

THE STATUS OF RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND COMMUNICATION

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The purpose of this essay is to survey and summarize the research on women, gender, and sex differences that has been published in speech communication journals. Five categories of research emerged from this survey: historical treatments of women, sex differences, images of women in the media, education and pedagogy, and surveys and integrative works. While future research is needed to fill in the gaps made evident by this survey of literature, perhaps more important is to begin to question and investigate the assumptions underlying current research about women.

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"Unless we begin NOW," said President Johnson on the subject of womanpower, "then the needs of our Nation just are not going to be met" (Macy, 1966, p. 698). There is no indication that when Johnson made this remark in an address on February 28, 1966, that he was aware of the prophetic nature of his words. Before the year's end, however, his plea for women to become involved more fully in all aspects of social and political life had become the rallying cry of the National Organization for Women, the first formal women's group to emerge in the contemporary phase of feminism.

The rebirth of feminism was accompanied by a surge of research about women in virtually every discipline. Women's issues, sex differences, and gender studies of all kinds found their way with increasing frequency into academic journals, and the field of speech communication was no exception. Communication scholars began to explore the relationship between sex, gender, and virtually every aspect of communication behavior.

The study of women and women's issues was by no means new to the field of communication, however. As early as 1937, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* had included an article entitled, "Pioneer Women Orators of America (Yoakam, 1937). *Speech Monographs* contained a similar piece in 1951—"Women Emerge as Political Speakers"—which documented the role of women at the political conventions of 1920 (Donaldson, 1951). The *Southern Speech Communication Journal* included two early articles on women in theatre: "Casting Plays in Girls' Schools (Gooch, 1943) and "The Masculine Repertoire of Charlotte Cushman," which described a nineteenth-century actor noted for playing masculine roles (Coats, 1946). Even the study of sex differences, which did not become a major research focus until much later, preceded the rebirth of the women's movement. Scheidel's classic study (1963), in which he found women to be more persuasive than men, appeared in a 1963 issue of *Speech Monographs*.

The research related to women and communication, then, is diverse, having spanned several decades. Thus an organization and assessment of this body of literature is useful at this point in time as well as especially appropriate for this special issue on women. Our purpose here is to summarize the published research in our journals related to women and communication and to suggest directions for future research.¹

This survey is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, our aim is to concentrate on the research in the journals² in the speech communication field that directly relates to the theme of women, gender, or sex differences.³ To locate relevant studies, we surveyed all issues of the following journals to date: the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Communication Monographs*, *Communication Education*, the *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, the *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, *Central States Speech Journal*, *Communication Quarterly*, *Human Communication Research*, the *Journal of Communication*, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, and *Women's Studies in Communication*.⁴

A typology emerged from the survey of research consisting of five categories: (1) historical treatments of women; (2) sex differences; (3) images of women in the media; (4) education and pedagogy; and (5) surveys and integrative works. For each of these areas, we will discuss studies representative of the category and describe the general trends of that research. Finally, we will suggest some directions for future research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Treatments of Women

This category of research deals generally with women on the public platform. It includes not only individual women who spoke or performed in public, but efforts by groups of women to make known their ideas. We have divided this research area into four

sections: (1) teachers in the speech profession; (2) women speakers; (3) women writers and performers; and (4) the women's movement.

Teachers in the Speech Profession

The earliest category to appear with some consistency in the journals consisted of articles about female teachers in the speech field. The first, and a typical article of this type, honored Sarah McGee Isom, a teacher of elocution in the late nineteenth century (Brown, 1959). The first woman on the faculty of the University of Utah and a founder of the Speech Association of America—Maud May Babcock—was the focus of three articles (Plummer, 1961; Smith, 1962; Smith, 1962a). Two other women—Sara Huntsman Sturgess, a teacher of dramatic art at the University of California, Berkeley (Wilson and Wessels, 1961), and Mabel Farrington Gifford, an innovator in speech therapy (Jackson, 1961)—were included in a special issue on the history of academic speech education in *Western Speech*.

These early essays were, for the most part, historical recollections by former students who described the characteristics of the woman's teaching style and personality that contributed to her effectiveness. No articles of this type appeared after 1965 (see Clark, 1965 and Skinner, 1965), evidence that the honoring of speech faculty was beginning to be done in other formats and that research on women was assuming new directions.

