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Toward a Theory of Female Subjectivity

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Toward a Theory of Female Subjectivity

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Carol Amoroso, and my father, Dr. Anthony Cupo, who loved, supported, and believed in me even when it was quite difficult to do so.

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As all work is in a real sense collaborative, I wish to recognize and thank certain outstanding members of the Sociology Department that helped shape me intellectually. Dr. Vern Baxter helped my developing interest in theory, Dr. Susan Mann reigned in and sharpened this interest, Dr. Rachel Luft forced me to question my theoretical presuppositions and Dr. D'Lane Compton suggested that I might be able to do other things besides theory. I wish also to thank my husband, Phillip Carleton, without whom I would still be several Dimitras ago.

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Abstract

Poststructuralist accounts of gender provide a useful theoretical space to unpack the workings of power and domination as they structure the organization of our language, representations, concepts, and discourse in general. One significant flaw of this theory is a failure to adequately account for the social realm of embodied individuals, social interactions, and interpretive moments. In this paper, I offer conventional femininity as a particular type of gendered habitus that highlights this theoretical flaw as it necessarily links what is promising and useful about poststructuralist accounts of gender with the physical, social, interactive, and interpretive everyday lives of women.

Theoretical Discussion

The abstracted realm of social discourse acts directly on the physical body in constitutive, productive, yet not entirely deterministic ways. These two modes of existence (discursive and material) are so complexly embedded in each other that they cannot be understood in isolation. That is, how women are represented (in images, symbolic systems, and language) and what women actually are[1] (in body comportment, physical strength, ability to speak and act) inform each other in ways that are extremely difficult to untangle. This paper will attempt to highlight the workings of discourse on the physical bodies of women as discussed in current feminist poststructuralist analyses. I will in turn explore a critique of the privileging of the discursive realm inherent to poststructuralism as proposed by the material and everyday practices of women which necessarily imply interactional, interpretive, and social moments. This critique of discourse presented by the material realm is, I believe, central to a feminist emancipatory project because it interfaces the individual's lived experience with macro-level institutionalized forces that regulate, represent, and produce subjects.

In turn, drawing on previous theory and research, I hope to demonstrate the cultural impositions of femininity as inhibitory to achieving a fully articulated subject position (both discursively and materially). Sexual violence, physical force, and symbolic objectification are interrelated elements that must be accounted for to adequately capture the manifestation of femininity in our current cultural moment. As I will argue in this paper, each element is constitutive of dominant cultural representations of femininity. I use "femininity" broadly here; I mean it to represent the discursive practices or physical practices that allow a person to be identifiable as a woman in our current cultural moment. By demonstrating the disabling effects of femininity and relating this to the removal of subject status from a woman's body, I hope to present a materialist-deconstructive feminist analysis[2] in order to pose the theoretical possibility of what I will call a subjectified woman or "female subjectivity". I have posited here two modes of existence – the abstracted domain of social discourse and the material domain of women's bodies and everyday social practices. I believe the possibility of female subjectivity exists at the intersection of these domains, in a space (the feminine body) that is the materialization of power.

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[1] This is not a reference to a biologistic, "natural" female essence or body, only a socially constructed one.
[2] I follow in the tradition of the "new" materialists like Dorothy Smith and Pierre Bourdieu who advance a much broader definition of materialism than the socialist-feminists of the 1970s who equated the material realm with the workings of the political economy and the mode of production (Mann, 2010; Gimenez, 2000). This "new" definition of materialism encompasses cultural practices such as speech, dress, body comportment, and interactions with others as acting in concert with the economy and production in order to generate the social structure of sustained inequality.

Recognizing Women

      To be clear, I will be speaking only to the femininity that produces white, middle-class, heterosexual, gender-conforming[3] women's bodies in the United States during the early 21st century. I wish to emphasize that this does not at all encompass the embodied experiences of women from other racial or ethnic backgrounds or social classes within contemporary American culture nor does it address the embodied experiences of women in different historical periods or geographic locations. By focusing my analysis within the U.S., and recognizing that gender is certainly not the only way bodies are characterized, I wish to highlight gender without prioritizing it (see Bettie, 2003:41 for this position on class). That is, I wish to strategically foreground gender to better understand what it means to propose a gendered subjectivity (social agency for women thusly situated). The femininity described here is a specific kind gender habitus[4] (Bourdieu, 1990); one which is privileged by race, class, sexuality and global location, but does not acknowledge these dimensions of its construction. I justify this position (and will refer to "women" throughout this paper rather than to "white, middle-class, heterosexual, gender-conforming, First-World women") with Ann Cahill's (2000) important observation that this is the standard by which *all* women's bodies are monitored and disciplined[5] and the fact that this particular gender habitus has the power to regulate and to discipline all other femininities by claiming universal or abstract femininity. I do this not to erase the experiences of the many women who do not fall into the narrow, produced and unstable category of "white and middle-class"; I wish only to foreground the power that this "emphasized" or "conventional" femininity (Connell, 1987: 183-188) wields over all women[6].

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[3] My definition of femininity requires that women conform to conventional gender practices within the context of heterosexuality. On this point, Chrys Ingraham (1994) writes, "Ask students how they learn to be heterosexual, and they will consistently respond with stories about how they learned to be boys or girls, women or men, through various social institutions in their lives. Heterosexuality serves as the unexamined organizing institution and ideology (the heterosexual imaginary) for gender" (p.216). Although Ingraham's point is to separate out these two levels of analysis (gender from heterosexuality), I rely on her demonstration of the frequent conflation of these concepts to highlight their imbrication.

[4] Lois McNay offers the following definition for this term: "Bourdieu claims that large-scale social inequalities are established not at the level of direct institutional discrimination but through the subtle inculcation of power relations upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals. This process of corporeal inculcation is an instance of what Bourdieu calls *symbolic violence* or a form of domination which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity. The incorporation of the social into the corporeal is captured by Bourdieu in the notion of *habitus*" (1999:99 emphases in original).

[5] "[W]omen who are excluded from this dominant class are often nevertheless defined or measured over and against this standard. In certain cases, the dominance of this particular articulation of femininity serves to define women of certain ethnicities or classes out of their femininity (and thus, importantly, out of their very humanity)" (Cahill, 2000:51). Highlighting the well-established fact that femininity is always racialized (that gender is constituted racially), for my analysis, the "whiteness" implied in the concept of femininity is an integral part not only of what allows it to claim itself as an abstraction, but also of what marks the denial of subjectivity. This is because the "othering" of this particular femininity provides the constitutive outside to hegemonic masculinity (which is itself imbued with unacknowledged whiteness). Therefore, the whiteness of femininity is not separable from its ability to signify the (falsely universal and necessarily white) sexual object position. In this way, as I understand Cahill's position, women who cannot claim white racial dominance are relatedly prevented from claiming femininity itself.

[6] For example, Gayle Rubin (1984) describes how "good", "natural", "normal", "healthy" sex is highly specific and exclusionary; it is "heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial . . . any sex that violates these norms is 'bad', 'abnormal' or 'unnatural'" (p.152). She notes how "good" sex is privileged in religion, medicine, psychiatry, politics, law and

Foucault (1990 [1978]) confirms that "standard" images or ideals have much regulatory and disciplinary power because the image that is the standard maintains power because of its abstractness and its (false) claim to universality. Images that have become standardized are imbued with this power because they contain specificity that masquerades as the abstract or universal. For my purposes, the whiteness, class privilege, heterosexuality and privileged global location contained in images of femininity are present but unacknowledged parameters of the "standard" that construct and empower the concept itself.

Because I identify as a gender-conforming heterosexual woman who is both white and middle-class[7], my structural positions of race and class and heterosexual (and national and others) privilege are complexly embedded within my structural position of gendered oppression. This limits my ability to speak to other dimensions of identity as I attempt to claim a theoretical space for "female subjectivity". Identifying as a woman not oppressed on any other dimension of structural inequality challenges me to consider in what ways any development of "female subjectivity", as I have defined it here, would be meaningful to women very differently situated in interacting modes of oppression, inequality, and exploitation. While I acknowledge that the ramifications of my theoretical project might bear little significance in the lives of these women, I nonetheless maintain the importance of deconstructing the disabling[8] effects of femininity as it confers femaleness to women otherwise privileged in that this analysis requires my accountability to women excluded from this privilege.

With this, I believe that "woman" as an identity category does not require that individuals do not differ on other dimensions of social privilege or penalty. On the contrary, my ability to identify *as* a woman requires that I eventually identify *with* (other) women (Sedgwick, 2000:51). The as/with distinction reveals the reliance of each claim to identity on the other; identifying *as* a member of an identity category[9] requires subsequent identity *with* other members of the category that are by definition other than me. Any possibility of knowledge that claims to stem from shared identity then actually stems from difference. Spivak clarifies this apparent inconsistency: "The position that only the subaltern can

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other important domains. This is a useful example of how a "standard" is imbued with regulatory power over those it excludes as well as those it purports to represent.

[7] Having been raised middle-class, I have the "cultural capital" (skill set, privileges and entitlements) of the middle-class which undoubtedly informs my position in this paper, although I wish to clarify that for my family of four, our household income is 185% above the federal poverty line which qualifies us for the following social programs: WIC (a supplemental nutritional program for low-income pregnant women or mothers with young children), Medicaid, and NOLAC (free legal aid for low-income residents of New Orleans). Because I believe this paper to be a feminist work, I share the assumption of feminist methods that require the author to disclose her position in social relations because "the generator of knowledge [is] central to understanding that knowledge" (Hurtado, 2004 [1996]:125). This is in purposeful opposition to Western scientific disembodied methods that study "others" with no acknowledgment of the knowledge producer.

[8] I define "disabling" as follows: to remove ability from, to deprive of capacity, to make incapable or ineffective (2010, Merriam-Webster Online).

[9] This refers to strategic, not fixed, essentialism. By foregrounding gender I necessarily evoke a group category that is unavoidably essentialist. I rely here on Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism" (Mann, 2010) which refers to a kind of temporary and imperfect collapsing of identity into a single dimension in order to achieve a political goal.

know the subaltern, only women can know women and so on, cannot be held as a theoretical presupposition either, for it predicates the possibility of knowledge on identity. Whatever the political necessity for holding the position, and whatever the advisability of attempting to 'identify' (with) *the other as subject* in order to know her, knowledge is made possible and sustained by irreducible difference, not identity" (Spivak, 1993: 8 emphasis added). As will be discussed in more detail later, difference is a requisite precursor to any coherent category and the possibility of knowledge rests not on sameness but on difference.

Having clarified my ability to speak to the category of "women", I will proceed with a theoretical inquiry into the violence contained within the particular construction of white, middle-class, heterosexual, imperial femininity. I will be exploring this particular social location as the current hegemonic[10] female social position, while acknowledging that it is always already raced, classed, (hetero)sexualized, and projected from a global position of privilege. While indeed every act is raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized[11], my purpose with this paper is to explore the parameters around what can be read as female in our current cultural moment while acknowledging that gender may be articulated differently by women in different race, class and sexuality (and other) locations. Other structural dimensions of oppression certainly overlap and intersect producing (non-white) raced, (non-privileged) classed, and (non-hetero) sexualized (and others) manifestations of femininity. These articulations are regarded as specific, in need of modifiers (such as "Black woman" or "working-class woman" rather than simply, "woman") and seen as distinct from the falsely universal and unacknowledged privilege and dominance contained in the concept of femininity.

My definition of femininity – as that which secures for a (non)subject the cultural position of "woman" – excludes a certain number of persons with female bodies that are not culturally intelligible as women; these female-identified persons are gender non-conforming. We could call this category of persons "masculine women"[12] [Halberstam, 1999]) who suffer a different kind of violence (as gender

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[10] Although this is not "hegemonic" in the same way that dominant masculinity is hegemonic, the latter having been produced by the ruling "class" of men. I use hegemonic femininity in the sense that it exerts power over all other femininities without explicit consent but instead through general consensus (Connell, 1987).

[11] In her book *Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity* (2004), Ann Arnett Ferguson notes how poor Black boys who do well in school are subjected to accusations of "being gay" from their peers while poor Black girls who do well in school are accused of "acting white". This points to the complex ways race, gender, sexuality and class intersect in everyday situations such that we cannot talk about abstracted "race" or "gender" or any other dimension of identity in any meaningful way.

[12] I wish to distinguish my notion of female subjectivity from Judith Halberstam's (1999) notion of "female masculinity". She notes how masculine women experience their masculinity as "a deep or internal identity effect" (1999: paragraph 7). Although there is often a slippage from "masculinity" to embodied power, she maintains a distinction between the two. For Halberstam, "[masculinity] becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white, middle-class body . . . . But all too many studies that currently attempt to account for the power of white masculinity recenter this white male body by concentrating all their analytical efforts on detailing the forms and expressions of white male dominance" (1998: 2). For her, "masculinity" is not the same thing as the forms and bodily effects of white male dominance. For her, the bodily effects of white male dominance are

non-conforming) than the violence doled out to what we might call feminine, discursively aligned, culturally appropriate women (as gender conforming). Masculine women are culturally inappropriate because they threaten the social order that aligns masculinity with power and power with maleness. They suffer violence because they are socially read as appropriating an embodied subject position which does not cohere with a female body[13] (Bordo, 1993). In other words, they have illegitimately embodied power. This paper will be an exploration of the possibility of a woman's legitimate claim to power *as a culturally recognizable woman* relative to discourse and the physical body. I will call this possibility "female subjectivity".

      To begin, I will provide an overview of some of the major ways gender has been analyzed in the past (focusing on how discourse attempts to describe the physical body), illuminating contradictory views of gender within the history of feminism and how poststructural analyses of gender attempted to transcend these contradictions in contemporary gender analyses.

Difference versus Sameness

      Conservative scientific, religious, legislative and medical discourses hold that women are qualitatively different from men because of the nature of women's bodies. That is, a woman's body is that which separates her fundamentally and without exception from the category of persons we understand as men[14]. Currently, women's bodies are understood to be inherently, qualitatively different from men's bodies. This was not always the case, as in ancient western medicine up to the Renaissance, accounts of female anatomy held that women were inverted or underdeveloped men. Women were understood to be quite the same as men (the fully developed human specimen) so much so that some women could continue development outside the womb and actually turn into men (movement in the other direction was not possible, men could not "regress" into women) (Laqueur, 1986). Although this formulation of ideas served to justify the social hierarchy of male dominance and female subordination, it was based on the logic of a fundamental sameness (Laqueur, 1986).

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more a description of dominance than of masculinity. In Halberstam's analysis, masculinity is an expression of identity, which does not necessarily cohere to male bodies, whiteness, or dominance. For my analysis, "subjectivity" is exactly those bodily forms and effects that express and signal dominance. For my purposes, a subjectified woman is not a woman expressing an internal masculinity; it is a woman demonstrating embodied power. In support of my viewpoint, Susan Bordo defines orthodox masculinity as "the subjectivity which actively defines and constitutes ('penetrates') reality" (1993: 732), it is this kind of subjectivity that I refer to and I understand Halberstam's project to be of a wholly different kind.

[13] Importantly, gender non-conforming women are frequently subjected to both types of violence (physical violence as punishment to a woman illegitimately embodying power [masculinity] as well as sexual violence as punishment for what is seen as the denial of a woman's true social status and physical body [denigrated and violable]). Femininity is enforced in two separate ways here – physically and sexually.

[14] For the social insistence on sexual dimorphism that is unsupported by biology, see Fausto-Sterling's "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough" (1993).

Interestingly, although a justification for gendered oppression has existed since Aristotle and it has based its evidence on anatomy, the social interpretation of this anatomy has dramatically shifted. That is, there has long been a logic of inequality, and it has always claimed anatomical evidence, what changed was what anatomy was called on to explain. It began as evidence as to the fundamental *sameness* of men and women in a hierarchical sense (as in a true hierarchy is an account of sameness just lesser or greater than, quantitatively, in degrees). It subsequently shifted to the pervasive understanding today that is an account of the fundamental *difference* between men and women. This account cannot qualify as a gender hierarchy which is in fact a quantitative difference; it must be understood as radical gendered exclusion/expulsion (a qualitative difference). The motivation behind this shift in interpretation had origins in social and political upheaval.

