13 Interactional Accountability

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Abstract
Interactional accountability, a concept derived from ethnomethodology, is the foundation of the doing gender perspective. Although often overlooked or misunderstood, it provides the motivation for doing gender, a mechanism for social control, and the link between interaction and social structure. This chapter provides an overview of how accountability has been used in sociology and in scholarship on gender. Accountability involves ongoing *orientation* to the expectations associated with sex category membership, *assessment* of behavior, (i.e., the production of accounts that compare behavior to expectations), and *enforcement* or the interactional consequences of the match between expectations and behavior. Schwalbe's notion of "nets of accountability" further extends the concept of accountability, illuminating how the embeddedness of interaction in social networks functions to reproduce inequality across time and social context. Although resistance to expectations is always possible, the individual consequences may be substantial. Nonetheless, resistance does occur, and points the way to how gender can change. Further development of work on accountability requires attention to the ongoing, back-and-forth nature of interactional processes.

1 What Is Accountability?

Accountability is a perplexing term, used in multiple ways, with a technical meaning that is quite different from how most people understand it and use it in everyday talk. Within sociology, accountability is the core of one of the leading theoretical approaches to gender, the "doing gender" perspective, but it is often overlooked or misunderstood. In this chapter, I review the multiple meanings of accountability, describe how it is used within sociology, and then discuss its foundational role within the doing gender approach.

The everyday meaning of accountability is, simply, responsibility: "*Accountability*: The principle of holding people responsible for having participated in, contributed to, or effected an occurrence. To be accountable is to be liable for what has taken place" (Sullivan, n.d.). In this usage, to be "held accountable" for one's behavior is to be liable for its consequences, be they positive or negative. For example, those who commit crimes may be required to pay a fine or serve time in prison; those who make mistakes at work may be censured or fired.

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A more nuanced definition of accountability is that it is the state of being "subject to the obligation to report, explain, or justify something; responsible; answerable" (Accountable, 2017)—in other words, to be obliged to provide an *account* for it. An account is an explanation of social behavior, whether one's own or others' (Scott & Lyman, 1968, 46; see also Heritage, 1983). Accounts may be spoken or written, or may simply be "those non-vocalized but linguistic explanations that arise in an actor's 'mind' when he [sic] questions his own behavior" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, 46–47). In any case, accounts are pervasive in social life; we are constantly explaining our own and others' behavior in order to make meaningful what we perceive around us. One is *accountable* for something, then, when one can be required to explain it. As Mills (1940) notes, explicit demands for accounts—as well as people's conscious consideration of their own motives—typically occur only when something has gone awry and smooth social interaction has been disrupted. For example, an employee may be "called on the carpet" to explain a problem in the workplace, a public servant may be required to testify before a congressional committee investigating an alleged breach, or a child may be ordered to explain their misbehavior. Here, "punishment may not necessarily follow the accounting; it is the explanation that is key. A satisfactory account is thus needed to keep interaction from going awry, or to put it back on track" (Schwalbe, 2016, 109).

Not just any account is acceptable, however. Accounts entail descriptions of motive, and as Weber argued, motives are social: "A satisfactory or adequate motive… *tends to be one which is to the actor and to the other members of a situation an unquestioned answer to questions concerning social and lingual conduct*" (Mills, 1940, 907; italics in original). There are shared and situated "vocabularies of motive" that are common to particular institutions and located in concrete social situations. It might be acceptable in corporate America, for example, to explain one's erratic behavior as the result of fatigue or despair, but not possession by the devil. Possession might be an appropriate account, however, within a specific religious group. Indeed, "particular institutions and organisations can be relevantly viewed as boundaried (or better, 'quasi-boundaried') frameworks of accounting practices" (Heritage, 1983, 127).[1] Scott and Lyman (1968) detail a useful typology of the various types of excuses and justifications that comprise accounts, such as appeals to biological drives or denials of injury.

