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# PERFORMING GENDER AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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Most of us can trace the terms *sex* and *gender* through feminist theory. And most of us can point to the moment when their separation became an important theoretical move in talking about women, men, femininity, and masculinity (Rubin, 1975). With great satisfaction we were then able to assert that “sex is a biological designation,” and “gender is a set of socially constructed expectations for women and men.” That distinction permitted us to make claims about material conditions, historical moments, and cultural pressures. In short, the separation of sex and gender allowed us to point to social constructions, not biological destiny as the source of women’s oppression and men’s privilege.

But in 1990 two books took the sex/gender distinction to task: Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* and Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. For Sedgwick, the sex/gender system failed to account for sexuality and its multiplicity of expressions. Although sex/gender can offer purchase to a feminist critique of oppressive social systems based on biology, sexuality falls outside both categories unless it is anchored to masculine and feminine terms within a heterosexist ideology. Sedgwick also questioned the political efficacy of pitting biology against culture: “I remember the

buoyant enthusiasm with which feminist scholars used to greet the finding that one or another brutal form of oppression was not biological but ‘only’ cultural! I have often wondered what the basis was for our optimism about the malleability of culture by any one group or program” (p. 41).

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler built (1990/1999) a case that radically upset the sex/gender system. Beginning with the feminist *we* and the universal category *woman*, Butler questioned the ontological ground of any subject of feminism within the sex/gender system. Moving away from the foundations for gender in biology, constructionism, psychology, and sexual difference, Butler argued that gender—across these foundational approaches—is always already framed as binary, hierarchical, and compulsorily heterosexual. This triptych is important: Gender is always named as either masculine or feminine (binary); the masculine is always placed above the feminine (hierarchy); and compulsory heterosexuality (proscribed by discourses of law, family, religion, and education) secures that hierarchical binary in material ways. With those three theoretical moves, Butler arrived at gender as a cultural performance and not natural—whatever one posits *natural* to be.

Out of the closet and in trouble, these revisions of gender theory require rethinking the usefulness of the sex/gender system, its questionable foundations in either biology or constructionism, and the traditional ways of studying gender in communication. Some research now claims that gender is performed (Wood, 2005, 2006; Wood & Duck, in press), and performativity—as a theory of gender constitution, as strategy for its critique, and as political praxis—is a rich construct for returning the body to the study of interpersonal communication. A quick glance at almost any textbook in communication finds models drawn as not only de-gendered but disembodied: real people are replaced with boxes, arrows, circles, and silhouettes. The messy, material body of any act of communication—its relationality, dynamics, historical and

cultural embeddedness, and emergent quality—is refigured as absent.

Performativity questions this figuration and demands attention to the body and its materiality: not as a site of biologically determined conditions that cause certain effects and not as a surface onto which culture writes gender. Both site and surface constructions of the material body foreclose questions of individual agency and the possibilities for cultural transformation. Instead, gender is a complex matrix of normative boundaries, constituted in discourse, materially embodied and performed, and mobilized through culture to secure political and social ends. Nor is gender a singular constitution, but gender is always articulated in, on, and through sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, and abilities.

Research on interpersonal communication, so aware of the messy ebullience of relationships—their stages, processes, tensions, norms, and dialectics—is well positioned to embrace performativity as a way to return materiality to relationality, sociality, and power. Returning the body, however, demands rethinking the body as situated in interpersonal research questions, methods, and findings. First, the body should be attended to but not be the foundation for claims about identity, gender, or communication. It should be seen as the center of interpersonal communication but not be fixed as causal, ahistorical, or reducible to measured variables. It should be accounted for as inescapably present but not overdetermined in theories of relationship development, instrumentality, or cognition. In short, bodies matter in research that investigates gender.

This chapter seeks to guide and to challenge investigations of gender in four ways. It (a) offers tentative definitions of the performative; (b) explores theatrical performance as a metaphor for the materialization, history, and politics of performing gender and notes where the metaphor breaks down; (c) surveys previous research on performativity; and (d) finally, challenges to interpersonal research on gender are offered.

