social practices do not express "natural" differences so much as produce them (1977, p. 324).[2] To some extent Goffman recognised this as an unequal difference, suggesting that the production of gender generally works to men's benefit at the expense of women (1977, pp. 314-5).

Garfinkel and the managed achievement of sex

Harold Garfinkel's principal contribution to the sociology of gender is his piece "Passing and the managed achievement of sex status in an intersexed person", published in 1967. Garfinkel discusses the case of Agnes, an intersexed person who was assigned to the "male" sex at birth on the basis of possessing a penis and testicles. However, Agnes felt herself to be truly "female", her penis an error in contradiction of the "true facts" of her femininity (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 126). Accordingly, the penis was removed and a vagina constructed at age 17, with Agnes reassigned to the female sex. This reassignment marked a turning point: Agnes had to learn how to "accomplish" femininity.

Garfinkel suggested that Agnes' transition can illuminate the ways in which all people must strive to present themselves as gendered. Garfinkel argues, like Goffman, that for all of us gender is a managed and routinised accomplishment involving particular constructions of self and our representations of these to others. Routinisation ensures that we may "do" our genders without necessarily having to think about the processes involved (1967, p. 181). This accomplishment of gender comes to be regarded by self and others as "a natural matter of fact", as indeed it did for Agnes (1967, p. 123). This "natural attitude" requires one to be either male or female, else one is regarded as a "freak" of nature" (1967, pp. 123-4). In this way, Garfinkel suggests that being one or the other sex becomes a "moral" or evaluative rather than a "natural" matter (1967, p. 124). Like Goffman, Garfinkel does not draw a distinction

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2. Goffman's most famous example is probably 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 honouring, if not producing, this difference" (Goffman, 1977, p. 316).

between sex and gender, regarding genitalia as symbols with which both are socially constructed.

Garfinkel also follows Goffman in his understanding that in order to attain maleness or femaleness one must act in concert with others within particular social contexts involving prevailing "communities of understandings" (1967, pp. 181-2). This is certainly not an individualistic or voluntaristic process. One must adhere to predominant gendered performances, appearances, activities, particulars of talk, attitudes, dress, feelings, membership obligations and style of life (1967, pp. 123-5, 134, 181). If compliant, the reward is freedom from excessive interference by others, otherwise community sanctions ensue (1967, pp. 122-5).

On one important matter Garfinkel disagrees with Goffman's work on the presentation of gendered self. Garfinkel suggests that Goffman's analyses tend to focus on individual, discrete episodes in the presentation of self, but eclipse the ways in which the accomplishment of self is in fact an ongoing matter (1967, pp. 166-7). While Goffman's focus on impression management devices is useful in that it permits an examination of *how* the self and its impressions are managed in particular contexts, it can obscure the ongoing courses of action involved in the mastery of personal circumstances. For example, Agnes' accomplishments of her "new" gender were ongoing rather than episodic, in terms of her sense of herself and her "interpersonal transactions" with others (1967, p. 175). With his focus on longer runs of time, Garfinkel raises the possibility of a socially constructed gendered self with a biography. While receptive to feedback and susceptible to change, reconstruction, inner conflict and inconsistency, such a biography exhibits some continuities over time and the self is able to experience recollection, remembrance, anticipation, and expectancy.[3]

Kessler and McKenna on gender attribution

Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna's book *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach* is concerned primarily with the gender

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[3] In another point of departure, Goffman implies that impression-management is goal-directed, while Garfinkel suggests that the result achieved at the end of the conduct of everyday affairs may not be deliberately striven for (1967, p. 184).

attribution process. These authors explore those means by which bodies become understood as gendered through the granting of meaning, and the manner in which these meanings are reproduced within society.

In the course of elucidating their position on gender attribution, Kessler and McKenna revisit several themes from the work of both Goffman and Garfinkel. Following the lead of the earlier authors in rejecting a distinction between sex and gender, they understand the division between male and female as a practical accomplishment achieved within social settings (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p. 163). This accomplishment is achieved in interactions between performers and interpreters. The display and interpretation involved is guided by social rules for attributing gender to bodies (1978, p. 157), a suggestion not dissimilar to Goffman's notion of gender schedules.

