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GENDER, WORK, AND THE HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Figures, Formations, and Flows

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Whatever else it is, communication research is gendered work. This has been true since its inception as an academic field, and in its commercial, civic, and educational wings as well. The specific gendering of its work has varied across time, region, and institution. But across all contexts, gender and affiliated relations of difference have been constitutive forces in the (re)production of the field.

This chapter supports those claims by developing and demonstrating a conceptual framework for investigating the gendered history and contemporary enactment of communication studies. In principle, this framework is applicable to other academic fields and forms of knowledge work as well. It arises out of theories of gendered work and organization, which we advance toward a new way to understand the evolution of the field. Specifically, we argue that the complex array of people, ideas, institutions, roles, relations, efforts, and affects that converge(d) into a global assemblage of communication and media studies is a gathering animated and propelled by gender relations.

The chapter proceeds in four sections. We begin by taking note of how gender has already found purchase in the historiography of communication studies, noting both advances and limitations (see also Thiele, this volume). We then offer a compact summary of gendered work and organization theory, observing specific capacities that promise to illuminate the formation of the field. Next, we develop those capacities into an overarching framework of figures, formations, and flows. This model provides a post-humanist heuristic for tracing the gendered organization of the field—a potential we show in the final section by revisiting a key juncture in the history of communication study—media research in the U.S. from the mid-1930s through the mid-1950s. There we focus on Columbia University’s Bureau of Applied Social Research, offering a new way to understand an iconic institutional location and providing cues for further such reformulations of the history of the field.
Gender in the Historiography of Communication Research

Accounts of communication as a historically gendered field began to appear in the early 1970s, when women in select countries began to secure professorial positions in increasing numbers. Many joined overwhelmingly male professional associations and formed friendships, networks, and formal groups organized around women’s issues. Feminist analyses of media began appearing in that decade, though it was only in the 1990s that they began to achieve something close to a sustained position in the literature. Histories of the field were slow to take up gender as an analytic category. This was true even in the new critical histories that emerged in the 1990s, which challenged whiggish tales of disciplinary progress but focused nearly exclusively on male actors and ignored questions of gender. Feminists, however, began to reconsider the discipline (e.g., Rakow, 1992; Jansen, 1993).

To date, gender and feminist analyses of the history of the field fall into two main categories: histories of (1) gender in theory and research and (2) women in the field. The first is a kind of intellectual history focused on published texts. It includes broad mappings of feminist approaches to communication studies (Ardizzoni, 1998; Meyer, 2007) as well as readings of feminist or proto-feminist texts of significance in the history of the field, like Herta Herzog’s soap opera studies or Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (see Katz, et al, 2003). Gender has also been a lens through which to view silences in historically significant texts, such as Merton, Fiske, and Curtis’s Mass Persuasion (Simonson, 2004) and Katz and Lazarsfeld’s Personal Influence (Douglas, 2006).

A second strand examines the evolution of women’s presences in the field. Much of this literature entails historical recovery projects that highlight and often celebrate the work of forgotten or previously undervalued scholars (e.g., Simonson and Archer, 2008; McCormack, 2008; Dorsten, 2012); of women still active in the field (e.g., Rakow, 2008; Meyen, 2012); or some combination of the two (e.g., Signorielli, 1996). The bulk of such documentation work investigates the U.S. context, but Klaus and Seethaler (this volume and forthcoming) investigate Herzog as a transnational figure, while Martina Thiele (this volume) illuminates women’s careers in Germany and Austria. Most projects in this second strand focus on authors of published texts. A handful draw attention to a fuller range of women workers who contributed to the rise of communication studies—from secretaries, interviewers, and research assistants to the female audiences whose social experiences provided the epistemological base upon which classic U.S. media research was founded (Douglas, 2006; Simonson, 2012; Rowland and Simonson, 2014).

While most recovery projects focus on individual women and their published research, some look out toward contexts and social structures that systematically disfavor women and their work in the field. In an early essay that remains compelling, Jansen (1993) argued that gender-based exclusions are constitutive, not incidental, forces in the historical construction of communication studies. Drawing upon feminist epistemology, the sociology of science, and feminist social theory,

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Jansen made a case for gender as “a crucial constituent for the analysis of all fields of power relations and all disciplined subjects and structures of knowledge” (142), including that which “secured the legitimacy of the field of communications” originally in the 1950s (144). The essay stops short of offering historical analysis to substantiate this claim, however—an invitation we take up in the last section of this chapter. We also belatedly heed her call for approaches “with sufficient analytic power to systematically investigate the multiple and multifaceted ways that gendered patterns of communication and gendered distributions of power [have been] variously constructed and replicated” in the field (144).

Only scattered work since Jansen has advanced a systemic understanding of gender as a constitutive force in the history of communication studies. Within the field, scholars have drawn attention to monopolies of knowledge that have marginalized feminist research in the field (Robinson, 1998), used feminist standpoint epistemology to account for exclusions of female-authored research in the 1940s and ’50s (Dorsten, 2012), and drawn upon post-humanist assemblage theory to outline the socio-material array of gendered relationships, technologies, and hierarchies of status through which 1940s media research was actively produced (Rowland and Simonson, 2014). They have also drawn upon Margaret Rossiter’s (1993) resonant concept of the “Matilda effect”—a gendered advance on Robert K. Merton’s concept of the Matthew effect that names the process whereby women’s contributions are systematically undervalued in patterns of citation, social attribution, and incorporation into disciplinary literatures, including communication (Knoblauch-Westerwick and Glynn, 2011).

