Clare Walsh
Speaking in Different Tongues?:
A Case Study of Women Priests in the Church of England

Abstract
Approaches to language and gender which accept the performative thesis espoused by Judith Butler (1989, 1993), appear to assume that linguistic behaviour that troubles gender self-evidently furthers feminist goals (see, for instance, Cameron 1995; Bergvall and Bing 1996). I intend to take issue with this assumption by focusing on one specific community of linguistic practice, the Church of England. My research suggests that the type of strategic gender crossing engaged in by women since their ordination as priests constitutes, at least in part, a form of accommodation to androcentric institutional norms. These norms are in marked contrast to the radical feminist-constructed norms with which female ministers aligned themselves in the pre-ordination period. Furthermore, I will suggest that strategic shifts in gendered linguistic behaviour, such as those practised by women priests, can have effects other than those intended, since it is not possible to control how they are perceived and evaluated. This underlines the need for a more contextually situated theory of language and gender than has hitherto been proposed by performative theorists; one that takes into account the institutional and other material constraints that operate on speaking subjects. For instance, in spite of the differences between women priests, in terms of sexual orientation, race and theological and political affiliations, their performance as priests tends to be evaluated, particularly by the media, according to prescribed gendered frameworks which, in turn, help constitute their identities as women priests. Such practices of representation have contributed to a more general restructuring whereby the gendered nature of the private/public dichotomy is reproduced within the public sphere. However, women priests are not passively positioned in relation to the institutional and societal constraints that operate on them. To illustrate this, I will conclude by foregrounding ways in which they have successfully exploited a coincidence between a number of feminist discursive goals, and changes that have occurred independently in the structure and role of the Church. I will argue that this is an approach which could profitably be adopted elsewhere by feminists seeking to influence the discursive norms that circulate in the public sphere.

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Introduction
When General Synod, the legislative body of the Church of England, voted on 11th November 1992 to admit women to the priesthood, it was perceived as an historic victory for women. It also brought into being a new subject position for women in the Church, that of the 'woman priest'. Of course, other denominations, and even other branches of the Anglican Communion world-wide, had had women priests for many years, even decades, in some cases (1). Nonetheless, the concept of the 'woman priest' commanded sufficient novelty value to ensure that there was a good deal of speculation, including amongst the largely non-church going general populace, about what women's priestly ministry would mean. The majority of women aspiring to priesthood were acutely aware of the expectation that they would fashion a distinct identity for themselves, rather than embracing uncritically a masculinist conception of the sacerdotal role. As in the other contexts in which women enter traditionally male-dominated institutions, the media framed the story about women's ordination by portraying female aspirants to priesthood as potential agents of change. In this way, they contributed to the expectation that women priests would transform not only the nature of priesthood, but the fundamental structures of the Church, as well. A study of the pre- and post-ordination period affords an ideal opportunity to explore the tensions between women's construction of themselves, as both campaigning outsiders and as recently ordained insiders, and the ways in which they have been constructed by others, including by the media. In the course of this discussion, I intend to consider the extent to which the performative view of the relationship between language use and gendered identity, set out in a recent collection of essays edited by Bergvall et al. [1996], can account for the complex negotiations women priests have had to make with the various subject positions available to them.

Campaigning Outsiders: the Movement for the Ordination of Women
Prior to November 1992 ruling, the only subject position available to female clergy in the Church of England was a subordinate one, based on an appeal to the concept of service. Women deacons performed a wide range of so-called 'non-stipendiary' welfare roles, a peculiar ecclesiastical euphemism for the fact that these roles were unpaid.
However, it was the insult offered to more fortunate sister clergy from abroad, who were refused the right to officiate in services in England, that led to the launch in 1979 of the Movement for the Ordination of Women [hereafter, mow]. It would be another thirteen years, however, before a measure permitting women's ordination was to be passed and an additional two years after that before the first women priests were finally ordained. The unwieldy bureaucratic structures of synodical government seemed calculated to slow up the process of change. As a result, as Wakeman [1996: 50] notes, 'Until 1994 the priesthood was the one area of work closed to women in this country'. Many women aspiring to priestly ministry stressed the symbolic, as well as practical, significance of their exclusion. Schneider, a Roman Catholic theologian, refers to women's sense of 'sacral unworthiness' and their 'total sacramental dependence on men' [cited in Baisley, 1996: 107]. Although frustrating, the period of waiting created a discursive space in which women aspiring to priesthood could debate if, and how, their approach to the sacerdotal role would differ from that which had been developed and put into practice exclusively by men.

Establishing a Common Identity

Not surprisingly, in the Church, differences of identity are primarily constructed along the axis of Church affiliation. Aldridge [1989] identifies the four main traditions in the Church of England as evangelical, liberal, centrist and conservative catholic, and mow members were drawn from all four. If it was to campaign successfully, it had to re-think an affinity that did not erase or undermine these theologically based differences. At that time, in this particular institution, it was felt to be politically necessary for women to suppress temporarily all other differences in order to unite on the basis of a sexual identity which was used by opponents as a sufficient reason to perpetuate their exclusion. By definition, then, issues of sex, sexuality, gender and gender politics were unambiguously to the fore as identity categories throughout the campaign. For instance, although not all those involved in mow regarded themselves as feminists, the majority seemed happy to identify themselves as such in the pre-ordination period. If anything, being committed to feminist goals was more important than being female, hence mow's decision, in 1991, to merge with Priests for Women's Ordination (pwo).

Developing Alternative Structures

The period of waiting also enabled campaigners for women's ordination to construct a coherent set of oppositional norms designed to resist, challenge, and ultimately transform hegemonic discursive practices in the Church. These included eschewing the confrontational style that prevailed in synodical government throughout the decades during which the issue of women's ordination had been debated. According to Webster [1994: 10], mow developed structures that transformed the potential for conflict between its members into a 'creative and fruitful tension'. It was chaired along non-hierarchical lines by a 'moderator' whose role it was to develop new and creative ways of dealing with disagreement. An even more radical approach was adopted by the St Hilda Community which was founded in East London in 1989, partly to worship in inclusive language and partly to experience women's ministry. Its members subverted the Church's rules by taking part in 'illegal' eucharists, presided over by women priests from abroad. One of its founder members was Monica Furlong and she explains the aims of the Community, 'We wanted a community that worked by consensus and not by hierarchy...and we wanted to share - gifts, leadership, vision and perhaps sometimes possessions and money.' [1991: 6]. Women's construction of, and participation in, communities of linguistic practice, such as mow and the St Hilda Community, offered new visions of gender relations in the Church. Both involved women and men, clergy and lay people, in an exploration of discursive practices which implicitly critiqued those accepted as normative in the Church.

