

Language and the gendered body

The body as mediator in
heteronormative social worlds

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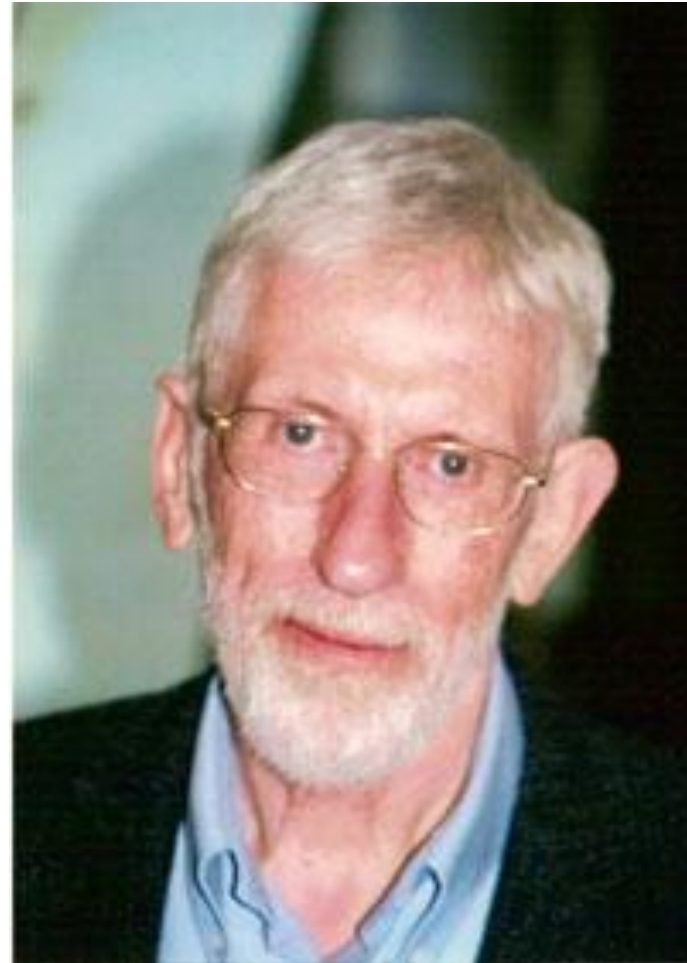
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LINGUISTICS AS AN AVENUE
TOWARD SOCIAL CRITIQUE
AND CHANGE

Norman Fairclough

- *'Language and Power is about how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in contemporary society, about ways of analysing language which can reveal these processes, and about how people can become more conscious of them, and more able to resist and change them.'* (2001, p. viii)



Geneva Smitherman

- ‘Being a critical linguist means seeking not only to describe language and its socio-cultural rules, but doing so within a paradigm of language for social transformation.’
(2000, pp. 7-8)



Mary Bucholtz



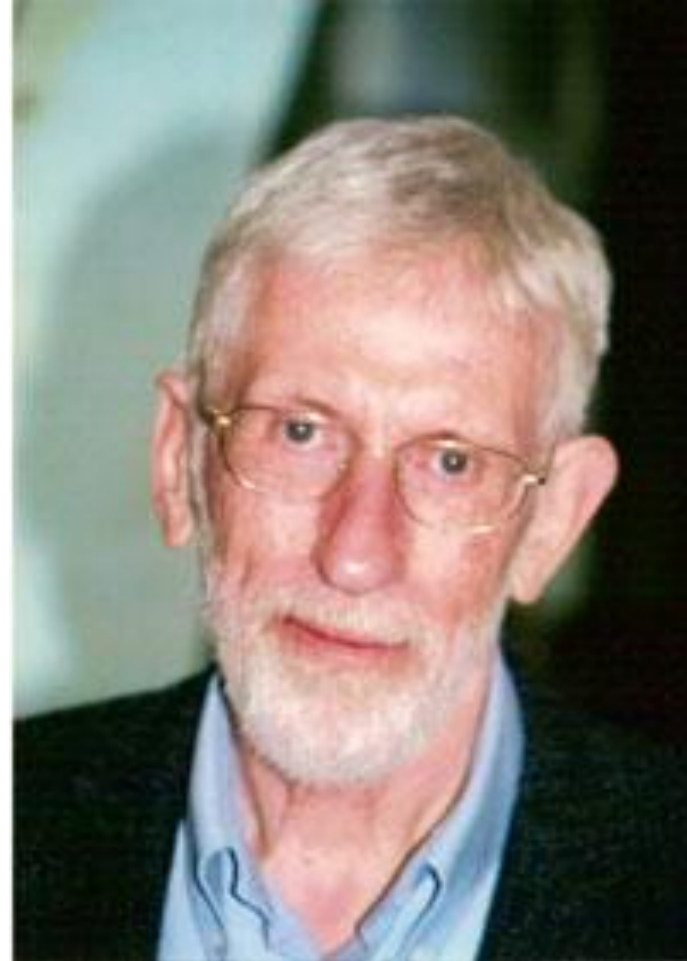
- one of the most refreshing things about critical discourse analysis as an approach, particularly for scholars of language within the United States, is its willingness to voice an overt political commitment. (2001, p. 167)



