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ABSTRACT

More than a decade after the provocative writings of French feminist writers Julie Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, and Monique Wittig first appeared, the exploration of sexual and gender differences continues to draw controversy. Their work has been considered mostly in regard to literature, philosophy, and feminist theory, but their theories could make valuable contributions to American interpersonal communication scholarship. They are intrigued by basic questions that are also at the heart of communication research--identity, especially as associated with notions of sex and gender, and how these notions are socially constructed in discourse. French feminist theories could contribute to three areas of interpersonal communication: (1) by using the body as a starting point, interpersonal communication scholars could construct a theoretical rationale to look at key concepts in a way that is not equated with biologism; (2) interpersonal communication scholars could follow the French feminist approach to examining how gender is constructed in language and discourse; and (3) French feminist theories could help interpersonal communication scholars in their current efforts to redefine concepts of sex, gender, identity, and self. The French feminists maintain that it is not biology but the representation of biology that oppresses women. However, they have distinct notions about gender and sexual identity. By borrowing some of these notions, research in interpersonal communication could be designed that allows a more complex view of gender and sexual difference and that could accommodate a greater variety of discourses. (Contains 20 references.) (NKA)

An Initial Exploration of the Potential Contributions of French Feminist Theory to Interpersonal Communication

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Running Head: An Initial Exploration

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential contributions of French feminist theories to interpersonal communication. In particular, it examines the work of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig in relation to the concepts of sex, gender, self, and identity. It argues that, by borrowing Kristeva's notions of the subject-in-process and the discursive construction of biological conditions and Cixous' concept of bisexuality, research in interpersonal communication could be designed that allows a more complex view of gender and sexual difference and that could accommodate a greater variety of discourses.

Same and other meet at the crossing of our languages, a third body happened to us, where there is no law. (Cixous in Conley, 1984, p. 33)

Sexual difference.

More than a decade after the provocative writings of French feminist writers such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig first appeared, the exploration of sexual and gender differences continues to draw controversy. It is not surprising, perhaps, especially in light of recent findings that document neuro-biological differences between women and men, that some consider sexual difference one of the major issues, if not the major issue of our age (Irigaray, 1993; Suleiman, 1986). Suleiman (1986) states the question of women's bodies and sexuality is still a highly loaded one with strong implications for politics and literature, and, I would add, communication studies.

The work of the so-called "French Feminists" has been considered by U.S. scholars mostly in regard to literature, philosophy, psychology and feminist theories. Examinations of the potential of French feminist contributions to interpersonal communication appear less common. In this paper, I want to show how French feminist theories could make valuable contributions to U.S. interpersonal communication scholarship.

"French Feminism"

Any exploration of "French Feminism" needs to begin with a comment on terminology. The following background is based on an overview provided by Conley (1984).

The "French Feminist Movement" refers to a particular political institution, the *mouvement de libération des femmes* (MLF) which developed out of the 1968 student revolt. Feminists focused on psychoanalytic discourse and aligned themselves with a movement called

psych et po (psychoanalysis and politics). Important institutions of the MLF are the publishing house *des femmes*, monthly and weekly papers, and a legal movement. It is in relation to this particular historical-political movement that writers such as Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig identify themselves and use or reject the use of the term "feminist." This background seems helpful to understanding why the three writers who are often referred to as "The French Feminists" in the United States, namely Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous, have often stated that they are not feminists (Oliver, 1993).[1]

Oliver (1993) considers labeling Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous "The French Feminists" "an essential element of the problem with their importation" (p. 163). The label "French" feminists is also misleading as reference to the writers' national or ethnic backgrounds. Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous were not born in France. Irigaray was born in Belgium; Kristeva is a native Bulgarian; and Cixous was born in Algeria and spoke German as her first language (Oliver, 1993). Wittig left France for the United States in 1976 for political reasons (Wenzel, 1981). Considering these four writers "The French Feminists" also creates a problem of representation and categorization. Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig oppose being grouped and categorized as "The French Feminists,"[2] and other scholars point to the multitude of French feminist voices.[3] Indeed, the works of Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig differ drastically from each other. However, seen in comparison to U.S. feminist work, their approaches share certain characteristics and ideas that serve as the basis of exploration for this paper, and they will be discussed together here for that purpose.