The original conception of hierarchy based on sameness could not withstand the profound transformations of European society from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (Laqueur, 1986). The Enlightenment presented a challenge to this set of ideas as "Political theorists beginning with Hobbes had argued that there is no basis in nature for any specific sort of authority- of a king over his people, of a slaveholder over a slave, nor, it followed, of a man over a woman. There seemed no reason why the universalistic claims made for human liberty and equality during the Enlightenment should exclude half of humanity" (Laqueur, 1986:18). This time period bore witness to the social revolutions engendered by this kind of thinking; it would also note that the space created for democracy and the empowering of the individual subject over lord and church would necessarily threaten claims to any kind of domination. It was precisely at this time that it became necessary to articulate "a new model of incommensurability" between men and women (Laqueur, 1986:18). This is when women became qualitatively different from men, as evidenced by their bodies. Although the very term "Enlightenment" suggested a new modern era where the light of reason and rationality would render inoperable the superstition, traditions, and irrationality of the feudal premodern era or "dark ages", the maintenance of gender inequality within a framework that legally recognized only the individual rights of "male citizens"[15] required that women be deemed qualitatively different from men, especially as evidenced by their bodies under "scientific" scrutiny.

Feminist reactions to this paradigm shift and concurrent reinterpretations of the body faced new problems – liberal ideology required a neuter body, the workings of which should be of no interest to legislation, labor or discourse (Laqueur, 1986). The body was simply the vessel that contained the rational subject – rationality itself constituted the person (Grosz, 1994). The "individual", in order to represent the universal figure of liberal theory *must* be "disembodied and disembedded" (McNay,

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[15] The law defined a male citizen as a white, married, property-owning, tax-paying male of voting age (Mann, 2010).

1999:95). If it were not abstracted from specific physical attributes, it would be revealed that the "individual" is really the raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized subject of racist, western, imperialist, masculinist thought. Concepts like "individual" or "citizen" are highly exclusionary and any claim they might have to the idea of the universal, abstracted person undefined or uninhibited by bodily specifications is a political fiction (Pateman, 1986). Although a useful political tool to argue against the legitimacy of discrimination, the problem to historical, liberal feminism is that the neuter body, unencumbered by gender effectively erases women's embodied experience, material reality, and consequently negates any basis for political mobilization[16]. Liberal feminism itself (defined as the work which seeks for women full participatory parity – to participate as equals in discourse, language, social interaction, and institutions) then depends on an ideology of sameness (Laqueur, 1986:18; Fraser, 1998). In contrast, more radical feminist perspectives which were unwilling to erase women's embodied experiences, but rather sought to celebrate them[17], depended on an ideology of gender differences (Mann, 2010).

Domination Embedded in Difference

As an unrelenting challenge to all identity politics whose ultimate aim must be the erasure of the identity that mobilized political action, feminism too has struggled with the "equality in difference" dilemma. Toril Moi (1988) explains that the feminism of difference is necessarily implicated in struggles for equality, "For the very case of equal rights rests precisely on the argument that women are *already* as valuable as men. But given women's *lack* of equal rights, this value must be located as *difference*, not as equality: women are of equal human value *in their own way*" (Moi, 1988: 5 emphases in original). In abstracted terms, this would translate as the specificity of women is what guarantees their access to the universal, as it is defined around white, middle-class, heterosexual men (Wittig, 1992). This position, although politically strategic for oppressed groups, does not appear to make logical sense.

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[16] Liberal feminists did organize in this country and quite effectively too. They were instrumental in passing much legal and social reform including anti-discriminatory laws as well as the public recognition that sexual harassment, battery and rape are social problems rather than individual ones. The problem remains, however, in how women are interpreted under existing frameworks that were established by men on the basis of the exclusion of women. Explaining the process by which women can file charges of sexual discrimination, Catherine MacKinnon provides a useful example of this exclusion. Women must choose one of the two following legal arguments: the first, the "equality rule", offers an understanding of women as gender-neutral, abstract, and objective, which is in effect the male standard for men applied to women. The second option is "benign discrimination" which is the view that women are in need of special protection or help. To be a woman claiming sex discrimination under the law, a woman must be treated as either a man or a "lady", "We have to meet either the male standard for males or the male standard for females" (1987:71). There is, under existing law, no understanding of women as women outside of male domination. Another example of the law's inability to accommodate women is The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1964 which although established to protect the working rights of pregnant women, this law understands pregnancy as a hybrid between a disability and an illness.
[17] This became the domain of spiritual feminists and cultural feminists of the second wave women's movement in the U.S. which rested on an essentialist notion of the differences between men and women (Mann, 2010).

Demonstrating an option out of this dilemma by incorporating a poststructuralist critique into the ways in which historians have framed the "equality-vs-difference" debate, Joan Scott deconstructs these terms, each the presumed antithesis of the other, and finds that "equality is not the elimination of difference and difference does not preclude equality" (1988: 38). When these terms are paired dichotomously they create an impossible choice for feminism, "If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable" (1988: 43). This dilemma is itself antithetical to feminism and not logically necessary. The only useful response to this established arrangement of terms is to unmask the power relations that pose equality as the antithesis of difference and to consider the political implications that result (Scott, 1988). We cannot render invisible our differences (neither from men nor from each other) as this would not only erase our political front, but it would fail to recognize that power is constructed on the ground of difference and so must be contested there. Scott recounts that the origin of the meaning of equality, as it is applied to social relations, is in the concept of egalitarianism: it is "a social agreement to consider obviously different people as equivalent (not identical) for a stated purpose" (1988:44). The opposite of equality then is not difference, but inequality or inequivalence of obviously different people in a particular circumstance for a particular purpose. The definition of equal persons differs from that of identical persons in that equal persons (the application of the political notion of equality) requires an acknowledgement of difference. Scott concludes, "Equality might well be defined as deliberate indifference to specified differences"[18] (1988: 44). The feminist assertion of "equality in difference" then does not suffer from an inconsistency in logic, but is instead a necessary feminist critique of falsely constructed binaries that preclude other ways of thinking.

The promise of poststructuralism is that it offers a critique to both liberalism ("women are the same as men") and radical feminism ("women are fundamentally different from men"). It does so by suggesting that an appropriate understanding of the position of women cannot be captured within the confines of this debate. Instead, poststructuralism understands that women exist as "other" to construct

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[18] Joan Scott (1988) is writing here a critique of what she sees as a current trend in theory production to rewrite all historical feminist struggles as inevitably having to choose from one side of the "equality-vs-difference" debate as a political strategy; she rejects this falsely constructed binary and its application throughout history. Her quote I have included here could be critiqued as failing to analyze material differences between women which feminism must *not* be indifferent to. Perhaps this could be the next step in Scott's theoretical project and not a fair critique of her analysis which was to deconstruct each term within the binary and demonstrate its social and not inevitable formulation. A useful extension of her work would be to propose how feminism might understand how women who are differently situated might be able to claim equality as it is defined as "deliberate indifference to *specified* differences", that is not indifferent to *all* differences, especially not the effects of inequality. If power and dominance are constructed on the ground of difference, we must be careful to recognize when differences are used to oppress, exclude and exploit. Differences undoubtedly exist (indeed they are necessary for group cohesion– as Sedgwick [2000] states to identify *as*, one must identify *with*), it is the exploitation of difference not its existence that Scott draws attention to. This does not mean that equality for oppressed groups is not understandable within an account that calls for "deliberate indifference"; it means only that we must qualify which differences we are being indifferent to.

(provide the constitutive outside to) various categories that we employ to describe our social reality (i.e. subject, agent, person, citizen). Revealing this construction highlights the masculine bias inherent in much of what our language allows us to say[19].

In another attempt to account for the workings of power inherent in how discourse shapes our social world, a materialist perspective proposes that an emphasis on difference or sameness ignores the unfolding of history as an inherent conflict of interests and the fact that shifts in ideology reflect less scientific "discoveries" in anatomy and physiology than they codify shifts in social relations (Laqueur, 1985). Indeed, they are "expressed in terms of the body's concrete realities, [however, these shifts in ideology are] more deeply grounded in assumptions about the nature of politics and society" (Laqueur, 1985:16). Wittig (1992) agrees and offers the following caution regarding interpretations of difference, "The concept of difference has nothing ontological about it. It is only the way that the masters interpret a historical situation of domination. The function of difference is to mask at every level the conflicts of interest, including ideological ones" (1992:29). Following Wittig, we may claim that the forcible institution of difference is an aggressive act, attributable to the interests of power working to maintain itself.

Although Wittig has influenced many poststructuralist theorists including Judith Butler, her work is much closer to what one might call a post-radical feminist analysis. Indeed, second wave radical feminist Catherine MacKinnon (1987) elaborated a similar position when she distinguished between what she terms the difference and the dominance approaches to understanding gender subordination. The former which pervades existing law and current justifications for gender inequality has the following underlying assumptions: "[O]n the first day, difference was; on the second day, a division was created upon it; on the third day, irrational instances of domination arose. Division may be rational or irrational. Dominance either seems or is justified. Difference *is*" (34, emphasis in original). This particular alignment of terms clearly rests on the primacy of gender difference with subsequent and conditional divisions which themselves lead to subsequent and conditional instances of dominance. In this way, domination and subordination arises from a fundamental, essential, and unavoidable gender difference in a way that difference is privileged, primary, and productive of unequal social conditions. MacKinnon contrasts this notion with an alternate understanding of gender subordination which she terms the "dominance approach":

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[19] Our language is not color-blind either, as Toni Morrison writes, "Neither blackness nor 'people of color' stimulates in me notions of excessive, limitless love, anarchy, or routine dread. I cannot rely on these metaphorical shortcuts because I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority . . . . The kind of work I always wanted to do requires me to learn how to maneuver ways to free up language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (Morrison quoted in Hurtado, 2004 [1996]:123-124).

> [O]n the first day that matters, dominance was achieved, probably by force. By the second day, division along the same lines had to be relatively firmly in place. On the third day, if not sooner, differences were demarcated, together with social systems to exaggerate them in perception and in fact, *because* the systematically differential delivery of benefits and deprivations required making no mistake about who was who (p. 40, emphasis in original).

This alternate alignment of terms cleverly demonstrates the primacy of domination in subsequent and conditional understandings of the division of gender and its resultant markings of difference. In this latter interpretation, the forcible establishment of power is both a precursor to and productive of gender division as well as the necessary markings of gender difference in order to maintain dominance. In other words, domination came first and difference followed as its justification. Conversations about gender that begin with differences between men and women and subsequently try to explain unequal social conditions have it exactly backwards; this includes discussions about gender that begin with anatomy as well as those that claim all differences are inconsequential. In light of MacKinnon's analysis gender differences are very consequential; they are the consequence of domination. It is the assertion of power that requires differentiation between the dominant and the subordinate; making gender differences and the meaning we infuse them with a description and function of social inequality.

However, it was poststructuralism[20] that has had a seismic impact on feminist analyses over the last three decades. Indeed, one might say that poststructuralism has ushered in a new paradigm of feminist thought. Some important questions raised by this new paradigm that will be addressed in this thesis are: whether bodies are constituted by, or exist outside of, social discourse; whether women can speak in any language that does not exclude or oppress them; and whether women can be subjects or agents in the social world.

Linguistics -The Power of the Word[21]

In the beginning of the 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussere developed a theory that is often called a structuralist account of linguistics (Lemert, 2004). This theory posits that language is a system that

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[20] Wittig and MacKinnon would not claim poststructuralism as their theoretical orientation as their work is much more consistent with radical or post-radical feminism. Importantly, there is much about post-radical feminism that is the antithesis of poststructuralism including post-radical feminism's privileging of dominantion as compared to poststructuralism's privileging of difference. The nuances of this theoretical divergence will be explored more fully in the conclusion of this thesis. It is true, however, that Wittig and MacKinnon both share one of poststructuralism's fundamental assertions which is that the construction of difference is an effect of power; it is for this reason that I include them here.

[21] Irigaray on the power of language and discursive coherence, "I am a woman. I am being sexualized as feminine. I am sexualized female. The motivation of my work lies in the impossibility of articulating such a statement; in the fact that its utterance is in some way senseless, inappropriate, indecent. Either because *woman* is never the attribute of the verb *to be* nor *sexualized female* a quality of *being*, or because *am a woman* is not predicated of *I*, or because *I am sexualized* excludes the feminine gender. In other words, the articulation of the reality of my sex is impossible in discourse, and for a structural, eidetic reason. My sex is removed, at least the property of a subject, from the predicative mechanism that assures discursive coherence" (Irigaray, 1985: 148-149 emphasis in original).

describes difference, so that meaning is conferred simply through conceptual contrast (implicit or explicit). Technically, all definitions contain within them essential contrasts necessary to define the concept itself. Therefore, "any unitary concept in fact contains repressed or negated material; it is established in explicit opposition to another term" (Scott, 1998:37). Thus, there are no positive terms in language (Salih, 2002:31). According to Joan Scott, a structured concept in fact works to falsely represent a dimension of description upon which it relies for its own definition as an independent, autonomous opposite. Meanings are derived from discursively-established oppositional notions rather than some inherently exact opposite. That is, concepts do not actually mean anything, language is provisional, and terms appear fixed but actually circulate (Scott, 1998). Concepts come to have meaning only by their relations with other similar concepts, and the values we assign each. As Saussure affirms: "it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not" (Saussere in Lemert, 2004:156). Dorothy Smith summarizes this understanding of language, ". . . [A] category is determined by the opposing and determining complement from which it is differentiated and carries with it traces of what it is not. Any category, any term, draws into the text or talk as a tacit subtext the other that defines it in difference. There is no discrete category that does not contain the other that defines it in difference" (1996:177).

For example, there is no inherent connection between a sign (the spoken or written word "baby") and its referent (the actual little person that you hold in your arms). All signs derive meaning from their relationship to other signs, or their position within the entire structure of language, "Language, in other words, is a *system of difference*" (Salih, 2002:31 emphasis in original). Important to this analysis, language is a structural system that is independent of the human agents who employ them. In and of itself, language is a justifiable category of analysis. Human subjects are displaced from interest and the relationship between signs in the system of language is upheld. The idea that language does not capture reality, that it does not inherently mean anything, and that it can only signify itself amounted to a philosophical revolution in thinking about language (Phoca and Wright, 1999:34).

Saussere's theory is extended (and modified) by Jacques Derrida (1997 [1974]) who sees not only a system of difference but a violent subordination among the terms within a binary opposition. According to Derrida, the privileged term is so intimately linked to the term it subordinates, that the subordinate term actually generates meaning for the privileged term (Scott, 1994)[22]. The violence present in the

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[22] Esther Newton (1979) provides an interesting visual example of this in her book *Mother Camp*. She describes female impersonators as gay men who perform "the homosexual situation" (negotiating a respectable social self with the knowledge that one's "inner" or "real" self is stigmatized) by playing with the masculine-feminine opposition in their acts. She describes mixing sex-role referents (as in wearing jewelry, makeup and heels with a suit and tie) as follows, "The feminine item stands out so

subordination of dualities (or binaries) does not innocently describe two things in relation to each other as in objectively comparing and contrasting two phenomena. Rather, a binary describes *one* thing, it does so by expelling and subordinating (negating and denying) that which it is not and in so doing establishes its borders and privileges itself. As captured by Elizabeth Grosz:

> The problem of dichotomous thought is not the dominance of the pair (some sort of inherent problem with the number two); rather it is the *one* which makes it problematic, the fact that the one can allow itself no independent, autonomous other. . . The one allows no twos, threes, fours. It cannot tolerate any *other*. The one, in order to be a one, must draw a barrier or boundary around itself, in which case it is necessarily implicated in the establishment of a binary – inside/outside, presence/absence (Grosz, 1994:211 emphases in original).

Misogynistic discourse has produced an account of women's bodies which excludes them from a view of the world that is dispassionate, rational, and objective. As has been widely observed, women's bodies are believed to be incapable of men's achievements because women are inextricably linked to their bodies in a way that has allowed men to be divested from their own (Grosz, 1994). Men exclude their ties to embodiment/nature/mess by projecting these qualities onto women's bodies. They exclude women from knowledge production and place themselves in the entirely false position of mind/reason/order (no nature/mess). As Grosz (1994) concludes, this is the result of collapsing femininity with embodiment.

One major effect of this conflation is the violence directed toward women's bodies. As authority and subjectivity are removed from a woman's body, the logical consequences of this devaluation, subordination, and in essence, dehumanization is a move toward violence as fragility and violation are intrinsic to the social recognition of a conventionally gendered woman's body. This is in effect the removal of women from the position of the subject (producer of knowledge). As women are defined by their bodies, their ability to attain the Enlightenment ideal of dispassionate, rational objectivity is a definitional impossibility. As objects of male desire, protection, and violence (alternately or concurrently), women cannot be said to have subjectivity. Instead, they represent the category of the objectified. As we have seen, a poststructuralist analysis points out that this category is constitutively necessary in order to constitute the subjectified. In other words, that which is not the subject (the object) is necessary in order to establish the subject itself (Butler, 1992; Derrida, 1997 [1974]).