The means by which these performances and accomplishments are widely understood as "natural" is a strong theme in Kessler and McKenna's work. They suggest that "men" and "women" engage in different gendered practices in part because this is necessary in order to convince others that one is one's gender not the other (1978, p. 155). In contrast to Garfinkel, these authors place the emphasis not on sustaining one's particular gender in social interaction, but rather upon sustaining others' sense that one's gender is "natural". Others must be convinced not so much that one is a particular gender, but that one has always been that gender. This, in turn, requires the sharing of trust in order that all agree that events are what they appear to be (1978, p. 158). Through this process, the belief in the naturalness of all aspects of gendering ("the natural attitude") can be maintained. All behaviours are then filtered through the gendered attributions made, and those behaviours made sense of in that context (1978, p. 160).

Kessler and McKenna appear to understand gender enactments and their meanings as more stable than do either Garfinkel or Goffman. While Garfinkel and Goffman imply that the significances of gender enactments are potentially amenable to re-working, Kessler and McKenna see the "natural attitude", once established, as difficult to undermine – however inconsistent or transgressive individuals' performances might be. Once a gender has been attributed to an

individual to the satisfaction of all, the natural attitude prevents the circulation of further cultural anxiety. For Kessler and McKenna, then, the path to large-scale social change lies in dislodging the "incorrigible propositions" of "female" and "male" themselves from their status as external, natural, objective, dichotomous, physical facts (1978, p. 164).

Candace West and Don Zimmerman: "Doing gender"

In their paper illustratively titled "Doing gender", West and Zimmerman also build upon the work of the ethnomethodologists who go before. They adopt Goffman's analysis of gender as a "two-part exchange" involving displays, exhibitions or portrayals which come to signify the "naturalness" of the two sexes/genders (West & Zimmerman, 1991, p. 16). While West and Zimmerman agree with Goffman that gender can be understood as a "socially scripted dramatization", they argue that he does not go so far as to regard gender as part of the "serious business of interaction" (1991, p. 17). These authors also revisit Garfinkel's discussion of Agnes in order to explore the cultural and interactional basis of appearing as gendered. They share Garfinkel's view that gender is a routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment and that the understanding of women and men as natural categories is always socially situated in particular ways (1991, pp. 18-21).

West and Zimmerman's piece adds a few more items to the ethnomethodological gender checklist, and offers a few corrections to what has gone before. Gender is interactional but also micropolitical. Garfinkel's recognition of sanctions upon gender performance can be elaborated: "doing gender" demands competence and thus involves the risk of negative assessment, being called into account or even disciplined. West and Zimmerman introduce a panoptical twist here: we do gender in the "virtual" presence of others as well as their "real" presence, and engage self-regulating processes to ensure we are doing our gender "correctly". This raises interesting questions about Goffman's notion of "back" stage, and whether we ever inhabit spaces entirely free of surveillance, especially when considered in light of Foucauldian analyses of the self within a disciplinary society (Foucault, 1977).

While one form of power involves self-regulation and discipline in the Foucauldian sense, another involves hierarchical relationships between women and men. Given that the very methods of attaining gender competence reinforce ideas about the naturalness of predominant gender arrangements, doing gender legitimates the hierarchical arrangements of male domination. In doing gender, men may be doing dominance and women deference, thus "doing gender" involves "doing power" (1991, p. 33). In adopting such a position, West and Zimmerman hint at the ways in which micro-level social relationships play a part in contesting or reproducing power at the level of social structures.[4]

Gender and performativity: The writings of Judith Butler

I suggested earlier that Butler's writing can be separated theoretically from the ethnomethodological approaches to gender and performance. At no point does Butler credit those writings in her own discussion; rather, she develops her accounts of gender and identity by engaging psychoanalysis, the speech act theory of John Austin, and the materialist feminism of Monique Wittig.

First developed in *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990), Butler's analysis of gendering is derived in part from Austin's work on performatives. These are linguistic declarations that perform actions, including calling objects or situations into being (Austin, 1962). Butler suggests that through performativity – the exercise of performatives – categories such as male and female, man and woman are brought into being. As performative speech acts "bring into being that which they name", so performativity is "the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed" (1996, p. 112). The proclamation "it's a girl!" uttered at birth, for example, is the initiator of a process of "girling" the female subject (Butler, 1993, p. 232). In this respect, performativity operates not dissimilarly to Althusser's notion of "interpellation" or "hailing" (Althusser, 1984).

