'You've gotta learn how to play the game': homeless women's use of gender performance as a tool for preventing victimization

Laura Huey and Eric Berndt

Abstract

As a masculinist space, 'the streets' present a variety of dangers to homeless women, a fact that has received too little attention within the social science literature. This study utilizes data drawn from interviews with homeless women and service providers in Edinburgh, San Francisco, Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa, to explore the complex survival strategies that homeless women develop to prevent criminal victimization. Through women's words, we see that gender is understood strategically as performance. Four gender performances are identified and discussed: the 'femininity simulacrum', the 'masculinity simulacrum', 'genderlessness' and 'passing'. We discussed how each of these performances is employed in the pursuit of safety and security in frequently violent and chaotic social spaces.

Research on the homeless has consistently demonstrated a link between time spent on the streets and increased exposure to criminal victimization (Lee and Schreck, 2005; Waccholz, 2005; Evans and Forsyth, 2004; Tyler and Johnson, 2004; Hall, 2003; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Yoder, Cauce and Paradise, 2001; Hagan and McCarthy, 1997; Fitzpatrick, Le Gory and Ritchey, 1993). However, what we know significantly less about is the relationship of gender to the risk of criminal victimization faced by the homeless, and less still on how gender-based strategies might be employed to reduce that risk. This oversight is perhaps not surprising: historically, the social scientific literature on urban spaces, particularly in relation to homeless communities has subsumed women within the category of the 'undifferentiated "he" ' (Lofland, 1975: 45; see also Bahr, 1973; Huey and Kemple, 2007).

Some recent scholarship has attempted to address this deficiency by exploring the question of how gender structures the lives of homeless women, variously increasing or decreasing their vulnerability to victimization (Bourgois, Prince and Moss, 2004; Evans and Forsyth, 2004; Wechsberg, Lam, Zule, Hall, Middlesteadt and Edwards, 2003; Wenzel, Leake and Gelberg,

2001; Wenzel, Koegel and Gelberg, 2000; Nyamathi, Leake and Gelberg, 2000; Wardhaugh, 1999; Passaro, 1996). Researchers have found, for example, relatively high rates of sexual exploitation, harassment and sexual violence experienced by homeless women (Evans and Forsyth, 2004; Wenzel, Leake and Gelberg, 2000; Maher, Dunlap, Johnson and Hamid, 1996; D'Ercole and Struening, 1990). Other studies have explored risk factors associated with women's experience of 'major violence' (Wenzel *et al.*, 2001), as well as how experiences of violence impact upon homeless women's mental health (Goodman, Dutton and Harris, 1997; D'Ercole and Struening, 1990).

Despite increases in the available literature on the role that gender plays in patterns and modes of victimization experienced by homeless women, what remains largely missing from the social scientific literature are theoretically informed, empirically grounded analyses of the ways in which gender also structures the strategies that homeless women employ to protect themselves from victimization while on the streets. Of the studies located that examine homeless women's use of survival strategies, there is a decided focus on the resort to criminal activities, survival sex and other 'risky behaviours' (Nyamathi *et al.*, 2000; Wechsberg *et al.*, 2003; Maher *et al.*, 1996; Golden, 1992). Further, much of this research focuses on strategies aimed at securing accommodation, food, drugs or other resources and does not address safety issues (Maher *et al.*, 1996; Banyard, 1995). A notable exception can be found in the work of Evans and Forsyth (2004) who identify women's avoidance of shelters as a survival strategy in response to fears of predation; however, this particular method of staying safe is also used by homeless males (Huey, 2007). Similarly, in a study of crime fears among homeless women, Coston and Finckenauer (1993: 9) report 'the existing communications network that exists among these vagrants is relied upon as a daily means of survival. It seems that reports of victimization on the streets are followed by forewarnings about what areas of the city are safe and unsafe, and these thus reduce the fear of victimization'. Again, this strategy is not unique to homeless women (Huey, 2007).

In short, the present study is an attempt at contributing to our knowledge of the role that gender plays in the survival strategies developed by homeless women seeking to reduce their risk of victimization. In the pages that follow, we offer an analysis of interview data drawn from two recent studies of the homeless. During interviews for both, it was repeatedly noted that female participants variously described, performed for the interviewer, or were otherwise observed performing one of an identified set of gendered strategies aimed at preventing criminal victimization. The first of these strategies is what we term here the 'femininity simulacrum': a set of behaviours socially defined as female, including girlishness, flirtatiousness, emotionalism and/or maternalism. The second strategy is the 'masculinity simulacrum': a set of behaviours socially defined as male, including assertiveness and/or aggressiveness, toughness, fearlessness, and/or repression of emotions other than anger. The third strategy is 'genderlessness': rather than being a state of presentation, it is an

attempt at invisibility through obscuring or hiding elements associated with a gender. The fourth and final strategy is what we term, with some irony, 'passing': this is an attempt by heterosexual females to present to male audiences as a lesbian. Each of these strategies is analyzed in the following pages using Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, we explain our methodology. Then we briefly explore Butler's theory of performativity and Goffman's dramaturgical model in order to provide a theoretical context for the analysis to follow. This discussion turns to an examination of the fears and dangers experienced by homeless women. We reveal the feelings of vulnerability expressed by the women who we interviewed, as well as their experiences of criminal victimization. Our focus then shifts to how these women attempt to protect themselves from both real and perceived criminal threats through the use of gender performances. In turn, we analyse the four different performances identified: the femininity simulacrum, the masculinity simulacrum, invisibility and passing. The article concludes with some final remarks on how these gender performances should be read as strategies of survival, and thus as expressions of women's agency.

