

CHEATING THROUGH PASSING: THE PARADOX OF GENDER PERFORMANCE DURING IN-CLASS EXAMINATIONS

Phillip Chong Ho Shon

Department of Criminology
Indiana State University

ABSTRACT

While previous and current research on academic dishonesty provides a framework for understanding the social and personal characteristics of cheaters, their motives, and the cosmetic differences between male and female students who cheat, gender is often assumed a priori and not pursued as a justifiable topic in its own right. Drawing on an on-going work involving the tactics that students use to cheat on in-class examinations, this paper examines a specifically gendered one. Using in-depth narratives from 7 female students, this paper explores how gender emerges in the classroom, how its relations are reproduced, and subverted in the micro-moments of academic dishonesty, resulting in what I refer to as the paradox of gender performance.

Key words: *in-class examinations, students, cheating*

INTRODUCTION

Researchers agree that cheating is pervasively practiced by students during their academic careers, and poses a serious problem for colleges (McCabe and Bowers 1994; McCabe and Trevino 1996). The literature, however, does not provide what the students do to cheat—how they cheat. Furthermore, while the extant literature on academic dishonesty provides a framework for understanding the social and personal characteristics of cheaters, their motives, and the cosmetic differences between male and female students who cheat, gender is not pursued as a justifiable topic in its own right.

This paper adds to the existing research on academic dishonesty and gender by delineating the innovative methods that a select few female students used to adapt to their perceived strain in the pursuit of scholastic excellence. More specifically, it describes a unique way that female students use their sex categories and gender displays as situational resources in the performance of gender to

negotiate the interactional management of “passing” during in-class examinations (Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1963; Zimmerman 1992).

Passing, essentially, involves the hiding of discreditable information/states by feigning normalcy (Goffman, 1963). As Goffman (1963: 73) writes, “where the stigma is nicely invisible and known only to the person who possesses it, who tells no one, then here again is a matter of minor concern in the study of passing.” Thus, individuals who face the possibility of having their stigma exposed—e.g., prostitutes, drug dealers and addicts, cheaters—attempt to mask their illicit activities as something mundane and ordinary. A fundamental element of passing, then, involves the possibility of being “discovered by those who can personally identify him [her],” thereby revealing information that is inconsistent the professed claims (Goffman, 1963: 75).

The most notorious example of passing—and constructionist perspective on gender—comes from

Garfinkel's (1967) study of Agnes, a woman born with a penis. Garfinkel's (1967) seminal work examined the strategies Agnes used to "pass" herself off as a woman, and how her ascription in that gender category was necessarily related to her appropriate identificatory displays (e.g., such as allowing men to light her cigarettes, not sun-bathing in public etc.). That is to say that Agnes had to "learn" how to be a woman from those around her.

Using West and Zimmerman's (1987) notion of "doing" gender, this paper examines how gender is "performed" in the context of academic dishonesty; more specifically, this paper examines how female students rely on their gender resources to "pass" during in-class examinations, thereby negotiating the intricate contingencies of academic dishonesty. Furthermore, it explores how gender is produced and reproduced in the classroom during such moments, resulting in what I refer to as the paradox of gender performance. In the process, I demonstrate how female undergraduate students subvert the interactional dynamics of an assumed asymmetrical relationship in the situational performance of "gender display" (West and Zimmerman 1987). The implications for ideology of education, gender relations, and subjectivity are discussed.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND GENDER

There is consensus amongst researchers that cheating is widely accepted and pervasively practiced by students during their academic careers (Baird 1980; McCabe 1992; McCabe and Trevino 1996). The extent of academic dishonesty—from plagiarism, using crib sheets, collaborative cheating, to substitute test taking—has been estimated to be as low as 3% (Karlins et al. 1988) and as high as 89% (Graham et al. 1994). Generally, researchers estimate the figure to be somewhere between 50% and 70% (see Diekhoff et al. 1996; Genereux and McLeod 1995; Hollinger and Kaduce 1996; Labeff et al. 1990; Newstead et al. 1996; Singhal 1982). Thus, it is safe to assert that cheating is pervasive, and poses a serious problem for institutions of higher learning (Smith 2000; but see Michaels and Miethe 1989; Spiller and Crown 1995).