Across these studies of texts, individual women, and gendered systems or contexts, the notion of work in the sense of labor is an underdeveloped theme. In the history of the field, ‘work’ typically refers to published research or sometimes, by extension, to the investigative labor of an author whose name is affixed to a publication. This dominant view reflects a widespread—and gendered—tendency to bifurcate mental from manual or emotional activity and valorize the former category, a hegemonic cultural practice that the field of communication studies was born into and helped advance (see Schiller, 1996). We argue that one powerful lens through which to understand how gender has been a constitutive force in forming the field is precisely to address work in a broader sense: as tasks coordinated in relation to one another and entwined with such systems as occupation (a line of work taken up by particular practitioners), organization (systems that coordinate and control work), and markets (systems that establish and regulate the value of work through competition), among others (e.g., technology, field). Though largely absent from the historiography of the field, these are traditional elements of political economy and found in some strains contemporary critical media studies. We take such critical and political economic frameworks as largely complementary to ours, but turn toward feminist theories of work and organization for explicitly gendered conceptual and methodological resources.
Gender, Work, and the Organization of Communication Research

Feminist studies of gender, work, and organization illuminate new and productive ways to understand the history of communication research. Here we introduce three dominant frameworks that have emerged over time and identify valuable insights borne of each. Because these frameworks have rarely been applied to the contexts of academic labor, we model ways of doing so on our way to proposing a fourth, overarching framework that integrates the first three by rereading them through a post-humanist lens.

Gender in and at Work: All Eyes on Women

Following the second wave of feminist movements in the 1960s and ’70s, a scattered and interdisciplinary crew of scholars began sustained investigation of gender in organizations and occupations, or gender at work. Those prepositions spoke loudly. Chiefly, they implied that gender exists prior to and independent of work, where it makes a notable stir. ‘Gender’ at this time served as a synonym for women, especially white, middle-class, Western/Northern ‘housewives’ entering the work world. Delving deeper, gender was generally held to be a group identity—a binary categorization of persons (male-female, masculine-feminine) associated with contrasting traits and habits, which individuals embody, express, and bring into work settings. Gender differences, in this view, are imported into organizations by individuals. Relevant differences were said to be biological, psychological, behavioral, and communicative.

Taking this perspective, one could explain women’s presence in certain academic jobs (e.g., secretaries, librarians, empirical researchers) and relative absence from others (e.g., professors, administrators, theorists) as the logical result of gender difference. We might say, for instance, that women’s relational orientation better suits them for research interviewing, or that their patience for detail and passivity equip them for clerical and library contexts. Men’s analytical preferences, on the other hand, lend them to abstract theorizing, while their ease with leadership propels them to the helm of research teams and organizations, to positions of first authorship and professional visibility. Evident in such examples is the superiority ascribed to supposedly masculine aptitudes. Men appear as ‘normal’ protagonists of scholarly life, naturally outfitted for the most central, valued intellectual activity, whereas women seem ‘different’ and ‘other’, well-matched to supporting roles.

Recognizing this point, gender differences came increasingly to be regarded as cultural-sociological (shaped by communal patterns, such as educational socialization) and political (tied up with power, as in higher educational hierarchies marked by male authorities and female handmaidens, or dynamics of male assertion and female deference in intellectual discussion). Anticipating later developments, it is worth noting that cultural-sociological accounts hinged on classic
dualisms such as individual–collective and agency–structure. Political analyses, meanwhile, stressed the cumulative effects of personal bias (i.e., sexist attitudes) on organizational behavior and structure. Consistent with these emphases was a growing interest in recovering the experiences and contributions of women who managed to overcome such formidable barriers, cross gender boundaries, and take part in male-dominated fields.

Overall, the first framework prioritized gendered individuals, regarding ‘one’s gender’ and related capacities to be established outside of and prior to participation in the occupations and organizations of scholarship. In short, gender difference becomes manifest in institutions of higher education, but it is not made there. This view thus subscribed to a tacit metaphor of contamination, wherein gender identities and prejudices ‘leak’ into intellectual work, smuggled by individual carriers. For our purposes, this perspective holds that people are gendered—not knowledge production itself—and women especially so. The early focus on gendered individuals enjoys a persistent legacy and, as noted earlier, has been particularly influential in the study of communication history.

**Gendered Work: Spotlight on Structure**

Scholars committed to social and, increasingly, relational ontologies of gender caught a different train in the 1990s. The term ‘relational’ is meant to intensify the claim to gender’s social character, past recognition that one’s gender is shaped by societal constructions, historical and political—past gender as identity politics, in other words—and toward the view that gender is not about individuals at all. The gender binary articulates relations of difference and inequality, wherein ‘men’ and ‘masculinity’ cease to be, much less to be superior, without their essential Other. Likewise, ‘women’ and ‘femininity’ rest on their status as secondary to the first (male) sex, which enjoys the luxury of appearing sexless—of becoming normal, universal humans—against the foil of its oversexed, dependent (female) opposite. It is thus the relation of gender, in all its stunning variety, that requires explanation and intervention. Playing on the title of a famous feminist treatise, we might say that a relational view of gender investigates “this sex which is not one” (Irigiray, 1985).

Whereas the first framework treats the gender division and hierarchy of labor as the result of individual difference and accumulated bias, a relational approach posits the reverse. Namely, difference and bias are effects of, rather than explanations for, women’s concentration in lowly work roles. Put simply, organizations produce gender difference and inequality when they wield gender as a structuring principle—as the primary basis for separating, assigning, valuing, and controlling labor—which they do as a matter of course (Acker and Van Houten, 1974; Kanter, 1975).

As the reigning Western model of organization, bureaucracy became a particular target. Some argued that gender relations, a specific way to configure dominance
and subordination, furnish the underlying metaphor for bureaucratic relations (Ferguson, 1984). Applied to scholarly work, we might observe how research assistants, graduate students, or junior faculty ingratiate themselves to senior scholars, how acclaimed professors in turn ‘court’ publishers and funders, and so on. From this view, the bureaucratic university binds us all in a relational system whereby virility—intellectual and otherwise—is made and maintained through feminized deference. Bureaucracy can thus be said to institutionalize male domination.

