

Indispensable Deception: The Role of Deception and its Evolution in the Original and Remake *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*

By Jina Kim

Introduction

I was a few months into dating this new guy—let’s call him Chad—when he suggested we watch the 2024 Amazon Prime series remake of the 2005 classic *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. He was actually insistent because unlike the original film, which follows a suburban white married couple, the remake features a heterosexual interracial couple of which the man is black and the woman is east Asian—a demographic we were a part of. Although an interracial couple of this specific group is not uncommon at all, we had never seen ourselves represented in Hollywood popular media this way and it was fascinating. The entire time, we were chattering variations of the comment “Oh my God, that’s so us.”

At first, we related to the personality dynamic within John and Jane’s relationship. Chad was—and still is—the gentle, loving, goofy John to my sarcastic, shy Jane. However, as the story progressed, we began to notice ourselves within their relationship dynamic, more specifically, their expressions of gender and race. As a black man, Chad explained that he was raised to believe certain ideas of masculinity, similar to John’s desire to take the lead and to appear outwardly tough, and I found myself, my mom, my aunt, and my sister in Jane’s hyper-independence—the adoption of masculinity of sorts—her strained relationship with her father, struggle to emotionally regulate, and guardedness. To have the subtleties of our relationship mirrored to us was captivating and humbling; it not only made us laugh and think, but it also sparked many conversations about our cultures: how our cultures have shaped our ideas of gender, how these ideas have built our gendered behavior, and how all that has shaped our ideas for what a relationship is.

As I was contemplating on a topic for research, these thoughts came into my mind. After many years of enjoying Hollywood media with a detachment towards white characters, I found immense value in being authentically represented. I could find myself in not just the emotional aspects of the show, but also in the way the character’s social experiences have led them to embody those emotions. Being able to have one’s identity and its complexities reflected back in a storytelling narrative makes one feel resonated with and accounted for. These narratives reveal the performances we take on with our identities, believing it to be the correct or accepted way to express our gender and culture.

As a result, in my research, I have aimed to compare the two *Mr. and Mrs. Smiths*, which contain a myriad of statements on gender and race. I intend to explain how the two conversely represent these social identities and its contributions to Americanness within the specific lens of deception, a performance that everyone engages in to express the average American behavior. Although there are so many moments of the primary source that exemplify this argument, I have limited my topics of analyses to the poker scene in the 2024 *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, the car chase scene in the 2005 *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, and, briefly, the campfire scene in the remake. In order to

provide a more inclusive image of average Americanness, the remake *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* rebels against the ‘grammar’ of the original *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* by portraying a differently inflected deception to pass as a normative American married couple.

Frameworks

I. Performativity: Deceptive Acts to Comply with Gender Normativity

Performativity is a key term that Judith Butler explores throughout her text *Gender Troubles*. It represents repetition and ritual, the understandable and the coherent, something they believe does not do justice to the complexity of gender/sexuality and all the intersecting aspects of identity. They state, “What we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts,” (Butler xv). Instead of gender being an inherent identity, they argue that it is created by a set of actions performed within social norms. Butler explains French feminist and poststructuralist Monique Wittig’s theory of humanism, which highlights individual agency, to emphasize performance as produced by gender within the acceptance of culturally constructed ideals. Butler aligns themselves with Wittig’s perspective, claiming that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results,” (Butler 33). Delving into the concept of real and unreal, the “naturalized knowledge of gender” versus that which can be a “changeable and revisable reality” through action (Butler xxiii), Butler urges their readers to reconsider the basic categories of not only what gender is, but how the culturally constructed concept of gender is formed and reinforced. They moreover want their readers to imagine the possibilities of gender outside of what we believe to be real. Language is a material of this performance as it categorizes persons and universalizes the hegemonic ideas of gender.