Why students cheat in the first place, upon cursory reflection, seems like a simple question. The obvious answer is to improve their grades; but when students are pressed for a detailed answer, they

relate that their decision to cheat is influenced by numerous factors, such as excessive workloads, inability to keep up with assignments, and presence of peers who do not disapprove of cheating, sometimes, encouraging their active and passive collusion (see Barnett and Dalton 1981; Drake 1941; Genereux and McLeod 1995). Furthermore, it has been shown that being pressed for time as a result of their involvement in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports), work, and social activities (fraternities and sororities) leads to grossly inadequate study time, poor study habits, and consequently, cheating (see Barnett and Dolton 1981; Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead 1995; Labeff et al. 1990; McCabe 1992). For some students, however, studying is just as painful, if not more, than a trip to the dentist's office; others simply confess—almost take pride in the fact—that they are mental couch-potatoes.

Research also indicates that certain situational and environmental conditions are more likely to influence students in their decision to cheat (see Bonjean and Mcgee 1965; Bushway and Nash 1977; Ferrell and Daniel 1995). Multiple choice exams that are administered in auditoriums breed a ripe condition conducive to cheating since the deviously creative tactics that students can use become almost limitless (Houston 1976, 1983, 1986); students frequently cite inattentive proctoring as a significant contributor to cheating, along with a professor's personality and teaching style; that is, teachers who are dictatorial in their pedagogical style bear the brunt of students' academic deviance.

A closely related direction of research has focused on the techniques that students use to "neutralize" their dishonest behaviors (Haines et al. 1986). Students place the blame squarely on the shoulders of apathetic teachers, teachers who favor blondes, unfairness of exams, poor instructor vigilance, sadistic teaching assistants, parental and societal pressures, and numerous other idiosyncratic factors—excuses—that compel a student to cheat. Simply put, students routinely use "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes and Matza 1957) to rationalize their cheating behavior *prior* to its commission: they *deny responsibility*, *deny injury*, *deny the victim*, and *condemn the condemners* (McCabe 1992). Students who respond in this manner would blame the moon, its pull on the ocean, and the family dog if it would justify their decision to cheat and mollify any remaining pangs of guilt—that is blame everything but themselves, lifestyles, and their study habits.

Students who cheat share similar social and individual characteristics (Tang and Zuo 1997). Students who lack maturity, students who are less invested personally in their learning, students who belong to fraternities/sororities, and students who view their education as a means to an end (instrumental) rather than an end in itself (intrinsic), are more likely to cheat (Diekhoff et al. 1996). And not surprisingly, students who perform poorly on intelligence tests and in their schoolwork are inclined to cheat (Bunn et al. 1992; Barnett and Dolton 1981). Cheaters are also less deterred by the prospect of stigma, less likely to report observed instances of cheating, and overestimate its occurrence (Diekhoff et al., 1996).

The primary thrust of research on academic dishonesty-education and psychology-has been content to survey the attitudes of individuals that best predict cheating (see Anderson 1957; Aronson and Mettee 1968; Bushway and Nash 1971; Centra 1970; Cooper and Peterson 1980; Enker 1987; Eskridge and Ames 1993; Johnson and Klores 1968). However, aside from the attitudes toward and about cheating that students, faculty, and peers hold, cheating is a warrantable topic for sociology since it also epitomizes the illegitimate means that individuals adopt in response to a perceived frustration in the pursuit of a desired goal (Merton 1938). That is, when students assimilate "the cultural emphasis on success without equally internalizing the morally prescribed norms governing means for its attainment," then the illegitimate methods employed to achieve the desired state becomes a pivotal focus of rule-breaking behavior (Merton 1938:678; Coston and Jenks 1998).¹

Recent work of Tony Smith (2000) applies two criminological theories (control and general strain) to student academic dishonesty. Thus, students whose ambitions to attend professional schools are thwarted by their low GPAs (failure to achieve valued goals), students who are in a position to lose scholarships should their GPAs dip below an acceptable minimum level (removal of positive goals), and students who are harangued by their parents to get high grades (negative stimulus) are, theoretically, more likely to cheat than those who do not face such strain (Smith 2000; see also Agnew 1985, 1992). Smith's findings, however, do not support the claims of general strain theory; that is, students aspiring to attend professional schools who have low GPAs, potentially having their scholar-

ships revoked as a result of poor grades, and parental pressure did not significantly affect students' decision to cheat. Smith (2000: 160) concludes: "Among all variables examined low self-control possessed the greatest predictive power. This study finds encouraging support for the theory's ability to explain another form of misconduct among the many that have already been investigated. Thus, the predictive breadth and scope of self-control lends further credence to its claims of theoretical generality."

