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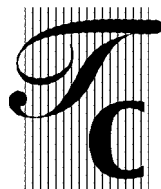
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The strengths and limits of 'doing gender' for understanding street crime

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Abstract

This paper is an engagement with Messerschmidt's structured action theory, and more generally with feminist criminologists' applications of the concept 'doing gender' for understanding street crime. Specifically, I investigate the ways in which the attribution of gender difference and the near exclusive emphasis on normative practices has limited our use of the doing gender model in theorizing gender and crime. I discuss several avenues for enhancing this approach, including the imperative to avoid tautology, and suggestions for challenging gender dualism, investigating the import of social hierarchies, and conceptualizing the complexities of agency and social practice.

Key Words

feminist theory • crime as structured action • James Messerschmidt • doing gender • gender dualism

In recent years, feminist criminologists have drawn on the concept of situated action to help explain the gendered nature of crime. This ethno-methodological approach (Garfinkel, 1967) was first applied critically to gender by feminists in the late 1970s (Kessler and McKenna, 1978) and gained widespread recognition and further refinement in the mid-1980s (West and Zimmerman, 1987; see also Connell, 1987). James Messerschmidt (1993) was largely responsible for the introduction of this approach

to the field of criminology with his *Masculinities and Crime*. In particular, his and other feminist developments of this approach have attempted to use ethnomethodological insights while simultaneously theorizing the impact of structural inequalities on the accomplishment of gender. Since Messerschmidt's landmark work, a number of feminist criminologists have applied and refined 'doing gender' as a means of theorizing about crime. Here my goal is to discuss both the strengths and limits of this approach, especially as it is applied to young *women's* involvement in crime; in its capacity to deal with the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality and generation; and its utility in addressing gendered identities and gendered social practices. In exploring these questions, I make use of illustrations from my own and other relevant feminist works that deal with 'doing gender and crime'.¹

Viewing gender as *situated action* or *situated accomplishment* means recognizing that gender is 'much more than a role or an individual characteristic: it is a mechanism whereby situated social action contributes to the reproduction of social structure' (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). According to this approach, women and men 'do gender' in response to situated normative beliefs about masculinity and femininity. These actions are the 'interactional scaffolding of social structure' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 147), such that the performance of gender is both an indication of and a reproduction of gendered (as well as raced, classed, generational, and sexed) social hierarchies. This approach advances theoretical accounts of gender in a number of significant ways.

One important facet of the approach is that it provides a means of bridging the agency/structure divide in a way that allows theorists to go beyond constructing women (and men) as simply passive victims of structural conditions. Focusing narrowly on women's victimization is problematic because, as feminist philosopher Sandra Harding (1987: 5) notes, this 'tend[s] to create the false impression that women have *only* been victims, that they have never successfully fought back, that women cannot be effective social agents on behalf of themselves or others'. Moreover, it results in a static and deterministic view of social structure which many social theorists have challenged (for recent discussions, see Emirbayer and Mische (1998), McNay (2000) and Sewell (1992)). Specifically, recognizing gender as *situated* action allows for recognition of agency, but does so in a way thoroughly grounded in the contexts of structural inequalities such as those of gender, sexuality, race, class and age. As social theorist Bob Connell (1993: ix) notes, this approach insists that 'social structure does not exist "outside" everyday life' and everyday practices. By grounding social practices within the structural contexts in which they occur, the approach makes logical sense out of actions that, decontextualized, might appear illogical or senseless.

Focusing on situated social action also challenges the notion that 'natural' (bodily or biological or psychic) differences between women and men

account for gender, gender inequality or gendered action. As Connell (1987: 77) points out, there is no:

logical sense in which the social processes of gender are exceptions to principles that apply to other social processes. There is no reason to make this exception. The body is implicated in the social processes of gender, certainly; but then the body is involved in *every* kind of social practice.

Moreover, this approach provides several important critiques of 'sex role' or 'gender role' theory — a way of conceptualizing gender that remains ever popular in criminology. First, while the concept of 'gender roles' assumes that 'gender is logically *prior to* behavior, already settled, and can be understood as [the cause of] behavior' (Connell, 1993: x), the current approach recognizes 'gender as something constructed in social action, as something done, accomplished in the everyday actions of social life' (Connell, 1993: xi). Moreover, given its grounding in the agency/structure nexus, viewing gender as situated action means recognizing that there are a multitude of masculinities and femininities — each shaped by structural positioning — rather than one static set of gender roles.

Doing gender and crime

As I indicated earlier, this approach has been applied most notably within criminology in explanations of the links between masculinities and crime. Messerschmidt has been at the forefront in this regard. Here, crime is described as 'a "resource" for accomplishing gender — for demonstrating masculinity within a given context or situation' (Simpson and Elis, 1995: 50). For example, robbery is described as epitomizing the use of crime to construct masculine identity among urban young men.² Messerschmidt (1993: 107) argues:

The robbery setting provides an ideal opportunity to construct an 'essential' toughness and 'maleness': it provides a means with which to construct that certain type of masculinity — hardman. Within the social context that ghetto and barrio boys find themselves, then, robbery is a rational practice for 'doing gender' and for getting money.

In Messerschmidt's earlier work (1993, 1995, 1997), he primarily relies on secondary analysis of previous research — an approach that, as I discuss below and Messerschmidt (2002) himself later notes, makes a series of problematic assumptions that can be better addressed through rigorous empirical investigation. More recently, his investigation of gendered structured action has instead been based on in-depth life-history narratives with young men (see Messerschmidt, 2000), an approach that offers promise, as it has allowed him to examine more thoroughly 'the meanings boys and men attach to their social actions and how these actions are related to conscious choice and specific social structures in particular settings' (Messerschmidt, forthcoming).³

Where this theoretical approach has most stalled within criminology is in attempts to apply the concept of 'doing gender' to explanations of female participation in crime. Examining crime as masculine accomplishment can help account for the gender ratio of offending; at least at first blush, it offers an explanation of women's involvement in crime in ways scripted by femininities. But it often leaves women's participation in presumably 'masculine' crime unexplained except as an anomaly. For this reason, scholars have recently attempted to refine the approach to allow for the explanation of women's involvement in crime, especially violence. Typically, this is done by emphasizing variations in normative femininity as they emerge within different structural and situational contexts (see Messerschmidt, 1995; Simpson and Elis, 1995; but see also Bottcher, 2001; Jacobs and Miller, 1998; Miller, 1998).

For example, Messerschmidt (1995, 1997) applied the concept of 'doing gender' to young women's involvement in street gangs, which he describes as 'doing difference'. He focused specifically on heterosexual relationships within gangs and inter-gang conflict. With regard to the former, he notes the following:

For both boys and girls . . . the street gang is ideal for 'doing gender' in terms of difference. Through maintenance of and emphasis on the 'femaleness' of girl gang members — for example, through specific heterosexual meanings and practices — gender difference is preserved and specific types of masculinities and femininities are both validated and strengthened. Consequently, girl gang members are not simply passive recipients of 'patriarchy', but actively participate in the construction of gender relations and orchestrate the various forms of heterosexuality that results in varieties of femininity. Indeed, these girls do difference differently.