In ethnomethodology, accountability has a still more specific meaning: accountable behavior is behavior that is, literally, account-able (Garfinkel, 1967)—that is, behavior that can be described in a way that makes sense to participants within the local context. In other words, it is behavior that is socially intelligible. During interaction, actors "generate continuously updated implicit understandings of what is happening in social interaction—a "running index," as it were, of what is happening in a social event… The overt descriptions and explanations (or "accounts") which actors provide for their actions must, if they are to "make sense," articulate with these already established implicit understandings" (Heritage, 1990, 26). These understandings are generally unarticulated, except when there is an actual or anticipated failure to behave in accountable ways. It is in these moments that explicit accounts are provided for behavior, or that people are "called to account"—literally, demands are made that they provide an explanation—for their socially unintelligible behavior. A parent's frustrated exclamation of "What on earth were you thinking?" illustrates this demand in shorthand. There is a large literature in conversation analysis dedicated to the exploration of

[1]It follows that people's accounts for their behavior may not provide a transparent window on their actual motives. "Explanations for action are not the freely created products of introspection, nor yet depiction of the psychological well-springs of action. On the contrary, they are occasioned and produced under specific circumstances and their content is specifically social in being tied to particular roles and institutions and in being subject to alteration as a product of historical change" (Heritage, 1983, 118). Accounts can therefore be seen as an indicator not of any kind of "truth" or "reality," but of the situation's normative accountability structure.

how, precisely, accounts are deployed and interpreted in social interaction (see, e.g., Antaki, 1994; Heritage, 1983, 1990; Robinson, 2016a).

Up to this point, the ethnomethodological conceptualization of accountability parallels the second lay definition above. Where they diverge, however, is in ethnomethodology's key insight that forward-thinking actors' expectation of future accountability guides their behavioral choices in the present. Actors anticipate the potential future need to provide legible accounts for their behavior, and their anticipation of others' reactions guides their own behavior so as to ensure that it will be intelligible to others (Heritage, 1984; Mills, 1940; Robinson, 2016a). Thus one need not be actually called to account for one's behavior to have that behavior shaped by accountability structures. Examples of anticipatory accountability are legion: consider, for example, a teenager's selection of clothing based on the projected reactions of her friends, a young man's boasting about his sexual exploits to forestall judgments about his virility, or a corporate discussion about the need to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest when making business decisions. In each case, people consider how others will likely perceive this behavior (i.e., the accounts they will likely construct) before deciding on a course of action. And when individuals fear that their behavior in the moment may be perceived as problematic by others, they react on the fly to try to influence how this behavior is interpreted: "the individual is likely to try to integrate the incongruous events by means of apologies, little excuses for self, and disclaimers" (Goffman, 1961, 51).

Accountability, in this ethnomethodological sense, thus serves important social functions, making joint action possible, rendering social behavior intelligible, and helping to maintain social relations and solidarity (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1990). Indeed, Heritage argues that "the social world, indeed what counts as social reality itself, is managed, maintained, and acted upon through the medium of ordinary descriptions" (1984, 137), which "play a crucial role in maintaining the foundations of social organisation itself" (1990, 41). Accountability is also a potent means of social control. To be called to account is to be identified as violating the normative expectations of a situation. Failing to provide a satisfactory account risks not only punishment, but also "being discredited as incompetent, immoral, or insane... To be discredited in these ways is to risk not only practical effectiveness in dealing with others, but also the side bets[2] and identity stakes that ride on social acceptance and situational cooperation" (Schwalbe, 2016, 110). But one need not be actually called to account for accountability to control one's behavior—or one's thoughts. In most everyday circumstances, there is no need for external discipline to ensure that people meet normative expectations; actors control themselves in anticipation of the imagined consequences of failure. In most circumstances, actors are unaware of this management in the moment, because "our expectations about others' possible evaluations of us become incorporated into our sense of the 'rightness' of our behavior" (Hollander, 2013, 4; see also Mills, 1940). As a result, according to Enfield, accountability is "arguably the single most important causal mechanism in establishing the norms and conventions that define our social, cultural, and linguistic worlds" (Enfield, 2016, vii).

