Feminist Pedagogy

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Feminist pedagogy in composition emerged out of the women's movement of the 1970s, which itself grew out of the civil rights and antiwar movements beginning in the 1960s. Groups such as Students for a Democratic Society, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Panthers, and others connected with the New Left involved men and women who based their activism on an analysis of class and race oppression. Women in these groups began to apply the same analysis to sex difference, recognizing the unequal treatment of women worldwide as a parallel phenomenon (Morgan). They observed that we live in a patriarchy—meaning literally "rule of fathers" but more analogically that men lead and thus essentially control the most important functions of our society—legislatures and courts, businesses, schools, and families—and often that control is not benevolent: that is, it is accompanied by the physical, cultural, and spiritual subordination of women as a group and the closing off of opportunities for full humanity to them. Rejecting the old rationale of separate spheres, women began to explore these new revelations in consciousness-raising (cr) groups, sitting in someone's living room, talking about their experiences as women—at home, at work, in bed, in the doctor's office—that they had never before shared. They were giving words to what Betty Friedan called "the problem that has no name." One of the most influential books of this early period was a doctoral dissertation by a literature student, Kate Millett. *Sexual Politics* offered a bold analysis of sexism in canonical male-authored literature. Alice Echols' *Daring to Be Bad* offers a detailed historical review of the beginnings of the women's movement, including sometimes gossipy interviews with many of the women involved in radical groups.

This movement was called the "second wave" of feminism, in reference to the first wave of nineteenth-century women's activism, which brought together black and white women in political groups working for the abolition of slavery and for women's suffrage. Angela Y. Davis' brilliant and very readable *Women, Race, and Class* tells stories of the inspiring but sometimes painful struggles of that time, including references to women's education, writing, and public speaking. This book provides excellent background, works very well with

undergraduate students, and integrates analyses of gender, race, and class like almost no other I know.

This history is a necessary context for understanding the twentieth-century women's movement and is particularly important for those of us in composition studies who are interested in the rhetorical and institutional roots of our contemporary feminist practice. Women had fewer opportunities for higher education in the nineteenth century and were supposedly forbidden from speaking in public. But some women did make it into universities (Solomon), and a passionate few—both university trained and not—defied the conventions barring women from public speaking. They have left a legacy of educational innovation, writing, and rhetorical performance documented in books like Shirley Wilson Logan's *With Pen and Voice*, chapters in Andrea Lunsford's collection *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, and Catherine Hobbes' *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write* (see also Campbell; Royster). Familiarity with this rhetorical and political history can deeply enrich a contemporary practice of feminist composition pedagogy.

By the 1960s, women were attending universities in equal numbers with men, and the student protests of that era gave rise to open admissions policies at major universities like CUNY, allowing working-class students and students of color access to universities in unprecedented numbers. This set of circumstances contributed to the emergence of the new field of composition studies, which appeared slightly in advance of the feminist movement but was driven by similar egalitarian political forces. The work of Mina Shaughnessy in analyzing the errors of her new students at CUNY, the institution-challenging ideas about writing introduced by Peter Elbow, and the new process writing theories began to establish "composition" as an alternative institutional site—one responsive to student needs and working against the grain of an elitist literary culture that had dominated English departments. These innovations would seem in retrospect to have created a welcoming situation for a feminist practice, but, aside from a couple of early essays (Bolker; Howe), it wasn't until the 1980s that feminists began to make contributions to composition pedagogy with broad impact. The reason for this delay may lie in the cultural status of women as educators and in the (related) demographics of the teaching of writing, subjects that have become fruitful areas for feminist composition scholarship.

Sue Ellen Holbrook and Susan Miller ("Feminization"[1]) have offered documentation and insightful analyses of the status of women as composition teachers. Both show that women have indeed been very involved in the teaching of writing for decades but most often as part-time and temporary employees—what Eileen Schell, in her excellent recent study of women in composition, calls "contingent workers." Miller describes the field as one "that collects, like bugs in a web, women whose persistently marginalized status demands political action" (39).[2] Women's accounts of their experiences in composition have given specificity to the statistics (Fontaine and Hunter; Phelps and Emig). The few women advancing early on to higher academic levels in composition encountered sexist barriers, like women in other academic fields (Bloom; Crowley), but they were doubly disenfranchised within traditional de-