The word 'generality' intimates that a theory is or ought to be-equally applicable to both genders: a gender specific theory of crime is not deemed necessary (see Smith 1979; Smith and Paternoster 1987). It is this theoretical drive toward gender "blindness" that has been a warrantable source of criticism in the criminological literature (Messerschmidt 1993). This, however, does not mean that there aren't noteworthy differences between male and female cheaters (Whitley et al. 1999). For instance, males cheat more than females and harbor positive attitudes toward cheating in general while females are more likely to harbor stricter attitudes (Anderson 1957; Newstead et al. 1996; Whitley et al. 1999). When female students cheat, they are more likely to make excuses before doing so and for reasons different from males (Kelly and Worell 1990; Ward and Beck 1990). That is, male students cheat for instrumental reasons (e.g., to get a better grade) whereas female students cheat for relational reasons (e.g., to help another student) (see Johnson and Gormly 1972; Newstead et al. 1996). Moreover, female students are more likely to experience shame, and be inhibited by internal (and informal) constraints (see Cochran et al. 1999; Tibbetts 1997a, b, 1998, 1999; Tittle & Rowe, 1973).

While these studies are informative and illustrate the cosmetic-attitudinal and behavioral-differences between male and female cheaters, they assume a static notion of gender, one that presupposes its social ontology. Prior studies that delineate the differences between male and female students merely use gender as a resource to pursue other ends, not as a justifiable topic in its own right. That is, sex is primarily treated as a biological phenomenon, and a foundational criterion used to classify students as males or females.² Consequently, this practice ignores gender's socially constructed, situationally produced, and interactionally achieved

character (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Gender is an accomplishment since it is mediated by a thoroughly social activity; that is, to be held accountable as a person of a particular gender, one must "do" or perform the appropriate "identificatory" displays of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987).

This ethnomethodological perspective entails conceptualizing gender as a dynamic form of social action, social structure that is constituted, accomplished, and sustained during situated moments of mundane interaction (Messerschmidt 1997, 1993). Accordingly, gender, in this view, is not an essential (biological) trait or a role enacted as much as it is a "doing" and a collaborative accomplishment—"carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production...rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126; see also West and Fenstermaker 1995: 20-22).

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study were collected from two medium sized regional universities in the Midwest (MU) and the South (SU) in the spring of 2003 and fall of 2003. The subjects were chosen from a convenience sample of 128 undergraduate students, 72 male and 56 female, who had enrolled in an introductory criminal justice/criminology course. Although participation was voluntary, and for extra credit, two respondents did not give consent to use their responses so they were excluded from the analysis; furthermore, seven respondents stated outright that they had never cheated on any exam, so their responses were not included in the substantive portions of the paper. While it could be argued that these two courses are not representative of the university population as a whole, the two courses fulfilled the general education requirements of both universities; hence, students from a broad range of majors and disciplines, as well as class standing, were represented in the sample (see Tibbetts 1998).

Each student was asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire. The students were asked two questions: 1) Have you ever cheated during an in-class examination? (Cheating was defined as copying a test from others, using unauthorized crib notes and "cheat sheets" during an exam.) 2) If students answered yes to 1, they were directed to a second question which asked them to write a detailed

narrative as to how they cheated—the specific tactics they used to cheat during in-class examinations.

This study was exploratory and qualitative in nature. Thus, rather than using pre-formulated surveys and coding schemes, students were instructed to be as detailed and as descriptive as possible in their narratives. The narrative responses were then inductively categorized into recurring analytical patterns (see Emerson et al. 1995:142-166).

Consequently, no hypotheses were tested. Moreover, no statistical analysis or tabulation of the demographic characteristics of the students (N=119) are presented because it is precisely along such lines that the extant works are directed. This study was concerned with the description and analysis of one specific technique that female students used to cheat during in-class exams.

There were wide variations in the length and detail of students' narratives, ranging from one paragraph to several pages. The creative ways that male and female students cheat on in-class exams share environmental, situational, and tactical similarities, and a typology of such methods has been addressed elsewhere (author). During that initial coding, however, 7 narratives with a distinct "gendered" and "sexualized" theme emerged out of the 55 narratives from female students. This paper seeks to "unpack" its import as it pertains to the sociology of deviance and the social construction of gender in the classroom in particular. To that end, narratives that are rich in descriptions and representative of these gendered techniques of innovation are included as examples. To capture the authenticity of the lived details of their experience, I have chosen to let the students represent their own stories, in their own ungrammatical voices.