Universality is defined as a political assumption, an identity, that is presupposed to exist outside of the hegemonic structure. Butler observes universality as not just a privilege of masculinity, but also its application within feminism in the way unity is prioritized over accepting “the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed,” (Butler 19-20). Universality dismisses that even within the category of women, various identities can be found, which only reinforces the hegemonic idea of “intelligible genders”, which advocates for coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire—an ideal that accepts some and otherizes others. Butler counters this idea by discussing the importance of first examining the dialogue that facilitates unity and suggesting new dialogue, one that admits its contradictions and acts with these in mind. They remind their readers that this will accommodate for the fact that not everyone within this so-called unity has equal positions of power nor agrees on what constitutes gender and thus, calls for the antifoundationalist approach, which essentially establishes that unity might just happen when we accept differences.

II. Racial Grammar: The Invisible Perpetuation of a Racial Hierarchy

In his article *The Invisible Weight of Whiteness: The Racial Grammar of Everyday Life in Contemporary America*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva outlines racial grammar as the hidden racial ideology that structures vision, emotion, cognition, and discourse around racial matters. He likens it to the oil in a car, “which allows the engine to operate somewhat smoothly in any racial order. This oil lubricates not just our race talk, but our race vision, racial cognition, and racial aesthetics and emotions. Without this oil, the car would run rough for a while and, ultimately, would cease to operate.” (Silva 188). He distinguishes it from linguistic grammar, arguing that racial grammar is a tool that the dominant racial group uses to its advantage to normalize the standards of white supremacy as *the* standard, which renders the domination nearly invisible. This system achieves this invisibilization “by shaping in significant ways how we see or don’t see race in social phenomena, how we frame matters as racial or not race-related, and even how we feel about race matters,” (Silva 174). Racial grammar provides the structure and rules of racial statements and how we respond to racial matters. It is acquired through social interaction and communication, thus it is able to be changed through ‘rebellion’. Racial grammar, in how it is used in a white dominant society such as ours, is used to set whiteness as the universal, the exception to the hegemonic structure.

He uses some examples specifically pertaining to Hollywood. He argues that racial grammar is persistent in ‘white’ movies and that due to the way racial grammar is integrated, non-white people cannot enjoy ‘white’ movies without letting go of the critique of racist analysis. They are forced to essentially “forget racism” and become “white-like,” imagining themselves as white—the universal standard (Silva 178). Non-white characters do exist but are underrepresented, stereotypical, one-dimensional, and secondary. For instance, he cites the 2008 box office hit *21*, in which the protagonists are MIT students whose skill sets are taken advantage of by their professor in a gambling scheme. The film is based on a book, in which these protagonists are Asians. However, in the film, the protagonists are cast by white actors and the few Asians roles are “buffoonish, clumsy sidekicks” (Silva 179). Silva claims that, because of racial grammar, the filmmakers’ choice to replace the Asian protagonists with white ones was financially motivated, as a white main character would make the movie more appealing, and thus more marketable, to the audience. In another example of the disregard to thoughtful racial representation, he brings up “‘magic negroes’--black people who are given some power and whose job in the plot of a movie is to help whites navigate their lives” such as Will Smith in *Hancock*, who plays a superhero that helps white couples solve their marital issues (Silva 179). The issue with these limiting roles is that it “reinforces racial boundaries, bolsters the racial status quo, and presents a felicitous view of racial affairs” (Silva 180). They minimize the magnitude and gravity of racism itself.

III. Racial Formation Theory: Race as a Template for the Formation of American Social Norms

Michael Omi and Howard Winnant in the chapter “The Theory of Racial Formation” of *Racial Formation in the United States* delve into the development of racial grammar through a

