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“I DEMAND MORE OF PEOPLE”:

Accountability, Interaction, and Gender Change

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Although accountability lies at the heart of the “doing gender” perspective, it has received surprisingly little attention from gender scholars. In this article, I analyze the different ways that scholars have conceptualized accountability. I propose a synthesis of these various understandings, and demonstrate the utility of this conceptualization with examples from my research on feminist self-defense training. This analysis sheds light on both the workings of accountability and the process of change in gender expectations and practices. I conclude by considering the implications of this reconceptualization of accountability.

Keywords: *theory; violence; social psychology*

Since its publication in the first volume of *Gender & Society* (West and Zimmerman 1987), the “doing gender” approach has been central to sociological gender theory.¹ Gender, according to this perspective, is not something that individuals possess. Rather, it is something they “do,” something that they must constantly accomplish in interaction.

West and Zimmerman’s, and later West and Fenstermaker’s, writings ground the doing gender approach in the notion of accountability. Their very first formulation of doing gender places accountability at the center:

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To be successful, marking or displaying gender must be finely fitted to situations and modified or transformed as the occasion demands. Doing gender consists of managing such occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate or, as the case may be, gender-inappropriate, that is, *accountable*. (West and Zimmerman 1987, 135)

More than 20 years later, they continue to argue for the centrality of accountability: “The key to understanding gender’s doing is . . . *accountability to sex category membership*” (West and Zimmerman 2009, 116).

Although other scholars have enthusiastically embraced the idea that people do gender, they have largely neglected the concept of accountability. Most writings either ignore accountability entirely or give it only passing mention; few authors explore how it functions, and there has been only one sustained attempt to empirically analyze its workings (West and Fenstermaker 2002). Moreover, many authors’ use of the term strays from West and her colleagues’ ethnomethodological conception of accountability, creating considerable theoretical ambiguity and confusion. Finally, when authors do write about accountability, they often provide a very thin conception of the interaction that it entails. As I will discuss in more detail, most writers note that people “are held accountable” to gender expectations—but by whom, how, and with what consequences are rarely addressed. In order to fully understand gender, we need to develop a clearer understanding of both accountability and how it functions in interaction.

In this article, I more fully specify the workings of accountability. What is accountability, and how does it play out, concretely, in interaction? I begin by comparing West, Zimmerman, and Fenstermaker’s initial formulation of accountability with the ways scholars have taken up the concept in subsequent work. I propose a synthesis of these various understandings and suggest some theoretical development of the concept. I then use data from my research on feminist self-defense training to illustrate how accountability functions in interaction. Because these data highlight how students’ understanding and doing of gender change as a result of self-defense training, this article also illuminates the importance of accountability for changes in gender expectations and practices.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Gender, West and Zimmerman write, is “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities

appropriate for one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 127). West and Fenstermaker define sex categorization as "the ongoing identification of persons as girls or boys and women or men in everyday life" (1995, 20). One's sex category, then, is the category to which one is perceived to belong. Although sex category is perceived to be aligned with sex, in most everyday interactions categorization is based on gender presentation, not biological criteria. Doing gender, then, creates differences between sex categories, differences that are socially constructed but that are understood to be natural and essential. These differences are then used to justify the underlying social arrangements.

West and Zimmerman ground their analysis in Heritage's (1984) ethnomethodological work on *accounts*, descriptions that "name, characterize, formulate, explain, excuse, excoriate, or merely take notice of some circumstance or activity and thus place it within some social framework" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 137). People do gender, West and Zimmerman argue, because they know that they are at risk of having their behavior evaluated in relation to prevailing normative conceptions of gender, and that these evaluations are enormously consequential for interaction and identity.

This knowledge, and the orientation to sex category that ensues, is what West, Zimmerman, and Fenstermaker call *accountability*. Because people anticipate assessments of their behavior, and imagine the interactional outcomes that may follow, they manage their behavior in an attempt to influence these accounts. Although much of the time people conform to gender expectations, accountability also provides the anchor point for gender resistance: Even if people choose not to meet gender expectations, they can hardly help responding to them. Finally, accountability links the interactional doing of gender to social institutions and structures:

While it is individuals who do gender, the enterprise is fundamentally interactional and institutional in character, for accountability is a feature of social relationships and its idiom is drawn from the institutional arena in which those relationships are enacted. (West and Zimmerman 1987, 136-37)

It is important to emphasize that the way West and Zimmerman use the term *accountability* is quite different from its everyday sense of holding someone responsible for their behavior. If I make a bad decision at work, for example, others may "hold me accountable" for that decision after the fact: They may attribute the negative outcome to me, insist that I take steps to mitigate the problem, or impose consequences. In this understanding of

accountability, *others' behavior* is the focus of attention. In contrast, West and colleagues would say that accountability involves *my knowledge* that others will evaluate my behavior and the way that this knowledge shapes my thoughts and actions *before I even act*. This knowledge often operates below the level of consciousness; our expectations about others' possible evaluations of us become incorporated into our sense of the "rightness" of our behavior. According to West and her colleagues' perspective, the consequences I suffer for violating expectations represent the enforcement of those expectations, not accountability itself. In its everyday sense, however, it is these consequences that are understood to constitute accountability.