Not only are these binary terms necessary to understand each other (in that they actually constitute each other), but the negated term (here, the object) must undergo a violent expulsion from the primary term (here, the subject). There is purposeful violence then, in the construction of the object. In

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glaringly by incongruity that it 'undermines' the masculine system and proclaims that the inner identification is feminine" (p.123). She concludes, "Even one feminine item ruins the integrity of the masculine system; the male loses his caste honor. The superordinate role in a hierarchy is more fragile than the subordinate. Manhood must be achieved, and once achieved, guarded and protected" (p.129).

the Enlightenment ideal of rational objectivity which informs our own codes of legitimate claims to knowledge, the object is differentiated from the subject in the same way that the body is differentiated from the mind (Grosz, 1994). The subordinate term, (body, object) is expelled to lend definitional coherence to the primary term (mind, subject). The object not only occupies the same devalued position as the body (which is conflated with femininity), it also represents chaos, disorder, and irrationality. The body/object is violently imposed upon to create the rational, disembodied mind/subject. In this way, the object is removed from knowledge. Indeed, the idea of a rational mind capable of objectivity was founded on the exclusion of the body, which is taken to represent (and house) specificity, situatedness, the mess of our unreasonable emotions. The body then, is the result of the expulsion of chaos and disorder necessary for erecting the cohesion and stability of the mind/consciousness (Kristeva, 1982; Douglas, (2002 [1966]). Discourse, then, rests on androcentric and disembodied concepts to define our notion of the "subject"[23].

Given this, I wish to explore the possibility of an embodied female subjectivity that in our current cultural moment appears as both a discursive and physical impossibility. I mean to demonstrate the possibility of a body that has not been radically and violently cast outside of the mind/consciousness/self - the possibility of a recognizable woman that has not been radically and violently cast outside of the subject. I believe an account of a woman's gendered physical practices (that which engenders her culturally intelligible as female) which are incorporated into her production of knowledge could lead us to a fully situated female subject. I specifically do not mean a gender neutral or androgynous subject, but an alternate form of recognizing (and treating) women as there is no possibility for a gender neutral body in the poststructuralist position as I have defined it here. With this, I mean to clarify that I am not proposing an androgynous subject as that would nullify my project of positing a specifically female subjectivity. Within a poststructuralist analysis, a body is either empowered/subjectified/agentic or it is the absence of these things. In the next paragraph, I will define subjectivity through a poststructuralism framework.

The poststructuralist construction of the subject rests on several assumptions. First, that subjectivity is what confers authority to the subject (it is the agentic force; it is what authorizes the subject). Second, that subjectivity is always already masculine; it carries a history and a debt to masculinist ideology. Third, that subjectivity is the individual's embodied claim to power. Fourth, that social forces work to maintain established forms of gendered oppression which privilege men and are predicated on removing from women the power implied in subjectivity. By contrast, I seek to assert the

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[23] Discourse is androcentric and disembodied and it is other things as well. For a discussion of how discourse is raced see Aída Hurtado's (2004 [1996]) *The Color of Privilege*.

possibility of a specifically agentic woman that is culturally readable. The purpose of this paper is then, to explore the possibility of strength and power coming from a woman's body in current social contexts that discursively conflate femininity with weakness. I mean to apply a masculinist term like subjectivity to a woman's body without reductive violence. To arrive at this end, I must first explore in more depth the poststructuralist argument that allows for the reorganization of concepts and thus, a new way of thinking.

Poststructuralist Possibility of Reclamation in Language

Derrida calls for the analytic deconstruction of the operation of *différance* in the binary construction of meaning. This specifically Derridian process of deconstruction[24] consists of first reversing the two concepts and then displacing the meanings attached to each. This process serves to expose the interdependence of seemingly discrete and oppositional terms while locating each in a particular discursive context. Again, as outlined by Elizabeth Grosz:

> Taken together, reversal and its useful displacement show the necessary but unfounded function of these terms in Western thought. One must both reverse the dichotomy and the value attached to the two terms, as well as displace the excluded term, placing it beyond its oppositional role, as the internal condition of the dominant term. This move makes clear the violence of the hierarchy and the debt the dominant term owes to the subordinate one. It also demonstrates that there are other ways of conceiving these terms than dichotomously. If these terms were only or necessarily dichotomies, the process of displacement would not be possible. *Although historically necessary, the terms are not logically necessary* (Grosz quoted in Scott, 1988:49, emphasis added).

This process of deconstruction applied to the possibility of a female subject would go as follows. As Butler (1992) has laid out, currently the fixed referent of the category of women is weakness, and what signifies this is femininity. Displaced at the level of the referent then, the fixed referent of the category of women would become strength and what signified this would be femininity. Significantly, this displacement inherently requires the fixed referent of the category of men to become weakness and what signifies this would be masculinity. This makes clear the reliance of masculinity and strength on the denigrated (expelled) categories of femininity and weakness. This simple linguistic and symbolic exercise clearly establishes the possibility of a different alignment of terms (women are not inherently tied to weakness). Alternately, displacement could be extended to the level of the signifier as follows. The fixed referent of the category of women is weakness and what signifies this would be masculinity. This would then require that the fixed referent of the category of men would be strength and what

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[24] As opposed to a more general dismantling of a text. Also, this process begins to try to locate meaning within a larger discursive context, while still remaining largely indifferent to historical periods, political climates, and relations of power. Importantly, many followers of poststructuralist thought have extended the importance of contextualization by relating discourse back to the material conditions of history and political and economic power.

signifies this would be femininity. This also establishes the possibility of a different alignment of terms (women are not inherently tied to femininity).

In the symbolic realm (discourse), the fixed referent of the category of women is weakness, passivity, violability and femininity is what signifies this category. Therefore the subordination of women becomes justified as the referent for women (weakness) is normalized and conflated with the signifier for women (femininity). While in a discursive realm, we may consider that signifiers do not bear a relationship to anything real, they have a relationship only to other signifiers and are understandable only through other signs within the same system. Even within this abstracted realm, the fusion of women's referent and signifier is consequential in that *women can only be recognized (referred to) by representations of weakness (signified by femininity)*. The way we come into an intelligible space is through "appropriate" (required, enforced) feminine body comportment, which signifies weakness. Women are recognizable as women by signifying violability. That this has consequences for the violence done to women's bodies is not difficult to imagine.

Drawing on Saussure, this deconstruction is meant to reveal two things – that all terms are defined not by what they *are*, but in how they relate to other (indefinable/unreal) terms and that because there is no foundation upon which any term can be said to rest, other definitions (and subsequent ways of organizing meaning) are possible. What this process of deconstruction seeks to establish by exposing the artifice of binary constructs is the "social liberation of the concept from its *natural* "referent" (Poovey, 1988: 59 emphasis added). In demonstrating the artificiality of binary constructs, the identity of each term as well as the discourse that fashions it as natural and prevents any other possibility from articulation, is subject to destabilization. It opens up to scrutiny the logic necessary to circulate and justify hierarchical thinking (Poovey, 1988). *Différance*[25] then can be understood as a tapestry of signification and meaning (discourse) that bears no relationship to the "real" that it is naively assumed to reflect. Lois Shawver (1996) offers the following excellent example as an explanation of "*différance*":

> Imagine observing a quilt on the wall with patches of yellow, blue and
> white. If you notice the yellow and the non-yellow, you see a pattern of concentric
> boxes. If you notice the blue and the non-blue you see a checkered design. Each pattern
> is a play of differences, but it is a different set of differences when yellow is
> differentiated from non-yellow than when blue is differentiated from non-blue, a
> different set of differences that shows us different patterns. What is interesting about this
> shift from one pattern to the other is that it not only calls our attention to a new pattern,
> but that it suppresses our awareness of the other pattern. . . You cannot study the pattern

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[25] Derrida uses this term to describe the interplay between presence and absence, interiority and exteriority. In French the verb "différer" means both "to differ" and "to defer". Derrida's meaning here is twofold; différance is the condition of being different, it is also the condition of being deferred (A. Scott, 2002). The play on words here is not detectable when speaking this word in French, only in writing it. This subtle linguistic disruption is literally "unspeakable" (Phoca and Wright, 1999: 48). His idea of "unspeakable différance" has been appropriated by feminists as it applies to the condition of women in a phallocentric misogynisitic discourse.

of yellows and the pattern of blues at the same time because différance causes one or the other patterns to be 'deferred'. Différance is the hidden way of seeing things that is deferred out of awareness by our distraction with the imagery that captures our attention.

According to Derrida, the relationship between the dominant and subordinate term can be uncovered only by questioning the system in which the artificial construction was made necessary (Derrida, 1982). What any signifier (concept) actually means then, is necessarily undefined and relational, grounded not by truth (as Saussure established – ideas do not predate the words we develop to name them [Lemert, 2004]) but is dependent upon the value assigned to countless other signifiers with which we try to understand it (Derrida, 1982). "Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general" (Derrida, 1982: 11). I wish to draw on his analysis to assert that female subjectivity is likewise a possibility of conceptuality.

The Discursive is Located in the Material

Poststructuralist deconstruction of binaries offers insight into the workings of power behind our notions of male/female, masculine/feminine, and subject/object (among others). It suggests an investigation into the interests (the organization of power relations) behind the conceptualities that are allowed and those that are not. On this point, Chrys Ingraham (1994) quotes Louis Althusser, "A word or concept cannot be considered in isolation; it only exists in the theoretical or ideological framework in which it is used: its problematic". Ingraham goes on to explain that a text's problematic is the tension operating beneath the surface, "It appears as the answer to questions left unasked. It is not that which is left unsaid or unaccounted for, but that which the text assumes and does not speak" (1994:207). Relating ideological frameworks back to the structural forces that shape people's lives, Ingraham concludes: "[I]deology is central to the reproduction of the social order. Because it produces what is allowed to count as reality, ideology constitutes a material force" (1994:207). By defining ideology as a material force, Ingraham offers a possibility of integrating a certain concreteness into the abstracted conceptualizations of discourse/ideology.

Extending this point, we may say that women are discursively established as "other", and what represents this "otherness" is the woman, identifiable by her body. A woman's body is the site upon which "otherness" is established, erected, and justified. That is, what renders a woman socially readable (femininity) is the site upon which violence is constructed. This requires us to fully consider the domain of recognition, established by discourse, as it acts on a woman's body. The domain of recognition, which is the physical articulation of difference, is on the body and in its forms and effects.

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The reverse is also true, that material relations and economic and political interests are in discourse and ideology. That is, bodies are shaped by economic, political, and historical forces that acquire meaning (are codified in) particular discursive contexts. Toril Moi on the importance of this point:

> Women under patriarchy are oppressed because they are women, not because they are irredeemably Other. Anti-semitism is directed against Jews, and South-African racism against blacks, not simply against abstract Otherness. . . The fact that oppressors tend to equate the oppressed group with ontological Otherness, perceived as a threatening, disruptive, alien force, is precisely an *ideological* maneouvre designed to mask the concrete *material* grounds for oppression and exploitation. Only a materialist analysis can provide a credible explanation of why the burden of Otherness has been placed on this or that particular group in a given society at a given time (1988:12 emphases added).

The study of ideology, if not grounded in material relations, is ignorant of its history. Ideologies without history are ideologies without a cause or an explanation and anything without a cause cannot lend itself to systematic analysis. Poststructuralist analysis and the study of semantics were both correct to view discourse and language as inherently justifiable categories of analysis. The error, I believe, was in treating each as a closed system, removed from context, conflict, and history.   To capture the interrelatedness of the government, the economy, the political climate and ideology, Ingraham offers the following: "Materialism here means a mode of inquiry that examines the division of labor and the distribution of wealth in the context of historically prevailing national and state interests and ideological struggles over meaning and value" (1994:205). The interrelatedness between the material and the discursive is complex and deep and each cannot be fully accounted for without reference to the other.

Poststructuralism on the Violence Necessary to Create Sex

In a poststructuralist analysis, subjects are not merely affected by or acted on by discourse (as in Foucault's early work on "docile bodies" (1995 [1977]), they are constitutively produced by discourse as Judith Butler summarizes: "It is simply not a strong enough claim to say that the 'I' is situated; the 'I' is constituted by these positions, and these 'positions' are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as a viable 'subject'" (Butler, 1992:9).

On this point, Butler draws from Derrida who in turn credits Saussere with locating the speaking subject *after* language, and for noting that if language is not a product of the speaking subject, than the subject must be the product of language. Derrida notes how this is to say that the subject only becomes a speaking subject by conforming to the system of language, the play of differences (1982). Judith Butler *materializes* this production of the subject (brings it the level of the body, demonstrates its relationship to

the real [referent]) by highlighting the utter unintelligibility of bodies that do not cohere to the rigid prescriptions of the sex binary. The mark of gender according to Butler, qualifies a body as human, that is, readable. "Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he', and in that naming, the girl is 'girled', brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender" (Butler, 1993:7). With this example it becomes quite clear that we do not have linguistic or discursive space for beings that are not appropriately gendered. Before girl infants are "girled" and boy infants are "boyed" (when "she" or "he" was an "it"), we cannot account for these infants in human terms.

"[G[endering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being" (Butler, 1993:7). Drawing on Wittig and Foucault, Butler asserts "sex does not *describe* a prior materiality, but produces and regulates the *intelligibility* of the *materiality* of bodies" (1992:17 emphases in original). "This does not mean that there is no such thing as the material body, but that we can only apprehend that materiality through discourse" (Salih, 2002:74). Butler argues here that the categorization of sex "can be called a violent one, a forceful one, and that this *discursive ordering and production of bodies in accord with the category of sex is itself a material violence*" (Butler, 1992:17 emphasis added). Because Butler asserts that the body cannot exist before or outside of gendered discourse, the discursive violence that produces a female subject[26] is actually constitutive violence.

Through Butler's poststructuralist framework, we can clearly see that there is no possibility of imagining a human (that is, a subject) that can be said to exist prior to an intelligible reading of gender, as it is gender that constructs the human (subject) as human. Our discursive relationship to gender then, is not descriptive (sorting bodies into one category or another - male or female), but instead operates through exclusion (to assign humanness to a body I must implicitly acknowledge what lies outside this category- that there are persons that lie outside humanness). Those bodies that do not fit into this constructed binary, that are not immediately recognizable as male or female fall into the space of the dehumanized, abjected other against which the category of human is itself established (Butler, 2008 [1990]; Butler, 1993; Kristeva, 1982). Through a similar process, there is purposeful violence done through the act of constructing a subject. Those excluded from subjectivity must also be constructed to counterpose the subject and give this term meaning. The process occurs "through the creation of a domain of deauthorized subjects, presubjects, figures of abjection, populations erased from view" (Butler, 1992:13). By extension, discussion of "identity" cannot exist prior to or outside of discussions of "gender identity" because "'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with

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[26] By "subject" here I am referring to Butler's understanding of the discursive production that establishes the appearance of a social actor. This is different from my definition of a "subject" in the sense of an agentic person.

recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler, 2008 [1990]:22). Subjects then, are the effect of discourse, there is no pre-linguistic, pre-discursive self, subject or body. The gendered body (necessarily gendered before it may be socially intelligible) comes into existence only through the naming (language and discourse) and practices (physical acts) that constitute it (Salih, 2002:65).

Discourse Acts on our Bodies – the Importance of Naming

With her focus on naming and practices, Butler has developed an account of the performative articulations of gender. This notion draws from J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1975) wherein he establishes a linguistic category of "performatives" which function as actions rather than statements (Nussbaum, 2000). This type of utterance does not merely describe or recount an occurrence; it in fact does what is being said. It is an active performance as distinguished from a passive statement. For example, (in appropriate settings) when one says "I bet ten dollars", or "I name this ship . . .", or "I do", one is engaging in a type of utterance that does not report on these events but performs them (Nussbaum, 2000). Importantly, what is considered a performative utterance is determined by social convention and existing rituals, which is undeniably discursive.

