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*Janis Haswell and
Richard H. Haswell*

Gendership and the Miswriting of Students

Go, litel bok, go . . .
So prey I God that non myswrite the,
Ne themysmetre for defaute of tonge;
And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understonde, God I beseche!

—Geoffrey Chaucer, “Envoi”
to *Troilus and Criseyde*

“**T**hat thou be understood, God I beseech.” The prayer at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* lodges Chaucer’s concerns for the way his work may be read. His anxiety does not surprise readers. They assume that great writers are savvy and hence worried about the hardships awaiting their writings in the world of readership. Better than anyone, established or “authorized” writers know that not even the finest works of the literary canon are immune from unfair interpretation: “So pray I God that none miswrite thee.” Of course, speaking from pre-print days when texts were copied by hand, Chaucer means “miswriting” literally, a misinterpretation that does not figure very large in the concerns of present-day writers. But surely still with us is his worry about “understanding.” In that arena, a clash between writer intentions and reader understandings will produce “miswritings,” if not in his sense certainly in the poststructuralist sense of interpretive misconstructions. Writers can’t ignore the fact that every reader perforce must write the text anew.

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One contemporary site for this Chaucerian agon is the composition classroom. Student writers may not be established or authorized—yet—but they too have serious aspirations for their work and care about their ideas and their literary voice. In fact, students may have more grounds for anxiety, since they know quite likely that readers will pre-code their work as apprentice products, doubt their content, question their expression. What interpretive hardships lie ahead for *their* work? What are the chances of a composition teacher respecting their authorial presence or even recognizing it at the moment of encounter? These are not new questions in the discipline, as attest titles such as *Encountering Student Texts: Interpretive Issues in Reading Student Writing* (Lawson, Ryan, and Winterowd) and *Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research* (Anson). The profession has its own fears that the audience for student writing may easily misunderstand and misshape the message or the desires of the student. And if that audience, teachers or student peers, is reading in order to give advice for revision, then to misread student writing is to “miswrite” it indeed, not just figuratively in the poststructuralist sense but literally in a compositionalist sense.

But little has been published on misreading and the understanding that student authors have of their own texts. We have just finished documenting the interpretive fate of some student writing and, since we know something of the prayers or intentions—the *envoi*—with which the two authors sent forth their essays, we can say with some confidence that students have a right to stand with Chaucer in his concern about readership.

Our study focused on gender. The findings were both disturbing and problematical. For instance, we documented a variety of places where readers were affected by stereotypical or idiosyncratic preconceptions about the sex of the writer and its connections with writing instruction. But if this gender bias of readers seems a clear instance of miswriting, such as authors everywhere fear, attempts to eliminate it did not emerge as a clear instance of correct understanding, such as Chaucer prays for. Neutralization of gender bias seemed to entail miswritings of its own. This crucial contradiction, largely ignored by the profession, turned out to be only one of the various ways—some equally disturbing—we found gender affecting critique.

By “critique,” we mean an act of appraising a piece of student writing still in draft stage, with intent to foster improvement in the writing—as in the term “peer critique.” Are the ways gender affects this kind of critical reading symptomatic of other kinds of reading, as in social critique of student discourse or in personal response to a particular thesis or topic? We will leave that question for others to ponder. Here we will stick to the

evidence circumscribed by our research venue, in which we asked readers to evaluate some student writing in order to advise the author about revision. Murky, complex, treacherous, taboo-laden, the interaction between that sort of critique and gender seems sufficient for one little essay to dare broach. That our essay be understood, God we beseech.

Gender Identity, Gender Bias, Gender Neutrality, and Gendership

Specifically, our study looked at the way peer critique and teacher critique are affected by the reader's knowledge of the writer's sex. Our research design had built into it several contrasts in gender and experience. In a one-on-one interview setting, we had college writing freshmen (16 females and 16 males) and college teachers (16 females and 16 males) each read and evaluate two student essays. One was written by Victoria, the other by Kevin—both enrolled in freshman composition. Readers *did not* have prior knowledge of the author's sex with the first essay but *did* with the second. Half were given Victoria's essay first, half Kevin's. One of us then prompted each reader through a protocol routine. For each of the two essays, we asked readers to imagine themselves in a conference or peer-editing situation with the student writer, and to point out good and bad qualities of the essay and recommend revision. That done, readers then guessed the sex of the writer (with the first essay) and indicated clues to the authors' sex in the text (with both essays). At the end of the interview, readers discussed whether they thought a student author's sex should have anything to do with a composition teacher's critique.

Gender effects came to light upon comparison of the readers' critique when they had prior knowledge of the author's sex and when they did not. But gender effects also surfaced with affinities between critique and the clues that readers used to determine the sex of the writer, and between critique and the gendered image that the reader constructed of the author when the author's sex was not provided. There were also effects in some of these areas associated with the sex of the reader.

In other words, the study showed that gendering of student writing during critique involves more factors than just gender bias. It is important to consider this fact before looking at our specific findings. In college composition classes, teachers and peer students do more than bring gender stereotypes to a student text. They also use gender signals in the text, sometimes put there consciously by the writer, to establish a notion of the writer's sex, and they use gender protocols, sometimes established explicitly by the profession, to deal with the writer's signals and with their own stereotypes. And to the interpretive act they also bring a sense-of-self that itself is deeply gendered. It is a complicated action, out of which we will

isolate four factors: *gender identity*, *gender bias*, *gender neutrality*, and *gendership*.

Gender identity is the writer's or the reader's self-image of her or his own sexual history, status, and role. As a process of personality construction, never simple, always under development throughout one's life, that self-image is termed gender typing by sociopsychologists. *Gender bias* consists of a reader's preconceptions about gender, with deep roots in the reader's own gender identity and in the culture. Often these preconceptions are either unwarranted by the text or unwanted by the writer. *Gender neutrality* is a method of reading and writing, currently authorized and sanctioned by society, to de-activate gender identity and bias. Writers are asked not to use sexist language and not to show stereotypical, discriminatory, and demeaning attitudes toward one sex or the other. Writing teachers are asked not to take the sex of the writer into critical or evaluative consideration and not to teach rhetorical values (correct mechanics, exemplification, citation of sources, etc.) as if they privileged one sex over the other.

By *gendership*—the term is ours—we mean the image of the writer's sex interpretable from text and context. It can be conceived of as the gender dimension to the "authorial personality" intended by the writer, or the gender dimension of the "implied author" imaged by the reader (see L. Rubin and Booth). Better, it is a joint creation of the writer, reader, text, and culture. In other words, "gendership" parallels "authorship" or the "author function" of poststructuralist discourse theory. Just as the reader's *sense* of an author is constructed from a variety of sources—personal knowledge (as Rosenblatt suggests), self-identity (Holland), ideology (Foucault), or discourse-community conventions (Fish), so gendership is multiply constructed. Our term, *gendership*, maintains the now familiar distinction between "sex" as a biological fact and "gender" as a cultural/personal construction. As authorship is not the flesh-and-blood author but rather a discourse construct, gendership is not simply the sex of the writer. It is the reader's *sense* of the author's sex.

But gendership does not lie in the hands of readers alone. Authors often try to shape the reader's image of their authorial personality by creating a particular gendership. Marian Evans published *Adam Bede* under the name "George Eliot," while Edward L. Stratemeyer launched the first Nancy Drew mystery, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, as written by "Carolyn Keene." Evans and Stratemeyer gender-marked these pseudonyms to affect how readers valued their novels, the first perhaps to avoid presuppositions about the frivolity of women novelists, the second perhaps to help build a female readership. In short, the apriori gender identity of writers and the posteriori gendership they help create through their text sometimes are not always meant to be the same.