West and colleagues' distinct use of accountability has been largely overlooked by other scholars, who almost invariably use the term in its everyday sense. For example, in a study of children's camps, Moore (2001, 843) writes that "the ways in which kids constructed their flexible and variable age orientations . . . guided how they categorized and held each other accountable." Bird, in an analysis of homosociality (1996, 130), writes, "Emotional detachment, competitiveness, and the sexual objectification of women remained as the criteria to which men are held accountable, especially in all-male interactions." Or Murray (1996, 17), in a discussion of male child care workers, writes, "The gender relations modeled at these sites . . . shape children's conceptions of what is appropriate for a woman or a man and, thus, afford children the conceptual apparatus for holding others accountable (and being held accountable themselves) as gendered and unequal beings." These are only three of many such sentences in the literature on doing gender.

To be sure, West, Zimmerman, and Fenstermaker's own writing contains this ambiguity as well. At times, as in the quotes here, they use *accountability* strictly to mean an orientation to sex category or the possibility of having one's behavior described in relation to situated gender expectations. At other times, however, and especially in their initial formulations, they use the term in its everyday sense. For example, in an early article, Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman write, "An individual involved in virtually any course of action may be held accountable for her/his execution of that action *as a woman or a man*" (2002 [1991], 29). Later, West and Fenstermaker write, "That persons may be held accountable does not mean that they necessarily will be held accountable in every interaction. Particular interactional outcomes are not the point here; rather, it is the possibility of accountability in any interaction" (1995, 34). Here accountability is used in both senses—as enforcement by others and as an orientation to the possibility of accounts. No wonder, then, that there is considerable confusion about the term.

A few authors do use accountability in West and colleagues' ethnomethodological sense (e.g., Kane 2009; Lucal 1999; Walzer and Oles 2003; West and Fenstermaker 2002). A handful of others expand on their approach, or use accountability in a novel but related way. Messerschmidt (2004), for example, retains the ethnomethodological focus on accounts, although he does not emphasize the perceived naturalness of gender expectations. For him, an "accountable" behavior is one that conforms to local gender expectations, whatever those might be.

A few authors emphasize the connection between accountability and social structures, a link that is explicit but not fully explored in West and colleagues' own work. Schwalbe (2000, 2005) introduces the term "nets of accountability," by which he means both ideas about "who can be held accountable by whom" and the "lines of joint action formed when people hold themselves accountable across time and across disparate contexts" (Schwalbe 2005, 68). This idea both emphasizes social interaction as the site of accountability—people are accountable to particular others and within particular social contexts—and links face-to-face interaction with social structures and institutions. This concept, however, has more to do with the enforcement of gender expectations than with the orientation to normative expectations that West and colleagues see as central.

Cook (2006) builds on Schwalbe's insights. Her major contribution is to emphasize the fact that accountability is a power process: Holding someone accountable to normative expectations is, in effect, claiming the power to define the situation and the actors involved in it. This power is, of course, not simply individual in nature; it derives from the institutional realm, and demonstrates how individuals reinforce structural inequalities through their exercise of power. This work shares West and colleagues' interest in the links between accountability and social structure, but again emphasizes individual enforcement.

Synthesis

The scholar of gender is left with a puzzle: The originators of the "doing gender" approach intend the concept of accountability to be used in a very specific way, but virtually no one else uses (or understands) it that way. Here, I propose a synthesis that retains the ethnomethodological heart of accountability, but broadens it to include other scholars' uses of the term.

The sense of accountability as orientation to sex category is key to understanding the accomplishment of gender.² The constant and ubiquitous orientation of one's thoughts, perceptions, and behavior to the societal

ideals and local expectations associated with sex category provides an important motivation for doing gender.³ Individuals are aware that their behavior is subject to account—literally, that others may describe and assess it in relation to normative expectations for their presumed sex category. As a result, they orient their consciousness and behavior to how their own and others' appearance and behavior fit (or do not fit) with these expectations.

At the same time, to say that accountability is *only* this orientation is to obscure the role that interaction plays in this important process. People are occasionally called on to account for their behavior as women or men, and they are always subject to the explicit and implicit consequences of others' assessments. These consequences, and the assessments that underlie them, are what maintain the urgency of the individual's orientation to sex category. These interactional manifestations of accountability, which are closer to the everyday use of the term, are an integral part of the social processes that follow from and reinforce orientation to sex category.

I therefore propose thinking of accountability as a three-part⁴ interactional system that produces gender. The foundation of the system is people's *orientation* to sex category, as described here. This is the heart of the matter, and what West and her colleagues mean when they talk about accountability. Next is *assessment*, or the production of accounts that evaluate people's behavior in relation to expectations for their presumed sex category. As West, Zimmerman, and Fenstermaker describe, people manage their behavior so as to control, as much as possible, these potential accounts. This self-management entails self-assessment: In order to shape their own behavior, people must evaluate themselves, considering what accounts their appearance and behavior may elicit. At the same time, people also assess others' behavior in relation to sex category, forming accounts of others' behavior that they may or may not communicate explicitly. These processes of monitoring and assessment generally occur without our active awareness (Martin 2006); they rise to the surface of interaction only occasionally, such as when expectations change, accountability threats emerge, or other interactional disruptions occur.

