

**“BIOLOGICAL SEX AND GENDER COULD BE DIFFERENT”:
A ROLE FOR NARRATIVE IN THE PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL AND LINGUISTIC
DIFFERENTIATION**

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Abstract: In everyday behavior speakers make connections between language use and social identities. Gal & Irvine (1995) assert that we “often notice, rationalize, and justify” these connections between linguistic form and social identities in a process that creates “linguistic ideologies that purport to explain the source and meaning of the linguistic differences” (p. 973). Judgments of the social groups are solidified in this process. Johnstone (2006) shows how narratives about encounters with linguistic difference influence the formation of vernacular norms and simultaneously serve in the process of linguistic ideological differentiation. Building on Johnstone’s analysis of narratives about dialect difference, we suggest that similarly structured narratives about encounters with semantic/pragmatic linguistic difference also serve in the circulation of ideological differentiation. Specifically, we use Johnstone’s framework to show how the kinds of linguistic ideologies that Gal & Irvine identified are shaped in relation to social and linguistic indexes of gender and sexual orientation.

When lesbians get together, we talk; we listen to and share the details of our lives. We engage in recreational conversations with each other to connect as lesbians—to create a conversational space that is uniquely lesbian. We do this with an unspoken collusion which enables us to work together in our conversation building to mark our conversational space as lesbian.

(Morgan & Wood, 1995, p. 235)

1. Introduction

Johnstone (2006) analyzes people’s stories about encounters that highlight the uniqueness of the speech of Pittsburghers. Johnstone shows that the particular *structure* of these narratives, in addition to their content and evaluative function, emphasizes some linguistic difference, links it to a place (Pittsburgh), and strengthens people’s perceptions of that difference. Indeed, these narratives can even create a perception of difference or uniqueness where there previously was no such perception. Johnstone suggests in conclusion that the exaggeration encouraged in the “interactional demand for evaluation” (p. 54) in the narrative-telling process lends all such narratives about linguistic difference to the production and circulation

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of the ideological aspects with which people frame their perceptions of linguistic and social difference, as described in Gal & Irvine (1995).

In this paper we take up this notion of ideological linguistic differentiation and extend it to narratives in lesbian conversational interaction in order to explore Johnstone's framework for the sociolinguistic study of language and gender. We will show that ideological differentiation is circulated among lesbians discussing an encounter with semantic/pragmatic linguistic difference in a manner similar to the way dialect differences were circulated by Johnstone's narratives.

Johnstone (2006) has argued that narrative analysis in variationist sociolinguistics need not be only a means of speech elicitation, but can also be the object of study itself. The stories people tell each other about encounters with linguistic difference serve the creation and perpetuation of "shared orientations to particular sets of non-standard linguistic features" (p. 46). The narrative links these features to various sources of identity, such as region and class. We will show that sexual orientation is also an identity that narrative can link to in this way.

Johnstone cites Wolfram (2003, p. 253) as problematizing the "dynamic issue," the question of what social mechanisms are active as people circulate ever-changing vernacular norms. Johnstone finds an answer in Agha's (2003) description of the "enregistration" of British Received Pronunciation in the eighteenth century. According to Agha, in order for a speech register to spread (enregistration), it is important that there be public circulation of messages that typify the register. Johnstone applies this observation to the ideological linking of a contemporary speech style with the city of Pittsburgh. She identifies narratives about encounters with linguistic difference as one of the forms of public discussion about Pittsburgh speech that Agha would see as necessary for the dialect's enregistration.

We start with Johnstone's claim that narratives can be effective in circulating and consolidating dialect norms. Depending on the audience, the telling of stories describing the uniqueness of the speech of Pittsburghers creates or strengthens the perception that Pittsburghers speak their own dialect. We propose that narrative can have a broader role, namely, it can consolidate and extend other ideologies that language plays a role in. In other words, Johnstone's claim that narrative plays an important role in solidifying membership in a *dialect* community can be generalized as a claim that narrative *about language* can play an important role in solidifying membership in *other types* of social communities—for example, a lesbian community. Research on narratives told in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities is not new. The activity known as the *coming-out story* is a distinct narrative genre in which interactants negotiate shared meanings about identity and position themselves (or are positioned) in larger societal Discourses¹ about gender ideologies. Our paper considers another role for narrative in marginalized communities for the production of social and linguistic differentiation.