(Messerschmidt, 1995: 177)

With regard to inter-gang conflict, Messerschmidt focused on what he calls 'bad girl' femininity. He argues that group processes within gangs provide situations (such as the protection of 'the hood') in which there is a 'path for similarity in behavior' (Messerschmidt, 1995: 182) between males and females. Though he recognizes gang conflict as a site in which gender differences are less salient than gang differences (for example, rivalries across gangs), here Messerschmidt nonetheless characterizes girls' participation in gang violence as a means of constructing a 'bad girl' femininity:

For girls in the gang, doing femininity means occasionally, and in appropriate circumstances, doing violence. However, because participation in violence varies depending upon the setting, girls are assessed and held accountable as 'bad girls' differently. Given that gang girls realize that their behavior is accountable to other girls and boys in the gang, they construct their actions in relation to how those actions will be interpreted by others in the same social context. These girls are doing femininity in terms of activities appropriate to their sex category and in specific social situation. Accord-

ingly, violence by young women in youth gangs should not be interpreted as an attempt to be 'male' and 'pass' as the other gender.

(Messerschmidt, 1995: 183)

Thus, he suggests that girls in gangs engage in activities, including violence, with the goal of enacting normatively appropriate femininity — a femininity situated within the social context of the gang.

For reasons I detail below, I suggest that this formulation offers a limited account of girls' (and women's) gendered social action (and by implication, men's and boys' as well). Here I argue that serious engagement with the limitations of the approach offers promising directions for the reformulation and expansion of evaluating structured action. Specifically, through rigorous empirical investigation, we can better conceptualize and examine the complexities of agency and social practices, and can better map the structural and ideological hierarchies of gender, race, class, generation and sexuality and their reciprocal affects on gendered social action.

'Doing gender and crime': evaluation and critique

I focus here on four specific, but overlapping, issues that I believe can strengthen our use of the situated/structured action approach within feminist criminology: (1) avoiding tautology; (2) challenging gender dualism; (3) accounting for stratification, hierarchy and power; and (4) conceptualizing the complexities of agency and social practice. In elaborating on these issues, my goal is to propose ways to enrich our examinations and theorizing about 'doing gender and crime', and to suggest avenues for doing so that deal explicitly with the intersecting nature of various social hierarchies and identities, avoid giving primacy to gender as normative practice, and can account for the dynamic nature of inequality.

Avoiding tautology

In order for the concept of 'doing gender' to be conceptually useful, we must theorize and apply it in ways that avoid tautology. This means, first, that our analyses cannot employ circular reasoning; and, second, that they must not be static, but instead capable of accounting for transformation and social change. Circular reasoning can occur in several ways: by presuming gendered action occurs primarily in response to gendered *norms*, and through the assumption of gender duality. A static (and ultimately deterministic) approach to 'doing gender' occurs when we suggest that behaviour is *governed by* social structural position. Here change resulting from individual or collective action is not accounted for, but instead results from responses to external (structural) change. Instead, our conceptualization of 'doing gender' must address the transformative potential of agency. Changing our conceptualization of *structure*, and

integrating the intersections with gender of such structuring positions as race, class, sexuality and generation, provides a means by which to avoid tautology and stasis.

Often the ways in which ‘doing gender’ is applied to explanations of crime are problematic because they involve circular reasoning. Drawing from West and Zimmerman’s (1987) seminal work, Messerschmidt (1995: 171) argues that ‘in *all* social situations we attempt to adorn ourselves with culturally appropriate “female” or “male” fashion’ (my emphasis), because we are accountable to others for our gendered actions. By definition, this statement does not provide for individuals’ reinterpretation of, resistance to, or subversion of culturally appropriate patterns (see Butler, 1990; Thorne, 1993). Instead, variations in gendered actions are accounted for exclusively by variations in cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, as emerging from variations in structural position (see Hood-Williams (2001) for a similar critique).

As already noted, one important contribution of viewing gender as situated action is that it allows for recognition that there are multiple masculinities and femininities, shaped by structural positioning. Nonetheless, it is tautological to assert that every action is taken with a goal of accomplishing normative femininity, whereby different variations of social action are simply reflective of different variations of normative femininity. Inadvertently, this becomes a rather static view of gendered action. Moreover, stated and applied in such a way, the propositions of the theory ‘are so open-ended that any contradictory empirical evidence can be interpreted or re-interpreted to support the theory’ (Tittle, 1995: 8).

One of the problems here lies with the primacy given to *normative* aspects of gendered action. The emphasis on norms limits our ability to grapple fully with power and inequality, that is, how gendered actions are a response to structural or situation exclusion from other modes of action rather than necessarily based on adherence to norms about masculinity and femininity.⁴ Instead, a more complex concept of agency — including recognition that action can be routinized and largely taken for granted, strategic and goal oriented, norm oriented, resistant or negotiative, and temporally based — provides one means of avoiding tautology in examining gender as situated action (see Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; McNay, 2000).

Applying such a concept in the context of empirically rigorous research provides a means of enriching the theoretical import of ‘doing gender’. For example, Messerschmidt’s (1999, 2000) most recent study moves away from tautology in just these ways as he blends specific empirical investigation with theorizing. Evidence presented in his previous articulation of this perspective was based on interpretation of data not collected with the explicit goal of addressing this theoretical perspective. This made the interpretative process more problematic because he was left with the task of imbuing meanings and motives to behaviour without clear evidence of the gendered intents of the actors under examination.⁵

In contrast, Messerschmidt's (2000) analysis in *Nine Lives* is based on comparative life-history interviews with three groups of young men: boys who sexually abuse children, boys involved in physical violence, and a comparison group of non-violent boys from the same white working-class communities. The interview data collected for this analysis emphasized the boys' constructions and beliefs about masculinity (and the linkages of these to the body as a resource for enacting masculinity), and these youths' perceptions of the role hegemonic masculinity played in the commission of their crimes. Such rigorous examination of accounts provides an important means of 'arriving at meanings or culturally embedded normative explanations [for behavior. Accounts] represent ways in which people organize views of themselves, of others, and of their social worlds' (Orbuch, 1997: 455). Importantly, in his most recent work, Messerschmidt does not argue that normative beliefs about masculinity are always primary in doing gender, but instead focuses on instances of *masculinity challenge*, when 'both body and gender became highly salient as organizing principles of interaction' (Messerschmidt, 2002). Moreover, his concern is with examining these boys' accounts of when and how masculine identity construction was a goal of violent behaviour, rather than assuming this is always the case.

The question of tautology still remains, however, and is linked specifically to the problem of gender duality. This is a matter of *selective attention* to accounts based on gender difference. Hood-Williams (2001: 45; see also Spelman, 1988: 136), in a critique of Messerschmidt's analysis of men's construction of specific forms of masculinity, poses and answers the question:

And why is this masculine? Because men do it. The argument is clear: every (criminal) thing that men do is masculine. But if everything that men do is masculine then the concept of masculinity is an empty tautology: gender collapses into sex.

