

# [Gender performativity in modelling and drag queens](https://assignbuster.com/gender-performativity-in-modelling-and-drag-queens/)

## Introduction

This paper analysesgender performativityamong men and women who in the highly gendered occupation of fashion modelling, and it includes famous so-called drag queens who have become iconic figures in this industry. Gender, as ethnomethodologists and feminist theorists have claimed, is an issue   of “ doing”, and not passive being (Butler, 1990; West and Zimmerman, 1987). In the same stance, Judith Butler (1990, 1993) has observed that gender performativity has been proclaimed as potentially making “ gender trouble”. Initially, her work caused much philosophical and phenomenological debate and focused on singular sites of transgressive practices, such as drag (Bell et al., 1994).  In a postmodernism approach this paper analyses four drag queens who are famous performer and icons in the fashion industry. Although Drag performers have been discriminated from many social arenas, their art and performance comprises three important sociological concepts: gender performativity, simulation, and ethnometodhology.

Inthe fashion industry there are not rigid methods when it comes to modelling. Itis a flexible world with no rules or codes. However there exist normativegender scripts and gender roles which models must perform. Heteronormativityhas perpetuated certain roles in the dichotomy of feminine and masculine. Thoseroles have been imposed in society through different agents of socialization. As Butler claims (1993), there is a heterosexual matrix that has establishedcodes and norms in a dominant way. Therefore, modelling has become an importantarena that enables and reproduces such heterosexual narratives of gender thathave been highly criticized by feminists. These representations result from dayto day activities to everyday work on the part of models. If modelling imagesare fundamental for understanding gender, it is then important to understandsomething of the gendered nature of the work behind the scenes. The differentbodies of the many models that are part of this industry, have also becomepieces of ethnographic study where gender performativity takes places toconstruct the narrative of femininity and masculinity. In the case of theso-called Drag queens, they have escalated to different arenas of socialinclusion. Such issue could be framed within social media dynamics.

In the last couple of years, social platforms such asInstagram, Facebook, and Snapchat have created social spaces that have becomemediums of socialization. In this particular subject, some accounts of famousdrag queens in Instagram have been approached to understand their dynamics and howin their characterizations they enhance the principles of ethnomethodology andsimulation.

Drawing on two separate ethnographic projects on fashion models in New York and London, we investigate the bodily practices and gender performances of male and female models. Fashion modelling is the professionalization of multiple types of gender performance; it is a market in which performances of masculinities and femininities are used to sell commodities and, in addition, a labour market where models commodify themselves to clients – fashion designers, photographers, and casting directors – and are promoted as such  by  modelling  agents  (known  as  ‘ bookers’).  Bringing these two ethnographies together  provides  insights  into  the  comparatively  different  ways  that  male  and  female models‘ do’ gender within the same industry.

We observe a number of contrasts: unexpectedly, male models strategically ‘ drag up’ at work. They parody heterosexuality or homosexuality to increase their market potential. They ‘ do’ gender in strategic ways to enhance their employability to different clients. Hence men deploy non-normative gender and sexual identities that, whiletemporary and  limited to  the  workplace, have  the  potential to  upset  heteronormative  discourses.

Such subversive performances suggest gender performativity can be both disruptive and reproductive  of  stable  gendered  orders.  We  conclude  with  a  discussion  of  how  gender performances are potentially unstable and dynamic, while also grounding and stabilizing, and always relational and context-specific.

## Theoretical Frame:

### Gender Performativity

Alongside ethnomethodological work on ‘ doing gender’ (West and Zimmerman, 1987), Butler  has  been  influential  in  the  explosion  of  literature  on  gender  and  the  body  (see  Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 1994; Grosz and Probyn, 1996). This work claims that gender has no ontological reality; it is an effect of codes endlessly and compulsively repeated within the  hegemonic  framework  of  ‘ compulsory  heterosexuality’  (Rich,  1980).  Thus,  sexed bodies are not the natural units upon which gender is socially imposed; gender is “ performative” and repeated renditions of gender performances serve to generate the appearanceof ‘ difference’ (Butler, 1994).

The inherent instability of gender in Butler’s early work (1990) – she has subsequently re-examined this (1993, 1994, 2004) – points to potential disruptions and discontinuities of gender (Harding, 1998; Henderson, 1993) with the parodic qualities of drag being taken as one example of a radical challenge to gender norms (Bell et al., 1994). However, ultimately all gender is a form of drag and thus not all drag is transgressive. In a re-evaluation, Butler (1994: 32) is critical of the view that ‘ if gender is performative … it must be radically free’, and critical of the view that ‘ if we were all more dragged out gender life would necessarily become  more  expansive,  less  restrictive’  (Butler,  1994:  33,  see  also  Butler,  2004).  Drag needsto be situated or contextualized before claims about it can be criticallyanalysed.