Butler is commonly misunderstood as arguing that performativity

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4. For more analysis of the relationships between macro- and micro-levels of power, see Jackson (1999), and Smith (1990).

involves subjects performing gendered presentations, even though her performativity does rely upon the repetition of norms through language. Performativity is predominantly a process of invoking the subject, not a performance by a subject:

> [p]erformativity 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. (1993, p. 95)

Incessant repetitions of gendered norms within "a highly rigid regulatory frame" enable the constitution of the gendered subject (1990, p. 33). However, these repetitions are not doings by subjects who originate them, and therefore gender is "not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (1990, pp. 25, 112). While the ethnomethodologists understand the performance of gender as a doing or achievement by actors through which their gendered selves come into being, Butler appears reluctant to grant actors any capacity for enacting gender.

This disinclination to locate agency in the acting subject creates a highly confusing and perhaps insoluble set of problems, which have already been explored to varying degrees (Allen, 1998; Lloyd, 1999; McNay, 1999; Webster, 2000). Some writers have found themselves hopelessly tangled, stressing that Butler disallows the "one" who takes on gendered norms while also suggesting (contradictorily) that she sees gender as "something that one does" (Allen, 1998, pp. 459-60; Lloyd, 1999, pp. 196-201). It would appear that Butler's rather confusing position on this stems from her rejection of the "metaphysics of substance", a term from Nietzsche scholarship signifying the notion of the individual or person as a "substantive thing" (Butler, 1990, p. 20). In her attempt to reject the substantive or sovereign individual, she rejects the acting subject entirely. As a result, Butler tends to reify gendered acts, "gestures", "movements" and "stylization of the body", as though these originate outside of gendered subjects (1990, p. 33). Even in her later work, Butler seems unsure about the extent to which human subjects actually come to exist, and if they do exist what degree of autonomy

they might possess relative to the forms of power which enable them to exist in the first place (Butler, 1993, p. 7; 1997, pp. 12-15; 1998, pp. 278-9).

It seems to me that this set of problems need never have arisen in the first place. As has already been well theorised in sociology, there is no need to regard gendered subjectivity as either essential to the human person or as an illusion to which we are all misguidedly wedded, or to adopt an extreme position in the structure/agency debate. To say we act in the world and that these actions have consequences for ourselves and others is not necessarily to say that we are self-evident, sovereign subjects. We become ourselves through social processes and social interactions; we do construct biographies, but from the resources available to us within our culture – as Garfinkel points out.[5]

While this discussion may at first glance appear tangential, these ontological questions are important. As it stands Butler's analysis frequently fails to meet the demands placed upon it by those seeking a theoretical basis for their studies of gendering in particular contexts. Take, for example, this excerpt from Cameron's study of the construction of heterosexual masculinity through young men's talk:

> For Butler, gender is *performative* – in her suggestive phrase, "constituting the identity it is purported to be" ... Butler claims that "feminine" and "masculine" are not what we are, nor traits we *have*, but effects we produce by way of particular things we *do* ... Gender has to be repeatedly reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms which define "masculinity" and "femininity". (Cameron, 1997, p. 49, original emphasis)

While Cameron looks to Butler to provide a framework in which we do, repeat and reaffirm gender, this does not reflect Butler's position in which we are constituted as gendered through a set of apparently reified acts. In attempting to make Butler's writing useful for her project, Cameron is forced to reclaim the subject and hence to collapse

5. And as Marx famously noted, we make our histories although not in circumstances of our own choosing. For further useful discussion of selves, creativity, agency, cultural resources and social structures, see: Crespi (1989, pp. 97-110), Elliott (2001, p. 32), Giddens (1992), Hekman (1992, p. 1099), and Lemke (1995, pp. 20-4).

performativity (bringing regulatory notions into being) into performance (doing).[6] The outcome is that Butler's performativity is defined in terms of subjective performance when her discussion in fact appears to reject such a proposition.

We need to be able to account for subjective action in the performance of gender, even if this action becomes routinised to the extent that we do not realise or pay attention to what is going on, at least not wholly. In the concluding section I suggest that in this respect, the ethnomethodologists offer a more coherent account of gender performance than Butler does. However, Butler does offer some apposite observations. Her two foremost contributions concern the centrality of heterosexuality and the mimetic aspects of gender performance.