By definition this approach reifies gender difference. Thus, returning to the earlier example of the gendered actions of gang girls, Messerschmidt (1995: 180) argues that they behave in the ways they do in order to construct a 'bad girl' femininity in opposition to a 'dud' femininity, but always a *femininity* in relation to other femininities. As Hood-Williams (2001: 42) observes: 'This raises . . . the question as to whether girls *can ever* be (or "do") masculine (or perform masculinity) and the tautological assumption of this observation'. I examine the importance of challenging gender duality in the following section. First, though, I return to the issue of stasis.

In order to address inequalities based on gender, race, class, sexuality and generation, it is necessary to be attentive to the ways in which these structural inequalities are reproduced through social action. The 'doing gender' approach has potential precisely because it is a theory that situates masculinities and femininities within hierarchies of structural position. However, accounts that focus on the reproductive aspects of social action

can speak to social change in only limited ways, typically by giving primacy to structural changes that result in reconfigurations of agency and identity (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Sewell, 1992). As noted, we need to theorize structured action in ways that can sufficiently account for resistant, dynamic and potentially transformative aspects of agency. One way to improve our ability to do so is to 'adopt a far more multiple, contingent, and fractured conception . . . of structure' (Sewell, 1992: 16).

Sewell (1992) proposes such a conceptualization of structure to account for how the ordinary operation of structure through action can generate change. His approach avoids a static model of the agency/structure nexus and highlights potential avenues for transformative action, without ignoring the import of structural inequalities in shaping agency. Moreover, it provides a systematic means of addressing the intersecting and sometimes competing nature of practices tied to such structuring positions as gender, race, class, sexuality and generation.⁶ First, he highlights the multiplicity of structures: 'Societies are based on practices that derive from many distinct structures, which exist at different levels, operate in different modalities, and are themselves based on widely varying types and quantities of resources' (Sewell, 1992: 16). As a consequence, he argues that individuals have the ability to draw from a wide array of schemas⁷ (including incompatible or contradictory ones) when engaging in social action. For example, as I will illustrate below, one could consider the schemas associated with gang membership as offering young women the potential to engage in behaviours and construct identities that contradict those schemas associated with a given definition of normative femininity. Likewise, generational schemas (such as the acceptance of adolescence as a time for 'role experimentation') can be adopted as accounts for the abandonment of gang activities.

Sewell (1992: 18) defines agency as 'entailing the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts'. Here, for example, a schema that shifts definitions of gendered behaviour in one context may be brought to bear, in another context, with the potential for transformation. Importantly, Sewell notes that whether and how schema are brought to bear in various situations remains an empirical question that requires specific investigation. In this process, he highlights the unpredictability of resource accumulation: the enactment and application of schemas require validation in the form of accumulated resources.⁸ Whether and how such resource accumulation that occurs affects the reproduction or modification of schema application in any given setting is, again, a question for empirical investigation.

Such an approach provides a means of addressing the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality and generation, and allows for a broadened and dynamic conceptualization of agency that can address the impact of differences in power, access to and exclusion from resources, as well as the role of potentially competing or contradictory schemas. As Sewell (1992: 20–1) argues:

Agency is formed by a specific range of cultural schemas or resources available in a person's particular social milieu. . . . What kinds of desires people can have, what intentions they can form, and what sorts of creative transpositions they can carry out vary dramatically from one social world to another depending on the nature of the particular structures that inform those social worlds. Occupancy of different social positions — as defined, for example, by gender, wealth, social prestige, class, ethnicity, occupation, generation, sexual preference, or education — gives people knowledge of different schemas and access to different kinds and amounts of resources and hence different possibilities for transformative action.

Importantly, such an approach does not necessarily give primacy to *gender*. Returning to the argument that 'in all social situations we attempt to adorn ourselves with culturally appropriate "female" or "male" fashion' (Messerschmidt, 1995: 171), we see that even when attending to structural and situational differences (for example, 'white working-class boys' or 'urban African-American girls'), the primary concern remains the construction of *gender* identities (and specifically identities constructed in reference to gender norms). Primacy is given to the accomplishment of gender rather than enactments founded on other bases of identity. This is not to suggest that constructions of femininities and masculinities do not vary across structural positions such as race, class, sexuality and generation, but to suggest that primary attention to gender ultimately has the potential both to elide other bases of identity and power, and, as noted earlier, to reify gender difference (see Spelman, 1988). To examine these issues in detail, I turn now to the dichotomous treatment of gender.

Challenging gender dualism

As noted, the problem of tautology is linked with the maintenance of gender duality. In theorizing 'doing gender', we need to ensure that our approach does not inadvertently continue to reify the dichotomous treatment of gender by analysing gender exclusively through the 'dynamics of varied same-gender groups or styles' (Thorne, 1993: 107). Selective attention to difference results in the argument that women's actions are always an articulation of 'femininity' and men's of 'masculinity', even when oppositional or diverse femininities and masculinities are being described and even when there is behavioural similarity across gender. In this approach, as feminist sociologist Barrie Thorne (1993: 107) notes:

While the groups and subcultures are multiple, a sense of deep division between boys and girls persist; how far such divisions may vary by situation or context is not made clear. *Dualistic assumptions poke through the multiplicity.* (Emphasis added.)

Thorne, in contrast, insists that while 'gender categories, gender identities, gender divisions, gender-based groups, gender meanings — all are produced, actively and collaboratively, in everyday life' (1993: 4), it is nonetheless the case that gender 'may be more or less relevant, or relevant in different ways, from one social context to the next. . . . Gender is not always at the forefront of . . . interactions' (1993: 5, 29). I return to the implications of this statement with regard to integrating race, class, sexuality and generation into the analysis below. First, through an illustration from my own work, I examine why the relevance and significance of gender — and the existence of gender differences — cannot be assumed at the outset. If we only seek to uncover gender differences — and even if we are examining race, class or culturally based differences *within* femininities and masculinities — we will not be able to attend to commonalities across gender, or instances of what Thorne (1993: 121–34) calls 'the continuum of [gender] crossing' — seeking access to and participation in the activities and groups of the other gender.

In a seemingly controversial move, I titled my recent (2001) book on young women in gangs *One of the Guys*. Some may find it antithetical for a feminist scholar to describe gang girls as constructing a masculine identity, as it would appear to echo the antiquated 'tomboy' stereotype that feminist research has repeatedly challenged (see Campbell (1984) for an overview). This was not my intent when I embarked on the research. I hoped to find those gang girls other feminist scholars had described: girls who expressed the importance of 'sisterhood' and close familial-like bonds with other young women in their gangs (see Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995; Lauderback et al., 1992). But empirical discovery led me elsewhere. The phrase 'one of the guys' highlights the gender crossing that occurs in some instances within gangs, and underscores the gender and gang identities prevalent among the young women I spoke with. With a few notable exceptions, these young women heavily identified with the young men in their gangs and described these groups as masculinist enterprises. To be sure, 'one of the guys' is only one part of a complex tapestry of gender beliefs and identities held by the gang girls I spoke with — and is rarely matched by gendered actions — but it remains significant nonetheless.

