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# “Said and Done” Versus “Saying and Doing”

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**“SAID AND DONE” VERSUS  
“SAYING AND DOING”  
*Gendering Practices, Practicing Gender at Work***

PATRICIA YANCEY MARTIN  
*Florida State University*

*Recently, the study of gender has focused on processes by which gender is brought into social relations through interaction. This article explores implications of a two-sided dynamic—gendering practices and practicing of gender—for understanding gendering processes in formal organizations. Using stories from interviews and participant observation in multinational corporations, the author explores the practicing of gender at work. She defines practicing gender as a moving phenomenon that is done quickly, directionally (in time), and (often) nonreflexively; is informed (often) by liminal awareness; and is in concert with others. She notes how other conceptions of gender dynamics and practice inform the analysis and argues that adequate conceptualization (and potential elimination) of harmful aspects of gendering practices/practicing will require attention to (1) agency, intentionality, awareness, and reflexivity; (2) positions, power, and experience; and (3) choice, accountability, and audience. She calls for incorporating the “sayings and doings” of gender into organization theory and research.*

**Keywords:** *practicing gender; gendered practices; agency; intention; reflexivity; gender as institution; organization theory*

**M**ore than a decade ago, social science and humanities scholars started conceptualizing gender as a dynamic process, as practice, as what people say and do, in addition to such static properties as an identity, social status, what is learned via socialization, a system of stratification, and so on. This development occurred rapidly. I wrote an article in the late 1980s in which I used the term *gendering* to mean gender/gendered practices in a way that was unconventional at the time (Yancey Martin

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1992).<sup>1</sup> Only a short time later, many scholars in multiple disciplines were using this term and other similar ones to represent gender dynamics.

Subsequently, feminist theorists and researchers have shown that workplaces are infused with gender. They have called into question claims that gender is irrelevant in rational-technical-legal bureaucracies that allegedly are governed by official ends-means considerations oriented to the accomplishment of formal goals (Calas and Smircich 1997; Cockburn 1988; Collinson and Hearn 1994; Fiske 1993; Fletcher 1999; Ridgeway 2001). Specifically, gender is pervasively practiced in bureaucratic workplaces and conflated with working dynamics through interaction, as I showed in a recent study of men's mobilizing of masculinity/masculinities (Yancey Martin 2001).

This article argues (1) that men and women socially construct each other at work by means of a two-sided dynamic of gendering practices and practicing of gender, (2) that this dynamic significantly affects both women's and men's work experiences, (3) that gendering practices produced through interaction impair women workers' identities and confidence, and (4) that attention to the practicing of gender will produce insights into how inequalities are created in the workplace.<sup>2</sup>

Pathbreaking work by Baron and Bielby in the 1980s found that most jobs in more than 400 organizations in the private and public sectors in California were totally sex segregated (Baron and Bielby 1985, 1986; Bielby and Baron 1986). Furthermore, they found that jobs reserved for women in one organization were often reserved for men in another, undermining the assumption that certain jobs belong only to men or only to women. The pervasiveness of sex segregation in varying forms across multiple decades and different organizations led them to conclude that gender-related dynamics are robust. Accordingly, they challenged researchers to pay more attention to these dynamics. In response to their call, I entered the field in the early 1990s to study gender processes in large corporations.

I chose large, for-profit organizations as a study site for several reasons. One, these organizations greatly influence U.S. culture and society (Dahms forthcoming). Multinational corporations have access to national lawmakers and are able to influence the laws that the U.S. Congress considers and, frequently, enacts. For instance, they have influenced national accounting and taxation standards as well as insurance, pension, retirement, and health policies by promoting laws that are favorable to themselves (Gordon 1996). Furthermore, through franchising, they inject corporate philosophies, methods, and practices into "small businesses" that allegedly are free to adopt local standards and practices. Through advertising and public relations campaigns, corporations shape popular culture, for example, by promoting iconic figures like Michael Jackson in expensive television ads. Finally, corporations have been slow compared to the public and not-for-profit economic sectors to promote women (and men of color) to key decision-making jobs (for a recent report on this point, see Stevenson 2002). I wanted to understand the dynamics that produce this result. I hoped to see how gender is socially constructed—talked about, acted on, used, denied, and ignored—in these settings and understand when, how, and why gender is viewed as legitimate or illegitimate as an issue for

discussion and action. I have noted elsewhere that despite their leaders' framing of corporations as "rational-technical" enterprises where gender is irrelevant, an extensive body of research shows that gender has a consequential role in their routine dynamics (Cassirer and Reskin 2000; Collinson and Hearn 1996; Ely and Meyerson 2000; Kerfoot and Knights 1996, 1998; Martin 1990, 1994; McGuire 2000; Reskin and Branch McBrier 2000; Whitehead 1998).

Not surprisingly, my fieldwork proved hard going. Corporate controllers were reluctant to let me as an outsider see or even talk to them about work as it happens. Furthermore, I found that practices of any kind are hard to observe and, even when observed, hard to capture in language. Many gendering practices are done unreflexively; they happen fast, are "in action," and occur on many levels. They have an emotive element that makes people feel inspired, dispirited, happy, angry, or sad and that defies verbal description by all but the most talented novelist. Think about capturing in words an inspirational talk or "bawling out" by a boss. One can describe postures, actions, and conversation, but when all is "said and done," words are pale reflections of the literal "saying and doing." Reducing practices to words drains experiences of their emotional effects as well. Still, I accepted the challenge of trying to see and name gender dynamics at work. In agreement with Acker (1990, 1998), among others, I assume that harmful practices can be, if made visible and named, challenged. I hope that by bringing to the light of day the multifaceted and subtle practicing of gender, the cloak of gender's naturalness, essentialism, and inevitability can be removed and gender's negative effects on contemporary social and cultural life eliminated (see [Hedström and Swedberg, 1998](#), on social mechanisms and Reskin, 2002, on the mechanisms of gender and race).

My analysis rests on several assumptions. One is that gender is a social institution (Connell 1987; Lorber 1994; Risman 1998). Along with other social constructionists, I view gender as having a social structure and related practices with a history that entails opportunities and constraints and a plethora of meanings, expectations, actions/behaviors, resources, identities, and discourses that are fluid and shifting yet robust and persisting. Framing gender as an institution lets me focus on only one aspect of it—the practicing dimension—while acknowledging that there is more to the story. While gendered practices/practicing gender constitute only one aspect of the gender institution, they are key to its perpetuation (Quinn 2002; Ridgeway 2001; West and Zimmerman 1987). If the gender institution failed to provide a repertoire of practices for societal members' use, they (we) would be at a loss about how to "do gender" at work (and elsewhere).