### ◆ *Philosophical Traditions of the Performative*

Performativity defies definition. Even Butler (1990/1999), writing on the 10th anniversary of the publication of *Gender Trouble*, says,

It is difficult to say precisely what performativity is not only because my own views on what “performativity” might mean have changed over time, most often in response to excellent criticisms, but because so many others have taken it up and given it their own formulations. (p. xiv)

In 1988, she defined gender as constituted in performance:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 519)

Elin Diamond (1996) explains Butler’s radical departure from both biology and constructionism: “Butler’s point is not that gender is just an act, but that gender is materially performative: it ‘is real only to the extent that it is performed.’” Through repeated enactments, gender is “both a doing—a performance that puts conventional gender attributes into possibly disruptive play—and a thing done—a pre-existing oppressive category” (pp. 4–5). And Bordwell (1998) contends that the constitution of gender through repetitive corporeal acts in time “recognizes that we are born into and must operate within a network of power relations not of our own making” (p. 375). Butler (1990/1999) locates

the genesis of performativity in these power relations:

I originally took my clue on how to read the performativity of gender from Jacques Derrida’s reading of Kafka’s “Before the Law.” There the one who waits for the law, sits before the door of the law, attributes a certain force to the law for which one waits. The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object. I wondered whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates. (pp. xiv–xv)

Most explanations of the performativity of gender begin, not with Derrida, but with Austin’s (1962/1975) *How to Do Things With Words*. In Lecture I, Austin introduces the performative as a class of utterances that “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constatae anything at all, are not ‘true or false.’” Instead, “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action.” With four simple examples (“I do,” “I name this ship,” “I give and bequeath my watch to my brother,” and “I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow”), Austin isolates the performative, in which “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (p. 5).

In Lecture II, however, Austin (1962/1975) offers examples that are excluded from the performative:

A performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. . . . Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiologies* of language. (p. 22)

Derrida turned Austin's examples of parasitic speech into the centerpiece for his theory of citationality. All language is cited, all language is always and already quoted and quotable. Derrida (1988) argues: "Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written . . . , in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing, it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (p. 12). Theatrical utterances, then, are not outside ordinary language use but their use testifies to the condition of language as always already severed from context. Words do not refer to anything naturally, but are already unanchored from context, instead confirming an iterable model, not an original signature, event, or context.

For Butler, not only is gender a citation, an iteration of "ideals," but the body is subjected to norms—laws in Derrida's vocabulary—that are produced in speech acts. The laws depend on their citation and naturalization in repetition. The possibility of failure in speech acts—Austin's (1962/1975) "infelicities"—creates the space and agency for subversion of laws, for repetition, and for acts that do gender differently. Indeed, the terms *gender trouble*, *gender blending*, *transgender*, and *cross-gender* are already suggestive of the possibility "that gender has a way of moving beyond that naturalized binary" of masculine and feminine and their citational norms (Butler, 2004, pp. 42–43).

### ◆ *Theater as Entrée to Performativity*

If Austin, Derrida, and Butler are steeped in philosophical traditions, assumptions, and debates that may make it difficult to relate their arguments to some interpersonal research, the theater can be a productive space to engage an understanding of gender as performance. On stage, foundational approaches to body (as natural, as

biological, as socially constructed) are not taken for granted. The theater constantly tests the audience's faith in any biological or socially constructed truth under the costumes and the greasepaint. On stage and in life, gender is a matrix of boundaries—constituted in discourse, materially embodied and performed, and mobilized through culture to secure political and social ends. Theatrical performances are a fruitful starting point for understanding three interrelated concepts of performativity: (a) the materialization of bodies in performance, (b) the embeddedness of bodies in histories of performance conventions, and (c) the potential for political efficacy in and through performance.