Method of inquiry

The present work is informed by two data sources. The first source derives from interview data produced from an ethnographic study of public policing of three 'skid row' districts: San Francisco's Tenderloin, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and the Cowgate and Grassmarket district of Edinburgh (Huey, 2007). Although the subject of gendered experiences of crime and criminal justice was originally outside of the scope of this study, in interviews with female participants in each of the sites, women's unique experiences of victimization and the strategies they employ to keep safe became a recurring theme. Once the original study was complete, we extracted fifteen (15) interviews containing relevant material on issues of criminal victimization experienced by female participants and its prevention. This dataset included eight (8) interviews with female residents of the Tenderloin, Downtown Eastside and Cowgate and Grassmarket, as well as seven (7) interviews with area service providers (including outreach, shelter, mission and other workers).

In order to more fully explore the issue of homeless women's adoption of strategies to minimize their risk of victimization, a second study more narrowly focused on this issue of gender and victimization was conducted. Working with service providers in Montreal and Ottawa, we located and interviewed sixteen (16) homeless women about issues of safety and risk. Each woman was asked, in particular, about how they perform gender in 'the streets' and about whether they employed gendered survival strategies in attempts at keeping safe from victimization. This material is supplemented with data

drawn from interviews with nine (9) service providers from three different organizations in Montreal and Ottawa. In total, forty (40) participants were interviewed across five cities (Vancouver, San Francisco, Edinburgh, Montreal and Ottawa), including twenty-four (24) homeless women and sixteen (16) service providers.

The women who participated in this study are a diverse group. They were drawn from a range of ethno-cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginals, Latinas, Afro-Americans, Scots, Anglo-Canadians and Franco-Canadians. Their ages range from seventeen to sixty. Some of the women were fairly new to the streets when interviewed; others had spent more than half their lifetime in street-based communities. While the majority of participants lack stable housing, a few rent rooms in rooming houses in and around some of the 'skid row' districts initially studied.

Our access to the homeless populations was facilitated by supportive community agencies. One of the strengths of the existing study is that we also draw here extensively upon interviews with area service providers. Outreach, mission, shelter, food line and other local service providers were included because they are often uniquely placed to assist in representing the experiences and views of their clients, and are frequently more likely to see and understand the nature of social patterns over time.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both groups. With homeless female participants, we posed questions focusing on a set of core concerns: safety issues facing women on the streets, personal experiences with crime, fears and feelings of vulnerability, strategies for responding to potential threats of victimization and individual presentations of gender. We note that both a strength and a limitation of the present study is that we did not ask the women interviewed questions concerning any illegal activities that they may be engaged in, such as drug selling and prostitution (although if interviewees volunteered this information it was duly noted). While such activities can create significant safety issues for the women involved, we wanted to move away from what we view as an over-emphasis within the social scientific literature on the role that 'deviant' activities play in street-based life. While it is the case that engaging in prostitution can place one in very risky circumstances, the reality of street-based life is that visiting a shelter or sleeping rough can also increase one's exposure to violence and other forms of victimization (Huey, 2007; Evans and Forsyth, 2004).

Service providers who we interviewed were asked to speak about the dangers their female clients face on the street, as well as about women's modes of adaptation in these spaces. To permit both sets of participants to feel more at ease, interviews were conducted in a conversation-like manner, which afforded us flexibility during the process so as to be able to capture more fully the beliefs, thoughts and experiences of differently situated interviewees.

All participants were advised that their names and other personal information known about them would be kept strictly confidential. To help preserve anonymity, each of the women has been assigned a pseudonym.

Performing gender/gender as performance

> A woman's subjectivity is not stabilized or essentialized by identity catego-
> ries (eg, race, class, gender) because her ways of existing in the world can
> shift depending on social relations, historical experiences, and material
> conditions (Jackson, 2004: 673).

In order to present an account of gendered performance, this study draws
upon Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model and Judith Butler's theory of
performativity. Context is provided for the reader through a brief examination
of these two theoretical frameworks, including their potential points of simi-
larity and difference.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman articulates a
theory of social interaction as performance. The dramaturgical model uses the
concept of performance to explain how social roles are enacted strategically,
both consciously and unconsciously, in order to convey to an observing audi-
ence messages that will lead to a favourable assessment of the actor (a social
transaction that Goffman terms 'impression management'). In order for the
actor to receive a favourable 'review', the performance must contain plausible
elements. Thus, actors rely on the use of scripts, props, masks, costumes, and so
on, to lend an air of credibility to their performance. However, of particular
importance in this process is what Goffman (1959: 45) terms 'idealization'; for
a performance to be accepted it must 'incorporate and exemplify the officially
accredited values of the society'.