Developing Inclusive Language

Like many campaigners for women's ordination, Furlong [1991: 72] sees the campaign to have inclusive language accepted as central to the feminist project of securing equality for men and women in the Church, 'a change in language indicates whether the change in church attitudes to women goes “all the way through” or is merely cosmetic'. She points out, however, that on this issue, as on many others in the Church, men have the power to legislate on behalf of women. A Commission set up in 1988 to investigate the issues surrounding inclusive language comprised two women and fourteen men. One of the two women notes the contradictory responses evoked by the issue, 'A feature of the response to pressure for inclusive language is the paradoxical insistence that, on the one hand, the issue is too trivial to be discussed and, on the other, that to raise it is positively satanic.' [Morley, 1984: 60]. Objections, include claims that it leads to a 'lack of dignity', a 'weakening of sense' and 'a diluting of richness' [Thomas 1996: 168]. Yet, as long as public prayer and liturgy implicitly gender readers/listeners as male, the majority of women are likely to feel discursively excluded from their address. This point was made by one of my respondents, 'it jars with me every time I hear something that is non-inclusive' [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. Her reaction challenges the oft-quoted claim that it is inclusive language which constitutes a needless distraction in Church services. Rather than awaiting inclusive material officially sanctioned by the Church, the St Hilda Community produced a non-sexist prayer book that was used by the networks of women's liturgy groups which met up and down the country throughout the pre-ordination period. It was, however, disowned by Lambeth Palace and condemned by some as blasphemous. Petre [1994: 113] terms the liturgies the Community devised as 'New Age-style feminist' because they referred to God as 'mother' and 'her'. Yet, this ignores the fact that both maternal and paternal terms were used. For instance, the revised version of the Lord's prayer began, 'Beloved our Father and Mother, in whom is heaven'. Clack [1996: 149] is among many feminists who argue that, "God the Father" is an image
Encounters with Feminist Theology

Women's relatively recent role as theologians has been a crucial means of seizing interpretative control within the Church. According to Dowell and Williams [1994: 50], 'Women's exclusion from the means and sources of theological reflection has proved as dispiriting as our exclusion from the Church's ministerial structures'. In order to disseminate the rich body of work that has been produced by Christian feminists in both Britain and the us, Women in Theology (wit) was founded in 1983 and operated thereafter via a network of cell groups throughout the country. Some, inspired by the American feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether's [1983] conception of 'womanchurch' as an exodus church, decided to leave what they came to see as an intrinsically patriarchal institution in order to seek an 'authentically woman-centred' spirituality [Dowell and Williams 1994: 58]. For others, the encounter with feminist theology seems to have influenced their sense of the 'proper' exercise of their sacerdotal role. The existence of a link between feminist theology and sacerdotal practice is borne out by Lehman's [1993] survey of women in ministry in the us. He found that younger women, trained in seminaries with courses in feminist theology, manifested more 'feminine' ministry styles [2]. He concludes that these styles have therefore been constructed, rather than arising spontaneously from women's life experiences [ibid: 198].

A central theme of feminist theology is an attack on what is seen as the pervasive heresy of dualism in the Church, whereby body and spirit are seen as incompatible. Furlong [1994: 21] points out that this denigration of the body goes back to the early church and is tantamount to a denigration of women, 'to despise the body is to despire women's unique ability - that of giving birth - and to despise sexuality is to despise the one who inspires sexual desire'. The very word 'pregnant', as used by Janet Morley in the phrase 'pregnant with power' in a draft edition the Church commissioned report, Making Women Visible [1988], was felt to be too loaded and was removed without her permission [in Furlong 1991: 81]. The view of women as culpable inspirers of lust is illustrated by a comment made in a radio interview by Graham Leonard, the then Bishop of London, to the effect that, 'if he saw a woman in the sanctuary, he would be unbearably tempted to embrace her.' [in Dowell and Williams 1994: 33]. The Old Testament's ritualised taboo about blood, and the tradition of churcbing which it produced, have likewise contributed to a view of women as 'unclean'. Feminist theologians argue that these taboos, though rarely acknowledged, help to explain the irrational dread some opponents felt about women as embodied subjects performing priestly functions. Many feminist theologians believed that the sight of women ministering the sacraments will, itself, constitute a powerful challenge to these taboos.

Marginalisation and Subordination in The Post-Ordination Period

The idea that the passing of the November 1992 legislation introduced equality for male and female priests is, according to Maltby [1998: 44], 'a deeply inaccurate perception'. Despite fears expressed by opponents in the debate that they would subsequently be marginalised and denied preferment, the opposite has proved to be the case. In fact, the second and third most senior appointments in the Church are currently held by men who do not ordain women as priests and do not have a record of appointing women to positions of responsibility [3]. This means their views are at a variance with the majority view of the church which is supportive of women's ministry. In the sections that follow I shall outline a number of ways in which women priests have effectively exchanged exclusion for subordination and marginalisation within the Church's institutional structures.

Legislating for Inequality and the Revival of the 'Doctrine of Taint'

Even opponents acknowledge that institutional subordination was built into the November 1992 legislation, since Clause 1(2) states that, 'Nothing in this Measure shall make it lawful for a woman to be consecrated to the office of bishop.' It is difficult to imagine any other public institution which would explicitly legislate to exclude women from its most senior positions. Other clauses ensured that, 'No parish was obliged to receive women priests, no male priest was obliged to work with them, no bishop was obliged to ordain them.' [Mayland, 1998: 71]. Thus, legislation designed to ensure equality for women within the Church simultaneously denied that equality. Under this legislation it is patently clear that some priests are more equal than others. The subsequent Act of Synod [1993] enshrined further concessions to opponents in perpetuity, unless rescinded. The Act was intended to enable bishops to preserve their fraternal collegiality at all costs, as is clear from a comment made by the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, 'It was the sense that we had been drawn together in a brotherhood, which was historic and deeply moving.' [cited in Petre, 1994: 169]. This fraternal unity was only achieved, however, by further institutionalising the subordinate status of women priests. Particularly detrimental to the force of the original legislation was the concept of the 'two integrities', a piece of casuistry which stated that there were two equally legitimate, albeit opposing, views on women's ordination. Furlong [1998: 5] recalls that, by appealing to women's natural capacity for 'generosity' and 'compassion', 'It was assumed, alas, rightly, that [they] would go along quietly with the demeaning process of seeing the provisions of the Measure substantially altered to their disfavour.'
The Act also ensured that the pastoral needs of opponents were catered for by making provision for the appointment of three Provincial Episcopal Visitors (pevs), the so-called 'flying bishops', whose activities, despite denials, are implicated in the 'doctrine of taint'. They act as a 'safe pair of hands' for those who perceive their own bishop as having been compromised by his involvement in the ordination of women. For instance, one opponent in the diocese of Durham said of his bishop, who ordains women, 'I find it very difficult to even contemplate receiving communion at his hands' [cited in Mayland 1998: 74]. This is mirrored by the behaviour of parishioners within individual parishes. Thus, my respondent who is priest-in-charge of a parish in London explained that a male priest comes in on the first Sunday of every month to administer the eucharist to those who refuse to accept it from her hands [interview with author, 14 May 1996]. Shaw [1998: 21] concludes that the Act thereby gave legitimacy to a view of women as 'untouchable' and their sacramental ministry as 'polluting'. Fraternal conflict amongst bishops was avoided, but only at the cost of reviving and legitimating deep-seated fears about women and women's sexuality. In turn, this made it difficult for some priests to employ the premodifier 'woman' as a mark of pride, despite the obvious joy they experienced in finally being ordained as 'women priests'.