Insisting that such critique does not go far enough, others argued that gender is not mere metaphor for bureaucratic relations; rather, bureaucracy as an ideal type is fundamentally organized around and upon gender (Acker, 1990). Bureaucracy’s strict divide of public and private, for example, foregrounds a public world ruled by rationality, objectivity, standardization, and impersonality. Yet because public and private spheres are linked in a thoroughly gendered relation, this seemingly neutral public world is actually founded on suspicion, and thus, exclusion and control, of women and all that is associated with them—forms of emotionality mythically aligned with femininity, female bodies and feminized sexualities, reproductive labors and domestic responsibilities, and the list goes on.

Another premise derived from the gender binary is the bureaucratic division and hierarchy of work (e.g., the determination that interactive and analytical tasks are separate, and that the latter are more complex and valuable than the former). Yet this gendered inequality too is eclipsed as jobs are routinely disembodied—divorced from the sexed persons who actually fill them and abstracted into seemingly neutral textual relations among ‘positions’ (e.g., job descriptions and classifications, chains of command and reporting), which in turn become warrants for differential worth, working conditions, and career movement. In these and other ways, bureaucratic organizations are built around an ideal worker who is, in social fact, a man, or someone who can masquerade as such (Acker, 1990).

Traditional academe, which casts the production of knowledge as a rational, objective mental enterprise, exemplifies the point. In this world, rigorous adherence to standardized protocol is said to stave off the compromising intrusions of feelings, desires, intuitions, and bodies. Whiffs and contours of sexuality belong strictly ‘under wraps’, for they diminish serious intellectual work. Tenure clocks presume a continuous, linear career progression, such that time away for reproduction or other domestic demands presents a ‘special’ (i.e., unusual and difficult) case. Theorizing—that most lofty and potent of intellectual labors—is an impersonal, disembodied, and therefore ‘pure’ task, whereas cultivating and curating empirical material is ‘dirty’ or ‘messy’ by comparison, requiring ‘lower’ analytical and, often, interactive skills. Within the empirical arena, quantitative methods fare better for their ‘hardness’; qualitative methods go ‘soft’. Disciplines too are configured around a gendered hard-soft binary, their complexity and value arranged accordingly. As many of us know all too well, communication fields suffer in such rankings, although even within the most emasculated disciplines, the gender
relation affords opportunities for reviving virility through the feminization of 'others'.

As the illustration mushrooms, it becomes difficult to deny that the world of intellectual production is premised on the gender relation and, particularly, on a reverence for masculinity. To bring the parallel full circle, we can conclude that the ideal intellectual is, in social fact, a man, or one who can emulate masculine privilege.

Let us put a finer point on the contrast between the first and second frameworks, ‘gendered people’ (i.e., women) versus ‘gendered work’ (i.e., organizational structure). The latter shatters the very premise of the former: namely, that individual gender differences are mostly settled prior to entering work organizations; that they manifest but are not made there. Once off the hook as a neutral, passive container into which people tote ‘their’ gender, organizations now come under critical fire. Gender is the pivotal structuring relation of organizations, and focus shifts from biased individuals to biased institutions like bureaucracy, which manufacture gendered people and prejudice.

It was Acker’s (1990) influential essay on “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies” that synthesized these insights into a comprehensive theory of gendered organization. In her words, “To say that an organization . . . is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (146). Put simply, gender is a constitutive principle of organizational life, from design forward, before people ever enter the door (a point that, as we sketched earlier, Jansen [1993] applied to the academic field of communication). Gender is not just a metaphor, not a parallel, ancillary, or sub-structure, not an imported, peripheral phenomenon. As illustrated in our preceding analysis of conventional academe, the gender relation structures organizational life through and through, encoded in its DNA, so to speak. We are thus ‘set up’ for gender inequality: entangled in the webs of gendered work, people can scarcely do otherwise.

Gender is not only constitutive of organizations; it is also the core relation through which their tasks are structured, as demonstrated by affiliated research on gendered occupations. Constructing gender divisions—of tasks, behaviors befitting them, logical groupings thereof, and locations associated with their performance—is one crucial way that organizations become saturated with the gender relation (Acker, 1990). Occupational segregation, or the concentration of certain bodies in certain lines of work, includes both those who actually do work (demographic trends) and its symbolic gender coding (‘sex-typing’ of tasks). In other words, occupational segregation involves the nominal and physical, as well as discursive and ideational, division and hierarchy of labor (Britton, 2000).

Work is configured, in short, around associated bodies—actual, typical, and figurative practitioners; and the interdependence among those bodies is critical to the relational view of gender operating here (Ashcraft, 2013). Intellectual
work, for example, is riddled with all manner of familiar gendered pairings, literal and symbolic—relations of mentoring, co-authoring, supporting, and bonding, for example, shot through with symbiotic gender roles that are parental, marital, homosocial, and heterosexual at heart (Pringle, 1989).

That occupations are fashioned out of the gender relation is especially patent in the professions. Their disembodied yet deeply masculinist potency depends on a feminized Other (non- or semi-professional) who simultaneously performs their abject, adjunct labor and embodies the lowly foil against which they appear elite (Davies, 1996)—faculty expertise made elite against staff, professors delivering knowledge free from the interactive grunt work performed by teaching assistants, theorists and researchers exalted on the backs of graduate students and research assistants, empirical researchers elevated against transcribers. Here again, we see how gendered work creates and explains gender difference, not the other way around.