Butler’s arguments are suggestive of new gender possibilities but empirical application  is  scant.  Feminist  post-structuralists  have  focused  on  gendered  meanings  through which  discourses  can  ‘ make  sense’  of  sexed  bodies  (de  Lauretis,  1987;  Diamond and Quinby, 1988; Grosz, 1994), but this move to understand discursive systems is divorced from the material world and everyday practices within it. There are exceptions. Studies have shown that discourses of gender regimes can change, for instance among families in developing China (Powell and Cook, 2006). Other analysis suggests that bodies materialize in the image of organizationally-specific discourses of gender (Borgerson, 2005), as classed and sexed bodies in Bettie’s (2003) study of high school girl culture, and as nationally-grounded sexualized bodies inthe world of dance, which Nash (2000) sees as a travelling set of discourses that bodiesperform.

In studies of women at work, the businesswoman ‘ power dresses’ her body for the corporate workplace (Entwistle, 1997, 2000) and women workers perform the ‘ docile and dexterous’ body on the factory floor in Mexican maquiladores (Salzinger, 2003). Men at work similarly  enact  different  scripts  of  masculinity  within  situational  practices  and  relations (Connell, 2005). Broader social norms structure workplace expectations of what men should do, such as the ‘ camp’ hairstylist which threatens to destabilize masculinity in its hegemonic form,  or  the  ‘ macho’  fire  fighter  who  upholds  it  (Hall  et  al.,  2007).  Thus,  organizational environments serve as contexts for the iteration of gender, creating the conditions for particular subjectivities (Borgerson, 2005; see also Brewis, 2000, on sex work).

We  extend  this  analysis  to  examine  gender  performativity  in  a  work  context where men  and  women  perform  the  same  job  but  within  very  different  discursive  settings  of  appropriate gender identities. Further, modelling sits outside formal organizations, which have been the focus of so much research. Our comparative analysis is especially useful since gender is a relational construct(Deutsch, 2009) and such a comparative case offers insight into how men’s and women’s bodiesmatter differently. Furthermore, as Deutsch notes, while much research on genderperformances attempt to demonstrate the ways in which women or men ‘ do’ gender, and howdiscourses of difference are maintained and reified through practice, we suggest thatthe presence of men in fashion modelling holds potential to ‘ undo’ gender.

We  examine  how  gendered  bodies  are  produced  differently  in  routine  performances  and  practices  of  modelling  work,  through  various  investments  and  techniques of  the  body (Mauss,  1973)  and through  particular  embodied performances.

Focusing on everyday transgressions does not mean shifting attention to individual performances.  While  performance  assumes  a  voluntary  subject,  performativity  denies voluntarism (Butler, 1994) although, in reality, this distinction blurs, as Lloyd (1999) argues, since all individual performances are preceded by, or predicated upon, performativity.  Thus,  to  consider  individual  performances  means  considering  how  gender performativity is enacted in and through individual acts, not privileging the latter. Some performances may imply agency, as when models consciously attempt to  produce  a  desired  appearance,  with  styles  of  dressing  and  walking,  in  strategic  hope of securing work. However, performativity refers to the fact that gendered subjectivity  takes  place  within  social  contexts  of  gender  and  sexual  inequality  that  exceed the individual. Models are always caught up in the unconscious displays of femininity and masculinity inextricably linked to (hetero)sexual desire. For the most part, these two are mutually reinforcing, although male models can and do step outside the heteronormative script, as wedescribe below.

## Data and Methodology

This paper is based on two separate datasets of men and women working in the fashion modelling industry collected independentlyby each researcher with an oversampling on male models.  Entwistle’s  study consists  of  interviews with  25  male models  between  2000 and 2001 in London and New York modelagencies, and interviews with eight of their agents. Mears’ study, from 2005 to2006, consists of 40 interviews with male and female models  in  New York  and  London, evenly  split  by gender  and  city. Mears  also  interviewed  24  bookers,  seven  accountants/business  managers  and  two  bookers’  assistants in  New  York and  London.  These interviews  were  supported by  observations  of  models in situ byboth Entwistle, during interviews with male models at their modelling agencies, and Mears, who worked as a fashionmodel.

Models in this study ranged from 18 to 32(women) and 18 to 44 (men); the mean age of male and female respondents was 26 and23, respectively. Sixteen models had been modelling for  three  years or  less,  while just  four  had modelled  for  over ten  years;  the  mean time of their participation in themodelling market was just under five years.