Covert and Overt Discrimination Against Women Priests

Women priests are still very much in a minority in a a male-dominated institution, with projected figures for 2001 of 11% [Numbers in Ministry, 1996, 2-3]. All the evidence suggests that a two-tier clerical system is likely to persist for decades, with women priests disproportionately clustering in assistant roles, almost half of which are unpaid. Particularly adversely affected are women priests in clergy couples, 'Some couples found that they were only offered one and a third stipends for two full-time jobs; others had been told that the Church would never pay the woman in a joint clergy couple team although they would be happy to give her a job for no remuneration!' [Guardian, 10 March 1999]. This may be due in part to the Church's tradition of relying on women in ministry to respond to the language of service, alluded to above.

In addition, as Aldridge points out, a woman's access to career routes is often blocked by the operation of informal fraternal network, whereas for the male priest, 'There are frequent meetings with brother clergy for him to attend and there are many clerical societies for him to join. If he aligns himself to one of the "churchmanship" groups, he gains access to a nationwide network of debate, information exchange, sponsorship, sociability and friendship.' [1989: 55]. The Windsor Consultation Document [September 1995] also notes the way job advertisements reveal implicit masculinist assumptions about the limitations of women priests, including their alleged inability to carry out church maintenance and their greater vulnerability in relation to security issues. It reproduces the following from a parish profile, 'After deep and prayerful discussion, we feel that although we seek the best person for the post, in view of: (a) the extremely large plant (b) the combination of church and parish problems (c) the security problems we are facing at the moment (d) the feelings of a minority of the congregation which must be respected (e) the loneliness of the situation of the Rectory... the position would not be suitable for a woman incumbent at the moment although we are open to the ministry of women.' [The Windsor Consultation Document, 1995: 5]. This litany of hedges and qualifications is reminiscent of the doctrine of 'unripe time' used to rationalise women's exclusion from ordination, and is consonant with a general climate in which the views of a minority of opponents hold sway. Potential candidates have no grounds for appeal against these strategies of exclusion, since the clergy's conditions of employment are not covered by equal opportunities legislation. This means that, in practice, hundreds of parishes remain no-go areas for women priests. A recent survey carried out by the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union of those already in post revealed that 75% of respondents had been subject to bullying and harassment by both parishioners and male clergy [msf, 1998]. The most common strategy used to marginalise them was verbal abuse, including pejorative naming, sexual innuendo and patronising comments.

In order to challenge the continuing mechanisms for subordinating and segregating women priests, mow was relaunched under the new name of Women and the Church (watch) on 9th November 1996. Its aim is to keep statistical information on the deployment of women priests and to press for positive discrimination to encourage more black women to seek to enter the priesthood. Its most urgent problem, however, is to secure women's access to the episcopacy. Darling [1994: 223] records the effect this had on the us Episcopal Church in 1989, twelve years after the first female ordinations, 'The actual admission of women to the brotherhood of bishops shattered a powerful symbol of male control over women that the episcopate had represented'. However, according to watch's newsletter, Outlook, this is unlikely to occur in the Church of England until at least 2009 [1999, no. 7: 15]. Yet, as long as women are excluded from becoming bishops in the Church of England, they will remain second class priests.

How Women Construct Themselves as Priests

Poststructuralist theorists, such as Butler [1990], stress the instability of identity categories and the potential individuals have to 'perform' different sexual and gendered identities, in particular. Such identities are, she argues, constituted through a variety of different discursive routes or acts [ibid: 145]. To some extent, this performative thesis is supported by my research into women priests in the Church of England, since what is interesting is the range of different, sometimes contradictory, subject positions they occupy. In particular, their behaviour since ordination, linguistic and otherwise, cannot be accommodated within a polarised gendered framework. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify a set of competing expectations and norms with which they have had to negotiate and which constrain the subject positions available to them. On the one hand, they are aware of the
expectation that they will challenge the dominant masculinist ones that prevail in the Church, but, on the other, they have to confront an institution that is not only male-dominated, but in which they occupy officially sanctioned subordinate roles. This involves them in an entirely different set of negotiations from those they engaged in as campaigning outsiders, often connected to women-oriented communities of linguistic practice.

I will suggest that, by underestimating the type of material constraints that operate on speaking subjects, linguists who draw on Butler's [1990] work tend to overstate the constitutive nature of discourse [see Bergvall et al., 1996]. I will illustrate this by outlining some of the constraints that influence both the subject positions adopted by women priests, and the ways in which these are evaluated by colleagues and parishioners. The latter are particularly important, since advocates of a performative approach to language and gender also tend to neglect the metadiscursive control exercised by those who evaluate the appropriacy of the language used by women in public sphere roles. Following Smith [1990: 86], I will suggest that women priests, 'actively work out their subject positions and roles in the process of negotiating discursive [and, I would add, material] constraints'.

The Expectation of Difference as Productive of Difference: The Role of Mediatized Discourse

A particularly potent source of the widespread expectation that women would be priests in a completely new way is the mass media. The ordination debate attracted the sort of attention in the mainstream media that is usually reserved for important Parliamentary occasions and political party conferences, despite the fact that fewer than 5% of the population are regular churchgoers. A trial vote in July 1992 was narrowly defeated and the uncertainty this generated created an ideal space for media intervention. The fact that the coverage which followed was wholly at odds with the cultural importance of the event for a largely secular society, suggests that its cultural significance lay elsewhere. It can be explained partly by the Church's status as one of the last bastions of male exclusivity in British society and partly by the symbolic investment people have in an institution inextricably bound up with English history. Opponents saw a media conspiracy at work, designed to promote a liberal secular agenda. Yet, the conspiracy theory ignores the trivialising coverage of women's aspirations to be priests and the disproportionate focus on the opposing minority following the passing of the legislation.