To be clear, it is not only that gender relations serve up the primary means for structuring scholarly tasks. The very quality (i.e., the ‘nature’, conditions, and worth) of academic jobs is thoroughly constituted in the process. The concept of gendered occupations and professions indicates that privilege and discrimination are directed toward jobs themselves, not only people, and deeply embedded within occupational systems, such that making faculty jobs or theory labor more gender-inclusive likely erodes the status and conditions of the work itself (for more on this logic and the supporting evidence, see Ashcraft, 2013).

In sum, the gendered work perspective initiates a relational approach to gender and work—an important and radical turn that redirects attention from individuals (e.g., forgotten women scholars) and the gender differences they ‘carry’ (e.g., ‘women’s ways’ of knowing) toward webs and patterns of relation (e.g., academia as gendered organization, knowledge production as gendered occupation). As it emphasizes organization structure (i.e., gendered work—established systems of relation), however, the second framework builds an ossified relational view. It accentuates the ‘solid’ rather than ‘liquid’ side of relations, such as the division of public and private spheres, bureaucracy, and occupational configurations (e.g., within universities but also in ‘outside’ research consortiums as well as disciplinary and professional associations). In so doing, the second framework preserves the individual-collective and agency-structure dualisms at play in the first but swings toward the opposite poles. A third framework aims for the middle ground of practice.

**Gendering Work: The Practice Turn**

Sharing the central premise of gendered work theory—namely, that gender is a constitutive principle of work—the third approach takes a less (and often post-) structuralist spin. Hailing from diverse and often dueling theoretical positions, this framework stresses the process or activity of gendering. Research in this vein
treats gender, work, and organization as entangled verbs—ongoing and interwoven accomplishments achieved, sustained, and transformed in everyday practice. This framework is relational too but in a pliable sense, less about solid structures of interdependence and more about fluid relational enactments that flow and ripple through systems over time.

Initial formulations of gendered work actually invited this lively spin. Davies (1996), for example, described professions as an active and ongoing gender relation; and Acker (1990) posited five gendering processes and focused on one—“creating and conceptualizing social structures” (p. 147)—with particular promise for exploring the history of field-making. Despite such fluid beginnings, the ‘gendered work’ perspective developed a habit of congealing process (“creating and conceptualizing”) into outcome (“social structures”). In the case of scholarly work, for instance, the second framework is more likely to focus on the Matilda effect (i.e., the systematic suppression of women’s contributions to science) than to follow the situated authorial, editorial, and citational practices that breed or buck the trend. Such practices are precisely the interest of the third framework—hence, our distinction between gendered and gendering work.

Calls for a process lens came in varied degrees of strength. The popular doing gender/difference model, (e.g., Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987) for example, emphasized how people actively negotiate expectations for gendered work relations through mundane interaction in specific organizational and occupational situations. This approach asks the analyst to keep one eye scanning for gender improvisation and innovation while the other tracks predictable performances. Close attention to the experience and management of gender accountabilities in context cultivated two key insights for our purposes: (a) the sheer multiplicity of masculinities and femininities at work, such that scenes of intellectual virility vary and bear little resemblance to those of machinist virility; and (b) the pivotal role of other, entangling relations of difference—especially race, class, and sexuality—in shaping these variations. Claims about the gendering of knowledge production, then, must be sensitive to contextual contours (e.g., specified cases of communication history) and to the particular, intertwining forms of difference alive in situated practice.

Stronger process claims are found in performativity models, which offer a fuller theory of practice and its complex, evolving web of discourse, materiality, and agency. Most famously articulated by Butler (1999), the notion of gender performativity augments dramaturgical performance with performative speech acts that activate the very ‘essences’ they are thought merely to express. This model explains the fluidity and durability of gender relations with the concept of historicity, by which is meant not merely repetitive performances over time that can transgress and morph, but also iterative insistence that these recitals, however variable, are not performance at all but, rather, ‘the real thing’ with secure origins and a long past.

It is here that sensitivity to gender-work history explicitly entered the scene. Research on the evolution of varied professional masculinities in situated historical
moments (e.g., Witz, 1992) provides an especially helpful guide to understanding the rise and professionalization of communication ‘expertise’ as a gendering process.

Other notable performativity models came about in post-structuralist response to the abstractions of gendered organization theory. Rejecting static, bloated accounts of structure and shying away from the term itself, scholars spoke instead of ‘organizational forms’ as evolving local relations whose continuity or break with some grand, historical ‘original’ (e.g., bureaucracy) could only be established and negotiated through enactment. An increasingly malleable vocabulary of practice formations (rather than structure) followed: among them, gender “discourse communities,” gender “scripts” and “rationalities,” and organization as “gendered communication act” (Ashcraft, 2006; Maguire & Mohtar, 1994; Mills & Chiaramonte, 1991; Mumby, 1996). These models of gendering-organizing are deeply communicative, in that discursive practice becomes the site and surface of excitement, where formations pulse and mutate in the flows of activity that bring them into being.

With this liquid conception of relationality, performativity thus shatters the pervasive ‘container’ view of context, sparking new temporal and spatial sensibilities—namely, awareness of (a) local nuance as the remainder of complex historical trajectories and (b) manifold sites of gendering practice. Gendering work occurs not only in ‘classic’ organizational settings (i.e., physical sites where work is carried out, or formal labor and professional associations), but also in arenas such as family, education, public discourse, and popular culture, to name a few. The guiding question for us becomes where and how particular genderings of the field unfurled, revealing historical networks of practice that defy the conventional blinders and boundaries of work and organizational analysis.

From discussion of performativity emerges a final contribution of the third framework, also pivotal for our purposes. Particularly in its stronger forms, the practice turn is not a dive from the high tower of structure to the low ground of activity, leaving intact some grand, imposing edifice looming over the chaos below. Instead, we see reformulations of structure as nothing but relational practice. In sum, ‘gendering work’ erodes the viability of structuralist accounts and, with performativity, abandons structure altogether in favor of the ‘flatland’ view that shifting ground is all there is. As we build our own overarching model next, we contend with this and related vital challenges posed by the third framework.