Two, I do not assume that everything women and men do at work signifies gender. Indeed, I am interested in knowing when, where, and how men and women see/interpret each other and themselves as gendered and when they do not. Three, I assume it is because women and men are situated within a gender institution that they can construct each other (and themselves) as gendered in bureaucratic workplaces. I endorse Connell's (1995) claim that behavior is gendered only because and when enacted within a gender order (or institution) that gives it meaning as gendered. Four, I assume that gender at work is at work not because

“infected” workers inappropriately bring it with them and pass it around like a virus but because paid work as currently conceived, organized, and practiced springs from and is shaped by gendered conceptions (but see Britton 2000). As Acker (1990) claimed, the so-called empty position for which organizations recruit assumes the body and life of a man, not a gender-free person.

Five, and last, I assume that gender is present at work because bureaucratic organizations, the predominant form of workplace in developed economies, are fundamentally constructed of gender (Bologh 1990; Martin and Knopoff 1997). This condition, which is unhealthy for many men and most women, can (and does) cause pain, thwart potential, and prompt silly, even disastrous results, as Maier and Messerschmidt (1998) showed in the space shuttle *Challenger* case. In that instance, (men) corporate managers mobilized a form of competitive masculinities in refusing to heed engineers’ warnings about flawed O-rings. Their goal of retaining a lucrative government contract prompted them to take unnecessary risks and proceed with a launch that caused seven people to die, including New Hampshire school teacher Christa McAuliffe. Concepts that are key to organizational life such as competence, leadership, effectiveness, excellence, rationality, strength, and authority (among others) are moreover conflated with the practicing of gender in ways that differentially affect women and men (Ely and Meyerson 2000; Gruber 1998; Leidner 1991; Pierce 2002; Pyke 1996; Quinn 2002; Yancey Martin 2001). Radical reforms, perhaps even demolition and starting again from scratch, will be necessary to remove gender from the allegedly rational-legal-technical gender-free workplace (Acker 1998; Calas and Smircich 1997; Ferguson 1997).

This article is organized as follows. First, I report three stories from my fieldwork in corporations to illustrate how gendering is practiced at work. Second, using these stories, I define practice and review four prior conceptions of gendering dynamics that have influenced my work. Third, I review the twin dynamic of gendering practices and practicing gender in relation to issues of (1) agency, intention, awareness, and reflexivity; (2) position, power, and experience; and (3) choice, accountability, and audience. My concluding discussion reiterates the value of studying the “sayings and doings” of gender in light of a growing consensus that practice is key to understanding social life. It also suggests the value of studying gendering practices and the practicing of gender relative to situated interactions that occur in rapid-fire fashion and are informed by liminal awareness and nonreflexive intent.

### SEEING AND DOING GENDER AT WORK: THREE STORIES

In this section, I report three stories—two from a telecommunications company and one from an engineering company. The first one, about Tom and Betsy, had acquired apocryphal status by the time I interviewed employees in their company. Everyone knew and had opinions about the events it reports. I think this event may have stimulated an aggressive policy of promoting more women into senior

positions, although no official acknowledged that point to me. The third story, about Valerie, an engineer, shows men collectively mobilizing masculinities (defined below) in ways that she experienced as harmful. All three stories offer clues to past and future dynamics; as Czarniawska (1998, 20) noted, "Organizational narratives [or stories] are inscriptions of past performances and scripts and staging instructions for future performances."

### Tom, Betsy, and the Telephone

Tom and Betsy, both vice-presidents in a Fortune 100 company, stood talking in a hallway after a meeting. Along the hallway were offices but none was theirs. A phone started to ring in one office and after three or so rings, Tom said to Betsy, "Why don't you get that?" Betsy was surprised by Tom's request but answered the phone anyway and Tom returned to his office. Afterwards, Betsy found Tom to ask if he realized what he had done. She told him: "I'm a vice-president too, Tom, and you treated me like a secretary. What were you thinking?" Betsy's reaction surprised Tom. He did not mean anything by his action, he said, commenting: "I did not even think about it." Tom apologized to Betsy. She told Tom his behavior was "typical of how men in High Tech Corporation [a pseudonym] treat women. You're patronizing and [you] don't treat us as equals." Tom was again surprised and decided to ask other women if they agreed with Betsy. (Field notes, *Fortune* 100 telecommunications company 1994)

After this occurrence, Tom talked to Betsy and an additional 18 women about their experiences at High Tech. Some women talked for hours, and some cried over the hurtfulness of their experiences. Hardly any said life at High Tech was "just fine" for themselves or women generally. Several women (and some men) told me they would not want their daughters to work there because High Tech was not "woman friendly." This experience inspired Tom to start a "gender group" of 18 men and 18 women that, ultimately, met periodically over two years. Betsy helped start the group but was transferred to another location before it ended. Tom kept the group going until he reached age 55, at which time High Tech encouraged him to accept a golden parachute and retire.

According to everyone who knew this story (and most people at the director and vice president ranks knew it), Betsy became angry with Tom for asking and with herself for answering the telephone. Tom and Betsy were both familiar with and skilled in gender practices; thus, they simply "hopped into the [gender] river and swam" (see discussion on swimming below). They did not reflect. They did not analyze the situation; they were "practiced" in gender; they practiced gender. The gender institution holds women accountable to pleasing men; it tells men/boys they have a (gender) right to be assisted by women/girls; Tom and Betsy knew this. Tom's request and Betsy's behavior are thus unsurprising. Without stopping to reflect, Tom practiced a kind of masculinity that the gender institution makes available to him, which is to request practical help from women; Betsy responded in kind by complying with his request.

These practices existed before Tom and Betsy's encounter, as do many parallel practices at home, for example, "fix my dinner," "wash my clothes," "clean my

home,” “cook my food,” or “raise my kids.” Such requests, while operative, are rarely articulated; they are simply understood. They would not have been needed in this case if Betsy had been a secretary. When she articulates what was jarring for her in the interaction, she did so in the language of institutionalized positions that are gendered over time and across situations, that is, “like a secretary,” which means both “like a subordinate” and “like a woman.” She did not dispute the assumptions or practices made available to Tom by the gender institution (about women as helpers of men) that allowed him to make a demand that was bureaucratically inappropriate from one vice president to another. After her initial compliance, she then enacted an alternative norm to challenge a gendered practice of treating women as subordinates and “did gender” in a way that was not merely nonconforming, as it would have been if she refused to answer the phone, but actively resistant. She practiced gender in and through resistance, making her a “different kind of woman” in her eyes, and in Tom’s, than a woman who would just “take that kind of treatment.” Betsy thus gained Tom’s respect.