Butler adds to this Althusser's concept of "interpellation" – subject positions are extended and accepted through the action of "hailing" (Salih, 2002:78). "[H]e uses the term interpellation to describe the 'hailing' of a person into her or his social and ideological position by an authority figure. Althusser gives the example of a policeman calling out 'Hey, you there!' to a man [sic] on the street. By calling out, the police interpellates the man as a subject and by turning around, the man takes up his position as such" (Salih, 2002: 78). This example nicely demonstrates that with the act of physically turning around the man positions his body into the realm of social discourse; that is, how a physical act positions one discursively[27]. Alternately, glancing at an infant's or fetus' genitals (physical body), the proclamation "It's a girl" effectively establishes her as a subject within social discourse. This type of speech act is performative (in the sense that Butler [from J.L.Austin] uses this term) in that through language, a girl is not being described, a girl is being constituted (Salih, 2002:80). Through language, bodies are never merely described or reported on; they are constituted in the descriptive process. "When we act and speak in a gendered way, we are not simply reporting on something that is already fixed in the world, we are actively constituting it, replicating it, and reinforcing it. By behaving as if there were male and female

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[27] The reverse is also true that by doing something entirely discursive like writing, our bodies must be made visible (in a discursive act, we must position ourselves physically). This argument is made by Monique Wittig (1992) although instead of using the term 'interpellation' (which it could be understood as – constructing a subject in the act of writing) she describes her theory as a "materialist approach to language". She notes that personal pronouns are the mark of gender in language, they "designate the locutors in discourse . . . they are also the pathways and the means of entrance into language". She concludes, "[personal pronouns] forc[e] every locutor, if she belongs to the oppressed sex, to proclaim it in her speech, that is, to appear in language under her proper physical form" (1992:78-79).

'natures', we co-create the social fiction that these natures exist" (Nussbaum, 2000). Butler's notion of performative utterances that discursively produce subjects is how she places her discursive theory back into the realm of the "social", the world of embodied people, activity and interaction, that poststructuralism does not adequately incorporate (Smith, 1996).

The Discursive inside the Material

Within the confines of poststructuralist theory, any rejection of a subjugated status, any attempt to disrupt what discourse has claimed for you can frustratingly only occur within this (oppressive) category. Outside of gender, women are not understood as subjects and therefore cannot speak at all, let alone about their gendered oppression. Butler comments on this point: "This is a 'girl', however, who is compelled to 'cite' the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject. Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, and punishment" (Butler, 1993:232). Women must speak from this category (and write "she" and "her") if we do not, we have no claim to speech. "The 'I' who would oppose its construction is always in some sense drawing from that construction to articulate its oppositions; further, the 'I' draws what is called its 'agency' in part through being implicated in the very relations of power it seeks to oppose" (Butler, 1993:122-123). The constitution of the subject is at once empowering and disabling, "'constitution' carries both the enabling and violating sense of 'subjection'" (Butler, 1993:122-123). Echoing Wittig, Butler sees women entering social discourse "through being called or hailed in injurious terms" (1993:122-123).

With the performance of discursively produced subjects, Butler offers a new way to incorporate the engagement between the discursive/ideological and the concrete realm of social interaction. As an extension, Butler's answer to the complex relationship between materiality itself and discourse is a fully integrated account of the discursive inside the material. She is clear that we should not be content to consider these notions as necessary opposites. To do so would be to invisibilize the workings of power that orchestrates the construction of the body itself (1993:29). "What does it mean to have recourse to materiality, since it is clear from the start that matter has a history (indeed, more than one) and that the history of matter is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual difference" (Butler, 1993:29). We cannot ground our claims for social justice on the materiality of the female body and proclaim that this is the site upon which violations occur and hence what we must mobilize around because "*matter itself is founded through a set of violations*" (Butler, 1993:29 emphasis in original). In other words, we cannot claim anything like equality, justice, or subjectivity by grounding our claims in the "realness" of our bodies as this surface is always already the site of violence and discursive production. "And against those

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who would claim that the body's irreducible materiality is a necessary precondition for feminist practice, I suggest that that prized *materiality may well be constituted through an exclusion and degradation of the feminine* that is profoundly problematic for feminism" (Butler, 1993:30 emphasis added). Materiality for Butler is not reducible to discourse or the stuff of language or a set of signifiers. Indeed to hold this position would be to fail to understand that signification is embedded within materiality from the start. While she presents a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between the realm of ideas and the realm of materiality than was present in earlier modernist attempts that distinguished idealism from materialism, her analysis is not without its own limitations.

The Limits of Discourse – An Historical Critique

Interpellation and performativity are compelling concepts because they focus our attention on how language constitutes us as subjects and so these ideas highlight the constraints we face in claiming for ourselves a subject position uninhibited by the masculinist bias contained in our language. However, it has been argued that these concepts do not adequately explain historical change or social reform. For example, as noted by Aída Hurtado writing about the performance of masculinity, "Enactment, although interesting to study in an evolutionary kind of way is irrelevant to power. It alone does not bring power; power has to already have been allocated to this particular group of people, men, *before* the enactment of manhood can have any meaning" (2004[1996]:127 emphasis added).

This suggests that because power organizes itself first and subsequently seeks out means for its justification (recall MacKinnon's account of dominance arising first and difference following), the organization of power relations behind the organization of ideology is necessary to consider. For example, one might ask how a poststructuralist analysis of the male/female binary and the "othering" of women would be able to address the diverse levels of gender inequality in different historical social formations. Anthropological accounts of some hunting and gathering societies locate significantly more fluid and egalitarian relations among men and women than occurred in later agrarian societies where rigid patriarchal gender relations organized social life (Leap, 1994). Also, in some hunting and gathering societies, hermaphrodites held prestigious positions even though they could not be easily read or categorized as male or female (Reed, 1975). Here it appears that cultural discourses allowed for different bodies since hermaphrodites were not treated as culturally unreadable or abject, but rather as having more prestige and insights than more distinct males or females (Reed, 1975). Yet, the discursively constructed categories of male/female existed in each of these social formations; therefore, we must assume that these categories were constructed around different material relations (of food procurement/production and social organization) and that these factors led to different understandings of gendered relations. That is, if the "othering" of women and the abjection of hermaphrodites only occur under certain historically

specific conditions, this would suggest that discourse is a *product* of transformations in the material world rather than that discourse shapes, molds, or constitutes materiality. Christine Delphy summarizes this point: "A feminist interpretation of history is therefore 'materialist' in the broad sense; that is, its premises lead it consider *intellectual production as the result of social relationships*, and the later as relationships of domination"(2005 [1998]:293 emphasis added).

The Separation of the Discursive with the Material

There is a difference between feminist work that seeks to undermine current social conditions of inequality for women by changing the social structures (material relations) of family, economy, polity, and other gendered institutions, and scholarship that seeks to undermine current social conditions of inequality by establishing a place for women in discourse (language, representations, symbols). I hope to establish with this paper that women's gendered physical practices traverse these two levels of analysis and cannot be said to inhabit one or the other more fully, that is, we cannot hierarchicalize them. I hope to incorporate a materialist- deconstructive feminist analysis that is capable of accounting for these two distinct levels of analysis as they are played out on a woman's body because a woman's body *is* the discursive production interacting with the material reality that establishes the meaning by which she relates to the world. As it relates to social practices, the concept of embodiment is a central feminist concern because it is this fluid, dynamic, and contested border.

Demonstrating a materialist analysis at the institutional level, Nancy Fraser (1998) theoretically separates what she terms "injustices of distribution" (material resources) from "injustices of recognition" (p.141). The latter is not merely a psychological injury as she explains by bringing this type of injustice into the social or material realm:

> To be misrecognized, in my view, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others' conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a *full partner* in social interaction and prevented from *participating as a peer* in social life . . . as a consequence of *institutionalized* patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (Fraser, 1998:141 emphases in original).

With this, Fraser reformulates a status injury as a socially orchestrated attempt to remove personhood from certain groups of people. These injuries are

> . . . rooted in social patterns of interpretation, evaluation, and communication, hence, if you like, in the symbolic order. But this does not mean that they are 'merely' symbolic. On the contrary, the norms, significations, and constructions of personhood that impede women, racialized peoples, and/or gays and lesbians from parity of participation in social life are materially instantiated – in institutions and social practices, in social action and embodied habitus, and yes, in ideological state apparatuses (Fraser, 1998: 43-44).

Fraser takes issue with Butler's (following Foucault's) account of discourse producing subjects as well as her resulting privileging of subversion as taking place only in discourse (with concepts like resignification and performativity). Fraser calls for historicization to reveal the interests of power behind current social relations, in order to highlight the political, economic, and resulting social effects of global capitalism. By broadly defining "material" as that which is more than economic relations of maldistribution, but an organized social instrument of injustice, Fraser rejects the denial of subjectivity to certain persons as reducible to what resources they have (i.e. economic capital, physical capital, cultural capital).

On this point, Bourdieu agrees and refines this observation to specific bodily effects: "[he] argues that social classes develop clearly identifiable relations to their bodies which result in the production of distinct bodily forms. These bodily forms are valued differently and are central to the formation of social inequalities in the quantities and qualities of physical capital produced by individuals" (Shilling, 1993:130). The bourgeois class, for example develops a bodily form that is characterized by "a certain breadth of gesture, posture and gait, which manifests [itself] by the amount of physical space that is occupied . . . and above all by the restrained, measured, self-assured tempo" (Bourdieu, 1984:218 quoted in Shilling, 1993:132). Important to Bourdieu's account of the reproduction of inequality is that there are "*substantial inequalities in the symbolic values accorded to particular bodily forms*" (Shilling, 1993:133 emphasis in original). In a sense this is quantification of the symbolic value attached to the body itself, the meanings we assign to it which establishes Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence". In this way, Bourdieu puts forth his own formulation of how the discursive/ideological is embedded within the material body, that symbolic value is assigned or removed from bodies which justifies reproduction of the system of inequality. Although this system originates with material relations of maldistribution, it is given form and function and justification through a largely discursive incorporation[28] of such an imbalance of power. Echoing Bourdieu by noting how the effects of symbolic violence arise from material oppression and are condensed and abstracted into discourse and ideology, Wittig writes:

> The ideology of sexual difference functions as censorship in our culture by masking, on the ground of nature, the social opposition between men and women. Masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which serve to conceal the fact that social differences always belong to an economic, political, ideological order. Every system of domination establishes divisions at the material and economic level. Furthermore, the divisions are abstracted and turned into concepts by the masters, and later on by the slaves when they rebel and start to struggle. The

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[28] By "discursive incorporation" I am referring to Bourdieu's (1990) understanding of how the political, economic and material system of injustice and inequality gets inside our system of language, concepts, ideology, and discourse. Material maldistribution, oppression, and exploitation become incorporated into discourse, according to Bourdieu, through the symbolic values we assign to different bodies. In effect, this is a symbolic system stemming from material relations that acts on physical bodies. In this way, Bourdieu's analysis posits both an abstraction (of material relations into symbolic values) and a solidification (of symbolic values onto physical bodies).

masters explain and justify the established divisions as a result of natural differences. The slaves, when they rebel and start to struggle, read social oppositions into the so-called natural differences (1992: 2).

In this passage, she locates the effects of domination first in the material/economic realm which later become abstracted into language and concepts. That is, systems of domination establish divisions at the material level which subsequently become abstracted into ideology; these divisions are then justified by referencing "natural" differences. So called natural differences which justify and even appear to cause social inequality are actually its effects. This ties into Bourdieu's argument that social inequalities are represented on our bodies, that symbolic or social value (domination or oppression) appears on the body itself.

Drawing from this understanding that material relations become abstracted into discourse and that in turn, discourse gets solidified into physical bodies, by using a materialist-deconstructive approach to this thesis, I intend to use a very literal definition of physical violability or vulnerability, as I understand these terms to be descriptive of femininity. As I will support with empirical studies later in this paper, I believe the feminine social script literally shapes and deforms a woman's body. Importantly, my understanding of the discursive script that productively molds and restricts feminine bodies is that it is in the analytic domain of discourse - one that exists in a separate dimension of analysis from the economic domain of the structural system. I rely here on Nancy Fraser's (2004) separation of the (economic) dimension of redistribution from the (cultural) dimension of recognition[29], "The point is to account for the existence in capitalist society of at least two major orders of subordination: class hierarchy, which denies some actors the resources they need in order to interact with others as peers, and status hierarchy, which denies some the requisite social standing" (2004:1115). I believe she writes first about women as a subordinated class and second about women as non-subjects. While they do interact in complex ways, she maintains their distinction as will I in this thesis[30].

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[29] In her later work, she extends her analysis to include a third (political) dimension of representation by which she means government and policy.

[30] In attempting to develop an integrated perspective about these two modes of analysis, Nancy Fraser (2004) embraces the phrase originally developed by second-wave socialist-feminists, "dual systems approach". With this approach, she posits two (later, three) separate systems or sets of relations which is quite a controversial maneuver. Separating out patriarchy (gender oppression) from capitalism (class oppression) is not without its critics. The opposition as captured by Joan Acker (1988): "Economic dependence is recognized as fundamental to the powerlessness of women in this society by almost everyone who has written about the condition of women" (p.476). Acker herself proposes a reformulation of the concept of class by arguing that the relations that produce class are also gendered processes. Writing in 1988, perhaps she can be forgiven for not including the well recognized integrated concept today that the relations that produce class not only also produce gender but they produce race and (hetero)sexuality as well. Acker skillfully extends the concept of class to include gendered distribution and gendered relations of production, but she maintains the primacy of a class analysis. By contrast, Fraser maintains the primacy of both redistribution (class) and recognition (race, gender, sexuality and others) without reducing one into an analysis developed for the other. In her later work, Acker (1992) separates out four analytically distinct processes that "constitut[e] the gendered understructure of society's institutions". First are the "overt decisions and procedures" which include hiring practices, defining job descriptions, and legal codes. Second, are the construction of images and ideologies that justify and reinforce the above

The undeniable and important fact that women are economically dependent on men does act on what I believe to be the separate dimension of discourse that acknowledges "recognition" or "subjectivity". That is, economic dependence (maldistribution) and the learned helplessness of femininity (non-subjectivity) are integrally related and the injustice of resource distribution does not go away in positing women as deserving of equal social standing (positing women as subjects). In positing women as subjects, what is contested is femininity itself, which is in effect the injustice of the denial of recognition. In this assertion of subjectivity which is the refusal of the sexual object position, women become subjects (McCaughey, 1998). My analysis then will focus not on the injustices of resource distribution (which is an important but analytically distinct domain) but on the injustices of the discursively established feminine social script, which is the embodied denial of recognition[31]. This is my own formulation of how the discursive/ideological acts on and through the materiality of bodies. My argument then is that women are physically vulnerable because they have learned femininity in becoming women. In other words, women are physically vulnerable when they become culturally recognizable as women.

The Object of Violence – A Woman's Body

In our current cultural moment, women are recognized in the embodiment of femininity and femininity is the demonstration of a non-subject status. The embodied subjectivity of a woman is an inherent contradiction because what we recognize as the successful articulation of femininity is the absence of this subjectivity (MacKinnon, 1987). "That is, the reason that men can travel where women ought not to is only that women can be and are raped (whereas men can be, but are not often), not that women can be and are mugged or beaten up (as in fact men can be, and are)" (Cahill, 2000:55). Dangers exist not to her body, the bearer of her subjectivity, but to her *sexuality* (the part of her that represents her sex, that which signals her social position). This threat of violence is as it root, social.

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practices. Third are interactional processes ("doing gender") and fourth are internal processes (like constructing gender identity). Importantly, she maintains a distinction between practices (the first) and ideology (the second). However, her focus here is on the constitution of work, the separation of production from reproduction and the masculine bias in work, production, the formation of the state and the workings of capitalist economies. This leads her to put forth what I would argue is still fundamentally a class analysis that reduces a gender analysis to class concepts which Fraser's theory does not. Fraser explicitly maintains the distinction between each system and thus does not reduce and grossly distort either in an attempt to understand it within the framework developed for the other. It is for this reason that I side with Fraser, however, my position is distinguishable from Fraser's in that although capitalism and patriarchy are analytically distinct, I believe they interrelate in constitutive ways. I believe her use of the phrase "dual systems approach" implies more autonomy among each system than I believe exists.

[31] For example, a woman fighting off an attacker, verbally confronting a heckler, or even the simple act of unapologetically taking up physical or conversational space, are all demonstrations of the refusal of the cultural impositions of femininity which require that women not do these things. My point in the analytical distinction between the injustices of resource distribution and the injustices of recognition are exemplified in these examples, where economic dependence or independence cannot adequately speak to these assertions of subjectivity.

"The threat of rape, then, is a constitutive and sustained moment in the production of the feminine body" (Cahill, 2000:56). Transwoman activist and author Kate Bornstein positions her lived experience as a born male raised with race, gender, and class privilege in agreement with this analysis:

> "Male privilege is assuming one has the right to occupy any space or person by whatever means, with or without permission. It's a sense of entitlement that's unique to those who have been raised male in most cultures – it's notably absent in most girls and women. Male privilege is not something given to men in this culture, it's something that men take . . . Male privilege is, in a word, violence" (Bornstein, 1994:108).