### *BODIES MATERIALIZE IN PERFORMANCE*

Butler (1988) reminds readers that the dramatic is how performers "materialize" a set of historical possibilities in and through their bodies on stage: "To do, to dramatize, to reproduce" are "some of the elementary structures of embodiment" (p. 521). For Thompson (2003), "gender identity—or any other kind of identity—is not something that you *have*, but something that you *do*—or, at least, something that you have 'only' by doing it again and again and again" (p. 132). The materialization of the body on the stage depends on presence—physical and discursive. Characters in a play do not exist until they appear onstage or are spoken of by others. This process of materialization of bodies—raced, gendered, classed, abled, disabled, and sexualized—is central to performativity.

Bodies on stage are always produced by and change through history. So actors always perform within a set of proscribed historical conventions and directorial cues for how the body ought to move, gesture, and articulate itself on stage. Butler (1988) extends the theatrical metaphor to gender: "Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text

and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (p. 526). The production of gender—in time and space—is a repetitive enactment of stylized acts that are ongoing.

This materialization is not about self-display or self-creation but is a reconstitution of social reality. Following Bourdieu (1995), Butler (1997) argues that “the body is not a mere positive datum, but the repository or the site of an incorporated history” (p. 152). According to Sedgwick (2003), these repositories are produced, for gay and lesbian identities, as sites of shame—at once powerfully visceral, beyond willful control, but experienced through bodies and constitutive of social reality:

Shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication. Indeed, like a stigma, shame is itself a form of communication. Blazons of shame, the “fallen face” with eyes down and head averted—and, to a lesser extent, the blush—are semaphores of trouble and at the same time of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge. (p. 36)

Gender identity—constituted both inside and outside normative boundaries—is “a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (Butler, 1988, p. 520). The performative, then, is a theory of material constitution and a critical strategy for acknowledging and critiquing the weight of this materiality on bodies.

### ◆ *Repetitive Sites of Incorporated History*

Theatrical events are public, with times and places for the performance carefully demarked and observed. Traditional theater requires a script to be memorized, rehearsed, and enacted anew in each performance. But scripts are

starting places for interpretation, not fixed repositories of meaning. Despite the temporal and spatial specificity of a performance, performers, directors, and scripts are always part of the ongoing history of the theater. Butler (1988) draws parallels to the performance of gender: “The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again” (p. 526). In *Undoing Gender*, Butler (2004) continues to use a theatrical metaphor: “(Gender) is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraints. Moreover, one does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary” (p. 1).

The repetition required to produce gender is a double bind: The iterated performance is always risky. Despite an intention to perform gender, race, or sexuality as parody, subversion, or transgression, that iteration can continue to produce the harmful, violent, reinscriptions of effects it names. Tulloch (1999) summarizes this doubleness of “performativity as not only being constitutive of power but at the same time being implicated in that which it opposes” (p. 66). In speech acts, “when and how does a term like ‘queer’ become subject to an affirmative resignification for some when a term like ‘nigger,’ despite some recent efforts at reclamation, appears capable of only reinscribing its pain?” (Butler, 1993, p. 222).

These questions are difficult to answer, for the limits of critical reappropriation and resignification, especially on the stage, are all too real. But the stage metaphor enables critical examination of the production and relationships of power that produce those artifacts. Diamond (1996) reminds us that “to study performance is not to focus on completed forms, but to become aware of performance as itself a contested space, where meanings and desires are generated, occluded, and of course multiply interpreted” (p. 4). How

bodies come to “bear meanings” in their material and cultural production shifts the question from what is or is not constituted to how these “theories are acted out with consequences” (Alexander, 2004a, p. 648). Performativity, then, is a theory of the relationship between materiality and history and a critical strategy for intervening in the production of that relationship.