2. Language-and-gender ideology

Consensual cultural knowledge about gender is a social resource that is used by individuals in everyday practices. Conversation is one medium in which we take up a stance with regard

¹ We capitalize *Discourse* when it refers to societal values, practices, and ideologies. We use *discourse* uncapitalized when it refers to conversation. This distinction is sometimes spoken about as "big 'D' discourse" and "little 'd' discourse."

to values, practices, ideologies, and social structures that form the basis of a gender hierarchy. Through talk, as well as in other social performances and practices, individuals implicitly or explicitly align themselves with or resist ways of thinking about gender ideologies that are enforced by socially shared Discourses. Kiesling (2006) describes social Discourses as “the entire interlocking web of practices, ideologies, and social structures: a system of understanding and expectation that prefigures which practices and interpretations *are available*, and how practices and structures are understood [italics added]” (p. 262). Woolard (1998) notes that

ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, *gender relations*, the nation-state, schooling, and law [italics added]. (p. 3)

Gal & Irvine (1995) claim that the ideological process, whereby “people conceive of the links between linguistic forms and social phenomena,” can result in “erasure” (p. 972), which makes some people and practices invisible. For Lippi-Green (2001, p. 293) also, language ideology functions to promote the interests of certain groups and to devalue the interests of others.

In this paper we will consider how narrative is a vehicle for making clear how gender ideologies are represented in particular word choices. Through the evaluative force of narratives, lexical meaning can be contested and the governing ideology about gender that circulates through social Discourses can be contested as well. The narrative we will analyze was produced by people who live every day in parallel lesbian and straight worlds. They regularly struggle with whether, when, and how to contest their marginalization, erasure, and invisibility, since the prevailing, hegemonic Discourse about gender positions them as being outsiders, if not outcasts.

3. Johnstone (2006): The role of narrative structure in producing and circulating perceptions of dialect differentiation

Johnstone identifies narratives about encounters with linguistic difference as a key social mechanism in the regulation of Pittsburgh speech norms. Encouraged by the interactional demand for evaluation, the storytellers emphasize and often exaggerate a linguistic distinction and associate it with place. As such, these narratives serve the enregistration of “Pittsburghese” and encourage the tie of ideology to those who speak it.

Johnstone uses Propp’s (1968) system of functional analysis for the comparison of folk tales to construct two plot types, or “semantic scaffolds,” which model how the personal stories she collected are constructed. We feel this is an equally viable model to account for how ideologies of sexual orientation circulate. In order to show this, we start with Johnstone’s Type 1 and Type 2 plot structures, given in (1) and (2). Following this model, we alter these plots in section 4.

(1) Encounter with linguistic difference Type 1

1. The teller/protagonist is a Pittsburgher.
2. The teller/protagonist leaves home (to move, for work, for vacation, etc.).
3. The teller/protagonist encounters an outsider.
4. The teller/protagonist says something.
5. The outsider reacts in some way to the form the teller/protagonist has used.
6. The reaction causes the teller/protagonist to make a generalization about Pittsburgh speech.

(2) Encounter with linguistic difference Type 2

1. The teller/protagonist is not a Pittsburgher.
2. The teller/protagonist comes to Pittsburgh.
3. The teller/protagonist encounters a Pittsburgher.
4. The Pittsburgher says something.
5. The teller/protagonist misunderstands or fails to understand.
6. The reaction causes the teller/protagonist to make a generalization about Pittsburgh speech.