Most of the time, women are in structural positions that make active assertions of the gender order unnecessary (e.g., good secretaries need not be told to answer the phone, and women are still far more likely to be secretaries than vice presidents), or they are willing to do gender in expected ways (e.g., accept being inappropriately told to answer the phone) because disrupting the gender order is seen as “rocking the boat,” as upsetting to the social structure and coordinated actions that are premised in gendered expectations. But without rocking the boat, the gender institution cannot be changed. Betsy took a risk in how she did gender and won the gamble by making Tom aware of the nature of gendered practices in the firm.

Betsy, equally as well schooled in gender as Tom, knew the practices of femininity/femininities that entail taking care of men. She knew that women are expected to help/serve men and to do routine/repetitive labor for men, described by Dorothy Smith (1987) as the everyday/everynight material labor that keeps the body whole and social systems functioning, for example, the family, the school, the workplace. Betsy acted unreflexively in answering the phone. What was her intention? We do not know; she may not know. She simply acted, engaging in a gender practice that unreflexively complied with the femininity rule that tells women to help men (see Simmons 2002 on femininity rules). After she acted and reflected on her actions, and on Tom’s, she became angry, questioning the triumph of the gender order over the bureaucratic workplace and coming to the conclusion that Tom treated her not as a colleague but as “woman to his man.”

In Judith Butler’s (1993, 12-16) terms, Tom’s and Betsy’s actions were citational of the gender order. They showed awareness of and skill in reinstating the gender institution within which they live—as man, as woman. Their normative enactments were made possible by the gender institution, and their reiteration of normative gender practices kept/keeps the gender institution going. They required no reflexivity. Tom’s request made perfect gender sense to both. Viewed from Robert Connell’s (1995) framework, Tom enacted a masculinity/masculinities practice associated with being a man who, due to his superior gender status, could expect

help from a woman. He enacted a form of masculinity that is hegemonic in western societies, including inside formal, for-profit corporations, that allows men to call on women for practical, as well as emotional, support (Fletcher 1999; [Pierce 1995](#); Yancey Martin 2001).

If Betsy had said on the spot, "Why should I answer the phone? Why don't you?" she would have challenged the gender system and its norms then and there, but, as noted above, she would have been viewed as "uppity" and overly sensitive. In failing to reflect before acting on how the workplace and situation were gendered, she acted "like a woman" more than like a vice president. She had enough awareness of the inappropriateness of the gendered behavior she and Tom fell into to confront Tom about it, however, and for him to respond by making the gender order problematic. The result of this quite minor incident was a shift in the normativity of the gender order in that workplace, at least to a degree for a period of time.

#### **Tom and Dining Alone with "a Woman"**

This same Tom told a story about a personal policy he had followed for 30 years. Tom traveled often on his job and, when he traveled, met his "host" at the other end for a dinner to make plans for the upcoming day. He was "a Christian married man," he said, and did not want anyone to think he was doing anything improper. Thus, if his host at the other end was a woman, he would not have dinner with her.

Many years ago . . . when I first started working, uh, I made a rule to myself that I would never have dinner with a woman alone, just the two of us. And, to be quite honest, I said I never want to be in a position where either I would be tempted or anyone could come in and see [us] and develop a wrong impression. So, I have breakfast with them [women], and I would have lunch, but I would never have dinner alone with a woman. Just a rule . . . that Tom [referring to himself] put into effect when he probably just had gotten married. And, suddenly, in this process [the "gender group" process, described earlier], I got an insight . . . that if you go into a new town that rule might, if you fly into [city X], and the director of personnel is a woman, if that director of personnel was a man and you had two days to spend, you would kind of meet with that man the night before over dinner, a long dinner, and get set for the next couple of days to really understand what was going on. . . . In other words, you would create an informal network with that man. (Field notes, *Fortune* 100 company corporate headquarters 1994)

He continued, "I realize now that this discriminates. . . . It meant I never got to know the women as well; that maybe it hurt them in some way." At the end of our interview, I asked Tom if his realization made him change his policy. "Well," he said, "no. I still will not have dinner with a woman; I do not want to start rumors or give the wrong impression."

Tom's policy of not eating dinner alone with a woman coworker frames women as sexual beings, as signs of sexuality, as a temptation to engage in sex. His belief that others might perceive him as sexually interested in another (nonwife) woman prevented him, for 30 years, from having dinner alone with a woman work

associate, even once. This story illustrates both gender practices and Tom's practicing of a particular kind of masculinity. Within the gender institution, Tom framed himself as risking temptation by having dinner alone with a strange woman, thereby framing women as temptresses and men as easily tempted. He framed anyone who might see him with a woman companion as apt to assume he was unfaithful to his wife in violation of the standards of a "Christian married man." He held himself accountable to the gender institution, as he understood and had experienced it. Tom assumed that strange women are sexual temptresses, but he did not assume that two men having dinner together would sexually tempt him or be negatively perceived; two men eating dinner alone would not suggest a homosexual relationship, in Tom's view.

Tom's actions showed agency. He followed a policy for 30 years that reflected his personal views on sexuality, women, and femininity. His policy was defensive in preventing him from breaking the norms of marital fidelity, protecting him from temptation, and protecting him from gossip and a bad reputation. It had unintended consequences for women, however, that he was unaware of until he participated in the gender group. His 30-year policy was accountable to certain features of the gender institution rather than the corporation that paid his salary. If Tom had been faithful to bureaucratic ideals, he would have ignored the gender practices that led him to treat women colleagues as women more than as colleagues.

The gender sensitivity group that Tom established could not fundamentally change the gender order in High Tech Corporation. Even as someone now reflexively aware of his gendered practices and their unintended negative effects on women, Tom did not change his policy and practices. For Tom, the gendered practices of the institutions of family and religion were stronger than those of the bureaucratic workplace that ideally rejects gender as a basis for making policies and decisions.

#### **Valerie the Engineer: "Not Gregarious Enough"**

Valerie Parks, a 32-year-old engineer, had worked for a scientific research company for three years. With seven years' experience in an architectural firm and degrees in engineering and architecture, she liked doing research. Compared to men at her career stage, she felt she wasn't "going anywhere" and was trying to understand why. Her boss told her she was "not gregarious enough," which she interpreted as insufficiently aggressive about promoting herself. Besides feeling uncomfortable about "getting in the face" of senior researchers to "tell them how great I am," Valerie did not want to stay after hours to make up time spent "visiting" during the day. Although her male peers had less experience and no degree in architecture, they received more research assignments.