### ◆ *Political Efficacy in and Through Performance*

The theater has long been a place to enact changes in the body politic—from Brecht’s learning plays and Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed to Grotowski’s Poor Theater. The visibility of bodies in the theater is at the heart of much political activism. U.S. history is peppered with examples of political coalitions making claims for social justice through theatrical tactics: the 1970s Black Power and Black-is-beautiful marches and sit-ins (Elam & Krasner, 2001); *actos*, the one-act performances created and staged by organizers of migrant field workers in California (Sandoval-Sanchez, 1999); Take-Back-the-Night marches that began in the 1970s; Confront the Rapist at Work, the NOW protests staged by feminist organizations (Fraser, 1999; Hennessy, 1995); and the contemporary performance work of the Guerrilla Girls and Radical Cheerleaders. Queer activism makes tremendous use of the visible, with the kiss-ins of Queer Nation, die-ins by ACT UP, and gay pride parades across the country (Case, 1996). Nor is the left the only end of the political spectrum to make use of visibility tactics. Peggy Phelan’s (1993) analysis of Operation Rescue, the anti-abortion group, takes seriously their “shrewd understanding . . . of making a spectacle *for* the sake of publicity” (p. 130).

This theatricality, rooted in political enactment, analysis, and change, is not performativity. It is a site for exploring performativity as “the process by which

cultural norms are cited and reproduced” (Bordwell, 1998, p. 375). For Diamond (1996), “as soon as performativity comes to rest on *a* performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable” (p. 5).

Although theatrical metaphors are valuable points for understanding performativity as material production, as historical sedimentation, and as political strategy, they break down in two important ways. Performativity leaves the theater in a) its radical critique of the subject and b) its attention to all-too-real effects that are not at all pretend.

### ◆ *There Is No Subject Behind the Curtain/Under the Mask*

Most modernist conceptions of identity assume a coherent, interior, stable, and whole center—a self that exists prior to that self’s expression in body and words. Most contemporary U.S. acting theory assumes likewise, and the job of acting is to outwardly manifest another’s interior identity (Thompson, 2003). The theater, then, becomes a place where we can safely assume the stability of the subject. Actors are just acting. Performativity, however, critiques the stability, production, and reality of the subject. For Case (1996), “it strips the mask from the masquerade that would still retain an actor/subject behind the show” (p. 13). There is no subject—on stage or off—behind the mask. Instead, the subject is an effect produced through discursive and material regimes.

Gender masks not a “true” self but its construction. The performance of gender continually hides its construction as performers and audience collude in its fiction. For Butler (1988), the theatrical convention of the willing suspension of disbelief takes on a radical kind of belief: “If gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of

substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (p. 520).

Belief in gender as binary, natural, given, and readable is rooted in the fiction of an inner "truth" of a gendered self that is outwardly and visibly expressed. A transvestite on a bus—no longer safely ensconced on stage where illusion is understood—is Butler's (1988) teaching example of our faith in and collusion regarding a true gender identity under the clothes: "If the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express. Indeed, the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations" (p. 527). Moving from drag to transsexuality, this faith and collusion in discrete gender categories and in the bimorphism of male and female bodies is even more shaken. How are we to read a preoperative, transitional, or postoperative, transsexual body?

### ◆ *Performing Under Duress and Danger/Disease/Death*

The theater is also a place where audiences can safely assume, "This is *just* a play." On stage, the "trouble" of gender is often comedic. The metaphor of the theater breaks down with performativity's notion that some bodies more than others perform under duress and never to comic effect. Orientalist hegemonies write exotic, erotic, and "ineffable foreignness" on Asian bodies (Kondo, 1997, p. 9). African Americans are accused of acting white in a violent resignification that is very much about inclusions and exclusions, complicity and positionality (Alexander, 2004a; Lei, 2003). Acting straight is a performance where "passing" (for straight) is a complex social practice that relies on codes of intelligibility (Robinson,

1994). Each offstage performance under duress brings punishment, social sanctions, and taboos that are all too real. Gil-Gomez (2000) offers the poignant reminder that "the gender trouble that Butler advocates can easily become gender danger for lesbians of color; danger that affects them financially, emotionally, spiritually and physically" (p. xix). Real bodies, real risks, real effects offstage mark the performative as dangerous business.