Women Speakers

The most prolific type of study about women, and the next trend to become apparent in our journals, dealt with famous women orators. This area of research began with an overview essay on early women speakers in America, whose willingness to defy tradition by speaking in public helped establish the propriety of women in that sphere (Yoakam, 1937). Another essay that called directly for the study of women was Brake's (1967) "Women Orators: More Research?" As a follow-up, Brake published the results of an actual opinion survey, which asked for the names of famous women orators who should be studied (1973).

These general calls for the study of women were followed by a series of essays on women involved in the fight for women's suffrage in the United States. Several major suffrage leaders received attention, including Susan B. Anthony (McDavitt, 1944), Frances Wright (Hillbruner, 1958; Kendall and Fisher, 1974), Anna Howard Shaw (Linkugel, 1962; 1963), and Abigail Scott Duniway (Mansfield, 1971). Three other women studied who coupled women's causes with others were Sojourner Truth (Wagner, 1962), who championed black as well as women's rights and religion; Sarah and Angelina Grimké, who began as advocates of abolition and moved into the support of women's causes (Gold, 1981); and Emma Goldman, an anarchist who spoke peripherally on women's issues (Silvestri, 1969; Berry, 1981). Only

one leader in the contemporary feminist movement—Ti-Grace Atkinson—has been formally studied (Reynolds, 1973). This list of studies does not begin to include the many women active in social and political causes, yet they are the only women studied in our journals to this point. Interesting, too, is that many of the women studied have been the subject of more than one investigation, while many other women remain entirely neglected.

While the early women's rights speakers clearly were the focus of researchers, a related area of study evolved: that of women active in a variety of political and social causes. Four women holding political office were subjects of essays: Margaret Chase Smith (Graham, 1964), Ella T. Grasso (Whalen, 1976), Martha Griffiths (Pinola and Briggs, 1979), and Barbara Jordan (Thompson, 1979; 1979a). We also would include in this category Edith Bolling Wilson, Woodrow Wilson's wife, who played a critical political role during her husband's serious illness while President (Phifer, 1971). Finally, studies of Elizabeth Morgan, labor agitator (Ritter, 1971); Sarah Winnemucca, who promoted the Indian cause to white audiences (Scholten, 1977); Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who fought to remove prayer from public schools (Hudson, 1972); Anita Bryant and her campaign against gay rights (Fischli, 1979); and Patricia Hearst, whose kidnapping synthesized a number of social concerns (Rollings and Blascovich, 1977; Mechling, 1979) suggest a branching out of research dealing with women. No longer is the study of women limited to those active in women's causes per se; rather, their contributions in every phase of political and social life have begun to be studied.

Within the category of single speakers, a final set of studies deserves mention. Five studies to date have focused on women who were not Americans. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, appointed deputy of women within the Nazi regime, was the earliest to appear in our journals (Casmir, 1969). The other four were from the British Isles: Emmeline Pankhurst, British suffrage leader (Zacharis, 1971); Bernadette Devlin, member of the British Parliament (Dees, 1973); Margaret Thatcher, current prime minister of England (Auer, 1979), and Elizabeth I, queen of England (McGee, 1980). This last study deserves special mention because it represents a sophistication of analysis not apparent previously. McGee used Elizabeth's style of rhetoric and rule to illustrate the concept of "liberty" and to show the feminization of the power of English kings. Much room exists to study women speakers in connection with ideas, styles, and contexts, rather than simply studying their rhetoric and lives intrinsically.

Women Writers and Performers

Women writers and performers is another category of research dealing with individual women of renown. For the most part, these have been historical studies of a woman and her performances, with a description, but little analysis, of her communication

per se or its effectiveness. Women in theatre have been studied most often; Coats' piece on Charlotte Cushman (1946) and two essays on Sarah Bernhardt (Overstreet, 1975; Ritchey and Goss, 1979) are representative. Of a different sort entirely is Ritter's investigation into the confusion over the identities of the various "Miss Hallums" who appeared on the stage in the eighteenth century (1960).