The vast majority of gang-involved girls in my study were in integrated, mixed-gender gangs in which the majority of members were males. They were not, then, in single-gender groups affiliated with one another, or in independent female gangs. All of the gangs I studied were predominantly African-American, though a small proportion of the girls I spoke with were white members of these groups. With regard to gender ideologies, I found a significant collection of contradictions. On the one hand, most girls vigorously held to a belief that gender equality was a normative feature of their gangs, but they also described a distinct gender hierarchy within their gangs (which young women themselves often upheld) that included male leadership, a double standard with regard to sexual activities, the sexual

exploitation of some girls, and most girls' exclusion from serious gang crime (Miller, 2001).

With regard to the norm of gender equality, girls' discussions were not about suggesting that all women should be treated equally, but about differentiating themselves from other young women through a construction of 'one of the guys'. It was specifically girls' success at gender crossing that designated them as equals. Even within their gangs, status hierarchies among girls were evident and dictated in part by how successfully girls could resist gender typecasting and cross into boys' terrain. Clearly, part of what young women were doing was constructing an identity in opposition to other normative constructs of femininity. But they were 'crossing' gender to do so. As Latisha explained: 'I was the girl who done everything the dudes done. I wasn't scared of nothing. I was just like, I was just like a *dude in a girl's body*' (emphasis added). Likewise, Trina explained, 'They [gang members] just treated me like a little boy. . . . I got to do what dudes usually do. I got to be like dudes.' These girls' accounts do not simply reflect the construction of a 'bad girl' femininity that is differentiated from other femininities; instead, they reflect gender crossing, embracing a *masculine* identity that they view as contradicting their bodily sex category (that is, female).

Young women's identification of gangs as masculinist enterprises also came through in their discussions of all-female gangs. Veronica, for instance, described an all-female gang she was familiar with as 'stupid', and said the boys referred to it as 'pussey-infected'. She explained, 'They try to have their own little girl group goin' on. [Laughs] It was silly.' LaShawna said she had not heard of any female gangs, and if she did, she would 'probably *laugh* or something'. Asked why she would laugh, she explained, 'Cause! What they gonna do? They can't do nothin' about it. Nothin' about nothin'! They probably could be hard or whatever, but they wouldn't have no props. They wouldn't get no props.' While for at least a moment LaShawna was torn and admitted that an all-female gang could be 'hard', her general reaction, like Veronica's, was to laugh. Part of the reason that both found the notion of an all-female gang 'silly', to use Veronica's term, was because they believed that without males, the group would not be respected. This is because, for the most part, gangs in their communities (and their own gangs) were primarily male and were male-dominated in structure, composition and status orientation. Thus, young women's efforts at identity construction as 'one of the guys' made sense within the specific gang contexts in which they were involved.

In examining gender as situated action, then, it is necessary to be attentive to the possibilities of 'gender crossing' and similarities across gender, in addition to gender difference. This case illustrates several additional noteworthy issues: the significance of organizational structures in shaping gender dynamics and identities, and the intersections of race and gender in constructions of gang girl identity (see below). In an important

article on how organizational structure shapes gender dynamics, sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977: 967) suggests:

In both macroscopic and microscopic analysis, sex and gender components are sometimes confounded by situational and structural effects. . . . Conclusions about 'women's behavior' or 'male attitudes' drawn from such situations may sometimes confuse the effect of situation with the effect of sex roles [sic]; indeed such variables as position in opportunity and power structures account for a large number of phenomena related to . . . behavior that have been labeled 'sex differences'.

Kanter's research is particularly relevant to my findings with regard to girls in gangs (see Peterson et al., 2001), because she emphasizes that the *relative* numbers of males and females 'are critical in shaping interactional dynamics' within groups (Kanter, 1977: 965; see also Konrad et al., 1992). In skewed groups, where females are a minority and males a majority, Kanter suggests that women typically adopt two strategies for assimilation: overachievement according to the masculine standards of the group; and attempting to become 'socially invisible', to 'minimize their sexual attributes so as to blend unnoticeably into the predominant male culture' (1977: 974).

Likewise, in her analysis of gender crossing among elementary students, Thorne (1993) notes that when youths successfully cross into the activities of the other gender:

Gender remains relatively low in salience; the gender tokens . . . participate on the terms of the majority, *and not as 'the other sex'*. This can only be accomplished if gender-marking is minimized and heterosexual meanings are avoided. (Emphasis added.)

Thus, it is not surprising that many of the young women I spoke with — particularly those in skewed groups with a majority of male members — identified with what they described as the masculine orientation of the gang and strove, in certain circumstances (but by no means all), to be 'one of the guys'. Our interviews with male gang members offer similar evidence (Miller and Brunson, 2000). Young men in majority male gangs with one or a handful of female members described these young women as essentially 'token' or 'honorary' males. For instance, Doug described one girl as garnering a lot of respect because 'she's got a male's mentality. She acts like a male, she just be down for whatever'. Likewise, Robert explained: 'Tia's not a regular girl, she like a boy for real. . . . She just like the dudes for real.' As with the girls' accounts, these young men did not view the girls in their gangs as enacting a 'bad girl' femininity, but a *masculinity* that was incongruent with their sex. West and Zimmerman (1987: 139) note that there are circumstances in which 'parties reach an accommodation that allows women to engage in presumptively masculine behavior'. These findings highlight the salience of gender crossing, and illustrate some of the spaces that exist for commonalities across gender.⁹

Accounting for stratification, hierarchy and power

Messerschmidt's (1993) original formulation in *Masculinities and Crime* was developed specifically to describe the relationship between 'doing masculinity' and 'doing crime'. Part of the difficulty feminist scholars have had in translating this theoretical perspective to explanations of female offending is in theorizing women's participation in presumably 'masculine' crime, except through constructs such as 'oppositional' or 'bad girl' femininity (Messerschmidt, 1995; Portillos, 1999). As noted earlier, giving primacy to *normative* aspects of gendered action limits our ability to grapple fully with power and inequality, and address how agency can be a response to structural or situational exclusion rather than adherence to norms. Because 'gender relations and constructs of masculinity and femininity are not symmetrical but are based on an organizing principle of men's superiority and social and political-economic dominance over women' (Daly and Chesney-Lind, 1988: 504), it is unlikely that the same patterns and meanings of gender construction will apply, in a generalized way, across gender.