There are thus three related, but quite distinct, approaches to accountability: as liability for behavior, as obligation to explain behavior, and as social framework for behavior that balances on the anticipated need for socially intelligible explanations. Writers rarely specify which approach they are taking, and as a result their writing on accountability is often confused and confusing. In sociology, the concept of accountability has been used predominantly within conversation analysis, where scholars have studied how accounts function in everyday interaction (see Robinson, 2016b for a recent collection on this topic). The major exception has been the study of gender, where accountability forms the (often unacknowledged) foundation of

[2]Side bets include respect from significant others, feelings of purpose and independence, group memberships, friendships, enjoyable leisure activities, and so on; see Schwalbe 2016.

the "doing gender" approach. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the use of accountability to explain the enduring, omnipresent nature of gender and other structures of inequality in interaction and social life.

2 Gender Accountability

In their groundbreaking article "Doing Gender," Candace West and Don Zimmerman proposed an entirely new conception of gender: that it is not an individual characteristic or social role, but an activity, "something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (1987, 140). Thirty years later, "Doing Gender" remains the most cited article that *Gender & Society* has ever published. Less recognized, however, is the centrality of the ethnomethodological concept of accountability to the doing gender approach. As West and Zimmerman wrote, "To be successful, marking or displaying gender must be finely fitted to situations and modified or transformed as the occasion demands. Doing gender consists of managing such occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate or, as the case may be, gender inappropriate, that is, *accountable*… Societal members orient to the fact that their activities are subject to comment. Actions are often designed with an eye to their accountability, that is, how they might look and how they might be categorized" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 135–36, italics in original). Because the sex category[3] of actors is "omnirelevant," then "a person engaged in virtually any activity may be held accountable for performance of that activity as a woman or a man, and their incumbency in one or the other sex category can be used to legitimate or discredit their other activities" (p. 136). It is worth noting here that "actors" may be institutions as well as individuals: "As representations of collective action, institutions are subject to gendering in the presentation of their "essential" characters, and are thus assessed (and behave as *if* they are assessable) in relation to gender" (Fenstermaker & Budesa, 2015).

Generally, the gender expectations to which people are accountable are highly situated—that is, attuned to the specific interactional context. Thus, while there is a general sense that women are and should be nurturing, and men are and should be tough and dominant, what exactly nurturance and toughness mean varies across situations, and in some situations very different behaviors and qualities are expected from women and men. For example, the expectation that men appear tough would manifest very differently depending on whether a man is meeting with a potential employer, playing ice hockey, or roughhousing with a young child. Moreover, the gender expectations to which people are held are always inflected by their intersecting structural positions—their social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and many other identities. Thus there are no universal, transsituational gender expectations that drive gender accountability; unsituated gender ideals are always fitted to the identity of the actors and the local, concrete social context (see Hollander & Fenstermaker, 2018). Not all such contexts involve face-to-face interaction; Stabile's analysis of online game playing (2013) makes clear that mediated interactions are also subject to accountability demands, even when players never actually see or hear each other. Although the details of what constitutes appropriate gendered behavior varies across time, space, and social group, gender itself—that is, the idea that men and women are naturally and essentially different—is omnipresent, and these beliefs maintain gender inequality.

The motivation for doing gender in everyday life, then, is people's knowledge that others may, at any moment, evaluate their behavior relative to normative conceptions of gender, whatever those mean in the given situation. And these evaluations are deeply consequential: being evaluated as gender-inappropriate can bring tremendous social stigma and sanction, from disapproval or

[3]Note that "sex category" refers not to biological characteristics but to the "ongoing identification of person as girls or boys and women or men in everyday life" (West and Fenstermaker 1995a, 20)—that is, to the category to which one is *perceived by others* to belong. The doing gender approach thus does not reify sex categories, but understands them to be interactional constructs.