They're younger than me too. . . . I have more experience so I feel I should be doing at least as well as they are, probably better. But I'm not. They're getting all kinds of assignments that I'm not getting. . . . I'm thinking I'm in the wrong line of work. [Why

not change companies?] Well, there aren't many companies that do research and I really like research. I think it would be boring to do regular engineering projects.

Valerie's annual performance evaluation showed she complained, as she had done the year before, that her supervisor was not giving her good assignments or enough responsibility.

He [her boss] said to me, "You're not gregarious enough." [What does that mean?] I'm not aggressive, I guess. I see some of these people [men at the company], they spend half the day going around talking to people. I'm trying to change my views on that; I try to see it as important. I just want to come in and get my work done and go home. I guess I see sitting around talking as a waste of time. . . . They [men] apparently don't see it as wasted time. But it's just not me to do that; I can't go tell people how wonderful I am or get in their face. But that's what my boss tells me I've got to do. He said, "*I'll never think of you* [emphasis mine] when there's a project. I'm not going to assign you. *You* have to do it." [What does that mean?] I don't know. But it's discouraging. . . . I just have a bachelor's degree but so do lots of others. And the guys with bachelors [degrees] are getting lots more responsibility than I am. [How is that happening?] I don't know; I guess they are just more aggressive. (Field notes, *Fortune* 1000 company 1995)

When I entered the field to study gender dynamics, a pattern I soon discovered was women's minimal concern about individual men's practicing of masculinity/masculinities but deep discouragement over men's collective mobilizing of masculinity/masculinities (Yancey Martin 2001). Indeed, women seemed reconciled to the inevitability and even normalcy of individual men's doings of masculinity/masculinities. But men's collective practicing of masculinities affected women negatively even when they believed that men intended them no harm. I use the term *mobilizing masculinities* for "practices wherein two or more men jointly bring to bear, or bring into play, masculinity/ies" (Yancey Martin 2001, 588).<sup>3</sup> When women see and/or experience groups of men mobilize(ing) masculinities in ways women cannot frame as working, they often perceive men as acting like men, instead of like vice presidents, chemists, or engineers. When this occurs, they experience a range of negative feelings—for example, feeling exhausted, different, excluded, unsure of themselves, and, as Valerie said, as if they are "in the wrong line of work" (Yancey Martin 2001).

Valerie, who saw junior men "visiting" in the afternoons to tell senior (men) engineers "how great they are," concluded that men collaborate with each other this way as men instead of seeking/obtaining work assignments in an orderly, rational-technical way. She experienced their behavior as gendered, irrespective of what the men may have viewed themselves as doing. She was dispirited by her experiences because she lacked the inclination or ability to act this way and because she felt she should not have to "sell herself" or stay after work to do her job. While Valerie may be framed as making mountains out of molehills, her reactions to the men's practices caused her to doubt her competence and choice of engineering as a profession.

### DEFINING PRACTICE

To view gender as practice means, among other things, to view it as a “system of action” that is institutionalized and widely recognized but also is dynamic, emergent, local, variable, and shifting. Many gendering practices are readily recognized by societal members as features of a gender institution that is both local and society-wide. Outside (away from) the gender institution (if such a place can be imagined), these practices would not (could not) be viewed or interpreted or understood as gender. Yet because they are local, some gendering practices are optional actions that can be invoked or ignored during interaction. People practice the practices that the gender institution makes available and do so, furthermore, “in the heat of the moment”; as Bourdieu ([1980] 1990, 81-82) said,

Practice unfolds in time and it has all the correlative properties, such as irreversibility, that synchronization destroys. Its temporal structure, that is, its rhythm, its tempo, and above all its directionality, is constitutive of meaning. . . . In short, because it is entirely immersed in the current of time, practice is inseparable from temporality, not only because it is played out in time, but also because it plays strategically with time. . . . A player who is involved and caught up in the game adjusts not to what he sees but to what he fore-sees, sees in advance in the directly perceived present; he passes the ball not to the spot where his team-mate is but to the spot he will reach . . . a moment later, anticipating the anticipations of the others. . . . He decides in terms of objective probabilities, that is, in response to an overall, instantaneous assessment of the whole set of his opponents and the whole set of his team-mates, seen not as they are but in their impending positions. And he does so “on the spot,” “in the twinkling of an eye,” “in the heat of the moment,” that is, in conditions which exclude distance, perspective, detachment, and reflexion.

I agree with Bourdieu that practice is directional (one way, linear) relative to time and thus irreversible, a compromise between past experience and an imagined future. While one can try to “take back” an action or comment, this cannot actually be done. One can say or do something to “correct for” a “bad” comment or physical act, but one cannot erase it. These qualities of practice—directionality, temporality, rapidity—place it in a different category of human endeavor than depictions of past conversations and physical actions.

Such qualities complicate the study of practicing. Knowing how to correctly practice masculinity/masculinities and femininity/femininities depends on both tacit knowledge and skills that are acquired over time. Tacit knowledge that is associated with activities such as recognizing a friend, riding a bicycle, playing a piano, or “acting like a girl” is incapable of being verbally expressed although it is implicated in all kinds of practicing, including gender (Barnes 2001; Polanyi 1966; [Strati 1999](#)). Thus, because it is permeated with tacit knowledge that cannot be verbally expressed, practicing gender is more readily experienced and observed than narratively described or pinned down.

Gender scholars have used diverse terms to represent gender dynamics—*doing gender*, *gendering*, *performing*, *asserting*, *narrating*, *mobilizing*, *maneuvering*.

Each tries to capture gender in practice with only limited success. Riding a bicycle is a practice or activity, an instance of practicing. Riding a bicycle is different from the many elements that make this activity possible. Here's a bicycle; here's a rider; here is how to ride. Yet a moving bicycle propelled by a rider is something else again; a process that is the culmination of practice to get it right and the practice itself is enacted each time. Practicing gender is likewise more than a person and the activities this person engages in; it is actions learned through repetition. Each practice of gender is a moving phenomenon, done quickly, (often) nonreflexively, in concert or interaction with others.

Practicing is key to both reflecting and reconstituting the gender institution (Bickham Mendez and Wolf 2001; Ely and Meyerson 2000; Quinn 2002; Rantalaiho et al. 1997). Gendered practices are learned and enacted in childhood and in every major site of social behavior over the life course, including in schools, intimate relationships, families, workplaces, houses of worship, and social movements. In time, like riding a bicycle, gendering practices become almost automatic. They sustain gendered relationships and, in turn, reconstitute the gender institution. Over time, the saying and doing create what is said and done (Butler 1990; Ridgeway 2001).