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[1] Some scholars consider Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig to be the main "French Feminists".

[2] Suleiman (1986) states Wittig, Irigaray, and Cixous are poles apart and "would no doubt reject any attempt to talk of them together" (p. 12).

[3] A 1980 anthology by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivorn includes other French feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Annie Leclerc, Claudine Hermann, Marguerite Duras, Antoinette Fouque, Catherine Clément, Xaviere Gauthier, Chantal Chawaf, and Christiane Rochefort (Oliver, 1993).

One obstacle in any discussion of the applicability of French feminist concepts to interpersonal communication is the difficulty of leaping across cultural and academic boundaries. Interpersonal communication as a disciplinary subfield, or even "communication" as an academic discipline does not exist, to my knowledge, in European academia, at least not in a dimension comparable to U.S. academia. However, the relationship of these writers to endeavors in communication scholarship seems fairly self-evident to me. After all, Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig are intrigued by basic questions that are also at the heart of interpersonal communication research. They explore notions of identity, in particular, identity as associated with notions of sex and gender, and how these concepts are socially constructed in discourse.

Potential Contributions

French feminist contributions could offer a valuable alternative theoretical rationale at a time when scholars are rethinking approaches to communication research, and at a time when paradigm issues are frequent topics of discussion (Dervin, Grosberg, O'Keefe, & Wartella, 1989). These discussions often involve the question of sexual difference and gender. Deming (1989) observes: "No change in the field that does not accommodate the feminist interest in examining and challenging the power of gender constructions in all human endeavors, including the academic, will not be seen as revolutionary" (p. 164). Along with a growing emphasis on issues of gender, class, and race, U.S. feminists have become "understandably wary" of ideas claiming universality because universal ideas can, despite their inclusionary intentions, become exclusionary in impact (Deming, 1989, p. 164). However, it is my perception that at least some of the current investigations on gender issues in communication, linguistics and psychology may

lead to divisive representations of sexual differences and perpetuate categorizations and discursive stereotypical associations. From the work of Kristeva and Cixous, communication scholars can borrow concepts that could be universal and inclusive and that could help create a theoretical framework in which sexual differences can be affirmed in a non-divisive manner.[4]

French feminist theories offer a philosophical framework that fits into contemporary scholarly efforts to bring into awareness the power of social construction while, at the same, affirming existing biological differences. In particular, I will show that French feminist theories could contribute to three areas in interpersonal communication: (1) by using the body as a starting point, interpersonal communication scholars could construct a theoretical rationale to look at key interpersonal concepts in a way that is not to be equated with biologism; (2) interpersonal communication scholars could follow the French feminist approach to examining how gender is constructed in language and discourse; and (3) French feminist theories could help interpersonal communication scholars in their current efforts to redefine concepts of sex, gender, identity, and self. Although some U.S. feminist interpersonal communication scholars are already involved in such investigations, very few appear to use the contributions of the French feminists.

The work of French feminists appears deep and varied and offers a multitude of potential applications for interpersonal communication scholarship. For the purpose of this paper, I have selected just one key element that is essential to French feminism: the emphasis on the human body, which distinguishes French from U.S. feminism.

Kristeva And The Maternal Body

Kristeva's work offers a good starting point for a discussion of the French feminist focus on the body and sexual difference. Her work has been credited with bringing the body back into

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[4] Eventually, these new conceptualizations of sex and gender could serve as models for the discourses involving race and class.

structural perceptions of language (Oliver, 1993). According to Moi (1986), Kristeva arrived in France with a solid grounding in both Marxist theory and Russian Formalism. Her early work focused on linguistic and semiotic work, culminating in her doctoral thesis *La Révolution du langage poétique.* She became interested in psychoanalysis to the point of opening her own psychoanalytic practice and was particularly interested in Western representations of femininity and maternity. In her later work, Kristeva rejects the feminist notion that everything is political and "argues for the need to elaborate a more complex understanding of the apparently non-political aspects of human life" (Moi, 1986, p.8).