From the angle of the teacher of composition concerned about gender, we want to argue that it may be useful momentarily to shift focus from the notions of gender identity and gender bias to the notion of gendership. The most obvious reason is that gendership is a rhetorical phenomenon, hence teachable and discussible with students. While teachers may feel conflicted about the ethics or the chances of improving the personal gender identities of their students or of changing cultural gender stereotypes (laudable as those ends may be), they can introduce gendership into their courses as a legitimate means toward rhetorical effect. Moreover, gendership as a rhetorical means has been little pondered by the discipline. We feel it is worth studying. Focus on gendership, of course, does not excuse teachers or researchers from the vital controversies of gender itself. Whether gender is a natural essence or a social construction, whether men and women write differently, whether there is a coherent feminine voice or a distinctive feminine style, whether men and women employ different cognitive processes by which they interpret experience and access knowledge—these are questions from which gendership cannot disengage itself. Answers to them help determine what gendership is. We argue, however, by the same token, that for teachers to explore such issues in the context of the teaching of writing, they must take gendership into account, since it stands as a rhetorical reality dynamically merging all aspects of gender: inner and outer, psyche and culture, identity and bias, the domain of sex and the act of reading. Gendership, for instance, should be factored into pedagogical movements, particularly those articulated by feminists who advocate more diverse discourse forms and assignment topics, and less gender-exclusive language and teaching. Thus if the present study brackets the above gender issues, it is because we wish first to ask an initial fact-finding question that should inform debate: How does gendership enter into the way students and teachers actually read and critique texts?

From the angle of the student writer submitting a piece for critique, obviously this complex of gender and readership does not allay Chaucerian fears of miswriting. The student author's gender *identity*—admittedly, only one aspect of the writer's self, but perhaps a model for other aspects—may well have slim chances of survival if it encounter only two responses, *bias* or *neutrality*. Nor did our research findings ease those fears, as we will soon show. But as we ourselves pondered the full findings, we began to suspect that it is with gendership where the real agon takes place. So we have a third reason for our focus. It is our central conclusion that gendership—the point where reader and writer via the text construct a gendered picture of the author—marks the locale where the student writer is, at once, most compelled to assert self-identity and most vulnerable to bias and misread-

ing. Gendership is an authorial imprint often and easily erased by a reader's authority over student texts.

In what follows, we consider gendership as a rhetorical, pedagogical, and interpretive strategy that writers and readers use to deal with gender. We turn first to the experience of two students writing, not only because in this episode of critique their writing literally came first but also because their experience is most apt to be forgotten by critique. We next look at what we have documented most fully, the strategies of the readers. Between the experience of students writing and the experience of critics reading, we will see many a Chaucerian clash. But there is also, as Stephen North would not let us forget, the dialectical encounter between these two experiences and the experience of participant-observers. So we end with ourselves, trying to interpret the whole tangle and derive from it some sort of better way.

The Two Authors: "It's Me!"

Imagine you are one of our student writers, Victoria. (First, look at her photograph.) You are a young woman, eighteen years old. You are gifted with both an artistic/literary soul and an exacting, logical mind. You write well. During the fifth week of the semester in your English composition class after finishing a paper on Plato's Allegory of the Cave, you are asked to write a twenty-minute in-class essay on how you pursue truth in your life.

The process by which I search for "truth" is dependent upon what kind of an answer I am looking for.

For example, if I were looking for the answer to a question of morality, I would look within myself. I believe that only I can know if what I am doing or what I am saying is "good" or "bad". I use myself and my own personal values to determine the difference between right and wrong. I use the beliefs I hold strongly to act as a kind of guide to help me through some more complex moral decisions. For instance, I believe in obeying the law, but I realize that the law is only as perfect as those who made it. Thus, if an occasion arises where someone is in danger or is hurt and helping them would conflict with the law, I would tend to ignore that specific law.

If I were searching for an answer to a question involving knowledge, I would first look to myself and see how much I know about the particular subject or question I am contemplating. I then will take what knowledge I have and compare it to what other people (or other sources) know. This process also involves a gut instinct, for I'm the only one who can decide if a source or a person is giving me a qualified answer. In other words, it's up to me to figure out if somebody/source is feeding me a load of bull. Once I have the chance

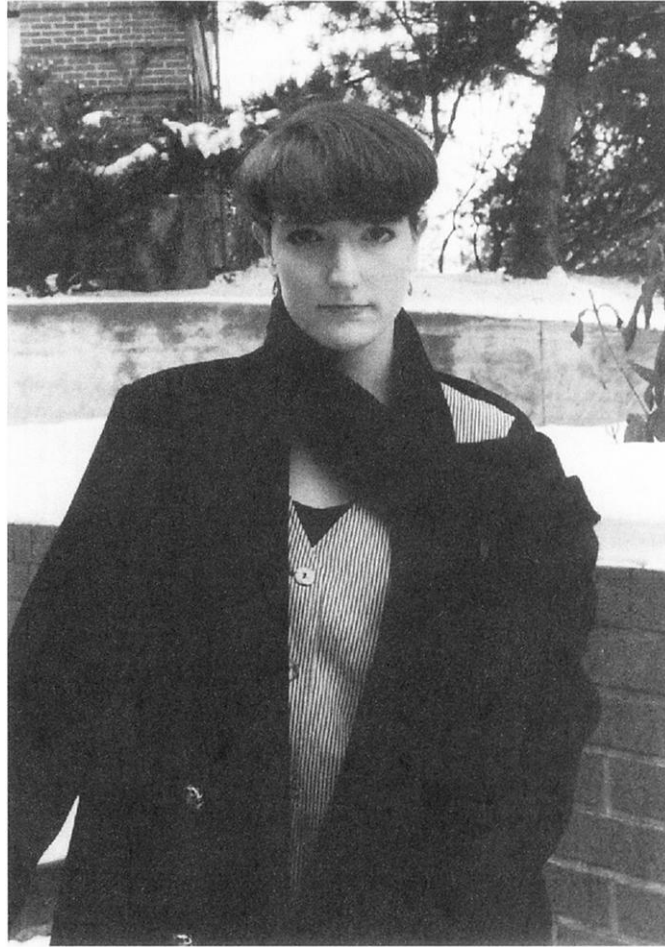


Photo: Janis Haswell

to gather as much information that I can, I will try to make as accurate an answer as possible. It should be noted that on some occasions I choose not to use other people/sources to find the truth. Sometimes I am able to find the answers without the help of anyone else.

In conclusion I would like to say that, while these methods for finding my own kind of truth seem to work fairly well, I realize that there are drawbacks. One involves emotion. Sometimes, in cases where there is a lot of emotion going on, I am apt to make decisions that are too hasty. Another drawback is the amount of time I have to make these decisions. In cases such as these, I just go with what I know definitely and my instinct. Also, like any other

person, I don't like to be proven wrong, but I guess it's something I've learned to live with.

Two years later, you remember writing the essay. As you reread it, you exclaim, "It's me, it's me!" You are pleased with the lasting validity of your response: "It says everything I stand for." The writing is stronger than you remember, and though you would revise to clarify your style, you would not change it: "The voice is all me." When told that many readers thought the piece was written by a man, you concede that the stance of personal independence might be taken as masculine. Then you proceed through the essay, identifying phrases that bear the mark of your feminine personality, such as "conflict with the law," "gut instinct," and "load of bull."