partments of English, as women and as compositionists. It was then both understandable and ironic that literary studies—given Miller's discussion of its "masculinized" nature—was the place where feminist work in English really took fire in the 1970s: understandable because women scholars from this more prestigious side of the aisle in English departments had more power with which to challenge the androcentric (male-centered) tradition. Courses and publications on women writers in British and American literature (e.g., Gilbert and Gubar; Moers; Showalter) and in feminist theory and criticism from scholars in the United States and France (Cixous; Irigaray[3]; Kolodny) opened up space for women and feminism in English departments. Some of the earliest publications on feminist pedagogy in composition come from compositionists who had worked with women's published writing from a literary perspective and then began to apply those lenses and questions to their writing classes (e.g., Flynn). Since these rather late beginnings, feminist composition pedagogy has grown into a substantial field with a recognized body of scholarship.

DEFINITIONS

What makes a composition pedagogy "feminist"? In my view, engaging in feminist pedagogy does not necessarily entail an overt discussion of feminism as a politics or movement, although some teachers do include such discussions in their classes. At the end of the essay, I'll return to this subject. In lieu of a direct advocacy approach, then, feminist pedagogy can be described as a practice. But defining this practice is vexing because of feminists' desire not to reinscribe an orthodoxy, disciplining those who fail to subscribe. Feminist linguist Paula Treichler puts the dilemma in dramatic terms, and in the process, outlines some common practices of feminist pedagogy:

> I am not sure that there is or that there should be such a thing as "feminist pedagogy" as constituted by a set of practices: chairs in a circle, first names, collaborative agenda setting, and (as much of the literature puts it) collective revisioning of the production of knowledge. Many women, many feminists, are not comfortable with these practices, particularly when they are sometimes seen to be as expected and institutionally dictated as the most classically delivered "masculine" lecture by a pipe-smoking gentleman scholar in tweeds. (88)

Accepting Treichler's reservations, we can still note that these basic practices of feminist pedagogy are ones it shares with the pedagogical innovations of the process revolution in writing instruction: the decentering or sharing of authority, the recognition of students as sources of knowledge, a focus on processes (of writing and teaching) over products. But what makes feminist pedagogy distinctive is its investment in a view of contemporary society as sexist and patriarchal, and of the complicity of reading, writing, and teaching in those conditions. Those who define their professional activities in ways that

include efforts to transform that world are feminist pedagogues. Questions guiding this pedagogy ask of composition: Who created the knowledge and practices of this field? In whose interests do they operate? Are there realms of experience left out in the traditions of this body of knowledge? Who gets to teach this material? Who gets to learn it? Are there ways of teaching and learning that seem more suitable for one gender or another? Any compositionists who apply these questions to their teaching (whether or not they employ the strategies named above) could be said to practice feminist pedagogy.

One of the recurring anxieties about feminist pedagogy concerns inclusion: Who can do it and whom does it benefit? Can only female teachers claim to be feminist pedagogues? Does this pedagogy work well only for female students? While some male scholars in composition and rhetoric suggest that feminism operates in exclusive ways (Connors; Vitanza), many others have found places within it to explore gender issues (see references below to Bleich, Kraemer, Schilb, and Tobin). Anyone interested in social justice, as so many of us who choose composition as a field are, has a stake in moving society toward more equitable arrangements on every front. Just as many women in the feminist movement are deeply committed to antiracism, and straight people work toward the eradication of homophobia and raising consciousness about discrimination toward gay and lesbian people, men have a deep stake in the goals of feminism. In fact, the male teacher who adopts feminist pedagogical strategies can sometimes be more effective than a female teacher because his students won't be as tempted to read his pedagogy as a self-interested choice based on membership in a "special interest" group. Likewise, male students have much to gain from feminist pedagogy. We're all shaped by gender processes of our culture—messages telling us very powerfully how to talk, walk, play, work, and love. When the rich variety of all those ways of being is divided up into two columns, with one virtually off limits to the other group, everyone loses. Teaching students how this system works—and, perhaps even more important, learning from their experiences how it works now and in many different ways—is centrally connected with the teaching of writing—not a digressive special interest affair.