With regard to 'gender crossing,' for instance, the asymmetry of constructs of femininity and masculinity mean that there are greater rewards and incentives for women to 'cross' into culturally defined masculine terrain than there are for men to cross into feminine terrain (though certainly this occurs as well; see Chauncey (1994) and Kulick (1998) for examples). Thorne's (1993) work again is instructive. Comparing 'tomboy lore' with 'sissy lore', she highlights the ways in which girls' gender crossing is more likely to result in status and autonomy, whereas boys' is more likely to result in stigma and censure. This is precisely because of the asymmetry of the cultural categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' (even recognizing that there are masculinities and femininities). In her study of elementary students, it was only boys with extensive masculine social resources (popularity or excellence in sports) who could 'cross' into girls' activities without facing denigration. Few were motivated to do so. Dominant, even situationally specific, notions of masculinity are more heavily policed for males than dominant notions of femininity are policed for females, precisely because of the devaluation of femininity (Thorne, 1993: 120; see also Segal, 1990).

The devaluation of cultural constructs of femininity is readily apparent within the majority-male, mixed-gender youth gangs I investigated. Given this, it makes sense that young women would strive to adopt a gang identity as 'one of the guys', particularly given the status and respect available within gangs to youths who exhibit characteristics typically associated with the highly valued cultural construction of gang masculinities. In doing so, they attempt to resist others' attribution to them of devalued feminine characteristics. Young women's heavy policing of one another's sexuality within these gangs makes sense in this context as well — not as a means of constructing a gang-specific femininity, but as a way to

minimize or downplay gender-marking and heterosexual meanings. These functioned to perpetuate girls' devaluation and subordination in the gangs I studied.

For example, when gang girls attempt to enforce a gendered sexual code that requires serial monogamy for girls, this does in fact result in gender difference, as Messerschmidt (1995, 1997) notes, because gang boys have considerably wider latitude in acceptable sexual behaviours. Ironically, however, this was not the goal of such policing among the young women I spoke with. Instead, they were attempting to *minimize* gender difference by limiting the extent to which boys could apply derogatory sexual labels to the girls in the gang. Thus girls' policing of one another's sexuality — and their vilification of girls they deemed to be 'hos' and 'sluts' — allowed them to distance themselves from a denigrated sexual identity and maintain an identity as a 'true' member. To illustrate, let me return to Latisha, who described herself as 'like a dude in a girl's body'. She continued:

We just like dudes to them [male gang members]. We just like dudes, they treat us like that 'cause we act so much like dudes they can't do nothing. *They respect us as females though*, but we just so much like dudes that they just don't trip off of it. (Emphasis added.)

Latisha's meaning of 'respect' here is specifically that boys do not over-emphasize gender-marking and heterosexual meanings — they do not interact with girls who are 'one of the guys' in overly sexualized ways. In this way, the girls' orientation towards sexuality is a response to gender inequalities rather than simply a situationally-specific normative construction of femininity.

Thus far, I have focused specifically on one example to illustrate the import of challenging gender duality. These findings provide evidence of the need to examine group structures and gender composition when investigating girls' constructions of gender identities within gangs¹⁰ (see also Joe-Laidler and Hunt, 1997; Peterson et al., 2001). As further evidence, it is worth noting that the few girls I interviewed who were in all-female gangs or gangs with a sizeable proportion of female members were more likely to describe valuing their friendships and relationships with other girls in their gangs. This is in keeping with previous feminist scholarship on girls in gangs, which describes female gang members providing mutual support and sharing familial-like bonds with one another (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995; Lauderback et al., 1992). Moreover, these young women did not situate themselves as 'one of the guys' in their gangs, but had gender identities that are perhaps more in line with Messerschmidt's 'bad girl' femininity.¹¹ As noted earlier, our examination of 'doing gender and crime' is further strengthened by examining the intersecting nature of structural positions in shaping both constructions of gender and access to resources and power. As Messerschmidt (2002: 16) notes:

To understand crime, we must comprehend how gender, race, and class relations are part of all social existence, and not view each relation as

extrinsic to the others. Because crime operates through a complex series of gender, race, and class practices, crime usually is more than a single activity.

Continuing my focus on young women, gangs and gang structure, research suggests that both gang identities and the gendered structures of gangs are tied to race and ethnicity. For example, Chicana and Latina gang members are those most likely to describe their gangs as female groups affiliated with male gangs, while African-American young women are more likely to describe their gangs as gender integrated in structure. The handful of all-female gangs documented by scholars have largely been African-American as well (Curry, 1997; Joe-Laidler and Hunt, 1997; Lauderback et al., 1992; Miller, 2001; Venkatesh, 1998). There also is evidence that race, ethnicity and gender intersect in shaping gang girls' identities. Whereas the girls in my study viewed violence as normative and status-enhancing aspects of their gang involvement, Joe and Chesney-Lind's (1995) study of Samoan and Filipino gang girls in Hawaii suggests that participation in violence is a stronger normative feature of male gang involvement than it is for gang girls in these ethnic groups. They argue that for girls, 'violence (gang and otherwise) is not celebrated and normative; it is instead more directly a consequence of and a response to the abuse, both physical and sexual, that characterizes their lives at home' (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995: 428).

Portillos' (1999) study of Chicana gang girls indicates that gender identities in these groups are constructed in part around difference. For instance, girls sometimes dress in ways that distinctively highlight their sexuality, and also use their sexuality for gang purposes — to set up rival gang members for confrontations with males. These types of behaviours were avoided by the young women I spoke with, for whom such activities contradicted their identity as 'one of the guys'. Thus, in contrast to my portrait of African-American girls in majority-male gangs, Portillos describes Chicana gang girls constructing an oppositional femininity that is clearly differentiated from (and subordinate to) male members' gang masculinity.

Schemas of gender duality, in fact, appear to be at least partially shaped by racial identity. Owing not just to historical legacies of slavery, but also contemporary conditions in urban African-American communities, black women have occupied social positions that require independence — economic and otherwise — for survival. Moreover, they face entrenched controlling images of black female sexuality as promiscuous (Collins, 1990). The young women I interviewed bore witness to the sexual and other abuses of women around them in their communities. Thus, the rejection of gender duality and construction of gender identity as 'one of the guys' was an attempt to insulate themselves from these practices and resist negative consequences of their sex category, and was a more available schema given larger practices and acceptance of economic self-sufficiency

and independence among poor and working-class African-American women.

On the other hand, gender dualism is a schema that has been entrenched in white discourses on womanhood, offering white women both protection and privilege, and structuring dependency and subservience (see Spelman, 1988). Thus, the passive feminine ideal linked to gender dualism is 'much more relevant (and restrictive) for white' than African-American females (Simpson and Elis, 1995: 71). White women can call upon this particular schema to deflect responsibility for their participation in crime. For example, in a study of gender and the accomplishment of robbery, I found that the handful of white women interviewed for the project described themselves as mere accomplices in armed robberies and argued that they would not participate were it not for their African-American boyfriends (Miller, 1998). This was despite the fact that they wielded guns on victims and engaged in these acts on multiple occasions.