GENERAL PASSING IN TECHNIQUES OF INNOVATION

To appreciate the gendered techniques of cheating, they must be contextualized in relation to the general—gender neutral—tactics that students of both genders use during in-class examinations. Recent work suggests that students use highly creative methods to cheat on in-class examinations (author). The first step in cheating involves a "qualifying" process whereby students "size up" their teachers as potential victims of academic fraud; essentially, "sizing up" involves testing a professor's vigilance, and establishing the situational

parameters of acceptability of illicit action—how much they can get away with. This process is similar to the way police detectives “size up” a suspect in an interrogation room: students create a psychological “profile” of their professors and conjure up ways to dupe them out of a legitimate exam (see Leo 1996). Students also have to monitor their comportment as they are entering the exam site, during, and as they are leaving—impression management (Goffman 1959). Consider the following self report from a student:

Excerpt 1

Yes that is the last one now I just need to wait a little to turn it in so I do not look like I was cheating. That would be too obvious if I finished at the same time as her. Ok coast is clear. I will hand my paper in and make a run for it. Just do not make eye contact with the teacher. Oh no he is looking at me. Remember just look down whatever you do do not look up. Ok the paper is down now and head for the door. Yes I am safe I cannot believe I got through it. From now on, I have to study in advance because I am just too scared to cheat anymore.

This first person narrative of cheating gives us an intimate glimpse of the emotional and aesthetic contours of illicit action, and the delicate interactional management of “passing” that cheating entails (Garfinkel 1967). The student in excerpt 1 works hard to hide her undiscovered, albeit discreditable, identity as a cheater. To keep her identity a secret—to “pass” as a non-cheater—she collapses the temporal order of her test submission to control the “information flow” in order to project a “normal” appearance (Goffman 1963).

Next, notice that its negotiation is delicately intertwined with a tinge of shame and panoptic discipline. Reminiscent of subjects in a Foucaultian institution, this student’s internalized, self regulating propensities are reflected in the fleeting refusal to enter into the dialectical field of the omnipresent professor’s gaze; we are treated to the shame and fear that accompanies the student cheater’s demeanor: fear that quickly turns into elation, shame that transforms itself into a new found resolute determination to work hard. Thus, in addition to the compendium of attitudes that is correlated to cheating (Tibbetts 1997, 1998, 1999; Tibbetts and Herz 1996; Tibbetts and Myers 1999) we can see the complex interplay of shame, fear, and joy that is embedded in the transitory act of submitting a test in the course of passing.

Once students have “qualified” their professors, then must decide whether they want to cheat alone (solitary) or in collusion (collaborative). Collaborative cheating involves the use of confederates, witting or unwitting. Thus, if a cheater tactically positions him/herself around a “smart” student and peeks at the smart student’s answers without his/her knowledge and consent, then the smart student is a victim of theft; if the smart student actively participates, then s/he becomes an accomplice. In addition, it has been found that students use semiotic methods—prearranged signal systems—to communicate back and forth with their accomplices; sometimes, collaborative cheaters take turns distracting the professor as his/her confederates peek at “cheat sheets” (author).

Solitary cheating necessitates the smuggling of unauthorized cheat sheets into the testing site; although not exhaustive, the means by which students import these crib notes can be classified into thematic categories, and are delimited by parameters of feasibility. That is, students have to import unauthorized notes into the testing room (creative smuggling), retrieve them, make use of them while avoiding detection, and dispose of the evidence. To that end, they tape notes to various articles of clothing, store answers on calculators, cell (camera) phones, and other technological gizmos, and use ordinary objects such as pens, glasses, and water bottles to hide their illegitimate notes. In addition, some students use their body parts as cheat sheets. Consider the following self report narratives of a student who cheats in such a manner:

Excerpt 2

Another common technique was, writing words on your hand and arms. That way it want be so obvious that you are cheating. Most people just lie their arm straight down across the desk. Many people find that it is a lot easier to hide also. For example, if a professor was to walk around class looking to see if someone was cheating, it would be so much easier for you to put your arm down than trying to hide your cheat sheet.

Students are aware of behaviors that are normatively associated with test-taking, and they are used to project a normal appearance during the course of their illicit action (see Jacobs and Miller 1998). Thus, a student who is “frustrated,” and in exasperation, puts her hands to her head and projects a self image—a rather common sight—to dupe the professor into thinking she is dazed and con-

fused when in actuality she is sneaking a peek at her crib notes which she has scribbled between her fingers. In the excerpt above, a student who has written the answers on the underside of his forearm straightens it out and puts his head on it to cover his fraudulent method as the proctor strolls by; consequently, the student prevents the discovery of his stigmatizing identity as a cheater by feigning the normative behavior of a student taking a test—passing. There is, however, a way to cheat that precludes a proctor from taking action against the cheaters even if illegitimate tactics are detected; and should professors decide to investigate the misconduct, it may end up being a liability for them.