These assessments form the basis for the final element of the system, *enforcement*. Here is where the everyday use of the term *accountability* enters: People hold each other—and themselves—responsible for their accomplishment of gender by implementing interactional consequences for conformity or nonconformity. Closest to the ethnomethodological meaning of accountability is “calling someone to account” for their behavior: demanding that they describe or explain their behavior with reference to shared normative expectations. Cook calls these moments of

calling someone to account "accountability rituals"—challenges to a person's sex category membership that require that the target respond in order to reclaim membership in the category and thus repair any interactional disruption that has occurred. For example, a boy who is called a sissy "is being told 'you don't belong in this social category called 'male'", and to prove his masculinity he must take decisive action" (Cook 2006, 113; see also Jones 2010; Messerschmidt 2004; Pascoe 2007).

Even more common than calling someone out in this way are other consequences for gender nonconformity that, through their application, imply that one has failed to appropriately accomplish gender. These consequences take multiple forms: direct or indirect comments or questions (e.g., "Are you really going to wear that?"), the administration of material rewards or physical punishments, smiles of approval or frowns of disapproval, or simply continued (or discontinued) social interaction. As I discuss in more detail below, including assessment and enforcement in the concept of accountability synthesizes and clarifies existing uses of the term and appropriately places interaction at the center of our understanding of accountability and doing gender.

In the remainder of this article, I use data from my research on feminist self-defense training⁵ to illustrate this three-part system of accountability. When women complete self-defense training, as I have discussed elsewhere (Hollander 2012), they often begin to do gender differently, changing both their own behavior and the expectations they hold for others. Others respond to these new expectations and, as a result, the course of interaction may be transformed. These changes provide us an opportunity to see the workings of accountability more clearly. In routine interactions, the doing of gender is often hard to discern; it is just "the way things are" and the central role of accountability is obscured. When normal routines are interrupted, however, the process of doing gender, including the role of accountability, becomes more visible.

This analysis, then, sheds light on both the workings of accountability and the process of change in gender expectations and practices. Various authors have described this process as "undoing gender" (Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009), "redoing gender" (Walzer 2008; West and Zimmerman 2009), or "degendering" (Lorber 2005). In the remainder of this article, I argue that self-defense training fosters a redoing of gender in the sense that Walzer describes: "People remain cognizant of the possibility of gender assessment, but they describe changes in their own perceptions of the inappropriateness of the gender violations" (2008, 6), and develop new notions of appropriate gendered behavior.

METHODS

Between 2001 and 2005, I studied women enrolled in a self-defense class offered through the Women's and Gender Studies Program at a university in the western United States. The data I present here are drawn from 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with self-defense students, focusing on their experiences in the class and its effects on their lives. All students in four terms of the self-defense class were invited to participate in these interviews; 52 (of 98 total students) indicated interest in being interviewed and 20 followed through by making and keeping interview appointments.

Two other types of data from the project also inform my analysis. First, a much larger group of self-defense students (118 women of the approximately 150 enrolled in the class across five terms) volunteered to complete three written surveys: at the beginning of the class, at the end of the class, and one year after completing the class. Survey questions focused on participants' past experiences of violence; their thoughts and feelings about violence, gender, and themselves; and, on the final surveys, their experiences in the self-defense class.⁶ Finally, I attended the class one term as a participant observer. My formal role was that of an assistant: I helped with the logistics of the class, demonstrated techniques, and held punching bags for the students to strike. Although most of the data I present are excerpts from the interviews, my analysis draws on all three forms of data.

The class involved 45 hours of instruction and practice in physical and verbal self-defense skills, as well as awareness and prevention strategies and information about violence against women. Physical techniques were practiced in slow motion and then full-force against pads held by the instructor and her assistants. The class was similar to other feminist self-defense classes offered around the nation over the past 25 years, and fit the criteria for effective self-defense classes established by the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NCASA n.d.).⁷

In general, the students in the self-defense class were very similar to other women enrolled at the university, though because of the class's popularity, many were juniors and seniors before they were able to enroll. Most were of traditional college age: Participants who completed the first survey ranged from 18 to 37, with a mean age of 21.7. Like the larger university community, most were white, although about 20 percent identified themselves as other races (6.0 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, 3.4 percent Latina, 1.7 percent Native American, and 8.5 percent multiracial). See Appendix A for sociodemographic information about the participants quoted in this article.

To analyze the qualitative data, I read through a subset of the transcripts, field notes, and qualitative survey responses, and developed a coding scheme that captured the major themes present in the data. I then coded all the data based on this scheme. For the purposes of this article, I examined all excerpts related to change, gender expectations, and accountability. I read and reread excerpts identified with these codes to detect both patterns and exceptions, and then returned to the full transcripts and field notes to place these excerpts in context. Quotes were selected to be representative of multiple participants' comments and sentiments, and to be consistent with the overall tenor of the survey, interview, and participant observation data.

These data are, of course, limited. While the interviews produced rich storytelling, students' descriptions of their experiences and interactions are filtered through their own perceptions and interactional goals. Some scholars have argued that only naturalistic, ethnomethodological observation is appropriate for studying how people do gender (e.g., Wickes and Emmison 2007). However, the interviews allowed students to discuss how self-defense training had affected multiple aspects of their lives and to describe their interactions with a wide range of people across a variety of times and situations; it would be difficult to capture all these experiences using only observational methods. On balance, I believe these data provide a useful beginning for understanding how accountability functions in interaction.