Goffman later prefigures poststructuralist feminism by arguing against
essentialist notions of gender: 'one might just as well say there is no gender
identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender' (1976: 8). For
Goffman, gender is a social category that is expressed in the 'dialogic perfor-
mance of identity' (1977: 326). And, to the extent that gender performances
are intended to create meanings for a receptive audience – 'impression man-
agement' – such presentations can only be understood as strategic.

Judith Butler similarly adopts a performative approach to gender, in her
seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), arguing that gender identities are not
borne of fixed ontological categories, but rather represent discursive construc-
tions fashioned through the iteration of social norms. Butler (ibid: 178) asks,
'In what sense is gender an act?' Her answer: "as in other ritual social dram-
as . . . the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This rep-
etition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings
already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their
legitimation" (ibid). Thus, she argues, gender 'identity' does not produce gen-
dered behaviour; rather gendered behaviour constitutes one's gender 'iden-
tity'. These discursive performances are centred on the binaries of masculinity
and femininity, and on those acts, mannerisms, practices and/or behaviours
associated with one *or* the other of these oppositional categories.

Other scholars have noted similarities between aspects of Goffman's dramaturgy and Butler's performativity (Dunn, 1997; Taylor and Rupp, 2004). A significant similarity can be found in the fact that the underlying premise of each theory is a view of identity and its attendant social behaviour as constructed phenomena performed as everyday reality. According to each theorist, the individual learns gender and the performance of social roles. Similarly, both Butler and Goffman conceptualize social behaviour as performance enacted for an audience. These performances are strategic in the sense that each is designed to benefit the actor. For Butler, performativity is about meeting society's expectations about identity and gender, expectations that are enforced through normative devices ('gender regulations') (2004). Individuals who meet or exceed these social expectations are rewarded (one need only look to beauty pageants and male sports competitions to see this reward process enacted); social actors who behave in non-normative ways are punished through social exclusion, violence, imprisonment and so on. For Goffman, performance is similarly strategic: actors seek to create favourable impressions in others in order to accrue increased social status and other benefits. In a society where everyone is rewarded for citing the norm, a woman who presents as 'girlish' in appearance, attractive, charming and even mildly flirtatious, is often more likely to cast a favourable impression at a job interview than the woman who is either plain in appearance or 'masculine' in demeanour. Whereas the former woman meets social ideals, the latter may invoke a sense of unease within an audience that has little tolerance for perceived gender ambiguities. A further point of similarity: both Butler and Goffman understand social performance as acts that reproduce hegemonic values. To perform gender – and later we will argue that this includes what we term here 'genderlessness' – is necessarily to affirm conceptions of what it means to be masculine or feminine.

Butler and Goffman are sometimes held to differ in relation to the issue of agency. While both theories hold that individual performances bring the potential for strategic benefits, Butler has been criticized for either disallowing, or limiting the potential for intentionality in performance. For Butler, all attempts to re-code meaning are restricted *a priori* by the language, acts and symbols of dominant discourse. This position is seen as being in contrast to that of Goffman, for whom intentionality is clearly a critical element in image management. For example, in Nelson's (1999: 334) reading of *Gender Trouble* she claims that slippages – those failures of identity iteration which serve to subvert gender both in cases where it is exceeded and where it is not accomplished – cannot be 'conscious or intentional'. She further adds that, '[Butler] emphasizes this point as she derides other approaches that vest the subject with agency . . . it seems that for Butler any assertion of intentionality within the doing of identity necessarily assumes a masterful humanist subject, one that lies 'outside' power/discourse matrices' (ibid: 334).

The dense prose and ambiguity rife in some of Butler's texts can easily lead to misinterpretations of her work. However, one need only reference her writing on drag as performance to understand that Butler is keenly aware of the fact that people can consciously alter their presentations of gender. For example, Butler makes her knowledge of this fact explicit in a section of *Undoing Gender* (2004) where she discusses her discovery of the importance of slippage while watching drag performances: 'I also experienced in that moment a certain implicit theorization of gender: it quickly dawned on me that some of these so-called men could do femininity much better than I ever could, ever wanted to, ever would. And so I was confronted by what can only be called the transferability of the attribute'. What Butler is describing is not simply parody, but rather intentional imitative performances, performances that reveal the constructed nature of gender through the transferability of its associated traits. Her point is not that individuals lack agency and thus subjectivity, but rather that gender performances are discursive. Thus, when men don 'women's clothes' and perform femininity, their ideas as to what constitutes the feminine subject are locked into existing cultural constructs; they are not inventing new gender performances. Within this conceptualization of gender, Butler's account of performativity allows room for individual agency, but an agency that is always negotiated in relation to the categories created as ontological realities – gender, race, sexuality, and so on. Hardt and Negri (2004: 200) offer a complementary reading of Butler's thoughts on the role of agency within performativity:

> Against critics who charge that her notion of gender performativity credits the individual subject with too much volition and autonomy, as if each of us could decide each morning what to perform that day, Butler has to insist repeatedly that such performances are constrained by both the weight of past performances and social interactions. Performance, like habit, involves neither fixed immutable nature nor spontaneous individual freedom, residing instead between the two, a kind of acting in common based on collaboration and communication (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 200).

