STUDYING GENDER FROM THE INSIDE OUT: JOURNEYS OF SELF-DISCOVERY

by

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ABSTRACT

In British Columbia required curriculum to address gender issues does not exist. In the grade twelve English course, where such curriculum would seem to belong, gender roles are discussed only at the discretion of individual teachers, and consequently may be only superficially considered or even remain unexamined. This paper describes the pedagogical and emotional experiences of one female teacher and a group of nineteen students who focussed directly on the examination of their own attitudes around gender.

The participants represent a cross-section of the seventy-five grade twelve students who took the gender unit at some time during the English course. The teacher's antisexist approach and class exercises were designed to encourage personal reflection based on experience as a route to analysis of gender relations insociety. Major goals of the research were to initiate self-examination of attitudes about gender, to expose gender biases, and to assess the degree of praxis stimulated by participation in the process.

Excerpts of journal responses from each participant together with the teacher's description of her multiple roles as female teacher, and researcher/participant are central to the study. Combined, they reveal diverse experiences in encountering oppositional ideas, recognizing personal resistances and dealing with the effects of highly charged class-

room debate.

The words of individuals provide richly detailed evidence of the complex dynamics at work in a co-educational class on gender studies. Outstanding are resistances and counter-resistances, variations in male and female perceptions of gender discrimination, feelings about marginalization and power imbalances between the sexes. The difficulties of both the teacher and the students in acknowledging prejudices and moving toward antisexist positions provide a reflection of the erratic power struggles between males and females in contemporary North American.

Throughout this work vivid images of the participants provide insights about the many ways praxis may be achieved. The study suggests a need for further research on teaching gender issues, on effective methods of approaching resistance, and the challenges facing female teachers who assume the responsibilty for change regarding gender.

To Dawn Sandberg
for her loving support
and inspiration

To Celia Haig-Brown
for her perceptive critical appraisal
and steadfast encouragement

To my Student Participants
for their candour
and willingness to risk

The real voyage of discovery consists
not in seeking new landscapes
but in having new eyes.

Proust

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

GENDER STEREOTYPES AT WORK

No offense, Ma'am, but what do women want anyway? 1

Grade 12 Male student

This study describes the reciprocally educative process that took place when I combined strategies and activities to engage students in reflective and interactive research beginning for each individual from the position of personal experience and leading to a critique of gender problems as a public issue. It is inspired by my growing concern over the last few years that my grade twelve students were leaving my English classes without having confronted or critiqued their own perceptions and attitudes about gender relations or examined the significances of gender roles and gender discrimination in their own lives.

When I first developed an interest in women's issues about five years ago, after many years as an adult woman denying that gender matters, I selected my readings almost at random from contemporary feminist liter-ature, both non-fiction and fiction, having no specific focus and not even sure why I was drawn to the messages of feminists. Perhaps it was that I was nearing middle age and looking back at a life which I had begun to realize had been shaped as much by

stereotypical expectations of female behaviour in the society in which I grew up as it had by any of my own choices. Perhaps it was the recognition that what I had regarded as weaknesses were not necessarily personal faults as much as they were learned behaviours that I and many of my female friends had in common as young women. Regardless of what spurred my curiosity, it seemed that whatever I selected to read became one more piece of a puzzle that gradually formed a disturbing picture of the controlling power of gender in the lives of both women and men. I began to recognize the internalized and constructed set of references about gender identity, about power, and about learning and knowing on which my life has been built and which continue to affect my daily decisions, words, and actions. And I saw my gendered behaviours and beliefs emerge from their historical origins as impediments in my life. As a teacher within the framework of a male dominated school system and society, I see the broader influence of a gendered society on me. And I watch the students in my English classes for signs of the extent to which gender roles define, determine, and limit their behaviour in the classroom .

Whatever the grade, whatever the topic of our investigations, the 'maleness' and 'femaleness' of things seem to influence our interactions, the students' and mine. The language of our bodies, the sounds and silences of our interactions, the tensions that ebb and flow amongst us, our relative positions of power in the milieu of the classroom are affected by and affect our perceptions of ourselves not just as students and teacher but also as gendered individuals. Over

several years of observing my various classes of grades nine through twelve, evidence of gender bias has been apparent within every class.

Though many students, especially the grade twelves on whom this work is focussed, are mature and articulate, most of my attempts to lead them to more than a superficial look at gender issues in a regular English class have been, to say the least, frustrating. The following experiences, taken from various English classes I have taught in the last five years, suggest the range and complexity of the problems I have encountered in dealing with gender matters. They also mark my path toward the present study.

Case 1: The dynamics of communication

About three years ago, I modified the provincially approved Writing 12 course to include a public speaking component. The students learned creative writing skills which could be applied to speeches, interviewing and other oral language activities. I taught oral communication techniques, stressing ways to overcome the fear of public speaking, and the practice of tolerance and respect for the opinions of others. To encourage students to enroll, I called the course 'Dynamics of Communication.' One assignment required students, working in pairs, to choose controversial topics for presentation. For the most part they formed same sex pairs, the gender of which seemed to influence their choices of topic. For example, boys chose gang violence whereas girls chose harrassment of women; boys chose

drinking and driving whereas girls chose such topics as eating disorders and media emphasis on body image. Even though their choices seemed stereotypical, I was pleased that the students' wanted to tackle such topics and interpreted this as their need to deal in the classroom with what is relevant to their own lives. But their presentation and handling of the topics also revealed the disturbing depths of their gender biases.

Patterns of interaction between males and females highlighted the power imbalance within the classroom. Central to the boys' presentations was their use of images and examples framed in masculine terms using masculine pronouns and the showing of video clips featuring almost exclusively males. Although the boys directed their topics and their questions most often toward the male audience, the girls listened respectfully and tried to become involved as if the content had been intended just as much for them. However, when the girls presented their topics, which required the audience to think about issues that affect females, the boys refuted the girls' information and denigrated female perspectives or attacked them as mistakes or misperceptions that the girls ought to correct. With few evident exceptions, the boys responded with authority to judge not just the viewpoint of the girls but even their facts. For example, to two girls who presented the statistic that only 18% of females have the figure type to be models one boy spoke authoritatively that it is just "bad luck" on the part of the remainder of women if they don't look like models. Another boy supported this view giving the last

word: "So a girl doesn't look like Cindy Crawford - for her that's just tough." [2] Clearly in the dynamics of this class talk was used to 'judge, define, and legitimate' and thus 'define social reality' (Gal, 1991).

During lessons, the boys repeatedly took over the conversations, disregarding my requirement of a speaking protocol, demanding the last word by sheer force of volume or overshadowing the girls' presentations with loud sidetalk. They assumed linguistic privilege just as they did the notion that their views were definitive. I recognized that their dominance prevailed equally in discussions led by their peers or in those I was conducting. Their conviction of being 'right' was further confirmed in commentaries which I required them to write on the content of other students' presentations: the boys most often took a flat out, specific position, rejecting or approving others' views on the topic, while the girls were more apt to consider both sides before adopting or defending a particular viewpoint.

Case 2: It's not sexist unless you mean it

Another group, an English 12 class, examined several essays which challenged perceived notions of women as the homemakers and males as the workers, examined stereotypes of gender roles, and suggested language reform to further sexual equality. The vocal students frequently dismantled ideas of role stereotyping by begging the question, asserting that because male/female roles weren't like

that in their families that the predominance of sexual stereotypes isn't really 'that bad.' The notion that what we say has the power to affect our perceptions, at least in regard to sexist terminology produced strong resistance. They insisted, as they also did about racist pejoratives, that it's 'O.K.' to use sexist (racist) terms or tell sexist (racist) jokes as long as one 'doesn't mean them to be sexist (racist).' Generally the boys controlled the classroom conversation, reflecting their confidence that men were superior in the scheme of life, exhibiting extreme homophobia, and only thinly veiling their distrust of those few vocal females who challenged the obvious disparity in treatment of men and women. For the most part, the girls accepted the status quo and clung to the media image of the romantic ideal - a handsome, sexy, and rich husband, coming home to a grateful and hardworking wife and mother.

Not one to give up, I felt sure this group of students would exhibit more critical judgement in reading Myrna Kostash's "Profile of the Rapist as an Ordinary Man." [3] The article juxtaposes a woman's chilling account of her attacker's actions and her own responses, including her humiliation when she reports the assault to a male police officer and her agony in having to tell her parents what happened, with expositiory passages revealing the innocuous image, lifestyle, and habits of 'average young men' who rape. It emphasizes the idea that most young men who rape believe absolutely that they are not rapists, and that indeed their victims are mistaken or (more likely) at fault.

This reading provoked heated debate, particularly between three outspoken young females and several young men in the class, about the nature of persons who rape. Although both girls and boys, recognizing the politically correct position 'against' rape, loudly expressed their criticism of the single rapist described by Kostash, it was clear that it was outside the capability of these young men (and probably some of the young women) to acknowledge the possibility that they, as 'ordinary' males, could commit rape. Instead they deflected the argument away from themselves, refocussing on the girls by saying, "But guys can be raped too." The ensuing argument about the biological possibilities or impossibilities of this actually happening had the effects both of creating great mirth amongst the students and of putting the males into the limelight as victims. When I attempted to elicit some conclusions about the concept of 'No means no,' one of the boys, who embodied the media stereotype of the jock, complete with bruises and crutches from a recent soccer match, interrupted. "No offense, ma'am," he said, "but what do women *want* anyway?" I can still recall vividly the sound of this single male voice which erased any insights the class had gained from the essay. The more assertive girls who had previously attempted to develop some dialogue with the boys about male violence became silent and the rest of the girls laughed along with the boys. Unfortunately, I had no effective tactics for cutting through the verbal smokescreen. Meaningful issues around rape had been effectively trivialized. My frustration was mirrored in the faces of four or five girls who stayed after class to express their anger about the way the class had ended.

Case 3: It's the image that counts

In another class of grade twelve English students we discussed the impact on the public audience of the images of males and females as dictated by magazine advertising and televison. One of the girls spoke of making a personal choice not to buy into the media image, saying she deliberately does not wear makeup and refuses to purchase name brand clothing. A few moments later, another female said to the class, "Well, if I were a guy and I saw you with no makeup, and your clone looking all gorgeously made up coming toward me, I know I'd choose the one who was better looking." Not one male or female challenged this stunning remark. Once again, the more powerful voice of a very popular student, this time a female, prevailed. In the face of her statement, the entire class lost the point. Any of the resistances by the other girls against the stereotypical dictates of the media about the accepteable female image were obscurred and invalidated. The girl who had first taken a stand against media stereotyping told me afterward that her classmate's statement had been so humiliating that she could do nothing but remain silent.

Searching for a different approach

It seemed to me as I watched and taught these classes, that the majority of my students were hopelessly mired in sexist thinking. The confines of their personal beliefs, sweeping generalizations based on their upbringing, their limited personal experiences, and their

individual prejudices, severely limited their appreciation of the injustices inherent in present social constructs. Resistance to new knowledge about gender and fear of stepping outside the acceptable boundaries set by their peers and elders led to rancor amongst them. Discussions about gender relations frequently resulted in confrontation between the sexes and a win-lose competition of boys against girls. Boys said what was what and girls accepted it - or went along with the boys in order to preserve their popularity. I usually backed off in a conscious effort to seem unbiased and we all went our separate ways with little more than a ripple of difference. What kind of learning was this? My students were leaving my classes with what seemed to me to be little more awareness of gender matters than I had had at their age. And I found myself becoming more and more critical of my failure to evoke in them a challenge to the status quo.

I began to think about what really had been going on - and what had not - in these classes. Despite some genuine evidence that society is changing with respect to women's rights, sexism though veiled, still thrives. Traditional stereotypes of women and men are still ingrained in the minds of the kids I teach. They are perhaps not so much sexist as what I call 'gender ignorant.' And I questioned my role as an English teacher. Did I have to take on the responsibility of challenging my students' perceived notions about gender roles? Surely if I wanted to criticize the status quo then I could not escape the obligation to take action. My closest teaching colleague and I have long since agreed that our English classes are an appropriate venue

for tackling issues. What issues could be more significant, more complex or more controversial than those to do with gender relations? It seemed that the selection and content of materials I offered the students were less problematic than the discussions we had about the ideas we encountered in our reading. Despite my training as a teacher in facilitating discussion, invisible factors at work amongst us seemed to control and dictate the patterns of discourse that characterized our classroom dialogue. What I needed was an approach which would disturb the rubric that allowed male domination over discussion, obscurred meaning, encouraged silences, and reconfirmed what both sexes had already internalized about their relative positions within the class and within their larger worlds.

Simply reading and talking about single instances in which gender plays a part without examining seriously their own gender relations opened up too many opportunities for students to whitewash, ignore, trivialize or ridicule gender problems. From comments I had heard in the classes described above it was evident that many believed equality already exists for them and that inequality between the sexes is an old-fashioned notion which is no longer of much consequence, except perhaps for their parents or people in third world countries. Few could see why I should spend much time on gender matters. Their attitude was 'What's the big deal?' Those particularly observant students who may have suspected that inequity and gender are connected nevertheless evaded the issue by uttering the hegemonic response that 'You can't change things, that's

the way it's always been'. The few (usually females) who expressed interest in discussing gender matters were often silenceds by louder voices (both male and female). I wondered if, for the majority of students, keeping discussion at arms length, objective, outside of personal reach is as much a product of their school training as of their unconscious resistance to dealing with gender issues.