Butler argues that the division between men and women comes to exist only though the invocation of heterosexuality, so the "heterosexual matrix" is central to the gender distinction itself (1990, pp. viii, 18). In contrast, the ethnomethodologists consider heterosexuality incidental to a gender distinction that seeks stability and claims its naturalness for its own stake. Butler, however, argues that an apparently stable and oppositional heterosexuality is a precondition of the internal coherence of gender categories (1990, p. 22). Homosexuality troubles the coherence of the gender distinction, at least potentially. At this point Butler draws from the French materialist feminism of Monique Wittig, for whom the "category of sex" is a construct of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990, p. 21; Wittig, 1992).[7]

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6. To make matters even more complex, Butler's rejection of the subject behind the performance expresses Nietzsche's philosophy rather than Austin's. The latter saw 'performatives' as indeed uttered by active speakers (Austin, 1962, p. 8; Butler, 1990, p. 25).

7. Butler's appropriation of Wittig is not without its problems. Butler ignores Wittig's argument that it is the appropriation of women's labour power and selfhood by men within heterosexuality that creates the "category of sex" (Jackson, 1999, pp. 128-9). While Butler adopts part of the radical feminist analysis of heterosexuality (the argument that gender is an effect of heterosexuality), she disavows and disallows the analysis of male domination that goes along with it. This partly explains her dismissal of Catharine MacKinnon, a radical feminist who also suggests that gender can be understood as a construct of heterosexuality (see Butler, 1994, p. 7; MacKinnon, 1987).

The relationship between gender and heterosexuality as expressed by Butler involves mimesis: particular symbolic invocations of "copy" and "original". She suggests that heterosexuality is erroneously regarded as the "original" form of sexuality with homosexuality as the "copy". This makes some sense of the assertion that gay men and lesbians are inferior copies of "real" (read heterosexual) men and women. Butler queries this equation, arguing that the opposition of "real" and "imitation" gendering is in fact a construct for which there is no "real" original, merely the *idea* of an original. Thus, "gay to straight is *not* as copy is to the 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" (1990, p. 31, original emphasis). All forms of gendering are constructed, some as more authentic than others, and yet what is really going on is the circulation and privileging of particular, imaginary authenticities. According to Butler, dissident forms of gendering may rework and potentially subvert these relationships (1990, p. 34; 1991, p. 23).[8]

How different are these theorists really? Clarifying gender and performance

So far I have suggested that the writings of the ethnomethodologists and Butler contain key differences. They do, however, share some common ground. The following discussion commences with an analysis of the commonalities before returning to the differences between the two theoretical strands.

All writers surveyed here reject the sex/gender distinction that was developed elsewhere during the 1970s, and posits a demarcation between "biological" sex and "socially constructed" gender. This distinction was formulated in order to assert a space for social constructionist and feminist critique in the face of biological determinism, although its critics have more recently suggested that it is itself a social distinction based on the historically-specific nature/culture binary (Delphy, 1996; Scott, 1999; Thompson, 1991). The ethnomethodologists argue that "biological"

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8. While further discussion of the problems and potentialities of subversion is beyond the scope of this essay, see Brickell (forthcoming).

attributes such as genitals possess no meaning outside of social interaction, but can be understood to acquire symbolic meanings that render them important as markers of social distinction. These symbolic meanings are then routinised so they appear to verify the naturalness of differences between male/man and female/woman.[9] For her part, Butler rejects the sex/gender distinction on the grounds that gender cannot follow from sex if it is understood as "the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes", or the means through which sex is taken as a given (1990, pp. 6-7). Sex, like gender, is an epistemological matter, not a "natural" one.

Following on from this, all the theorists surveyed here regard "naturalness" as a cultural construction, the ethnomethodologists generally stressing its origin in interactive situations, and Butler suggesting that it arises from the meeting of discourse and performative acts (1990, p. viii). Apparent stability is contingent: an "accomplishment" (Garfinkel, 1967), which "congeals" over time (Butler, 1990, p. 33). "Natural" sexes as foundational categories do not cause performances and gender arrangements, but can be seen as the effects of these arrangements (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 135; Goffman, 1977, p. 324; Kessler and McKenna, 1978, p. 155), and of the power that regulates the forms these take (Butler, 1990, pp. viii, 8, 16, 32; West & Zimmerman, 1991, pp. 32-3). Incoherent gendering is significant in both theoretical strands: Butler suggests that gendered norms of cultural intelligibility are potentially threatened by the incoherently gendered even though the latter are cast as logical impossibilities (1990, p. 17), while Garfinkel regards gender incoherence as revealing the accomplishment and naturalising of all gendering (1967, p. 118).