In short, Butler has constructed a discursive theory of performativity that draws on both the symbolic and interactive dimensions similarly found in Goffman's dramaturgical analysis. While Butler places greater emphasis on the unstable nature of gender, permitting us to understand gender play as dynamic processes delimited by discourse, Goffman's theoretical framework provides tools for examining the details of these performances, in particular how certain mannerisms, props, costumes, and so on are imbued with symbolic meaning by both actor and audience. Integrated, these two theories provide a nuanced means of understanding gender performance as strategy. Within the paragraphs that follow, we employ these two theories in tandem to explore the four gendered survival strategies previously identified.

Fears and dangers

> I always get by, one way or another
> – Alicia, a resident of the Tenderloin.

In a study of homeless women in London, Julia Wardhaugh (1999: 104) defines 'the streets' as 'the quintessential male space' in which women appear only 'in a shadowy way' (see also Golden, 1992). The marginal presence of women 'on the streets' is clearly not a reflection of their numbers among the homeless. Rather, as we discovered through interviews with women from five different communities, it frequently represents a tactic that is adopted in order to stay safe within a community that they view as unsafe, violent and chaotic – that is, as dangerous for women.

In interview after interview, the women that we spoke with reported feeling vulnerable to a variety of dangers on the street. For instance, in answer to the question of how life is hard for women in San Francisco's Tenderloin, Alicia looked up solemnly and stated, 'Because you can get assaulted by anybody. Anyone can assault you'. Penny advised that she doesn't ever leave her Montreal shelter at night because, 'you can get attacked . . . I am very scared of being attacked at night'. Dawn spoke about women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation, '[Men] think we're vulnerable. They think they can use us; they can do whatever. "You sleep in my bunk, baby you've got to do something for me" '. Sylvie from Montreal worries about violence from youth from outside the community who come into her neighbourhood looking for a 'good time': 'You know there's these young kids, out partying, and you never know if you are going to get your head blown off'. Not surprisingly, a shelter worker says of her clients, 'They are scared when they come [here]'. For still others, however, the missions and shelters are also scary places. When asked if she ever feels uncomfortable in public spaces, Katie, a seventeen year old who 'hangs out' at a mission for access to food and other resources, quickly responds, 'Yeah, all the time, cause I hang out in this shelter and it is full of men. Alcoholics, drug addicts. It is no place for a girl'.

Women with access to hotel rooms also express concerns about their safety when 'home'. For example, Betty in San Francisco complained of being fearful because of the ease with which entry could be gained to her room. She described the 'constant knocking' on her door by neighbours and others seeking to access to her room (claiming the need to hide from someone or a safe space to consume drugs). These incursions into her 'private' space left her feeling vulnerable to thefts and potential violence.

We also received a number of reports of individual experiences of victimization ranging from harassment and physical assaults to accounts of sexual exploitation and abuse. Tina, an Aboriginal woman, advised that 'there is a lot of victimization against Indians . . . and Metis' in Canadian street communities. She herself had recently been subjected to harassment by a former male

friend who had told her that he would 'kill my cat and that he will kill me too'. When she subsequently encountered him across a street he began to throw empty beer bottles at her while she ran away. Another woman, Kelly, told us of a random assault over a cigarette:

> I was walking down the street and this guy came up to me and said 'do you got a cigarette?' and I went, 'No, I don't' and he beat me up. And he was on a bicycle and he started punching me you know, and my arm wasn't well yet, and I had an accident. He started punching my arm . . . someone beat you up, you know cause you don't have a cigarette.

Outreach workers related stories of the sexual exploitation of vulnerable women. There is the not uncommon story of Sally, told by an outreach worker in Edinburgh:

> She was a lady in her fifties who had a lot of physical health problems and mental health problems . . . chain smokes, like a drink. Wasn't supposed to drink because of physical problems, diabetes, she was incontinent . . . She was always filthy, stained . . . She was a really sad, sad old lady, but she was also a very nice old lady. You could sit and talk to [her]. She would love you, and wanted love. There was a guy called Willie who was a street drinker [alcoholic] in his sixties, maybe seventies . . . Willie was getting Sally drunk and taking her up to his flat over here. He'd take her back up there, have her drunk, do his business with her. She was lonely, she liked company . . . he was using her, and she wasn't in a position to really say no because of her mental health, because of her loneliness . . . about four months ago Sally died in Willie's flat. What happened was that Willie got her drunk again, took her up to the flat, and she had a massive heart attack in his bed.

Similarly, shelter workers in both Montreal and Ottawa explain that sexual and physical assaults on female clients were not uncommon: 'We see a lot of assaults over drug debts or just being on the street. We see a lot of sexual assault'. For women, like Celeste, the threat of sexual assault is something that affect the choices they make: '[I'm] not putting so much, so much makeup on and short skirt, because that will entice a guy to hold you down and rape you and all that. Or you get too drunk and you don't know what you're doing, and the guy will force sex on you'.

A local service provider in San Francisco describes her clientele in the following terms: 'most of the women that I work with are very savvy. They're very, very savvy'. This is not surprising given that to remain safe, homeless women must develop complex strategies to decrease their risk of victimization. Within the sections that follow we explore four of these strategies, each of which utilizes gender-based performance.