LINGUISTICS, SOCIAL
CRITIQUE AND CHANGE:
SOME LIMITATIONS

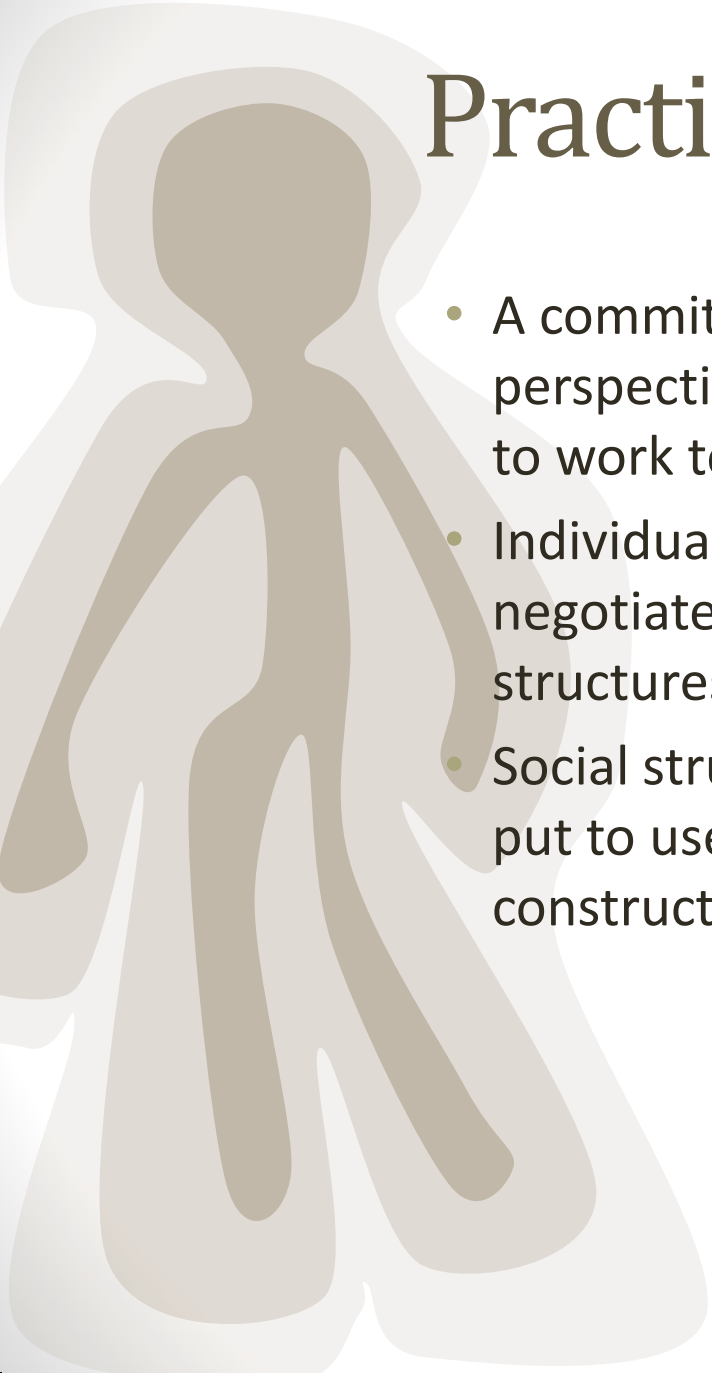
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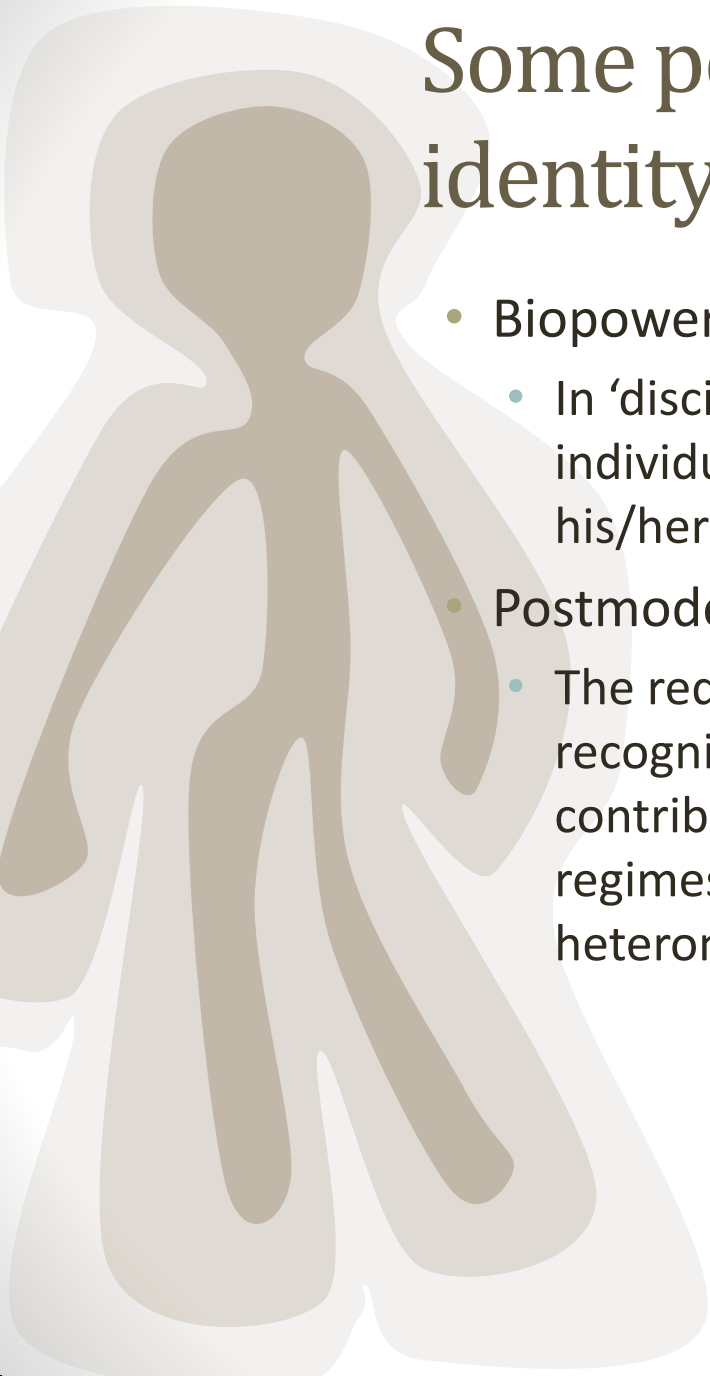
Practice theory

- A commitment to social change requires a perspective in which individuals are empowered to work toward bringing about positive change.
- Individuals must be conceived of as *agents* who negotiate (maintain, resist, challenge) social structures
- Social structures are viewed as resources that are put to use for local purposes (such as the construction of identity)



Some postmodern views on self, identity and structure

- Biopower
 - In 'disciplinary' societies (Foucault 1991), the individual self becomes the source of the 'truth' of his/her identity and/or desires (Foucault 1990)
- Postmodern feminist and queer theory
 - The requirement to present an identity that is recognisable within a hegemonic structure contributes to the maintenance of oppressive regimes such as patriarchy (Irigaray 1985) and heteronormativity (Butler 2006).