Hynes' 1975 essay is a refreshing approach to the study of women in theatre. She looked at a play written by Mercy Otis Warren as a piece of dramatic propaganda in support of colonial independence, thus investigating the theatre as a form of persuasion. Another study with a unique focus is Levine's study (1976) comparing female with male comics. She found that females make themselves the object of derision more often than male comics. Finally, one study explored the feminist theatre that accompanied the rebirth of feminism (Gillespie, 1978).

Another category of women as performers includes those writers who became known because of their treatment of important social issues, their writing skill, and in some cases, because of their capabilities as performers of their works. Writers whose works have been analyzed in terms of their effectiveness include Harriet Martineau (Thomas, 1966), Anais Nin (Potts, 1977), Mary Wollstonecraft (Stuart, 1978), and Kate Millett (Huyink, 1979). One woman who became known for public readings of her work was Harriet Beecher Stowe (Trautman, 1973).

An unusual study of this genre is Pearson's analysis of Abigail Adams' correspondence with her husband (1975). Pearson showed how contradictions in Adams' letters reveal conflicts between her role as wife and her role as advocate. Although the study of women writers and performers now may seem to be more appropriately the domain of literature and theatre, the communication perspective has been used fruitfully to explore the lives and works of women who addressed or performed for public audiences.

The Women's Movement

Following studies of individual women, the next research area to emerge concerned studies of the women's movement. Surprisingly, only three studies dealt specifically with the early suffrage phase. The first of these (Donaldson, 1951) actually dealt with the end of the suffrage phase—i.e., the role of women at the first political conventions to be held following their enfranchisement. The origins of the early women's rights movement were studied by Coughlin and Coughlin (1973), who examined the Seneca Falls Convention and the resulting Declaration of Woman's Rights. Bosmajian (1974) looked specifically at the tactics used by the suffragists in attempting to secure passage of the suffrage amendment.

By far the major focus in our journals has been the contemporary women's movement. General assess-

ments of the movement's strategies, tactics, and effectiveness have been most common. Researchers have studied the stages in the women's movement (Rossenwasser, 1972), the characteristics of the movement that distinguish it from other social movements (Hancock, 1972; Campbell, 1973), and communication techniques and their effectiveness (McPherson, 1973; Foss and Schneider, 1977). Of particular value is Anderson's study of audience images of contemporary women politicians (1973), organized around Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, a major philosophical treatise from the movement.

In addition to general treatments of the movement, two issues central to it have received particular attention—the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and reproductive freedom. The ERA has been the subject of three articles (Solomon, 1978, 1979; and Foss, 1979). Railsback (1982) studied the values clash in the pro-choice/pro-life debate, while Mall (1969) examined the abortion debate in the British Parliament in 1967.

A recent trend in the study of the women's movement that seems particularly promising is the analysis of the philosophical and ideological bases of the movement. While many studies in the past have touched on or incorporated such discussions, two recent studies dealt with philosophical considerations explicitly. Both of these looked at the early women's movement, although this type of study profitably could benefit our understanding of the current movement as well. Campbell (1980) studied Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "The Solitude of Self" as a philosophical statement of the principles of the movement, while Conrad (1981) explored the ways in which the ideology of a movement develops, placing the divorce debate of 1860 against this background.

A final category of movement studies concerns the relationship between the women's movement and other social causes. Chapel (1975) examined Christian Science as a unique manifestation of the women's movement, and Hope (1975) looked at the similarities between the contemporary feminist and black liberation movements. Foss (1979a), on the other hand, examined the confrontation between a movement and an institution—feminism and the Catholic Church. Studies relating to the women's movement, then, which began largely as histories, now are broader in scope, making various connections between the movement and important aspects of the communication process.

Sex Differences

While historical studies of women comprised the first research area to be pursued extensively in our journals, the study of sex differences in communication evolved as a second area of investigation; it continues as an important source of information about communication behavior. Because research exploring the link between the sex variable and communication behaviors represents a diverse

body of literature, we have relied on a typology devised by Murdock and Kinsky (1982) for organizing this body of research. They divide existing research on sex differences into five categories: description, production, direction, attribution, and evaluation. The research in this area is extensive; thus we will include only examples of the range of research in each category rather than offering a comprehensive discussion of each category.