It is also perhaps notable that the only young woman I interviewed in the gang study who articulated a 'gender difference' ideology in describing her gang was white. Describing herself as a 'Lady Crip', Diane compared gang organization to traditional patriarchal family organization: 'Like in a family: in a regular family there might be the dad and four brothers, and the mom and three sisters. . . . When mom says do somethin' but dad's over mom and dad says "no you do this," then it all goes back to dad, you see?' Ironically, she was in fact one of the most hardcore gang members I encountered — she and the few other girls in her gang routinely engaged in serious offending. She was also the only white member of her gang. She said people who did not know her often attempted to make race a salient issue, but she rejected these arguments and believed her gang identity had more primacy than her racial identity on the streets:

When I first started comin' here I really had to fend for mine 'cause I never, I mean, I've know that I'm white and I'm proud that I'm white and like all that stuff. I don't act black or don't wanna be black or none of that stuff. . . . When I first came here I always had to defend myself 'cause I'm white. But I'm not a punk. I'm not gonna go out like a little, a little white perky girl or whatever they wanna call it. . . . I really don't see anything now because ever since I was younger I've always been in black neighborhoods and been around black people and sometimes people, sometimes people be like, 'aw, she just a little punk'. But they find out. I'm different. Sometimes people like to stereotype. You do this, you're actin' black. If you're doin' this you're actin' white. I think that's a stereotype. I don't think there is no actin' black or actin' white. I'm a Crip.

The findings highlighted here are indicative of the interconnections of race, ethnicity and gang structure in shaping girls' gender identities within gangs. They also illustrate why it is important to be attentive, not just to gender difference, but also gender similarities and instances of 'gender crossing', as these findings suggest that such gender overlap is linked to

multiple sites of positioning (see also Moore and Hagedorn, 1996). Thus, as Cerulo (1997: 386) argues, it is necessary to:

Challenge the dualistic, oppositional nature by which gender is traditionally framed. . . . Elements such as race and social class produce multiple variations of 'women' and 'men,' distinctions that many societies use to build complex hierarchical stratification systems. The existence of these multiple categories alerts us to the flaws of binary gender conceptualizations, focusing us instead on the ways in which multiple identity affiliations qualitatively change the nature of human experience.

Such hierarchical stratification systems are also constructed and reproduced in the urban street milieu, narrowing women's options for social action and placing limitations on their available choices and activities (Anderson, 1999; Maher, 1997). Attention to the factors that structure opportunities for involvement in street networks highlights further why normative aspects of femininity are insufficient to account for women's involvement in crime. Messerschmidt (1995: 178), for example, suggests that prostitution is a 'principal criminal resource' for young women, not just for making money, but for 'doing difference' — constructing a situationally specific femininity. While the *result* of this situated action is the perpetuation of 'gender difference', it is more problematic to argue that women engage in street-level sex work *as a means of* constructing a feminine identity, particularly given the dangers and stigma attached to such activities. Rather, gender narrows those options available to women on the streets, making sex work one of the few money-generating activities open to women in certain contexts (see Maher, 1997). To examine the significance of this for understanding 'doing gender and crime', I consider how we may better conceptualize the complexities of agency so as to specify better the nature of the situated action.

Conceptualizing the complexities of agency and social practices

Lisa Maher's (1997) *Sexed Work* provides a nuanced account of the interplay of race and gender in structuring women's activities in a drug economy. Maher specifically examines how women's actions take place within complex relations of gender and race and in the context of a rigid division of labour. Important for the current discussion, Maher's work provides a model for linking micro-processes — in this instance, of a local drug economy, gender and race — to their larger structural underpinnings. She highlights both the reproductive aspects of social action by documenting how 'gender and race are conceived and structured within broader social, cultural and economic spaces' (Maher, 1997: 206), but also documents sites of resistance that play themselves out, often in small ways, in women's action. For example, Maher adopts the term 'viccing' to describe women's robbery of clients in the sex trade, and documents its

proliferation as a form of resistance against women's greater vulnerability to victimization and against cheapening sex markets within the drug economy.

Maher's examination of the impact of structures of racial and gender exclusion and differential allocation of resources in the drug economy highlights that 'any theory of agency must be placed in the context of structural, institutional or intersubjective constraints' (McNay, 2000: 20–1). In addition, in our investigations of doing gender, we must strive to disaggregate agency into its component parts and varied dimensions. Social theorists have conceptualized individual action in a range of ways. These include a focus on rational action that is goal-seeking, purposeful and deliberate; on norm-oriented action or that which is taken in response to normative expectations; on actions that may be viewed as 'resistance,' negotiation or rebellion against norms or inequalities; as well as routinized actions that are largely unreflective or taken for granted (see Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Recent attempts to theorize agency suggest the necessity to offer 'a more precise and varied account of agency' (McNay, 2000: 4) that distinguishes its various dimensions. Such an approach helps 'explain the differing motivations and ways in which individuals and groups struggle over, appropriate and transform cultural meanings and resources' (McNay, 2000: 4) and helps 'account for variability and change in actors' capacity for imaginative and critical intervention in the diverse contexts within which they act' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 970).

Integrating the features of agency noted above, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that a focus on the temporal dimensions of agency provides a means of unpacking and understanding agency's various dimensions. They distinguish between three general temporal elements. First, the iterational element, built upon past patterns, includes 'habitual, unreflected, and mostly unproblematic patterns of action by means of which we orient our efforts in the greater part of our daily lives' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 975). This aspect of agency typically involves the invocation of classificatory schemes (such as those based on gender, race and so forth) and 'cultural competences' informed by structural locations. Second is the projective element: 'the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 971). Here the various schemas available to the actor based on structural positions may be brought to bear for the purpose of creative reconfiguration of action, as illustrated above in the case of girls in gangs. Finally, Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 971) describe the practical-evaluative element of agency: 'the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations.'

With regard to gendered action, Emirbayer and Mische's iterational element is primarily a site of reproduction, in which identities are natural-

ized in individual action. Consider the original ethnomethodological studies on gender, which focused specifically on gender accomplishment among transsexual individuals (see Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler and McKenna, 1978). These studies focused on transsexuals' need to *learn* and *practice* doing gender so that their gender displays would be read by others in ways that would allow appropriate gender attribution. Kessler and McKenna (1978: 157) highlight the interactive nature of this process:

The gender attribution process is an interaction between displayer and attributor, but concrete displays are not informative unless interpreted in light of the rules which the attributor has for deciding what it means to be a female or male. As members of a sociocultural group, the displayer and the attributor share a knowledge of the socially constructed signs of gender. They learn these signs as part of the process of socialization (becoming members).

But they also argue that once transsexual individuals succeed in learning how to display gender, their gendered actions are less likely to involve a heightened awareness in doing so: 'It is not the particular gender which must be sustained, but rather a sense of its "naturalness". . . . In ongoing interactions, once a gender attribution has been made, it is no longer necessary to keep "doing male" or "doing female"' (Kessler and McKenna, 1978: 159). Thus Kessler and McKenna raise a critical issue concerning the extent that women's and men's gendered actions are often taken for granted, rather than enacted as a means of accomplishing gender.