While we have published on these twostudies (Entwistle, 2002, 2004, 2009; Entwistle and Wissinger,  2006;  Mears and  Finlay,  2005; Mears,  2008,  2011; Godart  and  Mears, 2009), this paper brings both studiestogether for the first time in comparative analysis of gender in this single occupation.

### Fashion Modelling as a Case Study of GenderPerformativity

Modelling work for women dates back to Charles Frederick Worth, who dressed live mannequins  in  his  Parisian  dress  salon  in  the  late  19th  century.  Comparatively,  few  modelling  opportunities existed for men, even as New York City agencies began to represent them in the late  1960s  –  four  decades  after  the  John  Powers’  modelling  agency  for  women  opened  in  New York (Evans, 2001; Scott, 2008). Only relatively recently have male models become a prominent feature in the visual landscape. Sexualized images of young male models emerged over the 1980s and 1990s in advertising, women’s magazines, ‘ new’ men’s magazines and in popular iconography, such as the 1982 Calvin Klein billboards of a bare-chested man (notably an Olympic athlete, not amodel) in briefs in Times Square (Bordo, 1999).

Contemporary  popular culture  encourages  unprecedented levels  of  scrutiny paid  to  men’s bodies  with  increasingly rigid  standards  of perfection  in  fitness magazines  (Dworkin and  Wachs,  2009), expanded  marketing  geared towards  men  (Mort, 1996;  Nixon, 1996; Jackson et al., 2001) andincreased investment by men in their appearances (Gill, 2003; Gill et al., 2000, 2005). These representations pose an apparent challenge to traditional notions of masculinity and thesort of work that men could aspire to do, with more young men approaching model agencies‘ on spec’ now than ever before.

In order  to  understand how  male  and female  models  ‘ do’ gender,  it  is necessary  to  outline some salient features of theirwork. First, modelling places primary emphasis on the body. Models sell their ‘ look’ toclients, and their ‘ bookers’ broker the trade. Beyond basic attractiveness, height and sizerequirements (for women, typically at least 5’9” or 175. 3 cm; measurements close to 34”–24”–34” or 86. 4–61–86. 4 cm; for men a height of 6’0” to 6’3” and a waist of 32” or183–190. 5 cm and 81. 3 cm, respectively), a model’s look is sized up as a matter of personaltastes and evaluations of his or her appeal (Mears and Finlay, 2005).

To see if they have the right ‘ look’ ornot, models audition for assignments in a process known  as  ‘ casting’. At  a  casting, the  model  shows their  ‘ book’,  or portfolio  of  pictures, and  gives  the client  a  ‘ composite card’,  which  has  on  it the  model’s  name,  agency name, sample of pictures, and measurements. If interested, the client may take the model’s picture, have them try on asample of clothing, and in the case of runway bookings, ask to see the model’s catwalk.

This investment of value in the aestheticappearance of the body makes modelling a unique occupation  for  men, historically  on  the other  side  of the  objectifying  gaze.

Modelling is ‘ feminine’ work that prizestraits and practices – good looks, posing, care of one’s body – traditionally unacceptable to conventions of white heterosexual masculinity (see Bordo, 1999, for a discussionof black masculinity). Adverts before the 1960s reflect a cultural discomfort with men infront of the camera lens, and when men posed alone in  fashion  images, they  tended  to look  off  into the  distance,  avoiding a  direct,  homoerotic gaze (Nixon, 1996; Scott, 2008). Today, however, male models connote ‘ to be looked at-ness’ similar to women in popularimagery (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975).

In addition to being assessed on their looks, models are judged on the perceived merits of their ‘ personalities’. Like other workers in service and ‘ aesthetic labour’ industries (Nickson et al., 2001; Warhurst et al., 2000; Witz et al., 2003), models have to manufacture an appropriate aesthetic surface and project a particular ‘ self’ in the form of personality and energy (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006; Wissinger, 2007a, 2007b).

This performance of personality, not unique to fashion modelling, happens under unique  conditions  for  male  and  female  models  due  to  the  gendered  nature  of  modelling work and the fact that the sex composition of the fashion industry as a whole over-represents women and gay men. Although labour market data on sexual minorities is not collected, it is commonly acknowledged that fashion has a preponderance of gay men in positions of power and influence (Bordo, 1999; McRobbie, 1998; Wilson, 2005). Participants in our samples estimated that upwards of 75% of men in the fashion industry are gay, excluding  themale models themselves, who are widely believed to be majorityheterosexual, as our own sample testifies. Since the 1980s, gay  men  in influential  roles  as designers,  stylists,  and model  bookers  have  been at the forefront of changingrepresentations of masculinity, positioned for visual homo-social pleasures (Bordo, 1999). These ‘ cultural intermediaries’ (Bourdieu, 1984) set the terms of work under whichmale models, especially, have to adapt their bodies and ‘ personalities’.