4. Narrative structure in a lesbian personal experience story about word meaning that negotiates ideological positions

Johnstone's plot Types 1 and 2 can be easily modified to model the structure of the example we will analyze. The modifications, which affect details, make the model more broadly applicable and underscore differences that might exist between the formation of dialect norms and other linguistically related norms. The resultant changes to Type 1 and Type 2 follow with discussion.

4.1 Encounter with linguistic difference Type 1.1

1. The teller/protagonist is a lesbian.
2. The teller/protagonist leaves her lesbian-only environment.
3. The teller/protagonist encounters a straight person.
4. The teller/protagonist says something.
5. The outsider reacts in some way to the ideology reflected in what the teller/protagonist has said.
6. The reaction causes the teller/protagonist to make a generalization about lesbian ideology.

Type 1.1 constructs a scenario where a lesbian reports saying something that gets a reaction from someone in the straight world. There are numerous circumstances under which someone might have this experience, though the likelihood that such an encounter occurs in-

nocently or inadvertently is low. People with non-standard dialects often conduct themselves without awareness of or concern for the sociolinguistic message their speech conveys. In contrast, members of a community who live in the world with stigmatized social practices and ideologies marked as non-standard are less likely to speak without an awareness of their status as a minority thinker. Nonetheless, any speaker can mistakenly assume the like-mindedness of their audience. Thus it is easy to imagine a narrative told by a lesbian about a time when she had misjudged the likely mindset of her audience. It is also likely that she could tell a story describing where she momentarily forgot the likely mindset of her audience, or spoke with awareness of it, deliberately displaying her otherness to them. In any of these situations, the narrative could conclude with generalizations about the political and social ideologies of lesbians and/or heterosexuals, thus strengthening the perceived differentiation between these groups.

4.2 Encounter with linguistic difference Type 2.1

1. The teller/protagonist is not a lesbian.
2. The teller/protagonist leaves the straight-only world.
3. The teller/protagonist encounters a lesbian.
4. The lesbian says something.
5. The teller/protagonist reacts in some way to the ideology reflected in what the lesbian has said.
6. The reaction causes the teller/protagonist to make a generalization about lesbian ideology.

The structure of Type 2.1 describes an encounter where a straight person reacts to the ideology conveyed in a lesbian's statement. This results in the straight person later telling others about this encounter, concluding it by making a generalization about lesbian ideology. The encounter might occur if a straight person entered an environment where a lesbian felt comfortable displaying a view that positioned her in opposition to the hegemonic Discourse on heterosexuality. It could occur any time a lesbian expressed her view in the company of straight people, regardless of the possible repercussions of revealing her non-standard ideology. The same scenarios described above in section 4.1 are applicable, except that under Type 2.1 the encounter resulting from a lesbian's candor is described by the straight listener.

Both of Johnstone's narrative types and our modified types feature stories centered around something said by a member of the relevant speech community (Pittsburghers, lesbians). Yet, to reveal the narrative structure we believe is most productive in circulating claims *among lesbians* about the distinction between a lesbian ideology and a straight one, we introduce a third narrative type. In this structure, a lesbian focuses on what a straight person said in the encounter. We have labeled this Type 3.1 for consistency with the other types we have introduced.

4.3 Encounter with linguistic difference Type 3.1

1. The teller/protagonist is a lesbian.
2. The teller/protagonist leaves her lesbian-only environment.
3. The teller/protagonist encounters a straight person.

4. The straight person says something.
5. The teller/protagonist reacts in some way, either spoken or in silence, to the ideology reflected in what the straight person has said.
6. The reaction causes the teller/protagonist to make a generalization about straight ideology.

In this model, a lesbian recounts to her lesbian friends the beliefs expressed by an outsider, a member of the straight world. And here we find a plausible representation for a narrative structure likely to occur frequently in lesbian-only discourse. In this narrative, the lesbian narrator takes up a position contrary to the ideology of straight world. We describe an example of such a narrative in section 4.4.