process they call racial formation. Like Bonilla-Silva's rebellion of racial grammar, Omi and Winnant discuss race as a concept that "[proves] to be unreliable as supposed boundaries shift, slippages occur, realignments become evidence, and collectivities emerge," (Omi and Winnant 105). It is a category that is subject to change and to varying interpretations. Marginalized groups, especially, whose social identities are enforced by the dominant group, are also formulated by the groups themselves through self-identification and resistance to these categorizations. They go on to explain race as a master category, a "fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States,"--a template of sorts--arguing that through the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the "historical encounter of the hemispheres", and the formation of racial slavery, race has become a master frame in shaping the experience of all minorities (Omi and Winnant 106). Essentially, race serves as a manual for the treatment of minority genders, sexualities, classes, ages, etc. Racial formation, Omi and Winnant contend, is divided into steps: First, *racialization* occurs, which is when phenomic markers, including skin color, hair texture, and eye shape, are given meaning in social identity. The next step is *racial project*, in which these meanings are integrated into social structures. This leads to the issue of *racism*, which are the conditions in which a racial project becomes racist. Lastly, *racial politics* is the way racial grammar prevails. While race serves as a template for marginalization, its malleability also serves as a template for resistance.

IV. Deception: Normativity in the Form of the American Married Couple

I acknowledge that there are multiple layers of deception engrained in the plot of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* but I would like to specify the definition, for the purposes of this paper, as the gender and cultural performativities that the characters display, externally--their social environment--and internally--within the marriage--to present as a disguisable American couple. Similar to Butler's performativity, deception in this context is a set of actions within social norms. However, to distinguish the two concepts, I propose that deception imbues more intention behind it, performing with the motive to survive, as the characters strive to deceive in extremely high stakes situations.

The film and television show chronicle the story of married couple John and Jane Smith who are secretly spies, deceiving their friends, neighbors, enemies, and each other. The premise of both the original and remake is that they must blend in as a typical married couple; they must use deception to be the American standard, assimilating into what can be passed off as unsuspecting or normative. Jane and John of both versions carry out incriminating, dangerous missions discreetly and competently to preserve their identities, and ultimately survive. Behaving outside of these covers would mean risking termination by their agencies; they not only perform to be accepted, but to live. The remake follows a black John and an Asian Jane who, through the deception within their cover, subvert gender norms and the dominant racial grammar of whiteness, while the original illustrates the story of a white John and a white Jane who reinforce whiteness and gender norms to blend in. The evolution of performativities from the time span of 2005 to 2024 is moreover significant in illustrating how what applies to being the American

standard married couple has changed over the years. The remake makes different creative choices, perhaps modifying the plot, characters, and even form of media to appeal to an audience of 2024 with changed values in political and social discourse. However, the prevalence of deception has not changed.

There are differences between the types of deception in both versions. The deception in the original is less complex as it focuses mostly on how to fit into the norms of the marriage within the dominant culture of white suburbia. In this culture, gender roles are divided and enforced more strictly and race is considered an afterthought as racial grammar maintains the dominant whiteness. However, the deception in the remake examines different racial backgrounds and the blurred boundaries of traditional gender roles in a marriage. These elements create a more evolved form of deception that accepts the complexities of non patriarchal, non white behavior as the norm. From the overarching subject of undercover spies to the more minute performativities that form the couples' social identities, both versions of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* utilize deception as an embedded theme that is representative of a commentary on the repetitive actions of performance they must conduct to maintain what constitutes a normal married couple in the United States as well as the remake's 'rebellion' against what can be applied to the norm.

Analyses

Poker Scene in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (2024)

In the 1930's Federal Writers' Project, 2300 formerly enslaved people were interviewed during which they recounted acts of direct and indirect resistance. Deception was key for these acts of resistance. One Cato Carter, enslaved in Alabama, recalls how his enslaver ordered him to kill another enslaved man on the plantation who was deemed incompetent. Carter pleaded with his enslaver, saying "I ain't never kilt nobody and I don't want to", but to no avail (WPA Slave Narratives). He was given a gun and sent to the fields where he told the other man that they were both going to leave "this minute" because he wasn't going to kill the other man, and once his enslaver found out he didn't, he was also going to get killed (WPA Slave Narratives). He expresses his relief in having never bloodied his hands. Carter is first racially formed by his enslaver through his enforcement of power based on racial characteristics. However, Carter defies the conditions of racial slavery and the racial grammar that arbitrarily holds him to executing any and all acts his enslaver demands from him, including the morally debasing act of killing a fellow enslaved person. Deception is integral here. By going out to the field with a gun, as if he is about to kill his fellow enslaved man, he performs obedience to his enslaver, the expectation for a black enslaved man of this era, and in doing so uses racial formation to his advantage—from the enslaver's perspective, he is acting within the social norms. Instead of actually fulfilling the act, he explains the situation to the other man and runs away with him, knowing both of them will be killed if caught. Faced with life-or-death stakes, deception becomes a tool to use performance for survival and resistance.