Across the Three Frameworks: Gendered People, Structure, and Practice

Each framework described thus far offers a useful lens through which to regard gender and work in the context of the history of communication study. As it highlights individuals, ‘gender in and at work’ points to the roles of women in field-making and suggests that we re-read already celebrated men as men, gendered
rather than generic human actors. Underscoring structure, ‘gendered work’ denies the autonomous agency of individuals, directing us to institutional constraints that bind these characters in relation, generating—not merely housing—their relative intellectual contributions and (in)visibility. As it emphasizes practice, ‘gendering work’ shows how seemingly obdurate institutional configurations are made in the ongoing, multi-sited activity of scholarly labor.

The frameworks can also be read progressively, such that each contends with the former’s conceptual hang-ups. Responding to the first framework’s superficially social and political account of persons, the second exposed the web of relations that en/genders their ostensible individuality, and from which ‘one’ cannot easily disentangle. The third framework closely inspected this web of relations and declared that ‘it’ does not hover in the nebulous ether like some ghostly cage that entraps daily movement. Rather, so-called structure ‘exists’ only as invoked and remade in practice. The relational view of gender was thus relocated, from abstract labyrinth to myriad concrete and buzzing sites of dynamic human activity. In this way, the practice turn leveled the bottom-up versus top-down debate in which the first two frameworks were locked, clutching their respective poles of dualisms such as individual-society and agency-structure. We mean ‘leveled’ in both senses of the term: The third framework demolished brittle dualisms toward a flattened ontology of the social, most evident in conceptions of performativity.

In this progressive spirit, we now engage the three frameworks with present provocations in social theory, toward a comprehensive heuristic that integrates them while reformulating each accordingly.

Inhabiting Communication History: Figures, Formations, and Flows

Two especially haunting dualisms and associated challenges guide our theoretical efforts: (a) the split of ‘social’ (especially ‘discourse’) from ‘material’ as well as the reversal of their traditional relationship in the wake of the linguistic turn (i.e., the troublesome belittling of matter in the worthy effort to valorize discourse), and (b) the split of ‘human’ from ‘non-human’ and the accompanying assumption that the former has a corner on agency.

Recent moves to transcend these dualisms extend claims of relationality beyond a human social, into realms once cordoned off as non-human materiality. Barad’s (2003) appreciative critique, as one example, argues that performativity fruitfully upends yet also subtly perpetuates stale dualisms. For instance, performativity claims that discursive practice is material but does so by granting the former constitutive force at the expense of the latter: “materiality itself is always already figured within a linguistic domain as its condition of possibility” (Barad, 2003, 801), ensuring an “implicit reinscription of matter’s passivity” (809). Matter’s strength is further sapped as performativity tends to preserve the category ‘human’ as the curator of agency, even as the concept also powerfully decenters
the humanist subject—that coherent individual who moves as a free agent in the first framework but gets stuck in structure by the second—as an ongoing relational production. Barad therefore invites new models that avow the indivisibility of social and material, human and non-human, which after all, is “what it means to matter” (Barad, 2003, 824, emphasis in original).

Post-humanist models are thus needed to address the inevitable interpenetration of discursive activity and material agencies. This is (an) especially pressing ‘matter’ for explorations of gender and work, which invariably encounter bodies of all kinds (e.g., corporeal bodies, bodies of knowledge, bodies of texts), technologies and other tangible objects and tools, economies, and more (Ashcraft & Harris, 2014). We cannot conclusively untie the symbolic and material threads of such hybrid formations; rather, meaning and agency flow from their ever-blooming fusion. Such thinking circulates in abundance under the signs of ‘new materialism’, ‘post-humanism’, and ‘non-representational theory’.

The framework we propose is particularly indebted to theories of assemblage and affect (e.g., DeLanda, 2006; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), on which we draw to rework earlier emphasis on individual, structure, or practice into a new analytical vocabulary conducive to confronting the challenges outlined here. We argue, and subsequently demonstrate, that illuminating gender–work histories can be articulated in three refractions—figures, formations, and flows—that together constitute a post-humanist feminist practice of inhabiting the history of the field.

**Figures**

We propose this guiding term to facilitate addressing people in a manner consistent with ongoing efforts to problematize ‘the individual’. Think first of the verb: to ‘figure’ in something is to be marked as playing a significant part, a relevant character. Likewise, we refer here to historical bodies of a particular kind: corporeal, with sensing and sense-making capacities, demarcated by apparent boundaries linguistically distilled into clear referents (“Paul Lazarsfeld”), which (“who”) become lightning rods, magnets, vessels of a sort, in a given scene, nodes or contact points around and through which trajectories come to dwell and pass, which affect those bodies such that they evolve as the effect of said trajectories, possessed by them as much acting amid and upon them. In sum, we call for treating ‘key individuals’ as inhabitants rather than agents of history—specifically, as concrete, gendered bodies dwelling in formations of the historical moment (cf. Simonson, 2010).

**Formations**

Drawing on reformulations of structure recounted above, we refer here to relations that may be evanescent and/or enduring but only live (on) if and as they are variously inhabited (e.g., in action, imagination, memory, object, sign, built environment). Moving beyond the notion of people co-constructing social
realities, beyond inter/subjective worlds, we invoke here the notion of assemblages: matter-rich, meaning-full gatherings or accumulations of fragments—‘human’ and ‘non-human’, ‘discursive’ and ‘material’—that form hybrid agencies on the move, roaming over space and time but never appearing exactly the same, trajectories with discernible tendencies that can morph or break off, colliding with other assemblages and transforming for their contact, though in ways that always remain to be seen—or, more aptly, inhabited. In our inhabiting metaphor, formations are the historical habitats in which inhabitants dwell, the habits that routinely possess them.