Her primary theoretical contribution has been the development of a dynamic, process-oriented view of the sign (Moi, 1986). Kristeva performs a balancing act by conceptualizing her subject as a definite subject, but one in process (*sujet-en-proces*). The theory of the subject as unstable, in process, and constituted in language is one of her primary contributions to feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1987), and I would argue, to philosophy of communication. Her approach still offers an alternative to common conceptualizations:

> the dramatic notion of language as a risky practice, allowing the speaking animal to sense the rhythm of the body as well as the upheavals of history, seems tied to a notion of signifying process that contemporary theories do not confront (Kristeva, 1980, p. 25).

This idea of the subject-in-process is illustrated in her analysis of the maternal body. Her depiction of maternity offers a fascinating portrayal of the interplay of biological and symbolic dimensions of identity and language:

> Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to *signify* [my emphasis] what is going on. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 237)

She develops the concept of maternal body as a "place of splitting" and a "threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture'" (1980, p. 238), leading to the question how we can "verbalize this prelinguistic, unrepresentable memory?" (1980, p. 239). For Kristeva, the "symbolic destiny of the speaking animal (. . .) is essential although it comes second, being superimposed upon the biological" (1980, p. 241). Kristeva asks what it is about the representation of the maternal that makes it alluring to society, that pleases men and women "so that sexes are established in spite of flagrant incompatibility" (1980, p. 103). She wants to examine why this representation of maternity is such a key issue for women. For Kristeva, there is no essential womanhood, not even a repressed one. Therefore, feminism's goal cannot be to restore the essential state (Weedon, 1987). For her, the feminine and the masculine are purely modes of language, open to men and women (1986b). Feminists mis-identify maternity with its dominant cultural representation, according to Kristeva, who concludes, "as a result, maternity is repudiated or decried by some avant-garde feminists, while its traditional representations are wittingly or unwittingly accepted by the "broad mass" of women and men. (1986a, p. 99)

Irigaray's Sexual Ethics

Psychoanalyst Irigaray was the first to present, in *Speculum de l'autre femme* (1974), a reasoned critique of Freudian and Lacanian concepts of female sexuality (Suleiman, 1986). She sees women's sexuality as autoerotic and plural (Weedon, 1987). Distinct male and female libidos exist in distinct male and female bodies. Male and female are distinct "others" to each other. Irigaray writes: "Who or what the other is, I never know. But the other, who is forever unknowable, is the one who differs from me sexually" (1993, p. 13).

Irigaray sees the rediscovery of otherness as a way of creating a new discourse. She suggests we need to change the perception of sex, space-time, places and destiny to allow for female otherness. Traditionally, woman was seen as a mother, which meant a place, and thus a

thing, to man. A sexual ethics could create a world where man and woman can live together (Irigaray, 1993). In Irigaray's view, language is based on the body. Since women have distinctly other bodies, they also have a distinctly other language. Language thus becomes gender and sex-specific. Weedon criticizes this concept, stating that making "such a sexuality the basis for women's language is politically dangerous, since it reduces women to a version of their sexuality," (1987, p. 65). Recent research in communication and linguistics suggests that notions of a genderlect, at least in American English, may be questionable. Research documenting women-specific language patterns may be better evidence of researchers' biases than of language patterns.

Cixous' Notion Of Bisexual Writing

Cixous was born in 1937 in Algeria. Her mother was of Austro-German descent, and her father died when she was very young. She was influenced by Lacan's theory of language and by Jacques Derrida's theory of *differance* (Conley, 1984). In her early work, Cixous calls on women to write themselves, to break the silence imposed by the phallocentric discourse. Cixous shares Irigaray's view of women's sexuality as rich and plural. As in Kristeva's work, the maternal function is not tied to the body of the person thus designated in culture, and kinship structures exist only within linguistic configurations (Conley, 1984).

