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Gender: Classroom Models for Thinking and Writing About Literature and Film

_The central issue ... is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex ... but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said._

—Michel Foucault, _The History of Sexuality_

Nearly a decade ago, I began to think about gender as a tool for learning in high school and college classrooms. How could I introduce gender as a legitimate means of reading and writing about texts without imposing a confusing terminology and a sometimes opaque system of thought on students already sufficiently confused and perplexed by our assigned readings? And further, how could I help students to use their own experience and self-knowledge about gender as a tool or guide for reading texts and writing about them?

Since I believe understanding is enhanced and deepened when students can call on their own experience and knowledge during the learning process, I reflected for some time on my students' and my own experience with the issue of gender. Questions of gender arise quite naturally in so many areas of our daily lives, though we often fail to take notice of them. Gender shapes how we name things, the way we use language, the books we read, the films we view, the ways in which we perceive those “texts,” even the most ordinary of conversations in which we engage with our teachers, our students, our colleagues, and our families.

I began to look for studies which introduced or modelled — in readable prose — theories of gender, or presented findings I believed might help students reflect upon their own personal experience and self-knowledge in relation to gender. And I also began to think about ways of presenting these materials as alternative perspectives (with strengths and weaknesses) we might employ among other perspectives in our study of texts and in our writing.

I settled on a number of studies, mostly by women, which explored gender in terms of several related areas — use of language, female and male development, history, film and women, and a personal view of being a professional woman in a man's world. Among them were works by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Carol Gilligan, Teresa de Lauretis, Laura Mulvey, Francine Frank and Frank Anshen, Michel Foucault, and Riane Eisler. I chose to present only two or three of the studies as assigned readings — depending on the course — presenting ideas and concepts from the remaining selections as they seemed relevant to our purposes. I used these writings and concepts in two courses, “Children's Literature,” and “Narrative in Film and Fiction,” both upper division university courses in English.

**Interactive Teaching Model**

I organized the readings and ideas around an interactive teaching model, asking students early in the quarter to read and consider the selections, write about them in journals, and discuss in small and large groups their reactions to these materials. Though we often read and write alone, I hoped this work would help students to reflect on the literary selections and films we would later study, giving them different perspectives which they might use in discussion and analysis of these “texts.”

In the discussion that follows, I will describe the results of our work — the ideas and articles we studied, our discussions, the early student reactions to our initial look at gender, and finally, the various ways in which students chose to use these ideas in their writing.
I want to preface my remarks in two ways. First, gender was only one in a series of perspectives we employed in either course. Second, I began each course by introducing the perspectives we would employ (as cited above), explaining how each would provide us with a different way of understanding and appreciating the texts, and suggesting each of us would have to “try out” these perspectives in order to decide their individual merit.

In considering gender, I began by asking students about how gender shapes our language and our behavior. After some initial discussion, I shared several linguistic studies of conversations, asking students to react through in-class writing and discussions.

One study, Candace West and Don Zimmerman’s “Sex Roles, Interruptions and Silences in Conversation,” discussed in Francine Frank and Frank Anshen’s book, *Language and the Sexes*, presents a pair of interesting findings. First, ten of eleven conversations between men and women contained interruptions but, oddly enough, of the forty-eight interruptions, forty-six were by men and two by women. And second, in contrast, there were only three interruptions in twenty same-sex conversations. I asked students to speculate on possible explanations for such a sharp difference between men/women vs. same-sex conversations. Some said it was natural for women to defer to men, a few that men have more “concrete information,” while others suggested men “want to control.” Though I did not share Frank and Anshen’s (both linguists) conclusions — I’m interested in provoking student thinking rather than settling on comfortable or authoritative answers — they suggest that interrupting is a violation of one’s right to speak and, thus, “the privilege of the more powerful, while being interrupted is the fate of the less powerful” (p. 30).

A second study, Pamela Fishman’s “What do Couples Talk about When They Are Alone?” (also discussed by Frank and Anshen), provides findings about the role of gender in topic selection. Fishman defines conversation as “a process of ongoing negotiated activity between people” and explains that in “twelve hours of recordings of spontaneous talk, seventy-six topics were raised, forty-seven by women and twenty-nine by men. But more than half, twenty-eight to be exact, of the women’s topics failed; that is, although women brought up the topics, they did not become the subject of conversation” (p. 31). In the end, Frank and Anshen say, “of the forty-five successful topics, twenty-eight were proposed by men and only seventeen were proposed by women” (p. 31). Again, I asked students for explanations, and though some of the same statements made about the first study are repeated, a considerable number of women said, simply, men often will not discuss women’s topics, a conclusion Fishman herself made, noting also that when a woman’s topic was raised by a man, it was greeted with interest by the men (p. 31).