disgust to ostracism to violence and, quite literally, death—witness the frequency of the murder of transgender individuals. Failing to behave in ways that are accountable may challenge one's entitlement to claim particular identities and may also threaten one's other relationships and entitlements (Schwalbe, 2005), as well as one's positive sense of oneself (Johnson, 2010). The personal stakes for noncompliance are high, which often "makes compliance the least interactively costly option" (Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, & Wolkomir, 2000, 442), even when that compliance works to uphold a system in which one is unequal. There are collective stakes as well: when one member of a category fails to meet accountability demands, other members' identity claims may be weakened. Schwalbe writes that "In boyhood teasing, in sports, in struggles for wealth and status, and in war, males call each other to account for the manliness of their behavior. To show weakness or fear is to fall short, though such failure may be more than individual. A poor manhood act is also a failure to uphold the impression of male superiority. It is thus not only an individual male's identity stakes that ride on being seen as a fully creditable man. Every male's sense of superiority, as well as his privileged position in a binary gender system, depends in part on other men signifying masculine selves. No wonder males aggressively hold each other accountable as men" (2005, 78). And no wonder, Schwalbe writes, that "non-elite members of dominant groups become invested in doing their part to uphold the systems of inequality in which they too suffer, while benefiting only marginally" (2005, 79).

Thus the doing gender framework understands accountability in its ethnomethodological sense: as the actor's ongoing orientation to the expectations associated with sex category, not simply the event of other people holding the actor responsible for their behavior. The process of accountability starts *before* the action itself; accountability is not only something that happens *after* a behavior has occurred, but involves the design of the behavior itself. Only when people's behavior deviates significantly from what is expected are they actually called to account for it; most of the time, they discipline themselves through the anticipation of potential consequences.

Doing gender is ubiquitous; it is difficult to imagine a situation in which expectations for gendered behavior are not present. Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014), in an analysis of transwomen incarcerated in a men's prison, found that even under these extreme circumstances, their respondents continued to do gender so as to be socially recognized by others as women. Despite the fact that everyone with whom they came in contact was aware of their transgender status, they all engaged in accountability processes that invoked conventional sex categories. Transgender inmates engaged in "a competitive pursuit of femininity that does not constitute 'passing' but does involve accountability to a normative standard and a 'ladylike' ideal… The result is achievement of a *recognition* from others that one is close enough to a 'real girl' to feel deserving of a kind of privilege" (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, 7). These prisoners' accomplishment of transfemininity despite the constraints of a sex segregated environment "evinces the ubiquity and tenacity of 'doing gender'" and "illuminat[es] the body's capacity to transcend institutional limits in order to create and reaffirm the categorical distinctions between men and women" (Fenstermaker & Budesa, 2015).

Despite the centrality of accountability to West and Zimmerman's formulation of doing gender, the concept has been mostly ignored in other scholars' use of the approach. At best, most give it only a perfunctory mention, focusing principally on the performative *doing* of gender and not the interactional and institutional expectations that structure that doing (Wickes & Emmison, 2007). In addition, when scholars do discuss accountability, they generally invoke its lay meaning of responsibility or accusation, not the ethnomethodological conception of orientation and social legibility that West and Zimmerman intended. This may be, in part, because West and colleagues provide a relatively terse description of the workings of accountability for an audience that is largely unfamiliar with ethnomethodology, whose

detail and nuance can be opaque for the uninitiated. The few exceptions include Walzer's (1998) analysis of mothering, in which she argues that new mothers do more "thinking about the baby" (i.e., the work of worrying, acquiring and processing information about baby care, and managing the division of baby-related labor) than new fathers—not because women and men are naturally different, but because these activities are part of expectations for "good mothers" but not "good fathers." Because women know they are accountable to these expectations, they manage their behavior so as to be seen by others (and by themselves) as good mothers (see also Christopher, 2012). Similarly, Brines' (1994) analysis of the division of household labor among heterosexual couples finds that when women out-earn men, both partners tend to compensate for violating gender expectations by engaging in a traditional division of household labor, thus rendering their overall behavior more consonant with gender expectations.