She draws a parallel between feminine libido and writing (Weedon, 1987), but she does not equate women's bodies with women's language. She develops the notion of bisexual writing, but later moves away from it with her theories of libidinal economies (Conley, 1984). Cixous is probably at her best in *The Newly Born Woman*, which Conley (1992) calls her most influential work. Throughout her work, she focuses on reading and writing from a "feminine border" (Conley, 1984, p. 9), which focuses on the *jouissance* of women's sexuality. The body is the point of departure for Cixous. Oliver quotes Cixous as saying that anything to do with the body

should be explored (1993).

In contrast to Irigaray's perspective, Cixous posits that "masculine" and "feminine" cannot be equated with "man" and "woman." Conley describes Cixous' approach:

> A clean opposition into man and woman would be nothing but a correct repression of drives imposed by society. Cixous writes (of) sexual *difference* from her feminine poetic border in dialogue with a certain philosophy and a certain psychoanalysis. She searches poetically for operating concepts of femininity and economies of sexual difference(s) that would not come back to unity and sameness. (1984, p. 9)

It is this notion that I find of potential importance to interpersonal communication.

Wittig's Radical Lesbian Body

Cixous and Wittig are frequently portrayed as opposites, both in their writing and politics as well as in their conceptualizations of female sexuality (Suleiman, 1986). Wittig is a Marxist feminist associated with the journal Question féministes, which placed itself in opposition to psych et po, in which Cixous played a dominant role (until she disassociated herself from psych et po and des femmes in the 1980s). A novelist, Wittig won the Prix Médicis in 1964 for *L'Opoponax*. Her later works include *Les Guérilleres* and *The Lesbian Body*. In *Les Guérilleres*, Wittig envisions the violent overthrow of the patriarchy. In *The Lesbian Body*, all male symbols have disappeared, and women inhabit their own world. The novel explicitly refers to all parts of the female anatomy, including the skin, organs, muscles, nerves, secretions and excretions (Crosland, 1975). Wittig comments about *The Lesbian Body*,:

> The body of the text subsumes all the words of the female body. *Le corps lesbien* attempts to achieve the affirmation of its reality. . . . To recite one own's body, to recite the body of the other, is to recite the words of which the book is made up. (1975, p. 10)

Biological Determinism?

It would be easy, but inappropriate, to see the French feminists' positions as endorsements of biological determinism because of the centrality of the female body in their writing. The work of the French feminists, in particular the work of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray, has been criticized by many U.S. feminists as elitist and determinist. Ziarek (1992, p. 94) observes: "For many feminist critics, Kristeva's association of the maternal with the prelinguistic moment evokes the most oppressive hierarchies of phallocentrism." She calls Kristeva's relation between discourse and the maternal body "at once the most promising and the most problematic aspect of her work" (Ziarek, 1992, p. 91). Kristeva's theory of semiotics is promising, Ziarek suggests, because it opens a "specifically feminine point of resistance to the phallocentric models of culture"(1992, p. 91). It is problematic, according to Ziarek, because of its association with the prediscursive.

Wenzel (1981) considers the practitioners of écriture féminine under the leadership of Cixous advocates of biological determinism. Wenzel comments:" Écriture féminine emerges as a thesis dismally congruent with any theoretical consideration of woman based on biological destiny" (1981, p. 269). However, it is possible to read Kristeva and the early work of Cixous in opposition to biological determinism. Kristeva's observation that the biological memory is prelinguistic does not imply biological determinism. Far from making women prisoners of motherhood, Kristeva (1980) specifically presents the construction of motherhood as one that challenges archaic, mythical concepts of motherhood and sets out to sever the constructed equation of mother and woman.

The French feminists maintain that it is not the biology but the representation of biology that oppresses women. Therefore, women's oppression is not fixed or tied to their biology. Kristeva suggests that women's oppression is partially caused by the representation of woman as a mother. (The traditional feminist position portrayed women as oppressed

because of the pressure to reproduce and become mothers.) Kristeva wants to consider the maternal function apart from women and individual mothers and believes that the representation of woman and motherhood can be changed through changes in the discourse (Oliver, 1993). "Kristeva's politics of difference can sensitize feminists to the importance of conceiving of difference as a process of continually challenging identity," states Oliver (1993, p. 14). In the light of French feminism, gender and identity are socially constructed, bu not in their entirety. The body itself thus offers women a way of exploring prelinguistic biological memories and alternate representations of these that may thus create a new reality for them.