I retraced my own crooked path to my current location as a social critic, considering what had inspired me to look at my life from a feminist perspective. I had come at it gradually, at first inspired to examine my own experiences against the fictional characters of female authors. Later I began to listen to women more closely, often my own friends, and recognize the patterns of disillusionment in the tales of their personal and working lives. Finally I moved on to reading works by feminist writers. It had taken me more than twenty-five years of experiencing the disappointments and joys of a woman's position in the world, of reflecting on my life decisions, and of comparing my experiences with those of other women to find myself prepared to step into the role of feminist. How could I expect girls of seventeen and eighteen years to abandon their conditioning, to question the social relationships of males and females, especially at a time in their lives when finding love is so important to them, without engaging them in an emotional experience significant enough to provoke their demands for change? How could I arouse a sense of justice in the boys that would encourage them to criticize sexism? How could I help them to see gender equity as a

benefit rather than a threat to their egos and their rights?

I wondered if students would be moved by exploration of their personal experiences of being male or female. Could examination of their feelings in gendered situations displace their ill-considered, assumptions about the relative positions of females and males in society? What I had not given my students in previous classes was the opportunity to examine their own understanding of gender and gender relations through personal narrative, through the recounting of specific vivid emotional and critical experiences that would put them in touch with how their gender affects their lives. I decided to look for a way to structure this kind of opportunity for them.

Since I neither could, nor wanted to, remove the males from the class, I had to find some way of "making a space from which the unvoiced/unheeded can be said/heard" whether it be male or female thoughts that needed to be spoken/listened to (Lather,1991:124). The distanced nature of my approach to gender issues in previous classes had not allowed for the building of trust or given students time to respond adequately. Nor had it facilitated frank disclosure of feelings or honest confrontation of gender imbalances. The majority of students had reiterated the cliches they had learned about gender, or made comments that were for them politically and socially safe, but they had not examined critically the assumptions upon which gender discrimination rested. What seemed to be required was a pedagogical shift in emphasis from objective analysis to subjective reflection,

some approach that would provoke students' serious assessment of their own perceptions about gender issues. This study is a documentation of my attempts to make such a shift.

Overview of chapters

In Chapter I, I have related the classroom experiences which influenced my decision to pursue this study. Chapter II contains a literature review of feminist works relevant to planning a gender issues course for the high school classroom and of writings relevant to the methodology I adopted for the teaching unit I researched. Chapter III locates the work in my grade twelve English classroom in December of 1993-94 and provides detailed descriptions of the student participants, their role as participant/researchers and my role as teacher/researcher. There I also outline the parameters of the study and identify the problems and challenges involved in adopting a research for praxis methodology. Chapters IV and V and VI document the results of the study from several perspectives. Chapter IV follows the journey of the class (including my own) as we struggle with new and oppositional ideas about gender. I link my own edited field notes and excerpts from the participants' personal journals with explanatory and analytical passages from my perspective about the experience of day-to-day classes as we progress through eighteen class meetings. The focus is on resistances we encountered and realizations we made as we worked toward mutual appreciation of the issues surrounding gender relations. Chapters V is devoted to re-

examination of the journals for counter-resistances, ambivalences, and ambiguities. In it I seek to pinpoint students' individual concerns about the class and to 'listen' for messages not apparent in a first reading of the journals. Chapter VI contains significant comments from the anonymous written critiques of the class, in their roles as participant/researchers. Chapter VII contains my conclusions based on my experiences as researcher/teacher and participant.

Chapter I Endnotes

1. This comment was made by a grade twelve male student in a class I taught prior to the study group. The quotation at the beginning of Chapter III is the statement of another male student from a different class. Quotations appearing at the beginning of the remaining chapters are taken verbatim from the journal entries of students who participated in the research unit and, except for those from the final anonymous evaluations, are attributed to each writer using an assigned pseudonym.

2. The cases appearing in this chapter are actual classroom situations recreated as accurately as I can recall them using brief notations from my teaching daybook. To provide a context for my decision to undertake this study, quotations of the remarks made by students in these classes are reconstructed from memory and represent the literal meaning though perhaps not the exact words of the individuals who said them.

3. Myrna Kostash, "Profile of the Rapist as an Ordinary Man," in Ronald Conrad, ed. The Act of Writing McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd. 1983: 313.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the design of a gender issues course and a study of its dynamics, in which the teacher assumes the additional roles of participant/ researcher examining the nature of praxis, a survey of literature spans four areas of inquiry.[1] A review is required, first, of feminist theory on socially constructed gender roles and gender discrimination; second, of studies of the resistances of those associated with gender power struggles; third, of studies on gender inequity and its implications in the secondary classroom; and finally of relevant literature on qualitative research methods and ethnography.

Feminist theory

Several topics are central to a basic course in gender issues for secondary school students. These include gender identity, the power of language to shape gender discrimination, the ethics of male dominance in all spheres of social, political, and domestic life; the internalized perceptions and attitudes about gender which arise from social conditioning; and resistance as it pertains to males and females with respect to sexism. For the female teacher an under-

standing of the possession of power as the motivation behind maintaining gender inequity highlights the need for examination of classroom relations from a feminist perspective. Foucault(1980a:108) says, "Power is not an institution and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex stra-tegical situation in a particular society." A teacher who understands the politics of power can help her students, especially young women, become acquainted with the idea that power "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourse, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault,1980b:39). Freire (1970) lays down the principles of a pedagogy which, through respect for the individuality and uniqueness of the student, has the potential to turn education from an oppressive to an empowering experience. Lipman-Blumen (1964:5) identifies gender roles as "the blueprint for all power relationships."

The distinction between sexual orientation and gender, which frequently centres on the argument of inherited versus learned traits and behaviours is an important starting point for students' consideration (Birke,1992). At present the socially constructed notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich,1980) dominates virtually all discussion about sexual orientation in the high school classroom yet remains unnamed. Homophobia remains powerful amongst teens, particularly boys who focus their attention almost exclusively on male homosexual behaviour without concern for the feelings or personal

identity of individuals. As for homosexuality among females, it is doubtful that lesbians exist at all in the minds of most students, a notion that Frye (1992) attributes partially to the peculiarities of language. School systems still accept the traditional idea that children are either male or female with no attempt to expand notions of gender to encompass a continuum of individual experience and "being" either male or female. Butler (1990:16) challenges this rigidity: "Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time." Fine (1988) points out that overt recognition of sexual desire is taboo in most secondary classes, particularly the desire of girls. In her work on pornography, emphasizing a concept of power different from Foucault's, McKinnon (1992a) stresses the need for a new paradigm of gender relations which is experienced as sexual pleasure, an assumed entitlement of masculinity.

The concept of gender identity has to do with the notion of 'self' and its relationship to personal agency. Concepts of masculinity are both constructed and undermined by the capitalist labour process, or the "culture of work" (Carrigan et al,1987). The media provide a confusing image of femininity, advocating empowerment of women personally and in the workplace, while openly advertising the female body/object as a product for male consumption. These contradictions may be of concern to many teachers but pressure to deliver the 'regular curriculum' in the classroom leaves little room for consistent resistance, much less a genuine confrontation of the issues.

I believe that schools attempt to instil in today's young people general notions of equality and reciprocity. However, though teens go through an arduous process in which they develop some thoughts, however confused and egocentric, about their own identity, their perception of the self in others as distinct and worthy of recognition is often poorly developed and provides clues as to why both sexes become trapped in distinct gendered roles. It is questionable whether boys, who are rarely directed toward a consideration of females as individuals, can develop past the general sense of women as a single 'other.' What they do not understand they will probably ignore and/or violate (Benhabib,1992). This ignoring is an example of erasure that is modeled in patriarchal public forums, especially the media, and by male elders who complain that women are unintelligible to them. If that which adult men find unintelligible they generally ignore or dismiss, and, if boys learn to copy them as well as to follow the influences of women who perpetuate sex-role stereotypes, this phenomenon has significant implications for the continued failure to acknowledge women as individuals.

Through literature; through reference to male acts in history, male accomplishments, and male role models; through language patterns which permit male dominance and through patriarchal mechanisms of control; the notion of "male" is made multidimensional for boys - and for girls. But female identity has been ignored, and therefore remains as that which is not understood. Historically the "erasure" of women has occurred through consideration of what is *not*

encompassed by the conceptual scheme of a phallocentric society. This erasure operates powerfully in matters of law where women are substantively absent (McKinnon, 1992) and in history where women have been quite literally wiped off the map (Strong-Boag, 1990). The same is true of women in science, the arts, music, and literature. Rich (1980) insists that without insights into their own contributions to history, women have lived "without context." The teacher can find ways to have students examine the idea that women exist as much more than "generalized and undifferentiated 'other' " (Benhabib, 1992). Boys need to learn to 'see' women as real, as having gender that goes beyond sexual identity. A gender issues course can begin by drawing attention to the inequities that have made women invisible.

Female students are constantly faced with the conflicting desire to be recognized and the pressure to remain invisible. They frequently become outwardly very similar to their female friends, adopting similar patterns of conversation and behaviour. In the classroom their voices are so often drowned out by the assertive words of male students that they either give up talking or must risk sounding brainy or strident in order to be heard. Though somewhat tangential to this study, Bordo's examination (1992:103-105) of eating disorders adds a useful dimension to the issue of female visibility. She quotes a young woman on the subject, "You know, the anorexic is always convinced she is taking up too much space, eating too much, wanting food too much. I've never felt that way, but I've often felt that I was *too much* - too much emotion, too much need, too loud and demanding,

too much *there*, if you know what I mean" (italics Bordo's). Bordo identifies eating disorders as pathologies which register on the bodies of women but fail to register as politically significant. She recalls the depiction in myth of the devouring female as a dominant figure and connects this metaphor to the insatiable need of most women for acknowledgement and validation. Though the myth has been interpreted as reflecting the biological urge to reproduce, it may also represent the hunger of women for visibility. Paradoxically, anorexia, the desire to literally 'become air', may be a way of dealing with the sense of powerlessness by seeking to entirely conquer the invisibility one feels and thus subvert the feeling by controlling one's body over which one can have absolute power. All women must deal with feelings of invisibility but most choose other ways than the anorexic, many of them equally self-destructive. I observe in my female students, as surely as I see in myself, the conflict between the need to resist being made invisible and the desire to be not too much *there*, not to attract too much attention to their femaleness.

Some uncomplicated theory accompanied by numerous practical examples will help convey to students an awareness of the role of language in creating and maintaining power structures. Numerous studies have come up with the notion that the words we choose are reciprocally bound to the beliefs we hold. This connection has profound implications for women. Spender (1991) cites Douglas Barnes as saying that language and learning are virtually the same thing and that the act of verbalizing demands a reorganization of

ideas which can be identified as learning. Gal (1991) states that power's strongest form is likely the ability to define social reality. If she is right, those agents who/which do most to use and manipulate language meaning have the greatest access to power. Concepts of reality and of self are shaped powerfully in present western culture by verbal and accompanying visual constructions of the major institutions: business, industry, religion, education, medicine, and the most visible shapers of popular culture, the media. All are controlled by men. Barnes' notion of learning can be applied to learning about self. But what *are* little girls learning about themselves in everyday language experience? In answer Rich (1985:25) provides this observation:

> Sexist grammar burns into the brains of little girls and young women a message that the male is the norm, the standard, the central figure beside which [women] are the deviants, the marginal, the dependent variables. It lays the foundation for androcentric thinking, and leaves men safe in their solipsistic tunnel-vision.

The question for the teacher then is how can the teacher instil gender neutral language when children come into classrooms with a basic vocabulary of gender loaded words? Discourse is the chief method of classroom interaction used by most teachers. Therefore, when teachers do not allow the same possibilities of expression for girls as for boys, gender inequities are established which effectively

prepare students to accept the patterns of male dominance over realities that already operate in the major institutions. Certainly teachers are in competition against the other powerful sources of discourse encountered at home, in the media, and amongst their peers which shape reality for both boys and girls.

Differences in their acquired habits of language use have significant influence on the power relations of males and females (although these differences vary from one cultural group to another) throughout the world (Gal, 1991). Girls respond less often and override the words of others less often, though they frequently 'hear' more of what is said by others as is revealed by their conversations in small group combinations. These patterns exist both inside and outside the classroom. Gal notes that boys in western cultural settings tend to organize into relatively large hierarchical groups, to vie with one another for power and place in competitive verbal displays, and to interrupt or to ignore girls. Not having equal access to the floor, girls are marginalized or altogether silenced. Markita et al (1991) discuss the potential of experience to silence, a contributing factor in making females believe they are invisible.

As I learned while doing a brainstorming exercise in my grade twelve English class, the vast array of pejorative words that the students could identify as those men use to describe women far exceeds the number that they could find that women use to describe men. Most, such as 'pig', 'cunt', 'roadkill', 'dog', 'ho' and the like identify females

as some form of despised 'other,' a part of a greater whole (thus an object) or as an animal or non-human (thus like an object). Analysis of words for their connotations and for their power to silence, obscure, or erase the identity of women is an essential classroom activity. Beyond that, teachers' own choices of language in casual conversation with students and in conducting everyday classroom business have a subtle but significant impact on students' concepts of gender, particulary since the teacher represents the authoritative knower. Concrete examples and analyses of sexism in everyday language by Dumond (1990), Jones (1990), and Moore (1990) are helpful in planning lessons on alternatives to gender biased terminology. Niesen (1990) provides examples of homophobia embedded in everyday language.

Sex-role stereotyping affects both males and females but tends to condition one sex for power and the other for powerlessness. While males' speech is confident, forceful, and masterful and therefore taken as the norm, women's speech is hesitant, qualified, and tentative, and is therefore assumed to be deviant. Spender (1991) identifies the stratification of communication which exists in the classroom because of the influence of the teacher who talks about two-thirds of the time, divorcing the students from their own experience, and because of the tendency of males to interrupt more and to decree what is 'real', whereas girls run the risk of being perceived as invalid, as 'not real'. Control of talk by males in co-educational settings can result in the repudiation of female experience.