This activity, taking fifteen minutes or so when journal writing is included, suggested gender distinctions govern our conduct, though in ways we often don’t notice. Our discussion also set the stage for two reading selections which explore gender, Virginia Woolf’s “Professions for Women,” and Simone de Beauvoir’s “Introduction” to *The Second Sex*. I asked students to read each article for our next class meeting and be prepared to discuss and write about what they believed were the most important points made by the authors. I also suggested we would be able to develop (from these readings) models or ways of looking at and writing about the literary works and/or films we would study.

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At our next class meeting, I asked students to do the following: First, choose the author whose views seem clearest to you, then briefly define three or four of her most important ideas in your journal by quoting each and explaining them in your own words; second, individually share the results with group members and listen to their responses to the authors. By allowing students to choose quotes, I avoid the problem of privileging certain passages or ideas on which I might focus as the instructor. Journal responses, though uneven, reveal students struggling to construct a meaning from the author’s words, and to claim some understanding of that meaning in terms of their own experience.

Virginia Woolf

Consider Tony’s observations on Virginia Woolf’s “Professions for Women” in which he explains how women, more than men, are haunted by a phantom that inhibits their self-expression. His comments move toward self-understanding through his own privileging of certain ideas in Woolf’s essay:

Virginia Woolf’s essay suggests that it’s harder for women to express themselves in the fashion they want to, while men on the other hand are able to do so.

She supports her claim by talking about an ‘Angel in the House.’ She tells us that even though we cannot see
him, we know it's there. A sign of his presence is when we want to express ourselves and can't do it because of the feelings that are instilled in us from society. She claims that the 'Angel in the House' affects women more than it does men. For example, when she wanted to include something about ‘passion’ in her novel, she refrained from doing so because it wouldn't be ‘womanlike.’ She claims that the angel would hinder her to write in the direction of what was expected from a ‘woman.’

Tony's comments get to the heart of Woolf's essay, despite certain confusions, and help him clarify the problem of gender as the author defines it. He identifies her central metaphor, the "Angel in the House," and, though he assigns the angel the wrong gender ("his presence") and mistakenly slips into the woman's voice ("we want to express ourselves and can’t ..."), he still uses one of her best examples in creating a context for understanding the angel. In this example Woolf makes clear that a woman cannot speak freely — as freely as men — about the body and her passion, presumably sexual passion, because of the "extreme severity" with which men condemn such behavior in women. And Tony shows that this feeling, "instilled in us from society," hinders her expression.

In a later essay Tony uses Woolf's angel as a kind of paradigm for analyzing several fairy tales we were reading. (Tony and three students following him were members of my children's literature course.) While his exposition occasionally lacks transitions and a certain polish, his earlier analysis of Woolf allows him to make an original observation about how authors — even authors of classic fairy tales — may be constrained by gender in their creation of a fictional world. He writes:

Having read Woolf's article, as I was reading the fairy tales, I was thinking about the struggle she had with the ‘Angel in the House,’ and how she finally had to kill it to be a good writer.

In the fairy tales 'The Princess and the Pea,' ‘Sleeping Beauty,’ and ‘The Frog Prince,’ I discovered that these would have been unacceptable to society if they had been written by a ‘woman.’ She would have changed a few things. For example, in 'The Princess and the Pea,' I think a woman wouldn’t have considered including the part that states the Princess took off all her clothes ... As Woolf said, ‘Men, her reason told her, would be shocked.’

Tony's observation, as I reflected on it, also suggested some alternative writing assignments for my courses: rewrite the fairy tale (or story or film script) from a woman’s point of view; identify a character, setting, scene, or an entire literary work, which has all the marks of a male or female author, and demonstrate with examples the elements which suggest this authorship; or ask an entire class to write a fairy tale, etc., and later, direct students in groups to determine the student-author's gender. Tony's observation also demonstrated how students, without "authoritative" or instructional direction, can construct meanings and apply them in original ways to other texts and to their own worlds.