As Oliver (1993) puts it, Kristeva's strategy is to "trace the signifier through the body in order, at the same time, to reinscribe the body in language" (p. 3). The maternal function, which is important to human subjectivity, precedes the individual's entrance into language. For Kristeva, birth becomes the prototype for symbolic negation in a phallocentric culture (Oliver, 1993). The French feminist emphasis on the body could be helpful to research conducted in a cultural climate that has a more distant attitude toward the body. Some U.S. social scientific research appears to neatly, almost antiseptically, separate the human body from the speaking individual. One can observe this in many empirical communication research studies that seem to stress an apparent dichotomy between mind and body. But some qualitative, feminist examinations, also put emphasis on de-sexing the body to seek liberation from women's oppressive biological womanhood. French feminism may point to an alternative approach.

This approach appears particularly useful because it offers communication scholars a way of bridging into biological and neurological research. This could lead to research that accommodates, in its theoretical framework, the coexistence of biological and cultural elements in our lives, rather than reducing our lives to predetermined biological existences or having us

blindly ignore biological findings. Crosland (1975) observes in her introduction to *The Lesbian Body*: "The starting point of life and civilization can after all only be the body" (p. 6).

Language: Speaking The Body

Despite their theoretical differences, Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva all insist, in their own words, that the body can, and should, speak. Kristeva, Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig agree that women's bodies and language are inseparable and intertwined. Body and language are socially constructed, although not in their entirety. Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig seek to create a new language to speak (about) the female body and to use this language as the basis of a female-centered politics (Suleiman, 1986). However, while Kristeva also sees rethinking the maternal body as inseparable from rethinking of language (Ziarek, 1992), she questions that women should work to construct alternate discourses (Jones, 1991). Irigaray insists on discussing the morphology of the sexed body, which designates the interval between form and matter (Oliver, 1993). She tries to "open a space for a new desire, a place (interval in space/time) that could be inhabited by each sex, body or flesh" (Oliver, 1993, p. 172). Irigaray maintains that men and women have distinct languages, whereas for Kristeva, language is masculine or feminine, not an effect of biological sex. [5] Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig link feminine libido to female sexual organs and explore language created out of female or feminine desire as a place of resistance. Wittig is famous for her neologisms and word modifications, such as the "tendon of Achillea." Such creations are essential in a world "where language is the clue to speech, life and the body itself," writes Crosland (1975, p. 6).

[5] Weedon (1987) suggests that this position "marks a shift from biological sexual difference to subjectivity as purely an effect of language which has feminine and masculine aspects" (p. 69).

Wittig writes in *Les Guérilleres*:

> The women say that they have found a very large number of terms to designate the vulva. They say they have kept several for their amusement. The majority have lost their meaning. If they refer to objects, these are objects now fallen into disuse, or else it is a matter of symbolic, geographical names. Not one of the women is found to be capable of deciphering them. (1971, p. 48)

Again and again, the French feminists speak or write their bodies to show how language has excluded the female/feminine experience. Wittig writes about the use of language in *The Lesbian Body*:

> 'J' [*Je*] as a generic feminine subject can *only* enter by force into a language which is foreign to it, for all that is human (masculine) is foreign to it, the human not being feminine grammatically speaking but he [*il*] or they [*ils*]. 'J' [*Je*] conceals the sexual differences of the verbal persons while specifying them in verbal interchange. 'I' [*Je*] obliterates the fact that *elle* or *elles* are submerged in *il* or *ils*, i.e., that all the feminine persons are complementary to the masculine persons. (1975, p. 10)

For Suleiman, Irigaray's concept of an exclusive women's language is unsatisfactory because it leads to the reverse of the phallocentric exclusion of women. For Cixous, both men and women are caught in specific historical-cultural contexts which have constructed a "theatre of representation." The term "woman" is not a natural term but a "trap-word" (Conley, 1992, p. 40). For Cixous, "everything is language, and the body is always a written, never a 'natural body'" (Conley, 1984, p. 57). She suggests that perhaps some day, "masculine" and "feminine" could be replaced by other adjectives, such as color adjectives, to sever the biological connection. However, even Cixous acknowledges at this point that since "feminine" and "masculine" are still used, and since questions of sexuality have risen to the foreground, it would be easy for the terms to slip back into the old equation and for "feminine" to express a glorification of women (Conley, 1992). One might argue that this is what happened to Cixous' later work.