4.4 A sample analysis of a lesbian narrative using linguistic difference Type 3.1

The narrative extract in (3) comes toward the end of a 90-minute conversation between two lesbian couples. It was recorded in 2006 by one of the authors, Wicklund. The speakers are chatting over evening cocktails in the Minneapolis home of one of the couples. All speakers are white, middle-class, college-educated, and in their thirties. They have a dense and multiplex lesbian network, which includes owners of lesbian businesses. They appear to have a high degree of awareness about lesbian identity issues and seem to be experienced interpreters of sexual politics.

The evening's hosts were Carol, an administrator, and Rosie, a teacher. They had been together for three years at the time of the recording and had been recently married. The other couple, Lola and Claire, has been together since 1999. They had had a civil union ceremony in Vermont approximately five years earlier. At the time of the recording, Lola was a retail manager, and Claire had recently sold her restaurant and begun working at a warehouse. Wicklund has known Lola and Claire for about ten years, and they had agreed to record an evening spent with lesbian friends for a research project on lesbian discourse (Wicklund, 2007).

The conversation was recorded using a Sharp Viewcam VL-E42 video camera in ambient light. It was set in the living room corner on a tripod to run without an operator. This enabled the participants to talk without a researcher present. One couple was seated on a couch, the other couple sat in chairs side by side, facing the couch.

The occasion for the women's evening together was Carol and Rosie's recent return from their honeymoon in Northern Ireland. They purposely met to talk about their honeymoon; tales of their experiences on that trip dominated the conversation and preceded this example. Thus, the excerpt we analyze below is linked to overtly lesbian-related topics that had been part of the evening's prior discourse. In Rosie and Carol's co-constructed narratives about their honeymoon, an overarching theme was how they negotiated being a couple in public settings, and how they read their risks in this unfamiliar social environment, which might not be much different from what they were familiar with back home. They talked about picking places where they could be safely affectionate, not attracting undue attention as lesbians, and accurately reading people with whom they spent time. For example, one story was about going to a movie, picking one that would have a small audience so they could hold hands in the dark. They talked about spending time in a pub and how they read the people and their level of safety.

The narrative excerpt we analyze below is continuous with prior talk about fitting in socially or not. The excerpt fits the definition of an embedded narrative, which serves to “illustrate a point, make a comparison, support an argument, or otherwise elaborate a focus of concern” (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 37).

(3) Narrative example: “Biological sex and gender could be different”

- 01 ROSIE: The other thing that I- oh- the other thing that I was super annoyed by
02 is that because I'm an editor, um
03 *((Laughter))*
04 *((Indiscernible side exchange between Rosie and Claire))*
05 ROSIE: So, one of my co-workers sent out this website that, um, about listing a
06 whole bunch of things that your English teacher told you that are not
07 technically errors. Like it's not technically wrong to end a sentence with
08 preposition. [You know how many times we were taught that. Or to=
09 LOLA: [Right.
10 ROSIE: =start a sentence with a conjunction, like 'and' or 'but', you- you
11 know, English teachers tell you these things. But one of the things that
12 was listed in this non-errors site was this whole discussion of how the
13 world has changed from referring to people by their sex male or female
14 and now being- talking about gender.
15 LOLA: mmhmm
16 ROSIE: And this paragraph was really- it didn't say anything, specific, it was just
17 this whole sort of discussion. But I came away from the reading- it was
18 like the author was saying, “And introducing gender into the conversation
19 instead of just sticking with biological sex is dumb.” And I was like, “Oh
20 I am so annoyed with you.”
21 LOLA: What does the author use in terms of examples relating to what is
22 descriptive of sex and what is descriptive of gender?
23 ROSIE: There weren't really any examples of- it wasn't that these were
24 examples, but there was kind of a little aside about- that the person had
25 something about buying jeans that not only had a waist and a length but
26 also had a gender listed. I was annoyed because it struck me as a
27 person who didn't have a community or didn't have any part of a
28 community in which biological sex and gender could be different, or can
29 be on a- on a [continuum. So I was just super annoyed by it. I was just=
30 LOLA: [Spectrum.
31 ROSIE: =like, “You piss me off.”