Although Carter's deception involves reclaiming his ability to make decisions within the existing racial grammar and the racial formation whiteness imposes on blackness—as opposed to the show's rewriting of racial formation—I intend to draw the similarity in the overarching togetherness of deception, survival, and resistance between Carter's deception and this scene. In the remake *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, deception is used as a tool to rewrite racial grammar through racial formation—the social norm for race—and secure survival. In episode 6 “Couples Therapy (Naked and Afraid)”, John, a black man, infiltrates a poker group of other black men to accomplish a mission the pair are given. This scene is significant because it emphasizes black masculinity with a level of authenticity within the framework of Omi and Winnant's racial formation theory, all while John uses deception to be accepted as a part of this evolved social norm and ultimately, secure his survival.

As a part of his cover, he joins, effortlessly, as the supposed cousin of their acquaintance in a conversation that reflects the black culture. He first uses his phenomic markers to establish a commonality between himself and the group—markers that they all share and markers that Jane, John's female Asian partner who was supposed to take the lead on this particular mission, would not have been able to leverage. These phenomic markers are given meaning as part of their shared social identity. At first the men are suspicious of his sudden appearance, scrutinizing his behavior and mannerisms, asking John to repeat his name, and saying they didn't know ‘Lif’ had any cousins in New York (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2024], ep. 6 5:42-5:46). However, the group of men quickly welcome John as the topic develops into MTV personality Maya and their collective reverence of her as youths. They reminisce together on running home to watch her on television and laugh together (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2024], ep. 6 7:21-7:40). In this moment, their shared phenomic characteristics become more than mere appearance into shared cultural experience, unifying the men in their social identity. The deception and its use for rebellion begins here in how John first uses his phenomic markers and shared culture to his advantage. Although this group of men are not white like Carter's enslaver, they represent the subject whom John is attempting to deceive. It is notable that the subject of deception is a group of black men instead of white, emphasizing the reframing of racial formation from a position of power that the dominant racial group have to a minority racial group and rebelling against the invisible whiteness of the existing racial grammar in the original *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. This reframing sets the standard for the racial norm and by first acknowledging their phenomic similarities and shared culture, John deceives by performing within the norm.

They go on to talk about “branding” and the black community's lack of good branding, the resource to propagandize and promote that is “everything” (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2024], ep. 6 6:10-6:23). They hold the standard of good branding to cops, who they say “don't slip up a lot” and “when they do slip up, they make you forget about that shit fast as fuck. Have ‘em doing them little Tik Tok dances next day at the crime scene and shit” (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2024], ep. 6:24-6:37). The discussion of law enforcement constitutes Omi and Winnant's racial project step as the men point out a placement of this racial minority within a hierarchy. Language, in the sense that Butler uses—a material of performance that categorizes persons within the