GENDERED PASSING DURING EXAMS

Consider the following narratives from female students who used gender as a valuable resource employed as an innovative tactic for the sake of a passing grade:

Excerpt 3

Once in class, I would place the 'cheat sheet' between my legs on the seat of my desk...The way I had it placed, it seemed that I was staring down at my test, when I was really reading the sheet. If the teacher would happen by, I would close my legs completely together so it would be hidden.

Excerpt 4

An advantage to female is that we wear skirts. If wearing a skirt on test day, you can write on your thighs and cover it up with your clothing. Using this route, no one would ever know, and if someone does look, who made them king to raise your skirt and look?

Excerpt 5

It was a long skirt that came down to my ankles with a slit on both sides. Before every test I would write all the answers on my thigh. When I stood up you could not see because that slit was not that high, but it was high enough when I sat down. When I sat down to take my test, my skirt came up a little. I then crossed my legs and I could see all the answers that I had written on my leg. If he passed by my desk I would uncross my legs and I was good to go.

In excerpts 3-5 there is elusive sophistication in the innovative techniques the female students adopt; yet, despite the illegitimacy of the corporeal tech-

nique that is adapted to meet the exigent demands of academic life, there is a palpable imperviousness to the techniques that they employ; and what is beyond reach may be that the female student in excerpt 3 has placed the cheat sheet between her legs; the students in excerpt 4 and 5 have scribbled the answers on their thighs, and worn skirts to cover them. By using sex categories and gender attire as resources—writing the answers near sexually precarious places—the female cheaters effectively insulate themselves from surveillance and detection. The obvious benefit of this type of method is that it utilizes the cultural taboo of a sexualized body part to inoculate against suspicion: teachers do not normally expect students to write things in or near places pregnant with sexual suggestibility. In this way, gender or, rather its performance, becomes a key situational resource that is employed as an innovative tactic in the pursuit of academic excellence.

To hide her identity as a cheater, notice that the female student in excerpt 5 wears a skirt that is of a particular length and style so that the answers become accessible only upon her control. That is, she relies on gender specific attire and identificatory displays (wearing a skirt), and socially and culturally organized ways of “being a female” (crossing and uncrossing her legs) to pass as a non-cheater; the student in excerpt 5 has rehearsed the plan meticulously: should she encounter a proctor while looking at the answers on her thighs, she can pass herself off as doing something rather ordinary when in fact she is uncrossing her legs to hide evidence of her illicit actions. Thus, in the context of in-class college examinations, female students negotiate the interactional management of passing by “doing” gender.

The female student in excerpt 3 projects normalcy—passes—by “closing her legs” completely together when the teacher strolls by, thereby hiding her illicit actions, and opening her legs to sneak a peek when the teacher is out of sight. There is, of course, nothing that is inherently “gendered” about closing or crossing one’s legs; in conjunction with gender specific identificatory displays and sex categories, however, opening and closing one’s legs becomes a culturally and normatively recognizable performance of gender. What is noteworthy is that even if she is “found out” the teachers (male professors in particular) can’t expose her as a cheater since doing so mires the professor in another problem, being accountable for looking in the first place.

The reality of the academy inhibits—or ought to—male professors (especially) who witness a female student sliding up her skirt to sneak a peep at her upper thighs for answers from confronting her; should a professor be courageous—reckless—enough to accuse such a student of academic dishonesty, the cheater has at her disposal a trump card of her own. That is, she is able to counter his accusation with one of her own: “what are you doing looking at my legs [between my legs] in the first place?” By countering an accusation with another accusation, she is able to realign the footing of the encounter in a way that now puts the professor on the defensive; that is, he must now respond to her accusation—an accusation that emanates the pungency of sexual harassment. In this ploy, gender is a valuable resource that is employed as an innovative tactic for the sake of a passing grade, a tactic that is uniquely available to female students.³

These three excerpts demonstrate the situational enactment of gender in the ephemeral moments of academic dishonesty in the context of in-class examinations. In the excerpts above, the reader is treated to the emergence of gender in the sexually charged, titillating moments of deviance-in-action rather than in the theoretical or *a priori* imposition of such a macro level variable: gender is performed and comes alive in the female students’ decision to wear a skirt on exam day, and sustained through social practices such as crossing and uncrossing of her legs to pass as a non-cheater.

If gender is produced and grows out of banal activities such as crossing of one’s legs and placement of cheat sheets near sexually precarious places, and possibly, a professor’s refusal to enter into the scopic dialectics of enforcement, then such social practices become catalytic in the differential production of social structure. In the context of an in-class examination, there are two ostensible “roles” that are operative, professor and student; such relations are asymmetrical by definition, but there is an incremental diminution in the salience of such roles while gender relations are erected to a prominent foreground in the social construction of gender in the classroom.