The divide between Butler and the ethnomethodologists opens up not beneath questions of natural sexes or authenticity, for indeed both

9. West and Zimmerman represent something of an exception in that they do make a distinction between sex and gender, but even then it is not a purely natural vs cultural one. For them, sex is a "determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria" (my emphasis), while gender is the "activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (1991, p. 14).

positions regard gender (and the ground often covered by "sex") as socially instituted, and both employ metaphors of performance, although not in the same way. It is the ontology of that performance, with the related questions of agency and the self that causes the dissension. While others have understood Butler's writing as a poststructuralist reworking of Goffman, for instance (Bordo, 1993, p. 289), Butler has not acknowledged Goffman as an influence. Rather, she has sought to distance herself from him:

> Indeed, [the term] 'actor' carries a theatrical resonance that would be very difficult for me to adopt within my own work, given the propensity to read 'performativity' as a Goffmanesque project of putting on a mask or electing to play a role. I prefer to work the legacy of humanism against itself, and I think that such a project is not necessarily in tension with those who seek to displace humanism .... (Butler, 1998, p. 285)

This dismissal of Goffman does express the crucial difference between him and Butler: the existence of a performer. While Butler appears to reject the self *in toto* as an illusory effect of the problematic "authentic-expressive paradigm" (1990, p. 22), Goffman does see a self as coming into effect through performance. His concept of self is not a coherent essence who simply performs, but rather something that emerges through an actor's involvement in the performances undertaken during social interaction. While Goffman suggests we bring the potential for action to social interaction, we achieve self only within social, interactional processes (1971, pp. 244-6).

In this respect Butler's criticism is overdone. In her haste to banish all notions of a humanism that represents a core gendered personhood (1990, p. 10), she fails to notice the nuances in Goffman's theorising. While Butler implies that Goffman's notion of performance represents merely the clothing on a humanistic dressmaker's dummy, his theory in fact suggests a much more reflexive process of self-production than this. His self is an outcome of performance as well as an originator and an effect of future performances (1971, p. 26). Similarly, it is difficult to read the other ethnomethodologists as harbingers of a humanistic metaphysics of substance, given their discussions of the ways that

ostensibly immanent gendered selves are in fact social contingencies. Garfinkel extends Goffman's notion of self by introducing the possibility of biography: self as a continuation with a past and a future. Again, however, this is an interactively achieved attainment, not an expression of a humanistic core.

In seeking to banish the self entirely in the name of banishing humanism and the metaphysics of substance, Butler overrules the ethnomethodological insight that gendered selves are accomplished through one's actions – and interactions – in social context. What we need to adopt, and what the ethnomethodologists offer, is a gendered self which is neither pre-social nor insignificant and neither sovereign nor transcendent. Instead, this self comes into being as a social accomplishment through its presentation and performance, within the context of cultural resources, prohibitions and compulsions. The subject *does* sometimes pre-exist the deed, and is reinforced through the enactment of the deed, but it never pre-exists the social relationships in which it is embedded. In addition, these performances through which selves are constructed involve the exercise of power relations at the micro- and macro- levels of society, and the interrelationships between these levels (Scott & Jackson, 1996, pp. 10-11; 2000, p. 175; West & Zimmerman, 1991, pp. 33-4).

Conclusion: the uses of performance

The tradition of ethnomethodological writing on gender is an evolving one. Goffman's *Presentation of self in everyday life* from 1959 represents not a final word so much as a starting point for a particular theoretical trajectory. A layering across time is evident, as each successive author adapts the tradition and adds new ways in which we can understand gender as a performance and an attainment.

This layering has continued. For example, Kessler has recently examined the phenomenon of intersex, expanding upon and taking up the discussion of the male/female division as a cultural phenomenon perpetuated by us all on an everyday basis as well as by powerful social institutions such as medicine (Kessler, 1998, p. 31). The interrelated fields of discursive psychology and conversation analysis draw upon the

ethnomethodological writings surveyed here as they theorise the connections between gender, speech, text, discourse and identity (Stokoe & Smithson, 2001; Weatherall, 2002). The ethnomethodological focus on social interaction and gender as a "doing" has proved particularly useful here. Paul McIlvenny reflects upon the ways in which Butler's work might inform the earlier classics within ethnomethodological tradition (McIlvenny, 2002). However, he seems reluctant to concede that the reverse may also be possible, that ethnomethodology might strengthen a Butlerian approach.