To clarify the role of accountability in doing gender, Hollander (2013) proposes conceptualizing accountability as a three-part interactional system that includes (1) *orientation* to sex category, as described by West and colleagues; (2) *assessment*, or the production of accounts that compare behavior to expectations, and (3) *enforcement*, or the interactional consequences of conformity or nonconformity to these expectations. These consequences may range from disapproving looks to physical violence or exclusion. In all cases, however, these moments of enforcement represent attempts to control behavior by challenging its fit with situated gender expectations. Cook (2006), for example, describes "accountability rituals" that involve challenges to an actor's sex category membership. When a boy is teased by being called a "sissy," for instance, this labeling triggers an "accountability ritual" in which the boy must respond—providing evidence that he does, indeed, belong in the social category "male"—or be excluded from social acceptability (see also Jones, 2010; Messerschmidt, 2004; Pascoe, 2007). Similarly, Lucal (1999) describes the challenges she often receives as a masculine-appearing woman when she uses women's bathrooms. In response, she writes, she orients herself to the possibility of assessment, often modifying her behavior to preempt possible challenges by, for example, rearranging her clothes to make her breasts more obvious before entering the bathroom.

3 Accountability and Power

Of course, not everyone can require others to explain themselves, and not everyone is equally vulnerable to being called to account. Accountability is intertwined with power, and those with more power or those in particular institutional positions may be shielded from accountability demands, at the same time as they can compel accountability from others (Cook, 2006; Scott & Lyman, 1968). Moreover, there are often struggles "about whose version of the normative regulatory order will prevail" (Schwalbe, 2005, 72). Accountability, then, is about claiming the power to define both the situation and the actors involved in it. Actors tend to orient their accountability practices to powerful actors. For example, Martin's (2003) analysis of how men practice gender in organizations found that men were oriented mainly to other men: "men targeted peacocking and self-promoting masculinities only to men, but they targeted dominating and expropriating masculinities to both women and men. They targeted affiliating masculinities only to men; they visited with men in search of resources, 'sucked up' to men, and offered other men protection and support; but they did not act in these ways toward women. *The audience(s) to whom/that men hold themselves accountable at work relative to gender is, my research suggests, primarily other men*" (Martin, 2003, 358, italics added).

4 Accountability and Other Inequalities

In 1995, West and Fenstermaker proposed extending the "doing gender" approach to other social categories, focusing principally on race

and class. Framing this approach as "doing difference," they presented a series of extended examples demonstrating how people orient themselves to race and class during everyday interaction, and how their behavior is subject to evaluation based on shared expectations for these categories. People have preconceived ideas about what those they perceive to belong to a particular race or class category should look, behave, and *be* like. They use those ideas to manage their own behavior and to assess others' behavior—and, if others' behavior violates those normative conceptions, call them to account.

West and Fenstermaker's attempt to extend the doing gender framework to race and class met with tremendous criticism for, among other claims, a perceived failure to account for structure and history (see Collins, Maldonado, Takagi, Thorne, Weber, & Winant, 1995). West and Fenstermaker's reply to these critics (1995b) centered on the concept of accountability. It is accountability, they maintained, that links interaction with institutions and social structure. Although difference is "done" in interaction, "accountability is a feature of social relationships, and its idiom comes from the institutional arena in which those relationships are brought to life. The doing of gender, race and class is therefore a mechanism through which situated social action contributes to the reproduction of social structure" (West & Fenstermaker, 2002, 541). The normative expectations that drive accountability processes are the local manifestation of the gendered social structure; interactions are not free-floating but are shaped and constrained by history and social institutions. But the relationship between interaction and structure is not simply top-down, with structure simply furnishing the "idiom" for doing gender. As Schwalbe argues in his pointed discussion of inequality (2000), the doing of gender, and specifically the role of accountability in its doing, creates and preserves social structures of inequality. Without understanding *how* structures of inequality are created and maintained, he argues, we have not understood inequality. And to understand this *how*, it is necessary to look at interaction. "What we come to see as race, class, and gender are, if anything, outcomes. What they come out of are patterns of joint action, patterns created and sustained strategically and inadvertently" (Schwalbe, 2000, 778). Interactions are not simply the micro-level consequences of inequality; they are, quite literally, the way that inequality, and the social structures that maintain it, happen. Because critics of the doing gender approach misunderstand the fundamental importance of accountability, they fail to understand the institutional roots and implications of doing difference.