Description

Descriptive studies deal with how our language characterizes males and females. These studies typically are not empirical investigations, but general discussions of the ways in which our language treats women and men differently. This is a smaller category of research than many of the others. Kramer (1974) reviewed stereotyped concepts of the way women speak in order to suggest some hypotheses that deserve empirical testing. Meyer et al. (1980) broadened this category to include not only actual linguistic depictions, but how Fourth-of-July cartoons from 1870 to 1976 verbally and visually depicted women.

Production

This category is concerned with actual differences and similarities in the language behaviors of males and females. Brownell and Smith (1973), for example, looked at amount of talk among children and found that girls produced more speech than boys. Sanders and Robinson (1979) discovered that men and women employ different vocabularies to talk about sex, while Baird and Bradley (1979) explored sex differences in management styles. Ayres (1980) studied how long males and females, in various stages of relationships, conversed on a particular topic. McLaughlin et al. (1981), on the other hand, explored sex differences in story-telling behaviors. As a final example of this category, Shedletsky (1982) looked at the literature on sex differences in cerebral organization and its correlation with nonverbal behavior.

Direction

An interesting body of literature, but one which has not received the attention in the communication field to the same extent as others, can be labeled "direction." This category of research focuses on whether we vary our communication behaviors depending on whether the receiver of the message is male or female. The essay by Markel et al. (1976) on sex effects in conversation is representative of this category. They found that communicators, regardless of sex, speak for a greater proportion of the conversation when the listener is female.

Attribution

Attribution refers to expectations we have for or the assignment of certain communication behaviors to males and females. Bliese's 1977 study is typical: she looked at whether subjects considered

certain adjectives to be more believable as a characteristic of a person if ascribed to females or males. Bock and Monro (1979) examined the effects of speech organization and its relation to the sex of the source and the rater. They discovered that men are viewed as more organized than women regardless of whether the speech itself is organized.

Evaluation

A research area in which a large number of studies have been done is the category of evaluation, which focuses on interpersonal judgments made about variables and about communicator attributes given language differences. An early example of this type of study was Epstein and Ulrich's (1966) investigation of judgments of male and female voice quality when message filtering is manipulated. That receivers will rate a male communicator as more competent than a female was the finding of Miller and McReynolds (1973). Haviland (1977) studied whether adults recognize and interpret infants' facial expressions differently given the sex of the child, while Trenholm and Todd de Mancillas (1978) investigated what behaviors students interpret as sexist. Berryman and Wilcox (1980) examined several variables related to evaluation, among them subjects' evaluations of and attitudes toward the speaker and the attribution of sex-role characteristics to the speaker. Bradley (1981) looked at subjects' evaluations when four variables in a message were manipulated—sex, tag questions, disclaimers, and argumentative support. Finally, the Murdock and Kinsky (1982) study, which provided the organizational format for this section as a whole, represents research in this category as well. After offering their typology, they reported the results of a study of verbosity and sex-role expectations.

While the largest body of research in women and communication has been in the area of sex differences, it also has proved to be the most difficult to interpret. Contradictory findings must be resolved and clearer distinctions made between the impact of sex and that of gender before the abundant research in this category can be fully understood, interpreted, and utilized.

Women and the Media

The general heading of "women and the media" was chosen to cover research dealing with women's images in print and electronic media as well as with the efforts by women to gain access to decision-making positions and fairer treatment within the media. A general overview of one aspect of this area is provided by Busby (1975), who summarized the research dealing with the media's portrayal of sex roles.

Electronic Media

The study of women in television has been a major research interest since the advent of television as a major informational and entertainment

source. Images of women in television are a major research focus within this category. Tedesco (1974) looked at women in prime-time shows, Downing (1974) explored the role of women as major figures in daytime serials, and Turow (1974) found that women could serve as advice- or direction-givers in television shows but were generally restricted to topics concerned with feminine issues. Dohrmann (1975), on the other hand, looked specifically at children's educational television to elicit a gender profile of such shows.