The femininity simulacrum

Butler contends that gender performance is repetitively iterated because of interpellating calls from the social audience that must be answered through the articulation of one's gender. When a performance fails to faithfully reproduce idealized gender norms associated with masculinity or femininity, what is revealed is the constructed nature of gender. Thus, when women or men attempt what might be termed 'hyper-femininity', they are copying 'idealized' versions of genders that do not exist as independent reality. Following Baudrillard (1992), we term these performances 'simulacra': copies of things that have no independent reality.

Of the strategies that homeless women employ, one of the first noted is what we call the 'femininity simulacrum'. This strategy is constituted of a range of behaviours that are socially constructed as belonging to the category known as 'female' – including passivity, emotionalism, tenderness, flirtatiousness and/or maternalism, each of which may be performed separately or sometimes successively or concomitantly by the same actor.

We first became aware of this strategy following an interview with a woman we'll call Betty. Betty is a petite older lady, who lives in a single room occupancy hotel in the Tenderloin. One of the authors met Betty at an outreach clinic where she was conducting interviews. Speaking in a soft voice, eyes cast down, posture demure, her comments punctuated with the occasional giggle, she would occasionally look up at the (female) researcher and bat her eyelashes. Statements Betty made would frequently be accompanied with touches on the researcher's arm, hand and shoulder. Unlike other women interviewed, when asked if she thought women had a tougher time on the streets than men, Betty replied, 'Actually, I think it's more difficult to be a man in this community'. One of the reasons as to why Betty saw herself as having an easier time of it in the Tenderloin became apparent when she was asked about her interactions with local police: 'The police like me. They smile at me [giggle]'. In a subsequent conversation with one of the shelter workers about Betty's demeanor during the interview, the worker advised that this behavior was not a-typical in situations where Betty was interacting with those who she perceived as 'authority figures' (such as police and other social workers). According to the worker, what had been witnessed was a type of performance, and one that was not unique to Betty; other women in the Tenderloin community had also been observed by the social worker to behave in a similar manner with 'authority figures'.

With the possibility in mind that some interactions with the homeless women studied, might be, following Goffman, understood as a form of image management, we began to consider the idea of gender performance as a strategy that might be useful to the daily survival of the homeless woman as actor. After all, the adoption of 'strategies of survival' within the urban milieu generally (Lofland, 1973), and within homeless communities in particular

(Anderson, 1923; Wallace, 1965; Bahr, 1973; Archard, 1979; Duneier, 1999), has been well documented within the research literature. Thus, armed with this potential insight, we began to explore our idea further through interviews with homeless women and social service providers. The following is excerpted from an interview with Tashika, a service provider who is speaking of some of her female clients:

> Tashika: They can be really angry and mad at the whole world. And the minute a cop comes around it's like 'Oh yeah, hi. You remember me'. Yeah, yeah that happens lots.
>
> Interviewer: It's a flirting thing?
>
> Tashika: Yeah.

Similarly, Carol, a homeless woman from Ottawa, says in response to a question as to whether she's witnessed other street women using this tactic, "What did I do officer?" [high-pitched feminine voice]. I know a couple of the hookers in this area and they're like that. They're tough when they have to be, but in a situation where they are put under a little bit of pressure, they'll bat their eyes. "What did I do?" [laughs]'. The purpose underlying the use of this strategy is clear: 'women [who] stare at the ground, or flirt, or act grandmotherly, and often are met with sympathy and courtesy' (Passaro, 1996: 88).

Femininity as performance is also particularly useful in relation to attracting males who will function as protectors for otherwise vulnerable females. As Bourgois *et al*. (2004: 261) note, 'it is difficult and dangerous for young women to remain independent and autonomous on the street. Their vulnerability to direct violence and sexual predation obliges them to enter into an exclusive 'running partnership' with a man'. This point was confirmed by Mary, a resident of the Tenderloin, who explains that 'a lot of women, when they first get out there, they don't know what to do. They're scared. So they get hooked up with some men who're not very good for them'. Rather than looking out for each other, women are often more likely to compete over available males regardless, as Mary states, of whether the object is 'a good guy, a bad guy, or whatever'. This is not an unusual finding: in their study of women's participation in the street drug scene in San Francisco's Haight District, Bourgois *et al*. (2004: 256) noted that 'vulnerability to sexual predation . . . is often experienced as a form of power and agency on the part of the woman who finds herself competing with other young women to be the center of attention of older males'.

It is important to note that the femininity simulacrum as a strategy of self-protection is also potentially problematic; the 'feminine' woman is viewed as vulnerable in the masculinist space of the streets, and those without male protectors are likely to draw the attentions of would-be victimizers. Rose speaks about this vulnerability when she talks about being on the streets outside the shelter, 'I don't like to look feminine when I am in a situation like that'.

