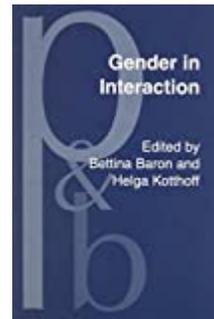




Bettina Baron, Helga Kotthoff, eds. *Gender in Interaction: Perspectives on Femininity and Masculinity in Ethnography and Discourse.* Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001. xxiv + 352 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58811-110-4.



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Speaking Gender, Doing Gender

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I want to begin my review with the following idea: more than twenty years ago, Cheris Kramarae said that too many studies had been conducted in a “theoretical vacuum,” whereas in the preface of the book under review, editors Bettina Baron and Helga Kotthoff “think that current gender studies suffer from a decoupling of theory formation and empirical grounding” (p. xii).[1] Truly enough, language and gender research has suffered both from insufficient contextualization, and from strong Anglo-American bias. The editors and authors of the book have done their best to eliminate the said drawbacks. First, the authors of the articles come from various academic backgrounds and their contributions discuss empirical materials from a wide variety of cultures. Second, all papers share the perspective on gender as interacting with other social categories and with cultural, situative and institutional contexts. The book has three sections, perspectives on childhood and adolescence, on masculinity, and on femininity.

Part One consists of a chapter by Barrie Thorne (“Gender and Interaction: Widening the Conceptual

Scope”). Initially, she reviews a history of research on gender and interaction in the United States. Then, based on the theoretical analyses of different strategies of inquiry, she draws the following conclusion: “The very complexity, and even the instability, of gender as a category of analysis open avenues for broadened understanding” (p. 14). This is highlighted by the following papers included in this volume.

Four contributions (by Jenny Cook-Gumperz, Amy Kyratzis, Spencer E. Cahill, and Gerry Bloustien) address perspectives on gender in childhood and adolescence. Cook-Gumperz in “Girls’ Oppositional Stances: The Interactional Accomplishment of Gender in Nursery School and Family Life” tries to observe a gendered character in the nursery school playground with girls from ages three to five. “Play becomes a site for rehearsal of oppositional stances through which girls can attempt to avoid the pressures of an over-socialized feminine self. It is this self that girls too often led to display in family life” (p. 46).

Kyratzis’ contribution, “Constituting the Emotions: A Longitudinal Study of Emotion Talk in a Preschool Friendship of Boys,” presents and examines transcripts

from play scenes (with same-sex friendship groups in nursery schools) videotaped across the school year. The author shows how children appropriate gender stereotypes from the adult culture; practice, reproduce, and reinvent them; and then actively produce them in their play. Cahill's article, "Notably Gendered Relations: Relationship Work in Early Adolescents' Notes," is based on the analysis of the written notes of thirty-six girls and ten boys from middle and junior high school. These notes are viewed as a significant medium for the construction, negotiation, and dissolution of relationships. Of course, both girls and boys experience a common problem in securing recognition of their maturity, but differences were observed: the female correspondent who wrote the notes "clearly saw themselves as being as much, if not much more, for their girlfriends as for boys" (p. 94).

The last chapter in Part Two is Bloustien's "Far from Sugar and Spice: Teenage Girls, Embodiments and Representation." The material in this paper draws upon the ethnographic study of female adolescence in Adelaide, South Australia. The participants (ten young women deliberately drawn from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds) were offered a small Hi-8 format video camera to use when and where they liked for just over a year. Bloustien introduces the framework of body as project, as an integral part of "self-making." "Their body work involved both aspects of difference and distinction, a vacillation between belonging and distancing, sameness and difference. It involved a constant negotiation of delicate territory wherein their bodies were evaluated, scrutinized and controlled by others as well as by themselves. It was a fundamental aspect of their gendered experience" (p. 126).

Part Three, "Perspectives on Masculinity," includes three chapters (by R.W. Connell; Cornelia Behnke and Michael Meuser; and Ralf Bohnsack, Peter Loos and Aglaja Przyborski). Connell's contribution, "Masculinities and Men's Health," focuses on the theoretical problems of the construction of masculinities, with regard to the field of health as a specific field of social practice. Trying to identify peculiar gender dimensions of "men's health," the author addresses to issues of human practice: of things done, road accidents, drug marketing, occupational health and safety, sport, AIDS prevention, child care, peacemaking.