Images of women in television commercials also have received considerable attention. Courtney and Whipple's (1974) study is a typical example. Similarly, O'Donnell and O'Donnell (1978) found little change in traditional stereotypes in commercials of the early seventies in comparison with those of the late seventies. Two studies suggest that changes in advertising are occurring, although these changes are not entirely positive. Marecek et al. (1978) found that although women sell more products on television commercials than was the case some years ago, more often than not they still are backed up by the traditional, authoritative, male voice-over. And Warren (1978) argued that advertising has co-opted the women's movement by the way in which it has incorporated the liberated woman into commercials.

Radio as a medium has received virtually no attention compared to television. Carlin's (1976) study is one of the few; it looked at radio talk shows that dealt explicitly with sexual themes—shows designed to appeal to female audiences in particular. Movies, too, remain a relatively neglected research area in terms of women and communication, although Leventhal and Cupchik (1976) linked sex differences in response to cartoons and slapstick movies to personality characteristics.

Print Media

The category of magazines and newspapers has elicited considerable research on the subject of women. Gibbons (1979) provided an excellent overview of the efforts of women's publications to compete with existing ones and of the women's movement to gain needed media coverage. A 1975 series of three essays on women in detective fiction (Krouse and Peters; Jones; and Bargainnier) explored the roles portrayed by women in this literary genre. Smith (1976), on the other hand, examined the content of adult-only paperback fiction and its relationship to sex roles. Another example of the studies relating to print media is Kidd (1975), who examined the advice offered to women in popular magazines. The treatment magazines accord women's issues also has been a concern of researchers, especially their coverage of the Equal Rights Amendment (Butler and Paisley, 1978; Farley, 1978).

Just as with television, the role accorded women in magazine advertising has received considerable attention in our field. Two articles in a 1976 symposium

called "Equity in Advertising" dealt with women in magazine ads (Poe; Pingre et al.). More recently, Skelly and Lundstrom (1981) studied male sex roles in magazine advertising, a relatively untouched area of sex-role investigation.

Another area of fruitful research that seems to be appearing with greater frequency deals with comparisons between treatments of the sexes and other demographic variables such as ethnicity in the media. Three studies to date explicitly have compared women and blacks in media-related contexts. Culley and Bennett (1976) showed that negative stereotypes of women and blacks still hold in the media, while Lemon (1977) explored the images of women and blacks on prime-time television. Johnson (1980) explored the phrase "blacks and women" as it was used in media coverage of the hostages released early from Iran.

Access to the Media

Finally, studies exist that describe women's efforts to gain access to the media—either coverage of women's issues and events or access to positions of power in media networks. Mills (1974), for example, examined efforts by women to gain fair treatment on television and to move into positions of power at television networks. Cantor (1977), on the other hand, summarized the Report of the Task Force on Women of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and discussed the lack of action taken in regard to it.

The area of the mass media, then, has contributed to a number of studies related to research on women and communication. Given the significant impact of the media on the American public, these studies provide information vital to our understanding of contemporary communication behavior.

Education and Pedagogy

This category of studies deals with efforts to integrate knowledge about women into communication classrooms. While most of the work in our journals in this area has occurred in the last seven years, there were some early precursors to this kind of study. Gooch (1943) discussed the casting of plays in girls' schools, and Emery (1952) called for a rehabilitation of women's debate. Both of these essays recognized some differences in technique between single-sex and co-educational communication activities. While separatism has not been the trend in communication education, one recent article has echoed this theme. Johnson and Goldman (1977) argued for separate communication classes for women in order for women to develop their communication skills more effectively.

More typical, however, than the advocacy of separate classes for women and men are those essays that argue for the equal integration of the sexes in the classroom. Many of these essays deal with strategies for de-sexing the classroom as well as for promoting awareness among students of both

the previous neglect of women as communicators and changing sex roles. Sanbonmatsu (1974) developed a case study of "Jenny and Ken" for use in the interpersonal communication class, an exercise designed to sensitize students to changing roles and values. Sprague (1975) and Karre (1976) suggested a range of strategies teachers can use to reduce sexism in communication classrooms.