That is because male professors carry a baggage that is different from their female counterparts.⁴ Because they are men, they are accountable as men. This means that their actions are interpretable by others, in consequential ways, and are “subject to comment...that is how they might look

and how they might be characterized” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 136). The analytical force of ‘accountability’ resides in the fact that one’s descriptions and actions are readily open to evaluative commentary from others, a process that is thoroughly interactional and institutional (West and Fensetemaker 1995: 21). Hence, male professors who are assiduous in their surveillance of female students’ alleged misconduct in the classroom run the risk of being categorized in unsavory ways (e.g., pervert, lecher, “sicko”) (Jayyusi 1984). That is to say that the behavior of male professors is accountable and interpretable through an overriding lens of gender while their occupational status fades into the background⁵

A (male) professor’s inability (or refusal) to confront female students’ gendered techniques of innovation subverts an obvious power imbalance, and highlights the paradox of gender performance in the context of in-class examinations; moreover, it simultaneously reifies the existing gender relations: men are supposed to turn away when the possibility of spying such private moments arises, lest they be classified categorized into a different—lecher—category.⁶ Thus, if female students perform gender by wearing skirts and crossing and uncrossing their legs to pass as a non-cheater, then a male professor also “does” gender by looking away, and refusing to expose a female student’s discreditable—stigmatizing—identity as a cheater; moreover, he also “does” gender by looking directly at such flagrant violations of academic dishonesty and calling it what it is.

Although the self report narratives in this study describe a successful example of cheating through gender displays, I might conjecture that even such practices may involve some degree of complicity. Aside from the social facticity of such deviant and creative techniques of innovation, it might be entirely possible that proctors (especially males) may be inhibited from enforcing academic integrity due to the accountability they face as beings of a particular gender, in addition to the institutional and social culture of the academy. Hence, the success of such gendered tactics and professors’ refusal to enter into the visual field of evident gender performance in the pursuit of academic dishonesty may reflect a fear of accusations of sexual harassment more than the inability to catch cheaters in action.⁷

Thus, when male professors encounter female students who cheat in the manner described in this paper, they can look, and “do” gender as a

particular type of a morally and legally accountable male, or justify their surveillance and enforcement of academic dishonesty under the thin mien of professional (and institutional) integrity. They don't have to pass on this mandate. To not look—overlook—involves the performance of gender to avoid accountability, which is itself accountable: to pretend to not see when looking or after having looked involves passing. To iterate Zimmerman (1992: 195), “the key criterion for passing is the possibility of being found out.” It is precisely to avoid being discredited for looking or having looked that a male professor must hide or redirect his gaze or not look at all. Male professors in the college classroom must either enter the scopic paradox of gender performance and integrity enforcement (and “do” gender) or not look (and “do” gender) and pass, thus becoming complicit in the social construction of gender and academic dishonesty in the classroom (see Rogers 1992).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If college education represents the ideological referent of pedagogical, socio-political, and economic aspirations, then the examination is the practical and systematized means of realizing such telic ends.⁸ As Foucault (1977: 184-185) notes, the examination combines “ceremony of power and the form of the experiment... At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. The superimposition of the power relations and knowledge relations assumes in the examination all its visible brilliance.”

Studies of academic dishonesty reveal a far more comic, yet funereal, picture of the academy, its ideals, and the examination: a whopping 60-70% of college students admit to cheating, across race, class, and gender boundaries, and despite the implementation of formal and informal social controls (McCabe and Trevino 1996, 1993). Furthermore, recent work suggests that college students use almost every available resource at their disposal to accomplish cheating during examinations (author). The extent of academic dishonesty across college campuses and its deviant techniques indicate that the magnanimous ideals of higher education has been abased by the exigent demands of college life, and the disciplinary and normalizing process of the examination replaced by the opaque brilliance of

college students' methods of academic dishonesty.

In this paper, I have shown how some female students “do” their gender as a strategic resource for passing as a non-cheater in the pursuit of academic dishonesty; to do so I have used the self report narratives of seven female students who utilized their bodies as innovative resources during in-class examinations. In the process, I have shown how gender categories and relations are (re) produced, and the asymmetry between two encumbered social actors is subverted in the micro-moments of gendered passing. That is to say that power and sexuality configure prominently into the contours of structural relations between men and women in the context of in-class examinations (see Messerschmidt 1995:71-73).