Lastly, modelling shifts the usual termsand conditions of work such that male models are in one of the few industries (alongwith sex work) with a significant inverted wage gap (Escoffier,  2003;  see also  MacKinnon,  1987, for  a  feminist critique).  Almost  uniformly,  women  who  do  ‘ women’s  work’  suffer  a  pay  penalty,  (Browne,  2006),  yet  in  modelling, at every level of work, from catalogues to catwalks, men’s rates are below women’s, and the difference is stark. For example, at a New York Fashion Week show for a major American designer in 2006, female models earned about $2, 000 for roughly six hours  of  work,  whereas  male  models  earned  $2, 000 worth  of  the  designer’s  clothing.

Men’s and women’s earnings distributionsare grossly unequal at every level for equal work across almost all types of jobs, withmen generally earning half that of their female counterparts.

Thus, modelling can be described as‘ women’s work’ both technically – it is disproportionately a ‘ female job’ with aconcentration of women – and culturally – it is a non-traditional job for men (see Williams, 1995). These peculiar features make modelling a site that  ‘ queers’  masculinity and  ‘ straightens  out’ femininity.  That  is, modelling  is  a  world of  work  that enacts  the  reproduction of  traditional  notions of  femininity,  or  ‘ emphasized femininity’,  and  simultaneously  has the  potential  to debunk  idealized  or  ‘ hegemonic’ masculinity  (Connell,  2005). To  analyse  this, we  examine  two different  levels of modelling work. First, we attendto work on the body –the shaping of physical appearances.  Second, we  examine  work of  the  body done  in  the performances  of  self/gendered subjectivities. This distinctionis artificial, as phenomenology attests, but we use it  pragmatically  to draw  an  analytical distinction  between  work on  managing  the  outward shape/size of the body and that ofbodily performances of self/‘ personality’. By examining these  key  elements of  modelling  work, we  demonstrate  different ways  that  male and female models ‘ do’ gender.

### Working on the Body

As the professionalization of types of gender performance, women craft themselves into ‘ ornamental objects’ in modelling (Mears, 2008). This process is continuous with normative femininity, premised on ornamentation and decoration, and, thus, their performances look like what models – and women generally – are, and not something that models especially do (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 141). Male models are also ‘ doing gender’, but in contradictory terms. Their masculinity is on display before a sexualized gaze, and a predominantly gay gaze. Thus, how men and women experience the work differs substantially in their daily rituals of body management, i. e. the work they perform on the body – such things as body size management, dress, and comportment. Such ‘ bodily gestures, movements and styles’ (Butler, 1990: 139–40) are significant  modes  for  the  presentation  of  the  body  at  work  and  the  performativity  of  hetero-normative gender.

## Shaping the Body

Perhaps the  clearest  difference in  models’  gender performances  is  the management  of  body shape and weight. Models arefrequently undressed or underdressed in semi-public spaces and their bodies are routinelymeasured, touched, groomed and sometimes treated as mannequins  in  garment construction.  In  observations of  castings,  we witnessed  women and  men  routinely asked  to  change clothes  often  with no  or  little privacy,  and  male models in particular are habitually asked to remove their shirts so clients and bookers may inspect their stomach muscles. Bodyshape is therefore a major issue, but how models  think  about  their  bodies  and  experience  the  monitoring  of  their  bodies  is gendered.

In interviews, women talked of how theyassessed their bodies in constant anticipation of being assessed by others. Theyspoke of a perpetual worry that clothes will be too tight, that their bookers will makenegative comments, and that clients will take a measuring tape to their hips. Even the slimmestwomen, after initially claiming positive body images, confessed to the pressure of being surrounded by younger and slimmer competition. For many, this fuels a criticalstance towards their bodies that is an exaggeration of what many women feel about their bodyshape. Addison, 19, a model in London for two years, explains  that  she  had  never looked  at  her body  with  quite so  much  disdain, not  since her bookers in London told her toreduce her 37” hip measurement to 35” (94 cm to 88. 9 cm):

And after … I’ve never stopped thinking about it. It’s like everything I eat, I just wonder like, ‘ oh God I shouldn’t be doing this’ and I never used to do that. It’s just completely changed my image of myself, and everything, what I eat. Yeah, I find myself comparing, to other girls, like my body, and I just do it without thinking.