Another major category within "Education and Pedagogy" consists of syllabi for courses that deal with women. Purnell's 1976 article was the earliest; she discussed a course in "Sex Roles in Communication," concerned with the similarities and differences in the communication patterns of women and men. Foss (1978) described an approach for teaching contemporary feminist rhetoric, while Berryman (1979) described a course that covered intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and public communication for women. Pederson's course (1981) focused on women speakers, with the primary emphasis given to contemporary women. More limited in scope is the syllabus devised by Trent (1981), which dealt with women as political communicators.

A final study of a different sort is Dorris' (1981) analysis of interpersonal communication textbooks between 1975 and 1979. To determine if the changes in educational practices that have been recommended indeed are being incorporated into instructional materials and classroom practices seems the logical next step for this category of research.

Surveys and Integrative Works

A final category of studies consists of those that survey literature or provide critical evaluations of a body of literature. Bibliographies and overviews dominate this category, and for the most part, these are limited by topic and time frame and do not attempt to be comprehensive. Shimanoff (1977), for example, compiled a bibliography of empirical and experimental studies on sex and communication between 1970 and 1976. Nelson (1978) provided a bibliography of two aspects of sex differences in proxemics—physical distance and personal space—between the years 1965 and 1978. Baird (1976), on the other hand, reviewed the research findings on sex differences in group communication from 1950 to 1976, and Busby (1975) surveyed sex-role research in the mass media. Pearson's (1981) annotated bibliography of research related to sex and speech criticism is another example of an overview study of this type. This present survey, of course, also belongs in this category.

Another type of study deserves mention here. Two studies to date explicitly have synthesized and assessed research related to sex roles in communication. Putnam (1982) enumerated some of the problems of current research on sex differences, while Isenhardt (1982) critically reviewed the various measures of psychological gender role. A questioning of the processes of research on women and

communication seems necessary if these studies are to make the quality contributions to the field of which they are capable.

Suggestions for Future Research

To summarize the directions that research on women and communication has taken is a demanding yet exciting task. Researchers have examined a variety of topics—women speakers, the women's movement, sex differences, women in media, and women's influence on education—and their studies have given speech communication new perspectives on and a new awareness of women's issues and impact. Given the research progress in this area, what directions do we now need to pursue?

One fruitful avenue for research is to begin to fill in some of the gaps, many of which are obvious from our survey of existing studies. To understand women speakers, room exists for studies of the discourse and impact of those women heretofore neglected in our journals. Perhaps of greater value, though, are studies that link specific women, their work, lives, and discourse to philosophical trends, communication styles, social contexts, and historical periods. Also needed are examinations of the discourse of women who are not renowned in the political arena, but whose daily and ordinary communication has significant impact on work and home environments. Much of this research may involve examining informal formats for discourse such as diaries and letters, since women have not always had access to traditional avenues of expression.

Further research remains to be done, too, into the communication aspects of the women's movement. More comparisons of the suffrage and contemporary phases of the movement might reveal tactics, strategies, and lessons from the past that could benefit contemporary feminists. The current backlash against the women's movement also suggests some studies: analyses of anti-feminist organizations and campaigns are one possibility, as are studies which assess and attempt to formulate communication strategies for presenting women's issues to indifferent or hostile audiences. Additional studies profitably could explore the links between the women's movement and other social movements as well.

Gaps in the study of sex differences also exist. While certain categories in our typology—directional studies, for example—clearly deserve further attention, more integrative and survey work definitely is needed to begin to pull together the diversity of findings that currently exist. Simple replication of studies is one approach to filling this gap. Another is to attempt to theorize about and pull together a number of variables that already have been studied independently. Clearer distinctions between sex as a biological condition and gender as a psychosocial one are crucial as well.

In the area of media, research is needed that goes beyond simply exploring the nature of

women's images in the media. We also need to examine the impact of those images on the viewing public to determine the extent to which they influence media consumers. In addition, more research can be done into the roles and images of women in media not yet studied in much depth, such as radio. A fascinating but as yet untouched area for investigation are video games—i.e., what images of women do they project and what do users learn about sex and gender as a result of playing them?

In the category of education, a still relatively unexplored area is the extent to which the recommendations for de-sexing educational practices made in many published syllabi have been incorporated into communication classrooms. And do actual teacher-student interactions differ based on sex? Student performances of communication skills—speaking, listening, and writing—also deserve attention. To what extent do boys and girls learn, perform, evaluate, and value these skills differently?