Simone de Beauvoir

Journal responses (and follow-up essays) on Simone de Beauvoir's "Introduction" to The Second Sex also provided interesting and original observations on gender and its role in texts we studied. While I initially thought students would have more difficulty with Beauvoir's analytical treatment of gender, nearly half the students in several classes chose to write about her "Introduction." They tended to treat narrow topics rather than offer global analyses of the essay, but this fact probably helped them to capture in isolated moments the essence of Beauvoir's argument. For example, a second student, Kathleen, focused on the concept of woman as "the other" or "the inessential," and was able to demonstrate how they applied in a particular fairy tale. She says:

Simone de Beauvoir's essay said a lot about how men want to keep women in a certain place, a safe place, almost like in a box. After reading and rereading the essay, I could understand the meanings of the problems women face as 'the other' and 'the inessential.' In 'The Princess and the Pea' a prince is desperately in want of a genuine princess. I thought, Why not a princess in pursuit of a prince, and Beauvoir's probable answer came into my mind: because she is 'the other' and can't escape from seeing herself as 'inessential' or subordinate to men. Andersen, the author of the fairy tale, sets out to show women as fragile. A pea is put under twenty mattresses with twenty feather beds placed on top of the mattresses. The princess slept on top and in the morning awoke black and blue. This delicate skin caused her to be a real princess so the prince married her for she was a genuine princess. Now, I thought, Who said she wanted to be married? And Beauvoir's answer was: 'It amounts to this: ... there is an absolute human type, the masculine.' (p. 43)

A third student, Suzanne, says that "otherness" explains the complete humiliation of woman in "The Frog Prince," arguing that men view women in ways that "dehumanize them and place them almost on the same level as animals." She states:

When he ceased to be a frog, and became at once a prince with beautiful kind eyes, we see he is still forgiving.
But the princess was the one who complains. To top it off, the prince marries her (with her father’s consent) and, in a sense, saves her from herself. This denies women any dignity and even seems to reverse the traditional image of woman nurturing. As Beauvoir says, ‘humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself, but as related to him.’

And finally, in a long essay written late in the quarter, a fourth student, Kari, sums up the way in which many fairy tales nourish a stereotypical image of women as persons who “cannot grow as individuals through themselves, their families, or their careers, but only as objects in subordination to men.” She writes:

Thus, we see Sleeping Beauty awakened by her prince, we see a princess wed to a prince ‘with beautiful kind eyes’ in ‘The Frog Prince,’ and we see, in ‘The Princess and the Pea,’ a girl who is wed by a prince only after he recognizes she is a ‘genuine princess.’ These examples show that certain fairy tales stereotype gender roles are reinforced. This is not to say that fairy tales do not have value, but in terms of gender roles I would have to agree with Simone de Beauvoir when she states, ‘The present eschews the past.’ If we are to strive for a change in the world in terms of male/female relations, we must not fuel the fire with that which can only destroy.

Tony’s observation also demonstrated how students, without “authoritative” or instructional direction, can construct meanings and apply them in original ways to other texts and to their own worlds.

The Woolf and Beauvoir articles, then, helped students in the children’s literature course (and in the film course) generate a perspective for analyzing readings and, in a half dozen or so cases, for expanded research projects such as the following: “Non-Traditional Gender Roles in Children’s Literature,” “Variations on Sexism: Three Versions of Cinderella from Around the World,” “A Bibliography of Non-Sexist Literature for Children,” and “Sexism: Is it Fading or Taking New Forms?”

When I presented the Woolf and Beauvoir articles in the film course, I supplemented them with Laura Mulvey’s essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” and a passage from Teresa de Lauretis’ book, Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema. We looked at a range of fictional and film works, a few with particular feminist themes or a focus on male/female relationships. In the remainder of this article, I will describe the ways students used Woolf, Beauvoir, and Mulvey, to analyze modern and contemporary works and, occasionally, to comment on the dilemma of gender today.