### PRIOR CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER DYNAMICS

This article is possible only because others have framed gender as a dynamic in ways I build on. Four prior conceptions have been especially useful.

Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987), ethnomethodologists and sociologists, expanded Erving Goffman's framing of the doing of gender as an active accomplishment entailing gender displays that are situated actions, that is, actions appropriate to particular contexts. Their work has had a tremendous impact on gender scholarship, and their emphasis on accountability to the gender order has helped us understand why people so extensively "do gender." Anthropologist Dorrine Kondo's (1990, chap. 8 and 9) framing of gender as a "strategic narrative assertion" and "performance" in her ethnographic study of work, identity, and gender is helpful in similar ways. Kondo said any behavior is capable of being gendered as masculine or feminine based on a person's talk and action, within the constraints of the societal system of gender relations. In agreement with Connell (1995), she viewed gender identity as a "strategic assertion" that is shifting, fluid, and contested rather than a "fixed essence." Kondo's framing of gender as relational and negotiated is reflected in her report that Japanese men at the confectionary factory where she worked defined masculinity "in opposition to us women" and "performed it for us women" (p. 207). Kondo's conception anticipates Judith Butler's and Robert Connell's.

Judith Butler (1993), postmodern feminist philosopher, emphasized the necessity to take account of the material body and the dynamic of performativity in conceptualizing gender. "Performativity is construed as that power of discourse to

produce effects through reiteration” (p. 20). Following Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault, she explored how the material body is gendered through discourse and how “individual action” produces and is produced by a constructivist gender system. In her view,

performativity is not a singular “act,” for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition [or “citation”]. (1993, 12)

The primacy of the gender institution relative to the individual actor is implied in Butler’s conception, although some scholars have used Butler’s “performativity” concept to represent willful resistance to the hegemonic gender order (on the “misuse” of Butler’s performativity/performance concepts, see Lloyd 1999). Butler’s conception poses a chicken and egg problem. Performing gender reconstructs gendering practices in a way that stabilizes gender as an institution but that also provides material for future gendering practices/practicing of gender (Campbell 2000).

Robert Connell (1995) focused on the practices/practicing of masculinity/masculinities rather than the generic dynamic of doing gender. He defined masculinities as “a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations” (p. 84) and “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender relations, and the effects of the practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture” (p. 71; also Connell 1987, 2000). Practices are the core feature of Connell’s definition. Echoing Kondo, masculinity/masculinities is/are an ongoing “gender project” (p. 72) not a “stable object of knowledge” (p. 33); they are practices rather than fixed, resolutely knowable “objects.” As noted, Connell moved away from the global dynamic of doing, asserting, negotiating, or performing gender to a concern with doing, asserting, negotiating, or performing masculinity/masculinities and, by implication, femininity/femininities. Influenced by Connell’s work, many sociologists of work are now focusing on the practicing of masculinities and femininities in work organizations (for example, Bird 1996; Britton 1999; Dellinger and Williams 2002; Quinn 2002; Wharton, Rotolo, and Bird 2000). Connell’s rejection of a “trait conception” of masculinities, emphasis on the multiplicity of masculinities available for “saying and doing,” and attention to context/situation, the material body (embodiment of practice), meaning, and affect (cathexis) are additional contributions.

### **GENDERING PRACTICES, PRACTICING GENDER: A TWO-SIDED DYNAMIC**

This section argues for a conception of gender dynamics as two sided: gendering practices and practicing gender. Practices and practicing refer to a set of interrelated activities and actions concerning a particular content about which people have

“practical knowledge,” for example, swimming, riding a bicycle, or “acting like” a woman or man (Schatzki 2001). “Gender practices,” “gendered practices,” and “gendering practices” stand for a class of activities that are available—culturally, socially, narratively, discursively, physically, and so forth—for people to enact in an encounter or situation in accord with (or in violation of) the gender institution. Practices are per se conceptually distinct from people who practice them. They are available to be done, asserted, performed—that is, practiced—in social contexts. They are potential actions—Connell’s (1995) configurations of practice—that people know about and have the capacity or agency to do, assert, perform, or mobilize. In a binarily gendered society like ours, one can “act like” a woman or “act like” a man although one can do so only serially, not simultaneously (Lorber 1996, 1999, 2000). This situation exists because a body of practices is available for societal members to invoke or display in this regard.

The more dynamic side of the coin is practicing gender, which directs attention to the literal activities of gender, physical and narrative—the doing, displaying, asserting, narrating, performing, mobilizing, maneuvering. Practicing is the literal event, for example, of Tom’s requesting Betsy to answer the phone or men engineers’ visiting with senior researchers to advertise their worth. Practicing is the means by which the gender order is constituted at work. Sociologists who want to understand gender in work contexts must find ways, I contend, to see, name, and understand such micro-interactional practicing dynamics. They cannot settle for only describing practices that have been “said and done.” To do so is to miss the immediacy, complexities, and subtleties of gendering dynamics.<sup>4</sup>

To play the piano well, one must practice—that is, play scales, take lessons, read music, build skill and familiarity, connect notes to the keyboard, and so on. The goal is not to excel at those activities, however, but to excel at piano playing. To learn to swim, one places one’s face in water; holds one’s breath and learns how to breathe properly; places arms ahead, head down, and feet back; kicks feet and legs and strokes arms and hands. And one does these things repeatedly. Again, the goal is to be able to swim. While many words are needed to describe piano playing, swimming, or bicycle riding, no matter how many one uses, one cannot fully capture these practices. A skilled swimmer simply swims; a pianist plays a sonata; a bicycle rider coasts down the hill. To one who does not know how to swim, play, or ride, swimming, playing, and riding are mysterious, difficult, even scary.

Likewise, those skilled at practicing gender, which most people are, do what they do almost effortlessly. They/we are more skilled at doing than at describing our gendering practices. Practicing masculinity/masculinities may be mysterious for girls and women yet easy for boys and men. Likewise, men and boys should find practicing femininities mysterious, perhaps more than girls and women do masculinities. Girls and women are observers of men’s and boys’ gender practices; men and boys pay much less attention to the details of girls’ and women’s lives (Smith 1987). A transsexual man to woman may have observed and read and think he knows how to act, but he has not had the lessons, drills, and constant practice since birth in practicing femininity/femininities (Raymond 1979). He may recognize

femininity practices and be familiar with them observationally yet be unskilled at practicing them. Like swimming, piano playing, and bike riding, the practicing of femininities entails instruction, lessons, drills, repeated efforts to gain familiarity and competence so that in time the practices become like second nature. The mark of true passing for transgenders is to be taken as a biological female or male; to succeed requires becoming so skilled at practicing “appropriate” femininities or masculinities that she or he need not reflect on her or his actions.