Rosie, an editor, is participating in a presumably straight environment when using the online forum for writers. She encounters remarks by a web-writer that conform to a non-LGBT ideology and likely assumes that the web-writer is not a lesbian. The online forum seems to take the governing social Discourse for granted, which implies normative heterosexuality. In lines 18–19, Rosie vaguely describes what she considers to be wrong-headed

remarks of the web-writer, who seems to be objecting to the departure from what she or he perceives to be a proper prescriptive word choice. Rosie describes the web-writer as objecting to the use of *gender* and the pragmatic meaning it implicates in contexts where, in the web-writer's opinion, *sex* would be more appropriate to use. Rosie paraphrases the web-writer as having said, "Introducing gender into the conversation instead of just sticking with biological sex is dumb."

The absence of a terminological distinction, which Rosie is bringing to her lesbian friends for their mutual inspection, is a serious one that scholars of language have analyzed as well. The conceptual distinctions between the terms *sex* and *gender* are frequently blurred in public (and private) discourse. Bergvall (1999) suggests that "this substitution of *gender* for *sex* might be occurring so speakers can avoid any implications of reference to sexuality" (p. 276). Cameron & Kulick (2003) note that in current usage "the conflation of the two terms remains pervasive. . . . The term *gender* is very frequently used as a sort of polite synonym for (biological) sex" (p. 4). Both of these observations are consistent with Rosie's criticism of the web-writer's willingness to erase the semantic and pragmatic distinction between gender and sex, seen in lines 27–29 when she says that "biological sex and gender could be different, or can be on a- on a continuum." Freed (2004) also discusses the need to keep the terms *sex* and *gender* distinct, not just for clarity of expression, but also for scholars "to stay keenly focused on the linguistic and social practices that sometimes separately represent sex and gender" (p. 1). She provides numerous examples of the conflation of these terms in the scholarly literature on language and gender. She also discusses an advertisement about a medical procedure that ran in the *New York Times* on January 24, 2004, which illustrates the extent of terminological fuzziness and ideological framing in circulating Discourses of gender. The ad is for an in-vitro "sperm-sorting gender selection procedure." It ran with the headline, "Do you want to choose the gender of your next baby?" (Freed, 2004, p. 1).

While we do not know exactly what the web-writer participating in the online forum said, we do know that it conflicts with Rosie's world-view and that the story surfaced in an evening of lesbian-specific conversation. Rosie's paraphrase contains the kind of exaggeration Johnstone identifies as the relevant narrative device that creates differentiation: Rosie's evaluation is the point of her narrative and holds her audience's attention. Rosie continues to develop the evaluation with four more negative evaluations of the web-writer's word choice. The first appears in the orientation section when Rosie begins the narrative, in which she foreshadows the evaluative point of the narrative. She says in line 1, "The other thing I was super annoyed by is" In line 26, she repeats, "I was annoyed," and gives her justification. In line 29, she intensifies her negative reaction and says, "I was just super annoyed by it." That evaluation is immediately followed by constructed dialogue in lines 29 and 31, when, as if she were directly addressing the writer, she says with dramatic force, "I was just like, 'You piss me off.'"

Despite Rosie's vague description of the web-writer's comment, it is apparent that she and her addressees have enough common ground, and that they have no difficulty interpreting her meaning. We interpret Rosie as saying that the web-writer does not have a complex enough interpretive framework for gender so that gender can be understood in relation to other phenomena such as sex, etc. One would be more likely to realize the need for such a framework if one were not heteronormative. Rosie is also reacting to the moral and political context in which the web-writer made these remarks; it was a website contesting prescriptivist views of language, replacing outmoded thinking with a *new* morality about language. The

web-writer is thus taking a *moral* position on language. This stance challenges Rosie's view that there needs to be a distinction between *sex* and *gender*. To Rosie, this is not a neutral terminological issue, but rather a moral and political disagreement about terminology that is needed to accurately describe the lesbian world that Rosie and her interactants know.