Nonetheless, coverage prior to, and including, the November vote was largely sympathetic to women aspiring to priesthood, with every newspaper, except the Telegraph, coming out in favour. The tenor of media coverage reflected the fact that 80% of the general public supported women's ordination, as did two thirds of all Church goers [Petre 1994: 88]. Another factor, however, was mow's decision early in 1992 to appoint Christina Rees as its pr officer in charge of co-ordinating the media campaign. Recognising the crucial role the media would play in influencing public opinion, mow decided to ensure it maintained a degree of control over how its campaign was represented. Rees relates how she set out to cultivate close working relationships with the religious affairs correspondents on all the major national dailies, as well as with those who worked for the Church press [interview with author, 19 July 1996]. However, she admits, 'it was not a smooth ride because the media was not entirely in favour and could also trivialise it as well' [ibid]. One third of traditionalist Church goers were adamantly against and this seems to have been the constituency addressed by the Telegraph, whose Editor, and religious affairs correspondent, Damian Thompson, remained steadfastly opposed. The following discussion is designed to give some indication of the contradictions inherent in media coverage, as well as central role it played in mediating between women priests' construction of themselves and the image of them that circulates in the public domain.

Women Priests as Problem Insiders

In the aftermath of the debate, almost all newspaper headlines re-produced the apocalyptic rhetoric of opponents. The headline in The Times, 'Joy, Dismay and Warnings Greet Synod Vote' gives a relatively accurate impression of the 'balance' of the coverage. Perhaps not surprisingly, given its oppositional stance, the Telegraph's headline is marked by the structured absence of any mention of joy, but instead focuses selectively on the alleged, 'Turmoil Over Synod Vote'. George Austin, an outspoken opponent, was quoted in the Guardian [12 November 1992] as saying that women priests would bring something 'wild' into Christianity. This metaphor of 'woman as chaos' is pervasive in the rhetoric of opponents. While some of the more extreme views of opponents were negatively evaluated by media producers, there was a general acceptance of opponents' construction of women priests as even more of a problem as insiders than they had been as campaigning outsiders, clamouing to be let in.

This can, of course, be explained by the fact that 'negativity', and, more specifically 'conflict between people', is perhaps the key factor that renders an event newsworthy [Bell 1991: 156]. In this context, the possibility of schism afforded more opportunities for sensational revelations than accounts of the hopes and fears of women priests. This is especially true since the majority of women priests were anonymous individuals, whereas a number of defectors to Rome were elite people, including the high profile Conservative MPs, John Gummer, Emma Nicholson and Ann Widdecombe. The Church Times wryly observes, 'more column inches were devoted to John Gummer's departure than to the event which precipitated it.' [4 March 1994]. By August 1993, three hundred clergy and lay people had defected to Rome, but it was not the high profile exodus that had been threatened and anticipated, and which had fuelled claims that the Church would suffer financial ruin. The latter fear was due to the fact that each priest who left was to receive compensation of £30,000, leading the Daily Mail to produce the alarmist headline, '£100m Church threat over women priests' [23 February 1994]. Petre acknowledges that, 'the departures have constituted a trickle rather than a flood' [1994: 183].
Bodily Tropes

One way in which the subordinate status of women priests was reinforced by media coverage is that they tended to be represented as embodied sexual beings attached to families. The emphasis on their role as mothers amounted to a positive obsession. Thus, Christian Tyler's profile of the London curate, Dilly Baker, carried the headline 'A mother in waiting to be a priest' [Financial Times, 22 February 1992], while all the major newspapers featured photographs of the Rev Susan Mayoss-Hurd, the first woman priest to give birth, holding her baby in a madonna-like pose. This preoccupation also manifested itself in the widespread use of bodily tropes, notably in punning headlines about pregnancy such as, 'Women expectant: from deacons to priests' [Tablet, 19 February 1994: 205] and 'Pregnant pause for ordinand' [ Guardian, 21 February 1994]. Such coverage was not only calculated to magnify the difference between female and male clergy, but in the process reinforced women priests' connection with nurturing roles in the home at a time when they were trying to escape the assumption that was their 'proper' sphere. This assumption has been cleverly and humorously subverted in the mow slogan, 'A woman's place is in the house of bishops'.

Femmes or Frumps

Another way in which media commentators can undermine the efforts of women who aim to achieve a public voice is by exhibiting an inappropriate interest in their appearance at the expense of what they are actually trying to say. This trivialising tendency is evident in media coverage of women priests, most notoriously in the headline in the Sun the day after the successful passage of the legislation, 'The Church says yes to vicars in knickers!' [12 November 1992]. Numerous articles since have focused on the implications for clerical dress [ Guardian, 25 November 1993: The Sunday Times, 25 June 1995]. The anomaly that was felt to exist between the priestly role and feminine appearance is strikingly evident in a recent article by Mary Kenny in the Express [17 February 1997: 11]. Referring to the Rev Lucy Winkett, she begins by posing the rhetorical question, 'How could one see such a pretty little thing as a priest?', thereby ostensibly establishing a dialogic relationship with her reader. Like many
commentators, she views earrings as particularly jarring metonymic signifiers of an inappropriate femininity in women priests. She concludes her article with a lame bid for tolerance which is undermined by the terms in which she frames it, 'If pretty girls in earrings can perform a holy and priestly function for some worshippers, then so be it.' The collocational chaining of the trivialising lexical items, 'pretty' (twice), 'little' and 'girl' are designed to make it difficult for readers to resist the conclusion that women and the priestly role are wholly incompatible.

Tannen's [1995] claim that women's appearance is marked, no matter what choices they make, is confirmed by the fact that those women priests who strategically distanced themselves from traditional signifiers of gendered identity were, and continue to be, found wanting for this very reason. Thus, an article in The Times [25 June 1995] reports that, 'Newly ordained Anglican women priests have already gained a reputation for frumpiness'. Both responses have signalled unequivocally to women priests that they are women in a male environment. The cumulative effect of representing women priests in terms of familial relations, bodily tropes and aspects of their dress and appearance is to undermine their claims to professional status. Such practices of representation contribute to a more general discursive restructuring, whereby the gendered nature of the private/public dichotomy is being reproduced within the public sphere.

Patterns of Naming

The increasing priority of newspapers to sell in a competitive market probably accounts for their tendency to report some of the worst rhetorical excesses of those opposed to women's ordination. For instance, the term 'priestess', used as a dysphemism by those who view women priests as an anathema, became a trigger for numerous sensational stories bearing headlines such as, 'Call for women priests to be burnt at the stake' [The Times, 9 March 1994: 4] and 'Cathedral circle dancers accused of witchcraft' [Daily Telegraph, 29 June 1994: 4]. The implicit charge that women's ordination as priests has led the Church beyond the theological pale into the dangerous territory of neo-paganism was invariably discredited by the liberal press. Nonetheless, such coverage may have contributed to a discursive context which has made it more difficult for women priests to be taken seriously when they raise theological objections to exclusive language, including the tendency to gender God as male.