To bring this argument closer to the home of composition, looking at the ways gender structures language and other symbol systems enables the kind of close attention to words and their effects that any composition teacher should strive for. In its interest in the social contexts for writing, the belief that language does things, and the concern with the operations of power, feminist pedagogy has strong links with rhetorical, cultural, and critical pedagogies (see chapters herein by William Covino, Diana George and John Trimbur, and Ann George; see also hooks, *Teaching*). Another way that feminist pedagogy refutes the "only-for-women" position comes out of the transformations of U.S. feminism in the 1980s, when women of color and lesbians began speaking out and developing frameworks for analyzing the intersections of multiple social differences, including race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, ability, and others (Lorde). The most significant of these works are deeply concerned with writing: e.g., hooks' *Talking Back;* Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and her

edited collection, *Hacienda Caras;* and Cherrie Moraga and Anzaldúa's collection *This Bridge Called My Back.* In the words of hooks, the "liberatory feminist movement aims to transform society by eradicating patriarchy, by ending sexism and sexist oppression, by challenging the politics of domination *on all fronts*" (*Talking Back* 50, emphasis added).[4]

Of course there are differences within "feminism," and some of the essays recommended here write about women as though they were an undifferentiated group; some fail to make connections with other forms of social difference. Indeed, there are some feminists who still cling to a politics of separatism, who would disagree with me that feminism is for men as well as women. Women who hold such views have sometimes been labeled "essentialists," either because of their explicitly stated belief that men are biologically and thus essentially different from women (see, for example, Phelps and Emig; Daly), or through assumptions implicit in their writing about "women" as an undifferentiated group. An alternative position reads differences between men and women as widely variable outcomes of social processes of gendering. Debates over this issue constitute one of the major theoretical questions in feminism since its reemergence and have deep significance for research and teaching in composition. Philosopher Linda Alcoff outlines these differences in terms of different "schools" of feminism. For current discussions of the ways essentialism has entered into feminist composition, see essays by Laura Brady and Joy Ritchie, as well as Elizabeth Flynn's recent review (see also Fuss; Looser). All these scholars eschew easy categories and the potentially damaging practice of labeling others' work and recommend instead rhetorical approaches to identity categories such as "woman." In the present essay, you'll find references to important work on feminist pedagogy from both orientations. Feminist pedagogy needs both to talk about women as a group—women teachers, women students—but also to notice differences within gendered categories, especially when it comes to student writing and reading practices. Only a few scholars today confidently write about women's or men's writing and speaking as though they were fixed quantities. It seems that most feminist compositionists today focus on gender construction rather than sex difference, but the ethics of feminist politics and argument suggest that, in our ongoing collective project, we not dismiss the work of those who hold other positions nor see those positions as outdated and superseded. Lynn Worsham's "After Words" to Susan Jarratt and Worsham's *Feminism and Composition Studies* makes a strong case for connection across generations in feminisms. One of the strengths of feminist pedagogy is its relentless capacity for dialogue and self-critique, and its ability to read and listen rhetorically. Most feminists see differences as productive signs of a dynamic movement, just as differences in composition pedagogies included in this volume index a strong and open field of academic work.

What difference does gender make? This is the question feminist pedagogy applies to the scene of composition—to teachers and students and the practices in which they engage: exercising (or renouncing) teacherly authority, talking (in class discussion, collaborative groups, and on e-mail), writing (in genres

like journal, narrative, and argument), reading, and assessment. Discussions about practices make reference to frameworks of ideas undergirding them, sometimes called "epistemology" (how we know what we know) or "theory" (first principles or assumptions). Those who engage in feminist pedagogy accept that some version of the social dilemma laid out in the beginning of this essay still obtains in the United States in 1998 (as I'm writing), but few of us enter into our pedagogical practice believing that we already know exactly how gender difference operates in the lives of our students or exactly how the gender dynamics of any particular class will work in advance. Feminist writing teachers bring historical and political knowledge of the feminist movement, sexism, and patriarchal structures, along with tools of gender analysis, into the classroom. Then we work in dialogic ways with our students, enabling them to share with us their knowledge and experience through language within these frameworks. Feminist pedagogy, to my mind, is *not* about forcing all the students to subscribe to a particular political position but rather engaging with students on the terrain of language in the gendered world we all currently inhabit.