Conversations in Film

As with the children’s literature course, we began in the film course with the linguistic findings on conversations and topic selections, but I also read aloud an extended passage from the Lauretis book, Alice Doesn’t (p. 12), asking students to visualize the setting as I read. Lauretis quotes Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities, in which men of various nations had an identical dream, “They saw a woman running at night through an unknown city; she was seen from behind, with long hair, and she was naked.” Though they dreamed of pursuing her, they lost her, and later constructed a city like the one in the dream, but each arranged walls and spaces differently so she would be “unable to escape again.” They waited for the scene to be repeated, worked and lived in this city, and soon this dreamed chase “had long been forgotten.” When new men arrived, having had a similar dream, they also recognized the streets of the dream, and “changed the positions of arcades and stairways … so, at the spot where she had vanished, there would remain no avenue of escape.” The passage closes with an enigmatic statement: “Those who had arrived first could not understand what drew these people to Zobeide, this ugly city, this trap.”

I asked students for reactions to this seemingly peculiar story, and later for comments on its relevance to our lives today. Students said the dream characterized the idea of “pursuit,” and some thought it represented the failure of men and women to establish relationships or any common ground for those relationships. When I quoted Lauretis’ interpretation of the passage, asking for comments, a striking division occurred among students. Lauretis says:

The city is a text which tells the story of male desire by performing the absence of woman and by producing woman as text … Calvino’s text is thus an accurate representation of the paradoxical status of women in Western discourse: while culture originates from woman and is founded on the dream of her captivity, women are all but absent from history and cultural process. (p. 13)

One group of students thought Lauretis’ view “extreme” and “feminist” (in a pejorative sense), citing familiar ideas about the division of roles for men and women, raising children as a more natural task for women, the representation of the biblical Eve originating from Adam’s rib, and so on. A second group thought Lauretis had a point, even if she was feminist — they and the women, especially, distanced themselves from association with that term. They said history is full of
wars, men governing, with little attention to the function of women, though some felt the notion of culture being founded on the dream of women's captivity was a little extreme. A third group thought the language was too abstract ("woman as text") and unsupported ("women ... absent from history and cultural process").

I then asked students to read Mulvey's article for the next class meeting and be prepared to share their reactions and questions. Mulvey's thesis is two-fold. First, she argues that "... woman stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (p. 199). And second, she says she wishes "... to make way for a total negation of the ease and plentitude of the narrative fiction film" (p. 200).

We spent some time trying to clarify terms and suggest examples. "Woman as signifier," "bearer of meaning," "maker of meaning," all demanded definition and example, though it was clear after the discussion that many students still lacked a concrete sense of Mulvey's view. I was reluctant to make clear my own interpretation of Mulvey — that film was a male medium, created by males, in which women could only tell man's story, or fantasy, as an instrument of the male perspective — preferring that students work out their own views by applying Mulvey's theory to several films and stories over the next few weeks.

That working out of their views became an interesting, if occasionally disconcerting, process of discovery for students. Some found gender an awkward scaffolding for viewing film and literary texts. Some rejected its logic, later reversing direction and applying Mulvey or a mix of views. And some used the readings only as a starting point, extending their thinking beyond theories to make original insights about film and fictional images which, earlier, had seemed unimportant. Several examples follow with my own observations of students as they worked out their ideas.

Alexander found gender a frustrating tool for analyzing texts. He makes several interesting observations in his discussion of Marlene Gorris' feminist film, A Question of Silence, for example, but these observations make no connection with a central concern or his own view of the film or theories of gender. He finds Mulvey's idea of male voyeurism in several scenes in the film. He first observes it when several women are monitored by a male over a jailhouse security system as they are escorted to their cells. He calls it "a strong metaphor in that men must always be watching over women whether they know it or not." And he later notes a "psychic and spiritual bond" among the women, suggesting the film turns the entire audience into voyeurs as we watch this "gift" which "is not shared by the average male."

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But despite these observations, Alexander argues against Beauvoir and Mulvey at various points in the essay (Beauvoir generalizes unfairly, for example, in accusing males of insisting women "think with their glands."). He concludes with a quote by the singer, James Brown: "It is a Man's World," and chooses not to amplify on the quote. The mixed messages here seem to suggest that, for this student, the subject of gender becomes a hindrance rather than a stimulus to analysis of fictional and film texts.