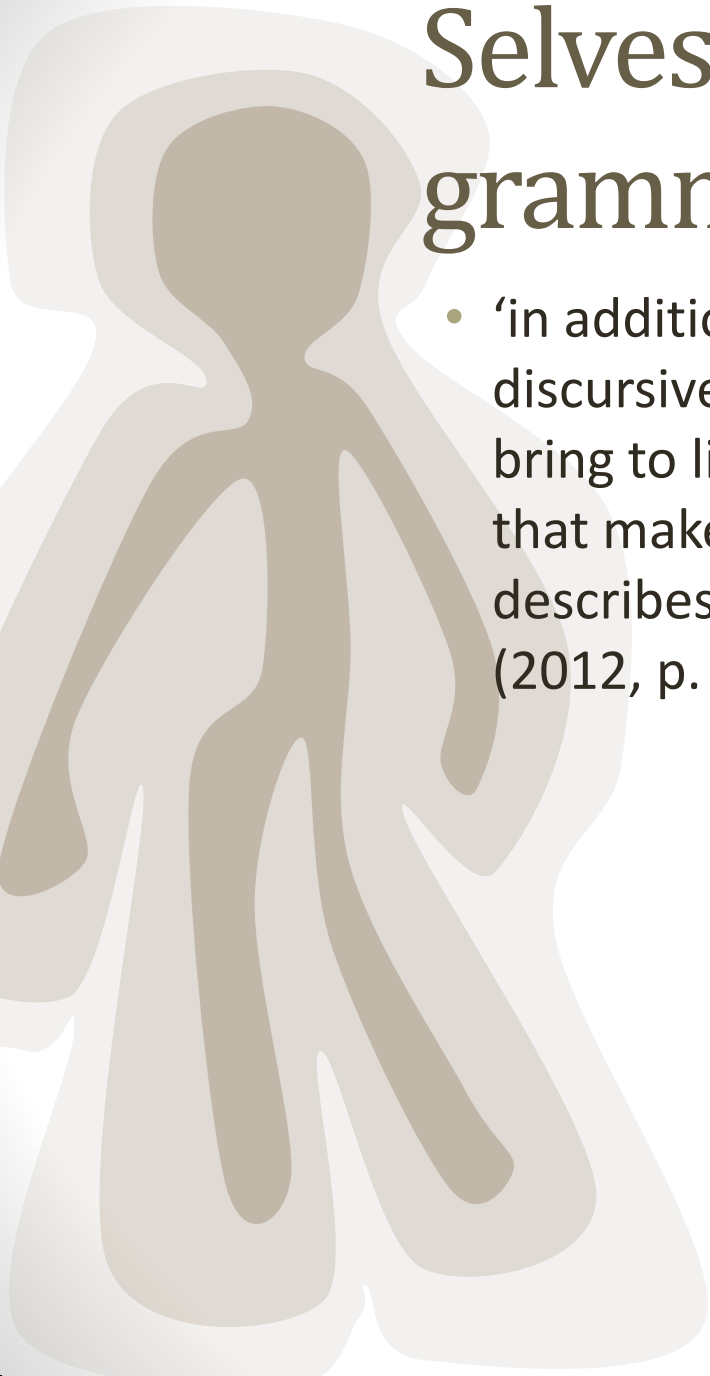


REIMAGINING SOCIAL CHANGE



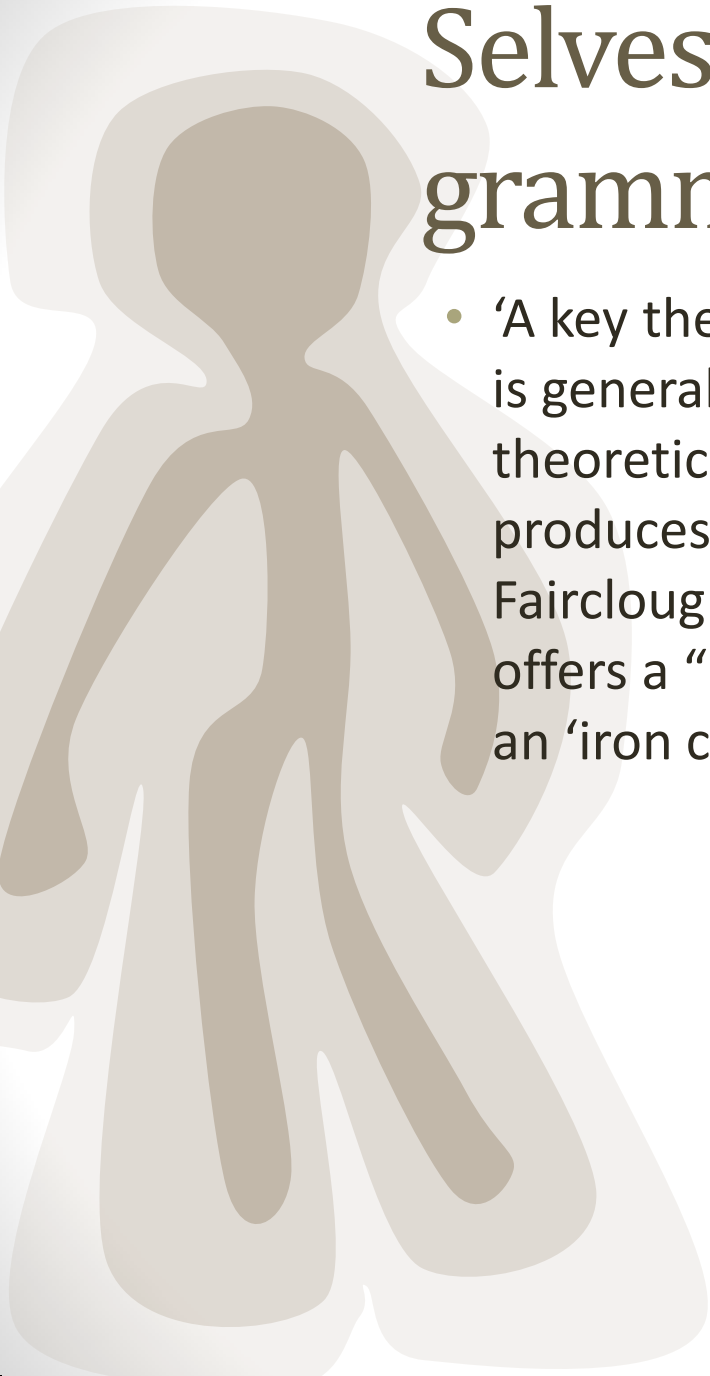
Selves, bodies and the grammar of social worlds

- ‘in addition to shedding light on oppressive discursive configurations, it is also possible to bring to light new ideas for social structures, ones that make possible what Margrit Shildrick describes as an ethics of “limitless welcome” (2012, p. 123).’ (Clark forthcoming)



Selves, bodies and the grammar of social worlds

- ‘A key theme in postmodernist theory, one which is generally incompatible with practice-theoretical and CDA approaches, is that discourse produces the subject. In fact, Chouliaraki and Fairclough’s argument that such a perspective offers a “bleak vision of the modern social life as an ‘iron cage’” (1999, p. 90).’ (Clark forthcoming)



Selves, bodies and the grammar of social worlds

- ‘The position I adopt [...], on the other hand, is that discourse produces both the subject and *the desire for an alternative structure* – one that allows the subject/self/individual to be differently conceived.’ (Clark forthcoming)