GENDERED TEACHERS AND POWER

One of the central tasks of feminist pedagogy has been reflecting on what it means to be a woman teaching writing. Miller's brilliant analysis of composition as a "feminized" profession links the demographics outlined by Holbrook with an analysis of the roots of nineteenth-century "English studies" in a vernacular literature that needed to assert "symbolic, manly associations with religious and nationalistic ideals" in order to compete with the classics and science in the university ("Feminization" 44). The teaching of writing, then, becomes the "distaff partner" to a masculine enterprise (literary criticism)—a domain for women and children, "the counterpart, the handmaiden, and low-order basement attached to vernacular literary study" (40–42). A crucial aspect of this "feminization" is the association of the composition teacher with a mythologized mother, endowed with qualities of "self-sacrifice, dedication, caring and enormous capacities for untheorized attention to detail" but also symbolizing "authority, precision, and . . . taste," prompting expectations of censure and disapproval (46). The mother/composition teacher attends to the rudimentary needs of students who are more like children than adults. In a similar analysis, Margo Culley and colleagues explain the double bind for women in the academy in terms of the psychological dynamics of the family. As women academics, "our maternal power is feared, our paternal authority is mistrusted" (14). On the other hand, some feminists buy into an unambiguously positive feminized identity for composition, building a feminist pedagogy on a maternal basis that emphasizes caring and nurturing (Däumer and Runzo; Grumet; Ruddick). Indeed, a teacher's attitude of caring and nurturing seems very compatible with process writing practices, within which the teacher shifts from the older role of making assignments, waiting for a product, then judging its value,

to the position of encouraging, supportive guide. This compatibility surely constitutes one of the pleasurable foundations of feminist pedagogy. But when women step into this role, we reinforce gendered stereotypes dividing intellect from emotion, authority from caring, the public from the personal.

Susan Stanford Friedman's short essay in an early (and unfortunately out-of-print) but still extremely useful collection edited by Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges offers an exemplary feminist response to the dilemma posed by a choice between adopting masculine authority and thus reproducing the existing hierarchies of educational institutions versus opting for a feminine "facilitator" role, and in so doing, reproducing the "patriarchal denial of the mind to women" (207). Enacting one of feminism's most useful *topoi*—substituting for the binary choice of "either/or" the multiple perspectives allowed by "both/and"—Friedman rejects a kind of authority that oppresses students and adopts instead one that recognizes the teacher's knowledge and experience (208). Such feminist authority would celebrate women's intellect without setting aside the emotional and relational richness of the pedagogical site. Likewise, Miller's institutional history/cultural analysis does not recommend setting aside composition's feminized "call to identity" in favor of a masculinized (and thus more powerful) alternative but rather invites a femin*ist* reclamation of the "low" site of composition through political/institutional activism in areas of, for example, employment, placement, and assessment.

A number of feminist scholars clearly recommend that women teachers adopt positions of power in their classrooms. In Kathleen Weiler's *Women Teaching for Change*, feminist teachers present themselves "as gendered subjects with a personal perspective on issues of gender and race. They are overtly political in their presentation and both will use personal anecdotes and will challenge and engage students on these topics" (131). hooks, likewise, eschews the nurturing posture for one of engagement: "Unlike the stereotypical feminist model that suggests women best come to voice in an atmosphere of safety (one in which we are all going to be kind and nurturing), I encourage students to work at coming to voice in an atmosphere where they may be afraid or see themselves at risk" (*Talking Back* 53). She sees the feminist classroom as one marked by struggle. (See also Bauer and Jarratt; Jarratt, "Feminism"). Gail Stygall advocates feminist authority in collaborative group writing contexts. Her analysis of some published collaborative group discussions reveals that the equity claimed for these composition practices often ignores the way male students gain advantages from the gender inequities built into everyday conversational practice. The teacher should use feminist critical authority to intervene in that process. In related studies, John Schilb takes up the question of the male teacher in a feminist classroom, and essays in the collection edited by Gabriel and Smithson foreground issues of power. The collaborative group of Jill Eichhorn and colleagues offers reflections on the ways graduate student status can exacerbate the power issues for a female feminist in the composition class.