In "Gender and *Habitus*: Fundamental Securities and Crisis Tendencies among Men" Cornelia Behnke and Michael Meuser apply Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* to gender-related phenomena. They present two types of

men: the first one represents the group enjoying the standards of so called "hegemonic masculinity;" the second includes men who are beyond traditional masculinity, in they have the task of critically examining themselves as men. The authors successfully introduce a notion of "habitual security" to point out the power dimensions of the male *habitus*. In both cases (both types of men) this "habitual security" is seen to play a crucial role in men's social practices.

The last chapter in this part is "male honor," towards an understanding of the construction of gender relations among youths of Turkish origin by Ralf Bohnsack, Peter Loos and Aglaja Przyborski. The study includes analyses of both group discussions, and biographical interviews and participant observation of young men and women of Turkish origin living in Berlin, Germany. It is obvious that German and Turkish cultures are very different, especially with respect to gender. There are not only different but rather contrasting values in these societies (cf. the words of one of the Turkish informants: "German men [1] I German men [1] really have now [...] not virility [in the sense of virility] but [...] the way I see it German men have with regard to women weel are not men to me" [p. 183]). It should be emphasized that the theme of the paper has been chosen very successfully, showing the youths facing "the task of having to reconcile two entirely different modes for the construction of sociality and habitual concordance—one which is based on the transmitted social *habitus* and the other which is based on the personal *habitus*" (p. 202).

Part Three, "Perspectives on Femininity," consists of the chapters by Baron, Britt-louise Gunnarsson, Kotthoff, and Rachel Giora. Based on the German and Swedish empirical materials, the first two contributions ("Arguing among Scholars: Female Scientists and Their Shaping of Expertise" by Baron, and "Academic Women in the Male University Field: Communicative Practices at Postgraduate Seminars" by Gunnarsson) highlight that the European university is cemented on an age-long male academic tradition. Despite the fact that women in universities are no longer a minority (in a quantitative point of view), they still seem to be a qualitative minority. Historical factors are still valid. The women included in the analyzed data typically adopt a style of self-explication, strongly contrasting with the men's speaking style, which is described by Baron as having a "lecture format" (p. 217).

Kotthoff's contribution, "Gender, Emotion, and Poeticity in Georgian Mourning Rituals," deals with mourn-

ing rituals (viz. lamentations: “xmit nat’irlebi” meaning “crying loudly with one’s voice”) in the eastern highland part of Georgia (Sakartvelo). The emphasis falls on the relationship between gender, emotion, and culture. It is noteworthy that modern linguistics has paid little, if any, attention to the problem of the language and communication of emotions. While men play the most important part in ending the mourning phase, women are the sole performers of bewailing; thus, there is a certain gendered division of labor. Kotthoff’s ethnomethodologic approach is rather effective, leading to many valuable findings. The author has shown that “doing gender” in the case of mourning rituals is multi-dimensional. “Understanding a culture depends on using all the data which the natives expose of” (p. 311).

The last chapter Rachel Giora (“Theorizing Gender: Feminist Awareness and Language Change” by Rachel Giora) examines how Israeli female and male authors introduce female and male protagonists. The data are taken from short stories by Israeli women and men writers, both modern (1965-1982) and early pre-state (1928-1940). One of the most significant findings, based on the analyses of the data, is that styles used by both female and

male authors can be similar, but their strategies differ, that is they adopt different point of view in language, especially Self vs. Other point of view. Therefore, the said findings pose a problem for both a similarity and different hypotheses as far as “language users may change the world by projecting their own point of view” (p. 341).

All the contributions in the volume call for the more detailed examination of gender-related phenomena in interaction. The contributors view “doing gender” as a multi-dimensional activity, and, significantly they add a factor of historicity to its study.

Notes

[1]. Cheris Kramarae, *Women and men speaking* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1981).

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