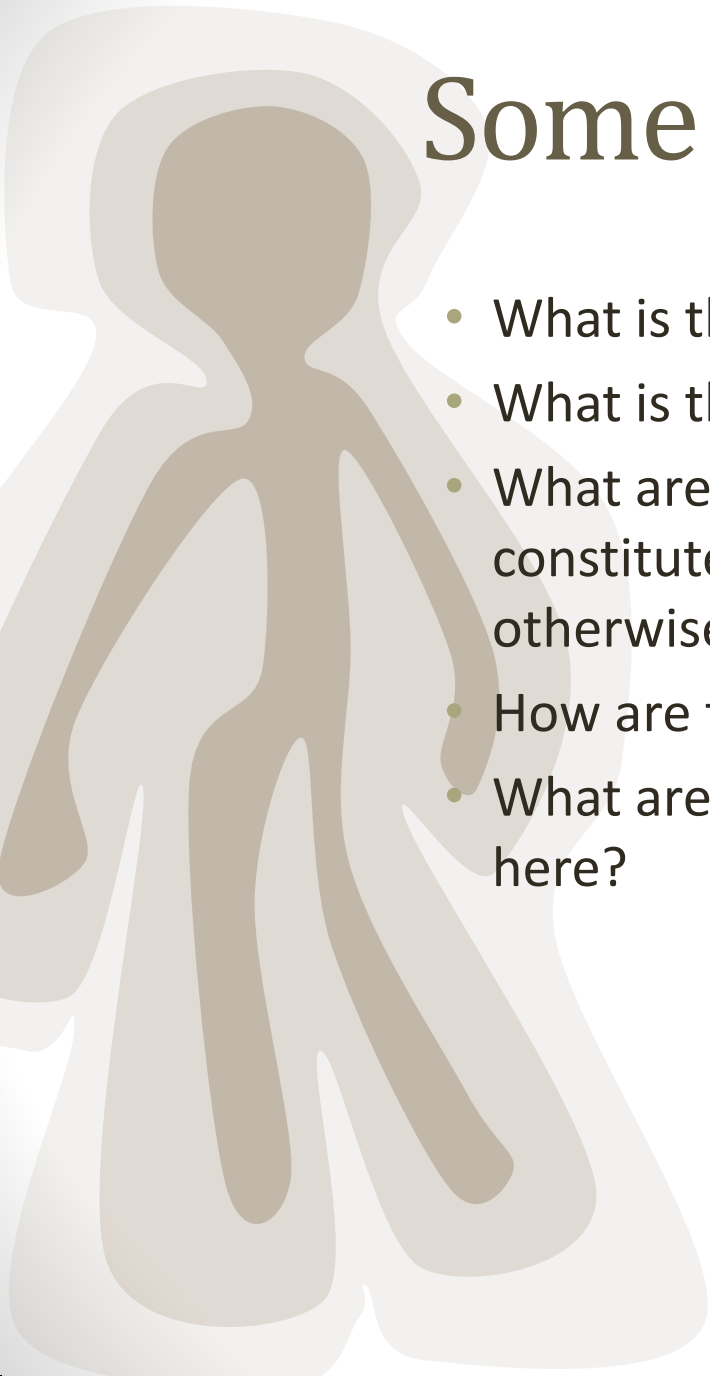
The empirical project



- Analyse the grammar of everyday accounts of social worlds
 - using Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Grammar
- Mary's account
 - 21-year-old Black American woman from the Black middle-class suburbs of Baltimore
 - describes experiences of high school
 - her 'strict' parents kept her from participating in the heteronormative practices of her peer group
- Beth's account
 - 20-year-old White English woman from a White working-class village near Sheffield
 - describes being bullied as an adolescent

Some new questions

- What is the shape of the social structure here?
- What is the desire for an alternative structure?
- What are the 'selves' that are textually constituted here, and how might they be otherwise constituted?
- How are these selves embodied?
- What are the possibilities for transformation here?





Entering heteronormativity requires the erasure of
both self and body

MARY'S ACCOUNT

Mary's account

- 1 Mary: I had a stage where I was like really ma- mad at everybody (0.9) I didn't
2 like anybody
- 3 Jodie: uh huh
- 4 Mary: (1.0) I dunno (1.3)[()]
- 5 Jodie: [At what age]
- 6 Mary: (0.7) hhh Like, cos (0.5) my parents are really strict- this is quite old,
7 [actually]
- 8 Rachel: [((laughs quietly))]
- 9 Mary: ((laughs))
- 10 Rachel: That's normal, though [((laughs quietly))]
- 11 Mary: [mm] (0.4) My parents are really
12 strict, and I just like (0.8) I was just- (0.4) I- y'know, I was just fed up
13 with it, like cos Rachel said like (0.5) fourteen she was allowed- at thirteen
14 ((quietly)) they were still giving me Barbie dolls for Christmas
- 15 Jodie: righ::t

Mary's account

- 16 Mary: (1.3) And y'know, but when I think about it like it- I didn't mind it?
17 Jodie: mmhm
18 Mary: cos I wasn't (1.0) i- I didn't- uh:: I wasn't- y'know. I didn't know
19 (.) that there was (0.6) Like you say you didn't know, you go to
20 the- (0.4) the mall?
21 Jodie: ((laughs))(((laughs)) .hhh]
22 Mary: [I mean, I didn't] know that there were other people going
23 on dates with [their]
24 Jodie: [oh:]
25 Mary: boyfriends, y'know what [I mean]
26 Jodie: [right]
27 Mary: while I'm getting- I'm playing with a Barbie doll.
28 Jodie: right

Mary's account

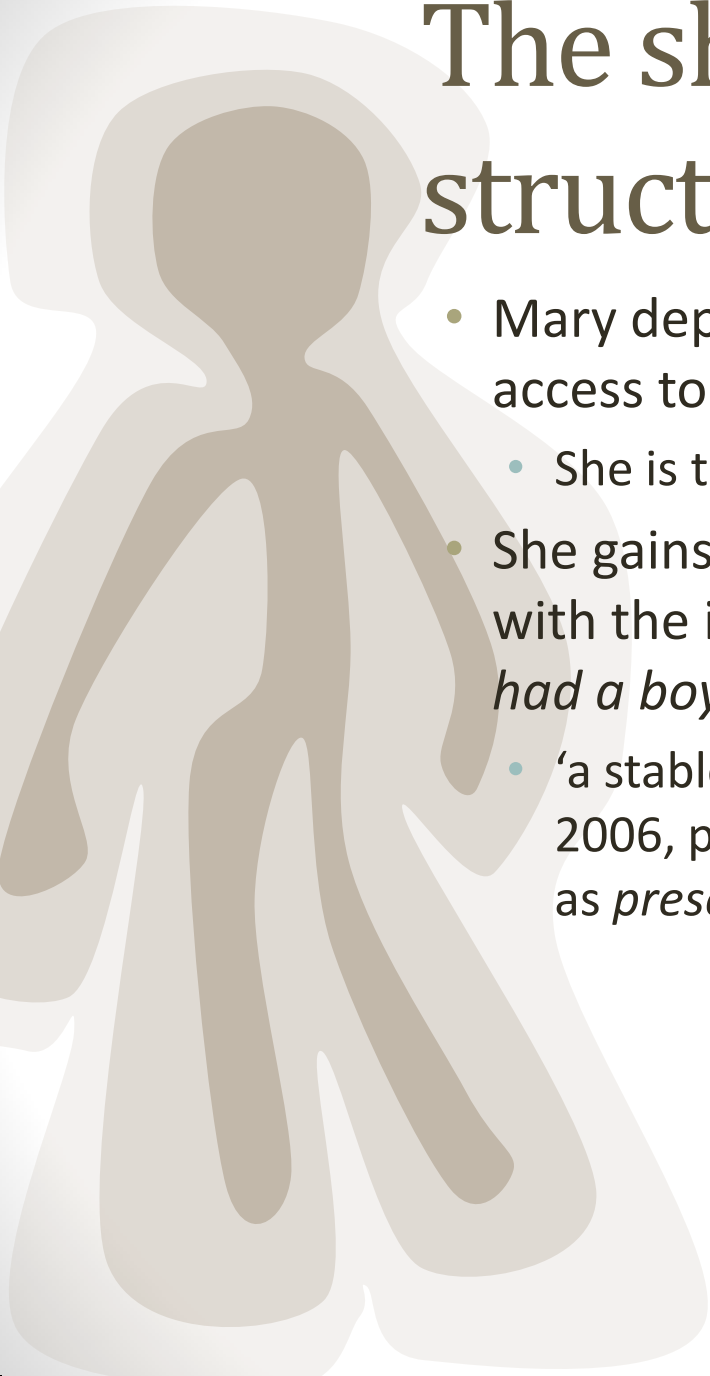
- 29 Mary: Y'know. (0.5) So it didn't- it didn't bother me or whatever, and
30 I guess I turned out OK I mean I'm not like sheltered like (0.3)
31 I got out, but it was like, I got out on my own. (0.5) I went to college
32 and I was like (0.4) y'know, what have I been missing here
33 ((laughing)) I mean like ((laughs)) Y'know, what's going on here or
34 [whatever]
- 35 Rachel: [How] did you miss it in high school though?
- 36 Mary: Like high school (0.5) OK, ninth grade, (0.4) nothing. (0.7) I didn't
37 even get to go to Homecoming in ninth grade
- 38 Jodie: (0.8) You didn't get to go- oh, your parents didn't let you.
- 39 Mary: They didn't let me.
- 40 Jodie: (0.4) Oh.
- 41 Mary: Tenth grade, (0.7) same thing, nothing. (0.6) u::m my eleventh grade-
42 (0.4) no- (0.7) uh yeah: no my- yeah, yeah tenth grade same thing, my
43 eleventh grade year (0.5) I had a boyfriend, (0.7) ((*sotto voce*)) my
44 dad (0.7) drove (0.8) us
- 45 Jodie: (0.5) mmhm