People practice particular kinds of gender, however, not generic forms. For this reason, I encourage focusing on practicing femininity/femininities and practicing masculinity/masculinities rather than practicing gender. As Connell (1995, 2000) noted, even these concepts must be used carefully because multiple masculinities and femininities exist, and people practice, and are held accountable to, specific kinds depending on their bodies (health, attractiveness), class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, nation, and other social statuses. Dynamics at work associated with varying forms of masculinities—for example, competitive/controlling/paternalistic (Collinson and Hearn 1994; Maier and Messerschmidt 1998) or affiliating (Yancey Martin 2001)—and of femininities—for example, flirtatious, sexy, mothering/nurturing (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio forthcoming; Dellinger and Williams 2002; Pierce 1995; Pringle 1989; Pyke 1996; Quadagno and Fobes 1995; Yancey Martin 1998)—need to be more extensively addressed.

To advance understanding of the practicing of gender at work, several issues require attention. Among them are agency/intention/awareness/reflexivity, position/power/experience, and choice/accountability/audience. These issues are ignored or addressed only implicitly in many studies of gendering dynamics at work.

#### **Agency, Intentionality, Awareness, Reflexivity**

Scholars in the social sciences and humanities use the concept of agency in varied ways ranging from action based on rationality and/or goal achievement to simply acting or doing something (see Ahearn 2001 for a review). Some gender scholars imply that people who exercise agency relative to gender consciously intend to practice it and/or are aware of practicing gender when they do. Others suggest that they do in nonintentional ways or, as Reskin (2000) said, unconsciously (also McGinley 2000; Ridgeway and Correll 2000). I favor defining agency as action or a state of being in action. I assume that people can and do practice gender both while intending to and without intending to and that others often perceive them as doing so irrespective of their intentions.

This definition asserts the instrumentality of agency but casts intentionality and awareness as questions rather than assumptions. (*To intend* means to have in mind a purpose or goal, to plan, to signify.) Although people are “gender-agentic,” that is, active practitioners of gender, I suggest that their practices are guided only sometimes by intention relative to gender (Yancey Martin 2001). Defining agency independently of intention leaves us free to assume that individuals and groups practice

masculinities and femininities at work without consciously intending to, although they may consciously intend to do, as Tom did after realizing how his 30-year policy had affected women (see Schippers 2002 on gender maneuvering as a challenge to sexism by alternative rock groups). Leaving questions open about intention and awareness relative to agency avoids assuming that the practicing of gender subsumes these qualities.<sup>5</sup> (Other views of agency are offered by Picart forthcoming; Rogers and Garrett 2002; Tsumima and Burke 1999).

My fieldwork has shown me that people routinely perceive others as practicing gender despite denials by those who are perceived this way. For example, (some) women perceived men as mobilizing masculinity/masculinities and conflating this dynamic with working (Yancey Martin 1996, 2001). Even when unsure about why men acted this way, women believed men “behaved as men” at work at least some of the time. Some men whom I questioned about women’s perceptions denied that their behavior was about masculinities. In Valerie’s case, for example, one young man said he was just “being assertive” to do his job. Valerie’s boss said she should act this way too. Irrespective of her peers’ or boss’s intentions, Valerie thought they mobilized masculinities by “visiting” in the afternoons and staying after hours to complete their work.

I have used the concept of liminal awareness to represent men’s mobilizing of masculinities without being conscious of doing so (Gherardi and Poggio 2001). To say that men are liminally aware of mobilizing masculinity/masculinities means they practice masculinities without being fully conscious of doing so and/or that their actions are viewed or experienced by others this way.<sup>6</sup> Liminal awareness allows men (and women, in other circumstances) to act as they please without being concerned about the effects of their behavior on others (Reskin 2000; Ridgeway and Correll 2000). That is, if they believe their practices are not gendered, they can “honestly deny” acting in a gendered way, even if others see or experience them as doing so.

*Reflexive/reflexivity.* Reflexivity is a special kind of awareness. To be reflexive means to meditate or engage in careful consideration; it also means to ruminate, deliberate, cogitate, study, or think carefully about something. To practice gender reflexively, one would carefully consider the content of one’s actions and act only after careful consideration of the intent, content, and effects of one’s behavior. I agree with Bourdieu ([1980] 1990) that practice is rarely guided by reflection. As noted earlier, practices are done quickly; they are directional and temporal. People routinely shoot from the hip, act rashly, and speak without thinking. Unreflexive action can have unfortunate consequences, furthermore. For example, men who act “like men” without having reflected on their practices may be unaware that their actions embody masculinities that women experience as harmful (Yancey Martin 1996, 2001). Still, some people, some of the time, are reflexive about gender. Second wave feminists worked to make society reflexive about language use, among other practices (Ferree and Hess 2000). For example, they admonished us to stop using “he” for both boys and girls because the practice was detrimental for girls

(and women). As a rule, people with less privilege are more reflexive about their actions than are those with more privilege. Thus, because women occupy a subordinate status, they may be more reflexive about gender. Research that identifies conditions at work where men (and women) are more reflexive about their practicing of masculinities would be useful.

### **Positions, Power, Experience**

Feminist standpoint (and other) theorists argue that different social positions offer different amounts of power and shape their occupants' experiences and consciousness (Harding 1997; Yancey Martin, Reynolds, and Keith 2002). Some positions have more power than others to say what is happening, including whether gender is "at play." A goal of understanding gender dynamics at work requires attention to the masculinities and femininities practiced by people in powerful positions, including how these practices affect workers' lives. No one has total knowledge or vision of his or her life and experiences; all (of us) are empowered and/or constrained by the positions they (we) occupy. Yet people in key positions have the power to affirm or deny that gender is practiced in workplaces (Ely and Meyerson 2000). We need to know more about how power fosters the practicing of particular masculinities and femininities and how it/they is/are perceived, experienced, and interpreted by occupants of more and less powerful positions (Collinson and Collinson 1996; Fiske 1993; Hill Collins 1997; Thorne 1993).