Even if males are not present, the male-centred curriculum, which is assumed to represent the entire human condition, can exclude a female version of the world. Spender (1991) maintains that both students' and teachers' validation of their experience, language and themselves encourages boys to assert themselves even more. The classoom needs to address and explore the notion of 'self' as pertaining to all individuals but it is inhibited by a preponderance of materials which focus entirely on males. At the English 11 and 12 level in British Columbia, novels such as Golding's Lord of the Flies, Orwell's 1984, and short stories such as McCuller's "Sucker," are curriculum staples. All are excellent literature, but what they have in common is that they require that girls attempt to appreciate the 'self' as it is described in terms of an almost entirely male cast of characters. The boys, having only males to whom they can relate as they read, assume girls are the same as boys - or ignore girls altogether. What remains ignored will never be understood. What results is that students comprehend male identity as both a particular and a universal concept because being male is continually reinforced in the classroom.

The question of how teens see themselves in terms of the external, concrete world, how they regard their individual "selves," deserves particular attention. Teen males (at least within the group structure of the classroom) may take for granted that they just "are," a circumstance for which they are frequently validated by external signals both positive and negative. Female teens generally are less

assertive about who they are; they are often tentative, equating "self" with body image more than with a clear sense of personal agency or identity (Gal,1991). Recognition of who we are in relation to others is crucial to developing a complete sense of ourselves and of others. What is problematic is that young girls (as do countless grown women) see themselves *critically* in their relationship to others rather than as participants in a mutual reality (Whitbeck,1990) In addition, women are constantly faced with scathing criticisms that have become embedded in the collective consciousness throughout history. Miedzian (1988:7) in her first chapter of Boys Will be Boys (which is an excellent assessment of attitudes toward the violences of male children) notes that throughout history women have been depicted as "deceitful, fickle, childish, irrational, untrustworthy, morally inferior." She reminds us that female inferiority has been certified by some of the greatest thinkers in our cultural tradition. It was Aristotle who set the belief that would be perpetrated for centuries when he wrote, "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior." [2]

The myth of women as morally inferior was further entrenched by Freud and more recently by Piaget and Kohlberg, who based their theories of moral development exclusively on studies of boys. When girls do not conform to the model, they are declared defective (Gilligan, 1982). Ferguson (1990) suggests an appreciation of selfhood as an "ongoing process", an existential understanding of self, a theory which offers promise as the basis for a gender issues course and

would aid a new approach to self in the literature students are encountering.

Another myth, that females cannot learn or that they are less intelligent than males, that they lack abstract reasoning ability or are hampered by their unstable nature, has prevented fair access of women to education for centuries. Without education, women lack authority. Frye (1992) argues that without authority one can leave no mark, hence, the erasure of women. Combined with other prejudices such as racism, classism and attitudes about parenting, the myth is still alive. Dworkin (1992) makes the controversial assertion that men hate intelligence in women. Code (1989) looks at factors which affect women's credibility. In a later work (1992) she questions whether the sex of the knower can be significant to matters of knowledge and attempts to identify what the nature of knowledge is for women. The 'autonomous reasoner', 'the individual' with subjectivity - moral and cognitive agency - is produced in developmental processes and is grounded in social-economic relations. Code maintains that asymmetries exist in the relative positioning of women and privileged white men with regard to knowledge and the distribution of cognitive resources in societies of unequal power and privilege such as ours. Belenky, Blythe, and Goldberger (1986) present the idea that women have ways of knowing that separate them from men, a position that makes them unique. They argue that unless these 'ways of knowing' are recognized and established as legitimate, the danger of again relegating women to the role of 'other' exists. Code, however,

counters that women need to refuse to remain 'other', and instead insists that we must ask whose knowledge is being talked about. Teachers' own beliefs, that girls and boys as 'knowers' are different, and their perceptions about how girls differ from boys in acquisition of their knowledge, have a significant impact upon the teaching methods they adopt and the material they present in their classrooms.

The western notion of 'respect for women' is a social construction which has served to excuse or obscure many kinds of subjugation of women and is still maintained. Throughout western history men have prided themselves on their 'respect' for women, particularly their wives. Yet they have regularly ignored women, beaten them, confined them to institutions, and driven them into poverty or emotional anonymity. The education system must accept its share of responsibility for wrongly assuming that because society claims to respect women, gender equity will naturally follow. Teenage males cannot respect women for whom they feel little empathy or to whom they are oblivious. Many boys, particularly in their early teens, see their female peers not as individuals but as generalized objects worthy only of either sexual and romantic desire or disgust and rejection. Within their social sphere, they regard older women as mother figures, as irrelevant 'oldies' or, those such as teachers, as authority figures to whom they may offer resistance, indifference, or grudging deference. It is likely that they (and many girls) think of the majority of females in the stereotypical terms available to them from the street or the media, not as individuals

with unique qualities, as is evidenced by their references to street women as 'ho's' or bag ladies worthy only of contempt or abuse, and to models as nameless 'babes' or 'foxes.' This same stereotyping on the part of both males and females may also result in homophobia, racism, ageism, and classism. Ideally a gender issues course should confront all these kinds of stereotyping.

Benhabib (1992) attributes the notion of women as 'other' to the narcissism of man [sic] which limits him to seeing the world in his own image with no awareness of the limits of his own desires and passions, no ability to see himself through the eye of another. For teenage boys the traditional assumption of priority and privilege is intimately connected to that narcissism and must be contended with in any attempt to teach respect for females. It is very possible that it could be the root of boys' resistance to dealing with gender inequities.

Conditioning for life roles leads to the replication of social patterns in the home and the workplace. The relation between women's consciousness and the world of 'man' is complex and involves accommodation, resistance, and self-imposed and externally imposed silences. Gaskell (1992) explores the experience of gender as it is constructed by school and by work. In her work she found that young women see that young men take their gender privilege for granted and, within the limitations of their situations, the women do the best they can, convincing themselves that the choices they make are based on what they really want for themselves. For a large percentage of

females, their received images of the 'real' world do little to encourage attempts to change, and much to encourage the passivity which reproduces traditional female roles.

Resistances and counter-resistances

Women (and other oppressed groups) have been engaged in silent resistance for centuries, sometimes as a means of basic survival. Most females engage in daily conscious attempts to resist psychological degradation and low self-esteem resulting from "the total application of the cultural ideology of femininity: sub-missiveness, dependency, domesticity and passivity" (Anyon,1984:25). But an oppositional resistance can be seen in the reaction of patriarchy against the women's movement - a counter-resistance. Probably the most popular recent documentation of this phenomenon is found in Faludi's Backlash (1991) in which she provides evidence of planned resistance to progress made by women in every aspect of American life. As it pertains to the teaching profession in British Columbia, male resistance has not always been overt but it exerts an insidious and powerful influence, embedded as it is in the Ministry of Education, school boards, school administrations, and in the minds of teachers and students.

Initiatives to promote sex equality, though not unknown, are uncommon and have been mostly unsuccessful in changing teachers' attitudes (Acker,1988). Acker's findings suggest that for some

teachers resistance is a matter of professional pride in that they do not appreciate the intervention of an initiative intended to change their own attitudes as well as those of their students.

Several authors (Aiken et al, 1987; Briskin, 1991; Jones, 1986) discuss student resistance to antisexist curriculum. Jones, (1986:27-28) speaking about violence and harassment by both male teachers and students against female teachers, documents the atmosphere of hostility toward women in a particular high school. She says, "One teacher reported that a 'Girls are Powerful' poster - which had been put up to give girls support in her mixed classroom - had been destroyed by boys who'd written 'we're here to stay' and drawn erect penises on it. The boys were clearly responding to the girls' growing confidence by asserting symbols of their sexuality, their power."

Briskin (1990) provides a convincing argument for a consciously chosen assertiveness when dealing with gender bias in the classroom. She maintains that it is not enough to show students the difference between appearing "not racist/sexist" and actually being actively "anti-racist/sexist." Rather, the teacher must adopt an anti-sexist position. In discussing the educator who actively seeks to free female students from the oppression of accepting gender inequity, Lather (1991:125) says that "pedagogy is fruitful ground to help us address questions of how our very efforts to liberate perpetuate the relations of dominance at the micro level of resistances." Lather's comments suggest that individual teachers adopting a feminist pedagogy must be

particularly mindful of how they handle curriculum and classroom interactions. Respect for all students, male and female, including those who cannot move to the position the teacher desires, must be a guiding principle in conducting classroom research.

Gender studies in the classroom

Articles which document studies of gender issues in the classroom focus mainly on tertiary education settings. Exceptions are the study by Gaskell, who looked at career choices of non-academic females in a secondary school (1988); Jones' examination (1990) of male violence in a secondary co-educational school; and asessments by Jones (1989) and Sadker (1989) of sexism in secondary schools. For the most part, articles describing gender bias amongst high school students cite similar but less sophisticated behaviour than that which operates in university classrooms. Eyre (1990) and Sadker (1987) propose teaching practices that enable teachers to promote more equitable treatment of girls and boys. Bybee and Zigler (1990) look at differences across gender, grade level and academic track that affect student self-image.

Of general interest in becoming acquainted with feelings about gender from a teenager's perspective is A Cappella (1990), published by the Canadian Teachers' Federation, which documents the realities and difficulties experienced by adolescent women in Canada. In a lively and realistic way, Seligman (1991) captures the realities of

being female for a ninth grader.

One way of getting students to examine their feelings and attitudes around gender relations is through writing. But there are problems associated with the sharing of what students write. Annas (1985) discusses the "political implications" for students in a gendered classroom if they expect their work will become public. Others who look at writing from a feminist perspective are Berry et al (1984) and Bullock (1990). Of particular importance in my study of gender relations was the use of the journal as a classroom tool and a way of 'hearing' voices that the power structures in the classroom may override or which peer pressure and fear may silence. Walden (1988), Berry et al (1987), and Masur (1991) examine the use of the journal for getting at otherwise undisclosed feelings and ideas, and ways of integrating journal writing into the classroom.

Qualitative research methodology

Several writings on the nature of qualitative research inform the research methods I adopted in this study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide an accessible definition of grounded theory which they say should offer an explanation of and a perspective on behaviour, give understanding to a practitioner and enable prediction based on the data collected in a social setting. These are factors of particular value to teachers wishing to introduce gender issues to students. Hymes (1982:26) makes particularly intersting and thought provoking

comments on the task of collecting and assessing elusive data:

> All of us are only partly able to articulate analyses of our lives and their contexts. The meanings which the ethnographer seeks to discover may be implicit, not explicit. They may not be in individual items (words, objects, persons) that can be talked about, but in connections that can only be gradually discerned. The deepest meanings and patterns may not be talked about at all, because so fully taken for granted.

Hymes' observation provides clues helpful to approaching the complex data I collected for this study. It illuminates the challenge I faced in looking for meanings and patterns about gender that are so deeply embedded in all of us as to be nearly impossible to recognize. Hymes also discusses the difficulties for the researcher of presentation, particularly in words, part of which is made more problematic by the characterisitics, both positive and negative, of the researcher. The most significant negative, partiality, cannot be avoided and Hymes recommends that, "the only solution is to face up to it" (1982:29). Van Maanen's refreshing text (1988) on writing ethnography assisted me in the challenging task of presentation. While Mishler deals with research interviewing, which has obvious differences from classroom discussion or writings, I also found his discussion (1986) of the power relations of interviewer and respondent of some help along with his notion of 'expansion' as a way of getting at meaning in the journals of students.

At the same time that it was intended to be a reasoned and carefully presented course in which students might become empowered and better informed, the gender course became for me and for the participants an intensely emotional experience. Dealing with the dimensions of this complex encounter has created a number of obstacles. Problems of objectivity versus subjectivity, of providing a reliable description of what took place and a reasoned analysis of the words of the students has led me to several sources for help. LeCompte and Goetz (1982) bring valuable perspective to the problems of dealing with multiple variables in a study. While I have found no description of a study approximating the one in which I engaged, I have been able to make my way using ideas from Harding (1987), Driscoll and McFarland (1989), Ellsworth (1989), and Lather (1991). A paramount concern for me in examining imbalances in between genders was the influences of pedagogical tactics which have potentially conflicting powers to liberate or oppress. Ellsworth's look at the "repressive myths" which surround critical pedagogy has great relevance to problems I struggled with in the classroom. Her observation that in a gendered classroom, dialogue cannot be satisfactory for exposing the sexism brought there by each participant, led me to explore the additional tactic of using the 'dialogue' of the journal and publication of anonymous journal excerpts. Finally, Lather's discussion of research for praxis and her warnings about the pitfalls of a pedagogy which seeks liberation for the participants provided insight on the challenges inherent in my role as teacher/researcher.

Material written for direct use in the classroom or directed at the general population via newspapers and magazines is becoming more available as gender debate continues in the 1990's.. A number of the articles I used with the students are documented in the appendix, but these are by no means definitive choices. Indeed, I have since found many others that I would like to have introduced to the students or which I prefer to those I used at the time. The interested teacher will find it easy to amass a continually expanding collection of literature to broaden her knowledge of gender issues along with controversial and stimulating articles and stories well suited to student interests and reading abilities.

Chapter II Endnotes

1. As yet no official curriculum for a gender issues course has been mandated by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. In authorizing publication of *Gender Equity, Gender Teaching.* Border/lines (Bryson, M., de Castell, S., and Haig-Brown, C.1991), the Ministry did not permit the authors to use the term 'feminism'.

2. Aristotle, Politics 1254b.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY: LOOKING FOR SPACES AND LISTENING FOR VOICES

> This class would have been totally different if it had been taught by a man.
>
> Grade 12 Male

I teach in a small high school with fewer than five hundred students. For several years I have had the good fortune to work with another English teacher whose great awareness of social issues and remarkable passion for justice continually inspire me. Over several years of planning together, she and I have looked more and more critically at the content of our courses, particularly grade twelve English. We agree that the dated short stories and essays in our available textbooks, while often beautifully written, gloss over or ignore so many issues facing our young students as they become adults. Most significantly missing is material that addresses gender discrimination, or, for that matter, focusses on females in any significant depth. We question how we can be socially responsible teachers if we present to students only traditional literature which reflects life in classical rather than contemporary terms and barely, or at best obliquely, relates to the lives of contemporary women. We question the gaping black hole that is the image of women in the

standard curriculum. We have not abandoned our mandate to teach basic skills, writing techniques or literary analysis. But we have boldly introduced material dealing with ethical and moral concerns specific to life in the bizarre culture of the 1990's. With the evolution of our working relationship has come an interdependence that has given us the courage to develop a program which challenges students to examine controversial topics presented in an organizational pattern that is new and unique to them. Out of our efforts has come my unit on gender equity, which I have chosen to call 'Pride and Prejudice,' an obvious allusion to Austen's astute commentary on male-female relations.