ANALYSIS

Below, I use examples from my study of women's self-defense training to illustrate the three aspects of the accountability system. I then use additional examples to argue for the multidirectionality of accountability processes, the role of self-accountability, and the centrality of accountability to change in gender expectations and practices. I conclude by considering the potential structural implications of the workings of accountability.

Three Aspects of Accountability: Orientation, Assessment, and Enforcement

One place where the functioning of accountability is clearly visible in self-defense classes is in students' learning to yell. Yelling is an important component of the course, initially taught on the first day of class and then integrated into every subsequent session. The instructor tells students that

yelling during physical self-defense increases the power of their strikes, and may be sufficient to deter an attacker. Many students report initial qualms about yelling, and this was evident in my observations. On the first day of class, students were timid and obviously reluctant to yell. As the class went on, however, their yells became louder and more powerful, and many interviewees told me that they had come to enjoy this component of the class. This student, responding to my question about what she remembered best about taking the class, describes the process well:⁸

One thing that I loved but is basically a challenge for a lot of women is the yelling aspect of self-defense. At first I was apprehensive because I didn't want to, you know, be that girl that yelled, and everyone's like, "Whoa, she likes to yell." Like, you don't want to stand out in that way. (Karen)

Karen's orientation to sex category membership is clear in this comment. Although she wants to yell, she (and, she imagines, "a lot of women") feels inhibited because of the reactions she imagines others will have; she doesn't want to stand out and be "that girl that yelled." She anticipates that others will comment on her liking to yell (i.e., form accounts of her behavior), implicitly contrasting her behavior with normative ideals for women in most public situations.

Another student's comments make the gendered nature of yelling explicit:

Girls . . . are just taught you're not supposed to be loud. You're not supposed to be getting angry or anything like that. You're just supposed to be quiet, you know? Like shouting is not a nice thing. You're a girl. What are you doing? It's not ladylike. (Christie)

Like Karen, Christie makes visible her orientation to sex category membership. Girls, she knows, are "not supposed to be loud." She imagines that if she were to yell, others would call on her to account for her behavior, and she explicitly connects this imagined enforcement with her status as a woman: "You're *a girl*. What are you doing? It's not *ladylike*." Yelling, then, risks this kind of assessment and enforcement for failing to appropriately accomplish gender.

During the self-defense class, however, the legitimacy of these beliefs is deconstructed, and students are encouraged to be as loud as possible:

We'd do a lot of voicing. That's another thing that I was never used to. You don't yell. But [the instructor] taught us, "Have your voice heard. You guys are women, I want your voice to take up this entire room." And we did. We would yell and it, oh, it felt so good. (Hannah)

Here the explicit reframing of gender is clear. The instructor links the new, situated expectation (yelling loudly) to sex category ("You guys are women."). This represents a reorientation to sex category membership; being a woman still entails behavioral expectations, but now these expectations, at least in this setting, include having your voice heard rather than being quiet and "ladylike." The instructor assesses the students relative to this new expectation, and enforces their behavior through her comments and instructions. These situated expectations trump the more general normative ideal in this context. And, as I discuss at greater length below, these new expectations eventually transcend the specific situation of the self-defense class and become integrated into the students' gender ideology, shifting their behavior in other situations as well. The interconnections among the three elements of the accountability system—orientation, assessment, and enforcement—are evident in these comments.

Multidirectionality

Most work on doing gender that mentions accountability describes the process as I have done: the focus of the analysis is on the actor doing gender, and accountability is essentially something directed at the actor from the outside. Actors manage their behavior because they know that others in their environment will evaluate them, and these others "hold them accountable" through the processes I have termed "assessment" and "enforcement."

But doing gender is an interaction, not simply a performance. It is not something one produces independently for an audience, but an accomplishment that is collaboratively constructed through interaction with others. As a result, accountability processes flow simultaneously in multiple directions. In interaction, we orient ourselves to others' imagined assessments and we experience the ways they enforce gendered expectations. But at the same moment, we are also assessing others' behavior and enforcing the expectations we perceive to be relevant in the local situation. And simultaneously, these others are doing the same thing: orienting to our (and others') assessments, managing behavior, and experiencing assessment and enforcement.

Self-defense students' changed understandings of gender made the process of assessing others very visible in the interviews. This student, for example, reported that after taking the self-defense class, she evaluates other women's behavior differently:

With women, I mostly think in terms of, well, I see that she isn't standing up for herself, I hope that someday she hears about women's self-defense. . . . It's like—I don't tell them this, but I'm thinking while I'm interacting with them—you seem not very confident or you seem kind of frail, or whatever. Like I hope that some day you have inner strength. (Sarah)

Sarah reports that learning self-defense has caused her to develop new expectations for other women; she now believes they should be strong and confident and stand up for themselves. When the women with whom she interacts fail to do so, her internal dialogue notes this failure.⁹

Changes in assessment are also visible in students' comments about their past experiences, which they now reevaluate through the lens of their new expectations. For example:

I just think back to a lot of situations I've been in where I'm like, "Wow, that really, I didn't give them permission to do that." . . . Because there's a lot of experiences where I just wish they hadn't happened. And then reading [the class materials] and then thinking back to them, I'm like, that really shouldn't have happened. You know, I didn't give them permission to do that. . . . That was assault. You know, that wasn't consensual. (Christie)

Christie now understands heterosexual relationships in a new way: She now believes that women's consent should be a prerequisite for sexual interaction. Although she cannot return to these past situations to enforce her new expectations, it seems clear that, at least in her own mind, she now assesses these others relative to her new expectations and judges their behavior unacceptable.