The masculinity simulacrum

The second strategy identified is the 'masculinity simulacrum'. This strategy involves the performance of a set of behaviours socially constructed as 'masculine', including aggressiveness, mental and physical toughness, emotionlessness and fearlessness. Women who employ this strategy exhibit these and similar other behaviours in their speech, comportment and dress. In relation to speech, they adopt tough language and are frequently direct and short in their answers. Women interviewed stated that they perform masculinity in their demeanor by being loud, adopting aggressive postures, or acting in a confrontational or challenging manner. With respect to clothing, women who adopt the masculine simulacrum as performance typically eschew clothing that would be considered overtly feminine – bright colours, frills, skirts, blouses, etc – in favour of more masculinized garb, including baggy T-shirts, jeans, golf shirts, and jean jackets.[1,2]

Support for the view that the performance of the masculine simulacrum is a strategic performance aimed at preventing victimization can be drawn from the words of the women interviewed, and from local service providers who referenced this style of performance. For example, the following exchange is excerpted from an interview with Patsy from Ottawa who is describing how she attempts to protect herself while out in public spaces:

> Patsy: I walk tough. I act tough and I am not really that tough, really, but just so the image like it scares people off and that seems to work.
>
> Interviewer: So do you change your voice?
>
> Patsy: Yes. It goes deep like a man's voice.
>
> Interviewer: And what about your body?
>
> Patsy: I walk with my arms out, very butchy kind of look.
>
> Interviewer: And do you dress like that sometimes too?
>
> Patsy: Yeah, I don't dress feminine.

Terese, who is living in a shelter in Montreal, also acknowledges that her performance of masculinity is a deliberately self-protective act:

> I do, um you know, do present myself and kind of act a bit like a boy. When I feel safe, um, I will just be my self, I will be my feminine self. But when I feel intimidated, by just anybody walking down the street, I'll go, 'I belong here' [Terese's voice deepens, her posture becomes more erect].

Jan, a woman in San Francisco's Tenderloin, spoke of the pressure she felt to adopt a masculine performance as a means of protecting herself from victimization:

Sometimes we have to downplay being a woman. To be tougher than what we seem to be. I have to get to the point of I don't give a darn if you're male or female. If I'm going to have to box you, I'm going to have to box you, or I'm going to have to take something I can use as an equalizer. A lot of us, we have to get tough like that. So hardcore. So, almost manly like, to live out here. We can't be vulnerable. We can't show feelings. We can't show anything. For us women, it's very hard.

As can be seen from Jan's words, the masculinity simulacrum can create tensions within female actors. This point is similarly exemplified in the words of Anna, a Latina from the Tenderloin, who complained, 'For me being on the street, it's very hard for me to be a lady. You know to dress up, be nice, and everything like that. It's like we have to be tough, we have to be on our feet all the time'. This complaint, that some women feel that they must adopt what they perceive to be masculine behaviours and dress, was also heard within the statement of Mary who complained, 'we can't be pretty'.

Genderlessness (on being invisible)

Karen describes sexual harassment as normal conduct on the street, with men often feeling no compunction about presenting sexual demands and comments to women passing by: 'If we're all nice and pretty we get, "damn baby, what's up? Yo, yo, come here. Look at that butt" '. Thus, if femininity is seen as equivalent to vulnerability on the streets, and a woman is unable or unwilling to seek a male companion or to perform convincingly according to the demands of the masculinity simulacrum, than a possible solution lies in the cultivation of invisibility. Homeless women can prevent their victimization by '[making] themselves less visible, less of a target for attack' (Passaro, 1996: 87). In doing so, they are not performing gender, but rather shrinking back from any presentation of self through obscuring visible indicators of overt femininity or masculinity.

One of the ways in which women attempt to become invisible, or genderless, is through the conscious choices they make about their appearance. A shelter worker explains that some of her clients, 'just they try and hide themselves. They disguise themselves . . . so that people don't approach them'. An outreach worker advises that a lot of the women that he sees, 'will wear big heavy clothes and long things to hide their bodies so that people don't approach them'.

Other women simply self-isolate as a means of avoiding attention; Dawn says that if she's in public, she tries to 'isolate' herself. Similarly, Cindy explains, 'I don't go near anybody, I usually watch out for other people'. While this form of the invisibility strategy may be more or less effective as a tactic to prevent victimization, it is clear that this too has a downside for the women who perform it. As Kat explains, 'self-isolating' can be a lonely experience that may

increase rather than decrease one's fears: 'in the beginning, it was really hard I was feeling really alone and, you know, you don't know who you can trust or not'.

Passing

The final performance strategy identified, 'passing', is one whereby a woman who self-identifies as heterosexual retains elements of their gendered identity but attempt to pass themselves off as lesbians when approached by men. We use this term somewhat ironically because passing has traditionally been used to refer to the act of gays and lesbians presenting as heterosexual, and sometimes in relation to women presenting as men. In relation to the latter form, the historical literature on homelessness shows multiple examples of lesbian and straight women attempting to pass as men – an extreme form of the masculinity simulacrum (Box-car Bertha and Reitman, 1937; Allsop, 1967; Golden, 1992).

The strategy of passing may be performed in combination with either the masculine simulacrum (presenting as 'butch') or with genderlessness (attempting to present as ambiguous). Sandy, who self-identifies as heterosexual and who performs genderlessness while in public space, notes her use of the passing strategy when approached sexually by males in public: 'The one good thing is that since this is San Francisco and we have such a large lesbian population, we just kind of blend in. That's usually a good way to rebound somebody, say, "Oh, I don't do men" '. In analyzing Sandy's statement the underlying retention of aspects of the feminine ideal are present, namely in the adoption of a 'polite' rejection technique that allows approaching males to 'save face'.

Use of the 'passing' technique was also noted by service providers, as well as by other homeless women we interviewed. In Montreal, an outreach worker suggested that this tactic for preventing potential sexual harassment and/or exploitation was rather common: 'Yes, we see that all the time. That's a big thing here, But this is the Village, this is the gay Village so, you know, they blend in'.