In the 1993/94 school year, working as a team with the entire group of approximately sixty-five grade twelve males and females, grouped heterogeneously for ability, my colleague and I set up the one semester English 12 course to span a year. After a two month core unit, all students were expected to complete one unit on issues around violence (taught by my colleague), at least one of five other independent study units, and my gender equity unit, 'Pride and Prejudice.' We repeated each unit three times over the remaining school year to give students options as to when they enrolled in each one and to limit group size to small numbers of about twenty, a factor that encouraged both independent study and good group discussion.

My first reason for introducing the 'Pride and Prejudice' unit

was to open up an area of inquiry that is often obscurred and to provoke both females and males to face the gender concerns that affect their lives. I wanted to provide a way of looking at gender matters that would begin in relative safety for each individual, a direction from the subjective to the objective, a look at gender from the inside out. I wondered if critical reflection on male/female interactions in their own lives and on their individual positions within their social framework would engage students in "the self-creative activity through which we make the world" (Lather, 1991:11), and would then provoke their critical assessment of gender issues in the larger setting of everyday society. I wanted to find out if senior high school students could become 'researchers,' engaging in critical reflection on their own experiences. Could they move from the personal toward the public, to identify and question traditional social and political structures that shape social attitudes about sex roles? Could students at the grade twelve level acknowledge and understand the socially contructed sexism inherent in their personal thinking patterns and work their way toward anti-sexist attitudes?

My second purpose was to make the unit the focus of a concentrated study in order to examine my own experience as teacher/researcher/participant and the issues that arise around my adoption of a feminist agenda as a tool in the classroom. While it may be postulated that some specific knowledge in some subject areas can be delivered without bias, the very selection of 'what' knowledge coupled with 'why' it is being taught, serves to set an agenda, no

matter what curriculum is being taught and by whom. In the English classroom, the discursive nature of discussion may generate an agenda even when one is not deliberately intended by the teacher. Certainly a unit on gender issues delivered in an English classroom, by a white female teacher, and *without an agenda* would seem an oxymoron. Lather (1991) identifies feminist research as that which puts "the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry" (71). Since that was exactly the premise on which I designed 'Pride and Prejudice' it becomes difficult for me to separate the agenda of the unit from the research maze (Hammersley,1992) .

This study describes the classroom dynamics at work when my students and I engaged in reflective and interactive research beginning for each of us from the position of personal experience and leading to a critique of gender problems as a public issue. What emerged as a central focus for my inquiry is the nature and dimension of the process of discovery, both mine and the students', as what Lather describes as praxis (1991). Although not an ethnography, the principles of ethnographic research may offer assistance in the study of the interactions that take place in my class if it is viewed as a temporary gathering that became, during its meetings, a unique 'culture.'

The limitations inherent in a qualitative study derive from "the interplay among variables situated in a natural context" (LeCompte and Goetz:1982:33). These variables include the hetergeneous grouping of students, the particular choices made by the teacher on a

day-to-day basis of what material will be studied and how it will be presented, and the myriad student and teacher responses, spoken and written, to both the expected and the unexpected that arise spontaneously as classes unfold. A study of any classroom may be expected to reveal similar complexities along with evidence of some bias on the part of the teacher investigator. But interpretation of the term 'bias' in the context of the feminist agenda, became problematic.

The very notion of teaching implies a series of decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, and from what perspective. The teacher/researcher always engages in a multi-faceted activity which raises questions about the contradictory roles of instructor and learner/observer. Adopting a feminist agenda complicates the activity even further. I was resistant to the adoption of an agenda within the classroom, believing it to be outside the acceptable bounds of teaching and research, as being somehow unfair. But as a feminist teacher, and as researcher, I was not agenda-free. If I chose the pedagogical tactic of telling the students that I expected them to change in the course of our time together, that I expected them to feel at times (or possibly all at once) angry, hurt, puzzled, confused, or resistant to ideas we were examining, I could not possibly be without a point of view, a position from which to observe. Despite my own resistance to the idea, the more I considered, the more logic challenged my image of myself as a neutral presenter of a smorgasbord of ideas from which students might select those they found intellectually appealing. What I had to question is whether or not I

could ever take (or even want to take) a neutral position in a gender issues class. Could such a position be effective in achieving any degree of praxis concerning a subject that was so loaded with emotional paraphernalia?

Parameters of the study

Data for this study comes from the second session of the gender equity unit I offered between December 13th, 1993, and January 28th, 1994. [1] The unit spanned eighteen class hours, a very limited time as I had discovered in the first session, in which to cover even the simplest overview of salient gender issues. [2] Before the unit began, I informed students and their parents or guardians in writing of the nature of my project and the content of the gender unit. I collected consent forms signed by parents authorizing their students to become participants. The students also signed consent forms outlining the conditions governing their participation in the study. Of the total of twenty-one students enrolled for this particular session, nineteen chose to participate. The other two remained as class members but none of their comments, actions or writings are included as part of the data.

Student participants were informed that the results of this study would be made available to them before its publication. All collected written or verbal data would remain anonymous. No names of individual participants appear in the document tion of results,

although when it became obvious that I needed an uncomplicated way of referring to the journal entries and their authors, I made the decision to use pseudonyms. I am satisfied that this was a good decision as it has added a human dimension to the analysis that would otherwise have been lacking despite the use of the participants' own words in their writing. Original journal entries, with the exception of the last anonymous submission, were returned to the individual student writers. I have retained photocopies of the journals and of student research assignments from which to work while preparing this study. Neither the school district nor the school are identified in any discussion or documentation of the data collected.

I informed the students that they were under no obligation to reveal any information against their will. I explained that some topics about gender might make them feel uncomfortable but that they were in complete control as to what they chose to say or write in response to class assignments. They would be eligible for a 'C+' or better as long as they participated fully in all the required classroom and research activites, turned in all assigned personal journal responses, attended regularly and participated in classroom discussion to the best of their ability. My purpose in assuring a minimum grade was to encourage honest disclosure without fear of 'being marked down' for expression of personal opinion and to encourage students to involve themselves intensively in the class. The same general guidelines about participation and assessment applied to the two non-participants.

The grade twelves formed a small closely knit graduating group of fewer than seventy-five students, approximately one fifth of the student body. Considerable communication took place amongst them outside of class time about 'the new way' things were being done in English. Most regarded the unit on gender issues as a novelty and the first twenty-three students enrolled for 'Pride and Prejudice' (November, 1993) arrived somewhat wary but definitely curious about what we would be doing. This first session offered me the opportunity to make notes and to assess our progress with a view to adjusting my strategies and content for the subsequent session.

Student responses to the class activities ranged from enthusiastic to critical and occasionally openly hostile. As did those in the classes I describe in Chapter I, the males immediately took the more vocal role, defending their own viewpoints or ridiculing, trivializing, contradicting, and sometimes outright dismissing ideas they found difficult or contrary to their previously held beliefs. Early in the unit, I assigned the boys and girls to work as separate groups, each to make two visuals, one of their collective image of 'female' and the other of 'male.' The resulting collages of both groups were predictable to the extent that they portrayed men and women and their activities mainly within the dimensions of the media stereotypes that the students knew and that were available in magazines. What I was not prepared for was the huge disrespect for women revealed in the boys' collage to depict 'female.' They selected a picture of a well-known female actor and glued a banana between

her legs and a sanitary napkin next to her. Above her head they pasted the words 'woman's day.' They arranged semi-naked women in multiples, like clones, and showed business women with dripping skulls pasted over their faces. In our subsequent class discussion of the four collages, the girls identified these images as unmistakeably sexist and violent, voicing outrage and hurt. Some of the boys were apologetic but others insisted the poster was a 'joke.' I chose not to dismiss the collage as the product of immaturity because that excuse is often accepted as a reason for ignoring sexism or abdicating responsibility for perpetuating sexual innuendo and stereotyping. In several classes following that first exercise, discussion amongst us degenerated into confrontation between male and female students, but more often it remained in the student-to-teacher domain, the males openly challenging the statistics and information I presented, accusing me of being 'biased toward' the girls. In their journal entries several female students expressed disappointment and frustration about the reactions of the boys. Although many of the boys in this group made significant progress in developing awareness of problems around gender, there prevailed a strong resistance to accepting responsibility for their own attitudes or to supporting changes to accepted social patterns of gender inequity.

Since the students usually speculate about what a course will be like, I had expected the same for 'Pride and Prejudice.' But as I soon learned, the recounting of scenarios by the first class about 'The Big Banana' as the collage came to be called, had become a focal point

of amusement and fascination, inflating the expectations of the study participants. By asking a few of them what they had heard, I learned that the nature of class discussion about the first group's activities would make it necessary to adjust the content and assignments for the research group. Some activities presented in the first session, especially the one involving the collages, could not be used a second time because their effectiveness lay in the participants' not knowing beforehand what they were about. Despite significant changes to the reading matter, assignments, and my approach to the material for the second session, I had reason to believe the attitudes of the participants toward the unit and to me as teacher/researcher would be affected by what they had heard. Would news of our conflict over the collages, for example, establish a bias in them before they even started the class? The evaluations (Chapter VI) confirm that the researched group had entered the class with expectations based on what they had heard. One positive effect was that they arrived with high curiosity and interest.

The aspect of the pilot unit that proved most worthy of repeating and improving was the use of individual journals of the students and the publication of anonymous excerpts from these for distribution to all students throughout the unit. I use the term 'journal' here to refer to responses written daily, usually focussed on a specific topic, and turned in the day following a particular discussion or reading. However, I asked the students not to use a book but to write each entry on a separate looseleaf sheet to facilitate

daily photocopying. Selecting and typing the excerpts each night for the next day's class proved an onerous task for me but the value for students was that they could think about what they had written and compare their own thoughts with significant, and frequently conflicting, passages by others. While there was rarely much discussion after I had handed out these exerpts, students poured over them with great intensity. As I had hoped it would, the breadth of commentary in the journal entries provided a source of rich material for this study.

The class comprised eleven male and eight female participants, all of whom were white except one oriental male who had been born and raised in Canada; and one male and and one female non-participant. I decided, in consultation with my colleague, not to adjust the imbalance of students by sex because we both wanted to honour as much as possible the choices students had made about when during the year they wanted to take the unit. The uneven distribution of intellectual ability in heterogeneously grouped classes that can typically occur throughout the school due to normal scheduling factors appears in the study group as well. As it turned out it many were high achievers, as was evident by their consistent appearance on the school honour roll from grade eight onward. Although not a major focus of this study, the facility in English of several of the students contributes to the richness of their journal entries and to the insightfulness of many of their written and spoken comments.

A factor which may have had significant influence on the class

dynamic is that, with the exception of one young man visiting as an exchange student from outside Canada and three females who had entered the school within the last two years, the students in the study group were long time acquaintances. Several had attended elementary school together. Most had attended high school together since grade eight and because the school is so small, had been in numerous classes together over several years. Relationships between various class members were complex. Some had been close friends for years and some were involved romantically at the time we worked together.

Classes were organized around whole-group discussions, or exercises followed by small-group discussions. In the hope that they would spark debate and provoke written response, I assigned a total of fourteen articles on topics ranging from gender identity, the social construction of gender roles, language as it shapes gender roles, and the invisibility of women in history, to evidence of sexism and violence against Canadian women, especially in universities. [3] Each student was required to write and submit twelve journal entries and one final evaluation of the course. The first focused on personal reflection on their own gender role and their upbringing; some were in immediate response to specific articles read as homework; others involved consideration of questions arising from the readings or from ideas and situations emerging from class discussions. I encouraged students to critique their own attitudes and behaviours with regard to gender matters, to write in first person, and to re-read their own entries and my comments from time to time in order to reassess

their thinking as the unit progressed. Lastly, I presented a broad spectrum of investigative activities on gender issues from which they were to choose one and, working in pairs or individually, research and plan presentations outlining their findings to the entire class.[4] In the final written assignment I asked for a detailed commentary on each student's individual experience and opinions of the class.

Even though I knew most of my students quite well (I had taught many of them in previous semesters for up to four years), I was concerned about the establishment of an atmosphere of trust in which any and all opinions and disclosures would be respected. I discussed with them the ethics of doing qualitative research and the assurance of anonymity in this document. In a gendered classroom, writing may become a complex political act if students expect their work will become public (Annas,1985). All students were encouraged to decide whether or not their private thoughts from the journal might be quoted and to indicate 'do not copy' on part or all of any entry should they wish me not to. We also worked out a means by which they might assure anonymity on the final assessment exercise by turning it in typewritten, in an unmarked sealed envelope.

A collection of student journal entries, the nature of which is described above, consisting of just under 270 separate handwritten and typed submissions, some of as many as four pages long, form the bulk of data I examine in Chapters IV and V. To this is added the

information from my own notes on a variety of topics including observation of daily classes, an occasional brief private conversation with students, and personal documentation of my concerns, observations, and emotional reactions as the unit progressed. My (re)visualization of the classroom scene, recall of my teaching experience, and memories of the expressions, body language and voices of students are intermingled with present impressions of what took place as these now exist in my own 'partial knowing' of the actual circumstances (Ellsworth, 1989). Chapter V, looks at the content of the participants' journals, decontextalized from the class-room scene where appropriate, for what might contradict or shed new light on the evidence in Chapter IV. Chapter VI is entirely devoted to the excerpts from final anonymous typewritten entries (nineteen in total, varying in length from three-quarters of a page to three pages) in which the students provide an evaluation of their experiences as participant/researchers and of the course.