Mary's account

- 46 Mary: (1.0) But (0.5) since he drove to my house thinking, y'know cos he
47 was a year older than me? (0.5) And he drove to my house thinking
48 like, OK. (0.6) He wouldn't like- what was he gonna do with his car?
49 (0.5) And it was his- it was his Homecoming, it wasn't mine.
- 50 Jodie: mm
- 51 Mary: He wasn't going with someone- his girlfriend's (0.4) dad! Y'know,
52 to his Homecoming, y'know, he's a senior (0.9) c'mon now. (0.4) So-
53 (0.4) so um: my dad drove me while my boyfriend (0.4)
54 [trailed in the back]
- 55 Jodie: [drove] his car hhh

The shape of the social structure

- Mary depicts a world in which she is denied access to a heteronormative structure
 - She is the absent centre of that structure
- She gains access to the heteronormative world with the introduction of a heterosexual partner (*I had a boyfriend*)
 - 'a stable and oppositional heterosexuality' (Butler 2006, p. 30) is required for Mary to depict herself as *present* in the centre of the structure.



The shape of the social structure

- 16 Mary: (1.3) And y'know, but when I think about it like it- I didn't mind it?
- 17 Jodie: mmhm
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The shape of the social structure

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44 dad (0.7) drove (0.8) us
45 Jodie: (0.5) mmhm

The shape of the social structure

Marked topical Themes (lines 41-43)

<i>Topical Theme</i>	<i>Rheme</i>
Ninth grade	nothing (happened)
Tenth grade	same thing, nothing (happened)
Eleventh grade year	I had a boyfriend

The shape of the social structure

43 eleventh grade year (0.5) I had a boyfriend, (0.7) (*sotto voce*) my
44 dad (0.7) drove (0.8) us

45 Jodie: (0.5) mmhm

46 Mary: (1.0) But (0.5) since he drove to my house thinking, y'know cos he
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53 (0.4) so um: my dad drove me while my boyfriend (0.4)
54 [trailed in the back]

55 Jodie: [drove] his car hhh

The shape of the social structure

Actors and Sensers in the Material and Mental Processes
(lines 43-54)

<i>Actor/Senser</i>	<i>Material/Mental Process</i>
my dad	drove
he [my boyfriend]	drove
he [my boyfriend]	thinking
he [my boyfriend]	gonna do
he [my boyfriend]	wasn't going
my dad	drove
my boyfriend	trailed

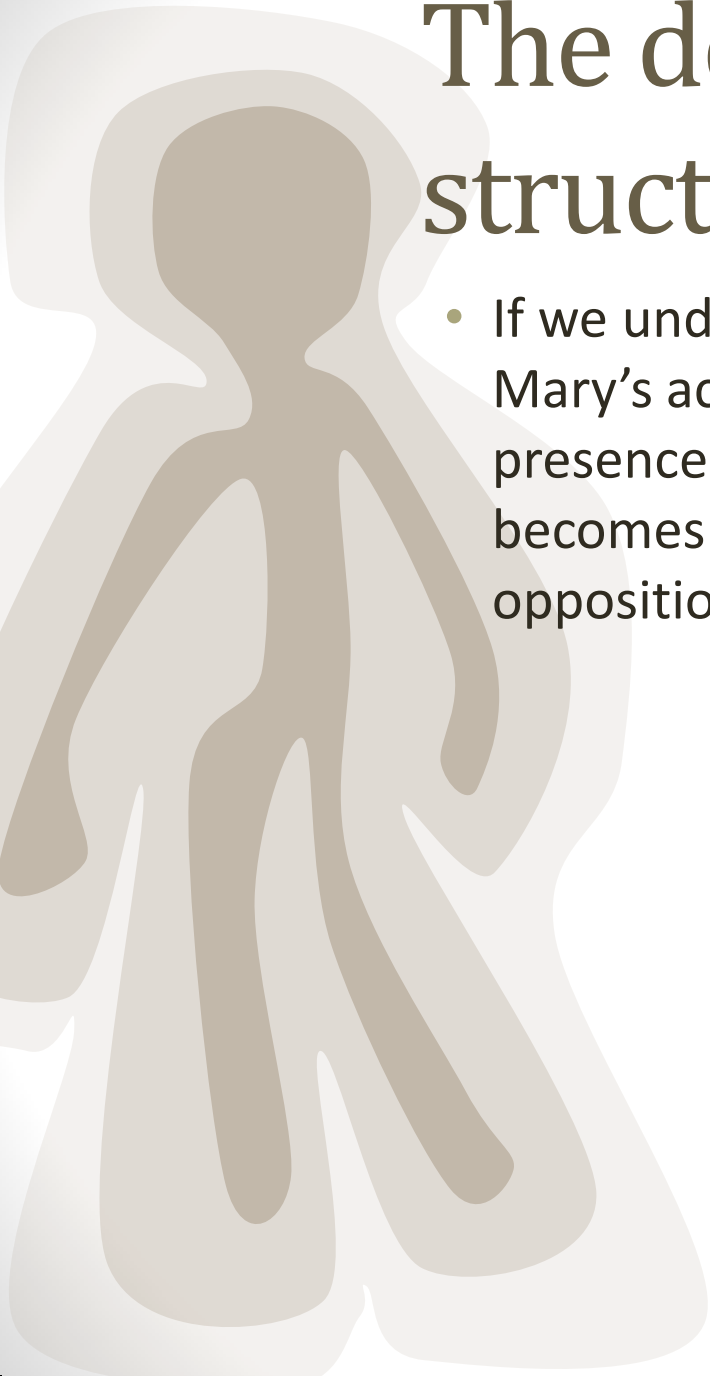
What self is textually constituted?

- While Mary's entry to the centre of heteronormative experience is secured through a relationship with a male partner, her own experiences within that partnership are suppressed: it is her partner's thoughts, desires and actions that are emphasised here at the expense of Mary's own.