For explorations of gender-work history, our reading of relevant literature suggests three initial strands of formation as sensitizing concepts, though these are by no means exhaustive: A first is (a) organization, or relations of coordination and control developed to enable and enhance concentrated pursuit of a common purpose (e.g., research teams, systems of rank and influence, divisions between and among staff and faculty, productivity measures and rewards) as well as to establish recognizable collective presence and participation in a field (to create a collective figure—e.g., Columbia University’s Bureau of Applied Social Research). A second formation of concern is (b) occupation, or relations pertaining to the division, configuration, and performance of tasks, as well as the development and recognition of area expertise (e.g., theoretical versus empirical labor, degree qualification systems, creating textual products, authorship and citation practices). A third likely relevant formation is (c) market, loosely defined as relations of competition and exchange, economies that establish and regulate value on a number of fronts (e.g., funding and labor resources, claims of scholarly identity and jurisdiction, the ‘marketplace of ideas’ in which philosophical, theoretical, and methodological claims circulate). On the lookout for additional relevant assemblages, a useful probe can be: On what other relations does this apparent formation and/or its transformation depend? Technology, field, and geopolitical relations come to mind, among other potential candidates.

**Flows**

If formations are habitats and habits, flows are the particular, fleeting inhabitations that constantly animate them. With the notion of flow, we seek to expand the vocabulary of the practice turn in gendered organization theory, which tends to stress constant motion or steady streams of activity, with a more nuanced and evocative vocabulary of movement drawn from affect theory. An affective notion of flow specifies how elusive yet nonetheless palpable energies and sensations arrive on the scene, in pulses and surges, sudden waves and dissipations of intensity, coming and going, rubbing together and bumping up against one another in abrupt or slow-motion moments of contact (Stewart, 2007). Put plainly, flow is how assemblages travel, entwine, collide, and mutate; it is the felt or lived quality of their movement. Flow is transpersonal; it is felt in and by corporeal bodies yet always exceeds them, filling and exiting rooms, coming to rest in artifacts and encounters therewith, leaving behind some residue that ignites another flow or goes entirely neglected.
In an affective language of flow, the relation of gender becomes a ‘possession’ in a strikingly different way: namely, an inhabitation, not a personal property. Far from the customary meaning of gender as individual trait (“I have a gender”), this form of possession is a transpersonal current (“we, this moment, that encounter, are possessed by gender”). We find the dramatic metaphor of possession especially apt for explorations of discursive-material agency. It calls out the fleshy sweat and writhing—the embodied and sometimes agonizing, shameful flailing—induced by the flow of formations. It invites us to trace how agency eludes grasp and control, how it becomes “caught up in things” (Stewart, 2007, 86). It directs us to the libidinal flows vital to yet denied by the practice of intellectual work. Such manifold relations of play, passion, aching, eros, joy, bonding, and intimacy often congregate not only with formations of gender, but also with sexuality, homosociality, and race-ethnicity, to name a few.

**The Three F’s**

As the last point suggests, our model draws explicitly on the third framework’s insight regarding the vast multiplicity and fluidity of genderings, as gender inevitably entangles with other relations of difference—a concept shorthanded as “intersectionality” in many feminist, race, and queer studies. Simultaneously, we retain the second framework’s premise that gender is a constitutive relation of work, recasting this premise as a generative pathway into histories of the field. In short, we argue that the gender relation is an integral, animating force that never works alone but, rather, consorts with other formations and flows of difference, “traveling in packs,” so to speak.

Far from discrete or mutually exclusive lenses, we intend the “three F’s” to open into one another; that is, we see them in relation—as “intra-dependent” particles (i.e., produced as evident entities only by their relation) or “agential cuts” that carve out heterogeneous, distributed agencies in ontologically and politically useful ways (Barad, 2003). Our framework, then, is not meant to generate either social or intellectual histories of the field—focused on human relations or ideations, respectively—but, rather, to yield hybrid histories that enmesh and animate human and non-human, matter and symbol. It is in this sense that we call for inhabited history or, more precisely, for a feminist analytical practice of inhabiting history. We conclude by trying our hand at that practice.

**Inhabiting a Field in the U.S., 1930s–1950s**

In the spring of 1945, Ruby Taylor typed. As a secretary employed by Columbia University, this was part of her job. She was working for Robert K. Merton, a 34-year-old sociologist whose youthful handsomeness, charm, and prodigious intellect made him attractive to at least some of the women and men who came into contact with him. Taylor typed yet another set of revisions to a manuscript.
Merton had given her, *Swayed by Smith*. Based on a study conducted by Columbia's newly renamed Bureau of Applied Social Research (until 1944, the Office of Radio Research, hereafter abridged as “the Bureau”), the manuscript analyzed the all-day radio war bond drive conducted by the entertainer and popular icon Kate Smith, whose patriotism, down-home sincerity, and working-class style were performed through a fat body that was a basic part of her public image. Besides Taylor and Merton, at least nine others played material roles in generating or analyzing the data upon which the study was based, eight of them women. Joan Doris (later Goldhamer) and others conducted long, in-depth interviews with listeners of the broadcast. Most of these audience members were women and, many, fans of Smith, whose daytime talk and advice show was a particular favorite among working class housewives. Funded in part by the research department of CBS Radio—whose chief, Frank Stanton, was a longtime friend of Bureau director, Paul Lazarsfeld—the manuscript would eventually be published in 1946 as *Mass Persuasion* in a series Lazarsfeld edited by Harper and Row (Simonson, 2010, 150–54). Taylor’s 1945 typing was a quotidian event that in retrospect can be seen as a wormhole into the figures, formations, and flows which at that very moment were constituting the academic field of communication research.