Fictional Representations of Women Priests

Women priests are generally positive about the effect fictional representations have had on the way their ministry has been received. bbc's Radio 4's long running soap, The Archers, made a well-intentioned attempt to expose some of the problems confronted by the new woman vicar, the Rev Janet Fisher, and included conversion stories of hardline opponents, such as Tom Forest. This may have helped to assuage the fears of some of the more conservative members of the Church who, like Forest, were wary about change per se. By far the most well-known fictional representation of a woman priest, however, is the eponymous heroine of the sitcom The Vicar of Dibley, a role played by the popular comedian Dawn French. It is based loosely on the ministry of a London priest, Joy Carroll, although the idyllic rural setting for the series could not be more remote from Carroll's experience of working with people on the margins of society in inner city London. Wakeman [1996] feels that the series has been very effective at countering stereotypes through humour, 'The caricature of a forceful and aggressive woman minister seems to be fading. Possibly the sting was drawn by The Vicar of Dibley, television's series about a lovely but terrible woman vicar who must have been an amalgam of everyone's worst fears.' (Wakeman, 1996: 15). The Windsor Consultation Document [September 1995] likewise records the unanimous opinion expressed by all those present that the series brought humour and humanity to the new role of women priests. So positive is the perceived impact of the series that one Synod member referred to it as the 'Vicar of Dibley spread of tolerance' [Guardian, 15 March 1999].

The response from one of my respondents was, however, more qualified. She noted that the media have a long standing record of trivialising the Church and cited the role played by Derek Nimmo in the popular 1960s sitcom, All Gas and Gaiters, as establishing a precedent for subsequent depictions of priests as effeminate and ineffectual buffoons [interview with author, 30 April 1996]. This is a tradition which has been reproduced more recently in the Channel 4 sitcom, Father Ted. In this context, she felt that the character played by French is likely to perpetuate, rather than challenge, the popular image of vicars, and in this case women vicars, as figures of fun at a time when they are striving to be taken seriously. While Geraldine is both a strong and attractive character, much of her humour is self-denigrating, and a number of storylines have centred on her frustrated attempts at romance. A particularly poignant episode was that the 1998 Christmas special in which she mistakenly assumes that a handsome BBC producer is attracted to her. Although the series has undoubtedly countered some stereotypical assumptions about women priests, it may have reinforced others, particularly the assumption that single women turn to priesthood because of their failure to find fulfilment in heterosexual relationships. The writer of the series, Richard Curtis conceptualised Geraldine as a character who, 'in moments of conflict, has to be the soul of sweetness.' [The Times, 5 November]. Such saintly restraint may be possible for Geraldine in the face of the comic antics of the inhabitants of Dibley, but it may be much less so for the many women priests who have had to confront hostility and abuse from their parishioners.

(De)gendered Performances: Priests, Women Priests or Fembots?

Some women priests have chosen to distance themselves from the identity criteria of sex, sexuality and gender that were necessarily to the fore in the pre-ordination campaign. Instead, they emphasise the institutional force of
their ordination as priests and insist that gender is largely irrelevant to the exercise of many aspects of their sacerdotal role. For instance, one of my interviewees feels that the use of the premodifier 'woman' is self-marginalising, 'I think it's time we stopped referring to ourselves as women priests we're priests that's all...I'm a little worried that we shall hive off into our little ghetto' [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. The implication is that the gender-marking of what should be a gender-neutral occupational role is an unnecessary distraction, whether you're a woman or a man shouldn't make any difference at all your gender should--I feel your gender should disappear in a service' [ibid]. Hence, her rejection of the 'feely' and 'personal' aspects of some women's approach to ministry, and of their propensity to 'go on endlessly about birth' [ibid].

Priest C also admits to minimising aspects of her appearance and dress that would draw unwarranted attention to her femininity, 'I will do all sorts of things when I'm in mufti erhm I like bright colours when I'm off duty it's an antidote to the sort of quietness and so on of clergy dress I like earrings I--very quickly decided that it wasn't appropriate to wear fun earrings when taking a service because it's a distraction you do not want people looking at your earrings instead of listening to what you're saying so I tone every-thing down then and big rings and so on I don't wear those during services' [ibid]. These de-gendering strategies may have been influenced by the media's trivialising focus on the appearance of women priests. However, they are also likely to be connected to her conviction, stated later in the interview, that men in the Church have a 'deep' and 'unacknowledged' fear of women's sexuality [ibid]. This is a fear that many women priests feel has been reinforced, rather than challenged, in the post-ordination period because of the revival of the 'doctrine of taint' [see Furlong ed. 1999].

While all of my interviewees appear to embrace occupational norms as gender-neutral, such norms have been perceived by others as male-identified, because of their connection with a traditionally male-dominated institution. Ross [1994: 116], for instance, is critical of what she sees as the failure of women priests to challenge the male-oriented bureaucratisation of the Episcopal Church in the us, 'the women seem more and more to be adopting the "executive" model, and they dress like upper-level management cum dog collars'. This is reminiscent of Daly's [1979] dysphemistic neologism, 'fembots', to designate women careerists who, in her view, inevitably collude with masculinist institutional norms. Such negative evaluations of women priests are not confined to feminist critics, but have been appropriated by those who oppose women's ministry on quite different grounds. This is evident in an article recording the reaction of traditionalists to the ministry of Miriam Byrne, Provost of St Paul's Cathedral in Dundee and the first woman priest to take control of an Anglican cathedral. She has been dubbed 'Atilla the nur', because, in the words of one parishioner, 'She is a woman doing a man's job and is over-compensating because of that.' [Guardian, 16 November 1998]. The implication is that hers is an exaggerated performance of a certain kind of authoritarian masculinity, yet, when journalist Gerard Seenan attempted to find evidence to substantiate claims of her 'Thatcher-like decision-making', it was not 'readily forthcoming'. Instead, he discovered that for Byrne's opponents even a professionally corrupt man (the previous incumbent had embezzled £44,000 from a company he set up to help the unemployed) is preferable to a 'strident' female who is merely playing at being a man. This illustrates the 'performative paradox' [Montgomery 1999], whereby women who seek to construct themselves as competent professionals are, nonetheless, vulnerable to the charge of mimicking men.