Lola seeks common ground with Rosie when she asks in line 21, "What does the author use in terms of examples relating to what is descriptive of sex and what is descriptive of gender?" Although Lola is asking her for more specific information than just the exaggerated paraphrase, Rosie offers little, except to say there was an "aside" about buying jeans with a gender distinction included in the label's size information.

The point of the narrative is Rosie's critique that the web-writer's linguistic prescriptivism is tied to a different, but dominant, ideology and a different social practice than the practice in Rosie's lesbian community. This critique is excerpted in (4).

(4) Rosie's differentiation of two communities

26 I was annoyed because it struck me as a
 27 person who didn't have a community or didn't have any part of a
 28 community in which biological sex and gender could be different, or can
 29 be on a- on a [continuum.
 30 LOLA: [Spectrum.

Despite the vagueness of Rosie's answer to her question, in line 30, Lola is attuned to what she is saying as she finishes Rosie's sentence in lines 29 and 30, sensing from Rosie's self-interruption in line 29 ("on a- on a continuum") that she is searching for a word. Lola affirms Rosie's emphasis of differentiation as the two simultaneously utter the synonyms *continuum* and *spectrum*. Lola's affirmation shows the assumptions of shared knowledge of societal Discourses integral to defining lesbian identity that are important to these participants, and perhaps their community, too (Moonwomon, 1995). Specifically, the women display a shared familiarity with the competing, lesbian-friendly Discourse that redefines the traditional notion of gender, and which competes with the hegemonic Discourse that the web-writer aligns with. Lola could not have correctly finished Rosie's sentence without already sharing her understanding of gender as fluid, as not the dichotomy represented by the gender-polarizing lenses of hegemonic Discourses.

Rosie's report of her disagreement with the web-writer over the word *gender* supports the idea that linguistic forms

are seen as reflecting and expressing broader cultural images of people and activities. Participants' ideologies about language locate linguistic phenomena as part of, and as evidence for, what they believe to be systematic behavioral, aesthetic, affective, and moral contrasts among the social groups indexed. (Gal & Irvine, 1995, p. 973)

Rosie takes offense at the web-writer's use of *gender*, exposing the writer's allegiance to society's gender hegemony. In evaluating her use of *gender* as inappropriate, Rosie judges the web-writer as complicit in perpetuating and circulating the gender hegemony that creates a lesbian's marginalization. Rosie does not use academic terminology like *language ideology* or *gender*

hegemony in this cocktail-hour conversation with her friends, of course, but she is exposing the relationship between language and ideology, nevertheless. And though she is asked for more details than she is able to deliver, her friends nonetheless seem to follow her point perfectly. Our impression is that the critique that underlies her current complaint has been talked about before with her friends, and that they share it, or are at least sympathetic to it.

Rosie is analyzing the political stance taken up by someone who makes no semantic distinction between *biological sex* and *gender*. The web-writer participates in the process of erasure that Gal & Irvine (1995, p. 972) identify as a means by which people construct ideological representations of differences observed in linguistic practices. A use of *gender* that reflects a view of gender roles as open to interpretation regardless of biological sex is seen as iconic of a group such as Rosie's community. In reaction, the web-writer acts to render these groups invisible.