In fact, Messerschmidt takes this issue into account with his refinement of the concept of 'masculinity challenges'. He notes that 'the taken-for-granted masculinity of a man or boy can be challenged in certain contexts' (Messerschmidt, 2000: 13), and describes these challenges as 'contextual interactions that result in masculine degradation' (Messerschmidt, 2000: 13). Because such actions make gender explicitly salient, they are likely to '*motivate* social action toward masculine resources . . . that correct the subordinating social situation, and various forms of crime can be the result' (Messerschmidt, 2000: 13). It is clear nonetheless that 'doing gender' can reproduce social structure via individual action, even when the accomplishment of gender does not occur at the conscious level or as an explicit goal. The example of sex work is one example. There is little evidence women choose to engage in sex work as a means of accomplishing femininity, but it remains the case that their actions help to reproduce gendered social structures. This results from patterns of behaviour informed by social position and based on available resources for action.

One means of getting at this facet of gender and gendered reproduction is to focus, not on individual action and its goals and motives, but instead on the gendering of social practice. Bottcher's (2001) analysis of gender and delinquency provides an example of such an approach. Based on comparative interviews with male and female siblings, her unit of analysis is social practice. She shows that the practices of everyday life reveal gendered

patterns 'that intertwined with delinquent activities, constraining female delinquency while enabling and rewarding male delinquency' (Bottcher, 2001: 893). Moreover, she avoids the limitations of gender duality by demonstrating that these gendered patterns are not universally applicable to all males or all females:

Some male-typed social practices appear to encourage or enable delinquent activity for either sex. Conversely, some female-typed social practices appear to discourage delinquent activity for both sexes. Thus, the social practices of gender disclose social conditions and activities that influence delinquent involvement, regardless of sex.

(Bottcher, 2001: 904)

This approach offers a promising avenue for the study of doing gender, particularly when coupled with analyses of agency and grounded in how gendered practices may be shaped by other social positions such as race, class and generation.

Likewise, Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) practical-evaluative element of agency reveals that women's situated action is as much a response to and negotiation with gender inequality as it is a resource for accomplishing gender. To capture this phenomenon, sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) coined the phrase 'bargaining with patriarchy', highlighting women's strategies of action as they arise within particular sets of gendered constraints. She notes: 'Different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct "rules of the game" and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression' (Kandiyoti, 1988: 274). Kandiyoti's work suggests that women's situated actions can be examined as gender *strategies* for navigating within male-dominated terrains. Applying this to doing gender and crime means being attentive to the reciprocal relation of gender and crime. For example, rather than crime simply being a resource for accomplishing gender, the converse may also be true: gender may be used as a resource for women to accomplish their participation in and avoidance of crime.

One type of gender strategy is to draw from cultural beliefs about femininity in order successfully to engage in or avoid particular types of crime. I found this to be the case with the gang-involved girls I spoke with. For instance, Vashelle suggested that when she sold drugs, she purposely avoided doing so with groups of young men on the street corner. This is the approach routinely adopted by male street-level drug sellers, and young women such as Vashelle were aware that such an approach intensified police scrutiny (Jacobs, 1999; Jacobs and Miller, 1998). In contrast, she described using more discreet methods, drawing from police officers' lack of suspicion concerning female sellers to accomplish her drug sales successfully:

The police, they don't be on the girls for real, females, but if they see a whole crowd of niggers sitting out, they gonna get down on them. But I'm

saying if there are niggers out there and I'm with them too they gonna shake me too. If I'm walking up the street by myself they ain't gonna trip off me cause I'm a gal but a crowd of niggers just walking, they gonna get on them.

Likewise, girls in my study recognized that they could use their presence to shield boys in the gang from police suspicion. Tonya explained:

Like when we in a car, if a girl and a dude in a car, the police tend not to trip off of it. When they look to see if a car been stolen, police just don't trip off of it. But if they see three or four niggers in that car, the police stop you automatically, boom. . . . [Girls have] little ways that we got to get them out of stuff sometimes, we can get them out of stuff that dudes couldn't do, you know what I'm saying.

Thus, gender — and gender stereotypes — were often resources that young women drew from to facilitate the success of gang members' crimes. Likewise, young women routinely articulated the position that male members tend to be 'harder' than females. Despite the incompatibility of this position with their assertion of equality and status as 'one of the guys', it nonetheless provided a number of advantages for gang girls. It meant accepting protection from male members of their gangs in recognizably dangerous environments; it furnished a justification for avoiding or limiting participation in those aspects of gang involvement that were dangerous or morally troubling; and lastly, it allowed young women to view the gang as less central to their long-term life plans and, instead, to define their gang involvement as a primarily adolescent commitment. Thus girls were able to cull from various schemas to construct contingent identities ('one of the guys' versus traditional gender schemas such as 'boys are harder') as the situation warranted and as best benefited them in a given situation.¹²

The utility of examining women's situated actions as gender strategies in male-dominated contexts is also illustrated by a comparative study of women's and men's participation in street robbery I completed several years ago (Miller, 1998). While respondents' discussions of their motives for engaging in robbery reflected similarity across gender (and thus did not appear to be based on normative features of masculinity or femininity), there were clear differences in how women and men accomplished robberies. These differences resulted from women's strategic choices in the context of gender-stratified environments. Men in the sample described committing robberies in a strikingly uniform manner, using guns and physical violence or its threat in close proximity to their victims. In contrast, women's techniques for committing robberies varied considerably depending upon whether they were targeting male or female victims, and whether they were working with male accomplices.

The most obvious illustration of using gender as a criminal resource was women's robberies of men. These events involved the use of a gun and feigned sexual interest in the victim. They used men's assumptions that

women could be taken advantage of sexually in order to accomplish the robbery. Quick explained:

They don't suspect that a girl gonna try to get 'em. You know what I'm saying? So it's kind of easier 'cause they like, she looks innocent, she ain't gonna do this, but that's how I get 'em. They put they guard down to a woman. . . . Most of the time when girls get high they think they can take advantage of us so they always, let's go to a hotel or my crib or something.

Men's actions, and their attitudes about women, thus made them vulnerable targets. It is also notable that only one woman described committing a robbery by herself in the prototypical masculine style. Significantly, she engaged in 'gender crossing' to do so, not just by adopting a masculine robbery style, but by dressing and comporting herself in such a way as to conceal her gender from the victim. These findings suggest that it is not sufficient to examine women's crime as a means of accomplishing femininity; instead, women also react to and strategically draw from normative beliefs about femininity in order to accomplish crime.

In examining gender as situated action and theorizing its relationship to participation in violence and crime, the recent attempts social theorists have made to conceptualize the complexities of agency offer intellectual promise for expanding our investigations. Though I have presented individual examples of studies that illustrate various facets of gendered social action, a fruitful approach for future research will involve the integration and unpacking of the various features highlighted here. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 973, 1005) suggest:

A disaggregated conception of agency . . . allows us to locate more precisely the interplay between the reproductive and transformative dimensions of social action and to explain how reflectivity can change in either direction, through the increasing routinization or problematization of experience. . . . The empirical challenge becomes that of locating, comparing and predicting the relationship between different kinds of agentic processes and particular structuring contexts of action.