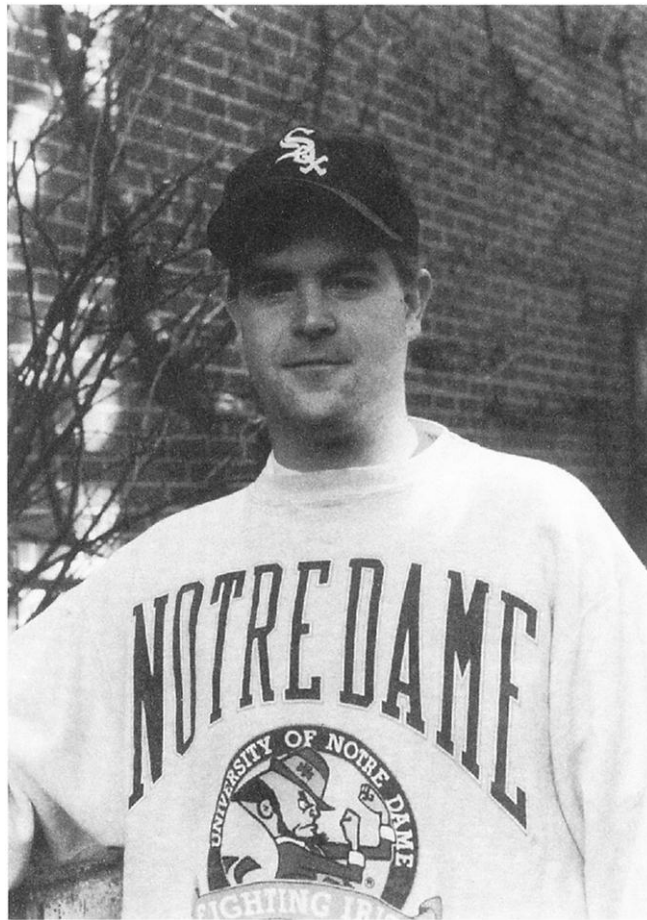


Photo: Janis Haswell

Next, imagine you are Kevin. (Look at his photograph.) You are a nineteen-year-old male, attending the same university (not Notre Dame, incidentally) and living in Greek housing. You plan to be a pharmacist and are enrolled in English composition. As a writer you are fluent, but you know you will not take another English course before graduation. During the fifth week of the semester you are asked to write the same in-class essay on how you pursue truth in your life.

When Plato describes a person's "search for truth," he uses the "allegory of the cave." How would you describe your "search for truth" and the process you use to pursue it?

When I find myself searching for truth I usually try to find it in friends and my family. I also find it through my own self, because I have to take in the information my friends and parents give me and decide what I want to believe it real. So I basically decide what is real through my own self and my own beliefs, but I get most of the information from other people outside myself.

To find truth is something that comes naturally to me I guess. When I take in information that my friends or my family is telling me I have to take in all the good, truthful information and through out all the bad information. Something that they believe is truthful may not be truthful to me. I am my own person and I like to make my own decisions so when I get the information I take all the variables that go along with it to make sure my decision will be right. There are so many things that could influence my decision, but the biggest thing is whether I trust the source I am getting my information from. That is, why when people I do not know try to give me information I really don't pay attention. I mean I pay attention because I am interested, but I am not going to take what they are saying as truthful. Only if I thought that it could be truthful would I then go to a friend or family and ask them to elaborate on the subject that I brought up. So, to me, all truth is something that I have to find myself through others. To know if somebody's information is really true or false is my own decision. I have to think whether I believe the information is real or true. In this part of the decision making, everything comes down on my own decision. This is the hardest part, trying to decide what is true and what is false. I see it as what I believe in and what I want to see is real, is real. Even if everybody else sees the same thing as false and I want to believe it is real, it will be real. This is the one problem with my decision making process on what is real and what isn't real because if it happens that the information that I believe is real is not real, by definition, then I go all through my life believing it is real. This is why I have to take so much caution and time to make the right decision on what is real, who do I get the information from, and making the final decision.

The information that I get from other people than myself is when I get the information to decide what is real and what is the truth. Making the right decision I encounter lots of variables, but I have to make the right choice because it stays with me my whole life. The information comes from the outside by the truth comes from my inside.

Two years later, you can only vaguely remember writing the essay. But you are still comfortable with your ideas: "The morals here I still have." Although you remember having composed the piece in a rush ("When you have twenty minutes, you just write as fast as you can"), you would not change much on rewriting it: "It's all one piece." When told that many readers thought your piece was written by a female, you admit that your response isn't typically "male." Only part of you touts the self-sufficient masculine pose ("macho stuff")—the other part has no need to do so: "I don't feel that way myself."

Both Victoria and Kevin read their own essays in four ways important to keep in mind as we look at the way our sixty-four participants read them. First, they reaffirmed that their words convey abiding parts of who they are—beliefs, values, voices. Second, they confirmed that one of those parts, their sense of personal gender identity, is not simple and not stereotypical. Third, they treated the gendership of their essays, the expression of their gendered selves, in part as a strategy of self-presentation, as a "staging of gender" very much like Kraemer found in the writing of his own students (331), little different than the strategies of posing they both displayed when their pictures were taken. (Kevin, who projects himself as the laid-back guy in a baseball cap, readily stood as directed but asked, "Do you want me to smile?" and Victoria, the artsy girl in fashionable clothes, needed no prompting but asked, "How about this— or this?") And fourth, they showed that while gendership had not been a part of their conscious design while writing, it is a part of their essay that they recognized easily and analyzed with interest and insight.

The Readers: Gender Bias and Critique

On the other hand, our readers, especially the teachers, experienced a reluctant struggle with gendership. They felt at once compelled by the culture to gender the writers and compelled by the discipline to degender them. "When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is 'male' or 'female,'" wrote Freud (577); teachers should not respond to student writing in gender-exclusive ways nor use sexist language, advises every manual in the profession. Overtly, our readers, students and teachers, took the professional way. Almost to a person, they denied out of hand

that the sex of writer should influence a reader's critique. What operated beneath our readers' awareness, however, was a very complex set of gender strategies that significantly affected both their appraisal of Victoria's and Kevin's essays and their recommendations for revision.

Before we bring these strategies to light, let's first look at some of the empirical evidence. After reading the first essay (with author's sex unknown), forty of our sixty-four readers had spontaneously constructed a sense of the writer as male or female. That sense was in fact wrong half the time. Whether they had gendered the author automatically or not, all readers evinced a familiar set of gender stereotypes, simplistic cultural assumptions about differences between the sexes. They used this set most openly when we asked them to identify clues in the text supporting their best guess of the author's sex. Their use tended to be highly traditional and highly polarized. They described males as independent, confident, and egotistical, and females as dependent, insecure, and connected with what other people think. They assumed males would be detached and devoid of emotion, and females emotional and eager for dialogue, more willing to listen to advice and to revise and edit their texts. They saw male writing as "rough and pointed," and female as "fluid," "tempered," "subtle" and "soft"; male writing as formless and unfocused, and female as well organized and clear; male writing as preoccupied with ideas, linear, and "abstract," female as detailed and "observant." Our readers described writing behavior also in a bipolar way. They expected male students to write just to finish the assignment, and females to write out of interest in the assignment; males to write for venial purposes, and females to write out of sincerity, truthfulness, and honesty.

The dominant gender stereotype shared by most of our readers (students and teachers, females and males alike) is that women are more competent than men in the use of language. This pro-feminine bias assisted the readers' most common tactic in identifying gendership. They reasoned that if the essay was well written, probably it was female authored: "When I picture a student, I guess, who has problems, I picture a male. When I picture a student who does a good job, I picture a female." The assumption that females handle language in general better than males do, of course, is well documented (Goldberg; Holbrook; Top). Within the critique of our readers, we found two direct pieces of evidence of a pro-feminine bias.

First, as the following figures show, readers gave Victoria's essay 10% *more* positive critique when they knew it was written by a woman than when they did not know the sex of the author, and gave Kevin's essay 5% *less* positive critique when they knew it was written by a man than when they did not know. Second, on a five-point evaluative scale, all groups of readers save the female students rated Kevin's piece lower when they

Scale Rating and Positive Critique

Gendership Dynamics	5-Point Rating Scale*		Percent of Critique That is Positive**	
	Victoria's Essay	Kevin's Essay	Victoria's Essay	Kevin's Essay
Reader has prior knowledge of writer's sex				
Female readers	3.5	3.1	41%	20%
Male readers	4.0	2.6	44%	21%
Reader has <i>no</i> prior knowledge of writer's sex				
Female readers	3.7	2.7	31%	26%
Male readers	3.6	2.8	34%	25%
Reader infers the writer's sex as female				
Female readers	3.6	2.7	24%	26%
Male readers	3.9	2.6	27%	40%
Readers infer the writer's sex as male				
Female readers	3.7	2.9	32%	34%
Male readers	3.4	2.5	19%	31%

* A reader rated an essay only after considering and discussing its good and bad qualities. They assigned a value at any point between one and five, with five being high.