By describing a sense of entitlement as an act of violence, Bornstein demonstrates an important link between ideology and physical practices. McCaughey agrees that power has created what we have come to recognize as masculinity, not the other way around; similarly, gendered subjugation has created what we have come to recognize as femininity, "The very things that mark us as successful feminine women make us easy victims" (McCaughey, 1997:90).

Wittig calls attention to the material, bodily violence that can result from discourse: "When we use the overgeneralizing term 'ideology' to designate all the discourses to the domain of Irreal Ideas; we forget the material (physical) violence that they directly do to the oppressed people, a violence produced by the abstract and 'scientific' discourses as well as by the discourses of the mass media" (Wittig, 1992:25). In this respect, discourse is real, it has real effects on the body, it is not confined to the abstracted domain of concepts: "It is itself real since it one of the aspects of oppression, since it exerts a precise power over us. The pornographic discourse is one of the strategies of violence which are exercised upon us: it humiliates, it degrades, it is a crime against our 'humanity'" (Wittig, 1992:26). From this perspective, pornography is symbolic violence because it shows women as objects of male sexual fantasies. It depicts women as sexual objects which is necessarily the removal of subjectivity and humanity. It is insightful to note how much this approach shares with certain modernist radical feminist opponents of pornography who also believe that these images have the (performative utterance) power to do what they depict. For example, a certain branch of radical feminist activists led by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon pushed for the enactment of anti-porn legislation[32] on these very grounds[33]. In

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[32] As a skilled legal scholar, MacKinnon produced a sophisticated account of what constitutes "free speech" and is thus protectable under the First Amendment in her book, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (1987). In this work she notes that pornographers wishing to exercise their freedom of speech are inevitably claiming that sexual access to women is freedom. They claim to publish "sex" but do so primarily in the form of women's bodies displayed for erotic male visual consumption. Upholders of this "right" fail to recognize that the marketplace of ideas that the First Amendment seeks to protect is literally a marketplace, those with the most resources can purchase the protection for what they wish to "say" (1987:140). MacKinnon herself has little faith that legal prohibitions on pornography would do anything but further eroticize it. Specifically, she fought for the right of women to sue if they were harmed in the production or distribution or consumption of pornography.

[33] There are other branches of feminism that argue for the protection of pornography on grounds other than the protection of free speech. Gayle Rubin (1993) for example, urges us not to confuse sexually explicit material with sexually exploitative material. She argues for a possibility of material that is both sexually explicit and sexually non-exploitative to women ("feminist porn" if you like). Conversely, MacKinnon and Dworkin argue against this possibility, as they see it, in our current misogynistic

support of the ongoing project to recognize the interrelatedness of ideological representations and material reality Drucilla Cornell offers the following: "Yet for both MacKinnon and Butler, feminist work is grounded in an insistence upon the material force of representations, linguistic as well as visual . . . [both theorists] focu[s] on the ways in which representations have constitutive force, the way in which who we are is deeply connected to how we are represented[34]" (1999: paragraph 3).

As an example of the constitutive force of ideology, Martha McCaughey (1997) presents the challenges faced by women who have sought training in self-defense classes. She describes how verbal or psychological assaults suddenly become visible to women who are training in physical forms of self-defense. A word, a sneer, even a look can be part of the assault. In addition to learning physical maneuvers that would allow a woman to neutralize or overpower an assailant, "women learn a new set of assertive responses to various forms of intimidation, threat, and harassment that fall along the continuum of sexual violence". One instructor explains, "The physical aspect is such a little part of what self-defense is. We women are always defending ourselves all the time, just the little slurs on the street, the looks, the stares, interacting with a boss or teacher that's not taking you seriously. That's all self-defense. That's the harder part of self-defense" (McCaughey, 1997:117). What the instructor identifies as more difficult is not the physical aspect of self-defense but the assertion of subjectivity in social interaction which is evidence to the power of the injustice of discursive non-recognition.

On the power of the ideological to act on our bodies, Sharon Marcus explains that rapes occur not because men are actually, physically, unavoidably stronger then women but because gendered social scripts position men as dominant, aggressive sexual pursuers while woman are positioned as weak, passive, and sexually violable. "A rapist's ability to accost a woman verbally, to demand her attention, and even to attack her physically depends more on how he positions himself to her *socially* than it does on his allegedly superior physical strength" (Marcus, 1992:390 emphasis added). She concludes, "rape is one of culture's many modes of feminizing women" (Marcus, 1992:391). What fosters rape is not the realness of physical bodies but the material realness of discourse that inscribes itself in a woman's flesh. Sharon Marcus explains that to treat rape as a linguistic fact entails "ask[ing] how the violence of rape is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength not from outright,

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discourse, sexually explicit material is *by definition* sexually exploitative for women. I share and draw from their analyses here. For an interesting discussion of the perspective that pornography cannot objectify women, but *must subjectify them* (as in desiring, valorizing, and willingly pleasing the man) because if women are only sexual objects, they have no power to reject and their unconditional acceptance of and insatiable desire for the man is unrepresentable, see Susan Bordo's (1993) "Reading the Male Body".

[34] Monique Wittig responds to the often cited critique that with this argument, we are confusing rape practices with images or symbols: "for us [women] this discourse is not divorced from the real as it is for semioticians" (1992:25). She contends that images and symbols constitute a discourse and this discourse transmits the message that women are dominated. In this way, images that exploit are not merely elements of a signifying system; they are a facet of the reality of oppression.

immutable, unbeatable force but rather from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts" (1992:389).

In sum, the relationship of the signified (language, symbol, representation) to the referent (the real, the physical) is not merely a functional relationship (a simple translation of form); it is necessarily a transformation – a real violence. In this way, what is represented in the symbolic realm can only be translated onto the body by transforming the body. This translation requires a violent transformation, it is an action not just a re-wording, not just a different mode of analysis (as in the discursive interpreted by the physical) (Wittig, 1992). The symbolic then, acts in physically violent ways.[35]

Violence in Language

In Wittig's account, the possibility for challenging oppression occurs first with cognitive subjectivity; which for her is the instance of the oppressed recognizing their oppression (economic, political, and ideological). The best way for her to move back and forth between these levels of analysis (cognitive recognition of exploitation and the exploitation itself) is through language, "Language for a writer . . . is a special material because it is the place, the means, the medium for bringing meaning to light. . . [but] one sees, one hears only the meaning. Then isn't meaning language? Yes, it is language, but in its visible and material form, language is form, language is letter" (1992:66-67). Language for Wittig is the visible, material form of meaning, it is the solidification of ideology into an organized pattern that we can speak and write. It is reified discourse. For Wittig, discourse is an abstraction that becomes material through the emergence of language. Discourse then, falls under the domain of materiality. In this way, Wittig is a radical materialist.

In Wittig's account, when women enter into language, they can only do so in a way that requires the announcement of their gender, of their particularity, as such they are required to announce their distance from the universal (the subject). She focuses her analysis on gendered pronouns. As soon as one writes "I", he or she appropriates language for the initiation of him or herself into social discourse. By writing "I", I am assuming the subject position, acting within language to demonstrate my presence within it. As soon as one writes "she", the reader is startled, required to imagine a gendered body, a conditional body, a reference point that is not, cannot be, universal because it is particular, it is marked away from the norm. By contrast, when a reader encounters "he" or "his", we may continue reading as if nothing has happened to this character we are reading about, because indeed nothing has, "his" gender is

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[35] The following is an example of a traditional interpretation of the symbolic: ". . . with entry into the symbolic order, our immersion in the immediacy of the real is forever lost; we are forced to assume an irreducible loss; the word entails the (symbolic) murder of the thing, etc." (Zizek quoted in Smith, 1993:174). By contrast, my argument here is that in the symbolic our immersion in the immediacy of the real is solidified, not negated.

not marked, it does not call our attention, it does not require a shift in thinking about this subject because "he" is the universal human (Wittig, 1992).

In this deconstruction of language, women may only speak through the language of domination, the language that justifies their subordination. Their only articulable and communicable option is to communicate with the oppressors in the language of their own subordination[36]. Christine Delphy confirms: "For example, are 'body' and 'mind' divisions of something concrete, or are they entries in western dictionaries? And what is the western dictionary, if not the intellectual product of, the rationalization for, an oppressive social system" (2005 [1998]:296).

On the biases inevitably held in language, Ronald Barthes (1979) defines "text" not as the book or paper that you hold in your hand but the meanings that are "held in language" and in an intertextual field (Smith, 1996). As we have seen, entry into this intertextual (or discursive) field requires that one take up the subject position. Importantly, in poststructuralist theory, one must take up the subject position in such a way that denies the subject-object relationship (in the Cartesian sense) and so individual consciousness, perception, and experience are no longer constitutive of our subjective position, "Language or discourse, not the objects or events, determine representation" (Smith, 1996:174). Experience is an unreliable measure of our reality because it relies on the subject that is already discursively determined. In other words, what "experience" establishes is our location within social discourse and not an unmediated route to reality (Smith, 1996).

Saussure's structuralist theory of linguistics takes as a given the notion that language can by itself exist as a subject of inquiry that reveals meanings and relationships. That is, Saussure believed that language can reveal the structurings of the social network without taking into account local and historical contexts of speech acts (Smith, 1996). Dorothy Smith explains this account of linguistics,

> . . . signifier-signified relations exist independently of actual contexts of speaking-hearing and reading-writing. Since people's actual practices of talk or writing/reading are already suppressed discursively, their social character is also already cut away . . . . When we speak and write, a discourse speaks through us. We speak/write/image only within its play of signification. The sign's capacity to signify is an effect of the play of difference within language or discourse (1996:176-177).

Smith's answer to the problems of the ahistorical and disembodied nature of poststructuralism is a kind of symbolic interactionism. In her view, practices must occur before discourse has meaning. Discourse exists as an imperfect and incomplete avenue to the actual meaning that a speaker/writer wishes to extend to a listener/reader. This is her infusion of real women's bodies and lives into the symbolic stuff we have to talk about them. For Smith, reclaiming speech and renaming our experiences

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[36] In her famous article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Gayatri Spivak refers to this form of oppression as "epistemic violence".

forces a new discourse, a new engagement with women's lives, a new kind of speech. This engenders a kind of subjectivity that accounts for women in their own terms.

In agreement with Smith, Bourdieu develops his own account of language that also incorporates the discursive struggle for meaning within language with real social contexts that must interpret this meaning. According to Bourdieu, communication, in the interactional sense is much more than derivations of meaning posed by contested linguistic descriptors. Although language is a justifiable category of analysis that can and does affect our social world we must not mistake one part for the whole:

> As competent speakers we are aware of the many ways in which linguistic exchanges can express relations of power. We are sensitive to the variations in accent, intonation, and vocabulary which reflect different positions in the social hierarchy. . . . We are experts in the innumerable and subtle strategies by which words can be used as instruments of coercion and constraint, as tools of intimidation and abuse, as signs of politeness, condescension and contempt (Thompson, 1991:1).

This is to say that language is a mode of representation (it is discursive) and it requires context and interpretation (it is accountable to our social practices). In writing an introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), Thompson praises Bourdieu for developing an account of linguistic phenomena that fully grasps the workings of the social relations of production such that all interactive speech "bears traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce" (1991:2). Language, then, helps to reproduce the material effects of preexisting power and inequality as derived from the mode of production; it does not by itself bring into being these effects. In this book, Bourdieu critiques Saussurian linguistics for proposing an entirely "internal" account of linguistics that neglects the social and historical practices that brought it into effect. The larger problem with this type of entirely ideological analysis is in positioning language as a self-contained system; as this mistakes an abstraction for an autonomous object. Language is not a homogenous, independently analyzable object, it is really an abstraction "of a particular set of linguistic practices which have emerged historically and have certain social conditions of existence" (Thompson, 1991:5). This emergence is often the result of extensive conflict engendered by the contradictions and oppressive conditions of specific material relations (Thompson, 1991).

Building on the notion of accountability to social practices, Bourdieu also draws from Austin's theory of speech acts and specifically, his notion of performative utterances to demonstrate the limits of positing language as a self-contained system. Such an account of language does not concern itself with who has the right to speak and the authority to be listened to and instead focuses on the generation of meaning within and between established concepts. In contrast, Bourdieu focuses on the *context* necessary to give such an utterance legitimacy (one must be appropriately authorized to name a ship, or in a specific set of circumstances to say "I do" and have it mean what it does). To claim that language is an entirely

self-contained discursive system "is to forget that the authority which utterances have is an authority bestowed upon language by factors external to it. When an authorized spokesperson speaks with authority, he or she expresses or manifests this authority, but does not create it" (Thompson, 1001:9). Authority of speech cannot be understood outside of relations of power which are generated by existing material conditions and modes of power, not abstracted struggles for meaning.

Alternative Ways of Knowing

Political theorist Jane Flax provides another example that critiques treating discourse as a closed system that does not account for articulations of power. In her critique of modernity, Flax, who draws heavily from Foucault, extends current formulations of gender to read a power move behind all presentations of knowledge. Also drawing from Derrida, Flax echoes poststructuralist claims that position order and unity as artificial constructs falsely held up through the expelling of chaos and disorder onto the subordinated term which is necessary in all absolute dichotomies. In the examples of culture/nature, man/woman, mind/body, thought/emotion, and subject/object we can see the establishment of the primary term is constructed in opposition to the unruliness of the secondary term. She calls attention to the forced order, control, and domination present in this process where excesses and abnormalities are pushed outside the boundary and thus silenced and disappeared as the point from which to claim dominance. The heterogeneity and complexity of contemporary life becomes violently and forcibly reduced to two falsely elaborated oppositions.

Flax (1992) also sets out to critique the Enlightenment ideals present today in liberal politics and the pursuit of "objective" science. She calls into question whether freedom or progress is the necessary result of the pursuit of knowledge, whether any claim can actually be objective, and whether reason and rationality can operate as innocently divorced from power as they claim. These premises of Enlightenment thought are problematic because they assume knowledge and truth are cohesive, non-contradictory, autonomous categories. These premises also assume that language is neutral, the real world is stable and able to be captured, knowledge is "innocent" and "clean", and it is available to all who seek it waiting to be "dis-covered" not constructed or formulated (Flax, 1992:457).

Her objection lies in the naiveté inherent in these assumptions as has been revealed by factors involved in the de-centering of the West; namely, the rise of post-colonial discourse, the rise of the civil rights and women's movements in the U.S., and the critique of feminism provided by women of color (Mann, 2010). That is, the essential elements present in Enlightenment discourse (self, freedom, knowledge, individuality, etc.) have been shown to rest upon racialized, androcentric, and privileged frames to support claims of superiority inherent in formulations of Western thought. Rather than having

no relation to history or social position, knowledge then is intimately linked to both and we cannot understand any claim to truth independent of relations of power. What we seek then (what "objective" science seeks, what politics seek, what all claims to truth seek), according to Flax, is power, not disembodied, free-floating truth. Truth is the result of our need for justification, not our need for explanation. In order to justify, nature must be reduced, ordered, and artificially constituted, infused with meaning and held up as "natural" (Connell, 1987).

Similarly, in over twenty years of studying particle physicists, Sharon Traweek (1996) offers some evidence that objective knowledge is *not* free from human (social) constraints. First, she reminds us that because all science is conducted by human beings, all scientific ideas are necessarily social and human. Not only is access to scientific knowledge highly restricted, but the selection of what to study is highly contingent on available resources (the more expensive the research is, the less likely it is to be replicated). Her most illuminating finding is that usefulness to scientists is what decides the status of data and theories, "Adjudicating which experimental data to take as facts and which theories to take as important is a collective process conducted by those who are tacitly empowered with the authority to participate . . . it is not accomplished with definitive findings as to their truth status" (Traweek, 1996:133).

She summarizes our ways of knowing up to this point – dyads (subject/object, good/evil), triads (thesis/antithesis/synthesis, induction/deduction/abduction), and quads (north/east/south/west, Cartesian coordinates). She also notes branching trees, crawling webs and hierarchicalized "orders" (Linnaeus and Darwin). Our near-obsessive focus on stability, regularity, and distinction is not only unsupported by the empirical world, it leads us to close off possibilities that might be true in a way our science cannot recognize, "Every way of making sense has its own cognate forms of obsession . . . swirling around with Occam's razor, slicing away what cannot be categorized, leaves more than order behind" (Traweek, 1996:135). Her call to develop a way of knowing that can allow for irregularity, complexity, and instability finds its inspiration in poetry, music, and dance. Christine Delphy in support of this point, "All knowledge is the product of a historical situation, whether it is acknowledged or not. . . If it is not acknowledged, if knowledge pretends to be neutral, it denies the history that it pretends to explain. It is ideology and not knowledge" (2005[1998]:294).