If practice is gendered when interpreted within a system of gender relations as about gender, interpretations are more than conjectures. Interpretations are the sense-making efforts of people who engage in practices made available to them by the gender institution and workplace. Power has a role in these dynamics. Powerful men can deny that their behavior is gendered, and women often cannot challenge them. Denial does not erase the harm women experience from men's excluding them, making them feel out of place, or requiring them to "act like men," furthermore.

This point was brought home in my fieldwork. I found that women who saw men "wasting time," "sucking up" to each other, visiting all afternoon, making decisions based on liking rather than performance, and protecting incompetents perceived that men were "behaving like men." In actuality, the men were pursuing informal avenues of sponsorship and patronage, time-honored ways for junior men to enter the inner circles of elite men (Lorber 1984). Women colleagues who bore the brunt of exclusion from inner circles understood correctly that the men's behavior was approved of by management. Men were the bosses; men were predominant; men were in control and had the power to define situations as they saw fit. Certain forms of masculinities and a form of cultural masculinism were hegemonic. Women felt nervous even about claiming that men behaved like men because men believe (and say) they behave like workers (Yancey Martin 2001). Men's superior power lets them claim that whatever they do is work; women's lesser power discourages or prevents them from challenging this claim (Fiske 1993).

Ironically, men in my study engaged in practices that are routinely attributed (as stereotypes) to women more than men—wasting time talking to coworkers, pretending to like people they dislike, making decisions based on affect rather than “objective” evidence, and ignoring rules in favor of particularistic sentiments. Such behavior is criticized when done by women. For women workers to interpret men’s similar behavior as evidence that men “act like women,” or practice femininities, is likely too heretical a notion for women to even consider. When women coworkers socialize, they waste time; when men coworkers socialize, they advance their careers (Lipman-Blumen 1976).

### **Choice or Accountability?**

A third issue concerns why people practice gender at work. Is it due to free, unfettered choice or to accountability pressures of the gender institution? While I do not resolve this question here, it is nevertheless useful to consider whether people practice femininities or masculinities because they “want to” (Mayhew 1980) or because situations—for example, the institution of gender—call for particular practices about which people are practically aware and in which they are practically skilled (Schatzki 2001). Do they, for example, practice gender at work “because . . . norms and expectations . . . [are] built into their sense of worth and identity as a certain kind of human being and because they believe their society’s way is the natural way” (Lorber 1994, 35)? West and Zimmerman (1987) said accountability is the answer.

Accountability pressures prompt people to do gender appropriate to the situation, rejecting a claim that “free will” in the form of unfettered choice—“wanting to”—is the reason people practice gender at work. An illustration of how gender accountability operates is shown in corporate women’s practicing of femininities that they would have “chosen” or preferred to avoid, for example, Betsy’s answering of the telephone. Fletcher (1999) reported that women engineers felt forced by male peers to listen to their personal troubles even though they did not want to (also Pierce 1995; Yancey Martin 2001). One woman who intensely disliked a man and was disliked by him nevertheless listened to him because she felt she had no choice.

To understand gender accountability, participants, situation, and audience must be considered. Is the audience of the same gender? The other gender? Both? My research on masculinities showed that men mobilized some forms of masculinities for women, some for men, and some for both genders. For example, men targeted peacocking and self-promoting masculinities only to men, but they targeted dominating and expropriating masculinities to both women and men. They targeted affiliating masculinities only to men; they visited with men in search of resources, “sucked up” to men, and offered other men protection and support; but they did not act in these ways toward women. The audience(s) to whom/that men hold themselves accountable at work relative to gender is, my research suggests, primarily other men (Yancey Martin 1996, 2001).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have claimed that women and men routinely practice gender—as masculinities and femininities—in embodied interactions that are emergent and fluid, grounded in practical knowledge and skills, and informed by liminal awareness and reflexivity. The stories about Tom and Valerie highlight the invisibility and the magnitude of gendering dynamics. Only by asking how, when, where, and by what means—both narrative and physical—gender is actively practiced can we gain insights into “saying and doing” dynamics. Toward this end, research and theorizing about the twin dynamic of practicing gender and gendering practices are needed.

In a recent volume on the concept of practice, Schatzki (2001, 2) said a consensus is emerging among social science and humanities scholars on a definition of practice as “arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding.” This consensus claims that practices are embodied and that the “skilled body” is basic to its accomplishment (p. 3). Defining practice as entailing activity, shared practical understanding, and the skilled body (or embodiment) is useful for exploring gendering practices at work. Sharon Bird (2001) told a story from her fieldwork that shows the utility of viewing gender practices this way. The story is about a bartender who commented on “the ladies” sitting at the bar while making eye contact with and winking at a man who stood nearby. The bartender’s behavior let the man know he was important enough to address, formed a bond with him on the topic of “us men” versus “the ladies,” and told the women they were objects but not subjects. Furthermore, as Bourdieu said, these events occurred in the “blink of an eye.” Yet they conveyed gendered messages about relationships and value to the women, the nearby man, and Sharon Bird.

Women describe similar experiences with men in corporations. They say men seek attention from each other but not from them. For example, men at meetings acknowledge women’s presence by nodding or saying hello, but they make extensive eye contact and talk mostly with other men. Such experiences give a message to women about their importance; that is, men’s failure to treat women as if they are important tells women they are unimportant. This message is often debilitating even for highly educated professional women when it is given over and over again (Yancey Martin 2001). Subtle, interactional, nonintentional masculinity practices by men—should we call them “gender slights”?—undermine women’s self-esteem and make them question their competence. Tragically, as Valerie’s comments suggest, some women hold themselves responsible for men’s failure to treat them as important, competent, and/or knowledgeable.

I have observed men pay close attention to each other at work. One example involved a high-status visitor to an all-day meeting. The visitor had been a professional football star and was considered a “really nice guy.” During the day, nearly every man in the room found a way to approach him and give him an effusive greeting and extended handshake. Some embraced him, and nearly all held his shoulder

or arm as they expressed welcome and admiration. Their behavior was attentive, flattering, obsequious, and physical. If women acted this way, we would call it flirting. When men act this way, we use names like sucking up, brownnosing, and "atta boy." (We know from research that "the same behavior" is interpreted differently when performed by women versus men.) Men's desire for other men's attention, company, and approval is relatively ignored in the organizational literature, leaving the homoemotional, even flirtatious (and some say homoerotic), character of men's relations with each other at work unacknowledged (Hearn 1993; Jacques 1997; Lipman-Blumen 1976; Roper 1996).