Out of Africa

Another student, Christine, found in an early journal that Mulvey was "an extremist and pessimist" in her relentless effort to find patriarchy in every film image, in every cinematic technique. But she revises her earlier analysis of Out of Africa in a long essay. As she explains in the later essay, she had originally found Karen Von Blixen (Meryl Streep) the maker of meaning and Dennis (Robert Redford) the bearer of meaning: "I wanted to show that Karen was just one example of a woman who triumphs over odds without the aid of men and who acts on her own initiative." The initiative Karen took in her relationship with her husband, Baron Von Blixen, and later with her lover, Dennis, seemed to support this view. But Christine cites a series of scenes, some early in the film, which contradict the notion of Karen as maker of meaning. She writes:

Karen, no matter how competent she is running the farm, is helpless when it comes to the men in her life. The minute her husband or lover make a request, she complies. The husband, for example, takes money she has planned to use to buy dairy cows with, and invests it in coffee beans in Kenya (where coffee has never grown before). As a result, she struggles without his help for four years before even seeing the first harvest. Later he gives her syphilis and, eventually, asks her for a divorce. Likewise, her lover, Dennis, seems to control Karen's life. When he goes on safari, she is left at home, waiting, wondering, and alone. When he suggests he
move in, she complies. Karen’s actions, then, were only reactions to the men around her. She cannot choose how to live, or what to grow on her farm. As a result, we see her as a passive person motivated by men, as well as dependent on men. So although Mulvey may seem a bit fanatical, she needs to be in order to make people see what is happening right before them. Women find themselves, in society and in film, in inferior positions because males dominate the world. Mulvey helps us to see this situation clearly for what it is.

I was impressed with Christine’s revision of her earlier journal entry because it suggested she was taking ownership of her ideas and because so few students engage in genuine revision of their own writing. I had told students the journal entries could serve them as a “thinking through” of their responses to texts which might either provide support for or refute earlier impressions as they wrote later essays.

My final examples are, perhaps, the most interesting. They demonstrate the ways in which students can engage in original thinking when confronted with genuine problems and when they treat the ideas of “experts” and even instructors with a healthy dose of skepticism. In the first example, Martin’s skepticism about Mulvey allowed him to correct her “misreading” of another critic and develop an insightful reading of a current film, Lethal Weapon 2.

Martin first discovered Mulvey’s misreading when she identified “… what Molly Haskell has called the ‘buddy movie,’ in which active homosexual eroticism of the central male figures can carry the story without distraction” (p. 203). He shows that Haskell had explicitly excluded both “sexual desire” and “homoeroticism” as shaping forces in these relationships, quoting her own argument that the point of these relationships is “love in which men understand and support one another, speak the same language, and risk their lives to gain each other’s respect.” He also cites Haskell’s characterization of this love as “a delusion” perpetrated by “the difficulties of adventure” and as a love which is “adolescent” or “one’s mirror reflection.” In other words, the story in the buddy movie is carried forward by a rather adolescent and self-centered affection shared between males, but without homoerotic desire, as Mulvey had suggested.

Lethal Weapon 2

Martin then analyzes Lethal Weapon 2 in terms of the film’s narrative treatment of its primary relationship, the bond between two detectives, Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) and Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover), and the way in which a kind of sex role reversal of a male character, Leo, plays into the Riggs/Murtaugh relationship and the story’s development. I was struck by the originality of Martin’s argument since I had recently viewed the film myself. He shows in a succession of scenes how Riggs and Murtaugh risk their lives for one another, depend on one another, and have the same kind of relationship with females (as protector and affectionate but distant lover or husband).

He cites the toilet bowl scene, among other examples, where Riggs risks his life for Murtaugh. Murtaugh has been sitting on a toilet bowl for twenty hours because it is rigged with a bomb which will detonate if he gets up. I remember the scene as hilarious. Riggs volunteers to save Murtaugh by throwing his friend into a cast-iron bath tub which will serve as a shield from the explosion, but with the possibility that he will be sacrificed. Both survive, naturally, but viewers see the depth of the bond of friendship each character feels for the other. Martin then returns to the homoerotic theme in an interesting comment he makes on the scene, reinforcing his earlier correction of Mulvey’s misreading of Haskell:

Just after the explosion in this scene, Riggs turns to Murtaugh and says, “Just get me off, man. I don’t want anybody to see us like this.” It was interesting to note that the friendship of the characters contained an element of homophobia. They did not want anyone to see them in a position which could be misinterpreted by someone else. Although they share a very strong friendship, there is nothing present here which implies the ‘active homosexual eroticism’ which Mulvey mentions.