** Positive and negative critique propositions were distinguished according to whether the reader described a specific rhetorical feature as a strength or a weakness of the essay. The proposition could be couched as analysis or advice for revision: "Their response to the topic is thoughtful" (positive), "The writer should provide more examples" (negative).

knew it was written by a man, and all save the female teachers rated Victoria's essay higher when they knew it was written by a woman.

Pro-feminine bias sometimes conflicted and sometimes joined with a second well documented gender strategy: same-sex depreciation (Barnes; Roen; Paludi & Bauer; Etaugh, Houtler & Ptasnik). When sex of the author was known to readers, males rated Kevin's piece lower than did females, and females rated Victoria's piece lower than did males. Furthermore, the males' rating of Kevin's piece drops when they have prior knowledge that it is male authored while under the same condition the females' rating

risers, and the females' rating of Victoria's piece drops when it is known to be female authored while the males' rating rises. It is both astonishing and telling that this pattern holds true, for both essays and both sexes, in terms of *inferred* gender. On reading their first essay, when readers had no prior knowledge of the author's sex and were not aware that gender was an issue, females rated Victoria and Kevin's essays lower than did males when both sexes imagined the piece as female authored, higher when both thought the pieces were male authored. And this symmetrical inversion with inferred sex-of-author is exactly repeated for the percent of positive commentary. The most extreme effect of same-sex depreciation appears in critical comments where readers explicitly describe the author as a "he" or as a "she"—critique uttered with the strongest evidence that the reader has constructed a gendered picture of the author. Male readers made 91% of their critical propositions using "he" negative, females made only 58% of theirs negative. By contrast, only 27% of male observations using "she" were negative, compared to 73% of female observations.

So in our study, males as well as females tend to be harsher on their own sex when it comes to writing. As we will see, that depreciation is played out not simply on a single holistic judgment (the scale rating) and on their willingness to find good in the writing (amount of positive critique) but is kneaded into the content of the readers' critique and in the substance of their pedagogical advice. Critically, in fact, same-sex responses sometimes proved insightful. Our readers (both men and women) devoted only 5% of their critique to expressive values such as emotional content, personal feeling, inner motive, affective tone, and individual voice. But within that pittance was a significant twist. When the sex of the author was known, female readers increased their expressive critique with Victoria and decreased it with Kevin; male readers increased their expressive critique with Kevin and decreased it with Victoria. Sure knowledge of the author's sex seemed to have released critical insights having to do with same-sex inner life.

This already complicated gender dynamic becomes more complex still when we add the effects of the sex of the interviewers upon the critique. Of a number of interactions, we list the three most intuitively sound. (1) Kevin's essay was rated more leniently in the presence of the male interviewer. The boost, nearly a fifth of the scale, came from female readers who knew Kevin's sex. Perhaps the pro-male bias of some female readers was enhanced with a male interviewer (male readers did not show the complementary effect of a pro-female bias with the female interviewer). (2) With the male interviewer, teachers degendered the agent of the text—spoke of the writer as neither male nor female—15% more often than when they talked with the female interviewer. Were some of the

teachers assuming that males respond to writing on a less personal level than do females? (3) When Victoria's essay was read with her sex known, students with the female interviewer and teachers with the male interviewer gave the piece around 20% more positive comments than when they were with the female interviewer. This last of our interviewer effects reminds us that they are confounded with other possible factors, linked with many dynamics, such as personality, status of participants, and presence of authority. What did the students, for instance, see in the female interviewer to increase their positive critique of Victoria's essay—teacher-authority, age, maternal care, personality? What did the teachers react to in the male interviewer to increase their positive critique of Victoria—personality, avuncularity, collegiality, professional standards?—and what stereotypical notions did that presence stimulate—that females are better writers, or perhaps better writing students, even perhaps more needy of positive reinforcement?

As the interviewers in question, we were aware of these kinds of reactions occasionally: the woman-to-woman "Yeah" meaning "We females know what it's like"; or the man-to-man glance meaning "We males know the way women write." Thinking back, replaying the tapes, and rereading the transcripts, we begin to understand that we had played a part in a situation more complicated than we had imagined originally—a situation, as recent analysts of society and gender have been discovering, not only where gender stereotypes shape people's behavior tacitly, but also where gender expectations help people shape the situation themselves, help them decide, sometimes consciously, on role, behavior, and strategies for action (Ortner and Whitehead; Holland and Skinner; Unger).

The Readers: Gendering through Critique

As we have noted, our readers may have denied that gender bias should influence critique, but they were also aware that it often does and that it easily could influence them. The question then becomes, how did our readers handle the gender effects we have just documented and how did that strategy affect their critique?

This is an important question, rarely asked in studies of gender and the teaching of writing. It bears repeating. When teachers and peers respond to student writing, gender operates not just as gender bias—as an unconscious and illicit sway of culture, status, upbringing, personal sex typing, and so on. It also operates as gendership, as an image of the author's sex, often perfectly conscious, and—as we will argue—a legitimate aspect of

any piece of writing. How do critics deal with these two intermingled, sometimes mutually exclusive, sometimes mutually supporting, presences of gender? The scene is conflicted. No surprise to discover that our findings are equally conflicted, both dismaying and promising.

Here is our current reading of the action. As readers critique student writing, they engage in a gendering strategy that functions simultaneously on as many as four levels. For purposes of exposition, we describe these levels as if they were autonomous and sometimes sequential, but we do not want to forget that in the actual responses they were interconnected, simultaneous, and recursive. The first mode of gendering is conscious. Most of our teachers called this gender *neutrality*, and assumed it means that being professional and objective demands disconnecting one's gendered response from student writing. The second level of gendering is a corollary of the first but functions on a subconscious level: the *suppression* of the writer's gender identity. Third, readers cut their critical interpretation of the text to fit culturally acceptable gender styles. This *tailoring* reveals that the second mode, gender suppression, may be only a smoke screen, or perhaps a purification stage in a larger process that takes teacher-critics to a final goal. They are not truly degendering the text but colonizing it through the enforcement of acceptable gendering conventions. Finally, there is an extreme kind of critique response that occurs when seemingly readers have trained themselves to not think about gendership. As we shall see, this gender *blindness* yields the most disastrous effects of all for the student writer. ("Gender blindness" as well as "gender suppression," are terms coined by Shirley Rose in her work on gender commentary and literacy narratives.) All modes of this gendering process—neutrality, suppression, tailoring, and blindness—help instruct the reader's sense of gendership and with student writing connect directly to the act of critique.

Gender Neutrality

"I'd like to think that when I am reading a paper, it doesn't matter to me if it's male or female" (a male teacher). Typically, our student readers rejected out of hand the option of a teacher taking the writer's sex into critical account. Behind their belief that "good writing is good writing," that there is no difference between competent writing by a man and competent writing by a woman, lay the student-writers' fear, equally explicit, of being treated differently because of their sex. The men assumed they would be graded down, the women that they would be falsely rewarded. Their conclusion: "Whatever is wrong [in the text] isn't male or female. It just needs to be fixed."

Teachers tended to consider the question more deeply. It is true that they also harbored a pervasive assumption that to be professional means to disregard the sex of the writer in the critique process. "Advice is asexual," said one of our male teachers. But they were divided and often ambivalent as to whether gender might be a factor in the writing and evaluation process. Many made a distinction we found pragmatically dubious. They said they would deal differently with two students as individuals but not as gendered individuals: "Gender wouldn't make a difference on how I critique, but person, individual personality, does." Gender enters into evaluation "maybe only to the extent that it might help you understand the writer's origin, and therefore maybe why they might be developing or thinking in a certain way." That is, if gender is allowed to be a factor, it should effect the tone or style of teacher-student interaction, not the substance of the critique itself. Most of our teachers never admitted the possibility that either student writing or critique is (or should be) gendered by its very nature. Gendership is not allowed the benefit of critique.