There are several ways for students and teachers to attend to the gendering of power and authority in the classroom, asking students to notice their responses to male and female teachers, and leading teachers to examine their

students' responses to them. Cheryl Johnson's reflective essay on the body of the teacher models a kind of case study exploration of situations arising from a setting in which the teacher does not fit into the neutral, assumed social categories: white, male, straight, able-bodied, etc. Asking students to write informally about their expectations of a college teacher, as Karen Hayes did, is one way to do this (Eichhorn et al.) Another way to address this subject might invite students to think about the gendered ways teachers are represented in the media: e.g., the creative, exciting (male) poetry teacher in *Dead Poet's Society* versus supposedly unattractive and sex-starved (female) teacher in *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (see Bauer, "Proposals"). Feminist pedagogy doesn't dictate one particular stance for the teacher in relation to these issues, nor does it guarantee that students will respond in any particular way (i.e., all male students will resist the authority of any female teacher). It simply invites reflection on them—brings them out of invisibility so that their sources and effects in the context of a sexist culture can be examined.

⇜ THE POLITICS OF SPEAKING

The fact that women are now students in U.S. colleges and universities in numbers equal to or greater than men constitutes one of the gains of the "longest revolution" (Mitchell). But studies such as Bernice Sandler's "chilly climate" project reveal that their experiences "are often unsatisfactory in ways that are not recognized by most university teachers" (Kramarae and Treichler 41). Among the reasons is the gendered structure of classroom interaction. Taking women students seriously, borrowing the title of an important early essay by Adrienne Rich,[5] means for feminist pedagogy in composition listening to the ways women speak (or remain silent) in class. In the 1980s, feminist sociolinguists such as Dale Spender, Robin Lakoff, Pamela Fishman, and others conducted empirical research on women's speech, using techniques of discourse analysis such as measuring time-on-turn and counting interruptions, tags (the uncertain raising of the pitch of the voice at the end of a statement, turning it into a question), and topic shifts.[6] Paula Treichler's convenient summary of a representative study on language and gender highlights cross-sex communication differences with implications for conversation in the writing classroom:

> (1) women see questions as part of conversational maintenance while men see them as requests for information; (2) women explicitly acknowledge previous utterances and try to connect with them while men have no such role and often ignore previous comments; (3) women interpret aggression as personal, negative, and disruptive while men view it as simply another conventional, organizing structure for conversation; (4) men shift topics quickly while women develop them progressively and shift gradually; (5) women respond to problems by sharing experiences, offering reassurances, and giving support; men hear problems as requests for solutions and respond by giving direction and advice, acting as experts or lecturing their audience. (78)

Since the early work in this area, scholars have begun to pay more attention to the ways class, region, and race differences in conversational patterns inflect findings related to gender. Deborah Tannen, for example, points out in her recent popular book *You Just Don't Understand* that membership in other social categories may override gender patterns. Her own urban, Jewish location puts her in a language group for whom interruption is not a form of domination but a way of connecting with the speech of others. In a later essay on speaking in feminist classrooms, Treichler narrates scenarios that suggest less hesitance on the part of black and working-class women to engage in conflict and challenging others in class discussion.

The best way to use this body of research is to let it make you and your students aware of the interplay of gender in classroom interaction and provide categories of discourse analysis but not to determine in advance the ways men and women will speak in your class. Students can be asked to become discourse analysts in "natural language" settings of their choosing. When they record and analyze speech in class, in dorm rooms, in social settings, and among family members, they can compare their own results with the findings of feminist scholars. Discourse analysis may be even more useful for the feminist pedagogue. To model discourse analysis for my own writing class, I made a series of audiotapes of our class discussions. Listening to the tapes revealed to me that, despite my awareness of the results of sociolinguistic research, I was still giving men more speaking time than women and was quicker to interrupt women than men in my composition classes. As teacher, I also took more speaking time than my self-serving memories of class interaction had recorded! Feminist pedagogues can use this research to make certain women are included in class discussions and to encourage women in ways of speaking that allow them to be heard. The feminist pedagogue, like any good teacher, will aim to create contexts for class discussion in which all students will have opportunities to express their ideas and to learn to listen attentively and respectfully to the ideas of others.