universal—seems to be prevalent here. Through the men’s definition of the word ‘branding’, they categorize the relationship between the universal—cops—and the person—the black man. They imply that the police’s easily accessible resources to brand themselves in whatever way is convenient give them excessive liberties, and in opposition, they also imply that the black community’s struggle to maintain a good image in the eyes of society is because of a lack of these resources. By laying out the disparities between the dominant and the minority, they apply the meaning of their racial position to social structures and implicitly assert the conditions that foster racism. They are satirically exposing, through language, the tool of branding. This constitutes rebellion against racial grammar because using language and its aspect of performance, they redefine their performativities as unmasking the subtle way an institutionalized power dynamic reinforces this dynamic, bringing attention to the injustices of the universal, rather than submitting to it. Furthermore, John’s contribution to this discussion symbolizes his deception as he conforms to this differing form of performance. Ironically, through solidifying the racial project step, he performs his own form of ‘branding’ to maintain his similarities with the group. He rebrands himself to match the level of blackness that the group exudes as a form of deception, using the power-imbued tool to blend in with the other black men. This action paradoxically shows resistance against the social norm the group is creating, while also submitting to it by sharing his culturally accurate perception on the matter as a black man.

The final step is racial politics, which allows racial grammar to prevail by “[intensively policing] racial boundaries” (Omi and Winnant 131). As Omi and Winnant state, race is a template in the way it is built as a social construct to other social identities. In this scene, racial formation, specifically the racial politics step, serves as a template to ideals of masculinity. Towards the end of the scene, John and the other men talk about women, discussing their desire for female submission and how different races of women fit into this desire. When John mentions his Asian wife, one man says “You a lucky man ‘cause I love me some Asians... They low key conservative... They know they role,” to which John responds “Not mine. She’s not like that at all” (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2024], ep 6 9:50-9:59). The show redefines racial grammar here through the racial politics step by policing the boundaries of race and gender in their traditionally masculine desire of submissive women. By bonding over stereotypes on other oppressed groups that they are not a part of, they enforce these social boundaries and fulfill the racial politics step. The rebellion of grammar happens with John’s deception. His performativity exemplifies the black man in the conversation of women of various races, but he also discreetly turns this around in the separation of his wife from participating in the stereotypes the men discuss. Although he acts within the norms of black masculinity by positively reinforcing the discussion on stereotypes, he also excludes his wife from the umbrella statements of race and gender. He goes so far as to add “at all” to the end of his sentence, signifying an absolute negative. This act can be seen as protective and subtly aggressive, both considered stereotypes of the black man.

The show’s re-racial formation omitting whiteness illustrates an evolution from the original *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* which reinforces the existing racial grammar of whiteness through their depiction of a mostly white cast and white suburbia. The original film’s lack of mention

about whiteness in the way black culture, struggles, and desire is portrayed in the remake's poker scene only emphasizes the pervasiveness of whiteness and the invisible continuity of the existing racial grammar. However, this scene redefines racial norms through the process of racial formation without the looming power of whiteness, utilizing the malleability of race that structured it in a disadvantaged position in the first place, and in doing so, it succeeds in a rebellion of the norm. To add on, John's deception of fitting himself into this newfound norm and not the dominant norm of whiteness displays a different depiction of Americanness, one that uses inclusiveness, rather than exclusion and domination, to survive.

Car Chase Scene in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (2005)

Towards the end of the original *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, John and Jane are the targets of a car chase. They are being pursued by their respective agencies for living under the same roof as a rival spy. Before the chasing cars catch up to them, John confesses to her that he's never liked her cooking. She smirks and the camera angle shifts from Jane's face in the center to replacing its position with John's face while Jane's face is pushed to the side of the frame and hidden by her hair. She responds wryly, "Baby, I've never cooked a day in my life. I-Temp girls cooked," and the audience sees John's shock and offended reaction in full ("Web of lies!"). (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2005] 1:24:08-1:24:20). The minute deception that both characters have been using to maintain their double lives is revealed in this small piece of dialogue. Jane, in particular, is revealing that she has never been in the housewife role as honestly as she has made it seem to John, not only because she has been hiding her identity as a spy, but also because she had been making shortcuts to the role of the housewife, the epitome of traditional femininity. However, instead of cooking herself, she had employees at her agency do it, and this confession exemplifies Jane's deception. Jane uses the performance of the suburban housewife, pretending to be what the traditional gender role of wife calls for and abiding by what the norm dictates, reinforcing what a woman and a wife must do to be considered unsuspecting—the gender grammar. In the scene, John exposes her lack of talent in cooking, wanting to imply, perhaps in the spirit of revealing deception, that she was never fully the perfect housewife as she had attempted to portray herself as. However, his playful yet nevertheless offended response displays his shock at her performance. The shift in the camera angle, intended for the audience to see his fully fleshed reaction, suggests that John feels betrayal of some sort, not just at the deception itself but at her use of traditional gender roles for deception. He takes it personally that she had only been pretending to be the perfect housewife, a domestic, husband and family-centered role, which is reminiscent of Butler's discussion of universality and unity—their tie to coherence and continuity within gender. Jane's deception is necessary because a subversion warrants a reaction like John's. To be an outlier to this norm is to defy the hegemonic structure of gender. There is no room for a more niche type of womanhood because as the suburban housewife stereotype shows, being able to understand and conform to gender roles is necessary.