As students did classroom exercises and conducted their own research into gender issues, I had planned to make detailed fieldnotes of the dynamic of the class' investigation process. But in most classes, my time and that of the students was fully occupied in presentation/discussion/listening and argument so that I had to make fieldnotes 'after the fact' and often after teaching several intervening classes on other subjects. These fieldnotes are edited to appear in present tense to give them some of the immediacy of the students' own journals. Further editing is restricted to minor changes

in wording for the sake of fluency.

The students did the majority of their reading, all their journal entries, and preparation of their projects, some of which required visits to commercial outlets, during their out-of-school time. I collected and photocopied individual journal entries daily and re-turned the originals with my personal written comments to indi-viduals. I also distributed excerpts from each journal entry on a given topic, typed and anonymous, so that all students in the class had equal opportunity to read and react to the statements of others.

Throughout the unit, I selected readings and designed activities which I hoped would engage interest and match the range of abilities in the group. Students could act as participant/researchers three ways: reflecting and writing their thoughts, listening to and reading the ideas of others, and engaging in the investigation of some aspect of the gender relations. The focus of the unit was to raise and consider questions such as: In what ways is our society sexist? What evidence confirms this? What does sexism and gender bias have to do with homophobia? With racism and classism? I also wanted the students to think on a personal level and to ask deeper questions of themselves: As a female/male what is my experience of the power of sexism? Am I sexist as an individual? How have I been affected by the study and discussion of sexism in this class? Has the class changed the way I will behave and think in the future about gender issues?

Taking a position within the research

The decision to teach gender issues posed immense challenges for me, both as an educator and as an individual. The inescapable fact that I am female impacted significantly on the nature of my classroom experience. While I based my decision on what I believe are altruistic reasons and equipped myself with the best arguments I could find from the feminist enclave, the bottom line is that until I introduced gender issues into the classroom, I had a very limited idea of how great the impact would be upon my thoughts and emotions or of the implications for my students of my undertaking this kind of teaching. "To make gender an issue in the classroom is, by definition, to take on the gendered relations of power in our society" (Briskin, 1990:15). Believing, as many female teachers do, that a feminist agenda is deserving of legitimate status in the public school curriculum is a long way from answering the challenge to activate anti-sexist principles in one's own classroom. Selecting curricular materials, planning classroom strategies and framing student activities were the least difficult tasks I faced daily. Looming largest as the course unwound class after class, were the tasks of dealing with student anger and resentment; of deciding how (and whether) to handle the challenges to my authority, or perhaps more accurately, my credibility; and of coping with the daily interplay of emotional and intellectual stresses that simmered ominously and sometimes exploded in the classroom. For many teachers, added also to these stresses may be those of working in isolation and possibly

against the grain of accepted teaching practice within one's school. While I was fortunate in having the general approval of my principal and the unswerving support of my closest teaching colleague, I nevertheless had to deal with significant pressure within the classroom created by the challenges of those students, particularly males, who felt threatened by what I was presenting.

Briskin (1990:16-20) argues that the teacher who makes the commitment to introduce gender issues to students must choose between a strategy of non-sexism and anti-sexism and that "by maintaining a position of being non-sexist, the individual abdicates responsibility for dealing with sexism." Briskin rejects non-sexism which "obscures the degree to which the classroom environment is shaped by the relations between the students" so that despite the most careful actions by the teacher to remove prejudice, "the gendered character of the classroom will continue." This she suggests "conceals rather than reveals structural inequality and institutional limits" and "holds out a false promise to students: of a safe space away from the sexism, racism and classism of the rest of their lives." The alternative of an anti-sexist strategy "makes gender an issue...in order to validate the experience of students, to bring it to consciousness, and to challenge it." In undertaking this study, I chose to adopt an anti-sexist strategy.

Assumption of an anti-sexist approach in the classroom has great potential to challenge the notion of respectful research. Be-

cause it is a position that does not tolerate sexism, it renders problematic issues of power, respect, and tolerance for disparate attitudes. It forces to the surface that male narcissism described by Benhabib (1992) which enables male students to ignore or dismiss as 'other' the females in the class. It raised for me the question of how I would be able to dismantle fiercely held assumptions about females without appearing to attack or undermine the self-esteem of the males. Critical pedagogy seeks to challenge oppressive social formations (Ellsworth, 1989). There is little doubt that gender bias is one such oppressive structure. But how can a teacher preserve the rights of each student, male and female, while actively challenging the positions each holds within society and within the immediate peer group? Is it possible to claim to do respectful research if the researcher, in the role of teacher, adopts strategies designed to take assured positions away from some and to grant new positions to others? Is it possible to avoid imposing guilt on some students in attempts to effect changes that will eliminate oppressions for others? I continually struggle, even now, with the possibility that I might have been creating classroom relations which only demonstrated for students their ignorance when I really wanted to provoke their honest confrontation of their biases. In a unit such as 'Pride and Prejudice' where emotion and ego of both students and teacher are intimately bound to intellectual responses, I must look critically at authority, how it is "constituted and constituting" (Lather, 1991).

Ellsworth (1989: 298-314) warns that failure "to come to grips with issues of trust, risk, and the operations of fear and desire...in the classroom," will continue to fail "to loosen deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations...." I echo her question, "What practice is called for when even the combination of all partial knowledges in a classroom results in yet another partial knowing?" Ellsworth's notion that 'empowerment', student voice', 'dialogue', and even the term 'critical' - are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination" lead me to question whether my chosen strategies would have validity as ways of getting my students to critique their own gender biases through 'dialogue' which would amplify their voices. Indeed, would I even be able to allow free dialogue having taken an antisexist stand? My very purpose was to facilitate 'empowerment' for students through 'dialogue' and their own 'voices' engaged in a 'critical' examination of social structures that promote and sustain sexism. But who would be empowered? Would it be the girls who might at last be able to speak freely about their oppressions as females? Would it be the boys? *Could* it be the boys, who would undoubtedly come face-to-face with themselves in guises they might not like the look of? Would my assertion of an anti-sexist agenda open up spaces in which to hear individual voices and allay the presence of fear of difference revealed in the silences of some participants? Or would I be reinforcing 'repressive myths' enabling students to achieve only a 'partial knowing' of what gender bias means? Would I possibly even be reinforcing gender biases?

The use of the personal reflection journal was one strategy through which I hoped to reduce fear of difference and overcome the silence of some participants. The tactic of circulating anonymous excerpts might allow for individual 'voices' to be heard. In contrast to the open-ended argument and dialogue during class time which might easily go off track or become contentious, silencing some individuals, the journal offered a 'space' in which all students might 'speak' without fear of having to cast their words into the arena of classroom debate. It was important to give this space both to girls who might be silent about their personal experiences as females for fear of criticism by their peers and to boys in the class whose views about gender relations might be unpopular, especially before the teacher, who is perceived as the voice of authority in the classroom. Writing would also allow students to address their criticisms of my role directly to me if they so wished.

The maintainance of some sort of dialogue between the student writers and me as I responded to their journal entries required considerable thought. I attempted to reply to their statements as if carrying on a discussion with each face-to-face. I chose particular reading materials with the intention of stimulating controversy and teasing out attitudes about gender so that students would not just exchange comments but also might detect each other's unspoken sexist and anti-sexist talk 'between-the-lines.' I wanted them to collect data pertinent to their own reality in an atmosphere of what Lather calls "constructive turmoil" (1991: 53). It was my ultimate

goal to facilitate a process of individual change which I might monitor from and with(in) unique statements, actions and writings of individuals. I felt these would provide more useful and specific information than any attempts to assess apparent progress of the class as a whole. In my interpretation of the students' written responses in Chapters IV and V, I will comment on the degree to which I believe the strategies I employed assisted individuals to shift their positions about gender issues or to grow in understanding of their own attitudes toward gender relations. I include myself in these comments because I was forced to face my own inflexibility on more than one occasion and found myself in the process of change as much as I hoped that the students were.

The premise on which this research rests is that the students can best find out what gender issues have to do with their own lives by thinking about their experiences in *terms of their own gender.* I saw it as my job to set up the circumstances wherein they could not avoid that thinking. But we were not engaged in interviews in the sense that researchers usually refer to them. The data I gave back to the stu-dents was their own and that of their peers, in the form of the ex-cerpted journal entries. While I accept that the stategies I adopted, including use of the journal, might not for some students loosen deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations, I argue that they served as provocation for the release of prejudices that could well be the best I could accomplish in an eighteen hour unit in a high school class where peer pressure and self-image act as

powerful inhibitors to full communication. Moreover, it is arguable that since all individual knowledge is a collection of partial knowledges, partial knowing is all that any person can hope to attain (Ellsworh, 1989). With these thoughts in mind, I looked to the combined power of audible voices in the classroom and inaudible voices that could be 'heard' in the writings to provoke in the students a questioning of their own attitudes about power/gender relations.

Two factors, both problematic in terms of their potential to repress voices within the class, must be acknowledged. First, my authoritative multiple role in the classroom as (female) teacher/ researcher, facilitator, mediator, gadfly and, frequently, devil's advocate, may have lead students to regard me with suspicion. They may have seen me as apparent 'authority' on gender inequities or conversely as a person who, by virtue of being female, can have very little authority on gender issues. They may have perceived me teacher-authority, a militant 'other' to be appeased but also to be resisted for holding a contradictory and unpopular opinion. And yet I felt I could not simply be an outsider since I was involved in self-exploration in a gendered classroom as a female along with my female students. Throughout the research, it became a struggle to clarify my status in and within the class. The second factor with the potential to silence was the ambiguity inherent for the students in my dual roles as anti-sexist teacher and participant/observer. Contradictions created by these two factors might either threaten or enhance my goal of "research as praxis" (Lather:1991).

Lather (1991:52-54) in her chapter, "Research as Praxis," says that "praxis-oriented inquirers seek emancipatory knowledge" which "increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings, and in doing so directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes." Two useful applications of the term 'inquire,' seem bound to the notion of praxis in the classroom. The first identifies the teacher-inquirer who seeks ways to guide, lead, and frequently provoke students into looking beneath surfaces, reading between lines, thinking beyond boundaries. The second identifies the student-inquirer who grapples with ideas which may be exciting, irritating, puzzling, even frightening, but ultimately enlightening. It is the interaction of the teacher and student in the classroom, engaging in a dynamic of inquiry, that has the greatest potential for achieving the praxis that Lather considers desireable in research - that which she describes as "research that is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society." In this sense the role of the teacher and the role of the researcher become paradoxically fused. As I discuss in my conclusions, I began to move away from Lather's definition of praxis, away from looking at praxis as a goal, and toward a definition which applied not just to my role as researcher but to a more far-reaching process that revealed itself as the study went on. For this I turned to Freire (1970). Gradually, I came to a fuller understanding of praxis as I completed the writing of this thesis.

Chapter III Endnotes

1. Though inconvenient, interruption of this session by Christmas break was unavoidable and as far as I can determine had no significant effect on what we did in the classes.

2. I was responsible during the same teaching time for a second group of students engaged in an independent 'Investigations' Unit which meant that I had to plan assignments and activities for the 'Pride and Prejudice' group to do on their own one hour per week while I went elsewhere to take a seminar with the Investigations group. Combined with the rest of my teaching load, I found the demands imposed by this arrangement put considerable pressure on me, particularly when it came to finding time to write adequate fieldnotes on the study group.

3. See Appendix for a list of articles assigned to students, p.205

4. See Appendix for student research assignment, p.206-209

Chapter IV

PRIDES AND PREJUDICES

Although I never wanted to be a boy, I thought
that being a girl wasn't as good.
From Holly's journal

'Pride and Prejudice' took us on a risky journey, no less for me than for the student participants. For my part the road was rocky and the travelling arduous. It changed me as a teacher and as a woman. And as I read the reflections of the girls who struggled along with me, I saw that their battles to establish their identities in a male dominated world are similar to those I fought as a girl. The boys found the journey difficult too. But it was as if they were on a different road seeing different obstacles, and different sights. What we all had in common is our resistances to the experiences along the way and to the insistent message that we needed to grow in awareness, to risk making changes to our perceptions about ourselves and our fellow travellers.

In this context it seems vital that I portray as vivdly as possible a sense of the classroom experiences as they unfolded. To do so I have presented my results in what may be an unorthodox way. First, I present my edited fieldnotes to recreate the tensions,

conflicts, observations and feelings that arose in the daily classes. These appear in italics in first person and, to heighten immediacy, in present tense. Second, I quote what I consider to be the most significant and revealing substance of this study, excerpts taken directly from the journal entries of the student participants. These appear mostly untouched except for surface editing. Third, I link the two perspectives with questions and interpretations of the day-to-day classroom interactions and the journal responses from the students.

By adopting this threefold presentation, I intend to approximate, at least partially, a living experience of the classroom dynamic and to echo in words the voices of the participants, both the audible ones and those which often remained silent until (and possibly even after) they appeared in print for the other students to read.[1] Using the pseudonyms Rebecca, Linda, Christina, Carleen, Kleo, Louise, Holly, Julie, Adam, Alex, Colin, Jeff, Byron, Hank, Curtis, Patrick, Stuart, Misha, and Todd, I hope to convey a more vivid sense of their participation, to give individual voices identity, to look for patterns, ambiguities, and inconsistencies in their classroom comments and journal entries that give clues to the evolution of their thinking.