Some composition teachers have begun to incorporate another mode of verbal interaction into their classes in the form of e-mail exchanges and on-line "conversations." Despite utopian hopes that electronic communication would minimize inequitable power relations, early research on gender and electronic communication has shown that they manifest themselves in this medium just as they do in others, sometimes even more virulently (see Faigley, Wilson). As Shannon Wilson suggests, though, transcripts of e-mail exchange offer teachers and students the opportunity to review and reflect on their responses, gaining insight at a distance on the operations of gender and other differences in this medium that places people in a new set of temporal, spatial, and discursive relations to each other.

WRITING (AND READING) . . . DIFFERENTLY?

The core of the composition class is, of course, writing, and perhaps the most interesting research on feminist pedagogy—and the most controversial—

concerns gender and writing. Do men and women write differently? If so, is this a good thing? A "natural" phenomenon? Are particular genres, styles, or voices feminine or masculine? How should teachers respond to gendered styles? Several important researchers work in, around, and against a binary division of gender and styles of writing into male/masculine/argumentative/rational/linear/academic over against female/feminine/personal/emotional/digressive. As usual, there are multiple feminist positions on this subject.

One line of research and pedagogical practice makes a positive identification of women with the personal and emotional, valuing women's storytelling, journal writing (Gannet), and autobiography (Hollis; Peterson). The androcentric knowledge generated by universities pretends to be objective and complete; women's accounts of their experiences in every area of life (e.g., of bodies, home, nature, pasts) challenge the completeness and value neutrality claimed for this one-sided knowledge (Lather). The feminist validation of personal experience fits well with many composition theorists' focus on student experience as a necessary starting point (Macrorie) or legitimate focus (Murray) for writing; both feminists and expressive compositionists are strongly committed to admitting the presence of the whole person into the educational scene. Harriet Malinowitz's study of gay and lesbian writers in "gay-themed composition classes" has made the case persuasively that students on the margins do better when they are given opportunities to write about their lives. Women of color and postcolonial feminists have made passionate articulations of their experiences in a dazzling variety of written forms—poetry and poetic prose (e.g., Trinh), mixed genre (Williams), and mixed language essays (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*)—making the case in unconventional arguments that the borders defining academic discourse are similar to the boundaries dividing genders, races, classes, and sexualities: limits that have more than symbolic significance (e.g., Gil-Gomez). Disrupting form is a disruption of the gendered rules keeping women (and other members of nondominant groups) out of places of power and influence (see also Bleich).

This critique of academic discourse has led a number of feminists to suggest that argument is a particularly masculine genre and as such either is agonistic, even violent, and thus shouldn't be used by feminists, or, because it is based in a masculine tradition of logic and linear reasoning, does not allow for the expression of women's experiences and ways of making sense of the world. Two examples of this strand of feminist pedagogy are Jane Tompkins' "Me and My Shadow," a personal reflection on alienating ways academics criticize others, and Olivia Frey's argument against "Literary Darwinism," the constant struggle to put others down in literary critical practice so as to survive in the academy. Catherine Lamb, in a similar vein, offers feminist/Rogerian mediation as a substitute for agonistic argument. Another form this research has taken derives from French feminists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, who (despite distinct differences between them) both recommend and practice a radically unconventional writing style. This *écriture féminine*—women's writing—is shaped in response to philosophical and psychoanalytic theories that understand language as a symbolic system associated deeply with masculinity. Some

scholars have proposed to teach a form of "women's writing" in composition classes (Junker), while Lynn Worsham ("Writing") argues that to turn this practice into a pedagogy runs against the grain of its radical disruption of just such systems of institutionalization. Lillian Bridwell-Bowles offers sensible advice about ways of incorporating diverse styles into writing classes.