There is an obvious discrepancy in power between male professors and female students: the former occupy a distinctly privileged status in the social and institutional hierarchy while the latter are theoretically powerless in two principal ways, as students, then as the mere “other” (DeBeauvoir 1952). And women have, in general, been the objects of patriarchal oppression, domination, and sexual subordination (Butler 1993; Matoesian 1993; Pateman 1988); consequently, they have been at the receiving end of the disciplinary and regulatory gaze of men: “In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality, woman must make herself ‘object’ and ‘prey’ for the man...in contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides with the consciousness of most women; they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment” (Bartky 1988: 72).

Power differential permeates the structural relations between men and women, and at the helm of such blatant oppression are men—power possessed, wielded, and exercised by men, for men, against women. An influential theory of power, however, posits that such a commodity resides under the rubric of a generalized, amorphous, decentered psycho-politico-legal discourse (Foucault 1977, 1979; see Bracher 1993). This post-structuralist theory of power has been influential across disciplines, but its eminence rests upon the presupposition of an often overlooked premise: subjectivity and social structure that is tacitly conceptualized independent of the situated social practices of its members mired in the vagaries of quotidian existence. Consequently, the stability of social configurations such as race, class, and gender

is silently assumed while ignoring the reflexivity of social structures and social practices (Messerschmidt 1997; West and Fenstermaker 1995). Thus, as much as Foucault rigidly maintains that power is exercised not possessed, and contested by the subjects who are most affected by its operation, there is an empirical gap in what he refers to as the 'micro-physics of power'; this view relies on a dialectical conceptualization of power without having examined its actual situated practices, the way power is really exercised on a moment to moment basis by those who are encumbered in some socio-institutional life (see Taylor 1984). This gap is particularly noticeable since Foucault himself conceives of power as a strategy rather than a property.

In such a view power flows down and interpellates—"subjectivizes"—those who are most affected by its operation. Hence, for neo-Marxist theorists, "ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects by the functioning of the category of subjects," and they become complicit in the production of subjectivity in their recognition of the summons (Althusser 1971: 173). For his Nietzsche influenced disciple, the production of docile bodies necessitates the subjugation and objectification of the subject through a regimentation of discipline and discourse (Foucault 1977). For more contemporary theorists, the subjects need not participate in the interpellation to be constituted as such since the force of nominalization inaugurates the subject as a subject, and works oblivious to the his protests and participation (Butler 1997). That is, whether power is insulated in ideology, discourse, or in the act of naming, it cascades down and encapsulates the subject's identity as defined by those in positions of power.

And if men exercise power in such a manner, perpetuating and regulating the patriarchal modes of domination through objectification of women through the "panoptical"—lecherous—male gaze (Bartky 1988), then it cannot account for the inability (or refusal) of male professors to discredit certain female students' academic dishonesty. As already noted, male professors enjoy the ideological privilege of two structural positions; however, as I have shown, exercise of power by those who ostensibly (and structurally) have the least of it—female undergraduate students—can be accomplished, hence inverting the power process, in the gendered moments of passing. Furthermore, the capacity of the object of the gaze to reciprocate it—and

accuse—vitiates the dialectical mechanics of subjection, and impels a reexamination of the way power and "the gaze" is configured in the construction of subjectivity (Lacan 1973; Zizek 1992, 1991). As I have shown, the patriarchal gaze of male professors becomes impotent in the face of the others' sexuality in the socio-institutional culture of the academy. And as I have argued, male professors are accountable, first and foremost, as men: the production of docile students and the enforcement of academic integrity, accomplished through an amorphous positioning of the professorial gaze, becomes secondary to the accountability that male professors face. In the process, the austerity of the examination loses its pomp, and the examination as a ceremonial ritual becomes tertiary to the deviant techniques of innovation that individuals adopt in response to a perceived strain. In this way, macro social structures such as gender and class do not automatically attain "master status" configurations; instead, they are situationally enacted, dynamically reproduced in the visual dialectics of classroom interaction, and reified through the social culture of the academy in the gendered passing strategies of female students who cheat on in-class examinations (Messerschmidt 1997, 1993).

This study has examined how gender is produced and reproduced in the classroom during in-class examinations, and how power is strategically invoked through the paradox of gender performance. This study, however, also highlights obvious shortcomings: out of the 72 male and 56 female respondents, only 7 female students admitted and elaborated on their gendered techniques of innovation. No male students relied on such a strategy.⁹ Thus the findings of this study face patently gross generalizability issues. If faculty members are faced with students who cheat using their gender as innovative resources, how would they deal with such blatant violations of academic integrity?