Gender Suppression

"I needed to have some kind of word to refer to the writer" (a female teacher). In their statements, our readers affirmed their adherence to the idea of gender neutrality, but in their critical acts they often went further, to a point that might be called gender neutering. Analysis of their critical commentary finds them not only suppressing a sense of the agent of the essay as a gendered person, but as frequently denying human agency at all for the text. With every reader, we categorized each non-repeated critique proposition according to how it referred to the agent of the text under critique, as a female, a male, a genderless person, a hypothetical extension of the reader, or as non-existent. As our percentages show, seventy percent of the time our readers preferred genderless or agentless propositions, that is, pictured text agency stripped of gender distinctions. This outcome might indicate the triumph of the profession's anti-discriminatory gender guidelines. Indeed, many of our readers consciously chose to refer to Kevin or Victoria as "they" to avoid exclusionary language and the awkward "he/she." But note that fully a third of the critical comments are agentless, that is, go beyond avoiding gender differences and avoid gender altogether. A closer look at the patterns of agency attribution will divulge that in other ways readers were not simply being neutral about gender but in fact were suppressing it.

The next table shows that these ways are gender-linked. Males degender the agent more often when they know or think that the writer is a

Attribution of Agency

Readers	Agency (percent of critique)*				
	"I"	Female	Male	Genderless	Agentless
All readers	3%	11%	17%	36%	34%
Female readers	3%	16%	13%	39%	30%
Male readers	3%	6%	21%	33%	38%
* "I" propositions transfer agency to the reader:			"I would simplify this sentence"		
Female propositions refer to the agent as a female:			"She should simplify this sentence"		
Male propositions refer to the agent as a male:			"He should simplify this sentence"		
Genderless propositions refer to the author as human but do not specify gender:			"The writer [or they] should simplify this sentence"		
Agentless propositions elide human authorship, with passive constructions or with an assumption that the text is its own agent:			"This sentence should be simplified" or "This sentence is too simple"		

female—ten percent more when they are inferring gendership, twenty percent more when they have prior knowledge. The females do not show this bias, but they degender the agent more than do the males when they are not sure of the author's sex. From this neutering, whatever the motive, it is the writer who suffers. Across the board, four out of five comments couched in genderless or agentless terms are negative, compared to three out of five for "she" and "he" comments. This twenty percent difference may be a startling finding for teachers who are careful to avoid sex-exclusive language. Yet a vision of an author as genderless or of a text as authorless seems to assist the critical discovery and expression of faults in the writing.

Together these tables readily show a kind of gender suppression even more obviously gender-linked. This is the unwillingness of male readers to attribute female agency to the writing. With prior knowledge of the author's sex, they recognized Victoria as the agent of her text half as often as they recognized Kevin as agent of his. When they had no prior knowledge, they visualized the agent as male about ten times more often than as female. This male preference for male agency (female readers do not show an equivalent bias) is not simply a case of the generic "he" surviving like some curious fossil. On occasion males refer to Victoria's text as male-authored after they had been told it was written by a woman. Within the overall pattern of suppression, it is the female writer who is most often

Reader Gendering of the Agent of the Writing

Gendership Dynamics	Agency (percent of critique)*							
	Victoria's Essay				Kevin's Essay			
	Female	Male	Gender-less	Agent-less	Female	Male	Gender-less	Agent-less
Reader has prior knowledge of writer's sex								
Female readers	40%	0%	22%	32%	0%	38%	31%	27%
Male readers	23%	4%	24%	47%	0%	45%	23%	27%
Reader has <i>no</i> prior knowledge of writer's sex								
Female readers	5%	5%	56%	32%	11%	9%	53%	26%
Male readers	1%	23%	32%	40%	3%	12%	50%	35%
Reader infers the writer's sex as female								
Female readers	12%	0%	57%	31%	18%	0%	55%	27%
Male readers	0%	14%	32%	49%	4%	12%	49%	34%
Reader infers the writer's sex as male								
Female readers	0%	9%	58%	31%	0%	30%	50%	20%
Male readers	1%	27%	33%	35%	2%	10%	51%	37%

*"I" attributions are omitted from this table.

denied active agency—or the writer whose gendership is constructed as feminine, as the next section illustrates.

Gender Tailoring

"The teacher has to be aware of how he or she is handling gender issues, which you know involves an exploration of their own attitudes toward gender" (a male teacher). The most significant examples of readers miswriting Kevin and Victoria's essays occur in the locus of gender tailoring, which is distinguishable by three interpretive actions, often combined. First and most common, readers tended to interpret a text, to write it or reshape it in ways that fit the gender of the writer, whether known or inferred. Their basic strategy was to use culture-wide stereotypes about gender to locate, isolate, and diagnose qualities of the text that they needed in order to rationalize their critique. When they presumed Kevin's essay to have been written by a male, they saw it as "repetitious," "wordy," "abstract": "He repeats himself to point of distorting or annoying the reader," "He writes the way he talks." Readers also found that the male Kevin lacks focus and stylistic grace; that he is rebellious, self-confident, and emotionless; that he acts independently of the opinions of others and validates

truth within himself. "It seemed to be kind of empiricist, scientific, male-oriented kind of thinking. . . . He's saying, I'm getting this data from my family and friends and cannot live without data, I cannot think without data, I have to judge it." Some readers assumed that the essay was clearly dashed out just to fulfill the required assignment, typical of "scared student writing." But when readers presumed the author of Kevin's essay to be female, they tended to see her writing as stylistically fluid, with complex sentences and detailed observation. She is caring, honest and sincere: "The way the paper sounds to me is friendly, I mean I have a sense of voice in the paper." She is comfortable with personal relationships and willing to engage in dialogue with others, "very much in a social network . . . in a web of relationships." Her essay displays a willingness to "analyze in depth" elements "that she obviously values." All these comments, remember, refer to the same essay—Kevin's.

Victoria's essay falls victim to the same phenomenon. *Female* Victoria thinks in terms of context, "thinks more about people." She would defy the law in order to protect people she cares about. She clearly values moral issues. She is open to emotion and relies on her own instinct. Although she can be hasty at times, she is comfortable in looking inside herself for answers. Her essay is thoughtful, mature, well organized, and contains few grammatical and syntactic flaws: "She proves what she is saying by giving examples and the reason behind it," "She's very fluent for a 101 student." Her lapses are emotional departures from logic and from formal style, using slang like "gut instinct" and "load of bull," and qualifying her attitude about the process she uses to search for truth with the admission that there are drawbacks and that sometimes she makes mistakes. Contrast this with the comments readers offered about *male* Victoria's essay. This writer is decisive, logical and linear in his thinking—maybe too much so: "This is set out in just an organized way, and without a lot of lively things but just basic facts and organization, logic." He hates to be proven wrong. He is competitive, self-reliant, and independent, "aware that the question asks for his search for truth." He will weigh evidence from other sources, albeit grudgingly: "sort of picking things up individually and holding them up and pretty consciously saying, 'No, that's not it.'" He is assured except when it comes to emotions. He has a vigorous style that is straight forward and aggressive, as evident by phrases like "gut instinct" and "load of bull."

As composition teachers, we ought not minimize the contradiction between these pairs of bipolar readings. They sound as if they describe diametrically different essays, yet they are in fact talking about the same piece. Frequently what purports to be objective critical commentary didn't emerge so much from Kevin's and Victoria's personal response to the in-class prompt, but rather from the bifurcated, stereotypical expectations

of gender and gendered writing that teachers and students alike brought to the interview, looked for and discovered in the essays, and then used to guide their critique of the writing.