As I read the daily journals, certain voices began to emerge for me in a continuing dialogue that simulates our on-going classroom discussions and evokes the tensions which reverberated amongst us. The result is that, gradually, a constellation of participants became

the central figures in the drama as I am decribing it here and in Chapter V. And these same voices echo in Chapter VI, in the anonymous passages quoted. Some voices are significant because of their brilliant articulation of the issues we looked at. Others, by their very awkwardness, highlight the struggles of individuals to cope with new and oppositional ideas that challenged them. Themes and threads of feeling weave their way through my recollections and I hear them in the journal voices, perhaps more vividly than I did in the classroom. I hear the confusions of Colin and Holly. I hear the resistances and belligerances of Jeff and Hank and Curtis and Alex. I hear the optimistic equanimity of Rebecca and Christina and Adam. I hear the logic and compassion of Louise and Byron. I hear the acerbic realism of Kleo and Carleen, mingled with a haunting despair. Collectively, these voices create a keleidoscopic montage of opinions, feelings, and perceptions, a "partial knowing" of what took place in the course (Ellsworth, 1989)

A (harsh) beginning

As I wait to begin the first class, I watch the students choosing seats. My hands perspire and I feel a terrible panic. Every eye is on me. This group appears apprehensive, as if they are waiting for news from a doctor. A few have their arms folded in a "show me" attitude. Most look wary. Am I reading too much into their body language? I know that they have been hearing from the previous group about the confrontations which erupted in the classes. For many of these kids

'English' is usually a pretty safe place where you read books and answer questions about other people, not even real people most of the time, you can get good marks if you are fairly insightful, and you don't have to say much about yourself unless you want to. Hoping to sound friendly and confident, I ask what they have heard about the gender unit. Among the murmurings a clear voice says, "We heard it was harsh." What does harsh mean? Is that good or bad, I ask. "We heard it was biased toward the girls and against the boys." Echoing what I imagine they have been saying in their private conversations, I provoke them: I suppose you also heard that I hate men and am probably a lesbian."Well, not that harsh," another voice replies. Immediately I am ashamed of saying these words., of employing such tactics. Do I really believe that the students think of me this way? Am I playing devil's advocate here or am I revealing prejudices that I have always believed myself to be free of? I am ashamed of my own sexism. I wonder if any of them has noticed. (Edited fieldnote, December 14, 1993).

Previous experience had filled me with fear of what could happen as I taught this unit for the second time. And I knew I was committed. Now I really had to do the research. I felt an urgent desire to begin quickly, to accomplish as much as we could in the three classes before the interruption of Christmas break. The timing was awful - to begin a new unit in the last week before a holiday. And we only had eighteen classes altogether. I worried that we would not have time enough to develop a good discussion in the class, to really

deal with the issues I knew were there to be explored. I worried that the students would not have time to absorb the articles they read, to reflect enough on their own attitudes and to spend enough time on the research topics I planned to assign. But mostly, I worried that we would have no time to get used to each other, to explore our feelings in an atmosphere of trust and respect. And I wondered how I would be able to collect data, write field notes and read and transcribe journal entries to be distributed for the class to read all within a span of less than a month while teaching four other courses? How could I possibly do a worthwhile study in these circumstances? How would the class react to my stance as an anti-sexist teacher? Would I be able to achieve my objective of effecting change in the minds of my students? I felt overwhelmed with apprehension and inadequacy.

Excitement about school Christmas activites and the impending holiday break injected distractions into our daily routine that could interfere with the momentum of the class. But, I would have to make do with the situation. Despite my first impressions of their wariness, most were actually keen to get started and seemed receptive to the investigative approach I outlined. When I had spoken with them the previous week, they had been positive about participating in my research and all but two had returned consent forms signed by their parents along with their own signed forms agreeing to the conditions around participation and confidentiality. I started our first meeting by talking about journals, explaining my plan to provide selected anonymous exerpts on assigned topics for the whole class to read. I

suggested that should there be an entry they wanted kept private they might simply write 'do not copy' on the page. Heads nodded in agreement with the plan. I stressed the importance of first person responses in the journal. To give them the idea of a free flowing commentary, I read aloud some entries from a journal I had kept in a gender issues course. I explained my intention to give them a topic at the end of each class, one that was open-ended enough to elicit a free response but specific enough that they would not have a problem thinking of what to write about.

When everyone seemed ready to start, I set them to the task of brainstorming their associations around the word 'gender.' We discussed differences between 'sex' and 'gender.' I introduced the notion of socially constructed gender roles, encouraging their consideration of both heterosexual and homosexual sexual orientation. The students left with the task of reflecting on their own gender as they understood it and describing what their own gender meant to them. Although I had read the entries of the pilot group on the same topic, I was unsure as to what to expect as I collected the first journals the next day. I read these first comments with great aniticipation. The following excerpts from the boys reflect quite diverse perceptions about what it means to be male:

> I would say that being male means being stronger willed emotionally (not crying enough or at all, this is not a good thing), liking big things instead of smaller things and

> making jokes and being obnoxious. But after I finish writing these things I realize it must be wrong because I don't think that I'm like any of these things. (Curtis)

> In my eyes men and women are equal so I've never looked at them being different. When I think of being male I can't help but think traditionally where the man works and the woman stays at home, but I work at a bank and am working with lots of women ...so I don't really relate to those traditional ideas. (Stuart)

Curtis knows the stereotypical expectations of males but feels he does not match them. Stuart's ingenuous and contradictory comment suggests a naivete about gender roles. Although he avows women and men to be equal, he "can't help but think traditionally." He recognizes the stereotypical separation of male and female but rejects it uncritically because he sees many female employees where he works. Without apparent knowledge of persistent inequities in position and pay between males and females in banking, for him the presence of many females on the job is sufficient evidence of gender equity.

Byron is willing to acknowledge what he has heard about gender inequity. He seems to espouse an anti-sexist viewpoint but he does not attempt to reconcile that position with his "stereotypical male" life:

> I am a male, whom many feel get an advantage at almost every aspect of life over female counterparts. Myself and other men are by unfair assumption often seen as stronger physically and mentally than any female.... I feel that it is up to all men to help destroy all the fake assumptions about women. With that said, I would also like to say that I am proud to be a male and that I live pretty much a stereotypical male life. (Byron)

Colin shows conflict in his desire to grant a woman a choice about a career at the same time that he believes that he, himself, has none because he is restricted to fulfilling what is expected of him as a traditional breadwinner:

> I believe the wife or female in a strong relationship should have a choice in pursuing her own career. Being a male in my own relationship, a marriage to come, I feel I have no choice whatsoever and must have a career to financially support the needs of the family. (Colin)

The boys have a superficial understanding of gender roles full of contradictions. Their comments contain little analysis or evidence of strong personal feelings about the topic. As Colin says, "The role I play as a male and the roles females play is a subject that has never really crossed my mind." In most entries, the boys approach the subject of being male with a degree of distance that enables them to

avoid revealing much about their personal behaviour or their emotions. The passages below reveal varying degrees of disregard for gender stereotypes mingled with genuine confidence and satisfaction which affirms the position of being male:

> Honestly, I don't often think of myself only as being a guy. It's obvious that I am male but it is not constantly on my mind. (Hank)

> To me being male means hanging out with my friends. I'm not sure that my personality fits some of the stereotypes there are about men. I don't feel that I'm a real tough guy and I don't feel that I need to act it. I like sports but not the way that Al Bundy likes them. To me, life isn't a question of being male or female, it's a question of who you are and how you live your life. (Adam)

> I believe you are what you are. That is the way life is, but to be honest I do have this little ringing voice in the back of my head saying that I'm lucky to be of the male gender (Alex).

But Alex also admits quite humbly that he knows his privileged position as a male may have something to do with "the problem:"

> I can go on in life knowing that I have more advantages

than disadvantages. But more importantly I don't have to deal with all the bullshit that women go through in life..... but perhaps I am included with the guilty party, for instead of solving the problem, I am like many others who just ignore it. (Alex)

The voices of the girls in contrast to those of the boys, speak very personally and specifically about what it means to them to be female. The girls use images of their own lives as females to situate themselves in a male world. Explicit 'knowing' about what it is to be female appears frequently and with it sensitivities to appearances, relationships, reputation, and position measured against male criteria.

Ever since I was little I was brought up with the knowledge of being a girl. I wasn't stereotyped by pink blankets, etc. but it was clear to me by my brothers' actions that I was diffferent than them. Although I never wanted to be a boy, I thought that being a girl wasn't as good...I guess for most of my childhood I tried to make up for my being a girl by being a tomboy. (Holly)

... being female to me means to have to shave my legs, not being able to play soccer like a guy, not having such aggressive tendencies and emotions....To me being a girl has to do with getting dressed every morning to make

myself feel good, putting on makeup and doing my hair. It also has to do with the close bonding found between girlfriends and loving them as they love you. Being a girl also has to do with our responsibility to stand up for ourselves and not allow ourselves to be called a minority. (Louise)

In her entry Julie refers to the symbols for male and female which I used frequently in notes on the board:

Why is it that male always comes before female? Why is it an arrow pointing up and an X pointing down? Is it because the men are moving up and to a greater destiny and the female has gone down and is sitting at a stand still? (Julie)

What is the source of Holly's conviction that "being a girl wasn't as good"? And why does Julie wonder if women's lives are "at a standstill"? Even in Louise's confident entry, evidence of learned assumptions about life as a woman stand out.

In their responses, the voices of Kleo and Carleen ring with disappointment and distress:

It means living your life with an underlying hopelessness, worrying about your safety and when you stand up for yourself and try to be tougher than any guy - you are a

bitch and you are not in your role - therefore you are wrong...there aren't very many positive identities set out for a woman to achieve unless it involves passive or even victimized behaviour. Maybe I'm making it bigger than it is but sometimes it doesn't feel like it. Pardon me for being confused, but I don't enjoy being female very much. (Kleo)

On a good day it means looking forward to the future that is filled with opportunity and freedom. Cherishing the beauty of being female. Awaiting the wonderful experience of childbirth and love. Taking advantage of the ability to express my emotions without being labelled a "fag"... Being a girl means I don't have to live up to macho stereo-types; my sex-appeal is not based on how large my muscles are and I don't have to worry about being judged by the number of notches on my bedpost. And yet on a bad day I am judged by the notches, if I have too many I am a slut, too few I'm a lesbian...Never feeling safe in a dark place, and it being my fault if I'm violated there. Wondering if I have sex with a male will he love me and if I don't will he rape me. I look at the past and feel small, stupid and insignificant. Knowing that I will never be pretty enough, thin enough, or smart enough for any man to love me...Society has raised me to believe that I am only as good as a male thinks I am. (Carleen)

These stories are vivid and compact. They capture all the pertinent tensions in the gender debate. What experiences has Kleo had which lead her to believe that "when you stand up for yourself and try to be tougher than any guy - you are a bitch and you are not in your role"? Why does she feel she must be "tougher" and not just strong? Carleen captures the contradictory positives and negatives of being a woman in tight, succinct phrases full of tension. Why has she come to "look at the past and feel small, stupid and insignificant." Why is she convinced that she will "never be pretty enough, thin enough, or smart enough for any man to love"? In spite of the desire to be happy as women with the joys of friendship and motherhood to look forward to, these girls, both of them attractive and intelligent, register deep disappointment that their gender commits them to always being measured against a male standard. The details they include and the quality of their phrasing gives their comments a different and an unmistakably poignant ring that is not heard in what the boys said.

Opening dialogues

From the first day patterns of position and interaction began to emerge in the classroom which to me emphasized in a literal way a separation of the girls from the boys. Down the left side of the room were four hexagonal tables and down the right another three, each with room to seat up to six people. The students chose their own seating arrangements, except the few times when I rearranged them for certain group activities, and after the third meeting the class had

gelled into five specific groups. Five girls, Kleo, Holly, Carleen, Louise and Rebecca positioned themselves at the third table down the room to my left forming a dominant barrier which closed off access to the last table at the back. There Carl, the one boy who had decided not to participate in the study, usually chose to sit, silent and 'invisible' to the rest of the class. Moving anti-clockwise toward the front, still on the left, sat Colin, Stuart, and three girls, Linda, Julie, and Pat, the other non-participant in the study. The front table at my immediate left stayed empty and became a place where I put journals, handouts, and my notes. Four boys, Jeff, Byron, Hank, and Curtis dominated the front corner on my immediate right. Behind them sat, Christina and two boys, Alex and Misha. At the back right corner table sat three boys, Stuart, Patrick, and Todd. Close to the end of the unit, Carl had joined them becoming a permanent member of this group. He was the only student who changed seats without a signal from me throughout the span of the eighteen classes.

A single major line of communication began to form diagonally across the room from the all-girl table on my left to the all-boy table at the front right. The verbal interactions between these two groups became the long side of a powerful triangle with me at its apex. Aggressive voices from the boys on the right and from the girls on the left controlled discussion with both groups addressing their remarks to the entire class via me almost as if competing for points from the figure of authority. Distancing in any classroom between males and females may be attributed partly to the natural grouping of friends

within the class, a factor I usually attempt to offset by frequently mixing students into new working groups. But I chose not to break up this structure, hesitant to disturb the emerging dynamic. I wanted to see if the students could recognize the pattern of male against female which positioned teacher in the middle. Eventually, though not until close to the end of the unit, new voices broke the pattern as Christina, Linda, and Patrick started to speak out more frequently. Holly, Alex and Todd also became more vocal although Misha, Adam, Colin and Byron remained relatively reticent.

Despite increased participation, power relations in the room shifted very little, for the most part alternating between the two most powerful tables, dominated by Carleen and Kleo at one and Jeff, Hank and Curtis at the other. Depending on what was being discussed at any particular time, I felt drawn in as interpretor, arbiter, mediator, and sometimes inadvertently as co-conspirator. Had I chosen to capture the day-to-day conversations on tape, it would be enlightening to verify whether or not my sense was accurate that so much of the richness of what individuals said in their journals remained unspoken in the classroom setting, or was obscurred, lost to recriminations, denials, accusations and silences created partly by the significant power dynamic at work.