Students also described how they enforced their new gender expectations in interaction with others. For example, in class students were often asked to practice physical or verbal skills in pairs, with one student playing the role of an assailant and the other defending herself. This student described how she interacts with students who seemed timid during these exercises:

I had multiple girls that were so tentative to hit me or touch me. It was like, *dink* [mimes weak hit], you know, on my shoulder. It's like, "Harder," I'm like, "Go on, keep going. Show you're angry or something." (Tanya)

During these interactions, Tanya reaffirms the value of the new expectations for behavior learned in the self-defense class: Women should be strong, determined, and free to express stereotypically masculine emotions such as anger.

Students also applied these new expectations outside of the context of the class. Christie, for example, commented that learning more about sexual assault made her more critical of her friends' behavior:

It makes it so when I go to parties now with my guy friends, I'm more aware of how they act and everything. Like if somebody starts getting weird towards me, I'm like, "Back off." (Christie)

Christie's statement illustrates the full range of accountability processes. She is now "more aware of" how her friends behave; this represents a reorientation to behavior based on sex category. If someone "starts getting weird" (an assessment of their behavior), she tells them to "back off" (enforcement). As a consequence of taking the self-defense class, she has developed a changed set of beliefs about what women and men should—and should not—do; all three aspects of the accountability process are affected by this transformation.

Much previous research has focused only on others' assessment of the self, and has neglected the multidirectional nature of this process. I suggest that one reason that most discussions of doing gender focus on gender stability rather than change (Deutsch 2007) is that they analyze only others' assessment of the self. Attending to how others enforce expectations, particularly in the abstract, keeps our focus on the maintenance of the gender status quo, rather than potential challenges to it. Expanding the analysis to include the self's assessment of others better illuminates the process of change.

Self-Accountability

At the same time that people are evaluating others' behavior, of course, they are also assessing their own. This practice is implicit in the idea of self-management, described in West and Zimmerman's original statement:

To be successful, marking or displaying gender must be finely fitted to situations and modified or transformed as the occasion demands. Doing gender consists of managing such occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate or, as the case may be, gender-*in*appropriate, that is, accountable. (West and Zimmerman 1987, 135)

But as with the evaluation of others, the evaluation of one's own behavior has not been fully analyzed. I argue here that the same three-part system of orientation, assessment, and enforcement operates with regard to

oneself. Even when others are not present, individuals orient to sex category, assess their own behavior, and enforce expectations.

These three processes were visible in the data. Self-defense training encourages a fundamental reorientation to the meaning of sex category membership. It is not simply that students know that others will assess them in terms of new expectations and manage their behavior accordingly; these new expectations acquire legitimacy and become part of women's own beliefs, changing their behavior across situations. The basis for this shift is a cognitive change in women's understandings of gender. Through discussion of violence against women and its consequences for all women, they develop a new critical consciousness about gender (see Hollander 2012 for a much fuller discussion of this transition). This new world view causes students to reevaluate and sometimes discard previous expectations for behavior, replacing them with expectations more consistent with their new understanding of gender. At first, students try out these new beliefs in the local context of the self-defense class, where they are explicitly preparing for assault or harassment. Over time, however, they broaden the scope of these new expectations to include other, everyday situations that do not obviously entail danger or violence. For instance, this student talked about developing new beliefs about women's rights in the workplace:

[Taking this class] changed everything. And it was just someone saying, "You can love yourself and you deserve this and you should be able to do this and not be afraid, and this is your right." And it was like, whoa, you're right. I should be able to be in a working environment and not be uncomfortable about the men around me and what they say. I shouldn't have to just watch what I say, how I act or anything. . . . If someone's making you feel uncomfortable, you have every right to say stop, it's not okay. . . . You should be able to have it all because it's not fair that just because you're a woman you have to deal with that at work. It's just not fair, and I don't want to just sit there and put up with it anymore. (Rachel)

In Rachel's statement, we can see both her new orientation to sex category and how the process of reorientation took place. She suggests that before taking the self-defense class, she did not believe that she had the right to be comfortable in her working environment. She connects this belief to the fact that she is a woman; this is a gendered lack of entitlement. But during the class, the instructor and her assistants said clearly that she *did* have these rights and, by connecting this idea to a principle of justice, challenged the legitimacy of the old belief. This new expectation

applied not only to the class context, or to situations directly relevant to the class topic, but also to everyday interactions. Rachel went on to describe several other occasions outside of the class where she acted on her new beliefs by speaking up when she felt uncomfortable, demonstrating a fundamental reorientation of her expectations for her own behavior.

Having developed this new orientation, students then assess their own behavior in relation to it, and attempt to shape their behavior to match their new ideals. For example, Isabelle describes her attempts to behave more assertively:

It's kind of cheesy, but I have put more thought into [being assertive] in my other relationships, in trying to say how I feel and what I need from the other person. . . . I have given a lot more thought to the fact that it is my right and responsibility to voice what I need and what I want from another person. (Isabelle)

Here Isabelle clearly describes both her reorientation to gender and her efforts to meet these new expectations, independent of others' evaluations. She now believes that she should be assertive in her relationships, communicating to others how she feels, and these beliefs have acquired normative force. It is not simply what she would like to do; it is her *responsibility* to live up to this expectation. She assesses her own behavior in this regard, and tries to enforce this expectation by making herself say how she feels and what she needs. These new ideals are supported by others in the class, of course, and when she is in their presence they may enforce them. But even when alone, or with others who do not know about her new expectations, she enforces them herself.