Ten years later, the habitation and habits that yielded *Mass Persuasion* had largely dissolved, supplanted by a differently masculinized formation—an aspiring professionalized social scientific discipline, centered within bureaucratic research universities, and organized around a behavioristic paradigm seeking generalizable, positivist knowledge through quantitative rigor. But the period before 1950 was another story. Institutionalization of the field had barely begun; paradigms were unsettled, qualitative inquiry had a non-trivial place; women played prominent roles in the production of knowledge; and communication research was possessed by gender in a radically different way. Radiating outward from the material image of Taylor, typewriter, and text in 1945, we follow some of the figures, formations, and flows that constituted the gendered work of communication research in a historical moment that was both fertile with possibility and not fully consummated.

Secretaries like Taylor were among the invisible figures in plain view whose labor has largely been erased from histories of the field—though some of the work they performed was organizationally, materially, and emotionally critical to the production of knowledge, professional identities, and institutions. Consider Rose Kohn Goldsen, who went on to become the first female sociologist at Cornell University. In 1934, Lazarsfeld hired her at what was then the Research Center at the University of Newark, an early predecessor of the Bureau. More than two decades later, she vividly remembered, against the backdrop of “turquoise walls with orange dragons crawling up them,” the “faces and studies” that we now see established one of the primary beachheads for a new field devoted to media research. Among them was “Alberta Curtis, who edited every manuscript that ever came out of the office, and Jeannette Green, who made her first intensive interviews with her babies in her arms” (Goldsen, 1957, 2). “I, with the
help of Eunice Cooper, typed (not so well, but fast), took dictation, made coffee, washed dishes, handled the switchboard, swept the floor in Leo Lowenthal’s office, made appointments for Paul and broke them, ran tables, percentaged them, and reminded the staff when they needed haircuts” (3). She found herself deeply stimulated by Lazarsfeld and “Teddie Adorno, who also found his way into and out of the Bureau” (3). The work pace was frenetic, taking shape amidst anxieties and laughter “in an atmosphere of intense emotional involvement, at a time when we were all young . . . full of energy . . . full of confidence . . . full of optimism . . . and—if I may say so—full of love” (4; ellipses in original). “Nights and weekends Paul and I spent together—he dictating and me typing and retyping the manuscripts” (3), she feeling variably crushed, exhilarated, and lucky to have the opportunity “to observe how a creative thinker thinks . . . a man who was asking questions that no one had asked before” (3). Goldsen went on to earn her doctorate, counting Lazarsfeld as her biggest influence, and among other achievements publishing a well-received book on television culture.

Goldsen’s recollections give a sense of both the unseen labor that helped build the field and the affective intensities that flowed through the Bureau. The embodied figure at its core was Lazarsfeld, the Viennese immigrant whose accent, physiognomy, and family lineage marked him as a Jewish Outsider to the fascists who came to power in Austria and the white Protestants who dominated the universities and power structure in America. In Vienna and New York, he inhabited distinctive micro-environments of gender practice, absorbing, refracting, and performing a masculinity that seems to have been at once proto-feminist and womanizing. From his earliest years, he lived his life among smart, highly educated women. His mother, Sofie Lazarsfeld, was a women’s rights advocate, trained psychoanalyst, and sex-advice author. He had three marriages to brilliant women who earned PhD’s—Marie Jahoda, Herta Herzog, and Patricia Kendall—and is said to have had affairs with a number of others. And from 1934 to 1949, he hired more than 50 more women at the Bureau and its predecessors, whose complex enactments of gender and work powered the socio-material production of one influential strand of the mainstream of media research (on which, see Rowland & Simonson, 2013)

In the 1930s and ’40s, these women conducted scores of studies that traversed marketing, propaganda, and media research. Often their studies targeted female audiences, whose consumer and media behavior was of value to funders like MacFadden Publications. The latter’s popular lowbrow women’s magazine, *True Story*, drove the large research study that eventually ushered in the defining text of the so-called limited effects paradigm, *Personal Influence* (see Morrison, 2006; Douglas, 2006). Members of these female audiences became the subjects of survey questions and in-depth focused interviews, generally conducted by women of the Bureau, who probed experiences, opinions, and behaviors related to what were just then becoming known as “the media of mass communication”. As the trade journal *Printer’s Ink* had written in 1929, “the proper study of mankind is man . . . but the
FIGURE 2.1 Rose Kohn Goldsen
proper study of markets is women” (quoted in Glickman, 2006, p. 211). Hailed by magazines like True Story and entertainers like Kate Smith among many other cultural forms, femininity of the era was performed partly through affectively saturated practices of reading, gazing upon, and listening to popular media. This gendered ‘labor of leisure’, or consuming work—commercialized through a media-advertising nexus that bought and sold their collective attention and purchasing power—helped constitute the early field of study. Indeed, Mass Persuasion, Personal Influence, and numerous other Columbia studies were all built upon it.

Though finances were chaotic, the Bureau engaged in organized social research, configured in hierarchically defined teams whose gendered divisions of labor were part of broader market patterns. Theory was generally the prerogative of the highest-status men in the group, Lazarsfeld and Merton, whose names bore the bulk of Columbia publications that entered the canon or are remembered today. Herzog was the highest-status woman, operating as Associate Director in charge of marketing research—a crucial position for an organization that depended upon commercial funds but also one with lower status than scholarly research. Dozens of other women worked in jobs beneath the upper tier. Some authored empirical research, often based on studies of women, children, or lower status genres like soap operas, comics, or mail from ordinary people. Many more served as research associates tasked with interviewing, coding, or training people to administer surveys door-to-door for larger studies. Others worked as secretaries. Some enabled the flow of knowledge by cleaning the office space. In short, gender was relationally performed through occupations coded masculine and feminine. These embodied associations were tied to markets that systematically devalued both tasks aligned with femininity and women workers, who were also more available than men during the war years—trajectories that collide into partial accounting for the large numbers of women employed by the Bureau. Within intellectual markets, communication research was a marginal, low-status field in the academy, reflecting among other things the evolving gender coding of and relations among disciplines—for example, communication as a “soft” (hardly) science treading in the realm of emotions, relations, and the popular. In an American higher-education system that was overwhelmingly white, male, and Protestant, communication research in the 1940s was disproportionately staffed by Jews (Peters, 2006) and women, groups in less demand in other lines of intellectual work.