Relatedly, Dorothy Smith, as well as other standpoint feminists, levels a number of critiques of poststructuralist privileging of discourse that largely ignores history and political struggle. First, in Smith's view, the verb "perform" is nominalized (into "performativity") in Butler's work in order to create an abstraction and not to attribute any action to the individual subject as would be the case with a subject "performing" (Smith, 1996; Thorne, 1995). Smith critiques this privileging of discourse,

"Language conventions are sedimented historically. They cannot be attributed to individual intentions. The individuated consciousness is structurally displaced by language to reappear as a subject who is an effect of language or discourse: 'performativity' substitutes for intention as the originator of action" (Smith, 1996:180). What disappears here is the social, the interaction, the relationship among people:

> The social, conceived as the ongoing concerting of activities among people, is reduced to a solo performance, such that promising, marrying, or launching a ship (Austin, 1962) is an act of an individual, a problem replicated in John Searle's (1969) theory of speech acts: 'in speech act theory, a speech act is conceived as a closed totality where the intention corresponds to the act itself'. The social remains unexplicated, even unnoticed (Smith, 1996: 180).

What Smith wishes to capture with the term "social" is all interactive meaning and nuance that cannot be adequately referenced in discourse. She finds a solution in George Herbert Mead's (1938, 1947) theory of "symbolic communication" where meaning is interactionally determined, "knowledge [is] grounded socially in an interindividual territory constituted by the language–mediated organization of the social act" (Smith, 1996:182). Although writing before poststructuralism, Mead moves from the idea of a contained symbolic system of signs to symbolic communication, a symbolic that exists not in "text" but in the space between the speaker and the listener. Also compelling to Smith is Valentin Volosinov's (1973) account of meaning as the field which exists between an individual psyche and language:

> [A] *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As a word, it is *precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'. I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view (Volosinov, 1973:86 quoted in Smith, 1996:183 emphases in original).

In this view, an individual becomes a subject not through entrance into language or discourse but from the interaction with an/other that language structures and mediates. The third account noted by Smith is Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) idea of meaning as the struggle between what we wish to say and what language has structured for us that is sayable, "[L]anguage, for the individual consciousness, lies on the border between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word" (Bakhtim, 1981:293-294 quoted in Smith, 1996:184).

The above accounts of language do not place the entirety of meaning within discourse; instead meaning is located in dialogue, interaction, between self and other, within the exchanges between people in social relations. Drawing from these perspectives, Smith understands that representation does not occur between a subject and object, instead it occurs in a subject-subject-object relationship that keeps objects (names) in the realm of the social, everyday interactions between people. Objects and the words we use to refer to them occur for Smith in a "dialogic production" (1996:188). In this dialogic or

interactional sense, the social universe produces meaning which is always more than that which is spoken. "Referring is not achieved wholly within language; it relies on a differentiation in the world beyond any given utterance; it is a moment in a social act in which the category used by the speaker provides something like a set of instructions for the hearer to locate and recognize an object that fits the category" (1996:192). As language becomes grounded in interaction, it exists as a bridge between the psychological and the social. Language (and by extension, discourse) becomes contextualized in this manner. This is Smith's understanding of the inadequacy of locating all meaning entirely within the discursive realm and a possible method for relating social practices to ideology and discourse.

Whereas Butler and other poststructuralists would contend that there are no subjects other than those constituted by discourse and that nothing outside of patriarchal misogynist, racist, capitalist culture can be said by a subject position constructed within these confines, for Smith and other materialist feminists, such a view is antagonistic to any project of social justice, as it is inherently anti-feminist and politically nihilist (Moi, 1988; Nussbaum, 2000). The only practical response from a group that is oppressed by this set of economic, political, and ideological relations is to speak from their own experience. Although constructed and confined by their oppression, privileging one's own socially devalued position is itself resistance. Hence, Dorothy Smith (1993) would say yes, there are subjects outside of discourse. In fact her critique of postmodernism argues that women's shared experience gives rise to a critique of the very discourse that does not allow it: "Thus we came to recognize our oppression as women in discovering a politics, forms of representation, and a poetics, in and through discoveries we made in the collaborative telling of our experience. In creating a discourse of women, we created ourselves, women, as subjects of that discourse" (Smith, 1993:184). She creates a space from which women may speak back to the discourse that excludes them, not as object or other but as subject, as agentic women. "Speaking from experience has the power to disrupt discourse, not simply because the feminine speaks and when it speaks it disrupts, but because women speaking their experience as women, speak from where they are in their sexed bodies as they live. Discourse is surprised, has to rewrite itself, has to learn, has to know other than what it did" (Smith, 1993:189).

She brings back into analysis the social relations within which discourse is produced, operates and is organized: "Conceiving discourse as actual practices and activities arising in specific local historical contexts and under definite conditions, rather than as bounded by the realm of meaning, leads us 'naturally' to its articulation in a political economy" (Smith, 1990:207). To do otherwise would leave unanalyzed the lived world of women where "there is no history, there is no work, there is no economy; there are no wars, no misery, no violence, no rape, no watching your children starve. If there is a lived

world, we may not speak of it" (Smith, 1993: 89). The lived world of women then, presents a challenge to poststructuralist accounts of the "othering" of women by incorporating our own bodies and lives.

Having discussed some theoretical critiques posed to poststructuralism by the unpacking of power, the acknowledgement of human/social embeddedness, the significance of the interactional moment, and the lived reality of women's social experiences, I shall now examine a number of empirical studies that illuminate how actual everyday, bodily practices interface with conceptions of gender to further explore the intricate relationship between discourses of gender and non-discursive manifestations of gender (practices).

Empirical Cases

Feminine Gendered Habitus is Learned

Not only is poststructuralist analysis of the "othering" of women unable to deal well with history – with gender relations in qualitatively different historical social formations – but also it does not deal well with time in the sense of an individual's life course. For example, in her influential essay, "Throwing Like a Girl" Iris MarionYoung (2005 [1990]) extends the work of Merleau-Ponty, a philosopher famous for removing the seat of subjectivity from consciousness (the mind) and placing it inside the body itself. Merleau-Ponty describes the act of coming into subjectivity as the body acting on the world, thereby giving meaning to the subject (person) as it (the body) begins to relate to its surroundings. Therefore, meaning is possible for the subject only insofar as the body is able to approach, interact with, and direct the physical world. As the body brings its surroundings into relationship with itself, the self (subjectivity) becomes possible. In this sense, borrowing from Merleau-Ponty, Young understands the body as the "first locus of intentionality" (Young, 2005:36).

Young takes this theoretical framework and combines it with de Beauvoir's account of woman's place as "Other" (or the denial of subjectivity) in a patriarchal society. De Beauvoir contrasts the "Other" (woman) with the "self" (man) who alone can occupy the subject position *because* of the contrast provided by the object position. De Beauvoir understands the position of women in a sexist culture as a fundamental contradiction between the subject and object positions, a required social positioning that is learned at a specific time in a girl's life.

De Beauvoir in her groundbreaking feminist text *The Second Sex* (1989 [1952]), finds the period of adolescence to be the most turbulent and alienating for a girl, as this is when the full weight of cultural prescriptions of femininity descend upon her. Up until adolescence, girls are encouraged to explore the world, engage in physical activities with boys, and satisfy their curiosities. De Beauvoir's phenomenological framework understands this active, exploring pre-pubescent girl as a subject.

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According to this theoretical perspective, a person's ability to act on the world is what gives him/her the idea of him/herself. The active self (or subject) is established in relation to the (body's) ability to manipulate the physical world; by exploring, manipulating and acting upon one's physical environment, a person comes to recognize herself as agentic. For de Beauvoir then, girls are subjects *before* they become "gendered"[37] during adolescence when female body comportment is imposed upon them. What "gendering" for a girl means then, is a subject disabling herself. According to Young (2005 [1990]), as girls learn to appropriate adult femininity, what they are actually learning is to restrict their movements, withhold their strength, and approach other people and things with timidity. Femininity, then, is the process by which a subject (girl) becomes an object (woman) through inhibitions to her body. While written before the rise of poststructuralism, this type of analysis is, nevertheless, a critique of how poststructuralism (as a form of discursive analysis, operating in an abstract domain) ignores an individual's life course. De Beauvoir offers gender as a process that occurs in stages, has boundaries before and after its transformative process, and ultimately as one that is tied to a woman's life journey and everyday social practices and not an abstraction divorced from bodies.

Young takes this concept of de Beauvoir's and applies it to women's accomplishment of physical tasks like throwing a ball, lifting something heavy, or twisting an object with force. Young applies de Beauvoir's theory to explain why a woman tends to duck from a ball being thrown toward her rather than move her body to make contact with it (as a man would). Similarly, she explains that when twisting something women tend to employ the hand and wrist rather than the arm and shoulder (as men do), which are not only much more powerful body locales, they are also required to accomplish the task most efficiently. Young[38] describes the tendency for girls to act on the world in such a way as "inhibited intentionality" or as a subject unable to achieve full subjectivity. She believes this is a consequence of viewing one's self as an object (or more correctly, as the outcome of the discursive denial of viewing her *self* as a *subject*). From a poststructuralist viewpoint, this learning of a gendered habitus is the materialization of a discourse that dominates and violently excludes women.

"As Young emphasizes, the feminine body is constituted as that which is alien to the female subject" (Cahill, 2000:53). Her body is what impedes, it is her obstacle, it is frustratingly weak and ineffective and separates her from her need to act on the world (to become a subject). A girl learning femininity learns to be afraid and immobilized by her *social* position, she learns to fear physical violation and visual consumption and therefore she reins in her body for protection. This is an excellent example

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[37] Poststructuralist theory has refined this concept (indeed, some might say abolished). Importantly, de Beauvoir's analysis was radical enough for her time and current theoretical attempts to understand the objectification of women owe her a great debt. Technically though, poststructuralist theory (see Butler, 1993) positions all subjects unintelligible before they are gendered.

[38] Again, gender is not the only way bodies are characterized and the femininity that Young and de Beauvoir report on is specifically white, middle-class, heterosexual, gender-conforming and globally privileged.

of discourse acting on the body in the context of the physical practices by which fear produces feminization. Our culture's various techniques of feminization also tend to buttress the rape script, since the femininity they induce "makes a feminine woman the perfect victim of sexual aggression" (Marcus, 1992:393). Women can only become subjects according to Marcus, by becoming subjects of fear; which is the necessary counterpart to positioning women as the objects of violence. Subjectivity is possible only in the full grasp of one's violability through its logical manifestation, fear. This socially-established "rape script" assigns us a subject position (one of action) in relation to fear. Women then, understand their subjectivity in fear and learn to associate it with immobility and silence. Paradoxically, we come to identify with a state of subjectivity that is exactly the dissolution of subjectivity (Marcus, 1992:394).

As developed by Sharon Marcus, the power in fighting back is the power accorded to a woman as she moves from a subject of fear to a subject of violence. According to Marcus, exualized violence is specifically not understood as subject-subject violence before the law nor within a typical rape scenario. Sexualized violence is not a fight wherein each participant expects violence from and doles out violence to *his* opponent. Instead, it is an act of terrorism wherein men demand from a woman's body the logical conclusion of the feminine script – passivity, submission and a sexually receptive response to sexual aggression. The act of responding to aggression with aggression positions a woman as a subject, in relation to her own action, in the primal position of defending one's self. It is the rejection of the social script that allows her body to be violated. This very physical act is so powerful because it challenges discourse and it does so with her physical body (McCaughey, 1998).

Feminine Gendered Habitus can be Unlearned

Building on this framework, through an ethnographic study of a wide variety of women's self-defense instruction, McCaughey (1998, 1997) finds what she terms "physical feminism". In martial arts studios, padded-attacker courses, aerobics studios and on firing ranges, McCaughey documents the "metamorphosis" of leaving behind the disabling requirements of femininity in favor of powerful and often violent strategies for a woman to effectively defend herself against attack. She convincingly frames the process of a woman learning her physical boundaries and how to defend them as the active deconstruction of femininity (more correctly, the disabling of the disabling effects of femininity). Her definition of embodied femininity relies heavily on Young's phenomenological analysis of girls' body comportment as reactive and hesitant. This logic has radical implications not only for the integrity of a woman's body but also for her intellectual integrity as "the general lack of confidence that we frequently have about our cognitive or leadership abilities is traceable in part to an original doubt of our body's capacity" (Young, 2005 [1990]:156).

In this sense gender is for women particular bodily practices and comportment that marks a person violable, vulnerable, and defenseless. Self-defense then, becomes an explosive and dynamic undoing of this process of female subjects disabling themselves. Significantly, as women learn self-defense, they learn to undo their feminine inhibitions not just theoretically or cognitively, but physically, in the immediacy of their own bodies (McCaughey, 1998). This is an important way to see the operations of gender ideology manifested not only in social interaction, discourse, and the larger social structure, but also at the level of the body (that femininity is the materialization of gendered oppression). For her, the body is undoubtedly a discursive text, but also the *material* upon which male dominance enforces its authority, therefore a woman's body is an important place to begin to contest both social and physical victimization with physical bodies (McCaughey, 1998). This is a challenge to women's social position made by her bodily practices.

It seems that because these "transformed" women do not *permanently* upset the established heteronormative order, the transformation that takes place for a woman who learns physical defense might not be as radical as McCaughey claims. "[W]omen's refusal of a status of helpless, sexually available objects can be disconcerting. To become a self-defenser is to become a gender transgression" (1997:128). What happens here might be an objectified, heteronormative woman *temporarily* leaving behind the object position as she acts out defensive moves powerfully and violently (in these moments she claims the subject position). We must assume that these women then return to the object position (and leave behind the subject position) because they are able to lead lives unencumbered by harassment and the threat of violence that is always present in the lives of persons who exist outside of gender normativity (that self-defense is *not* recognized as gender transgression)[39].

Self-defensers seem to be subjected to the threat of violence *as heteronormative women* and then for a few moments protect themselves from the actual manifestation of this violence, but they do not remain here, in this position where the imposition of violence on a (heteronormative) woman's body is contested with her own body. We know this because in this space, where a woman protects herself from the violence doled out to (heteronormative) women, she does so *as a heteronormative woman*[40]. What

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[39] McCaughey would disagree with this assertion. In her book, *Real Knockouts* (1997), she recounts many instances where women who participated along side her in various self-defense classes announced to the class a newfound ability to verbally respond to a heckler, talk about a past instance of abuse, or critique mainstream media movie depictions of feminine women's physical incapacity. She noticed that even she seemed to walk differently when alone, with more purpose and force. She understands these newfound instances of subjectivity as "gender transgressions" whereas I do not. To qualify as a gender transgression, in my view, is to leave behind the privileges of gender conformativity, to be unrecognizable as a feminine woman, and to accept the consequences of not cohering to the heteronormative binary.

[40] In using this phrase, I do not wish to conflate oppression along the axis of gender with oppression along the axis of sexuality. In contesting McCaughey's claim that self-defensers are gender transgressions, I mean to highlight the embeddedness of heteronormativity within our concept of femininity. I believe this is not only a fair critique of her work but an important demonstration of the limits of how we can physically challenge discourse if we wish to remain culturally intelligible.

she does not do is live the rest of her life as say, a gender non-conforming woman (the refusal of heteronormative femininity) as this continued embodiment lies outside the constructed heteronormative binary and this would subject her to a different type of violence. McCaughey has found the refusal of the violence directed toward heteronormative femininity, she has not found the refusal of heteronormative femininity itself as she claims. "What feminists talk about interrupting – femininity – self-defensers practice interrupting: They enact the deconstruction of femininity" (1997:90). Her self-defensers do not so much unlearn femininity as they contest (with kicks and punches) its implications (the violability of women).

Importantly, McCaughey succeeds in locating the struggle for dignity and subjectivity in the body. Fighting bodies warding off violence is a powerful visual image that captures an embodied subject struggling to remain so. Also, her analysis positions the transformation of the female body (learning self-defense) as occurring before (indeed causing) the subsequent transformation of the woman's consciousness. That is, women learn to fight in high adrenaline situations, which only later cause them to consider what has prevented them from fighting back all along. In this analysis, a woman's body has brought her to knowledge. Fighting back is a fully embodied articulation of subjectivity in that the physical body is resisting discourse.