For homework on the first day, in addition to their journal entry, I assigned the students to read the article, "Your Life as a Girl," by Curtis Sittenfield. [1] I chose it because Anna, the main character

speaks to the reader directly as 'you' giving the words much the same kind of immediacy as first person. I wanted the students to plunge into the realm of 'female' instead of 'male.' I wanted them to hear a new voice, a jarring voice that would provoke a thoughtful response.

Today we begin some really serious discussion. I have rearranged the seating, in a long oval so that students can see one another and talk face to face. Several males take a position at the far end of the oval opposite me. Somehow I can't seem to see the girls along the sides as well as I can the boys. I begin by asking if everyone has read "Your Life as a Girl." Kleo's voice rings out, "Yes, unfortunately." What lessons did Anna learn about being a girl, I ask.

The article describes Anna's many experiences from each of which we can infer a lesson she has learned about being a girl. I expect the students to easily recognize them: girls are supposed to shave their legs, girls really shouldn't run faster than boys, girls who play rough are being "vicious", girls aren't good in math, girls who put their hands up too often in class are "intimidating." These are just her early lessons. Later ones focus on sexual roles: learning that when someone '"tries to feel her up," she should take it as a joke, that women always say they don't want sex but they really do, that men who look at a woman's body are not seeing her as a person. Anna reaches her college years with a sense of fear, the sense she is waiting, somehow incomplete, and the conviction that she is visible only as an object not as an individual.

I ask again what Anna learned. Several boys put up their hands. Without being acknowledged, one says, "She felt bad when she was told not to put her hand up too often in class." I ask what lesson is conveyed by the teacher who tells her this. Before the class can think about this, Curtis, whom I know to be a high achiever, speaks out. Ignoring my question and Sittenfield's inference he says, "What's so unusual about that? It happens to me all the time." 2 *I explain that just because a male has had a similar experience is not sufficient reason to say it does not matter to the female. Another male voice takes over, "Well, this girl may have had a hard time, but that doesn't mean all girls experience the same thing." No, it doesn't. But let's look at the issue from Anna's viewpoint as a girl, I say. "I think she was just weak," says one of the boys. "She couldn't take reality so she got depressed." I realize that I have fallen into the trap of my conditioning, accepting the boys' answers before giving a single female a chance to respond. Although one or two admit that Anna's story was "sad," for the most part the boys adopt a rationalizing and patronizing position, refusing to try to put themselves into Anna's shoes. Some of the girls may want to speak, but they say little, probably because I don't encourage them enough. I struggle to conduct the discussion in a reasoned, non-confrontational way. But Anna's 'lessons' are never given consideration or even clearly identified. They are ignored, subsumed by the personal comments of the boys whose defiant voices make real their experiences and devalue Anna's. The discussion deteriorates into an argument between me and two or three very vocal boys at the end of the oval. The girls remain mostly silent.*

Stonewalled. (Edited fieldnote, December 15, 1993)

I read the journals written in response to "Your Life as a Girl" questioning whether it was my ineptness as a facilitator that had allowed the boys to overtake the discussion and whether their apparent insensitivity to the character, Anna, was genuine. Their responses on Anna's life range from grudging sympathy for her situation to outright disbelief in her credibility:

> I found "Your Life as a Girl" ... a depressing story of one girl's life. To say, however, that the incidents which happen around this girl are true for all girls, I believe to be false .... (Colin)

> Curtis Sittenfield was lead to believe that her main goal in life was to please men. This also included the implied judgement that women were inferior. These are both mythological ideas because even though there will be a 'boundary line' between men and women a person's sex has nothing to do with how well they can do.... (Patrick)

While Patrick speaks positively about the present status of women as he perceives it, he chooses to completely ignore the woman's point of view as it is revealed by the writer. He has not heard her. Hank's comments reflect assumptions and generalizations that are not supported in the article. By making them Hank is also able to dis-

regard Anna's experience, thus invalidating it: "... *every negative thing* that happened to this girl was *directly attributed* to sexism ... I find it hard to believe that *all the bad things in life* happen because of gender" (italics mine).

To their credit, the boys, as any readers might be, are suspicious of personal experience that purports to be universal. Sittenfield, however, does not generalize although she uses the pronoun 'you' throughout the story, leading the reader (if female) to compare her own experiences with Anna's. Evidently the boys read the story entirely as bystanders, a role they are quite unused to after years of reading about male protagonists. Unable or unwilling to empathize with Anna, they come to the generalized conclusion that all women blame all their problems on all men. It is not surprising then that several entries reflect the boys' scepticism, their conviction that Anna's difficulties as a female are 'mythological.' Their lack of compassion for Anna is disturbing:

> It seems to me that she found out early that the world works this way. She found out and continued to push against the conventions of ordinary life more than she tried to adapt. (Jeff)

> Anna wasn't emotionally strong and some of those lessons were a joke....What I did not like about the piece was that men were always catalysts in something negative hap-

> pening to Anna. I personally do not think the gender gap is as wide as this article believes [sic] it to be .... (Alex)

Possibly the boys' disbelief can be attributed as much to their ignorance of what girls may go through as to their own denial. But it is difficult to accept this explanation when so many of their comments reveal apparent disregard and lack of compassion bordering on dismissal for the concerns of females. No entry seems to reflect this more strikingly than Adam's:

> In response to "Your Life as a Girl" a phrase comes to mind: "Shit happens." I'm not a girl so I can't really speak intelligently about this subject .... I am inclined to wonder if this story is really true to life for a large population of girls.... (Adam)

My first reaction to Adam's apparent intolerance was anger. But my responses to the entries of individuals is filtered through what I know as a teacher about each, sometimes merely impressions based on classroom behaviour, but sometimes very personal aspects of a student's private life. For instance, Adam is a young man whom I know has watched his younger brother battle a life threatening disease and who personally displays thoughtfulness, good conduct and great integrity. I know him to be gentle, non-judgemental and tolerant. Decontextalized, his remark at first sounds callous and uncaring but his choice of the phrase, "I am inclined to wonder..." softens its

harshness. Could his phrase "Shit happens" mean simply that all people have troubles? If so, is he being sexist in any significant way? Or, is he simply displaying genuine unawareness, lack of contact with women's feelings? In contrast, Jeff, who says that Anna "continued to push against the conventions of ordinary life more than she tried to adapt" may truly believe that girls should accept the traditional role of female without resistance and is in that sense displaying sexist thinking. His assumption that females should adapt or acquiesce to sexist stereotypes reflects ignorance about the degree of injustice women experience and may be a product of what he has been taught. Although several times throughout the course Jeff vehemently maintained that he was not sexist, he reacted with anger, both to me and to other female participants, if challenged during class discussions for particularly sexist remarks or for denigrating the opinions of the girls.

Curtis displays some compassion toward Anna but also reveals a characteristic defensiveness that emerged as the class moved forward. Here his comment on girls in math was, I think, coloured more by his own intense desire to be one of the top students than by his desire to deny girls equity:

> I think this story is very sad ... but I don't know if this girl is a reasonable statistic ... I do know however that all things are not perfect for males either.... And where the hell does it say that girls aren't allowed to be good at

> math. Take a look at contest winners from this school and you might be surprised who has won.... (Curtis) 3

Of all the boys, Byron seems to ponder most carefully the words of the article, making an attempt to understand Anna. His comment shows apparent empathy for her anc for all females:

> ...when a girl feels that she can be only a slut or a matron, it is incredible waste and injustice. Females aren't privileged to live on this earth, they own and share it with men. The essay shows how many girls feel empty inside because they are different than what seems to be the governing force. (Byron)

It is characteristic of several of the boys to avow that they do not believe in gender inequity, yet their words repeatedly belie acceptance, even justification, of the inferior status of women. Several reject sexism as the underlying cause of the difficult experiences Anna went through, even though the article described her having her breasts pawed in the hallways at school, being physically humiliated and frightened by a young man who sat on top of her, holding her down and washing her face in the snow, telling her to "suck it up" when she protested. Maybe, having learned to be physically tougher, the boys simply cannot imagine that a girl could really suffer because of such treatment. They either do not understand or cannot accept that such acts create fear in women or that they derive

from the sexist indifference of males to women's feelings.

In contrast, the passages the girls wrote reveal the depth of their identification with Anna's experiences. The responses of Linda, Carleen, Christina, and Kleo reflect anger as well as pain and resistance to the reality Anna brings to light.

> I could relate...everywhere from playing four square to lowering my math grade when I reached grade 8. (Linda)

> Reading it seemed as if someone had pried open my mind and taken out expressions I could never put into words .... (Carleen)

> ... girls are called vicious instead of competitive or they are being "bitchy" when they stand up for themselves. Incidents like these make me very angry and this story shows how they can seriously mix up a girl's personal identity .... (Christina)

> I hated it, her elementary years sound like mine but I hate her life and thoughts. She gets less and less assertive in these stupid situations. I feel sick.... (Kleo)

Sittenfield's article obviously struck a chord with these girls, presenting images of sexism that they may or may not have been

aware of but were definitely unwilling to admit existed. Some, like Rebecca, seemed taken by surprise by Anna's account and left me wondering if it was fair of me to disturb their naive security:

> ... a real eye opener for me. I didn't even notice half the things in my life that were stereotyping me as a female . ... we have to start noticing. (Rebecca)

As she reads the article, Holly recognizes Anna as the the grim reflection of herself:

> ...a terribly accurate fiction ... the author revealed an evolution of female "acceptance" by including the grandmother, "The women admit their natural inferiority" ... the "shame" of being female transmits into insecurity ... Some of the things she says seem like they are coming out of my own mouth. (Holly)

Looking at the girls' responses not only reveals the greater significance of Anna's story to the females but also puts specific remarks of the males into a different perspective. What is most noticeable is that the girls understood Anna in a way that the boys could not or would not. Alex who said, "What I did not like about the piece was that men were always catalysts in something negative happening to Anna," was unable to accept that in the specific incidences related by Anna men indeed had been catalysts for development of her negative feelings about herself. Whereas the boys

saw all Anna's experiences as similar and mostly insignificant, the girls identified with specific experiences. They did not once question the reality Anna set out for them although several mourned their recognition of their lives in hers. For the most part the boys assessed the story whereas the girls related to it. With different life experience to guide them, such disparate responses, though possibly predictable and understandable, provide sad evidence of how little meaningful communication about their feelings is occurring between girls and boys as they grow up. By the time they have reached the high school classroom, males and females exist in almost separate spheres.

To explore further the power of socially constructed gender roles, I asked the class to think back over their growing years and to describe how and from whom they had learned their own gender lessons. Again speaking with intensity and great detail, Kleo and Carleen describe the activities in which they engaged while growing up:

> Female, female, female - this is my tag - my label and automatically certain things are expected of me. I avoided those typical behaviours as a child but after puberty you start to wonder if you are normal for not giggling and flirting and looking pretty to other people.... I mastered the art of the five hour phone call, manicures, finding bras that fit without hurting, codes to communicate about your

period without being made fun of, how to avoid competing with other girls, and a million stupid things that need evaluating now. They make me feel stupid. Things like giving up on opening jar lids and handing them to the nearest guy - stronger than me or not. Or dropping a sexist argument and trying not to care. Or pretending to be the soft pretty girl into woman-child every guy likes. I've sort of given up. All except that damn looks/body obsession... I try to keep it simple but I fuss and complain. (Kleo)

Similar to Anna, I was a tomboy. I loved to climb trees, play with cars, and fight. My development to femininty was a very slow one. I was always flat chested and could run and swim faster than any boy. This caused me to be accepted as a boy for a lot of my childhood. From the ages of six to twelve I walked around in a grungy pair of shorts, or a very boring and not figure flattering bathing suit, and at home just a T-shirt. My relatives would constantly tell me, "Now that's not something a girl should do" or "That's not what a girl wears." Or they would make an extra big deal whenever I wore a dress or skirt, "My, don't you look positively stunning, doesn't she," then hold me up like a piece of meat for all to 'ooh' and 'aah' at. My body meant nothing to me except a mode to escape from a fight with a boy, or to chase him and pummel him for awhile. Fighting, and screaming, and running was as familiar to me as dolls

were to 'normal' girls. The boys were my friends and comrades while the girls were too clean and fragile. I'm not sure how it happened or really when but, like Anna, gradually the boys started to pull away from me, harassing each other about being beaten by a girl, or getting accused of being a girl lover. I started to notice changes in myself, my legs were getting longer and starting to let me down. I was getting clumsy and awkward, even my emotions started to change. I was no longer a boy.... No longer could I saunter around with a boyish lope, I walked carefully and dignified as if each step had to be carefully planned as if walking along a very steep and narrow path. I became insecure and ashamed of myself, and when I was abused by a male I didn't tell anyone, and when I did I was told it was my fault and I was a slut. So I forgot about it for a long time. Often after that I would let things go and stay silent because I was scared of not being listened to again. (Carleen)

About learning a female role Holly says,

... when I was really young, I learned the 'basics' of a woman's role by watching my mother. I learned that she stayed home and cleaned, she made dinner, she took care of the kids. When we needed someone... she was the maid/nanny. Through her relationship with my father I learned that he was the

> decision maker because he made the money.... The most prominent thing I think I've ever learned is to be nice. Nice to me meant sacrifice... I gave my cookies away to Jeremy because he wanted them and lied to someone if they hurt me accidentally because I didn't want to hurt their feelings. I even wore clothes my mom liked that I hated so that I wouldn't hurt her feelings. (Holly)

What powerful stereotypes the girls have learned: the "'basics' of a woman's role" in which mothers stayed home, cleaned, made dinner, took care of the kids. What trivialities young women have been encouraged to adopt: "five hour phone calls," and codes to communicate. Significant in all three of these passages is the enormous giving over of self to others. Carleen 'was' a boy, with all the freedom and potent energy of a boy, until she had to let go that power. Kleo gave up her agency, even in small matters like opening jars, to males, and Holly gave up personal desires in order to be nice. This genderizing of powerlessness is a phenomenon which must surely account for the vague sense of loss, the inherent helplessness and incompetence to which so many girls fall victim by the time they are young women. The insidious implications of their learning to be nice no matter what it feels like, of becoming "insecure and ashamed" remind me too much of my own "education" as a girl. The equation of niceness with sacrifice, as Holly so aptly puts it, captures the female condition as it has remained for centuries.