Male models also talk about thesurveillance of their bodies, but their descriptions lack the emotional charge evident in thewomen’s accounts, and they are more likely to confront the challenges of their bodilycapital with straightforward acceptance, as in, ‘ Well,  time  to hit  the  gym’, or  pay  better attention  to  nutrition. For  JD,  it  was expressed  as  a simple  matter  of eating  fewer  kebabs; for  Owen,  it was  fewer  Krispy Kreme doughnuts; for Ian, it wasplaying more sports. Several male models joke about  their  skinny bodies,  and  bemoan their  inability  to  put  on weight  or  to  build muscle. But it seems just that, ajoke. Edward, a London model, comments on the ‘ six-pack’ of other models and hisbooker’s insistence that he goes to the gym, but, he says, he takes it ‘ with a pinch of salt, I’m not that concerned’. Women succumb to  intense  demands to  be  physically perfect,  while  men largely  resist  such  expectations. Dressing the Body

The  model’s  dress  style  is  a  key  marker  of  the  body  to  be  worked  on.  Bookers  take  the  initial steps to guide models towards an appropriately fashionable disposition in their dress, filtering their wardrobes, instructing them to look at Vogue, even taking them shopping to hip retailers like Topshop. At an agencyobserved in New York, bookers instruct new models to arrive early the day of importantcastings for an ‘ outfit check’. A spare Marc Jacobs dress hangs in the coat closet, waiting toadorn the unstylish model.

Male models  do  not receive  such  attention because  dressing  is  not  as significant  a  feature of their work-day presentation ofself, and they pay little attention to it. In fact, the more  a  male model  frets  about his  appearance,  the less  attractive  he becomes.  In  interviews, bookers suggest that male modelling requires less skill and craft than women’s modelling, and that there is somethingunseemly about a man trying too hard: as the owner of an agency in London notes, ‘ Theboys are just cool like that’, meaning that men do not, and should not, try to beornamental objects. Male models largely agree, and are aware of  a  danger of  being  perceived as  too  stylish. One  male  model who  is  dating a  female model explains:

I think from a boy point of view … there isn’t much you have to do. It’s different for girls. Like, my girlfriend explained, in Paris she has to go to the castings looking a certain way, whereas in London and New York I can just kind of rock on to an extent looking casual. (Lucas, 26, London)

Such observations  resonate  with studies  of  gender and  dress.  Women have  long  been connected to dress and adornment, while men’s dress has been largely obscured from  history  (Breward,  1999;  Tseelon,  1995;  Wilson,  1993).  Discourses  on  the  supposed vanity and superficiality offemininity and women’s supposed love of all things sartorial are thus performative offemininity, and women’s dress is read as significant of her sexuality (in rape trials, forexample, a fact ironically challenged in 2011 with ‘ Slut Walk’  demonstrations  internationally).  However, rarely  did  the male  models  show any interest in adornment; indeed, they take pride in not caring about their dress and overall appearance. Women, these malemodels imply, are well suited to be ornamental objects, but not men.

### Catwalking

Asymmetrical  gendered bodily  practices  are further  evident  on the  ‘ catwalk’,  where  women and  men  ‘ strut’ the  length  of an  illuminated  runway at  a  fashion show  under  enormously different expectations. Womenmay undergo hours of walking practice, or ‘ runway lessons’ with a professionalcatwalk ‘ coach’. Mears attended one such lesson during Fashion Week in New York lasting two hours. In field notes she records her observations as Felix, an openly gay man and‘ runway coach’, instructed models on how to prepare for the catwalk:

For the next hour Felix will have us walktoward him and back again, taking turns. Sometimes he’ll walk first and we try to copy it, orhe’ll just say where we need to modify. He keeps telling one woman that she needs to take largersteps. He tells me my right shoulder is stiff. At one pointhe tells me after I walk: ‘ Don’t charge at a man. Come to him. Flirt.’ Walkingtowards me coyly, the way I should learn to walk, he adds, ‘ Can – I – take – your – order ?’

Forwomen, embodying this gendered identity – of a woman who offers sex def-erentially to a man – is not far removed from dominant ideals of femalesexuality (Bordo, 1999; MacKinnon, 1987). Women are positioned to seethemselves as sex objects, and several in our interviews had imaginedthemselves as models from a young age. Becoming a model for a woman is toattain ‘ emphasized femininity’, a privileged place within culturally dominantexpectations of womanhood (Connell, 2005). However, the overwhelming majorityof men enter modelling through an agent’s encouragement, not in pursuit of achildhood dream. They come to the field not having thought much about theirlooks, as have their female counterparts. Despite having less socialpreparation to sell their bodies, men generally get less training in new waysof ‘ doing’ masculinity. When asked if he trained with a cat- walk coach, oneLondon male model seemed surprised such a thing exists: ‘ No. Not at all. Theyjust put me out there and I did the show and I just learned it as I rolled.’Men must ‘ pick up’ bodily skills for the runway and the camera over time andlargely on their own.