For queer theorists Parker and Sedgwick (1995), the distinction between the safety of the theater and the reality of the bus has little purchase. Interested in the relationship between language that says and language that does, they explore the performative utterance "I am queer" for producing the effects it names, especially in the U.S. military's policy of Don't Ask, Don't Tell in the 1990s. The complex relationships among speech acts, identity, and the effects produced by naming are at the heart of queer theories of the performative. Nor are these effects limited to stages or buses. Sedgwick ("Gender Criticism") writes:

I almost never put "gay and lesbian" in the title of undergraduate gay and lesbian studies courses. . . . To ask students to mark their transcripts permanently with so much as the name of this subject of study would have unpredictably disabling consequences for them in the future: the military, the churches, the CIA, and much of the psychoanalytic establishment . . . are still unblinking about wanting to exclude suspected lesbians and gay men. (§ 1)

Boundaries of exclusion and the regulatory schemas that produce, in their citation, their subjects and effects take queer theory to the streets in a charged relationship between theory and praxis with consequential, material effects.

"Perhaps it is no accident that the term 'queer performativity' grew up around acts of dying," writes Sue-Ellen Case (1996, p. 148). ACT UP and AIDS activism

returned the dying body to the medical and state institutions that denied them. Gender is a complex matrix of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that deems some bodies worthy, legitimate, and intelligible. The political effects of these constituted bodies are all too real.

### ◆ *Communication Research and Performativity*

General discussions of performativity in communication studies are rare, except for essays by Strine (1998) and Pollock (1995, 1998a). Most research mobilizes performativity for its critical efficacy in the service of other projects. This research can be broadly placed into five domains: narrative, body, performance criticism, performative writing, and pedagogy. Interpersonal communication research, with its contemporary interests in qualitative, ethnographic, narrative, and critical approaches to relationships and their dynamism, is well-equipped to add to the study of gender and its performances in these five domains and in new ones as well.

#### NARRATIVE

For the many interpersonal scholars interested in narrative (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Orbach, 1997; Shank-Krusciewicz & Wood, 2001; Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1999; Veroff, Sutherland, Chadiha, & Ortega, 1993; Wood, 2000, 2001, 2004), performativity can anchor their research in body, history, and power. Langellier (1999), for example, mobilizes performativity to account for personal narrative as “a site where the social is articulated, structured, and struggled over” (p. 128). She maintains that identities created in personal narratives are always “situated, embodied, and material—stories of the body told through the body, which make

cultural conflict concrete and accessible” (p. 129). Scholars who have taken up Langellier’s (1998) call for performativity’s political usefulness to personal narrative include Spry (2000), Alexander (2000), and Carver (2003).

Langellier and Peterson’s *Storytelling in Daily Life* (2004) utilizes performativity as a theory and strategy to critique storytelling in families as material practices that constitute and produce effects—both normative and transgressive. Pollock’s *Telling Bodies/Performing Birth* (1999) engages birth stories for the “convergence of performativity and maternity . . . in making history subject to the maternal body performing itself” (p. 10). In being told and retold, birth narratives are performative in “the endless (re)iteration of competing maternal norms” to which many of us are compelled (Pollock, 1999, p. 40).

Written narratives explored through performativity include Bennett’s (2003) analyses of ex-gays and lesbians in the so-called reparative therapy movement of Exodus International, a Christian-right organization dedicated to “curing” homosexuality. Masequesmay (2003) details the discursive-identity work of a support group for Vietnamese lesbians, bisexual women, and female-to-male transgendered people.

#### THE MATERIAL BODY

Much of the communication research that takes performativity as a model for identity focuses on the body and its materialization within discourse. Sloop (2000) explores how both essentialism and social construction are mobilized in the accounts in the mass media and the medical community of a case of infant gender “reassignment.” Jordan (2003) explores identities of temporary workers in texts that enable resistant labor practices. Grindstaff’s (2003) critical rhetoric project explores gay marriage debates and S/M gay culture as both scenes of heteronormative power and sites of potential resistance to it. Nor are

communication discourses excused from performativity's critique. Lovaas (2003) writes a stinging assessment of textbooks on nonverbal communication for their rigid essentialism of gendered bodies, pervasive heterosexism, and absence of queer subjectivities. Owen (2003) and Gingrich-Philbrook (1998) critique the List-serv responses by scholars to Corey and Nakayama's "Sextext" (1997) for their heteronormative policing of the boundaries of communication studies.