By making the body speak and by writing the body, the perhaps most dramatic contribution of French feminism to interpersonal communication research could thus lie in the construction of gender and identity.

Gender and Identity

The four French writers have distinct notions about gender and sexual identity. For Wittig, the sexual is not ontological or biological but political. She arrives at the famous statement "lesbians are not women" (Wittig quoted in Suleiman, 1986, p. 19) by arguing that "woman" only has meaning within a heterosexual sexual system of thought and economy. According to Wittig, sexual differences will be obliterated in the class struggle. I consider the separatist aspects of Wittig's work detrimental in regard to social or political change, but perhaps this is the place where one needs to distinguish poetic from political truth (Suleiman, 1986). I agree with Suleiman that the creation of an exclusionary vision such as the one crafted in *The Lesbian Body* is likely to have the opposite effect. Suleiman asks, "Is one going to do away with the confines of sexual categorization, whether in language or in life, by eliminating one of the terms altogether? Does not the eliminated term become reinstated by its very absence? "(p. 22).

Irigaray's concept of distinct male and female libidos and sexual differences seems to perpetuate rather than transform the dualism inherent in Western culture. Neither Wittig's nor Irigaray's conceptualization of gender allow for a radical transformation of discourse. However, a combination of concepts developed by Kristeva and Cixous may offer a new avenue. These concepts are Kristeva's idea of the subject-in-process and her investigations into the cultural representations of biological conditions and Cixous' notions of bisexuality, discursive construction of "man" and "woman," and her assumption that one cannot place oneself out of one's historical-political discourse.

The French feminists conceptualizations of gender and identity could be used to complement current work in interpersonal communication involving gender scales and distinctions between qualifiers such as "male," "masculine" and "man." Communication scholarship currently works with two main constructs: sex and gender. Contemporary scholarship involves differentiation between "sex" as biological characteristic and "gender" as the representation of socially constructed and/or psychologically grounded manifestations of previously sexually-identified traits. Keeping in mind the French feminist emphasis on the body, and, in particular, Kristeva's reflections on a prediscursive biology, the task for scholars thus is to choose which construct they want to pursue. Rather than eliminating sex, one may want to investigate sex out of a rationale of prediscursive biological differences, e.g. neurolingual differences. On the other hand, scholars would want to distinguish, as Cixous and Kristeva do, between "male," "masculine," and "man," and "female," "feminine," and "woman." Communication scholars already make these distinctions when they use gender scales.

But even when scholars assess gender, they perpetuate the limitations of the dominant discourse because they generate anew dualisms (e.g. masculine, feminine) that have already been constructed in discourse and we basically just reapportion them in disregard of sex. Reapproaching the debate from a theoretical framework that contains the aforementioned notions of Kristeva's and Cixous' work might offer an alternative. Kristeva's theory offers conceptual tools for examining the construction of discourse, and the exclusions inherent in this construction, specifically in the context of representations of the feminine and the maternal. For Ziarek, the "most promising" aspect of Kristeva's thought lies in the repositioning of the feminine speaker (1992, p. 105). This refers to Kristeva's subject-in-process. Ziarek points out that Kristeva's theory of language gives us a tool to "question and revise rigid notions of sexual identities and subject positions in culture" (1992, p. 105). Kristeva's theory of the subject in

multiple practices could lead to a concept of femininity that allows a pluralism of feminine experience.