A recent article by Cottingham, Johnson, and Taylor (2016) extends the reach of accountability to the realm of sexuality, focusing on how people do gender and sexuality at work. The authors use the example of men nurses who, they say, are subject to two related, but sometimes conflicting, accountability structures: one stemming from the stereotype that all men in feminine occupations are gay, and one based on stereotypes about male hypersexuality. Together, these stereotypes create a "labyrinth of accountability" for these nurses (2016, 546). The authors describe how their respondents orient to these two sets of expectations, managing their behavior so as to avoid any perception that the intimate touch required by their job is at all sexual, while simultaneously avoiding being perceived as gay. Cottingham et al. introduce the concept of "heteronormative labor" to summarize the cognitive, emotional, and discursive work that people do "as a result of the heteronormative assumptions embedded in organizations" (2016, 545). Ultimately, these strategies end up reproducing heteronormativity.

5 Accountability as Interactional Process

Conceptualizing accountability as a three-part system emphasizes that interaction lies at the center of accountability and thus, of doing gender. Accountability is not simply an action but an interactional process: An actor perceives a set of expectations as relevant to the current situation, and anticipates how others might respond to

various courses of behavior in light of those expectations. Based on these perceptions and anticipations, the actor manages their behavior to meet (or not meet, as the case may be) those expectations. Others in the situation assess that behavior based on their own understandings of what is appropriate to the situation. If they perceive the behavior to be consonant with expectations, they may provide positive evaluations (smiles, praise, material rewards, or simply smooth continued interaction); if they perceive it to violate those expectations, they may call the actor to account for their behavior and may implement negative consequences ranging from social disapproval to physical violence. But the process does not end there: the original actor may respond to these attempts at enforcement—whether with shame and acceptance of consequences, with an attempt at repair, or with resistance. The interaction continues in this back-and-forth manner, and it is the total interactional process—not simply the observer's implementation of consequences—that constitutes accountability. Moreover, these processes are multidirectional: at the same time as the first actor is orienting to sex category, anticipating others' assessment, and experiencing enforcement, they are simultaneously assessing those others and anyone else in the social context.

Gender, then, is an interactional, collaborative accomplishment among multiple actors that involves cognition (shared understandings of situated expectations and perceptions of self and other), emotion (anticipated or actual emotional consequences of being assessed and evaluated), and behavior (management and enforcement of behavior in interaction). However, it is never complete. When different people join or leave an interaction, when expectations shift, or when the social context otherwise changes, the social legibility of a particular behavior may also change. As a result, individuals and behaviors can never be "accountable" in more than a momentary sense. As Jenness and Fenstermaker observed with regard to transgender prisoners, "the effort to be recognized as 'a lady' is not something one finally achieves, but pursues as an ongoing proposition" (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, 14).

Centering accountability thus moves our understanding of doing gender from an individual performance—as it is too frequently understood—to an ongoing, collaborative accomplishment that involves multiple actors and the social expectations to which they are subject. Even those scholars who talk about interactional accountability in an ethnomethodological sense often examine only one individual's reaction to another's expectations, or sometimes the management of situated conduct, rather than the unfolding back-and-forth process of interaction (Hollander, 2002). Wickes and Emmison (2007) go so far as to suggest that researching how gender is done requires observational methods that capture interaction as it occurs; other methods, such as interviews, "will not yield data that are ontologically consistent with the essence of the concept as a routine accomplishment of everyday interaction" (2007, 319–20). One of the very few pieces of scholarship to actually examine the ongoing course of interaction is West and Fenstermaker's (2002) analysis of a meeting of the University of California Board of Regents on the topic of affirmative action. In their detailed excerpts from that meeting, it is possible to see how people orient themselves to gender, class, and race category membership, call others to account, and resist being called to account by categorizing themselves and others as members of social groups—in other words, the total interactional process of accountability.