A second strategy of gender tailoring is for readers to shape critique out of a sense of solidarity with their own gender group. Given our research design, this strategy showed up in contrasts between female and male reader groups. The use of "she" and "he" agents was a clear instance, with males tending to opt for the male agent and females—although less assiduously—for the female agent, under the same reading conditions. Another and parallel instance was the way male readers bypassed expressive critique of a female author and female readers bypassed—but to a lesser degree—expressive critique of a male author. A third area was the recommendations for revision. In general, readers tended to rely on a stereotypical image of their own sex as a tacit ground or premise from which to start their critique. Consider some gendered strategies with Victoria's essay. Of readers who pictured the author as a woman, females imagine her working *toward* "feminine" strengths of connecting and empathizing with others; males imagine her working *away from* "masculine" strengths of logic and abstract thinking. For instance, the female readers often advised her to personalize her answer and elaborate on what other points of view might be. The male readers often advised her to make her style less formal, saying that she provides adequate proof and displays some reflective thinking, but that her essay is too abstract, the tone "too goody-goody." This pattern of advice was reversed when the readers pictured Victoria as a male. Now the female readers imagine him working *away from* stereotypical feminine qualities of fluency, personal tone, and hesitancy, while male readers imagine him working *toward* masculine strengths of abstraction and balanced, detached reasoning. Female readers often asked him to eliminate wordiness, avoid "I," and remove the reservation about "drawbacks" in his method of finding truth. Male readers thought he needed to focus more on a global, abstract level since his essay disclosed only a personal response. Males also recommended that he be more logical, to see other sides to his argument—not for the sake of connecting to other people, but to make sure his argument was balanced. In short, a direction in which to revise is needed for any recommendation for revision, and the familiar picture of one's own gender often seems to provide that direction.

In many discourse contexts, researchers have found characteristic language strategies with same-sex communication, and it is not surprising to find examples in writing critique. Johnson and Roen discovered a distinct woman-to-woman habit of complimenting in peer critiques. But gender-group identity, of course, develops largely in tune with culture-wide stereotypes about gender, and it is often impossible to tell whether advice

for revision emerges from one or the other. When known or assumed to be written by a male, for example, Kevin's essay elicited the same gender-polarized advice from females and males. The male Kevin is told to work on surface elements that females are supposedly good at: to shorten his sentences, to clean up mistakes in usage. The female Kevin is not advised to change her expression but to work at masculine thinking: to elaborate ideas, to "think more deeply on the subject," to distinguish between "truth" and "reality," to acquire more "authority of thought." The working assumptions for both gender camps is that the male Kevin must perforce work on basics whereas the female Kevin is ready to work on the more advanced areas of content. The male author is verbally inept, the female ideationally impoverished.

Mingled in this advice is a third strategy of gender tailoring: A reader shapes critique out of a sense of her or his own personal gender identity. The encounter between one reader's unique gender identity and one writing's particular gendership, of course, will take a multitude of shapes (see D. Rubin). The essays of Victoria and Kevin, however, illustrate one encounter of importance to the teaching of composition. They show that the writer most at risk from this strategy assumes a precarious form of gendership: the cross-dresser—the woman who wants to say "load of bull" as a mark of her own personality, the man who wants to write about family and friends. Such cross-dressing makes many readers uncomfortable, and there is much evidence that it attracts a strong negative bias in evaluations of human performance (Hartman et al.; Penelope; Cameron; Ruble and Ruble; Kramarae). Are Victoria's and Kevin's essays cross-dressed? Certainly with our readers they produced ambivalent gender markers and scrambled the subconscious signals that directed many aspects of critical strategy, from assigning value to selecting tasks for revision.

This effect is most clearly seen in the eight female teachers' response to Victoria's essay with sex known. Here cross-dressing seems to heighten same-sex depreciation—they rated the essay nearly twenty percent lower than did the other eight female teachers to whom Victoria's sex was unknown. Most of the female teachers were fairly knowledgeable and generally supportive of feminist principles. Our first eight may have reacted negatively to a piece of writing, known to be by a woman, that seemed to show masculine or male-academic traits. But even more notable is their lack of empathy with the essay. Although they saw mechanical and structural strength, the female teachers remained "unsatisfied" by the piece. They demanded more specific, personal examples and in-depth exploration of how emotions interact with principles. The essay is "like a how-to" description. "It seems to be kind of worthless," said one woman, "I want something else. . . . Something's lacking but it's hard for me to say

what it is. . . . It's pretty boring . . . the mundane kind of generalistic approach to the facts." Several readers remarked that the woman writer sounds like a man: direct, to the point, and "strongly self-reliant." "She's plodding to the man's world too much," complained one teacher. Another wanted to ask Victoria, "Don't you think when you're working from your heart you might be closer to finding the truth than when you're very rational?" This woman goes on, "I want her to plunge in deeper. I want her to get in water for a while."

The impact of cross-dressing is also evident in the male response to Kevin with sex known. The eight male students are especially negative in their critique of this essay, in which they find "some feminine aspects." Here the word *depreciation* is too weak; antipathy better describes the tone of their comments. The writer is perceived to have a "bleak" outlook, he "doesn't listen to others," he "panicked." His essay "is really poorly written"—brief, shallow, jumbled. "He's just putting down words on the paper. He didn't know what to say." One of these male students found the paper particularly frustrating. "He's writing sort of the way I'm talking. He has run-on sentences, he doesn't say anything . . . like he's going through this in his own mind and kind of spewing it out on paper. . . . I mean what can I say?" Another reader remarked that Kevin "wrote the question at the top to show what the hell he was writing about."

Gender Blindness

"When I read a paper I usually try to put a face with it so I can hear the author speaking to me" (a female teacher). From our look at the strategies of gender neutrality, suppression, and tailoring, we might well conclude that our readers were correct after all: gender should be eliminated from critique. Consider the damage. When a particular gendered face is inferred (often incorrectly), the writer may be rated lower, given fewer positive comments, offered less affective response and a narrower range of options for revision, or depersonalized as the agent of the ideas and words.

Still, we argue that a fourth gendering strategy in our corpus of critique—gender blindness—shows that trying to rid critique of gender may be a premature solution. The evidence can be seen best by observing the fate of the two essays when readers appear to have blocked out gendership. In the interview process, when we asked our readers with their first essay if they had any sense of the gender of the writer, forty of the sixty-four already had envisioned either a male or female writer, as we have noted. But twenty-four readers aggressively envisioned a faceless writer (eventually, it is worth noting, two readers absolutely refused even to guess the sex of the writers). In this kind of no-man, no-woman's land, there emerge

signs of extreme hardship for student writers. Female readers gave their lowest scores of all when they had not pictured the writer as either male or female. This suggests that female teachers and students need to visualize a person, put a face to the writer, in order to respond positively. More alarming was one reply from a female teacher who refused to *guess* the sex of the writer but unblushingly offered this comment about Kevin's essay: "Some of the things that he [sic] has said led me to think that he might be a black student and is not probably used to looking at abstractions." Publicly armed against sexism, this reader lets it and another atrocity in the back door. Male readers who kept the writer faceless offered more comments than male readers who envisioned a man or woman. But the bulk of their critique was negative; even the paucity of positive comments was qualified in some way. Most of the observations passivized the act of writing ("The piece was not well thought out") or suppressed it ("This paragraph never seems to end"). In general, the advice to a "faceless" writer shows less insight and empathy than the advice provided by readers who gendered the writers in their imagination.

Is gendership in critique of student writing, then, a case of damned if you do and damned if you don't? That too may be a premature conclusion. We found that at least with one group of readers, gendered lenses help deal with Kevin's essay profitably. Contrary to the other groups, the eight female students who read his essay second, knowing his sex, actually rated it as highly as Victoria's. It isn't that they overlooked the problems that the teachers and the male students saw. In fact, they discovered the same textual problems in Kevin's writing, and offered the same proportion of negative commentary. But in contrast to the male students, these female students centered on character. They refused to be gender neutral (they convey 37% of their commentary in a gender-specific way, in comparison with the teachers' 23%) and at the same time to resist donning gender-polarized glasses. In writing they knew was male-authored, they admired traits that stereotypically would be attributed to a female author. They liked the way Kevin advocates listening, communicating, and accepting one's limitations, and the way he writes with his reader in mind and imbues his piece with strong feeling and a tone of honesty and sincerity. "He says, I have to refer to myself," commented one of these female students, "He really believes in that and . . . his feelings come out really well." "What he's saying is realistic and it's really easy to read and follow," said another, "It was so honest and so straightforward." Maybe we do not find Kevin's essay "an awesome paper," as did one student, but the support she provides points to traits most of the teachers missed and accomplishments we all can find in Kevin's essay once we look for them: "This huge paragraph here takes the audience through his thought process, how he

gets through it, from point one to the end." With these eight first-year college women, the gendership imposed by the research protocol seems actually to have helped them see and value strengths in Kevin's writing. Perhaps there is a certain poetic justice in taking students as a model for the way teachers might rewrite gendership as a productive frame for critique.