Finally, more integrative and overview works of all kinds are needed to help us fully assess, interpret, and understand the vast body of literature related to women and communication. Of critical importance, however, are studies that question, evaluate, and even attack the methodologies, approaches, and frameworks underlying current research. Perhaps the 1982 essays by Putnam and Isenhart foretell a growing body of literature of this type.

As important as all of these suggested studies are to enhancing our understanding of particular research categories, another direction needs to be pursued as well. We need not only to provide closure in these areas, but also to investigate the most basic tenets and "taken-for-granted" assumptions underlying current research (Putnam, 1982, p. 6). To demonstrate how a questioning of presuppositions can suggest new conceptions of the communication process and alter research goals and findings, we will mention two such assumptions here.

One assumption that seems to underlie much of the research in women and communication is that sex—and more recently, gender—is a primary variable in the communication process. While sex may often be selected out as a variable because it is easily observable, such selection also may lead us to treat the sex of communicators as an important and influential variable that operates independently of other factors in a particular context. This assumption, in turn, may promote the conclusion that sex or gender influences communication or that communication reflects gender. Were another, very different assumption in place, however, we might discover that the reverse is true—i.e., that communication behaviors determine gender (Putnam, 1982, p. 6). As a result, too, of the assumption that sex somehow is primary, we are likely to look for differences between the sexes. Because sex is considered a major variable, that there are two sexes becomes important; thus we seek and find differences rather than similarities between the two categories. Yet if

we assumed that the sex of a communicator was not important enough to bother studying, we might find ourselves seeing similarities rather than differences between the sexes.

A second assumption that seems to underlie research in this area is that the current system of reality in which we conduct research is sex neutral. Schaeff (1981), along with a number of others (see, for example, Ulanov, 1971; Miller, 1976; and Farrell, 1974), has attacked this assumption and argues that a "White Male System" operates in our culture, surrounding and permeating our lives:

We all live in it. We have been educationally, politically, economically, philosophically, and theologically trained in it, and our emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual survival have depended on our knowing and supporting the system (p. 5).

Although this currently is the dominant system, Schaeff argues that other systems exist within our culture, including the Black, Chicano, Native American, and female systems (p. 3).

Schaeff delineates what she believes to be the characteristics of the female system in contrast to those of the white male system. Among these are a view of decision-making as consensual, an emphasis on a processual rather than a clock-oriented conception of time, a focus on relationships, a view of power as limitless, and an intuitive rather than a logical method of processing

If our investigations reveal that there is a system of or approach to reality shared by women, we would have to question whether our research environment is in fact sex neutral. Have we imposed male values and approaches onto the sexes, rather than allowing actual differences and styles to emerge? Perhaps the move to phenomenological methodologies and naturalistic inquiry represents a promising direction in our research; these approaches suggest that we are beginning to study phenomena as they are rather than laying predetermined frameworks onto our objects of study. Such investigations of women's communication behaviors may help us determine more accurately the true nature of women's reality.

In addition to accepting the potential for a separate women's reality, we need to design studies that incorporate this framework. Brockriede (1978) has argued that consistency among the various components of the research process is crucial:

If research is a process, its every activity is related to every other activity. Persons who choose a philosophical perspective on the process as primary, for example, should make their epistemological-ontological assumptions consistent with the theoretical constructs treated in the research, with the kinds of questions asked, with the methodological design selected, with the kinds of experiences or behaviors used as data, with the techniques for collecting and analyzing

data, and with the styles and strategies for reporting the results (p. 6).

If the female system is more intuitive than logical, then, we would design research studies that allow subjects to utilize knowledge based on intuition and would devise ways of reporting it that do not destroy the qualities of that knowledge. If the female system includes a view of power as limitless and regenerative, expanding as it is shared, researchers in areas such as persuasion, conflict, and negotiation would have to begin with different assumptions about the behavior of individuals in such communication contexts. We might want to question, for example, the generally accepted conclusion that communicators are power vulnerable (Simons, 1976, p. 284). Perhaps women view and use power differently from men and do not experience it as a source of vulnerability. As another example, researchers have claimed that persuaders typically ask for more than they expect to get (Simons, 1976, p. 146). Again, women may approach the task of persuasion with a different philosophy and tools, given the nature of their reality, and our studies should be designed to reflect this possibility. As a final example, if women tend to focus on relationships and connections, our research may need to be designed not simply to examine the impact of one independent variable on a dependent one, but to examine that impact holistically, studying as many factors as possible that appear to be influencing the phenomenon under investigation.