6 Resistance

Although much scholarship on doing gender and other forms of inequality focuses on how people fit their behavior to expectations, compliance is not the only possible outcome of accountability processes. Resistance is always possible, though fraught with danger. West and Zimmerman are not sanguine about the possibilities of resistance specifically *because* of the functioning of accountability. In their original article, they write that, "If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based

on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements–may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions" (1987, 146). The deck is therefore stacked against resistance, whose consequences are likely to be serious for the individual but negligent for the structures against which they resist. Indeed, Wilkins, Mollborn, and Bó (2014) note that the application of consequences reaffirms those structures: "To critique a behavior for not being ladylike is not to suggest that a social actor is *not* in the category woman but rather to perpetuate ideas about appropriate gendered behavior; thus, the assessment of even categorically discrepant behavior *perpetuates* difference" (p. 138).

Even when people attempt to resist gender expectations—or to disrupt them altogether—they may nonetheless be held accountable to those expectations by others, as Connell (2010) found in her interviews with transpeople about their negotiation of gender at work. Interviewees who were "stealth" at work (in other words, they did not disclose to others that they were transgender, nor did they believe that others identified them as transgender) reported being subject to the same accountability demands as cisgender people in the workplace. Participants who were "out" in the workplace, even when they self-consciously resisted normative gender expectations, often found that "other participants in the interaction uph[e]ld gender accountability by resisting or reinterpreting discordant gender cues" (p. 42). Indeed, Connell suggests that out transpeople may be even more subject to gender accountability in interaction than cisgender people, who may be allowed more latitude in how they do gender. Thus, "simply *being* transgender does not necessarily disrupt doing gender" (Connell, 2010, 42). These findings reaffirm the importance of seeing gender accountability as an interactional process. While an individual transperson may intend to disrupt gender, others may not permit this resistance to succeed, enforcing normative expectations instead of the new expectations to which the individual hopes to be held accountable (Hollander, 2002). Connell's research thus demonstrates "how intractable the gender order is, regardless of the subversive intentions of individuals struggling within it" (p. 52).

Despite the difficulties facing those who would resist, resistance is always an option. Lucal's (1999) analysis of her own gender presentation, for example, shows how individuals can attempt to subvert gender—as well as what the individual costs may be. Walzer (2008) finds that divorce can generate new expectations for behavior; she calls this a "redoing" of gender because "people remain cognizant of the possibility of gender assessment, but they describe changes in their own perceptions of the inappropriateness of their gender violations, such as living without a relationship partner. They hold themselves to different standards on the other side of marriage" (Walzer, 2008, 6). This "redoing" results not only from individual behaviors but from changing relationships, such as moving away from "interactions as husband and wife." Similarly, Hollander (2013) argues that women's self-defense training can "redo" gender by transforming expectations about how women and men should behave—and by providing new communities that share these new expectations. Learning to defend themselves verbally and physically changes women's expectations for themselves and others; as a result, they behave differently, and their unexpected behavior sparks different reactions from others in interaction. As a result, the course of interaction changes, and the new expectations can spread across situations and to other people. Thus understanding accountability processes helps us see not only why gender is difficult to resist, but how and where change might be possible, countering charges that the doing gender approach necessarily implies gender stability (Collins et al. 1995; Deutsch, 2007).

7 Nets of Accountability

To explain how systems of inequality are reproduced, Schwalbe introduces the concept of "nets of accountability," by which he means webs of interacting and mutually reinforcing accountability demands that operate across social contexts. Actors are always embedded in extended

networks of relationships across which there is ongoing communication and coordination (Schwalbe, 2016; Schwalbe & Shay, 2014). The accountability demands of any particular interaction, then, are embedded in the potential or actual demands of all the other relationships in that social network—demands that derive not only from personal interactions, but from institutional positions and relationships. A teacher who calls a student to account for their behavior, for example, acts within the net of accountability that includes the student's and the teacher's relationships with other teachers and students, school officials, and parents. Depending on the situation, it may also include child welfare workers, police officers, college admissions officers, religious leaders, immigration officials, medical professionals, or potential employers. "What is operating here, *across situations*, is a net of accountability that keeps everyone in line —everyone, that is, who cares about reaping the benefits that ride on continued participation in the activity system called 'school'" (Schwalbe & Shay, 2014, 172).