This is particularly paradoxical, since priestly ministry is, in many ways, a feminine occupation. Indeed, priesthood can be seen as an instance of socially and institutionally sanctioned gender-crossing behaviour by men. Thus, the Roman Catholic theologian, Schüssler Fiorenza [1993: 100], says of the sacraments, 'as rituals of birthing and nurturing, [they] appear to imitate female powers of giving birth and nurturing the growth of life'. The psychiatrist, Robert Hobson, believes men who are drawn to the priesthood are motivated by an envy of women's reproductive powers, finding 'refuge in the "motherly aspects" of priesthood and such "feminine" expression as ceremonial or ritual dress.' [cited in Petre, 1994: 39]. Indeed, Wakeman [1996: 6], implies that a large measure of the hegemonic power which has historically been vested in the priesthood appears to come precisely from the fact that men have been performing women's private sphere roles in a public institution, 'He [the male priest] does not become female, but by adding female functions to his own masculinity becomes culturally hermaphroditic or complete'. This may help to explain the bitterness experienced by many male clergy who recognised that women's entry into the priesthood would unmask their masquerade, rendering their feminised rituals a parodic imitation of the 'real thing'. This has led some opponents to engage in exaggerated and reactionary performances of masculinity (4). Whereas Bing and Bergvall [1996: 6-7] suggest that both sexes are equally penalised for transgressing normative gender roles, in the Church at least, men and women are clearly not equal players in the game of gender-crossing.

Interestingly, all three of my respondents refer to empirical studies that indicate that male priests have traditionally taken up gendered subject positions at variance with their sexual identity [Francis 1991; Lehman 1993]. They appear to regard this 'fact' as offering them a way out of defining themselves in narrowly gendered terms. Thus, referring to the Myers Briggs personality test, a test widely used in the Church's training institutions, Priest B alludes to her own masculine character trait of being 'guided by the head, rather than by the heart' [interview with author, 14 May 1996]. Her comment is suggestive of the way in which so-called gender-crossing behaviour can reify stereotypical assumptions about gender, even as it appears to trouble them. Her identification with a masculine subject position does not, however, preclude a radical stance on gender politics. For instance, she regards the Act of Synod as an 'act of apartheid', and, in her own ministry, actively promotes inclusive language via an inclusive style of address [ibid].

The strategic appropriation of a range of discursive subject positions is especially likely to occur in liminal periods,
such as that which currently exists in the Church of England, where newly ordained women priests are in an ideal position to negotiate the boundaries of gendered identity. For instance, Priests A and C both claim that their gender affiliation is contingent on the gendered nature of the setting in which they find themselves. They strategically exploit connections between women and qualities such as empathy and sensitivity in situations where this seems appropriate, like funerals, but elsewhere, for instance in mixed-sex meetings working to male agendas, they suppress these. In other words, women priests construct themselves as 'like men' in some respects, in order to assert their equality in relation to, for instance, the criterion of competence, and 'like women' in other respects where the aim is to point up male 'lack' of qualities such as empathy. According to Priest C, 'at moments of emotional stress and so on women are quite welcomed because they [sighs] they [indecipherably] men disappear into the back room and get on with the job or something they're afraid to show their emotions or something' [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. This is in marked contrast to her claim, noted above, that gender is irrelevant to the exercise of the priestly role. The apparently contradictory, and often highly qualified, claims she makes about gender and occupational role can be explained by the fact that she stresses the importance of gender in informal interactional settings where it is likely to be perceived as advantageous to women, and she minimises its importance in more formal interactional settings where it might be perceived to disadvantage women. Yet, both Priests A and C are aware that their gender-crossing behaviour may be negatively evaluated by others. Priest A, for instance, notes that male Church Wardens in her parish regard her leadership style as 'bossy' [interview with author, 30 April 1996], while Priest C says of herself, 'I have to be conscious very much that I don't come over too powerfully...I haven't experienced [negative evaluations] because I am very careful not to fall into that trap I can be sharp-tongued and I know I'm powerful... I have found that I can sway a meeting but I have to careful when I use it' [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. This offers an insight into the type of pragmatically motivated form of self-surveillance that women in professional roles have to engage in order to overcome the perennial double bind.

The Strategic Disidentification with Feminism

There is a good degree of unanimity when it comes to how women priests choose to situate themselves in relation to gender politics in the period since ordination. Time and again my interviewees, and numerous other women priests who have written about their experiences, seek to distance themselves from the 'feminist' label, even though they admit that they were happy to employ it in the pre-ordination campaign. It could be argued that this is symptomatic of the recent and widespread post-feminist backlash, but this does not explain the reluctance with which women priests give up the label. It becomes clear from their responses that this is a strategic decision designed to enable them to promote an implicitly feminist agenda more readily in an institutional environment that is particularly hostile to feminism. Thus one of my interviewees said she wouldn't admit publicly to being a feminist because in the Church it is equated with being an ‘aggressive fighter for women's position' [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. This is a view shared by Rev Frances Ward, 'I know if I am labelled a feminist it gives people a good excuse for marginalising me and not listening to me.' [in Loudon ed., 1994: 86].

A poststructuralist feminist might be tempted to applaud this as a masquerade designed to further feminist goals. However, this ignores the personal investment subjects have in identity labels, especially since this public denial of a feminist stance is not freely chosen. If, as poststructuralists, like Butler [1990], claim, language is constitutive of our sense of self, then this type of strategic disidentification is likely to be accompanied by a feeling of self-betrayal. This is evident in the following anecdote related by Ward, 'I remember preaching a sermon once and coming down and shaking people's hands at the end of the service and someone came up to me and said, 'You’re not one of those feminists, are you?' and I was caught on the hop and said, “No”, which I've always regretted because it felt like a loss of integrity.’ [in Loudon ed., 1994: 86]. If women priests are reluctant to be labelled 'feminists', it seems unlikely that they will be prepared to confront the equally hostile reaction engendered by the issue of inclusive language. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the process of strategic disidentification with overtly feminist goals in the post-ordination period appears to have gone hand-in-hand with a relative retreat on the issue of inclusive language. From a feminist perspective, not all strategic uses of language are equally valid and some may even be positively reactionary. In this case, the danger is that the subversive power of self-confessed feminists who campaigned for women's ordination is being co-opted and neutralised, leaving the Church's masculinist discursive practices intact.