In the process of erasure, subscribers to the dominant language ideology either ignore or transform elements that do not fit the ideology's interpretive structure. Importantly, Gal & Irvine (1995) assert that it "is probably only when the 'problematic' element is seen as fitting some alternative, threatening picture that the semiotic process involved in erasure might translate into some kind of practical action to remove the threat" (p. 975). Individuals or communities, such as Rosie and her friends, who have become aware that feminine (or masculine) gender is a social performance that can be enacted in different ways, can present a challenge to some people. Gendered selves are constructed and performed in everyday interactions in reference to the ideologies of prevailing social Discourses. We are all engaging in social practices that represent a gendered self that is positioned in some way with regard to these Discourses. When the web-writer belittles the need for the word *gender*, it can be interpreted by a person who identifies as not-straight (or by someone who is an ally) as an attempt to erase or minimize the prevailing ideology that reduces the diversity of human social and sexual difference to binary categories, and naturalizes heterosexuality. Not having sufficient words to describe your world limits what you can understand and say, as well.

It is as if the web-writer is saying, according to Rosie, "Oh no, come on, don't start with that 'gender' stuff. Now it's on clothing labels! Gimme a break, we're male and female and enough already with this 'gender' thing." Rosie's vagueness about what the web-writer actually said may indicate that to her and her friends, the web-writer is taking a position with which they are all too familiar. Thus, it would need no elaboration for this audience. Reducing the exchange to a short paraphrase, it is as if Rosie is saying, "This person on the web forum thinks our view of flexible gender is dumb." Her audience asks, "What did the person say?" And Rosie responds, "Oh, I don't know, but they came from a view that it isn't on a spectrum."

Rosie's frustration, voiced to her lesbian friends, is an example of how marginalized groups attempt to intervene in the circulation of oppressive hegemonic Discourses, which make non-dominants invisible and which reify false dichotomies. As long as the web-writer's terminological view remains part of the standard social Discourse on gender, Rosie and her audience find themselves ideologically and socially positioned on the margin. This is not a dispute about two socially neutral definitions of a word. It is about a word choice that links to different sociolinguistic ideologies, and that indexes different subjective experiences of social reality. It calls into play "systematic behavioral, aesthetic, *affective*, and *moral* contrasts among (the) social groups [*italics added*]" (Gal & Irvine, p. 973) about what constitutes a gender system, in which one location in the system is more normative and therefore more

powerful than the other. When Rosie positions herself as resisting the prevailing Discourse, it is another opportunity during the evening of talk about the honeymoon in Ireland for these friends to strengthen their sense of lesbian identity and lesbian values. Or, as Morgan & Wood (1995) say, a chance to talk in “unspoken collusion . . . to mark our conversational space as lesbian” (p. 248). Building lesbian community through talk also builds social and ideological contrast.

5. Conclusion

This paper is a demonstration that Johnstone’s use of narrative analysis to study vernacular norm formation with regard to dialect differences has broader applications. Narrative analysis in Johnstone’s framework can be extended to study norm formation with regard to encounters with linguistic differences other than those pertaining to dialect differentiation. We can apply her model of the connection between narrative structure and ideological norm formation to personal experience stories told by other kinds of social groups that are also marking a distinctive social place for themselves. In this paper we have extended Johnstone’s model to lesbian personal narratives. We have shown that narratives told in this context too can play a role in the production and circulation of the ideological aspects with which speakers frame their perceptions of linguistic and social difference.

Everyday encounters with linguistic difference of a semantic/pragmatic nature, when recounted and evaluated in narratives, can also be a mechanism that circulates and solidifies ideological differentiation among individuals who position themselves in these narratives as members of socially marked groups, such as lesbians, but also others in LGBT communities. Thus, these personal experience narratives play a broader role in the production and circulation of the ideological aspects with which people frame their perceptions of linguistic and social difference.

We suspect that the critique underlying Rosie’s complaint is not new to any of the evening’s participants. Rosie is reconstructing her experience in a *lesbian* context, for a lesbian audience. This narrative’s content and structure shapes and circulates a consensual view of gender among the interactants. The exaggeration in Rosie’s narrative encourages the interactants to think in an essentializing manner about the straight speaker, simplifying straight speakers as the *other* in a society divided over the understanding of gender. Such simplified representations can “serve to generate linguistic differences or exaggerate and increase already existing differentiation” (Gal & Irvine, 1995, p. 975).