Schwalbe notes that nets of accountability have a "double reality: as symbols and as lines of joint action" (2000, 780). Most of the time, these nets simply form the taken-for-granted background of everyday life, a community's shared knowledge about "who can and will be held accountable by whom." (Schwalbe, 2005, 68) When a participant in an interaction describes the possible consequences that may ensue from a course of action—for example, a manager's threat that "if you don't leave now, I'll call security to remove you, and then you'll be fired" (Schwalbe, 2000, 780)—they symbolically invoke a net of accountability. If the participant actually puts that threat into action—which involves communication across time and social situations—then the net of accountability becomes manifested in joint action. And of course, actors' mutual awareness of these nets, and how they can be activated, shapes behavior even when they are not explicitly invoked. "Who can confidently demand deference from whom, who can claim the prerogatives of higher social value, who can safely express contempt for whom, and who can make demands of whom depend not just on shared norms but on the larger pattern of relationships, often legally codified, within which every encounter is embedded. These extra-structural relationships are invisible structural presences in every encounter" (Schwalbe & Shay, 2014, 173). Nets of accountability, Schwalbe says—the coordinated action of many people, communicating across situations—are what sustains inequality and social structures: "The concept of nets of accountability thus provides a theoretical link between the production of order in situations and the production of order on larger scales… What we call 'social structures' are what they are, we might say, only by virtue of the nets of accountability that enable and constrain the people who are caught in them" (Schwalbe, 2016, 116).

8 Conclusion

Accountability is a concept that has been too often overlooked or misunderstood. Its neglect is in part due to confusion between its everyday meaning of responsibility and its technical meaning, which adds the important elements of description, social legibility, and orientation. Even in the sociology of gender, where the ethnomethodological conceptualization of accountability was explicit in West and Zimmerman's original statement of doing gender, the term has been misunderstood and misused. In order to realize its explanatory power, accountability must be understood to encompass orientation and assessment as well as enforcement. Without accountability, doing gender is just performance. Accountability supplies the motivation for the doing of gender, the shared normative structures that inform the doing, and the link to structures and institutions that extend the reach of doing gender beyond the individual interaction.

Schwalbe's notion of nets of accountability extends the concept's power by making visible how any specific interaction is tied to other situations, relationships, and institutions. This extension of the concept enables us to see *how*, concretely, inequality happens—how it is achieved, reinforced, sustained, and replicated

through local, face-to-face interactions that are linked, across time and space, to other interactions and the ongoing relationships and social institutions in which they are embedded. This approach does not ignore the importance of understanding the historical and structural causes of inequality; it adds to these understandings by examining the processes through which they are manifested. As Schwalbe says, "Unless we imagine that inequality is other than a human accomplishment, to understand it we must look at what people—the powerful and the weak—actually do in concrete situations" (2005, 65).

Despite its centrality to doing gender, accountability has not yet received sustained attention within the sociology of gender. With very few exceptions, most discussions of accountability have been theoretical or abstract—perhaps because analyzing accountability requires attention to ongoing processes of interaction, which are difficult to capture using survey and interview data. Instead of analyzing hypothetical situations, analysts must turn their attention to the messy business of actual interaction in concrete situations. As Wickes and Emmison (2007) contend, observational data may be required to fully understand how accountability shapes the doing of gender. This kind of data would have the advantage, however, of capturing the ongoing, back-and-forth sequences of actual interaction, making accountability processes more visible. Of course, future research should also address not only gender but also its intersections with race, social class, age, sexual identity, and other axes of inequality. This will entail more focused discussions of power, inequality, and history—topics which are not absent from West and colleagues' initial discussions of accountability, but which require further elaboration and incorporation into most scholars' use of the approach. Schwalbe's concept of nets of accountability is one attempt to specify the relationship of interaction to larger social structures, but it, too, has been built mostly on hypothetical examples, and would benefit from more empirical work.

None of these directions for future research is easy, as social interaction among people with multiple, intersecting identities is complex, untidy, and often contradictory. Such analyses would be well worth the effort, however. Accounts give meaning to behavior, and accountability is both a potent means of social control and, as Heritage (1990) wrote, a key source of social organization. It is time that we paid serious attention to this foundational concept.

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