Celebrating Gender Difference

Many women priests continue to stress the distinctive nature of their ministry as women priests in the post-ordination period. Priest C claims that the most significant change women have introduced is their different approach to the question of sacerdotal authority. Both she and Priest A say that they are conscious of seeking an alternative to the authoritarian approach to ministry that many men adopt. Although careful not to generalise about all men, Priest C argues that the Western conception of masculinity means that some male priests are, 'into power and relish the thought of being you know erhm emperors of their own little domain absolute rulers' [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. The more egalitarian concept of authority promoted in mow and the St Hilda Community may account for the preoccupation with re-visioning modes of authority evident amongst my interviewees and numerous other women priests. Thus, Priest A resignifies 'authority' as 'leadership' and expresses the ideologically creative idea that 'vulnerability' is an integral feature of any leadership role. She goes on to contrast the self-assuming nature of authority with the self-effacing nature of leadership, when this is properly exercised [interview with author, 30 April 1996].
Priest C’s focus is less on practical leadership skills, and more on moral leadership. She seeks to disentangle the responsible exercise of ‘moral authority’, which she conceives of as context-dependent, and being morally ‘authoritarian’, which she feels relies on abstract reasoning and an appeal to moral absolutes [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. She tentatively suggests that these two approaches to moral authority may be gendered, ‘women meet people more where they are than men do...men do intellectualise an awful lot’ [ibid]. This accords with, and may have been influenced by, Gilligan’s [1982] work on women’s tendency to draw on an ‘ethic of care’ and men’s tendency to rely on an ‘ethic of reason’. However, perhaps because she trained as a lawyer, Priest C employs much more cautious modality than Gilligan when making this claim. Hence, she uses a series of hedging devices to mitigate the illocutionary force of her utterances, including, ‘that’s a sweeping statement’, ‘generally speaking’, ‘now I have to qualify that’, and ‘I may be entirely wrong’ [ibid]. Contrary to the assumption that a high density of hedges renders women’s speech weak and uncertain [Lakoff, 1973], in this instance, the effect produced is to make Priest C’s propositions appear more authoritative, because carefully weighed. This impression was reinforced during the interview by the extremely confident tone in which her assertions were delivered, something that is impossible to capture using transcription conventions. As Holmes notes, ‘it is often important in terms of accuracy to qualify a proposition or indicate that it cannot be asserted with complete confidence.’ [1995: 79, italics in the original].

Nowhere is this more important, perhaps, than when making claims about the correlation between gender and language use. Significantl, Priests C was also careful to refute the idea that her context-sensitive approach to moral reasoning absolves her from what she perceives to be her moral obligation to challenge people [ibid].

Related to the issue of authority is the interactional style favoured by women priests. Once again, Priest C contrasts this with the tendency of some male vicars to adopt an ‘exceedingly patronising’ and paternalistic mode of address, thereby infantilising lay people and fostering a culture of dependency within the parish [interview with author, 10 May 1996]. In her experience, women priests, on the other hand, employ a self-consciously empathetic interactional style and are more ‘feely’ [ibid]. Priest A claims that she consciously tries to give a ‘feminine slant’ to the content of her sermons, in order to make female listeners feel included, but says she prefers interacting with people in small groups to formal preaching. She is committed to a collaborative approach to ministry, devolving leadership roles to lay people, especially to other women [interview with author, 30 April 1996]. Priest B expresses her regret that her role as priest-in-charge of a small parish denies her the opportunity to work co-operatively with others as part of a ministry team, something she values [interview with author, 14 May 1996]. None of the three priests interviewed regarded these feminine/feminist discursive norms as either ‘natural’ or inevitable; instead, they consciously employed them as alternatives to dominant masculinist norms. In fact, Priest C admitted that so-called feminine norms go against the grain of what she believes to be her ‘naturally’ more assertive speech style [interview with author, 10 May 1996].

In terms of its impact on theological issues, Robins [1996: 71] believes that women’s ordination to the priesthood has helped the Church to move closer to the feminist ideal of embodying spirituality and sexuality together. Although the Act of Synod has revived the ‘doctrine of taint’, taboos surrounding women’s sexuality are challenged every time a woman, especially a pregnant woman, performs sacred priestly rites. Whereas Priest C consciously eschews marked signifiers of femininity, Rev Joy Carroll, a priest-in-charge in a parish in London, habitually foregrounds such signifiers, by, for instance, wearing short skirts and striking earrings. In an article in The Sunday Times she manages to make a symbolic link between the work she does on her body and a central tenet of feminist theology when she says, ‘I don’t think you should hide your sexuality in the same way that you shouldn’t hide your spirituality’ [25 June 1995]. The body/spirit dualism is also troubled by the marked tendency amongst some women priests to employ bodily and familial tropes when discussing their ministry. Rev Penny Martin [1996: 94], for instance, compares the pain engendered by the ordination debate to the pang of childbirth, while the resistance she has encountered since is alluded to metaphorically in terms of the problems faced by mothers with difficult offspring. She also explains co-operative ministry in terms of the relationship between different parts of the body [ibid]. Such tropes blur the boundary between private and public language, re-valuing language associated with women’s private sphere activities by deploying them in descriptions of activities that are both public and sacred. But, as noted above, when re-contextualized in punning media headlines such tropes tend to reinforce women’s connection with the private sphere and/or with certain sacred. But, as noted above, when re-contextualized in punning media headlines such tropes tend to reinforce women’s connection with the private sphere and/or with certain sacred. But, as noted above, when re-contextualized in punning media headlines such tropes tend to reinforce women’s connection with the private sphere and/or with certain sacred. But, as noted above, when re-contextualized in punning media headlines such tropes tend to reinforce women’s connection with the private sphere and/or with certain sacred.

There is a surprising degree of consensus amongst those who have been ordained and other commentators in the book Crossing the Boundary [Walrond-Skinner ed., 1994] about the gifts women bring to their sacramental role. The question arises as to whether this type of uniformity about women’s sacramental ministry will serve to inscribe a new set of orthodoxies which may inadvertently lead women to collude in their own marginalisation. For instance, some women explain the distinctive gifts they bring to ministry in essentialist terms. Wakeman [1996: 5-6], herself a priest, re-produces the idea that, ‘for biological reasons [women] have innate pastoral and nurturing skills’. Such essentialist claims may help to reinforce women’s supposed suitability for low status roles within the Church, replicating within priesthood the separate spheres of ministry that operated in the pre-ordination period between female deacons and male priests. This is a point also made by Schüssler Fiorenza [1993: 191], ‘The categories of “service” or “selfless”, “sacriﬁcing” love have always allowed society and the church to exploit women and to “keep them in their place” and in low-status, low-pay, servant-type occupations.’ Citing her own experience, Priest A fears that women who place too much emphasis on the distinctively ‘womanly’ gifts they bring to priesthood will be assigned to failing parishes [interview with author, 30 April 1996]. Prior to her appointment, the parish where she is
currently priest-in-charge was on the verge of closure, mainly because her male predecessor had neglected his pastoral duties. Unusually, those parishioners remaining requested a woman priest on the stereotypical grounds that women are more likely than men to prioritise the pastoral side of their ministry.