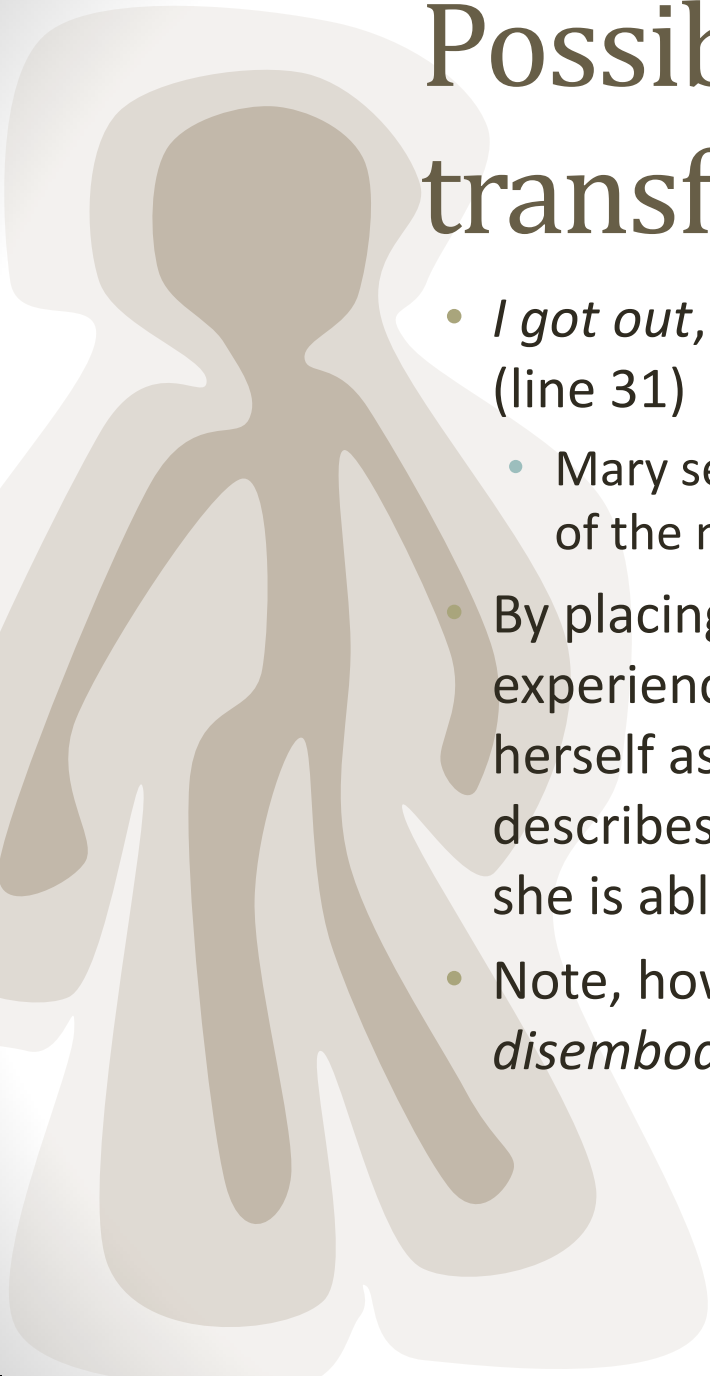
The desire for a new structure?

- If we understand the absent self at the centre of Mary's account as a *desire* for presence, then presence can only be fulfilled when the self becomes the female component of an oppositional heterosexual partnership.



Possibility for transformation?

- *I got out, I got out on my own, I went to college* (line 31)
 - Mary serves as both Subject of the clause and Actor of the material action processes
 - By placing *herself* at the centre of her experiences as an adolescent, she is placing herself as the centre of the social structure she describes. It is by virtue of that placement that she is able to emancipate herself from it
 - Note, however, that the centred self remains a *disembodied* self





The body the body as protective boundary to maintain
the integrity of the self

BETH'S ACCOUNT

Beth's account

- 1 Beth: When I started high school (0.4) I got in with the wrong crowd (0.4) and then
- 2 since I got in with that crowd- this were like first year of school (0.7) they
- 3 then didn't like the fact that I wasn't like them because I've never been one to
- 4 try and fit in.
- 5 Maryam: [() ((taking some food from the table?))]
- 6 Andrew: [mm]

Beth's account

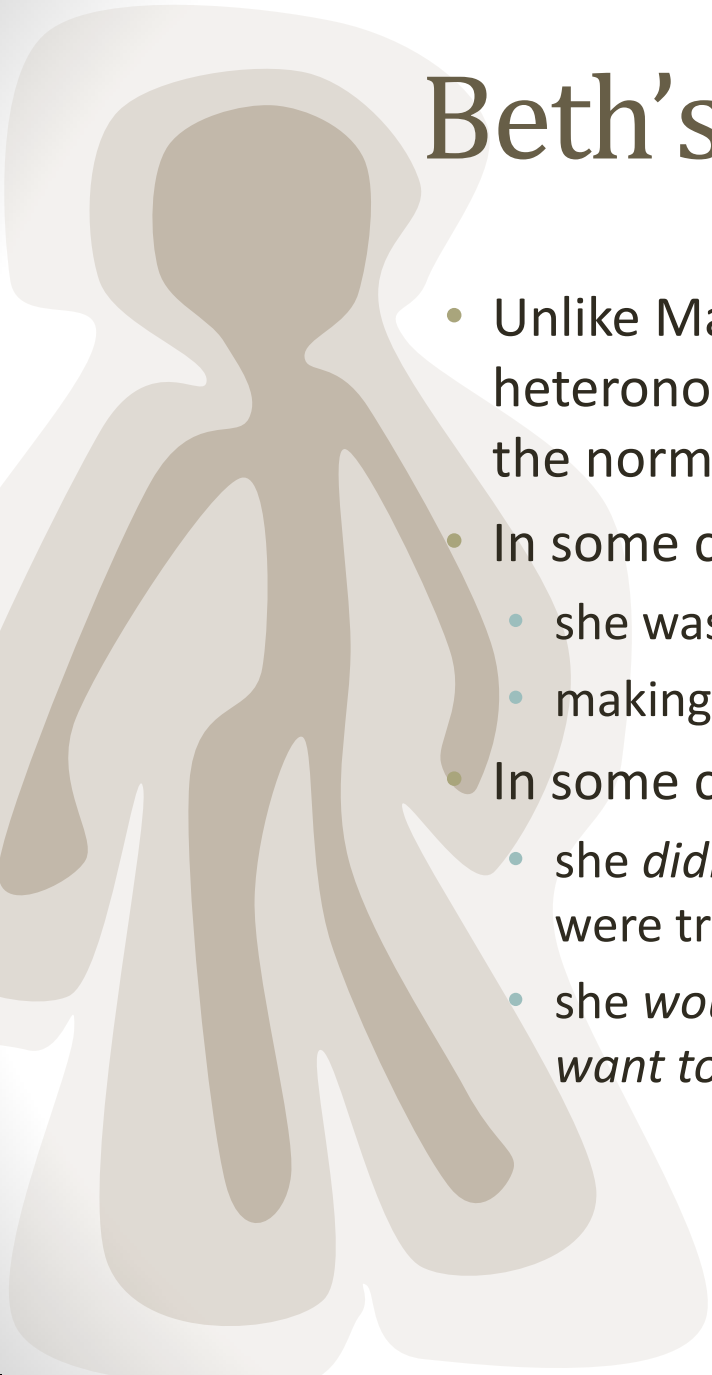
- 7 Beth: So when I were trying to fit in they were laughing at all 't mistakes that I'd
8 made fitting in, like, Oh she's not doing her hair right and stuff like that. (0.4)
9 But from that then it started to get to 't point where they were getting er (0.4)
10 their boy- like they were ↑so young- they were- they were sleeping around at
11 like twelve. (0.6) ↑So so young. But they were getting their boyfriends at
12 time to like tie me up and punch me and (.) erm they were
- 13 Jodie: °oh°
- 14 Beth: putting me under boxes? And I'm very claustrophobic now cos they used to
15 put me under boxes and sit on 'em (.) and not let me- like, wooden boxes
- 16 Jodie: °yeah°
- 17 Beth: (0.5) and not let me get out. (0.6) Er::m (0.4) then (0.8) as I liked tried to
18 (0.4) grow up and get away from it because they were in my form. I couldn't
19 avoid 'em.
- 20 Jodie: (0.4) mm

Beth's account

- 21 Beth: I told all my teachers, and they found out that I'd told er my French teacher
22 who I were really close to and they came and dumped a load of water on me
23 hair? (0.7) So for rest of day I had wet hair that were all stuck to me face
24 Jodie: good God
25 Beth: (0.6) They used to push me down (0.3) and er try and hurt me (0.5) but when
26 teachers weren't there so it just looked like I'd [fallen?]
27 Maryam: [mmm]
28 Jodie: mmhm
29 Beth: Erm (0.4) they tried to make me go out with this boy that I didn't want to-
30 (0.7) like, I didn't want to be near him, he were nasty. (0.4) And then when I
31 wouldn't kiss him, cos I- I didn't want to, I mean, I were like ↑thirteen and he
32 were a dick (0.7) a:nd er when that didn't happen they shoved me off a kerb?
33 (0.4) And I cut all me leg, I've still got a scar.