In the same scene, the cars catch up to them and John and Jane are forced to defend themselves. At first, Jane is shooting, while John is driving, but John's bumpy driving creates an

obstacle in her ability to target accurately, allowing their pursuers to advance. She asks him a few times to hold steady, but John nonchalantly excuses himself by saying “it’s called evasive driving, sweetheart,” while also blaming the vehicle itself (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2005] 1:24:56-1:25:14). Instead of adhering to Jane’s requests, John makes excuses, highlighting his emotional absence as a husband and as a partner. Jane seems to realize that the only way to survive, in both the current circumstance and in her marriage, is to regress to her performance, her deception, once more. Hiding her frustration, she changes her tone from demanding—“Move over. MOVE!”--to coaxing—“I’m the suburban housewife, sweetheart. You move,” (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2005] 1:25:24-1:25:34). This change of tone finally seems to convince John to switch positions, as he reluctantly relents. Jane’s regression to the suburban housewife, in her statement and in her more subservient tone, allows John to view his acceptance of her request as something he is willing to do. He is less threatened by the relinquishing of control. Performativity on her part allows him to feel comfortable performing his own stereotypical masculine role within the marriage.

As Sivan discusses in her review of Rachel E. Adelman’s *The Female Ruse: Women’s Deception and Divine Sanction in the Hebrew Bible*, female deception is a way for women to finesse their way around the distinct ways that the patriarchal system asserts control. It is a way for women to maintain agency within a system that does not recognize their opinion. They seemingly conform to norms, while using it to achieve what they want. Like Rachel, who maximizes her roles as matriarch, while also pulling strings outside of her husband and father’s knowledge to place herself and her descendants in a position of power, Jane deceives to get the results she wants. She realizes that for them to escape their persecutors, she must be the one driving. John does not recognize the validity of this realization and continues to assert several times that he is in control of the situation. She allows her deception to return, even after revealing it, because her opinion is not recognized. To get her way, she realizes she must resume her performance. However, Jane’s need to use female deception is more developed than ensuring her stance on their situation is taken into consideration—she deceives for survival.

In the chapter “Deceptive Demeanors” of *The Female Face in Patriarchy: Oppression as a Culture*, authors Frances B. O’Connor and Becky S. Drury invoke various women’s experiences of being oppressed by the patriarchy, showing how deeply the need to deceive is. One young married woman from Paraná, Brazil laments “I make myself a slave in my own house...If I changed my behavior, I could lose my husband and my house.” (O’Connor et al. 104). The awareness of the simultaneous necessity and toxicity of the homemaker role that women are confined to acknowledges the survival aspect of performativity. Women must perform the roles that the patriarchy has deemed suitable or risk losing their livelihood. O’Connor and Drury comment “A few women have rejected the patriarchal/machistic oppression, but at a great price, sometimes losing their husbands because of their stand.” (105). Within the same scene Jane initially rebels. She tries to reject the patriarchal oppression by exposing her deception. However, through John’s offended reaction, she registers that rebellion may be unsafe, and she must revert back to her deception when it is clear that John’s insistence