Questioning our assumptions and making them explicit not only could change our conceptions of communication, but could have practical effects on the discipline of speech communication as well. Such a process, for example, could encourage scrutiny of the assumption made by some tenure and promotion committees that the study of women and communication is "soft" and therefore less valuable than many other types of research. Similarly, it could help to explain the extremely low proportion of women who publish in our journals and present papers at our conventions⁴—i.e., they may be less at home in the system in which they are expected to perform. If theories are "attempts of various authors to represent what is conceived as important in the process of communication" (Littlejohn, 1978, p. 7), the questioning of our presupposition that research is sex neutral could reveal that what is conceived as important both in research and in the professional treatment of researchers is defined by male rather than female standards.

Littlejohn has suggested three ways in which theories may change: (1) growth by extension, where research expands knowledge piece by piece, adding new concepts to the old; (2) growth by intension, which is the process of developing a more precise understanding of single bits of knowledge or concepts; and (3) revolution, where the discovery of information that runs counter to the prevailing assumptions of the theory in use precipitates a

crisis and leads to the development of a new theoretical approach (Kuhn, 1970). Research in the area of women and communication thus far has been confined largely to growth by extension and growth by intension. We have been building on accepted assumptions and findings by contributing additional data in these same directions. While such approaches have allowed us to begin to resolve some of the inconsistencies that have plagued research in this area, we need to go much further—to explore the possibilities for growth by revolution. If we are serious about research in the area of women and communication, we need to question our presuppositions, replace them as necessary, and then create new conceptions of communication that truly incorporate women's perspective.

NOTES

¹While there are, of course, books, dissertations, convention papers, and other unpublished manuscripts and research reports on the subject of women and communication, we concentrated on journals because they are the source of the most current as well as the most widely disseminated information in our field.

²One limitation in particular should be noted about the studies selected for review. While sex is a control variable in innumerable studies, we included only those in which it was considered a focus of the study—i.e., if sex was mentioned in the title of the article, we included it in our survey.

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⁴A report on gender status in the Speech Communication Association revealed that in 1981, while the number of male and female members was roughly equivalent (2870 males and 2097 females), 80 males authored articles in SCA's journal compared to 39 females. Similarly, 483 males presented convention papers in 1981 compared to 244 females (Boileau, 1982).

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Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Science of Language*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

A paperback edition of a 1972 French work, this book provides an overview of the mystic maze of linguistics. (Finally—someone has defined "illocutionary.") Some of the language used is virtually incomprehensible. The reviewer thought perhaps this was because it was a translation, but past experience with linguistics books suggests it may be an inherent flaw in the discipline. More than most books of the genre, this book does provide workable definitions for a number of complex terms and ideas.

This is primarily a reference book, usable by those who need to refer to the linguistics discipline. It is not pleasure reading. Having it out in paperback, however, will make the information more accessible to potentially curious people.

Deborah Dumaine, *Write to the Top: Writing for Corporate Success*. New York: Random House, 1983.

Help! What will help me get fast relief from self help books. Here's another. This one tells you how what you didn't learn in 8th grade grammar can make you a millionaire top executive super star captain of industry with peace of mind if only you can learn how to tell your adverbs from commas and such like stuff. Reading it makes one want to write badly, to violate the rules, to get it printed and then thumb one's nose at the author as if to say, "See, you can get into print without using your book."

Ms. Dumaine, apparently a blonde, has her picture on the back page. She is identified as degreed by Smith College, a matter of which the alumni office of that institution should take proper note. She runs a consulting firm. She knows all, uses cute names (Rick Cotta, for example) and gives you a neat little quiz on the back—"If you answer yes to five of these questions you need this book."

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Writer's Digest Books, *International Writers' and Artists' Yearbook: 1983*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1983.

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