A Creative Dialectic Between Structure and Agency?

As is evident from the previous section, women are not passively positioned in relation to the institutional and societal constraints that operate on them. The following provides a brief outline of two ways in which the feminist goals of the campaigning group mow have been put into practice in the period since women's ordination.

The Troubling of the Clergy/Lay Boundary

An important strand in the feminist critique of the church has been a commitment to challenging the power asymmetry of the clergy/lay divide. There is no doubt that the relative insecurity of some women priests has led them to appear even more clericalised than male colleagues, but the majority claim to minimise status differences between themselves and lay members of the Church. The irony is that, having struggled to achieve powerful subject positions as priests, the majority of women who have been ordained feel obliged to emphasise the egalitarian concept of the 'priesthood of all believers'. In an address to members of watch, before the 1998 Lambeth Conference, Penny Jamieson, Bishop of Dunedin in New Zealand, set out the ideal of 'Mutual Ministry' as one that all women priests should actively strive towards. She defines it as, 'a style of leadership that shifts the relationship between the ordained and lay to one of partnership rather than privilege' [Outlook, 1998, no 5: 12]. However, the ability to realise this goal in practice in the Church of England is, of course, a prerogative of the newly acquired institutional status of women priests. Dowell and Williams [1994: 73] point to independent factors that are likely to facilitate this goal, 'Recession and falling numbers have brought about a decline of the old parochial system...So there is simply no way, even if they wanted to, that women priests can be seen to be buying into the kind of clerical status many people (particularly urban dwellers) associate with the Tory shires'. This illustrates the complex interplay between structure and agency that is often difficult to disentangle, but which, in this instance at least, has helped women priests to put into practice in their everyday relations with those to whom they minister a central tenet of feminist theology.

The Reclamation of a Communicative Discourse of Ministry

As in other contemporary institutions, the Church has been moving increasingly towards a business model in order to modernise its structures and improve its mode of operation. For instance, an article in The Times, reports the Church's commitment to using Total Quality Management (tqm) techniques to improve its efficiency [February 1 1996]. As a result, the strategic discourses of bureaucracy and professionalism have for some time been in the process of expanding at the expense of the more communicative discourse of ministry. Women's entry into the priestly ministry has led to a reclamation of the communicative discourse of ministry since, for some of the reasons outlined above, they have come to be identified with collaborative styles of ministry based on the foregrounding of interpersonal goals. The task of reclamation has, in turn, been facilitated by the increasing importance of team ministries and by the growing emphasis on the social and pastoral functions of priesthood as a result of the decline of the welfare state. In this context, male priests are more likely to move in the direction of a stereotypically feminine discursive style than vice versa. This likelihood is reinforced by the fact that the discourse of professionalism is itself changing. According to Baisley [1996: 108], the increasing emphasis on adaptability has led to a new evaluation of the multi-skilled approach she claims women bring to ministry and which was formerly denigrated. Again, rather than being undermined by discursive shifts taking place at the institutional and societal levels of discourse, the goal of promoting a more communicative discourse of ministry, advocated by organisations like mow, has been facilitated by these shifts.

Conclusions

What I hope to have shown in this paper is that a question which seeks to establish whether women priests have challenged, or colluded with, the dominant masculinist discursive norms that prevail in the Church of England is too simplistic. What is clear is that their language and behaviour is more likely than those of male colleagues to be fractured by competing, and often contradictory, norms and expectations. From the outset, stereotypical assumptions about what their ministry would mean constrained the subject positions available to them, leading some to adopt feminine norms that were at odds with their preferred discursive style. Their officially sanctioned subordinate status within the Church has led others to distance themselves from feminism in the post-ordination period, while nonetheless covertly pursuing feminist goals. The issue of whether these subject positions are compliant or oppositional is contingent upon a number of factors, including the context in which they are assumed and, crucially, upon how they are perceived and evaluated by others, however playful and subversive the 'performance' is intended to be. This offers an important corrective to those who emphasise the performative aspect of the theatrical metaphor of identity construction, while downplaying the role of audience and critics. This is particularly important, since as my study of women priests suggests, such critical judgements are differently gendered.

It is often assumed that there only two possible relationships between dominant and dominated discourses: either the latter can continue to function oppositionally as a reverse discourse, helping to challenge the legitimacy of the
former, or it can simply be incorporated and its subversive power neutralised. However, this study of women priests reveals that a creative dialectic can exist between institutional structures and the ability of individual agents to subvert and transform these. Thus, the acceptance of so-called 'feminine' styles of leadership and discursive practice has been facilitated by independent changes in the nature of the Church's institutional structures and social role. In order to influence the discursive norms that operate in the public sphere, feminists need to identify and exploit the areas of potential convergence that exist between these norms and the independent discursive shifts that are occurring at the institutional and societal orders of discourse. A more socially situated theory of the relationship between language and gender is required to account for the complex negotiations such an approach entails.

End Notes

1. Despite their reputation for conservatism on issues of gender, low church denominations have been much more accepting of women's ministry. For instance, the Congregationalists, have had women ministers since 1918, while the English Presbyterian Church ordained its first women ministers in the 1950s. The Church of Scotland followed suit in 1969, as did the Methodist Church in 1974. The first ordinations of women within the Anglican Communion took place in the diocese of Hong Kong in 1971, thereby opening the floodgates for other Provinces to follow. Three Anglican Provinces, New Zealand, Canada and the us, also have women bishops, and in another six provinces, as far apart as Ireland and Burundi, women bishops are canonically possible, although none has yet been elected. [Back]

2. Lehman [1993] derives the criteria for a 'feminine' style of ministry from the research of what he terms 'maximalist' feminists, 'the feminine stance incorporates personal communities, holistic relationships, egalitarianism, empowerment of lay people, democratic decision making, co-operation with nature, open and flexible theology, existential ethics of responsible sharing, and inclusion of women and minorities.' [Ibid: 4]. [Back]

3. In 1995, Dr David Hope, Bishop of London and a leading opponent of women's ordination, was appointed to the archbishopric of York. He was replaced in the see of London by the Right Rev. Richard Chartres, Bishop of Stepney, another vocal opponent of women's ordination. [Back]

4. In the US, and to a lesser extent in the UK, this has given rise to a male spiritual backlash. The Promise Keepers, over a million of whose members gathered at a rally in Washington in 1997, is a particularly reactionary organisation committed to creating an environment of 'godly masculinity'. The UK branch is a much smaller grassroots movement which has nonetheless attracted support in a range of towns and cities around the country [Guardian, 1 November 1997]. [Back]

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