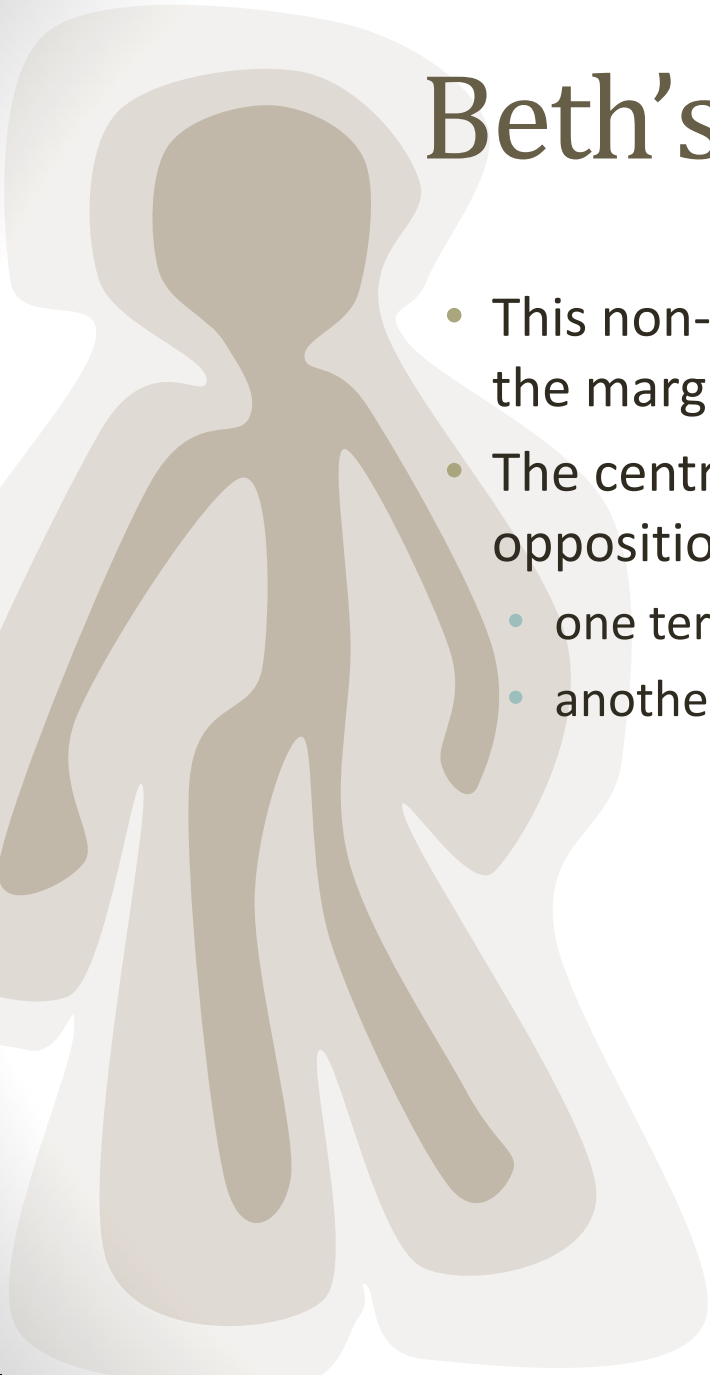
Beth's account

- Unlike Mary, Beth is a present centre of a heteronormative structure – she has access to the norms of her group
- In some cases she cannot conform to these
 - she was *trying to fit in* (line 7)
 - making *mistakes* (line 7)
- In some cases she is unwilling to
 - she *didn't want to be near* (line 30) the boy they were trying to make her go out with
 - she *wouldn't kiss him* (line 31) because she *didn't want to* (line 31).



Beth's account

- This non-compliance does not position Beth as at the margins of the structure, but as at its centre
- The centre of such a structure would need two oppositional terms to stay in place
 - one term to enforce the norms
 - another to resist them



The shape of the social structure

First-person singular (underlined) in oppositional relationship with third-person plural (italics)

1. I got in with *that crowd*
2. I wasn't like *them*
3. *they* were laughing at all 't mistakes that I'd made fitting in
4. *they* were getting their boyfriends at time to like tie me up and punch me
5. *they* were putting me under boxes
6. *they* used to put me under boxes and sit on 'em ... and not let me get out
7. *they* were in my form
8. I couldn't avoid 'em.
9. *they* found out that I'd told er my French teacher
10. *they* came and dumped a load of water on me hair
11. *They* used to push me down (0.3) and er try and hurt me
12. *they* tried to make me go out with this boy that I didn't want to
13. *they* shoved me off a kerb

The shape of the social structure

Transitivity of the Material Action clauses in Beth's account

<i>Agent</i>	<i>Material Action Process</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Scope</i>
they	were putting	me	under boxes
they	used to put	me	under boxes
they	used to not let get out	me	
they	came and dumped	a load of water	on me hair
they	used to push	me	down
they	used to try and hurt	me	
they	shoved	me	off a kerb

The shape of the social structure

Overarching structure of Beth's account of being bullied

<i>Agent</i>	<i>Material Action Process – Transformative – Contact</i>	<i>Goal</i>
They	used to put, used to not let get out, came and dumped, used to push, used to try and hurt, shoved	me

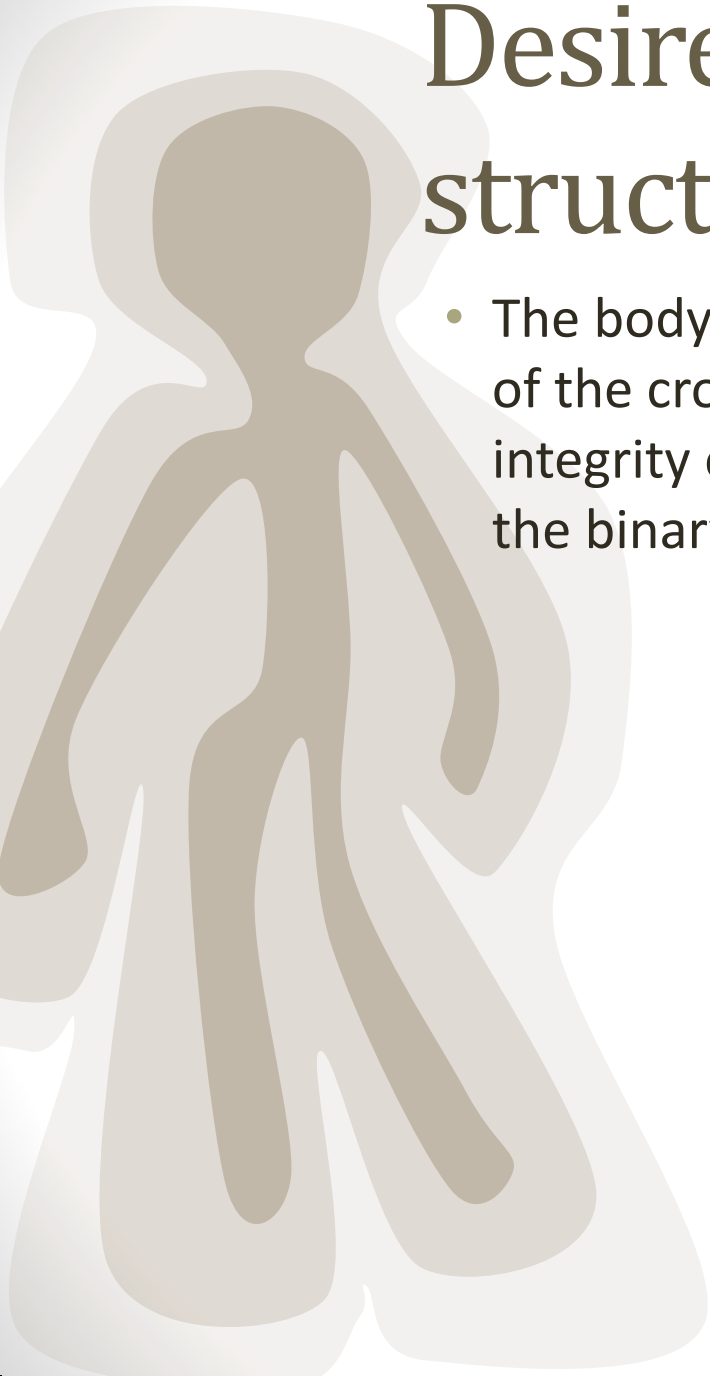
What self is textually constituted?