Transforming Interaction—and Gender

As I have described, accountability is the motor for the maintenance of the gender system at the interactional level. Accountability provides incentives, both positive and negative, for people to monitor their own behavior and do gender in accord with situated expectations. And if people do not comply by managing their own behavior, the assessment and enforcement elements of the accountability system provide further encouragement to do so.

But there is also room for change in gender systems, and understanding accountability as multidirectional and fundamentally interactional allows us to see how that change can occur. When gender expectations shift, and accountability processes change as a result, interaction may be transformed.

The self-defense students described many examples of how their interactions with others had changed as a result of taking the class: They reported effective negotiation with roommates and coworkers, more comfortable interactions with strangers, and more assertive communication with intimate partners. Consider the following story:

Rachel: I did [a local canoe relay race], and I had to drive a big truck to carry the canoe and everything. And right there, a woman behind a huge 4-by-4 truck and a canoe in the back and everything. And so I got crap the whole time, just like pulling out of the parking lot and everything, saying, "Woman driver," and all this other [stuff]. But when I was leaving our drop-off area for the canoe, I had to go around a sharp corner, and there was a fence post that was just holding up a little thing and I hit it by accident, because it was a narrow area. But of course, if I'm a woman in a truck, I'm going to get way worse crap about it. And so this man shouts out, "Why don't you let your *man* drive?" or something like that. And . . . I had my best friend . . . in the back of the truck, and she was like, "Oh, that's so rude." And I got out and I yelled at him. I was like, "You ignorant fool." It was like, "You dumb, central Oregon white man." Because that's what I grew up with. They're all white, they're all men, and they're all wealthy. And they are so ridiculous. But I yelled and said stuff, something back. And my best friend was like, "I'm so glad you said something. I was so angry, but I feel really good because you said something." I was like, "I know! I know, this is what I've learned." And stuff like that. And it was just fun to show her and then have her see the reaction and everything. It was like, "I know. This is what I do now."

Interviewer: That's a great story. What did the guy say when you yelled at him?

Rachel: He was like, he just stood there. And then he walked behind his car. . . . And I was doing the race with two other boys. And they had gotten to know me over the weekend, and when he had yelled that, they both looked at each other like, "Oh, no." You know, "You should not have said that." And so I started yelling and the guy just froze and walked behind his car.

Interviewer: He tried to hide behind his car?

Rachel: It was so funny.

All three elements of the accountability system are visible here. Rachel's orientation to sex category membership is clear; she knows how

a woman driving a truck will be seen, and anticipates others' responses. And as she predicts, men on the scene assess her behavior ("woman driver") and attempt to enforce the expectation that women, but not men, are incapable of handling large trucks ("Why don't you let your *man* drive?"). Note also the presumption of heterosexuality here: The heckler assumes that Rachel has—or should have—a man to drive her truck. The heckler expects that Rachel will be shamed by his comment, indicating her implicit agreement with his assessment of gendered driving abilities. But she is not. Both women are dismayed and angered by his comment, but because of her experiences in the self-defense class, Rachel gets out of the truck and confronts the man, challenging both his assessment of women drivers and the sense of entitlement that allows him to comment on women's behavior.

Here the multidirectionality of accountability becomes visible. The man has attempted to enforce expectations for gendered behavior—or, in everyday language, to hold Rachel accountable for her failure to meet these expectations. But she has new expectations for herself and for men, and not only resists his attempt at enforcement, but assesses his behavior in terms of these new expectations ("You ignorant fool") and attempts to enforce them by communicating this assessment. This change jolts the interaction, and the doing of gender, off its well-worn tracks. Rachel's reaction is so unexpected that the man does not have a response; he freezes and walks behind his car, apparently trying to remove himself from the interaction. One can only imagine his inner response, but his outer response makes clear that the interaction is not proceeding as he intended. His comment, assessing Rachel's behavior, was meant to keep her in line; instead, Rachel has assessed *him* in terms of an alternative set of gender expectations that do not permit sexual harassment, publicly shaming him for his behavior. Her pride in calling him to account for his behavior, and in living up to her new expectations for her own behavior, is palpable. She evaluates both his behavior and her own in terms of her new expectations, developed in the self-defense class, and as a result, both participants in the interaction do gender differently, and interaction is transformed. This interaction demonstrates the possibility of change in how gender is understood and done, and the central role of accountability in producing that change.

Not all attempts at change are immediately successful, however. In the following example, Rachel describes her difficulties challenging the previously taken-for-granted behavior of her male friends:

Rachel: And a lot of people, like the boys that I hang around with, get annoyed and frustrated now because I'm always like, "That was sexist!"

Interviewer: They can't get away with anything anymore?

Rachel: Yeah, now it's like, "Um, no," or "Excuse me, you *man*, you."

And stuff like that. So they're starting to get overwhelmed and frustrated, and they think that's the only thing on my mind anymore.