By considering the ethnomethodologists and Butler together it is possible to formulate a useable checklist that we can work through in analysing gendered performances in particular moments and contexts. As sociological theorists and researchers, we can ask how:

- The gendered self is constructed in particular contexts through the presentations actors make in two- (or multi-) way interactions with others;
- Gender presentation or performance can be understood as a reflexive process; or, current performances condition future ones;
- We develop biographies (which may be more or less stable) through the consolidation of gendered enactments and interactions over time;
- Gender is attained in ways considered satisfactory (or not) by selves and others;
- Participants in society "do gender" on an ongoing basis;
- Rules and norms about what constitutes "competent" gendering are established, enforced and changed in particular contexts;
- Those doing gender are subject to the surveillance of themselves and others, and they may be held to account if gender is not done in an approved manner;
- The placing of selves into gender categories, and those categories themselves, come to be seen as natural, and this ostensible naturalness is enforced;
- Doing gender involves micro-level forms of power; or, doing gender involves doing power, and the micro-level relates to wider social structures.

If we then bracket the questions about subjective agency, Butler's analyses offer further additions to the list. We might ask how:

- Discursively informed means of gendering congeal over time to create the illusion that gender is a matter of an abiding substance rather than a construction specific to particularly interested relations of power;
- Repetition and stylisation are implicated in any given form or instance of gendering;
- The gender distinction is created and reinforced through the specific operations of heterosexuality, and the regulatory power accompanying the heterosexual matrix disciplines gendered subjects;
- Gender and heterosexuality rely upon mimetic logics in which the manipulation of symbolic copies and originals may reinforce or challenge dominant relationships.

To some extent this combining of Butler and ethnomethodology already takes place as researchers search for theoretical perspectives to inform their empirical investigations. However, the similarities (and the differences) between Butler and the other theorists are not necessarily recognised at the time, at least not explicitly. By way of example, the following excerpt comes from a public health-based investigation of smoking, youth and gender in New Zealand schools (Plumridge et al., 2002, p. 169):

> Everyone is instantiated as a particular identity through the way they comport themselves. Butler's argument is that identity consists in that 'doing'. Identity is not something we 'acquire', but something we 'do' ... Such presentation of self is inescapable for everyone, and the accoutrements used, the products consumed and the competence in behaviours displayed are the basis of claims and ascriptions of identity. Individuals are not free to 'fashion' identity as they choose, but have to do so under others' reading of their competence.

Plumridge et al. follow Butler in their suggestion that identity is not acquired so much as performatively constituted. However, in arguing that identity is something "we do", they move away from Butler's

aversion to subjective action and toward the "doing gender" approach developed by West and Zimmerman. The idea that we "do gender" under others' readings of our competence is similarly reminiscent of West and Zimmerman, while the reference to "claims and ascriptions of identity" suggests Garfinkel, and the term "presentation of self" echoes Goffman. While Butler is credited with originating this analysis of gender as performance, she is but one of those responsible. It might not even be unreasonable to say that this excerpt resembles Goffman, Garfinkel and West and Zimmerman more than it does Butler.

Butler's disinclination to concede that subjects act in the world ensures that sociologists need to go elsewhere – including ethnomethodology – for an adequate set of theories. (Not that turning to sociology's traditions could possibly be a bad thing, of course!) Thus, Butler's influence is not total, even if the work most often cited in discussions of gender and performance is *Gender trouble*.

The gendered self is a concept that must lie at the heart of sociological investigations of gender. While Butler's subject – if it exists at all – can be understood really only as a discursive outcome, I would much rather see the gendered self as a reflexive construction. It comes into being through our interactive performances among the symbolic resources provided by the surrounding culture and social institutions (Brickell, 2002). As theorists, then, we can reclaim the social action and interaction central to the term performance, without slipping back into essentialist assumptions about the performers. As researchers, we can investigate how gender is "done", and how such doings reproduce gendered selves and bestow illusions of naturalness upon particular manifestations. For her part, Butler can widen the scope of this investigation rather than setting its terms.

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