Thereis, therefore, a discrepancy in techniques of walking that are heavilygendered. The training required for a female model results in a walk that ishighly exaggerated and stylized and which deviates radically from ‘ normal’styles of walking. Female models often have to walk in very high heels thatalready change the gait of the body, a ‘ tech- nique of the body’ that Mauss (1973)describes, and the current aesthetic is for an exag- gerated ‘ strut’ thatpronounces the lift of the legs and involves planting one foot directly infront of the other rather than in front of its own hip socket. The overalleffect generates a very distinct bounce that is an over-blown parody of a walkin a way that would be inappropriate for men.

Malemodels’ catwalk has none of these obvious affectations; it is ‘ casual’, even‘ slouchy’. It is as if the men have simply wandered off the street and onto thecatwalk by accident, but it is only ‘ natural’ in so far as it replicatestechniques of walking men practice off the runway, techniques learned fromchildhood (Mauss, 1969). Male models’ walk appears to disavow or distanceitself from the performance; it does not call attention to the men as objectsof display and does not offend normative defini- tions of masculinity. Indeed, Parker, a 24-year-old New York model, explicitly linked masculinity to hiscatwalk performance: ‘ Just walk like a man, just walk like yourself. For guysit’s very different than girls. Girls have to learn to walk. Guys just walkwith confidence.’

Itwould seem, so far, that the practices involved in being a female and malemodel conform to normative heterosexuality: women are decorated, done up, andmade to feel more pressure in terms of how their bodies are assessed, and areexpected to exaggerate their performances or ‘ drag up’ the elements of displayand exaggerate femininity as display for others. They are schooled and overloaded with codes offemininity, what Borgerson and Rhen (2004) refer to as ‘ excesses’, that thefemale body is inherently lacking, requiring supplements to create the femininewhich is always an incomplete final state.

Malemodels, in both interviews with us and in their day-to-day negotiation ofcastings and jobs, follow gendered scripts so as to appear uninterested inthings largely defined as feminine. In this case, they align themselves withheteronormative expectations and per- form hegemonic masculinity.

## Performing the Self

Womenhave long performed ‘ emotional labour’ in service industries, using theirgender and (hetero)sexuality to increase company profits by flattering andflirting with (male) customers (Hochschild, 1983). In fashion, such labour is expectedof male models as well. All models, especially new models, spend considerabletime selling themselves to clients at highly competitive castings. Mears andFinlay (2005) describe routine work- days in which women models engage in‘ strategic friendliness’ with clients and bookers, channel their ‘ energy’, andsuppress their true feelings in order to get hired. Wissinger (2007a, 2007b)similarly describes models’ strategies to feign enthusiasm and affect on thejob. Selling the self involves producing an energetic, upbeat version ofoneself that ‘ connects’ to bookers and clients: warm smile, solid eye contact, and manufacturing the persona of genuine niceness. Models exploit their good looks and sexuality byflirting to charm clients, as with one young model in London, who was observedduring a casting audition for a cosmetics campaign. When the client, agood-looking young man, asked where she was from, she replied blithely, ‘ FromRussia, with love!’ and winked at him, knees bending in a flirtatious courtesy.

Charmtakes a distinctive form for the male model. Male models are frequently objectsof homosexual desire both in front and behind the camera, chosen and styled bythe large preponderance of gay men, often destined for fashion magazines, suchas Attitude, L’Uomo , which have significant gay male readerships. As objects ofhomoe- rotic desire on a daily basis in their working lives, male models learnthey can increase their chances by the strategic performances of(homo)sexuality. As one London model put it, the aim is ‘ to make the clientsfancy you’. Inevitably this involves flirting with male as well and femaleclients, either ‘ queering’ their performance, or emphasizing heterosexuality. He demonstrated how he performs for clients at castings depending on theirgender: with women he strikes a confident pose and behaves in typically ‘ manly’ways – firm handshake (the researcher’s hand was shook) and confident stare(head up, chin back). Male clients, he notes, are likely to be gay and forthese encounters he resorts to a stereotypically ‘ camp’ performance –‘ effeminate’ voice and ‘ limp wrist’ – all of which he performed during theinterview.