It is important to remember that 'the streets' are not only a masculinist space, but also one inscribed with hetero-normative rules. Thus, 'passing' can also be a problematic tactic in that its performance leaves the actor open to the possibility of physical and sexual assaults motivated by hatred towards one's perceived sexual identity. This problem was raised by an interviewee. In response to a question as to whether she had ever used this tactic or seen it performed by other women, Carol from Ottawa relates the following story:

> I have seen this one situation, when I was in Toronto, a girl did that. She just didn't want to be bothered by certain guys and she did it one time with this one guy and it totally backfired on her and she got the extreme shit kicked

out of her like I mean, he just didn't like lesbians and so it kind of backfired on her. So you know you've gotta sort of pick and choose who you are gonna do that with.

Concluding remarks

In this article we have identified four gendered performances employed as means of preventing victimization by women living in conditions of poverty, social marginalization, and fear. The femininity simulacrum, we suggest, is employed strategically by women seeking to gain support and protection from those seen as holding power on skid row, mainly men.

Other women interviewed consciously choose to perform what we term the masculinity simulacrum as a means of surviving in a space where women are seen as vulnerable, and where masculine displays of aggression are socially acceptable and frequently rewarded. In contrast, genderlessness is a strategy that involves the attempt at presenting a non-gendered message to an audience; it is an attempt at invisibility through the removal of gendered signs or symbols. Passing as a strategy is intended to send a message to an immediate audience that a woman is not sexually interested in men. As is the case with the other strategies discussed here, passing similarly affirms existing gender constructions: women who present as lesbians perform gendered characteristics that a receiving audience can categorize as 'butch' or 'femme'.

Although we have discussed the above performances within the context of understanding how homeless women attempt to avoid victimization within street-based communities, the importance of understanding these performances and their strategic utility is not limited to their social meaning within these spaces and populations. Indeed, we suggest that the project begins here – the integration of complementary aspects of the work of Goffman and Butler to create new modes of conceptualizing the strategic nature of gender as performance – also provides potentially fruitful avenues for further research in other areas related to issues of gender- and sexuality-based inequalities. For example, we envision the utility of such an approach with respect to the potential employment of gender performances in a variety of hierarchical spaces, from prisons to work settings. Further, viewing gender as performance may also yield insights into a variety of patterns of social interactions within, for example, the domestic sphere or at leisure sites.

In concluding, we want to note that although the women we interviewed are using and thus reaffirming existing gender norms to subvert their subject positions, the present analysis should not be interpreted as critical of their actions. Rather, this article should be read as an attempt at tracing women's agency within a social environment where they are frequently viewed as objects of prey. That women like Carol are able to survive twenty-seven years of street life, under conditions that have been frequently violent, is testament to an ability to use and adapt the limited social tools available. In explaining

her own willingness to strategize with gender norms to keep herself safe, Carol simply states that if you want to survive, 'You've gotta learn how to play the game'. Carol's view holds an alternate meaning for us: it is through awareness of both the structured practices that keep women unsafe and the exercise of individual agency at local levels that resistance to the victimization of homeless women can be engendered, as well as supports and alternative strategies developed. In other words, we need to understand how the game is played, in order to develop winning strategies.

Notes

1 Although it is manifestly true that poor women have unequal access to material goods, there is often a perception that the homeless are unable to exercise any agency with respect to clothing choices. This is not always the case: many facilities receive a wide range of clothing donations that female clients are able to pick from. Service providers, and some of the women interviewed, acknowledged the latter's ability to choose among garments when answering questions about 'preferred styles of dress' and rationales underlying clothing choices.
2 Another potential explanation for the choice of wearing more traditionally 'masculine' garb is that a woman might self-identify as a 'butch' lesbian. However, the women that we interviewed for this study self-identified as heterosexual.

References

Allsop, Kenneth, (1967), *Hard Travellin': The Hobo and His History*, New York: Plume.
Anderson, Nels, (1923), *The Hobo: the Sociology of the Homeless Man*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Archard, Peter, (1979), *Vagrancy, Alcoholism, and Social Control*, London: Macmillan.
Bahr, Howard M., (1973), *Skid Row: An Introduction to Disaffiliation*, New York: Oxford University Press.
Banyard, Victoria L., (1995), ' "Taking Another Route": Daily Survival Narratives from Mothers Who are Homeless', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23 (6): 871–891.
Baudrillard, Jean, (1992), *Simulacra and simulation*, translated by S.F. Glaser, Ann Abor, MI.: University of Michigan Press.
Bourgois, Phillippe, Bridget Prince and Andrew Moss, (2004), 'The Everyday Violence of Hepatitis C Among Young Women Who Inject Drugs in San Francisco', *Human Organization*, 63 (3): 253–265.
Box-car Bertha and Ben L. Reitman, (1937), *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Box-car Bertha*, New York: Good Label Books.
Butler, Judith, (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.
Butler, Judith, (2004), *Undoing Gender*, New York: Routledge.
Coston, Charisse T. M. and James O. Finckenauer, (1993), 'Fear of Crime Among Vulnerable Populations: Homeless Women', *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 2 (1): 1–21.
D'Ercole Ann and Elmer Struening, (1990), 'Victimization Among Homeless Women: Implications for Service Delivery, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 18 (2): 141–152.