Nothing is wrong with men talking, smiling, even flirting with each other, of course. But prevailing theories of gender, work, and organization fail to admit that these dynamics occur. David Dorsey's (1994) yearlong account of a Xerox sales team described activities by men that were emotionally intense and extensively physical. Men on the team used highly sexualized language to relate to each other, for example, often referring to homosexual acts that indicate dominance or subordination (cf. Fiske 1993). They frequently wrestled and took pleasure in bodily contact under the ruse of "horsing around." They routinely placed their bodies next to their boss's body while he held his hand in the air and said inspirational things. Fred, the team's boss, pushed his subordinates to exhaustion, well past the team's annual goal, to help his boss meet his quota because he "loved" his boss. The men may not have intended to practice a form of masculinities that excluded women, but they did. Even though they were successful, women in the group were viewed, and viewed themselves, as different from and tangential to the rest of (the men on) the team.

Men need not invent schemes for excluding women from daily work processes in order for women to experience exclusion. As men engage in gendering practices consistent with institutionalized norms and stereotypes of masculinity, they nonetheless create social closure and oppression. If women simply go along with institutionalized norms and stereotypes of femininity, they remain outside of men's informal networks and usually formal ones too (see McGuire 2000). Yet women who practice femininity according to femininity stereotypes that define women as subordinate may gain approval from men, but they do not gain equal status (Jackman 1994). Women who fail to practice femininity according to femininity stereotypes that define women as subordinate lose approval and end up with even lower status than they would otherwise (Collinson and Collinson 1996; Schur 1983; West and Zimmerman 1987). Men who practice masculinity/masculinities according to masculinity stereotypes that define men as dominant do gain approval and status from men. While such men may not gain approval from women, their hold over powerful positions gives women no alternative but to respect them, especially in work situations where women's opportunities are at stake.

By identifying how men practice masculinities at work, the methods of sexism can be revealed. In simply going along with institutionalized features of the gender order, men perpetuate masculinism, a bias in favor of men, and a masculinist, or masculine/man-centered workplace. Men's adherence to such practices and

standards will not change without active resistance by both men and women. Practices in which men routinely engage both construct and maintain their privileged positions.

Although practicing gender is often rapid fire, directional (linear), time bound, and informed by liminal awareness and nonreflexivity, it is also practiced intentionally and reflexively. Historically, employers have formally prohibited married women from holding certain jobs, paid women (and men of color) less, and denied women access to valued opportunities (travel, bonuses, etc.) and positions. They have forced women into prostitution and harmed them at construction sites and in police, mining, and other contexts (Fiske 1993; Gruber 1998; Martin and Jurik 1996; Prokos and Padavic 2002). Glass ceiling research tells us women are routinely passed over for promotions (Cotter et al. 2001; Maume 1999). Blatantly biased actions are viewed as illegitimate because western values frame them as wrong, but subtle forms of practicing gender, like Tom's request of Betsy or his policy of not dining alone with a woman, are not widely viewed as wrong (McGinley 2000). Some men in my university view "getting in your face" and "saying how great you are" as valued, normative practices. I work at night and on weekends to succeed at being a professor at a Research I university. I do these things because they are required to succeed, even though I know they "require" me to "act like a man" by engaging in practices that are normatively, culturally, and/or empirically associated with men and masculinity/masculinities that prioritize work over home and family and that equate self-worth with workplace success (Weiss 1990). Of course, many men as well as women would like to see this situation changed (Gerson 1993).

Despite knowing the rules and playing by them, many women at work nevertheless fail to succeed. Playing by the rules does not guarantee success because men may not perceive women as "succeeding" even when "objectively" they do. A chemist once told me about a colleague who repeatedly said in her presence that women do not have a "natural instinct" for chemistry, like men do (Yancey Martin 1996). She laughed off the comment but still found it offensive. Absorbing the raw end of power is painful, and the harm can be worse if those on the receiving end fail to understand how or why they are targeted or how the experience affects their identities and self-esteem.

To counteract hidden and subtle but widespread and invidious forms of gender discrimination, the twin dynamics of gendering practices and practicing of gender at work must be made visible in organizational analyses. Practices that often are conflated with work relations and work dynamics have gendered consequences in perpetuating men's advantage and women's disadvantage. Theories and research that ignore gendering practices and the practicing of gender at work mischaracterize workplaces and workers' experiences, leaving their presence and effects unchallenged. For these reasons, the "sayings and doings" of gender must be incorporated into organization theory and research (Calas and Smircich 1992; Sinclair 2000; Yancey Martin and Collinson 2002).

## NOTES

1. This term bothered the editor Cecelia Ridgeway, but she allowed me to use it.
2. In this article, I use *gendering*, *gendered*, and *gender* as equivalent modifiers of practice(s) that is (are) perceived, interpreted, and/or intended as about gender.
3. As noted in Yancey Martin (2001), I define masculinities as practices that are represented or interpreted by an actor and/or observer as masculine within a system of gender relations that gives them meaning as gendered "masculine." Behavior can be represented, perceived, or interpreted as masculine because of (1) who does it and/or how, (2) the social and/or cultural contexts in which it is done, or (3) how those in power represent it.
4. It is a worry to me that in workplace sites where practicing gender is done—boardrooms, law offices, task force meetings, research labs, or training programs—we who observe may also contribute to this dynamic by our presence. For example, men may talk about or treat women differently in my presence; for example, I may stimulate or inhibit comments they otherwise would not make, for example, joking about sex. As a result, I have to consider that I may produce (or stimulate) effects that I had hoped simply to "study."
5. A reason to use caution in assuming intention is that observers may perceive individuals or groups as practicing gender even though the actors/practitioners have no such intention in mind. Of course, some people do practice gender intentionally—for example, an overweight boy who tries to "act manly" to keep bullies at bay (cf. Messerschmidt 2000) or a 20-year-old "Miss America" contestant who tries to act sexy and regal to appear desirable yet respectable. In these cases, the agents (or actors) intend to practice masculinities and femininities of particular kinds for reasons related to their gender identities, experiences, skills, and the context in which they are situated. How they are perceived or interpreted may be something else entirely.
6. In psychology, *liminal* refers to a limit below which a phenomenon is imperceptible or a state of consciousness that is supposed to exist but is not strong enough to be recognized. The phrase *liminal awareness* is more useful for sociological purposes than is unconscious or nonconscious awareness, in my view.

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*Patricia Yancey Martin studies gender in organizations. Her recent articles appeared in Organization (men's mobilizing of masculinities); Gender, Work and Organization (the subfield of gendered organizations); and Signs (feminist consciousness in legal professionals). She is president of the Southern Sociological Society and U.S. editor for Gender, Work and Organization.*