Another take on the issue of writing and sexual difference appears in Elizabeth Flynn's "Composing as a Woman," an influential early essay that actually brought feminism into the light of day for most compositionists. Her study highlights personal narratives written by male and female students: the women's stories feature interaction and connection; the men's, achievement, frustrated achievement, or separation. Flynn chooses to discuss these narratives because they are suggestive of differences in psychological, epistemological, and moral orientations of men and women as they have been explored in feminist research of Nancy Chodorow, Mary Belenky and colleagues, and Carol Gilligan. Flynn doesn't claim to find essential differences in male and female writing but something more like predictable choices of masculine and feminine topics. In her pedagogical suggestions, Flynn advises constructing courses that foreground gender in readings and writing. Another early essay, by Pamela Annas, "Style as Politics," connects the analysis of style in women's published writings, such as Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and the writing of women students.[7] Annas makes an interesting link between feminism and composition by focusing on subjectivity and objectivity in writing and research. Attuned to the fact that women are frequently accused of being subjective (emotional, even irrational) in their thinking and writing, she found women in her class writing at two stylistic extremes: adopting either a smooth, distanced, objectifying style—one that obscures the speaker—or a diffuse, subjective style often too coded to communicate well. Annas believes that feminist teachers should help student writers mediate between the two modes, but she believes it's particularly important to encourage women to write political essays because of the ways they have historically been "channeled toward private forms and denied access to more public forms" (369).

Peterson works strictly with autobiography in an empirical study seeking to discover whether men or women are more comfortable with such personal essays. Her results, like Flynn's, indicate that women write more often about relational topics and men about topics that focus on the self. She draws numerous thoughtful implications for teaching and suggestions for students from her study, including the observation that evaluation can (but should not) privilege certain gender-specific modes of self-representation. She also speaks personally of her negative response to male-authored stories of adventure—"'wild canoe trips down raging rivers . . . like one of those Miller beer commercials,'" as one of her students put it (175), admonishing herself to examine critically her own gender-linked preferences in assigning and evaluating student essays. In a related essay, Lad Tobin dives deeper into most writing teachers' (male as well as female) resistance to the male-authored adventure narrative in his essay "Car Wrecks, Baseball Caps, and Man-to-Man Defense." Tobin argues that, in our resistance, we may be less able to see discontinuities and potential in

the writing of young male students—that we will be less able to follow their work "beneath the surface," a reading strategy used to help students move toward more complexity and depth in their writing. Tobin supports a gender-based feminist pedagogy when he claims that, "[by] studying the ways that masculinity is constructed for me in the larger culture, we could begin to understand the ways that male students struggle to construct themselves in our classrooms" (167). For more discussions of gender and teachers' response to writing, see Duane Roen, Donnalee Rubin, and Stygall and colleagues.

Despite the fact that some research shows female students' affinity for personal writing, some feminist compositionists have voiced warnings about the misuses of the personal. Min-Zhan Lu describes a pedagogical situation in which students' written responses to readings came from personal experience but had the effect of blocking their understanding of differences other than gender. "The task facing a teacher," she writes, "is to help students rethink ways of using personal experience so that readings through the personal will not be at the expense of other stories and selves" (42). See also Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie on this subject. bell hooks advises that, while we respect students' experiences and recognize their need to speak about them in classroom settings, we must also "explore ways individuals acquire knowledge about an experience they have not lived, asking ourselves what moral questions are raised when they speak for or about a reality that they do not know experientially" (*Teaching* 88–89). The research in this area suggests that again a specifically feminist dynamic is at work in reflections on "personal/narrative" writing and "public/academic" argument. Rather than privilege one over the other, many feminist compositionists reject a strict division between the two poles, teaching students how to develop reflective positions within their narratives and to find and understand the experiential roots of their public arguments.

Two practices that have become standard within composition are especially useful for advancing these feminist goals: collaboration and revision. As Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford explain in *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*, writing collaboratively challenges the notion of an isolated and autonomous self—a masculinist model—and replaces it with a multivocal, relational writing process. Revision, as well, has radical feminist potential as yet little recognized. Rich, in two beautifully reflective pieces about the movement of her own opinions and ways of writing, demonstrates how textual revision can index deeply considered challenges to social structures and ways of being ("Awaken"; "Notes"). In the next few years, we should be seeing exciting new work in feminist composition pedagogy in these areas of reflective writing, collaboration, and revision.

FEMINISM AS A TOPIC IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

As you can tell by the summaries of this work, little is settled in the area of feminist pedagogy, which is better represented as a set of questions than a list

of practices. Despite differences in practice, feminist teachers report similar experiences when "feminism" is considered a topic in the composition class. We have learned some lessons in recent years about how best to approach this subject. Because of the current, widely shared negative attitudes about feminism in the United States, it's good to have some advance notice about what to expect from students and to develop strategies for encountering the resistance so many offer even to the very word itself.