Duneier, Mtich, (1999), *Sidewalk*, New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Dunn, R. G., (1997), 'Self, Identity, and difference: Mead and the Poststructuralists', *Sociological Quarterly*, 38 (4): 687–705.

Evans, Rhonda D. and Craig J. Forsyth, (2004), 'Risk Factors, Endurance of Victimization and Survival Strategies: The Impact of the Structural Location of Men and Women on the Experiences within Homeless Milieus', *Sociological Spectrum*, 24: 79–505.

Fitzpatrick, Kevin M., Mark E. La Gory and Ferris J. Ritchey, (1993), 'Criminal Victimization Among the Homeless', *Justice Quarterly*, 10 (3): 353–368.

Goffman, Erving, (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Anchor.

Goffman, Erving, (1976), *Gender Advertisements*, New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Goffman, Erving, (1977) 'The Arrangement Between the Sexes', *Theory and Society*, 4: 301–331.

Golden, Stephanie, (1992), *The Women Outside: Meanings and Myths of Homelessness*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Goodman, Lisa A., Mary Ann Dutton and Maxine Harris, (1997), 'The Relationship Between Violence Dimensions and Symptom Severity Among Homeless, Mentally Ill Women', *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 10 (1): 51–70.

Jackson, Alecia Youngblood, (2004), 'Performativity Identified', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10 (5): 673–690.

Hagan, John and Bill McCarthy, (1997), *Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, Tom, (2003), *Better Times Than This: Youth Homelessness in Britain*, London: Pluto Press.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, (2004), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: Perguin Press.

Huey, Laura, (2007), *Negotiating Demands: The Politics of 'Skid Row' Policing in Edinburgh, San Francisco and Vancouver*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Huey, Laura and Thomas Kemple, (2007), 'Let the Streets Take Care of Themselves': Making Historical, Sociological and Common Sense of 'Skid Row', *Urban Studies*, 44 (11).

Lee, Barrett A. and Christopher J. Schreck, (2005), 'Danger on the Streets: Marginality and Victimization Among Homeless People', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48 (8): 1055–1081.

Lofland, Lyn H., (1973), *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space*, New York: Basic Books.

Lofland, Lyn H., (1975), 'The "Thereness" of Women: A Selective Review of Urban Sociology,' in Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanger (eds), *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science*, New York: Anchor Books: 144–170.

Maher, Lisa, Eloise Dunlap, Bruce D. Johnson and Ansley Hamid, (1996), 'Gender, Power, and Alternatiive Living Arrangements in the Inner-city Crack Culture', in *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 33 (2): 181–205.

Nyamathi, Adeline M., Barbara Leake and Lillian Gelberg, (2000), 'Sheltered Versus Non-sheltered Homeless Women: Differences in Health, Behavior, Victimization, and Utilization of Care', *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 15 (8): 563–572.

Nelson, Lise, (1999), 'Bodies (and spaces) do matter: The limits of performativity', *Gender Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 6 (4): 331–353.

Passaro, Joanne, (1996), *The Unequal Homeless: Men in the Streets, Women in their Place*, London: Routledge.

Taylor, Verta and Leila J. Rupp, (2004), 'Chicks with Dicks, Men in Dresses: What It Means to Be a Drag Queen', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 46 (3/4): 113–133.

Tyler, Kimberly A. and Katherine A. Johnson, (2004), 'Victims And Offenders: Accounts Of Paybacks, Invulnerability, And Financial Gain Among Homeless Youth', *Deviant Behavior*, 25: 427–449.

Waccholz, Sandra, (2005), 'Hate Crimes Against the Homeless: Warning-Out New England Style', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 32 (4): 141–163.

Wallace, Samuel E., (1965), *Skid Row as a Way of Life*, New Jersey: Bedminster Press.

Wardhaugh, Julia, (1999), 'The Unaccommodated Woman: Home, Homelessness and Identity', *The Sociological Review*, 47 (1): 91–109.

Wechsberg, Wendee M., Wendy K. K. Lam, William Zule, Grace Hall, Rachel Middlesteadt and Jessica Edwards, (2003), 'Violence, Homelessness, and HIV Risk Among Crack-Using African-American Women', *Substance Use & Misuse*, 38 (3): 669–700.

Wenzel, Suzanne L., Barbara D. Leake and Lillian Gelberg, (2001), 'Risk Factors for Major Violence Among Homeless Women', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 16 (8): 739–752.

Wenzel, Suzanne L., Paul Koegel and Lillian Gelberg, (2000), 'Antecedents of Physical and Sexual Victimization Among Homeless Women: A Comparison to Homeless Men', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28 (3): 367–390.

Wenzel, Suzanne L., Barbara D. Leake and Lillian Gelberg, (2000), 'Health of Homeless Women with Recent Experience of Rape', *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 15 (2): 265–268.

Whitbeck, Les B., Dan R. Hoyt, Kevin A. Yoder, Ana Mari Cauce and Matt Paradise, (2001), 'Deviant Behavior and Victimization Among Homeless and Runaway Adolescents', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 16 (11): 1175–1204.