of patriarchal values through his maintenance of control might be the cause of harm. The filmmakers seem to represent the couple's literal survival as the stakes that women must risk by rebelling against oppression. Through Jane's coaxing and convincing that she is, in fact, a suburban housewife, they seem to contend that the only way for a woman's survival within a marriage to be possible is for the woman to submit. This comments on the disparity of power between men and women, especially in the private sphere of marriage. It is within a marriage that the authority of the patriarchal structure truly comes out. There is not much expectation from a husband, who has the freedom to expect their wives to center themselves around their husbands. However, once the wife begins to make demands, her life as she knows it is threatened.

This contrasts from the remake's version of Jane. The original Jane takes on the perceived identity of housewife in order to not stand out from other women and wives. Her husband, although a spy himself, is unaware of her identity as a spy, and the sameness of the persona she adopts within her marriage to her environment makes the deception in the original film less complex. In contrast, the deception of the remake's Jane does not involve domestic roles at all and in fact, her husband John is seen taking on those traditionally feminine roles, including cooking for her when she is sick and when they have company. The remake differs from the original in that Jane and John are aware of each other's spy identities from the beginning and are paired together as partners by the unnamed international agency they both work for. While doing so, they become romantically involved. This changes radically the form of gendered deception that this version's Jane employs, taking the conversation on gender within marriage away from stereotypical roles to a certain emotionality of marriage, which raises the stakes in maintaining a deeper connection to keep their cover.

For example, in the campfire scene in episode 6 of the 2024 *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, Jane and John argue about their relationship that begins from Jane's superficial grievance about a book. When John confesses that he never has despite lying to her initially that he had, she becomes furious and deflects, saying "...I actually have never seen you read a book in the entire time I've known you" (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2024], ep. 6 31:43-31:47). John retorts, requesting she speak the truth about what she means, and instead of honoring his request, she flatly says, "I'm not calling you stupid. I'm just saying you don't read books, which is true," (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [2024], ep. 6 31:57-32:02). This version of Jane's deception differs greatly from the original Jane. Here, Jane does not lie about her job as a spy and her performance of fitting into a specific role, but rather deceives about her hurt feelings. Although John gives her an opportunity to be honest, she covers her emotions by changing the topic to his flaws. This scene rewrites the expectations of gender, making the norm that Jane adheres to one that is stereotypically more masculine. Her deception is an emotional guardedness, an adoption of the emotional suppression of masculinity, and through this, the show argues that gender norms are not as black and white, public and private, as it once was. It disrupts the grammar of the patriarchy, blurring the boundaries of gender—making the "intelligible gender" unintelligible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both versions of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* use the theme of deception to assert racial and gender norms. The original claims suburban white America with its invisible whiteness and patriarchal values as a representation of the most relatable, familiar, common, and accessible part of America. The main character's deception as performativity within these norms, particularly Jane's, perpetuates oppressive discourses. The remake, on the other hand, in redefining the gender and racial norms of America to one that represents cultural accuracy of blackness and the indistinct boundaries of gender. John and Jane's deception upholds these evolved norms and in doing so, the show rebels against the dominant grammar and invites the audience to consider the inclusivity of Americanness.

One poignant statement that both versions makes is the stakes of survival. By portraying a couple that performs to avoid death, the film and television show points out a larger truth about performativity, especially in the face of defying social expectations. They suggest that we all perform to survive, not just to assimilate, even with changed norms, and it creates a power dynamic in which some must renounce authenticity to invoke performativity just to remain alive. With this in mind, Butler's antifoundationalist approach seems to be an answer. Rather than fixating on coherence and unity, we must accept differences and indistinctness even within certain categories. We must abandon the thought that a certain identity warrants a specific type of behavior. We must work to rebel against the grammar that preserves the need for performativity.

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