The French feminists begin with an individual as a subject-in-process.[6] This subject is bisexual.[7] This bisexuality does not consist of fusing two sexualities into one. Rather, Cixous conceptualizes bisexuality as "that with which each subject not enclosed in a false theater of phallocentric representation invests her erotic universe" (Conley, 1984, p. 60). All sexual components will be allowed to take stage.[8] Cixous wants "the bisexuality of a 'dual' or even multiple subject, who is not afraid to recognize in him or herself the presence of both sexes, not afraid to open him or herself up to the presence of the other, to the circulation of multiple drives and desires" (Suleiman, 1986, p. 16).

French feminism could point the way for interpersonal communication scholarship that operates in a "universal" framework in as far as its constructs would include men and women and all "degrees" of gender. According to Oliver (1993), Irigaray and Cixous both maintain men too have lost their bodies and their sexuality to the phallic economy. The masculine economy of metaphors, which excluded women's metaphors, is an economy of the same that created a monosexuality. Irigaray and Cixous are trying to imagine a bisexuality that does not deny difference. Oliver (1993) summarizes:

> For Irigaray, bisexuality is two different sexes engaging with their difference in discourse. For Cixous bisexuality means the location within oneself of difference, of two

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[6] This notion also appears in Cixous' work (Conley, 1994).

[7] "All human beings are originally bisexual" (Cixous in Conley, 1984, p. 131).

[8] Cixous says that for historical-cultural reasons, women are more open to bisexuality. This position has often been distorted or simplified by readings of feminists, who conclude that Cixous advocates biologism or argues that women are biologically destined to be more open to bisexuality.

sexes. She maintains that we are all bisexual; our primary bisexuality is perverted by phallocentric culture (p. 167).

Cixous' conceptualization of sexual difference and gender construction could help interpersonal communication scholars in current efforts to address and represent in communication research the variety of gender-related identifications that we know, from our own personal experiences and others' narratives, to be part of contemporary lives. Cixous warns that individuals cannot transcend their historical-cultural context. In this aspect, Cixous differs from Anglo-Saxon feminists who see gender as entirely socially constructed (Conley, 1992). For Cixous, it is not possible to create a new discourse and situate oneself outside contemporary ideology and history. However, one can change the discourse by re-marking and displacing terms (Conley, 1992). Cixous suggests to question the words "man" and "woman" and their adequation to a fixed sexuality, then to question terms such as "nature" and "essence" (Conley, 1992). Conley (1992) observes, "These terms determine how we think within the discursive formations of a given period" (p. 41). Cixous emphasizes, as do many contemporary U.S. feminists, that the effort to bring out the unspoken determination of language will lead to radical transformation (Conley, 1992).

The French feminist approach could be used in investigations of how sexually-derived gender traits such as "masculine" and "feminine" are constructed in discourse, not only in the dominant discourse but also in marginalized discourses such as lesbian and gay discourses. Leaving behind static manifestations of gender, investigations could begin with the presumption of constant process. Research could seek to document how gender traits may change in relation to one individual as the individual participates in multiple discourses and multiple subject positions, or over time. Rather than perpetuating the socially constructed notion of

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Cixous advocates biologism or argues that women are biologically destined to be more open to bisexuality.

"deviance" by separately examining marginalized discourses,[9] research presuming bisexuality as the norm[10] could incorporate research addressing all forms of gender orientation or preference. Research into the discourse of gay or lesbian couples raising children could be used to examine how paternal and maternal functions are culturally constructed and separable from biological function.

French feminist scholarship might alter the definitions of "self" and "identity" used in interpersonal communication research. In contemporary interpersonal communication scholarship, the concept "self" is associated with an internal cognitive world; the "self is an entity housed in a body and the repository of internal feelings, thoughts, and intentions" (Tracy & Naughton, 1994, p. 282). In contrast, the construct "identity," which Tracy and Naughton prefer, is grounded in the notion that "self is constructed, maintained, and challenged by self's and interlocutor's communicative practices" (1994, p. 282). An application of French feminist scholarship to these constructs would lead to a conceptualization of "self" as a symbolically (culturally) constructed representation of prelinguistic, biological determinants. This definition differs from the above definition of "identity" in two characteristics: the French feminist "self" is never static and always in flux (it therefore cannot be maintained) and for French feminists, exploration of the body is a means of arriving at alternatives to socially constructed representations of the body, which in return define gender concepts.