- The body serves as the mediator that keeps the self from being incorporated into the crowd.
- The self remains present in this structure only by virtue of the body.



Desire for a new structure?

- The body serves as mediator between the norms of the crowd and the resistant self, enabling the integrity of the self, as an oppositional term in the binary, to be preserved.



Possibility for transformation?

1 Beth: And minute I joined drama (0.4) my world completely changed? I got closer to
2 't friends that I have now, it's like made me have lasting friendships (0.6) it
3 gave me a bit more confidence and I- I mean, for one o' t nights we did a big
4 production and a Broadway- a Broadway, a West End critic came, we did We
5 Will Rock You, which is

6 Andrew: mm

7 Jodie: yeah

8 Beth: Queen musical (0.4) We did that and I were in that

[7 lines omitted]

9 Beth: D'you know what I mean, he ((the drama teacher)) did it to give us something
10 that we'd remember for 't rest of us lives and (0.8) that worked. (0.5) From
11 that minute onwards (0.9) when I stepped off that stage I just knew (.) I needed
12 to keep (.) with these friends that I made, cos they were- they still are so
13 protective over me (0.6) erm (0.7) but (0.3) I just knew that my life would
14 never be the same again, because minute I started that, bullying just stopped.

15 Jodie: (0.6) [°wow°]

16 Beth: [It's] like they saw me get confident and (0.3) get a good group of
17 friends around me and just backed away. (0.3) And it were (0.7) I can't even
18 describe to you that feeling

Possibility for transformation?

Parallelism in clauses complexes in Beth's account, lines 1 and 14

<i>Dependent clause</i>	<i>Dominant clause</i>
Minute I joined drama	my world completely changed
Minute I started that [drama]	bullying just stopped

Possibility for transformation?

16 Beth: [It's] like they saw me get confident and (0.3) get a good group of
17 friends around me and just backed away. (0.3) And it were (0.7) I can't even
18 describe to you that feeling

Beth as primary participant in relational processes

<i>Participant1</i>	<i>Relational process</i>	<i>Participant2</i>	<i>Circumstance</i>
me (Beth) [carrier]	get	confident [attribute]	
me (Beth) [possessor]	get	a group of friends [possession]	around me [location]

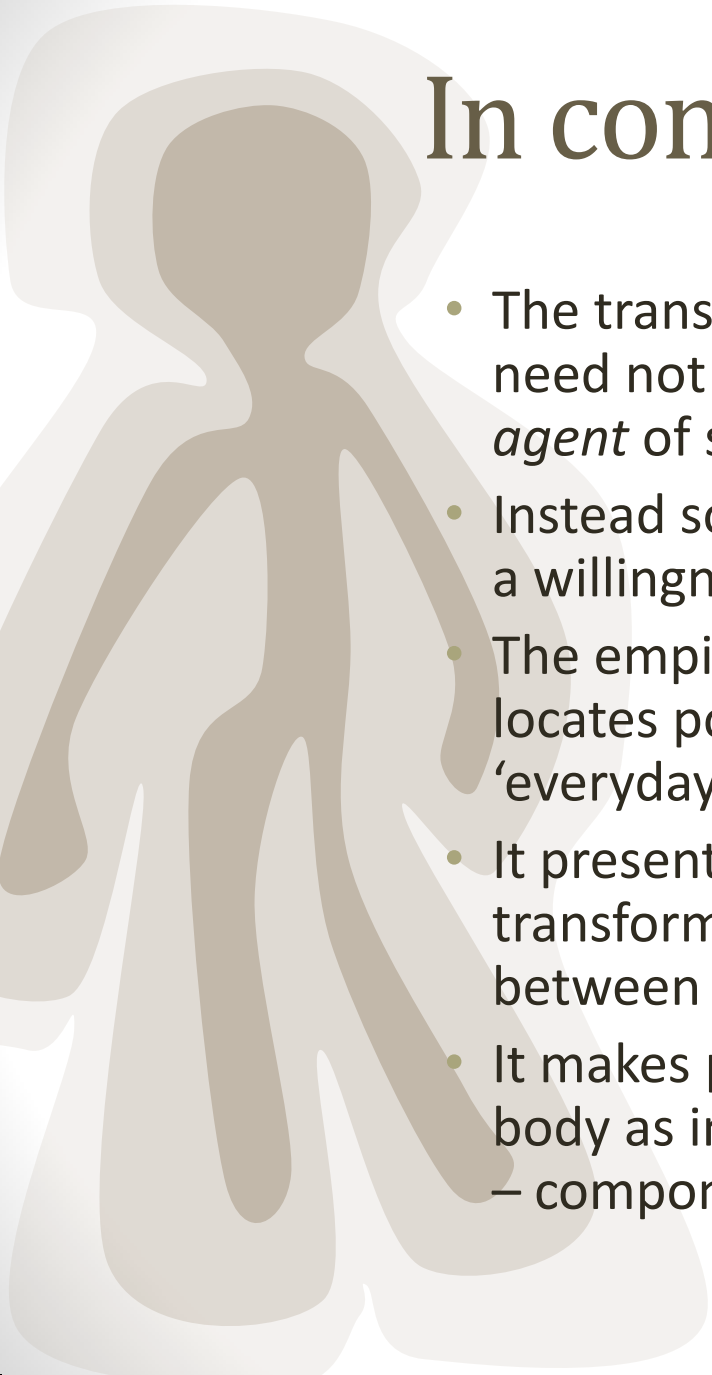
Possibility for transformation?

- Beth's new social structure is one in which she remains in the centre, with the integrity of her self staying in place. It is no longer necessary for her body to serve as protector of that integrity – her community of friends now plays that role.



In conclusion

- The transformative potential of linguistic research need not require an understanding of the self as *agent* of social change
- Instead social change can be approached through a willingness to imagine new structures
- The empirical project I propose is one that locates possibilities for new structures in 'everyday' accounts of social worlds
- It presents an understanding social transformation in terms of new relationships between selves, bodies and social worlds
- It makes possible an understanding of self and body as integral – and potentially transformative – components of social structure





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