How might race of the students and professors be played out in such a scenario? Although the current study has not explicitly addressed these questions, it does provide the theoretical mooring for a more rigorous empirical study involving gender, academic dishonesty, and power. For future research, a scenario based survey of faculty members may fill in the gap that is present in the current study. I surmise that male professors who witness the gendered tactics described in this paper will react differently than female professors, or they may not. My guess would be yes, but these are

questions that I have not pursued in this research. Thus future research may want to examine empirically how faculty members would act in the face of such flagrant academic dishonesty.

NOTES

1. While Merton's theory places the burden of rule-breaking on the economically disenfranchised and the *anomie* they encounter as a function of the absence of legitimate means of obtaining the culturally prescribed symbols of success, Agnew's (1985, 1992) revision of Merton's theory recalibrates the sources of strain in ways other than mere disjuncture "between an individual's personal aspirations and expectations" (Smith, 2000: 83). Thus, strain may arise from the failure to achieve valued goals, its removal, and the presence of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1985).
2. This statement should be qualified so that it does not too "essentialistic," for West and Zimmerman (1987: 127) note that although sex is a biologically related derivative, its determination is a "socially agreed" practice.
3. When I initially mentioned this technique to other colleagues, they seemed to be genuinely impressed. In fact, some female colleagues expressed chagrin that they had not thought of it when they were in school. When my colleagues were asked—both male and female—what they would do if they witnessed such behavior in their classes, most replied that they would do nothing. To investigate this further, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 faculty members, 5 men and 5 women, across a broad spectrum of disciplines. The female instructors stated that if they witnessed "skirt cheating," they would confront the cheater after class. One actually declared that she would tell the girl to lift up her skirt to check. Male instructors, on the other hand, extended caution, for obvious reasons. Two male professors admitted that they would do nothing; two stated that they would secure the assistance of a female graduate student for the next exam and instruct them to look out for that particular student and her "skirt cheating." One male professor noted that he would call the University Police if he witnessed such cheating, and said that he would request the presence of a female officer to do a "check." In all, male professors appeared to be wary of dealing with "skirt cheaters." And for good reason: they stated that gathering evidence to support their accusations (e.g., asking them to lift up their skirt to check for answers) would be nothing short of sexual harassment. Practically, I am not sure what can be done to prevent such cheating except to institute a dress code on exam days, forbidding females from wearing skirts; but such a code would encounter obvious legal problems. Theoretically, male students could do the same to female professors; but in this data, I encountered no such creativity from the male students. But that the male instructors felt the need to secure the eyes of a female confederate only buttresses the theoretical point I have made in this paper: that men can't look at women in sensitive places without being accountable, and that the looking itself can be held accountable.
4. Although this sounds like a complaint, it is not intended as such. I realize that most of the sexual harassment in the workplace, and elsewhere, is committed by men against women (e.g., Rogers & Henson, 1997), even in the academy. But aside from such social facts, there is at least some anecdotal evidence that male professors' worst fear is being accused of such behavior (see Benton, 2004). Male professors shoulder a burden that female professors do not, just as female professors carry a load that is different from their male counterparts.
5. Notice that terms such as 'pervert' or lecher' are usually reserved for ("dirty old") men, and not women; there is no language that accurately describes the behavior of women who do such things, just as there is no pejorative language available to describe men who are difficult and aggressive; there are plenty of terms reserved for women who behave in such manner.
6. To read about the personal and professional consequences of gazes that are interpreted as being "sexual" nature, see Taylor (2002).
7. For a discussion of a professor's fear of accusations of sexual harassment, see Benton (2004). Without sounding too paranoid, it is only after I collected the data, began coding, and started my analysis that I realized my accountability in the classroom as a male.

Consequently, to avert any accusations of sexual harassment and even the appearance of impropriety, I further policed my language, and more significantly, my gazes—to the point that when I encountered female students wearing skirts, dresses, or blouses of questionable cleavage during in-class examinations, I placed myself as far as I could from the situation fraught with moral and legal danger. Sometimes, I left the classroom during exams to secure a secretary or a graduate assistant when only female students remained in the room

8. It should be noted that the autogenous origins of students' plight do not militate against—is irrelevant to—the psychological and social reality of their consequences. The result of having an overly active social life, extracurricular activities, and work, consequently, being unable to devote the necessary study time, is a highly stressful and anxiety producing condition.
9. It could be argued that I have not “seen” the techniques that male students use to cheat because of my own standpoint as a male; if this is so then it is precisely what prevents female professors from being able to “see” the cheating techniques mentioned in this paper.

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