Here, Rachel makes explicit the links between accountability, doing gender, and sex category. By labeling her male friends' behavior sexist, she attempts to enforce the new expectations that she developed while taking the self-defense class. And these are not just any expectations; she connects them explicitly to gender ("you *man*, you"). These new expectations complicate her ongoing interactions with her friends, because they signal a rewriting of the implicit rules that previously governed the friendships. The friends respond by pushing back: by expressing frustration and by commenting that sexism now seems to be the only thing on her mind. In doing so, they both resist the change that Rachel is attempting to make in the terms of their interaction and try to enforce the old expectations, which permitted these kinds of behaviors. The eventual outcome of these struggles is not yet clear. What is evident, however, is that the self-defense class has empowered this woman to demand different behavior from others. This is a major shift in the power dynamics of the relationships, as well as the course of everyday interaction.

Although some people resisted the self-defense students' new expectations, as in the previous example, students reported far more examples of successful interaction change. Why did they not experience more resistance? It is well documented in social psychological research that behavioral expectations tend to call forth the very behavior they expect (e.g., Skrypnik and Snyder 1982; Snyder and Klein 2005). Several students provided additional evidence of this process when they noted that they perceived fewer intrusive comments and approaches from strangers since learning self-defense. For example, one student commented:

Irene: I feel like partially through the class, I started to feel like less of those situations [of harassment] started coming up for me.

Interviewer: That's interesting. What was that about?

Irene: I think you just kind of send out different vibes . . . like you put out this vibe like, "I'm not going to talk to you, and don't talk to me," or something like that. And it seems like less of those situations arose for me.

Students speculated that the changes in bodily comportment that they had learned (e.g., making direct eye contact, standing up straight, and taking up

physical space) made them appear less vulnerable and thus less attractive targets to potential harassers. Their more confident approach to the world, expecting that others would respect rather than victimize them, changed the way they believe they are perceived by others and effectively changed interaction. As I describe at greater length below, these changes may reverberate far beyond the particular interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Accountability lies at the heart of the theory of doing gender. It is curious, then, that most writers accord it only passing attention, and that its functioning has been so minimally articulated in past scholarship. Moreover, those scholars who have discussed accountability have typically used the term differently than the originators of the theory intended. As discussed earlier, West, Zimmerman, and Fenstermaker propose an ethnomethodologically informed understanding of accountability as orientation to sex category membership and demonstrate, across a range of situations, how that orientation affects interaction. Most scholars, however, have used the term in its everyday sense of assigning responsibility or consequences for behavior or outcomes. In this article, I have argued for an understanding of accountability that synthesizes both uses of the term.

Explicitly including assessment and enforcement, as well as orientation, in the accountability system solves three problems with the current use of the term. First, clearly distinguishing these three processes disentangles the existing incoherence in different scholars' use of the term. Although orientation to sex category membership forms the foundation for doing gender, it is the ongoing, interactional assessment and enforcement of these expectations that maintain that orientation. Anticipation of the accounts that others may develop is one motivation for doing gender, and the process of enforcement—whether one experiences it oneself or observes its effect on others—maintains gender regimes.

Second, including assessment and enforcement allows us to see accountability in action. Except in unusual situations, such as the public statements studied by West and Fenstermaker (2002), people's orientation to sex category membership is often invisible. Assessments, however, are sometimes made explicit, and enforcement is nearly always visible. Thus assessment and enforcement represent the visible manifestation of people's underlying orientation to sex category, and including them in the accountability system opens accountability to empirical investigation.

Finally, including assessment and enforcement centers accountability as an interactional process. Much scholarship on doing gender pays lip service to the idea that gender is something people do in interaction, without a full analysis of how that interaction unfolds and why it matters. Limiting accountability only to orientation to sex category membership perpetuates that problem. Orientations exist intraindividually (even though, as I discuss below, they derive from social institutions). If accountability is narrowly defined as orientation, analysts may overlook the interpersonal sequences of interaction that produce that orientation and result from it. Including assessment and enforcement in the system of accountability, in contrast, foregrounds interaction. When we communicate our assessments of self and other, and when we enforce gender expectations, others respond to these assessments while simultaneously assessing and enforcing our own doing of gender. This ongoing, multidirectional interaction is what produces gender. And, as I have contended, recognizing the interactional nature of accountability helps broaden our focus from gender stability to gender change.

Accountability is not simply interactional, however. Accountability tethers interaction to social structure through the normative expectations for behavior that are linked to social groups. Although the theory of doing gender has been characterized as astructural (e.g., Collins et al. 1995), it is clear in West and colleagues' theoretical statements that gender could not be done without accountability, and that accountability is based on societal, not individual, understandings of gender. For example:

Accountability is a feature of social relationships, and its idiom comes from the institutional arena in which those relationships are brought to life. The doing of gender, race, and class is therefore a mechanism through which situated social action contributes to the reproduction of social structure. (West and Fenstermaker 2002, 541)

Doing gender is thus a multilevel process. It is individuals who "do gender," but they do so in interaction with others, and the normative ideals and expectations that drive their behavior are the local manifestation of the gendered social structure. For example, the new expectations for behavior that the self-defense students describe here have an institutional source: They derive from the women's movement, and especially from the radical feminist focus on violence against women and the central role of the body in women's oppression and empowerment (Searles and Berger 1987). Research on doing gender has tended to prioritize the individual and interactional and neglect the structural, I suggest, not because of deficiencies in

the theory but because of the overall neglect of accountability as the centerpiece of doing gender. A better understanding of accountability re-centers the importance of social structure in the doing of gender.