Martin later examines the role of Leo Getz (Joe Pesci) in the narrative and the bond between Riggs and Murtaugh. He shows that Leo assumes the characteristics of a stereotypical female (he needs protection from the detectives, he assumes a submissive role, he does the laundry, he is even accused by Murtaugh of acting like a complaining woman). In one interesting example, Martin argues convincingly that Leo’s character receives the same treatment as the film’s peripheral females:

Guns have traditionally been perceived as a male phallic symbol and, in denying Leo a gun, Riggs and Murtaugh emasculate him. The only people in the film who possess guns are those who have power. Like Trish Murtaugh and Rita Van Dan Haas (the wife of Murtaugh and lover of Riggs, respectively), Leo plays only a peripheral role: when he is kidnapped, the heroes must rescue him. This eventually reminds the viewer of the threatening of Trish and the murder of Rita. Each situation prompts heroic action on the part of the heroes. As soon as Leo is rescued, like his female counterparts, he disappears from the screen (he is told to go to the safety of a police station).
Martin's skepticism, then, led him to check Mulvey's sources, challenge one of her theses, and develop a rather interesting and original reading of a film based on that initial discovery. His discussion of the buddy relationship expands on (and revises) both Mulvey and Haskell's views, and his analysis of the sex role reversal takes gender roles a step further, allowing him to find an interesting exploitation of female stereotypes in the guise of a male character.

D. H. Lawrence
In the second example, Lisa discovers in D. H. Lawrence's story, "Tickets, Please," women who are temporarily empowered but fall back into stereotypical roles. She uses Mulvey as a reference point, but goes beyond her to articulate in her own distinctive voice a sense of the peril and possibility for change in gender relations. Lisa identifies the problem in the story, and in Lawrence's rendering of it, as the unchanging nature of male/female relationships.

In the story, Annie, a strong-willed girl, succumbs to the approaches of John Thomas who, as she knows, has had many girls only for his own personal pleasure. Lisa points out that he later refuses her companionship because "He values her only for what Laura Mulvey calls her 'to-be-looked-at-ness.'" The story's pivotal scene occurs when Annie later devises and carries out with the other girls a plan to humiliate him. Though the plan succeeds, Annie is struck at the last minute by terrible self-doubt because she senses he may actually still care more for her than the other girls. Lisa defines Annie's dilemma in Mulvey's vocabulary:

\begin{quote}
Annie is meant to be only his object of pleasure. She is the image, and he is the maker of meaning, with no desire for real emotional involvement ... "Tickets, Please," shows how conquering women is merely a sport for some males.
\end{quote}

But Lisa then goes beyond Mulvey to illuminate in her own voice Annie's dilemma, thereby implicating Lawrence and casting the problem in a contemporary light.

\begin{quote}
Like animals to be hunted, these objectifying males think women are there just for their own pleasure. Because John Thomas walked away in this story, Lawrence seems to say that this status quo will not change much. Women today are becoming aware and gathering their resources, but many men are hindered in their learning.
\end{quote}

In Foucault's words, Lisa accounts for "the positions and viewpoints" from which we speak about gender by locating Lawrence's bias and by suggesting the array of positions from which men and women observe or act in relation to the question of gender. "Women can react and be temporarily empowered in Lawrence's story," she says earlier in her essay, "but they fall back into stereotypical roles in the end."

In this essay I have shown how students can develop conceptual models from readings which address gender, and how they can apply those models to various texts with interesting and instructive results. Sometimes these attempts fail, as with the example of Alex, but those failures can be instructive in helping us understand the student and alternative approaches we might offer them. And when students achieve some success or, perhaps, strike out in novel and original ways, we can glean from those successes ways of encouraging independent thinking and writing in our other students.

Gender, then, can provide a rich stimulus to genuine learning, discovery of one's own distinctive voice, and a recognition of the ways in which we individually speak as males and females about gender and hear others speak to us about it. Part of that stimulus derives from the simple fact that each of us forges an individual identity as we make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Carol Gilligan alludes to this process in her summary of Erik Erikson's view of human development:

\begin{quote}
In the process, as Erikson (1964) observes, the knowledge gained through intimacy changes the ideological morality of adolescence into the adult ethic of taking care. (p. 164)
\end{quote}

Or as Gilligan also says,

\begin{quote}
From the different dynamics of separation and attachment in their gender identity formation through the divergence of identity and intimacy that marks their experience in the adolescent years, male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community. (p. 156)
\end{quote}

For our students, the incorporation of gender into the curriculum offers an opportunity to discover themselves in that human community, and begin to define the possibilities for participation and development within it.

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References


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