Reacting to Gendership

Teachers also might study gender and its various critique strategies (among them, neutrality, suppression, tailoring, and blindness). That will mean reacting to gendership as an active presence on any number of levels—personal, professional, historical, ideological. Such study, of course, is more easily proposed than done. While we were conducting the interviews, for instance, we were largely unaware of the many ways gendership was operating with our readers. So cryptic and culturally inbred are gender strains in ordinary writing critique that for us to see what was happening right before our eyes took an after-the-fact reading aided by the hindsight derived from classification, enumeration, and statistical analysis of the typed transcripts. Further, a study of gender readings cannot be immune from gender effects itself. It seems both appropriate and inevitable, then, that we should present, as follows, our own individual reactions to gendership and the evidence for it in composition critique. Afterwards we will explain why in these two position papers we maintain anonymity of sex, an anonymity that up to now the authorial "we" in English has so conveniently preserved for us.

Living Gender

I was especially impressed by one reader's comment: "Gender does make a difference and I think that it probably should. Because when you are critiquing a student, you're not critiquing a student, you are critiquing a person. The writing is out of the person . . . a person's sex is part of them. So you have to be aware of it as a person and as an individual . . . that's the beauty of writing" (a female teacher). At this end-point of our study, I am deeply troubled by the insidious, deep-level values implicit in gender neutrality. Neutrality abets the power imbalance between the dominant teacher and the dependent student (who can choose neither to mismanage a comma or say "load of bull"). It excludes Victoria and Kevin because they demand the right to be a woman and a man in their own, distinctive ways.

That is why I find the above observations made by a female teacher so valuable. For me they capture the two essential issues we are dealing with.

First, composition teachers are hired to enhance the writing skills of students. But the writing of students is not generated in a vacuum—it comes from the student who is not merely a student but a person, and not merely a person but a gendered person. That is what poststructuralists have lost track of. It is one thing to identify the powerful influence of society and culture upon an individual, an influence that not only shapes experience but self-images and behavior. It is quite another to suggest that it is solely the social context itself that is gendered. To deny that gender is lived by the person first and foremost is to fall into the abyss dug a hundred years ago by Walter Pater, who waxed eloquent about the self perpetually weaving and unweaving itself (like some special effect we see nowadays in *Star Trek*). Victoria and Kevin are real yet always changing, always being influenced by teachers, among others, but clearly belonging to themselves before they walked into freshman composition and (thankfully) after they left. The way they live gender is a real and distinctive feature of who they are. To designate gender as real is not to reduce them to gender or essentialize them according to their gender. Certainly our concepts of gender (stereotypical and bipolar) are more entrenched than gender as it is lived. The concept of “man” and “woman” seems fixed (or affixed) like an artificial spine for some amorphous, jellyfish-like “self” that may vanish before our very eyes. But if we admit that gender is one creative attribute of a person—person here meaning an agent with reason and will, capable of making choices in his or her writing—then gender can be as fluid, multidimensional, and dynamic as any other attribute of that person.

If gendership is interconnected with issues of power, then the question facing us is this: Who has ultimate authority over his own writing, Kevin or his teacher (or the profession or society)? The very question forces us to engage in meta-discourse. Who will control/dominate/own the language of power in the classroom? Who owns the language that describes the language we use to talk about student writing? Victoria reads her essay and declares, “It’s me!” Sixty-four other readers, operating out of a simplistic, stereotypical perspective that finds no room for a writer like her, respond: “No, it’s not” or “Well, it shouldn’t be.”

Voices in conflict . . . authors and authority figures arguing over authenticity. During the course of this project, my co-author noted Richard Sennett’s definition of authority—as less a fact than an imaginative interpretation that gives meaning to acts of control. And what is authenticity? Henry Louis Gates, Jr. describes it as people writing “as a”—as a woman, as a man, as a Black American, as a Native American, as “delegates of a social constituency.” Indeed, if the self were exclusively constructed, its voice would be a by-product of the environment. Teachers appear to operate out of that presupposition by attempting to control the stimulus to

shape the voice that qualifies "as a" woman, man, black, white, Hispanic, or student.

But Victoria and Kevin don't write as delegates of any constituency. They write as themselves, as unique people who might sound like a woman or like a man to suit their own purposes. "That is the beauty of writing," as our female teacher notes. It is also a profound mystery. And as Sennett reflects, "The only answer to a mystery is another mystery" (195). What I see in these protocols are not personal failures in training, dedication, or concern. It isn't even a failure of critique. It is a failure of imagination on the part of the teaching profession. The scope of that failure hit home most powerfully when I worked with two colleagues, Connie and Bryan, who acted as outside raters for our categorization of pedagogical commentary. We had a list of all the readers' critical comments in need of classification, such as "The essay isn't organized," "The style is too wordy," "The writer needs to develop his thesis"—over 800 discreet observations. I remember a moment of silence as we shuffled through page after page of these commonplace responses to student writing. Then Bryan said: "It doesn't add up to much, does it, what we write on student papers?" Our challenge is to imagine a response to Victoria and Kevin outside the tired and repressive exercise of authority demonstrated in our interviews and (I lament) executed in my own comments on student papers. By allowing gendership its own play, we free students to make deliberate choices about how they want to shape their authorial and gendered presence in their writing, and teachers from deceiving themselves and their students that they are not affected by that presence.

Gender Agenda

During the course of this study, I got two major shocks. Significantly, neither happened while listening to my thirty-two readers. The first came afterwards when we interviewed Victoria and Kevin and I heard them critique their own essays. There was such a large gap between their reading and the reading of the others. Reader after reader had interpreted as masculine Victoria's phrase "load of bull" and her notion about being in "conflict with the law," and here was Victoria herself, running a finger down her essay, including those very two phrases as items that she saw as feminine. Reader after reader had pronounced Kevin's essay if not illogical at least circular, and here he was, nodding his head as he read his piece for the first time in two years, saying, "Basically, it's true." How could such a chasm between a writer's intent and a reader's critique happen? It is Chaucer's fears come to life.

There are, of course, as many avenues to reading amiss as to reading aright. Our study isolates several contemporary routes to miswriting. One is where the author's sex is left ambiguous, leaving an open slot for the reader to fill in gendership. Readers who take the professionally sanctioned, non-discriminatory way, who speak around the gender slot with non-sexist language, partake in a curious form of miswriting, done in good will, where they remove part of the text in order not to be affected by it negatively, like omitting "The Miller's Tale" from an edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. They are struggling, of course, with the basic contradiction between a teacher's politics of non-discrimination and a student's expression of uniqueness, between gender proprieties and gendership (see Illich). The misreading makes me think twice about the lessons I have been giving students about achieving non-sexist language. Maybe sex-specific language can be good if it clarifies the writer's gender position. At the start of her study of linguistics and feminism, Deborah Cameron writes, "Most sex-indefinite and generic referents in this book will be *she* and *her*. If there are any men reading who feel uneasy about being excluded, or not addressed, they may care to consider that women get this feeling within minutes of opening the vast majority of books." Ursula LeGuin, who also can't exactly be faulted for lack of awareness of gender, writes: "I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for 'he/she.' 'He' is the generic pronoun, damn it, in English." Neither Cameron nor LeGuin obey the CCCC guidelines on non-sexist language, yet readers will not be likely to miswrite their texts.