It is likely that social actors who are constructed as marginal through circulating Discourses are highly sensitive to occurrences of linguistic forms that even indirectly perpetuate their stigmatized social position, and which they experience as oppressive. They may be more likely to critique the Discourse in personal experience narratives created for and with like-minded others. Ehrlich (2002) notes that Cameron (1990, p. 86), paraphrasing Harold Garfinkel, makes the point that “social actors are not sociolinguistic ‘dopes’, mindlessly and passively producing linguistic forms that are definitely determined by social class membership, ethnicity, or gender” (p. 733). Because of these actors’ heightened sociolinguistic sensitivity, and the Discourses that compete with heteronormativity and circulate in marginalized communities, narratives that are told in these communities are likely to richly reveal how speakers interactively construct themselves as members of the community and differentiate themselves from the dominant sociolinguistic world around them.

The data discussed in this paper come from a conversation among lesbians about an encounter with linguistic difference of a directly ideological nature. Yet, if we return to Johnstone's original claim about how ideological differentiation circulates over difference that is less obviously ideological, we see additional applications of this framework of sociolinguistic differentiation for the study of how language and gender interact. That is, the same mechanism that adds ideological differentiation to perceptions of a unique Pittsburgh dialect is at work in the ways in which the phonological variety known as "clear speech" (Munson, 2007) is used to convey gay sexual orientation, as we discuss below.

Both encounters Type 1 and 2 in their original structures as Johnstone presented them, where a Pittsburgher's speech produces a reaction and evaluation, readily apply to the circulation of claims about what constitutes a gay male register. Numerous studies document listeners' perceptions of several articulatory and auditory characteristics in speech produced by men and women as not heterosexual-sounding. (Munson & Babel (2007) provide an exhaustive review of these studies.) Although there is no consensus on what combination of sounds might index a person's speech as gay or lesbian, it is hardly controversial to assert that the stereotype of how gay male speech sounds circulates more widely than a stereotype of lesbian speech patterns (which perhaps have no stereotype at all). Given that, it follows that a gay man signaling that stereotype could provoke a reaction by a straight person similar to someone's reaction to a non-standard dialect variation that is geographically or economically based, as represented by Johnstone's Type 1 and 2 experiences of linguistic difference. Both the gay speaker and the straight addressee could later tell the story to their respective communities, concluding with a generalization about gay speech style.

Future research, therefore, could continue to explore the viability of studying personal experience narratives about language told by members of socially marked groups, e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender groups. Moonwomon (1995) says that

the issue of visibility is bound up with the coming-out/being-out process. Whether, for an individual, being out means a self-labeling kept quite private or a public presentation of self as a lesbian, *lesbian identity is in tension with the enforcement of invisibility* [italics added]. (p. 64)

The narrative types under discussion here are likely to circulate in non-straight communities, because of the tensions from marginalization and enforced invisibility of lives lived in these communities. Therefore, Johnstone's model is likely to be broadly useful for understanding how narrative, sexual orientation, and gender ideologies interconnect in everyday conversational interaction. Applying this model would extend language and gender research in fruitful ways, and would make clear that the association of linguistic features with ideologies of sex, gender, sexual orientation, and sexual identity is part of a *general* sociolinguistic process that associates linguistic information with a *wide* range of social categories, and circulates that knowledge. One of the purposes of this paper is to demonstrate a possibility for this broader application of Johnstone's model.

The study described in this paper is also consistent with an observation about research that Weatherall (2002) makes:

The idea that taken-for-granted notions of sex, gender, and sexuality are not natural and inevitable consequences of biology or society but are constructed

through language and discourse, will, I think, be a general theme in future feminist research on language and gender. . . . However, the social practices that function to produce and maintain dominant notions of sex, gender, and sexuality are yet to be fully understood. (p. 156)

This is as true a characterization of speakers trying to interpret language as a social practice in their everyday world as it is of scholars trying to do the same.

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