Communication scholars could use the French feminist approach when they design research to trace the constant evolution of "self" or "identity" through changes in discourse. An

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[9] There certainly exists a need for such investigations. The argument here is that research should look further, beyond such investigations.

[10] For some, Cixous' notion of bisexuality is not positive: "Bisexuality and homosexuality would here appear to be interchangeable, manifestly confused and confusing concepts of libido which exhort women to simply experience a broader range of sexual contexts, " Wenzel comments (1981, p. 270).

Scholars might want to investigate (e.g. through interviews, questionnaires) how a "woman" might construct her notion of "self" in varying discourses (e.g. with her daughter, with her mother, with her supervisor, with a colleague). One might investigate how the notion of self as a woman constantly changes with social construction of specific identities (maternal function, sexual function, etc.). Researchers could start with the assumption that even within one conversation, these may not be fixed. For example, it is possible that discourse would construct a woman as a mother and then switch to construct woman as an object of male sexual desire. Designations on gender scales could be recognized as being temporary in nature. Instead of comparative gender research, interpersonal research could be designed to document the interplay of feminine and masculine traits in discourse and, by extension, in concepts of identity. Through these investigations, the discipline might arrive at a concept that includes the notions of "self" and "identity" but also acknowledges prediscursive biological conditions. Suleiman quotes Jacques Derrida:

> I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each individual, whether he be classified as "man" or as "woman" according to the criteria of usage. (1986, p. 24)

Conclusion

The feminist analysis of women's bodies and sexuality began with the demand of letting women speak their own bodies. In the light of poststructuralism, this demand has become more difficult, since one can be no longer sure what one means when speaking of women as subjects (Suleiman, 1986). However, the investigations of gender and sexual difference need to continue. "Think of it as an approach that would allow us to check the many forms that

destruction takes in our world, to counteract a nihilism that merely affirms the reversal or the repetitive proliferation of status quo values," Irigaray observes (1993, p. 5).

This French feminist thought process stresses the importance of cultural or symbolic representation and construction, which may, if not challenged, delude us into perceiving biological differences as important. Part of the appeal of French feminist theories is their incorporation of humans as "speaking animals" (Kristeva, 1980), which allows the acknowledgment of the biological aspects of human life. The body, itself always in flux due to the chemical processes and cellular exchanges that take place, is analogous to the continually changing subject-in-process. The body is the subject-in-process, but it is not reducible to a mere biological phenomenon because it is always represented.

In Western cultures with strong male/female dichotomies it may be difficult to integrate this approach into research. However, cross-cultural comparisons may make the task a bit easier. In Chinese culture, for example, the concepts of yin/yang, which are equated in Western culture with male/female although they are more complex concepts in Chinese culture, are always conceived to be part of one, to be distinct, but one. The concepts are complementary rather than contrary. Many of the French feminists seem to allude to such a new plateau in the treatment of sexual and gender differences. Early readers of Wittig even saw her text as transitory in its violence and exclusion. Crosland (1975) writes: "When (. . .) the phrase "two cultures" may have a sexual connotation only, *The Lesbian Body* will still provide stimulating reading for both women and men" (p. 8). Later in her life, when Cixous devotes herself to reading the work of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, "a new pluralism, of different sexes, species, and cultures is discovered" (Conley, 1992, p. 82). Cixous then moves from the feminine to the human and to a cultural pluralism. Irigaray proposes a sexual ethics to move society to a place where man and woman can coexist (1993).

The desired result of these new explorations would not be a culture of Same, but one where difference does not translate into oppression (Conley, 1984). Intuitively, such a conceptualization seems more "natural" and representative of the human experience in the cultures this researcher has been associated with. Such conceptualizations will be more difficult, but perhaps the time has come for communication research to move from easily measurable and quantifiable concepts to less easily distinguishable ones, similar to the contemporary move to "fuzzy figures" in computer modeling and natural scientific research.

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