Thisis widespread practice for straight male models, who admit flirting with gayclients. As Ian, 25, put it:

I just give some gay persons, you know, like a smile or something to let them think something. … It’s just to give them a little bit of hope, you know. I don’t ignore them. I play with them, because in life you have to seduce people, especially in castings.

Thisperformance defies expectations of masculinity. Modelling entails male modelsgo ‘ gay for pay’, which Escoffier (2003) has found to be widespread in theadult film industry, wherestraight men ‘ play gay’ in higher-paying gay sex scenes. ‘ Gay-for-pay’ infashion means strategically performing a homosexual identity at castings, whichone booker in New York explained: ‘ I feel that the male models know how to –not that the male models sleep with clients – but they know how to use it. Flirtation is a factorto their advantage.’

Indeed, a young male model in London explained having to adapt his previouslyhomophobic disposition, common in his hometown in North London. He jumped upduring the interview and, with a puffed out chest and tough-guy walk, pretendedto enter a casting studio, explaining, ‘ I used to be one of these like toughguys, like “ I ain’t getting changed in here in front of these gay bastards!”’Two years into mode- ling, he explained that he no longer gets uncomfortablearound gay men. He continued:

I had to adapt in a way, that I had to let them flirt with me, and I had to be quite a flirtatious boy. … So now I’ve changed; basically, I started treating gay people same as I would treat normal straight guys.

No oneteaches the male model this art of suggestion; he learns it on his own. As Ryanput it, ‘ it’s common sense’, and ‘ everybody does it’. It often takes the formof ‘ playing along’; for instance, Ethan passively let a gay client flirt withhim at a party. This is the opposite strategy of gay men in other types ofwomen’s work, such as teachers and nurses, who, in the face of homophobia andpressure to hide their sexual orientation, play up hegemonic masculinity(Williams, 1995). While sexuality and specifically heteronor- mativity arebuilt into norms in most occupations, we see this inverted for male models, andsuch expectations are built into their workplace encounters and even in leisurespaces such as at parties.

Ofcourse, not all male models are heterosexual but, barring just one self-identifiedgay man of the models in our sample, the men openly declared theirheterosexuality dur- ing the interviews, typically without being asked. Indeed, they seemed acutely aware that their work is thought to be ‘ feminine’ and thatthey are assumed to be gay, and thus, like this London model, they set therecord straight:

Most people think models are gay, but not at all, a lot of male models are really big lads, if you know what I mean: they want to go out and get laid and whatever. This is where people misinterpret it. Lots of the bookers and stylists and photographers are the gay ones, it’s not the models. (Gary, 22)

Duringinterviews, the majority of the models relied on clichéd performances of het-eronormative masculinity, enacting their sexual desire with declarations thatthey were in the industry ‘ for the girls’ or by describing their girlfriendsand sexual relationships. A few models used homophobic comments as a way ofpositioning themselves as hetero- sexual. These performative enactments enablethe model to situate himself on the ‘ right’ (i. e. normative) side of thesexuality divide. These comments are themselves performa- tive; made to ensureno misconception on our part that they were gay, and to frame the interview asa normative heterosexual encounter. Further, the models sometimes becameflirtatious during the interview and with female models in the agency. Indeed, the most common performance by London models was distinctly ‘ laddish’ in style(Gill, 2003):

slouchy, jokey, irreverent, including sexual references and jokes. As these examples highlight, heterosexuality and homosexuality are ‘ worn’ on the body, very much like drag, through gestures and behaviour in work interactions.

Incontrast to their laddish performances ‘ off the clock’, these men arefrequently called upon by photographers to exude homoerotic appeal onphoto-shoots. As one model put it, ‘ photographers want you to give them sex, sex, sex’ because ‘ sex sells’ commodities. In a curious extension of Simon deBeauvoir’s famous denouncement, men, as well as women, are ‘ the sex’ in thiscontext. Since photographers can be very influential in promoting a new model, it makes sense to win them over by being sexy and flirtatious. The aim is, asone model put it, to ‘ keep them guessing’ as to their sexuality. These men arerealistic about the work and its erotic content, and they are not afraid of thegay gaze. In this way, male modelling ‘ queers’ normative definitions ofmasculinity by confounding the conventions and expectations of dominantheterosexual masculinity. It is an occupation that challenges conventionalnotions of work and of what a ‘ real man’ should do.