If many students resist the exercise of power by a female teacher, even more react against the feminist teacher. Dale Bauer's essay "The Other 'F' Word" examines student evaluations, showing how feminism becomes a frightening specter for some students, especially in an era of what Susan Faludi terms "backlash." In her extensive and very readable study, Faludi demonstrates persuasively that patriarchal culture recoiled at many levels from the feminist gains of the 1970s—i.e., the entry of more women into higher level jobs, the increase of women's salaries, and the struggles to make domestic arrangements more equitable. In popular culture, the politics of the new right, the work place, and elsewhere, this "undeclared war against women" has undermined feminist gains and deeply influenced public opinion.

Students often echo backlash attitudes. The most common response my students make when the issue of feminism comes up is that all the inequities of the past were remedied sometime earlier and that anyone still talking about feminism is an embittered, power-hungry woman who wants to "bash" men. The violence invested in this symbolic representation of angry feminists is captured powerfully in Rush Limbaugh's ubiquitous coinage, "feminazi." These commonplaces themselves lead to focused work with language. What does it mean to "bash" men? What's the difference between "whining" and making a legitimate argument or giving an account of real human pain? In what ways are participants in the U.S. women's movement like Nazis? Asking students to examine closely the language they use in discussing social issues makes them more attentive to language in general and gives them practice in analyzing cultural stereotypes and clichés.

Another opportunity to examine language arises with the use of gendered pronouns. Reading and discussing the nonsexist language statement in the textbook you're using or one developed by your composition program puts the intersection of language and gender on the agenda in a useful (if usually contentious) way. For a book-length study of this subject, see Francine Frank and Treichler, or contact NCTE for a copy of their nonsexist language statement. The section of Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* titled "*He/man* language" makes a provocative reading assignment; it debunks the claim for inclusiveness of group nouns "man" and "mankind" by tracing the historical arguments by male grammarians for their use and reviewing empirical studies of the contemporary effects of exclusive language on male and female students (147–62). Other readings can help to fill in information and provide a range of perspectives. For excellent definitional essays on the terms *sexism* and *oppression,* see Marilyn Frye. Several irreverent new collections by twenty-something feminists (Findlen; Walker) provide perspectives and experiences closer to those of

traditional 18- to 22-year-old students than the now-classic second-wave feminist texts. Many readers have sections devoted to gender, and there are some focused solely on gender issues (e.g., Costello). Newspapers, news magazines, and popular media are all excellent resources for raising gender issues. Techniques for analyzing gender in popular media discussed in the essay in this volume on cultural studies (see D. George and Trimbur) are useful for feminist pedagogical aims as well.

Feminist teachers take a lot of heat, but for me and the feminist teachers I know, there's really no choice about whether or not to do feminist pedagogy, only how to go about it. As one of my colleagues says, anyone who's paying attention today is a feminist. Students, institutions, regional politics, and teachers themselves differ so much; this pedagogy must be shaped to fit the circumstances and possibilities under which you work. Form a pedagogy group at your institution, so you can get moral support and share ideas and approaches. The payoff comes in recognizing that as we teach our students how to shape their words, we're working together to reshape our world.

Notes

1. Another version of this material appears in Miller's *Textual Carnivals;* see chapter 4, "The Sad Woman in the Basement: Images of Composition Teaching" (121–41).
2. It might help you and your students to get a local picture of this phenomenon by charting the demographics of your institution and department: finding out numbers of faculty by gender at the various levels in the areas of literature and composition.
3. Many U.S. academics gained access to the work of French feminism through the anthology of translated excerpts edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle Courtivron.
4. For an extended discussion of feminism and composition, see my essay "As We Were Saying . . . ," the introduction to *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words.*
5. This preeminent feminist poet and essayist has much to offer compositionists interested in feminism. Her collections of essays *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* and *Bread, Blood, and Poetry* especially contain much useful material about women, language, and writing.
6. The bibliography in this area is vast. For a recent summary of central positions and sources in woman and language research, see Stygall (252–58).
7. Virginia Woolf deserves special mention in any work concerning women, gender, and writing. See Krista Ratcliffe's rhetorical analysis of Woolf's feminist prose and Barrett's collection of her writings about women and feminism.

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