McCaughey, drawing on Marcus, clarifies that the physical and sexual violence that men inflict upon women is not subject-subject violence between equals. Rather, it is a demonstration that women are incapable of an appropriate response to aggression. The reasonable assumption here is that a fully embodied subject would react to attempts of physical coercion and intimidation with aggressive physical defense. McCaughey has convincingly demonstrated the removal of subjectivity that occurs with femininity in that feminine women are not confrontational or aggressive, they take up as little space as possible with their bodies and voices. In this way, we may see that if a man is physically or sexually violent with a feminine woman, he is a subject acting on an object. He does not see her as a competitor in a physical challenge, he sees her as a body removed from subjectivity. Because a feminine body is the materialization of unequal power, male domination, and compulsory heterosexuality, learning a different kind of gender habitus (McCaughey calls this unlearning a feminine habitus and replacing it with a "fighting habitus" [1997:95]) enables a critique of discourse through the materialization of its effects on a woman's body.

When Gendered Habitus is Incongruent with Gender Identity

Relatedly, studies that document the transformative process of transsexuals moving across the gender binary are able to shed light on the significance of the physical practices of femininity (or

gendered habitus). Schrock, Reid, and Boyd (2005) found transsexuality could be explained in terms of moving from one position to the other, leaving the gender binary intact while transforming the body. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with nine white, middle-class, male-to-female transsexuals in order to reveal the ways in which born men do "bodywork" in the transformative process of becoming women. "Bodywork" is broadly defined in this study so as to include unlearning the habits (gender habitus) of moving and speaking like men (voice inflection, body comportment) as well as mastering the difficult art of women's make-up and fashion. The interviewees recounted much time and effort monitoring their bodily movement and speech. This self-monitoring led them to different experiences in role-taking, practical consciousness and reactions from others. Adopting women's clothing also became a way to "become a woman". As one interviewee explained, walking like a woman was much easier when she wore women's shoes and sitting like a woman was easier when she wore skirts, because she didn't have to make such a "conscious effort" and the clothes and shoes helped to "reinforce it a lot more" (Schrock, et al., 2005:324). The authors find that as the interviewees learned to retrain their bodies, they began to assume a woman's perspective (the practices altered their subjectivity).

Echoing the transformative process experienced by women in self-defense classes (McCaughey, 1998), repetitive practices of certain bodily movements, comportment, and voice became installed into "bodily memory" (McCaughey's term). This newly formed "memory" is inscribed in the body itself, becoming "naturalized" as an unthinking part of practical consciousness. Because the interviewees were raised under the rubric of hegemonic masculinity where women are "objects" situated under the "male gaze", interviewees had to move themselves from the position of those who employ the gaze to those whose self-monitoring and policing are the result of being subjected to this gaze. Interestingly, shifting oneself into the object position was eventually met with a feeling of greater authenticity, relaxation, and a freedom to be who they "really" are (whereas in McCaughey's study, freedom was acquired from the reverse process – unlearning femininity, or moving from the object to subject position).

"Authenticity" for the transsexuals refers to their newly constructed bodies matching up with cultural prescriptions for behavior. The participants adopted the label "woman" as their core identity before they embarked on a systematic remaking of their bodies. Seeking to have this (already present) sense of self affirmed in interactions with other people, the interviewees worked to remake their bodies to achieve "authenticity" or a consistent sense of self. The authors present their findings as evidence that contradicts postmodernist/poststructuralist theories that attempt to reduce the body to a discursive text or a "sociopolitical construction" as well as Butler's poststructuralist claim that "the body is material because language, which constitutes the body, is material . . . bodies themselves are cultural by-products" (Schrock et al., 2005:315). The authors accuse Butler (and other poststructuralist feminists) of failing to

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acknowledge the materiality (physicality, "realness") of the body and pose their findings as evidence to the contrary[41].

The authors have two main findings: that the women they interviewed used their bodies as a *resource* to represent or communicate their already present core identity as women, and unexpectedly, remaking their bodies altered their subjectivity (with constrictive movements, more smiling, less talking, and so on they came to adopt a woman's perspective). That is, these participants as born men were certain enough of their core female identity to undergo physical and surgical transformations, but it was only upon learning *femininity* that these (already self-identified) women came to inhabit a woman's "perspective". This finding effectively links transformations of the body (here, adopting female body comportment) with an altered practical consciousness.

This study also offers a powerful critique of the poststructuralist emphasis on discursively produced bodies but from a different perspective, that of gender identity. These men possessed an already present gender identity that conflicted with the social reading of their bodies. They subsequently transformed their bodies in order to experience a discursive alignment between their bodies and a social reading or interpretation of their bodies. This speaks to the power of discourse and the pain individuals experience when they feel socially misrecognized or invalidated. However, discourse cannot account for the existence or construction of an identity that discourse itself fails to recognize or actively denies (like in this study, individuals born with men's bodies but who socially identify as female). What a materialist analysis can do in such an instance is to highlight how the learning of feminine bodily practices (gender habitus) is the major agent allowing (producing) discursive alignment (coherence between identity and social recognition) as the body is being transformed. Here, incorporating femininity into a transforming body solidifies discursive coherence. In this instance, a feminine gendered habitus was actively sought and acquired despite the subjects having been raised male, which compromises the poststructuralist notion of a discursively produced subject.

Another study, this time regarding female-to-male transsexuals, also uses the framework of a gender habitus to describe sex category as a *response* to gender. However, in this case it is the embodied belief and social practice of masculinity (gender identity) that individuals possessed before seeking a transformation of their bodies – they identified with a masculine gender habitus and felt most comfortable

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[41] This summary of Butler's argument is not quite accurate as she clarifies in *Bodies That Matter* (1993): "This is not to say that the materiality of bodies is simply and only a linguistic effect which is reducible to a set of signifiers. Such a distinction overlooks the materiality of the signifier itself. Such an account also fails to understand materiality as that which is bound up with signification from the start . . . . To posit by way of language a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality, and the materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition . . . . Can language simply refer to materiality, or is language also the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear?" (p.30-31). Butler then does not fail to account for materiality, she only makes the point that materiality cannot be understood as outside of discursively produced language and concepts since language and concepts are the only ways we have to think and talk about what might fall outside or exist prior to language and concepts!

after they transitioned to male. This is different from the Schrock et al. (2005) study cited above where individuals possessed an embodied belief of femaleness (sex) before pursuing a body transformation – they identified with the female sex and felt most comfortable after they learned a feminine gender habitus. Interestingly, the former study positions a discursively misaligned sexual identity as precipitating a sex change whereas the latter study positions a discursively misaligned gender identity as precipitating a sex change[42]. This speaks to the complex ways gender identities, sexual identities and discourses about sexed and gendered bodies interact.

In the latter study, interviewing 18 female-to-male trans-identified people using semistructured interviews, Dozier (2005) critiques existing theories of gender through a transsexual framework. Confirming the theoretical work of other trans-identified scholars, she highlights the importance of the body in transsexual experience. The author notes, trans people provide an important critique to social constructionist theories of gender that rely too heavily on social interaction[43], a framework that denies not only the material "realness" of the body, but also the persistence of an underlying gender identity[44]. The incongruence of this underlying gender identity with one's physical body is a source of constant tension for the (pre-transitioned) transsexual. This "paradox" of gender identity – socially constructed yet present outside of social situations, is an important space to understand the workings of the social on our physical bodies. Again, this study presents evidence as to the limits of what discourse can explain.

In the process of transitioning from female to male, Dozier's interviewees found that their behavior did not change as much as other people's assignment of meaning to their behavior did. For example, when a butch-looking woman raises her voice and tries to get a saleswoman's attention in a store, this is something quite different from a man doing the same thing. Also surprising was the amount of conversational space and deferment granted to them from other people as they began to be socially "read" as men. Dozier finds that when sex category is unclear or likely to be contested, there is a tendency to rely on stereotypically gendered behaviors. She also found the reverse to be true, that when sex category is not contested, that is, after hormone treatment and chest surgery allowed them to be

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[42] To clarify, the men in the Schrock et al. (2005) study pursued female bodies to achieve greater coherence between an already present sexual identity of female and resultant social interaction. This is a different situation to what Dozier (2005) finds in her study; that participants pursued a male body to achieve greater coherence between an already present gender identity of masculinity and resultant social interaction.

[43] Dozier is specifically referencing symbolic interactionism which proposes a core self with an individual actor in the modernist sense; it also assumes that identity arises in response to social interaction. This perspective is not to be confused with radical social constructionist theories like Butler's and Foucault's that propose identity is a result not of interaction but of discourse which fundamentally displaces the individual actor in the post-modernist sense.

[44] I do not mean to essentialize gender identity, or to leave it entirely in a psychological realm. I mean only to point out its existence. In doing so, I will borrow Judith Halberstam's descriptive phrase of gender identity - it is a "deep or internal identity *effect*" (1999:[21] emphasis added). By naming gender identity an "effect" she remains safely within the poststructuralist position of how identity is constituted. This definition is clever, but it does not overcome the difficulty of explaining a psychological phenomenon with a social-structural concept.

quickly and easily recognized as men in public spaces, the interviewees were able to relax any hypermasculine behavior they developed as women trying to ward off associations with femininity.

An automatic assumption of maleness widened the range of behaviors the interviewees felt comfortable with because their underlying gender identity was confirmed in interactions with other people. However, because the context within which they were displaying their masculinity ("doing gender") shifted as they transitioned from female to male (they were "doing sex" differently), their behavior was interpreted quite differently. In this way, the author presents a balance between sex category and gendered behavior – gender does not arise from the social requirements of one's sex category, as many gender theorists assert (see West and Zimmerman, 1987). Instead, sex provides the context from which to interpret gendered behavior, gendered meaning of behavior is contingent upon readable sex category. This demonstrates the importance of how the physical body (comportment) is read in a social, interpretive situation by others and how this in turn affects the gendered practices of individuals.

Convincingly, Dozier presents her analysis as a way to understand the large proportion of participants in her study (and other studies) of FTMs (female-to-male transsexuals) who after transitioning change sexual orientation (women sexually attracted to other women become men sexually attracted to other men). She posits that the socially and sexually devalued position imprecated in a sexual relationship between a man and a woman is untenable for pre-transitioned FTMs. The interviewees needed their masculinity to be recognized (first by a femme lesbian, then by an effeminate gay man), which is not possible when a woman is sexually relating to a man. Skillfully, Dozier is able to demonstrate how sex (male or female) is an *outcome* of gendered identity (the expression of masculinity is incoherent with a female body; a change of sex is required to establish discursive coherence).

After transitioning from masculine women to masculine men, the participants in this study found their behavior was read by others with much more importance. The now masculine men were given more conversational room, physical space, and respect in general and some even found that women were afraid of them. This suggests the representation of masculinity is fundamentally the bodily comportment and practices that reflect power and at times, the ability to intimidate. In this study, masculinity originated as the masculine gendered practices that born women used to express who they *really* were. An analysis of discourse has little to say about the possibility of this scenario. Similarly, a discursive positioning of subjects cannot account for the incoherence between an individual's gender identity and physical body. This speaks to the power of gendered habitus and its relationship to discursive coherence (masculine men

are important and generate fear, masculine women are laughable[45]). This demonstrates the limits of a poststructuralist analysis that focuses on discursively produced bodies and neglects instances where misalignment occurs.

Another study confirms the reinscription of the sexual binary (man or woman) among those best posed to challenge it. In a nonrandom sample of self-identified masculine-to-feminine transgendered individuals (hereafter transgenderists), Gagne, Tewsbury, and McGaughey (1997) completed 65 semistructured, in-depth interviews, and observed the persistence of heteronormative ideology concerning gender, even within communities whose practices violate these norms. For example, most cross-dressers in their sample (men who wore women's clothing for an erotic experience or to express their feminine side) held very traditional ideas regarding sex and gender. The authors note, "they were masculine, heterosexual men who, when dressed as women, wished to be perceived as feminine, heterosexual female persons" (Gagne, et al. 1997).

The authors also noted a common "final rite of passage" among the volunteers in their study – an individual's initial social emergence dressed as a woman (but *before* sexual reassignment surgery). Because transgendered individuals are considered marginal members of gay and queer subculture, they can use those locations to "experiment" with new identities. Venturing out into a gay bar as a (somewhat) obvious man dressed as a woman, they will have their first experience being treated "like ladies" (Gagne et al. 1997). In this setting, they are likely to meet a category of men termed "punters" (male prostitutes that are experimenting with their own sexual orientation) who happily have sex with men dressed as women. Transgenderists frame this experience as a welcome opportunity to explore the sexual practices of *heterosexual femininity.* These social-sexual encounters are a highly-anticipated rite of passage for transgenderists eager to assume an authentic female heterosexual identity.

The authors note that socially constructed heteronormative prescriptions for behavior are so potent that individuals are more likely to believe they were born with the wrong genitals rather than confront the possibility of challenging the gender binary. The authors echo Dozier's claim by holding their data as evidence that it is gender (masculinity or femininity) that individuals tend to describe as their "core" sense of self which in turn determines sex (male body or female body). Similar to Dozier, they posit the result of sex from gender as inevitable in that changing sexes is what allowed the participants of their study to feel most "normal" and "authentic" (discursively aligned). This is further evidence as to the limits of a poststructuralist explanation where everything is rooted in a radical notion of social

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[45] Most often, participants reported that harassment radically declined after they were easily socially read as men. This was, however, dependent on the assumption of whiteness and the appearance of sufficient masculinity on a male body; as small, feminine men reported feeling more vulnerable to attack after transitioning and Black men reported that they were subjected to increased surveillance and rude treatment after transitioning.

constructionism. The ability of transgenderists to move within the gender binary and their unique perspective on what constitutes heterosexual femininity (that it may authentically be embodied by a born man) presents a challenge to a discourse that produces subjects to support established interests and cannot adequately address the emergence of individuals that are discursively incoherent.

Masculine Gender Habitus as Learned Violence

The following four studies demonstrate in different ways the constitutive violence, regulation, and reliance on intersecting dimensions of identity that are present in prevailing accounts of masculinity. In her book, *Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity* (2004), Ann Ferguson offers an ethnographic analysis of the role that public schools play in producing a simultaneously disempowered and feared Black masculinity[46]. For boys, the enactment of masculinity brings the rewards of a good gender performance, namely, "a thoroughly embodied display of physical and social power . . . while the consequences of an inadequate or bad performance are significant, ranging from ostracism and stigmatization to imprisonment and death" (Ferguson, 2004:171). She notes the importance of physical displays of power: "Fighting is a mechanism for preparing masculinized bodies through the playful exercise of bodily moves and postures and the routinized rehearsal of sequences and chains of stances of readiness, attack, and defense" (Ferguson, 2004:187). She makes a distinction among boys from different class locations; for middle-class boys, fighting takes place in institutionalized arenas, with school and community funding and support, while for working-class boys it happens spontaneously, on the street, in unsanctioned locations. "Though class makes a difference in when, how, and under what conditions it takes place, fighting is the hegemonic representation of masculinity. Inscribed in the male body . . . is the potential for this unleashing of physical power" (Ferguson, 2004:191). She concludes, "Fighting is the emblematic ritual performance of male power. Participation in this ritual for boys and for men is not an expression of deviant, anti-social behavior but is profoundly normative, a thoroughly social performance" (Ferguson, 2004:193)[47]. By highlighting the linkage between socially recognized masculinity and the physical practices of aggression and defense, Ferguson merges the abstractness in the production of Black masculinity with the socially necessary interactive moment of interpretation. In discussing the physical

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[46] I am unsure of the ramifications involved in switching to a discussion of Black masculinity without accounting for the ways in which this differs from hegemonic (white, middle-class, heterosexual, etc.) masculinity. I have included Ferguson's book here because she presents a nuanced analysis of the ways race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect in the lives of poor and working – class Black boys within the public school system in the U.S. The parallel I draw here is not to erase the significance of racial oppression in the lives of these boys; rather, it is to demonstrate one similarity in the construction of white and Black masculinities which is the reliance of both on gender, heterosexuality, and class to orchestrate a social position of power.
[47] Ferguson notes that girls do fight in school (at much lower frequencies) but when they do, it is considered an aberration, and as resulting from the girl's individuality, not explainable by or reflective of her "femaleness" (2004:191).

preparations and contexts involved in unleashing one's physical power, she effectively links masculinity as a discursive concept with the physical practices associated with embodied power and violence.