A more common variety of misreading, at least according to our evidence, occurs when readers unconsciously take advantage of the space in gendership and write into it their own gender agendas. That gender abhors a vacuum is not surprising—it was the original hypothesis of our study. What I found dismaying was the complicity of rhetorical critique in the way readers filled the vacuum in. It would seem axiomatic to say that composition teachers use a set of critical frames to "perceive, evaluate, and regulate not only their own behavior but the behavior of others." The trouble is that Sandra Bem wrote this not about critical schemas but about gender schemas (199). Both kinds of frames—rhetoric and gender—operate similarly. One can replace the other easily. My second shock was to discover, on using this inference to reread the interview transcripts, how frequently the readers replace personal gender presuppositions with rhetorical interpretations. One teacher, who swears that the sex of the writer has nothing to do with rhetorical critique, decides that Kevin "was caught in a loop and couldn't get out of repeating himself." Then the same teacher-critic says he can identify masculine writing because "Male think-

ing is somewhat circular, their writing is repetitive." Who is the one caught in a loop here? Another teacher, who swears that the sex of the writer has nothing to do with rhetorical critique, reads Victoria's essay and decides it "lacks a distinction between emotional and logical methods." Then the same teacher-critic says she can identify feminine writing because "with females emotion gets in the way of logic." The supplanting of gender stereotypes with critical axioms is so customary to some teachers that they seemed both conscious and unapologetic about it. One said about Victoria's phrase "load of bull": "This is a cliché, maybe masculine. But I'd ask them to revise it not because it's male or female but because it's a cliché."

But if "load of bull" strikes readers as masculine, even if "maybe masculine," then isn't it part of the rhetorical effect of the essay? And then shouldn't it be part of the agenda—the explicit agenda, not the hidden one set by teacher and writer in order to discuss revision? If Kevin's circular method of organization strikes readers as masculine (or feminine!), then he should be allowed to consider that fact before he is asked to change his essay because it is "disorganized." I suspect Kevin would say he is not interested in appearing a super-rational male. If a teacher thinks Victoria's phrase, "load of bull," carries a freight of gender stereotypes, then Victoria ought to consider them before complying with that teacher's recommendation to remove the phrase from her essay. The teacher would have to say, "Victoria, you don't want this phrase 'load of bull' because most readers think only men use such language." Knowing Victoria a little, I would guess that she would reply to the teacher, "Bullshit. I use that kind of language, and so do my friends."

I am not saying that we should make gender our agenda in teaching writing. I am saying—it is a major difference—we should make gendership part of our agenda. That would be to return a part of the writer, a vital part which standard professional practices of critique have excluded.

The Legitimacy of Gendership

So prey I God that non myswrite the . . .
That thow be understonde, God I beseche!
(a male writer)

We have spoken singly and anonymously here to demonstrate the legitimacy of gendership as a content in any piece of writing. Can you tell which section was written by the woman, which by the man? Did we try to write in the gendered style of the other, or to exaggerate our own gendered style? Did we write to enhance the image of one of our own sex writing, or in a way to frustrate that kind of image? Did we don conscious gender

masks, or simply yearn to speak as separate individuals (our own woman, our own man) rather than in unison? All motives are possible, all are legitimate. Anonymity itself is legitimate, so long as it is not forced on the writing when the writer has not planned it, as in plagiarism or placement readings.

But while a legitimate act of writers, *gendership* is also an inevitable action, or reaction, of readers. The implications question some standard assumptions of both composition theory and teaching pedagogy. On the one hand the profession assumes that gender bias is probably operating at deep psychological levels during critique in many contexts: teacher-paper response, teacher-student conferencing, small-group work, or peer evaluation. On the other hand, the profession assumes, at least on paper, that the proper way to calm the forces of such bias is to remain critically neutral to gender differences. But rather than trimming the ship, gender neutrality often seems only to mask and then channel stereotypes that saturate the responses of readers. If *gendership* is physically effaced—in professionally sanctioned events like examinations or placement tests where anonymity is prescribed—readers may respond more negatively than they would otherwise. Further, also according to our evidence, such bureaucratic attempts to put gender-blindness on response do not work well. Most readers will automatically and often unconsciously infer *gendership*, sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly. We are back to gender-linked misreadings that affect central critique strategies such as judgment about quality, allotment of praise, shape of proposed revision, and awareness of the writers as authors of their own text.

Still, for us, the complex, multi-layered, and deep-level gendering process of our sixty-four readers (and of ourselves) bodes more good than ill. Most centrally it tells us that the link between gender and critique cannot be captured in a formula guaranteed to occur precisely in the same way with every teacher, in every classroom. This is good news for people like us who do not much take to formulas. The process also tells us that the gender-critique line is open and vital. It says that solutions to gender bias lie within the social and psychological reality of gender, not in attempts to negate gender. In sum, our findings lend support to the positions advanced by Laurie Finke, John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit, Nina Chordas, Heather Brodie Graves, and Jane Roland Martin, among others, who warn against the dangers of both gender stereotyping and gender neutrality as well. "An educational philosophy that tries to ignore gender in the name of equality is self-defeating. Implicitly reinforcing the very stereotypes and unequal practices it claims to abhor, it makes invisible the very problems it should be addressing" (Martin 195).

Fortunately, the gendering processes and strategies of our readers not only illustrate the false solutions and actual problems of gendership and critique, they also reveal some possible solutions. This is only rightful, since all along we were taken by the good will and intelligence of the very readers who were alarming us with their hidden biases. One of our male teachers would ask Kevin, "How do you propose to express yourself?" It is a question teachers should ask students more often. Putting gendership on the pedagogical table lets teachers and students deal with gender and avoid, if they wish, such problematical and scary issues as essentialism, patriarchy, and sexual orientation. It introduces a kind of pragmatism that still does not declare these issues as illegitimate or unimportant. It would encourage both writer and critic to bear the responsibility of their own gender assumptions and assumings. For instance, Victoria and Kevin are risk-takers. You can see it behind and through the poses they assume in their photos. Taking risks carries consequences. We teachers might ask such writers whether in defying culture and writing against the grain of certain gender stereotypes, they know the penalties. But the next question should be directed to ourselves. Once Victoria knows the risks and still chooses to write "load of bull," how do *we* propose to receive that expression? If unthinkingly teachers are the penalizers, then, as Martin says, they may just reinforce the bipolar stereotypes that lie at the root of gender-biased reading.

Another of our male teachers noted, "When you evaluate anything, you bring yourself into the process." That is a fact in need of perennial resurrection. Gendership is inscribed not only in the text but also in the reader. As Donnalee Rubin has recently well shown, we bring our own gender identities, assumptions, and expectations to the process of critique. For better or worse, whether they know it or not, teachers shape gender identities as well as writing skills. Perhaps teachers have that right. But it's time that teachers own up to their gendered rewriting of student texts, and begin to understand it in terms of what the writers want to accomplish. It isn't unprofessional that our eight female teachers disliked Victoria's essay. But it is uncritical that they treated it like bad writing when they really disliked it because to them the woman behind the writing sounded like a man or because she did not match their expectations that female students write better than male students. Teachers, female and male, must not make Victoria (and women like her) pay for mastering a "masculine" style, any more than for using a phrase like "load of bull" because it is unladylike. They must leave Kevin (and men like him) free to speak honestly about interest in family ties and personal relationships or to prefer a narrative to an argumentative mode. They must not advance their personal gender proclivities in the name of teaching. That's critical miswriting.

There is one final antidote for miswriting gendership. It is always to keep in mind that, as a female reader told us, "There's more variability within the gender than there is between the genders." To the extent that we demand a conformist equality—"a willed negation of difference," in the phrase of Nina Chordas (217)—not only between genders but among gendered individuals, we deny students the right to write a part of their selves. Without giving up the political aims of sexual equality, and without closing our eyes to the ways that gender figures in critique, we can still provide for Victoria and Kevin a new kind of audience to write to, one that will accept their work, and their authority over their work, not within the narrow confines of our own personal or historical agendas but rather within the generous discourse and gender parameters that any individual enjoys in an open society. Another female teacher reminisced about just such an audience that changed her life, a teacher who "understood where I was as a person. . . . He'd been the same places I have and could pull out of me what needed to be pulled out." For teachers, the challenge is to act with both awareness and distance, both sympathy and deliberation, and with professional knowledge of the current fate of gender-in-writing with a variety of readers. How that translates into our personal actions as teachers is as individual as gendership itself.

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