Flows of homosociality and heterosexuality animated the figures that inhabited such gendered habitats and habits. Among the men, Lazarsfeld’s relationship with Merton stands out as pivotal, worked out through hours of weekly interaction that famously began with an aborted dinner party in November, 1941, when the two new colleagues left their wives behind to run an emergency audience test of a government-sponsored morale program at CBS studios (Hunt, 1961). Afterwards, over champagne and caviar at the Russian Bear, Lazarsfeld wooed an ambivalent Merton to pair with him at the Bureau. It was the latest in a series of important friendships Merton cultivated with slightly older men, and it formed the key
interpersonal axis around which post-war Columbia sociology would be built. In January, 1945, they recruited C. Wright Mills to join forces, seducing him over seven hours that included a lavish meal at an expensive restaurant and “several handsome young women from Smith and Vassar (invited to the table by Lazarsfeld to seduce Mills into joining the team)” (Summers, 2006, 29).

All three men had affairs with Bureau associates or graduate students, an apparent relational entitlement underwriting their gendered professional roles. In Mills’ case, an affair with the supremely talented Hazel Gaudet Erskine, eight years his senior, proved integral to his intellectual development. He later reflected back on his “very sharp images of . . . lacquer on the hair and thousands of bobby pins and the smell of well-kept office at noon; the quick noon-time and the night-times,” concluding that “14th Street in the middle-forties produced White Collar, along with so many other things, and the way you live sets a sort of pace of how and what you write” (Mills to Erskine, September 1951, in Mills, 2000, 156–157).

Flows of homosociality also teemed among the women populating the Bureau assemblage, though the historical archive runs thin on this point (a fact that indexes the gendering of historical memory). Some sense of it emanates from Rose Kohn Goldsen’s earlier reminiscence of worker relations, as well as from oral history interviews by women who fondly remember friendships that persisted for decades. But the practice of qualitative interviewing enacted in the Kate Smith study and other signature pieces of research merits particular notice. Joan Doris Goldhamer, for instance, vividly recalled interviewing women in their homes, where they opened up with deep feelings for Smith, the stories she told during the radio marathon, and their sons fighting overseas (McCormack, 2008). Skillful at fostering ease among women, interviewers like Goldhamer nurtured (literally) the conditions for telling stories that appeared in truncated form in Mass Persuasion. Among many, one woman recalled being deeply moved by Smith telling the “story of a young fellow . . . that didn’t have any legs or arms and was happy and wanted no sympathy and that we should buy bonds in his name and save some other boy from such a thing. It touched very deeply. Not only what she said. But my son’s in the service for three years . . . It got me so. I ran from the phone right over to his picture and started to cry. And I said, ‘Sonny, if this will save one hair on your head, I thank God, and I thank God that I live in the United States’” (Merton, Fiske, and Curtis [1946] 2004, 127, emphasis in original).

Such encounters suggest not only how tendrils of affect wove connections among war, nation, family, gender, class, celebrity, radio, and research, but also how these pulses and streams of intensity were made possible through the labor of women facilitating ephemeral bonds between women. Evident too is how this ostensibly gendered relational aptitude was strategically summoned in the service of knowledge production and, ultimately, appropriated largely for the gain of male theorists. Pioneered by Herta Herzog (see Klaus and Seethaler, this volume), in-depth, focused interviewing was a practice whose emphasis on social listening leaned toward femininity, forging an occupational pathway for many of the
women employed by the Bureau. Later, however, Lazarsfeld would ask Merton to take the lead on codifying the method, a homosocial work practice cultivating a Matilda Effect, whereby Herzog never received credit for her instrumental labor.

By the mid-1950s, spaces for women in communication research contracted considerably, in tandem with a masculinization-professionalization of the field that dominated into the 1970s (and after). The gendered labor market changed drastically. Beyond secretarial occupations, the market for women in academic communication research became severely limited as men returned from the war, entered universities on the G.I. Bill, and received preferential treatment in heterosexual formations that hailed them as primary breadwinners. A loose interdisciplinary field sought to become a ‘serious’ social scientific discipline through male-dominated networks and masculinized paradigms and methodologies. A ‘hard’ behavioral paradigm based on quantitative, experimental methodologies and exemplified in media effects research drove ‘softer’ alternatives to the margin. The kind of cultural, interpretive, and qualitative methodologies embodied in the Smith project all but vanished, only to resurface in the 1970s and ‘80s, (not) incidentally as women began entering the field anew.

In Brief Conclusion

Such iterative interruptions of the shifting masculinist figures, formations, and flows that constitute intellectual work create the space for a chapter like this. Our goal has been to show gratitude by inhabiting that space and throwing open the door for more to join. To that end, we have stood on the shoulders of feminist scholars of organization and work, peered into post-humanist theories of assemblage and affect, and suggested a new framework for understanding the gendered history of communication study. It emphasizes dynamic fluidities and relations within fields constituted through their ongoing performance and opens toward something that cuts across social, institutional, intellectual, and material history. Our illustration has been brief, but we hope it might cue further efforts to understand the gendered work of communication study across eras and elsewhere in the world.

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