Concluding remarks

In *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, Kessler and McKenna (1978) argue that the gender attributor plays just as important a role in doing gender as the gender displayer. More recently, theorists have discussed this in terms of accountability:

Because individuals realize their behavior is accountable to others, they configure and orchestrate their actions in relation to how they might be interpreted by others in the particular social context in which they occur.

(Messerschmidt, 1995: 172)

But Kessler and McKenna (1978: 157) go further in their analysis of

the role of those who attribute gender: 'the attributor contributes to the accentuation of gender cues *by selective perception*'. Moreover, they argue that social researchers are not exempt from this process: 'Our seeing of two genders leads to the "discovery" of . . . social differences' (Kessler and McKenna, 1978: 163). Consequently, in addition to the need to recognize gender as situated accomplishment, they argue that we need to recognize the primacy of gender attribution, including in our own research.

My goal in this paper has been to suggest some of the ways that our attribution of gender difference has limited our uses of the doing-gender model for understanding and theorizing about gender and crime. Ultimately, I suggest that a dualistic model of gender limits our ability to address the ways in which social positioning based on such factors as gender, race, class, sexuality and generation both intersect in the construction of identity and also offer contradictory schemas for identity construction and action. This means that the salience of various facets of identity — based, for example, on gender or race — can take primacy in some circumstances and not in others. In addition, I have suggested that the doing-gender approach has the danger of slipping into tautology when theorizing is not explicitly grounded in empirical investigations of individuals' constructions and beliefs about the role gender plays in their activities, and when we presume actions are always undertaken with specific reference to accomplishing normative gender. This is exacerbated when evidence of gender crossing is downplayed or is interpreted only in a dualistic way, such as the assignment of femininity only to women and masculinity only to men.

In addition, because gender is an asymmetric construct in culture and social structure, we cannot assume that 'doing gender' will occur in a symmetrical way across gender. Kandiyoti's concept of 'bargaining with patriarchy' illustrates the need to examine gendered actions as they are situated within particular types of gendered constraints. This provides a useful means of examining gender as situated action in a reciprocal way. It allows us to explore not just how action is sometimes guided by the goal of enacting gender, but also how women accommodate and adapt to specific forms of gender stratification and inequality in their enactment of crime. Moreover, even when 'doing gender' becomes naturalized, it nonetheless provides evidence of the reproduction of gender inequality in practice (see Maher, 1997).

I suggest several avenues out of this conundrum, including reconceptualizing social structure to recognize that it is 'multiple, contingent, and fractured' (Sewell, 1992: 16). This approach allows us to address social action, not just in its reproductive capacity, but also in its transformative aspects. In addition, I draw from recent social theory on agency to argue the benefits that emerge from adopting a dynamic conceptualization of agency that disaggregates various facets of social action. Such an approach provides promise for expanding our investigation of gendered social action and the accomplishment of crime. Ultimately, our best prospects will come

from rigorously grounding our theorizing in comparative scholarship (see Simpson, 2000) that includes both observational work and the investigation of actors' accounts of their activities and identity construction. Such an approach allows us to 'leav[e] open the issue of empirical gender difference . . . [and] attend to multiple differences and sources of commonality' (Thorne, 1993: 108), while grounding our studies in the intersecting positions of gender, race, class, sexuality and generation. Attention to these issues maximizes the significant insights to be garnered from the structured action approach.

Notes

A version of this paper was presented at the 2000 annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology. I appreciate the detailed feedback I received at that time from Jim Messerschmidt and Nancy Jurik. Thanks also to Christopher Mullins and the anonymous reviewers at *Theoretical Criminology* for their comments and suggestions.

1. This work does not attempt to summarize and synthesize the large and diverse body of feminist criminological investigations of gender and crime. The goal is to assess and refine one facet of feminist theorizing — structured action theory — and thus I draw primarily on qualitative investigations of this approach.
2. While this approach is a general theory used to describe a variety of types of crime, including white collar and corporate crime and sexual crimes (Messerschmidt, 1997: 2000), my focus here will be on street crime.
3. See Cerulo (1997) and Orbuch (1997) on the utility of accounts-based analyses of identity and action.
4. Consider, for example, the concept of 'doing race'. An emphasis on normative features of racialized behaviour clearly is lacking when it is not explicitly informed by structural inequalities, power relations, differences in access to resources, and privileges resulting from whiteness. The same should be true when examining gender: an overemphasis on normative features of behaviour has the potential to eclipse issues of power and inequality.
5. Messerschmidt (2002) later argues this point himself in a critique of Jefferson's work on masculinities: 'without empirical verification, literally anything could be defined as discourse depending on how the theorist chooses to interpret it'.
6. While it is the case, as feminists have argued (see Collins, 1990; Spelman, 1988), that structural positions such as race and gender are intersecting — such that there are racialized gender identities and gendered racial identities — it is also the case that, in a given situation, a particular axis of identity may take primacy. I discuss this further below.
7. In defining 'schemas', Sewell (1992: 8) draws from Giddens' (1984) conception of rules, and refers to these as 'fundamental tools of thought,

but also the various conventions, recipes, scenarios, principles of action, and habits of speech and gesture built up with these fundamental tools'. With regard to gender, for instance, we could consider these as conventional or normative expectations associated with masculinities and femininities.

8. Resources here include material objects, social capital, as well as forms of interpersonal status that result in the maintenance or enhancement of power.
9. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that young women's 'crossing' in this instance does not challenge gender boundaries or dualisms. And, despite girls' identity constructions as 'one of the guys', there remained vast differences by gender in participation in the most serious forms of gang violence (Miller and Decker, 2001), as well as other gang activities: 'one of the guys' is more ideology than practice in these girls' gangs. As such, it is typically not the actualization of 'masculinity' in practice, but a contingent, situational masculine gender orientation. Nonetheless, as Thorne (1993: 134) notes: 'incidents of crossing may chip away at traditional ideologies and hold out new possibilities'.
10. Though my focus here is on gangs, it is nonetheless the case that the approach I call for — avoiding selective attention to gender difference, and seeking explanations for gender difference in multiple arenas, rather than assuming it is based on gender norms — is widely applicable in the study of gender and crime.
11. Notably, the few case studies of all-female gangs available reveal that these groups are also often involved in fairly organized economic endeavours such as drug sales and distribution — presumptively 'male' undertakings (Lauderback et al., 1992; Venkatesh, 1998; but see Peterson et al., 2001).
12. Similarly, in a recent analysis of gender constructions among active burglars, Mullins and Wright (2002) found that women drew from traditional gender schemas such as family obligations, shame and informal social controls to explain why they would desist from offending, while they did not describe gender as having an overarching influence on their motives for offending.

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