Her findings are echoed in Kimmel and Mahler's (2003) article, "Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001". In this study, the authors offer a link between retaliatory violence and accusations of inadequate performances of masculinity. The authors find that all of the individuals in their national study of school shooters who had committed random acts of gun violence were adolescent white boys who had been teased relentlessly for inadequate gender performances. While none of the boys identified as gay, they were all teased with homophobic insults, a method of social ostracism that spoke not to their perceived sexual orientation, but to the perceived failure of male performances of masculinity. These boys were either honor role students, involved in theatre or band, or otherwise "nonathletic, geekish or weird" (Kimmel and Mahler, 2003:1445). In other words, the shooters were targeted and ridiculed for their failed masculinity. The shooters responded with a retaliatory measure that is the very embodiment of masculinity – aggressive violence, which was likely a response to the repeated allegations of failed masculinity. The authors conclude: "these boys are not psychopathological deviants but rather overconformists to a particular normative construction of masculinity, a construction that defines violence as a legitimate response to a perceived humiliation" (2003:1440). This is evidence not only of the embeddedness of heterosexuality within masculinity (as it is in femininity) but also to the ways our actions are interpreted and judged adequate or not through social interaction.

In a related study that also documents how stigmatizing accusations can police acceptable limits of gender behavior, and that they in fact an effective controlling mechanism among similarly situated individuals within the social structure, Pascoe (2005) presents an ethnographic study of a predominantly white, working-class suburban high school. In her book, *Dude, You're a Fag* (2005), Pascoe finds what she terms the "fag discourse" by applying poststructuralist theory to high school boys' joking behavior[48]. The ubiquity with which the boys in her study lobbed the insult "fag" at each other indicates its power to regulate and enforce gender normativity within adolescent male peer groups. Boys became vulnerable to accusations of being a "fag" if they were too emotional, cared too much about their appearance or other people, or failed to demonstrate physical and/or sexual prowess. In this way, accusations of "fag" become a regulatory mechanism through which boys police their own and their peers' behavior, ensuring they and their friends perform an acceptable masculinity congruent with gender norms.

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[48] Pascoe does not frame it in this way; she believes the abject position represented in the "fag discourse" is essentially a psychological expulsion which gets played out as a discursive struggle. For support of her interpretation, see Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror.* For simplicity, and because of its similarity, I will refer to her theoretical framework as poststructuralist.

Accusations of "fag" as they are articulated in this study do not *in effect* refer to sexual practices; instead they mark a boy as unmanly, not homosexual. Indeed, most of the boys admit they would never call a guy they actually thought was gay a "fag" because it would be "mean". Curiously, demonstrating one's distance from the label of "fag" is possible by mocking an exaggerated femininity ("doing fag"), and then immediately resuming masculinity after this performance. This allows Pascoe to frame "fag" as a fluid identity, one in which boys can move in and out of, assuring themselves and others that they have knowledge of this label and that it does not fit.

The physical passivity and submission involved in the act of being penetrated[49] places it outside of the realm of possibility for an active, aggressive, powerful subject. Penetrated masculinity (the "fag" epithet) is then, a contradiction in terms, (because masculinity acts, it is not acted upon); it is the absence of aggressive action involved in the pursuit of sexual activity (subjectivity). "It is precisely this specter of penetrated masculinity that functions as a regulatory mechanism of gender for contemporary American adolescent boys" (Pascoe, 2005:329).

Drawing on Derrida's notion of the constitutive outside (1997 [1974]), Pascoe effectively locates the "fag" as a discursive struggle – in that boys actively create the masculine subject position for themselves by defining and rejecting that which is non-masculine (the fag). Pascoe then is able to apply poststructuralism to the "fag" as "an abject position, a position outside of masculinity that actually constitutes masculinity" (2005:342). The "fag" then, is the discursively produced "other" that constitutes the rejected space necessary to define the "subject" (here, heteronormative/hegemonic masculinity). As she asserts, homophobia is essential to the making of contemporary adolescent masculinity.

To refine and correct her analysis a bit, it is not so much homophobia that constitutes adolescent masculinity as it is the radical and violent denigration of the feminine ("fags" are not laughable because they sexually desire other men; instead, "fags" are laughable because they are feminine males – a discursive contradiction). It is masculinity itself that requires projecting the fundamental hatred of the feminine toward *only* male bodies ("fags"), leaving intact the possibility of heterosexual relationships where the hatred of the feminine on female bodies is able to play out unannounced (in order for masculinity to construct and privilege itself, it must render hateful and abject *all* femininity).

Although Pascoe highlights the discursive struggle instead of the gendered practices, even she admits that "Engaging in very public *practices* of heterosexuality, boys affirm much more than just

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[49] With her research regarding the medical interventions forced upon intersexed infants, Suzanne Kessler (2009) provides evidence that the medical definition of maleness is a penis with the ability to penetrate. Intersexed infants with large enough penises capable of penetration have their female anatomy removed and are raised as male. Similarly, the medical definition of femaleness is the ability to be penetrated. Therefore, intersexed infants with a smaller then acceptable penis size (also described as larger than normal clitoris), will undergo surgery to construct a penetrable vagina and all male anatomy (including the "penoclitoris") will be removed (2009:72).

masculinity; they affirm subjecthood and personhood through sexualized interactions in which they indicate they have the ability to work their will upon the world around them. Imposing one's will and demonstrating dominance aligns boys with personhood and subjectivity, historically coded as masculine" (Pascoe, 2007:86 emphasis added). In high school parlance, the rituals of "getting girls" function to cement for boys each other's masculinity (while effectively removing the threat of homosexuality) and it allowed them to demonstrate control over what girls did with their bodies. In this sense they were able to articulate subjectivity by linking themselves not merely to action, but to dominance. Because the controlling of girls bodies relies on the threat of sexualized violence, "girls bodies, in this sense, became the conduit through which boys established themselves as masculine" (Pascoe, 2007:104). Masculinity then, is not only the domination of women; it is a constitutive component of agency (subjectivity). Because these are practices that must be read and interpreted by others, "fag" cannot be only a discursive struggle but a powerful stigmatizing label given to boys who do not engage in practices that are *viewed by others* as sufficiently masculine.

In a related study that weaves sexual practices with the intersections of race, class, gender, and heterosexuality, Ward (2008) offers her article, "Dude Sex: White Masculinities and 'Authentic' Heterosexuality among Dudes Who Have Sex with Dudes". In this work she presents an interesting example of how men are able to construct masculinity by relying on the denigration of femininity even where women are absent. She provides an analysis of ads placed on the "Casual Encounters" section of Craigslist-Los Angeles over a period of three months. "Casual Encounters" is an online community bulletin board in which predominantly white men solicit sex from other white men; it is distinguishable from the openly gay "Men Seeking Men" section in that most ads on "Casual Encounters" appropriate the trappings of white *heterosexual* masculinity. The men who place these ads correctly perceive their exclusion from heteronormativity and draw on other aspects of their positionality to reclaim the subject position. In this way, the distinctively "queer" practice of men soliciting other men for sex is not necessarily understood as existing on the queer side of the heteronormative binary. With references to watching straight porn, denigrating women, drinking beer, "hanging out" and referring to themselves as "normal" and "not into gay men", these men are able to make a claim to heteroerotic culture while soliciting sex from other men. The author points to the locally-specific nature of the white heterosexual masculinity that is referenced in the description of the type of guy they are looking to "hang out with"– frat dudes, skaters, surfers, and jocks are all recognizable lifestyles common to Southern California. Ward documents here references to not only gendered and sexualized practices, but to racialized and classed practices as well (frat dudes, skaters, etc. are emblematic categories of not just "straight men" in general, but "straight white middle-class men" in particular).

This language benefits from the conflation of whiteness and normality or the racist assumption that whiteness is de-racialized or "normal" as in – "I am looking for a *regular* dude". In this sense, white archetypes are used to support an "authentic" (read hegemonic) masculinity, especially important to men seeking to maintain a foothold in heteropatriarchal privilege (that confers financial and cultural power to *straight,* white, middle-class men) while placing themselves in a vulnerable context where this authenticity is understood to be in question (in the context of seeking sex with other men) (Ward, 2008). Great pains are taken to create a racist, sexist, and homophobic space in order to "maintain the heteroeroticism of dude-sex" (Ward, 2008:425). She explains her findings in reference to intersectionality theory in that sexuality is always articulated at the intersection of race, class, and gender. She observed the men in her study drawing on their race and gender privilege (and sometimes class) in order to re-frame their "abnormal sex" (within the heterosexual/homosexual binary) as non-deviant.

In the way of a conclusion, Ward offers the logic that "straight" and "queer" are not marked by sexual practices or identities, but by "cultural practices and interpretive frames" (Ward, 2008:417). This study cleverly documents how intragender sexual behavior among men can be interpreted as heterosexual, appropriating a framework that produces their own marginality. Although these men do reinforce the binary that marginalizes their sexual practices, they do so by upholding the gender and race binaries that create their privilege. While they have been "othered" on one dimension of their identity, they have recourse to "othering" alternate categories of people in order to re-establish a claim to subjectivity (which is in essence, masculinity, as has been shown). By privileging "cultural practices and interpretive frames", the author is demonstrating the power within the domain of ideology and discourse as these men seek to deliberately suppress the importance of the sexual practices that pathologize them by offering an alternate framework. In this way, Ward highlights the interpretive dimensions of discourse which occurs within social interaction and must be read by others. In this case, men focus on their heterosexual white, middle-class male *gendered practices* of watching straight porn, drinking beer, belonging to a fraternity, surfing, etc. in order to reduce the implications of their actual homosexual *sexual practices* of seeking sex with other men.

In the various studies cited above, we have seen that discourse cannot be understood to exist entirely within the abstracted realm of ideas; instead, as has been shown, discourse must be interpreted in interaction, established by physical practices, or else in some other way rendered concrete by the social moment of interpretation to establish meaning. Following the "new" materialist thought of Smith and Bourdieu, practices, social interactions, and physical comportment are materialist in the sense that they reproduce (and resist) the social structure. Interacting between the abstract realm of ideas and the concrete realm of material, a focus on social practices provides a critique of poststructuralist theory that

privileges ideas, language, and the symbolic as the fundamental source of what lends meaning to our lives. Cultural practices are broadly defined to include the interpretive, interactional and social dimensions of lending concrete meaning to abstracted concepts. The social structure then is accomplished (reproduced, reinforced, and resisted) through these practices.

Conclusion

The Possibility of Women in the Subject Position

Poststructuralist theory has arguably ushered in a new paradigm for feminist work. This analytical framework has brought attention to the workings of discourse and language that has provided at least the possibility of alternate arrangements of concepts and alternate claims to speech. If we accept the poststructuralist notion of discursively produced subjects then we must do the work of deconstructing binary oppositions to make sense of the subjectivities that racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, and imperialist discourses have provided in order to at least propose a new formulation of subjectivity. The power inherent in the deconstruction of the ways in which we are allowed to think, speak, and write cannot be overstated. In a unique way, deconstruction allows us to transcend our (imperfectly and incompletely) discursively produced subjectivities in the very act of imagining a different alignment of terms and, therefore, the possibility of a different subjectivity.

The concept of subjectivity as social agency through everyday practices is appealing because it requires an acknowledgement of the significance of gendered habitus. In an important way, this concept of subjectivity brings theory back to the realm of living bodies that must act within and are acted upon by given social structural restraints that injure, exploit, misrecognize and maldistribute. This is another way to propose the interpretive or interactional or social dimension with the realm of discourses/representations/language. That is, this definition of subjectivity bridges the embodied individual engaging in social practices within the realm of ideas and representations.

Indeed the notion of subjectivity is imaginable in both the discursive and the material realms: in language (subjectivity is reclaiming words used against us, creating a new language, new forms of speech), and in practices (subjectivity is relational; it occurs in interaction, it requires interpretation and context). If women can speak and are not wholly determined by discourse as I have sought to demonstrate, then both domains (discursive and material) are places of possibility to articulate an alternate or newly found subjectivity for culturally recognizable women as I have defined this phrase. These domains are places of possibility for a culturally recognizable female subject exactly where they intersect, at a woman's feminine body comportment, precisely because this makes each domain accountable to the other.

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Following poststructuralism, my definition of subjectivity, as articulated in my introduction is in effect the forms and expressions of dominance. To restate, the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity proposes the following: first, that subjectivity is what confers authority to the subject; second, that subjectivity is always already masculine; third, that subjectivity is the individual's embodied claim to power. This is problematic in that subjectivity in this framework seems to be merely the attributes of recognizable dominance. If subjectivity is what authorizes the subject, and it is the subject's embodied claim to power and it is always already masculine, then female subjectivity must be organized around a different alignment of terms, as poststructuralism demonstrates is possible.

An alternate definition of subjectivity as social agency articulated through everyday practices seems much more useful here as this alternative avoids the poststructuralist subject/object dilemma of each one constituting the other. Defined in this way, social agency disentangles this mutually constitutive dilemma; it does not require an "object" to constitute itself. Poststructuralism focuses on the construction of difference in a way that de-emphasizes the concrete practices of dominance, which results in an abstracted discussion of difference in language around privileged and subordinated terms. "Othered" "objects" revolve around and constitute the subject in a way that does not allow for social agency for the former. This abstracted discussion ultimately fails to account for the possibility of any kind of social agency or subjectivity or authorized action arising from a discursive position of subordination.

In contrast, materialists privilege the workings of dominance as existing before and carrying more theoretical significance than difference. Indeed, difference is a material, social, and ideological production that exists to serve and justify dominance. This theoretical formulation allows for the possibility of authorized action or subjectivity arising from oppression. By re-defining subjectivity as women's embodied everyday practices, I have attempted to relate the abstractness of the discursive with the concreteness of the physical as it intersects, constitutes, and produces (but not wholly) a culturally intelligible woman. Gendered practices bring theory back into conversation with social interaction, interpretative moments, and even historical and political context that all must be engaged to lend meaning to abstracted concepts like "femininity" or "subjectivity" as well as any possibility of where these terms might overlap. Gendered practices are promising places for a critique of the limitations of privileging discourse because they incorporate actual bodies as well as social interpretations of these bodies. Subjectified women can arise in this context in a way that reveals the masculine bias inherent to "subjectivity" and its reliance on "disembodiedness and disembeddedness". That is, subjectified women are possible speaking and acting and doing from within their "embeddedness" (gendered practices) in such a way that requires their "embodiedness" (the acknowledgment of their claim to legitimacy and equal status) as specifically female.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While I have maintained the importance of material relations in this thesis, I have not included any empirical studies or theoretical work around the exploitation of labor, the organization of capital, or the resultant impact on social relations. Perhaps in presenting a critique of poststructuralism's over-emphasis on discourse and representations, I have committed the same error myself. By arguing for a separation between the realms of economic redistribution and symbolic recognition, I did not intend to downplay the effects of the former and I fear I may have failed to adequately capture the significance of economic relations of maldistribution. To better account for this very real and ever-worsening effect of global capitalism, more research should be done around the limits to imagining an alternate possibility of a subjectified existence posed by the deprivation of resources.

Another oversight of this thesis has been my failure to adequately disentangle the practices that signal and construct femininity from the practices that signal and construct heterosexuality. This conflation is an obvious part of my definition of femininity which, as I have defined it, embeds heterosexuality. Although in the introduction I acknowledged the heterosexual (and racial and class and global privilege) dimension of the construction of what I believe to be "abstract" femininity, I have necessarily conflated the separate dimensions of gender and sexuality. In conflating these two separate dimensions of privilege/penalty, my statements regarding the challenge transsexuals pose to the gender binary do in fact erase the workings of heteronormativity. In turn, by claiming that some of the transsexuals studied reified the gender binary even from a position that is radically posed to challenge it (changing one's sex), it is unclear as to whether I meant the gender binary in terms of male/female or the gender binary in terms of heterosexuality/other. Because believe the phrase "gender binary" encompasses both the sexual binary (male/female) and the heteronormative binary (heterosexual/other), in conflating these axes, my conclusions are muddied. My intention was to focus on femininity and therefore gendered practices; but in failing to maintain an analytical distinction between the workings of male dominance and the workings of heterosexual dominance, I am unable to suggest how these different axes of dominance might interrelate.

Another topic raised in this thesis that was under-investigated has to do with the social practices that create knowledge production and rational thought. For example, in the beginning of this thesis I discussed how the male/female; mind/body; passion/reason binaries that underlay notions of masculinity and femininity placed women outside of the realm of rational thought and reason. This dimension of misogyny has been underexplored in this thesis. Instead, I focused on gender practices that are physical and observable (body comportment, physical relationship to other things and people, inhibitions to one's physical strength, etc.). In doing this, I have focused on the social practices that produce concrete

material effects (like physical violence) while ignoring the social practices that produce more symbolic or abstracted notions of violence (like defining academic or intellectual women as violating the norms of femininity, for example). Further explorations into these more symbolic types of violence are necessary to illuminate more fully how the symbolic and physical dimensions of misogyny might interrelate.

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Vita

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