Given performativity's emphasis on intelligibility of bodies—the codes and conventions that make certain bodies worthy and legitimate—it is not surprising that scholars in disability studies and health communication find performativity particularly valuable. Disabled bodies realized performatively are the subjects of Kuppers's *Disability and Contemporary Performance* (2004) and Ferris (1998) in "Uncovery to Recovery." Ill bodies constituted performatively are the subjects of Bordwell's (1998) critical engagement with a multimedia dance concert about living with terminal illness, Langellier's (2001) analysis of one breast cancer story (re)marked on the body; and Baglia's (2005) analysis of Pfizer's construction of erectile dysfunction and masculinity.

Communication scholars are at the forefront of demonstrating performativity's utility for understanding bodies of color. Performativity that masks whiteness as normative and as readable is explored in Warren's *Performing Purity* (2003). Performative practices in African American culture are explored for appropriation and divergent political agendas in Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness* (2003a).

#### PERFORMANCE CRITICISM

When performativity "lands on" a specific performance, exposing naturalized codes and conventions of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality, analysis and critique of specific performances provide entrée for understanding that performance and

performativity. Performances that are always double-edged include gay identity on stage (Kuppers, 1998; Gingrich-Philbrook, 1997; Peterson, 2000a, 2000b); policed hetero/homosexual black masculinity in performances by Eddie Murphy, Damon Wayans, and David Alan Grier (Johnson, 2003b); Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (Scheie, 1997); Pee-Wee Herman (Slagle, 2003); Eva Peron in *Evita* (Ellison & Lockford, 2004); staged whiteness (Jackson, 1998; Warren & Kilgard, 2001); women's and men's bodies in daily life and on stage (Lockford, 2004; Stucky & Daughton, 2003); Matthew Bourne's "queered" *Swan Lake* (Drummond, 2003); Mary Kay cosmetics representatives' feminine "aesthetics of excess" (Waggoner, 1997); and Dublin's James Joyce festival (Spangler, 2002). Performance criticism in these works asks whether resistance and parody are possible without reiterating harm and violence. What are the limits of performativity for reimagining bodies? Critical limits are especially intriguing in Sikes's (2002) analysis of humanness and subjectivity in the human genome project and in Chvasta's (2003) exploration of bodies in cyberspace.

#### PERFORMATIVE WRITING

Performative writing, like performativity, questions the links between coherent, stable signs and their referents to expose the naturalized fictions of unified writers, readers, histories, or meanings available in texts. Performative writing undoes and deconstructs itself—never assuming that language can capture or reflect a totality. Pollock (1998b) provides six tentative directions: evocation, metonymy, subjectivity, nervousness, citationality, and consequence. As method, performative writing explores how textual practices can embody performative practices (Miller & Pelias, 2001; Pelias, 1999) and how writing and research is located within contested spaces of cultural production (Pollock, 1998a). Lockford (2004) and Jones (2002)

utilize performative writing as an ethnographic and autoethnographic strategy for analysis and critique.

Kennerly (2002) uses performative writing to explore roadside shrines as performances situated within multiple discourses. Corey and Nakayama's infamous "Sextext" (1997) and "Nextext" (Nakayama and Corey, 2003) enlist performative writing to write "between the language of academia and the language of sex" (1997, p. 58). Spry (1997, 2000) makes use of performative writing to evoke her experiences during her mother's struggle with cancer. Bowman (2000) explores the history of the outlaw John Dillinger to demonstrate how performative writing forces its readers and writers to rethink both law-and-order and disciplinary boundaries.