Finally, the interactional transformations I describe here may reverberate well beyond the individuals involved in them and beyond the context in which they originate. Rachel's example of the canoe race in the previous section is an apt example. The new expectations Rachel invokes in this situation were learned in the context of the self-defense class, but Rachel transfers them to a situation not obviously connected to danger or assault. The interaction she describes educates not only the man in question but also the onlookers, both male and female. The speaker's friend is excited that she responded assertively to the harassment, and now she, too, has a model for resistance to gendered expectations. Perhaps the next time she encounters a similar situation, she will feel emboldened to respond, resisting others' attempts to confine her to conventional gender behavior and simultaneously calling them to account for their own accomplishment of gender. And the onlookers—the two "other boys" with whom the speaker was racing as well as any others who attended to the interaction—have also received the message that this woman, at least, cannot be constrained in the ways they might expect, and that they, too, may be called to account should they try to do so. It seems likely that the witnesses to this interaction may later recount the story to others—as the speaker did to me, and as I am doing in repeating the story here—and those who hear or read the story may also learn those lessons. Stories may also be told in other ways—for example, through the media—and these recountings, too, may diffuse the change beyond the original interactants. Thus, changes in gender expectations and accountability processes can spread far beyond the local interaction.

Of course, these kinds of changes are not inevitable, and individuals do not have unlimited power to change the expectations against which they and others are assessed. While my data are not sufficient to answer the question of the circumstances under which gender expectations will change, I would speculate that several factors make it more likely. First, the new expectations must have legitimacy. Without a cognitive change that delegitimizes past beliefs and legitimizes new ones, changes in expectations cannot be maintained at the individual level. Second, as I have described, others' resistance to one's new expectations may derail the process of change by making it interpersonally costly to maintain one's new orientation. Third, those with more power in a relationship are likely to be more successful in changing expectations, while those who

are less powerful may find that others' expectations prevail despite changes in their own beliefs. Similarly, those with more structural power (based on statuses such as race, social class, or age) are likely to have greater leverage to shift interactions. Finally, institutional support will facilitate change. For example, when there is a preexisting alternative set of gender expectations, and when there is a network of others who also support those expectations, then change is more likely to prove lasting. Future research should further explore the conditions under which change in gender expectations and practices is sustained.

Over time, changes in interaction like the ones I describe here have the potential to shift the larger gender system. As many writers have argued (e.g., Connell 1987, 1995; Lorber 2005; Martin 2004; Schwalbe 2005), social institutions, including gender, are composed of interactions. If these interactions mirror the status quo, they help to solidify the institution as it exists. When interactions challenge the status quo, however, they weaken the current institution, re-creating gender in a new form and opening the door to further change. Accountability lies at the center of this enterprise, joining together individuals, interactions, and the social institution of gender. Understanding the workings of accountability is thus crucial if we are to fully understand gender.

APPENDIX A

Participants Quoted in the Paper

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year in School</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Interview Timing</i>
Christie	Sophomore	19	White	mid-class
Hannah	Junior	20	Asian	6 months after class
Irene	Senior	27	did not self-identify	1 month after class
Isabelle	Junior	20	Asian	end of class
Karen	Junior	20	White	6 months after class
Nora	Senior	20	White	mid-class
Rachel	Sophomore	20	White/Hispanic	end of class
Sarah	Freshman	19	White	1 month after class
Tanya	Senior	21	White	mid-class

NOTES

1. Indeed, "Doing Gender" is currently the most cited article in the history of the journal, boasting nearly twice the citations as the second-place article.

2. West and Fenstermaker (1995) argue that accountability is key to understanding the accomplishment of other social categories as well. I address only gender in this article, however, because my data speak most clearly to accountability to sex category.

3. Accountability is not the only motivation for doing gender. For example, learning to do gender "appropriately" takes time and practice (Cahill 1986), and becomes so routine that *not* doing gender may feel uncomfortable and awkward. Conversely, doing gender in accord with normative expectations may feel comfortable and even pleasurable; these too are motivations for doing gender.

4. These three parts are interdependent, of course, and work together to produce gender.

5. For a review of the literature on self-defense training, see Hollander (forthcoming).

6. I also surveyed a group of similar women not enrolled in a self-defense class; these data are not reported here but are analyzed in other articles (Hollander 2010, forthcoming).

7. These criteria include not blaming women for victimization, offering self-defense options rather than prescriptions, and respecting and empowering students.

8. Quotations have been edited for readability but are otherwise reproduced verbatim.

9. This example illuminates a danger inherent in the empowerment processes I describe here. Those who undergo this kind of transformation may then judge others for not having undergone the same change. In this case, self-defense students may judge other women for their lack of confidence or strength. This may lead them to hold women responsible for preventing harassment and blame them for their own victimization. In this self-defense class, as well as other classes I have observed, instructors were careful to make clear that the responsibility for violence lies with perpetrators, not victims, and that women's *ability* to resist does not mean that they have the *responsibility* to resist or should be blamed if they cannot do so. However, victim blame remains a danger of this kind of transformational change and a frequent criticism of self-defense classes. I address this critique at length elsewhere (Hollander 2009). As I argue there, the possibility that some may blame women for their own victimization (or oppression) should not keep us from implementing changes that increase women's safety and empowerment.

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