However, the heightened sexuality of modelling work frequently spills over to becomesomething of an occupational hazard: stories of the ‘ casting couch’ werefrequently told, with models on the receiving end of unwanted sexual advancesfrom photographers and stylists while on photo-shoots, and, in one case in oursample, from a model’s booker. Nearly every model saw such encounters as anoccupational hazard; most male models told of unwanted sexual advances from gaymen, either first-hand accounts or stories of friends’ ordeals.

Theways in which male models say they handle these encounters further illustratedifferently modulated performances of masculinity engendered by this work. Ininter- views models recounted stories of how they had been ‘ felt up’ bystylists while dressing, or asked to strip down, or wear revealing clothes bythe stylist or photographer. One model on a shoot with a male photographer wasasked to make himself semi-erect. The unequal power relations between model andclient mean that models have to handle such situations carefully if the modelis to continue working. A commonly used strategy is to over-performheterosexuality. One London model describes how ‘ I make or pretend to make animaginary phone call to my mates: “ yeah I got laid last night, gorgeous bird”, and then they get the message’.

Tellingly, such stories were largely absent in women’s discourses of modelling work. Contrary to popular depictions of fashion models as the heterosexual objects ofpredatory male clients, as was recently portrayed in the documentary Picture Me co- produced by model SarahZiff (2009; see also Gross, 1995), women were less likely than men to recountstories of sexual advances by clients. This too may be indicative of genderperformativity on two levels. First, in an industry over-represented with gaymen, it may be that more male models than women experience come-ons. Second, itis also likely that female models may not report or even recognize sexualadvances by men, given the ubiquity of sexual harassment women on any job arelikely to face (see MacKinnon, 1987).

In anygiven context, argues R. W. Connell (2005), ‘ hegemonic masculinity’ is cul-turally exalted over subordinated masculinities and all femininities. Gay menrank near the bottom of the gender order, on par with femininity. However, within fashion, this powerstructure is reversed, with women and gay men in positions of influence. Thisrearranges the structure of gender and sexual power relations for male models. Within modelling, the male fashion model occupies one of the lowliestpositions, with little power or influence vis-à-vis these powerful gay men andtheir more revered female counterparts. They must rely upon their bodilyefforts and performances, which by heteronormative standards, are ‘ queered’, orientatedtowards a feminized, sexualized, often homosexual workplace. Thus, in polaropposite ways that women can achieve ‘ emphasized’ femininity via modelling, these men find their work identity at odds with normative hetero-masculinity. And yet, as the men’s performances suggest, while male modelling challengesnormative definitions of masculinity, this can be reclaimed by over-performingheterosexuality.

## Conclusion

As theprofessional ‘ doing’ of multiple types of femininities and masculinities, fashion modelling presents an empirical comparative analysis of genderperformativity in one occupation. We have examined two different levels of‘ work’ in modelling where gen- der differences are apparent – the monitoringand careful presentation of bodies – and, secondly, performances of thebody/self to ‘ charm’ clients. In each, we find a rich gen- der gradient inmodels’ expectations, behaviour, and subjective understandings.

Wesuggest that the everyday work of male modelling opens up partial chal- lengesto normative definitions of gender within the reiterative possibilities of gen-der performativity, specifically by ‘ queering’ it, firstly through the ways inwhich these men are invested in their body and, secondly, through theperformances they enact at work. However, rather than heralding a dramaticshift in notions of gender, the opening up of non-traditional occupations tomen and women produces differ- ently modulated gender performances in suchspaces of work. This counter-balances the overt determinism of genderperformativity, as well as demonstrating, through empirical observation, howopen to ‘ play’ normative gendered scripts can be, not just within thesupposedly ‘ radical’ and ‘ alternative’ spaces of drag. As our researchdemonstrates, and Lloyd (1999) argues, the de-naturalizing of gendereffectively extends to all forms of ‘ dressing up’, and models’ ‘ parodicproliferation’ defies the idea of two essential genders and desires. Indeed, they demonstrate how ‘ one “ is” never straight or queer, merely in a conditionof “ doing” straightness or queerness’ (Lloyd, 1999: 197).

Insum, our case study of models reveals subtle differences and nuanced ways of‘ doing gender’ that cannot be accessed through discourse analysis alone. Ourempirical setting reveals small contrasts in the ways of ‘ doing’ gender thatsuggest how gender performativity, while largely reiterative of normativeheterosexuality, may subtly con- found the conventions. Thus, the performancesof female and male models – predicated as they are on the performativity ofgender – testify to the resilience of normative hetero- sexuality, while alsodemonstrating some of the ways in which the scripts might be chal- lenged. Ultimately, the concept of gender performativity should be understood as locallyemergent and contextual. In this empirical application of genderperformativity, we find context to be crucial in shaping specific meanings ofgendered acts.

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