#### PEDAGOGY

Performativity is a valuable lens for research on pedagogy, for it accounts for the ways that body, history, and power are doubly articulated in classrooms, which risk marginalizing and entrenching subjectivities while offering space for alternative identities and identification. These researchers explore the crisis of teaching within institutional restraints (Alexander 2004b; Jackson 2004); how schools can discipline and create subjects as sexualized, racialized, and gendered (Alexander 2004b; Alexander & Warren, 2002; Cooks, 2003; Gingrich-Philbrook, 2002; Warren 2001a, 2001b); and how performance is a technique in the classroom for exposing naturalized categories (Stucky & Tomell-Priso, 2004; Warren, 2001a; Warren & Kilgard, 2001).

#### ◆ *Research Challenges for Interpersonal Research in/on/through Gender*

Performativity refigures bodies: female and male are not sex attributes that arise naturally

from essentialized cores of identity; femininity and masculinity are not social roles constructed by cultures on bodies. Male/female and femininity/masculinity are discursive and social constructions that reaffirm and reinstate the binary, hierarchical, and heteronormative categories that performativity seeks to expose and to critique. Gender is a complex matrix of normative boundaries—constituted in discourse, materially embodied and performed, and mobilized through culture to secure political and social ends—always articulated in/on/through desire, race, ethnicity, class, age, and abilities. These bounded matrices, navigated by individuals, are open to scrutiny by interpersonal researchers.

This scrutiny depends on refusing both causal links and assumed correspondences between demographic categories (male/female, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, age, abilities and disabilities) and the communication interactions studied. With performativity as a foundation, no longer does the box "M" or "F" provide *a priori* evidence of gendered communication styles, strategies, or perceptions, nor do the boxes stand as blank slates for inscription. This scrutiny depends on shifting notions of interpersonal contexts, participants, and processes to account for bodies as always culturally invested, historically specific, and materially performed. With performativity as a foundation, no longer is "gender is learned" a satisfactory explanation for the weight of history on minority communities, expanding technologies of reproduction, or the institutions—church, state, education, medicine, or family—that enforce those histories. And, finally, this scrutiny depends on politics to move beyond the question, "What is a good relationship?" to ask, "How are gender boundaries inclusionary and exclusionary? What rewards are reaped and costs paid in the lives of people? With performativity as a foundation for research, political structures and commitments can be more thoroughly interrogated, and the material effects of the research enhanced.

All paradigmatic shifts in approaches to the study of gender (or any other phenomenon) are uncomfortable: biological determinism, social construction, and performativity represent sea changes in how scholars ground claims about gender. Many will no doubt be wary of shifting premises. As Condit (2000) claims, "Scholars in communication have often been seduced by the approaches and methods of other disciplines. . . . Interpersonal scholars have often been tempted to imitate psychologists. Rhetoricians have often sought to imitate philosophers, literary theorists, or historians" (p. 23). Performativity, because of its complex genesis in gender theory, philosophy, and queer theory, may risk these imitations. At the same time, the American Psychological Association took the risk of theorizing differently and engaging in political critique of their own entrenched practices: *Gender Trouble* was one of the prompts that instigated reassessment and removal of homosexuality from the *DSM-IV's* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed.) categories of sexual disorders (Butler, 1990/1999, p. xvii).

Interpersonal communication researchers might benefit from taking a similar risk: departing from primarily or exclusively cognitive foundational claims to acknowledge the body as materially performed and to bring that to bear on questions, methods, and findings to better account for power structures that produce subjects. Interpersonal communication scholars can enrich their work on gender, relationships, intimacy, disclosure, dialectics, and conflict by recognizing and studying human communication as performances that range from the mundane to the monumental, that are always materially consequential, and that are productive of and challenging to relations of power. Such work requires research questions and methods that expand notions of what counts as gender, what constitutes research, and how the matrix of boundaries within communication creates knowledge.

Bell, in the introduction to *Performativity and Belonging* (1999), provides an important caveat and direction for interpersonal research:

An emphasis on performativity, however, does not mean an assumption of fluid, forever changing identities. Indeed, taking the temporal performative nature of identities as a theoretical premise means that more than ever, one needs to question how identities continue to be produced, embodied and performed, effectively, passionately and with social and political consequence. (p. 2)

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