Over and over again the journal excerpts of both the girls and the boys reflect bedrock beliefs about differences between the sexes that have the potential to impact negatively on their lives:

> From as long as I can remember, I've had a behaviour which is different from my sisters... not what I was born with but what I've been taught. When punished [my sisters and me] we'd all get spankings but I felt my dad used more aggressive words with me than my sisters. In elementary school the rest of the boys and myself always seemed to be sent out of the room for 'disturbing the class.' Boys were always more rambunctious using more physical actions. The girls always seemed only to chatter all the time. (Colin)

> I believe that because women are brought up with expectations that they will be more caring and sensitive than men, women do tend to discuss feelings and show emotion much more than men will. So I guess that I've learned to be open and care about others, and also that it is more acceptable for males to be violent. (Christina)

> In my family I would have to say that gender is an issue. Although my father does treat my sisters and I equal, I can see my mother leaning towards my sister's side of things. Seeing this I have learned to consult my father more often

than my mother, because I get a more reasonable answer which seems fair most of the time... I have found in the family it's best to deal with my father, cause my mother doesn't seem to understand me as well. (Todd)

Equally powerful but significantly more likely to be empowering are the lessons learned by the boys: that fathers use "more aggressive words" and give "a more reasonable answer" than mothers when consulted, that boys are "rambunctious," whereas girls seem "to chatter all the time" and it is "acceptable" for men to be violent. What tactics can a teacher use to expose the power imbalances embedded in such assumptions as these?

I am at home writing my comments on the journal originals and selecting passages for the students to read in tomorrow's class. I am deeply affected by the statements of some of these girls. I know them - thought I knew them - and now I am wondering if the course is too late. How will they move beyond the deep seated inferiority echoed by their words? Will I be able to dislodge the pessimistic assumptions upon which the self images of so many of them are built? The boys - what can I say - I wonder if they will be able to look beyond the 'lessons' inherent in their upbringing. What has obscurred their (in)sight so much that they are unable to describe their own masculinity except in objective unimpassioned words and unable to admit to the sexism inflicted upon girls? (Edited fieldnote, December 16, 1993).

The boys were vocal, quite justifiably, in stressing that it is not just girls who suffer the difficulties of growing up. Curtis reveals this vividly:

> I did learn when I was older though (through a process of much teasing and name calling) that boys didn't play the flute. It wasn't only boys that made fun of me for choosing the flute to play in school band, I was called a 'fairy' by girls too. Some of the very girls that are in this class with you now. Maybe you should consider this. I also learned, through females, that grade 8 basketball players that had to play, reluctantly, 'skins' (no shirt) at a practice, were expected to be muscular in the chest and arms and not be chubby around the stomach. This by the same girls that I sit beside in your English class. I do not blame them, though I still (four years later), refuse to take my shirt off in front of anyone but my family and my girl friend. (Curtis)

Curtis is understandably defensive as he describes the personal embarrassments he endured, especially as a teen. There is no question that he is the victim of the same stereotyping that dictates to the girls what they should look like. But on the surface the experiences of many males and females sound as if they have more in common than they really do. Curtis also says,

> I'm not sure just when I learned how to be male or female (sic) or how I learned it. I liked war toys more than dolls but I slept with a toy bear for so many years that it's embarrassing. My parents never told me what to like, I somehow must have decided for myself. (Curtis)

Perhaps Curtis was unconsciously initiated into liking war toys and learning to be a boy but, regardless, he perceives himself to have been free to decide unlike Holly who wore clothes to please her mother's taste. Can reading these passages possibly convey to the students the significance of this perception? Why despite his embarrassments, can a boy like Curtis feel this freedom while a female often feels "stupid" and must walk "carefully and dignified" as if "walking along a very steep and narrow path"? Apparently both boys and girls have learned to act in traditionally assigned roles. But what significant differences in their acquisition of their perceptions of self-image have resulted in the girls' learning fear and inadequacy whereas boys, despite their embarrassments, learn strength and competence from essentially similar life experiences? What can a teacher do or say that will encourage both males and females to appreciate the gender concerns of the other sex?

I distribute the typed journal excerpts I have selected for the class to read, labelled only "male" or "female," although in most the sex of the writer is evident. Silence blankets the group as they absorb the words. I wonder what I have done to the entries by fragmenting them,

tampering with their flow. Have I been arbitrary in selecting the quoted passages? Of course, I have. I have deliberately selected lines that reveal discrepancies, contradictions, bias. Will these examples awaken critical reflection? How much do the students appreciate the poignancy of the confessions, especially those of the girls? Can they discern the subtle differences between the very similar sounding accounts of female and male experiences? Do they hear the male voices denying the female reality? Do they even listen to the female voices? Do they recognize the aggrieved tone of the males as they defend their gender in contrast to the resignation of the females as they describe theirs? What effect will the words of their own friends have in getting beneath the obscurring dialogue during classes?

I cannot tell whether or not we getting anywhere. All I can do is pass out the next articles and introduce the exercises I've planned. My attempts to mediate discussion lead to the accusation that I "shoot down" everything the boys want to say. I ask if they want to discuss the journal excerpts. Carleen says flatly, "No. In case there would be put downs." Is she afraid that some students might recognize her comments? No one challenges her statement. I think they are silenced by her tone of finality so I just leave it. Besides, it is finally Christmas break. (Edited fieldnote, December 17, 1993)

Resistances and revelations

Christmas holidays over, on the first day back after the long

break I felt nervous all over again. There would be no second chances to collect data, to make an impact. I began by projecting an image on screen that can be interpreted as an old woman with a kerchief or as a beautiful young woman with a necklace, depending on how one at first 'sees' it. Two students said they knew about the exercise and agreed not to take part until the rest had responded. A show of hands confirmed that about half saw the old woman, about half the young woman. Once everyone could finally see both pictures, we talked about the perception shift needed to 'see' the image that had at first been 'invisible' to the viewer. I connected this exercise to the concept of a paradigm shift. I suggested that looking at gender issues from a new perspective requires a paradigm shift for both sexes.

In the next few days I moved the class on to comparison of the theories of nurture versus nature as explanations of how gender roles are determined. [4] We then moved on to the engendered nature of language. [5] I asked whether or not the students believed that language has the power to shape our attitudes and perceptions about the sexes. Their opinions varied but most expressed scepticism. They argued that it should not matter what words you use if you don't "intend" to be sexist. I assigned them to work in groups to brainstorm all the names for males and all the names for females that they could think of, no holds barred. This exercise produced a lot of laughter. Everyone seemed happy to have my permission to use crude language. Some lists contained words I had not heard, such as 'pouchmonster' and 'poptart' for males, and 'MacDaddy Ho' for females. As I observed their progress

in attempting to classify the words into categories, I listened for assumptions about meanings and directed them to check word origins in their dictionaries. They were surprised that 'ho' originates from 'hooker.' There was a roar of laughter when one group admitted that they had classified it under 'objects' because they had spelled it 'hoe.' Around the room other classifications like 'toy' , 'food', 'animal', and 'vegetable', and 'positive' and 'negative' sexual references were identified. The problem of classification led to much debate. But there was general agreement that the predominant number of terms for males are weighted with status and social acceptance. Even pejoratives such as 'stud' can become compliments for males within peer groups, whereas the lists for females tended to be longer and the pejoratives such as 'slut,' 'cunt,' 'roadkill,' and 'dead fuck' are more numerous, more damning, more socially loaded for women. We discussed the mutability of language which allowed us to use some words as positive that once had had negative connotations, or apply to both sexes a word that once had been gender specific. We discussed the power of language to create stereotypes. Reactions to the group exercise on language produced enthusiastic journal comments.

> You probably noticed I really enjoyed the group work where we had to come up with positive and negative names given to men and women. These kinds of activities are what keep me thinking about society and the cultural expectations of men and women.... (Holly)

> ...this class has made me more conscious of sexist comments and actions around me. For example, I don't like to hear guys call girls 'chicks' and I've started to wonder if I'm being sexist if I call men 'sir' at work - but women 'mam' - is there anything sexist about 'madam' or 'mam'? (Christina)

We are discussing answers to my question sheet "A Sexist Baker's Dozen." [6] *We are arguing about whether or not 'tomboy' and 'sissy' are sexist terms. Reactions are mixed but I am having trouble getting across the idea that comparisons of male and female are always based on the criteria for what is or is not 'male.' I explain that being female is about being female, which is different than being 'not male.' I feel myself becoming more and more frustrated as I struggle to explain that definitions alone affect images of women even before we look at social situations and relationships. Everyone in the class seems to want to raise objections today. Jeff and Rebecca see nothing wrong with calling a girl a 'tomboy.' The idea that women are identified and rated against a male model is not sinking in. I hear myself becoming more and more strident, more authoritative as my frustration mounts. I remind them of one of the assigned articles that compares dictionary definitions of 'manly' and 'womanly' - if you bothered to read it, I snap in exasperation.* [7]

Jeff challenges me: He says there is too much "tension" in the class. This "tomboy crap" is really getting to him. Across the room, his

girlfriend, Kleo speaks up to stress that we should keep the conversation "reasonable." Suddenly the tables begin to buzz and the focus of the discussion becomes blurred. I know I am becoming more confrontative. I am less and less able to keep from lecturing. Damn it, they may be listening but they are just not hearing! I am infuriated by the boys' tactic of shutting down any conversation they disagree with by outshouting their opposition. I am angry with myself for reacting to their rudeness. I hand out more articles about words and their power. Impulsively I reject my planned journal topic and scrawl on the board for tonight's entry: What is your reaction so far to this class? What have you learned up to now? (Edited fieldnote, January 10, 1994)

Reading my notes so long after the fact I criticized myself for my ineffective emotionalism. I wondered how I might have handled the class better. A different exercise, a clearer way of illustrating the effects of language in limiting females? But I also came face-to-face with my own powerful resistance to sexism.

It seems this heated session had hit a few nerves amongst the students too. Asking them to critique our progress after this particular class opened a floodgate. I acknowledge that my choice of journal topic was the product of my own dissatisfaction with our interactions, but it did produce useful information about subcurrents of concern that were flowing beneath the surface of our discussions. Hurt egos and high resistance were undermining critical thinking. Jeff, Todd and Rebecca at this point revealed great resistance, even

hostility, to recognizing the existence of gender inequities, against looking closely at how they affect society, and against me for asking them to look:

> I'm ... concerned with your biased nature in this class. I often wonder if the women are comfortable to express themselves just because they all know that you're on their side. Where does that leave the males? They are almost certain not to express their concerns about their problems - they'll be too busy defending themselves.... (Jeff)

> You began to dwell on... how to say someone acts like the opposite sex without saying it and people got confused and frustrated...I don't think very many of us cared how to say it.... I am against politically correct flattening of our language....We would have been much more interested in discussing our feelings on comparing the sexes instead of worrying about how to properly discuss it. (Rebecca)

Rebecca has missed the point. She is still thinking in terms of individuals acting "like the opposite sex" without questioning the prescription of set behaviours to men and women. She has not accepted that calling a girl a 'tomboy' is pejorative. That she does not care how something is said obscures the examination of why it is said and of the effects of saying it.

Todd who feels "trashed" is clearly having some difficulty just understanding one article he has been reading, for he says, " To start off the paper men are compared in the same category as the uterus in rats and guinea pigs! He has obviously misunderstood the opening lines of an article I asked the class to read, entitled, "Man as a False Generic." Its opening paragraph reads:

> Generic terms, like rats and guinea pigs are equally applicable to a class or group and to its individual members. Terms used of a class or group that are not applicable to all its members are false generics. The reason the research-report title quoted above sounds incongruous is that men in context is a false generic. This was not always so.... 8

Kleo's comment focusses on the class in a more general way. It suggests that there was more behind her words than merely anger at me:

> This class isn't teaching me anything I wasn't already aware of. What I do get is a constant reminder of how I may be stereotyped for the rest of my life. I don't need that reminder everyday. It reinforces my thinking as a victim....The males in this class are respectful and accepting of girls as whoever and whatever she [sic] chooses to be. I hardly believe that outside of school they

> turn into a Mr. Hyde of sexual discrimination....They don't need to be told over and over that their sex is an evil aggressor anymore than I need to be told that all girls are victims. (Kleo)

Kleo first says that she already knows enough about gender inequities to call herself a victim, but she insists that the boys in the class are non-sexist. Her contradiction is evidence of confusion and resistance to the possibility that sexism may affect her relationships within her group of friends in the class. She takes our discussions very personally, defending herself and the boys and blaming her discomfort on "constant reminders." She is not at this time ready to consider that awareness "of how she may be stereotyped" has the potential to empower her to avoid being victimized. Nor will she accept that "respectful and accepting" boys like those she knows may behave in sexist ways.

In these angry outbursts, the students directed their frustrations mainly at me as a voice of authority that must be challenged. But I suspected that they were likely just as much motivated by the resistance they were experiencing against new and oppositional ideas about gender relations. Jeff's comment on my "biased nature" and Kleo's defense of the boys against being told "over and over again that their sex is an evil aggressor" suggest their reluctance to accept the evidence of sexism exposed daily in the class assignments and discussions.

Resistance intensified in each succeeding class for several days. The boys and even some of the girls produced denial after denial: It's not like that. You're just a man hater. We know stereotypes aren't real so they don't mean anything. Women can do anything they want - they just have to do it. You think men suck. Finally it came down to their insistence that my position on women's oppression was just an opinion and that no one person's opinion was any more right than another's. I had a difficult time confronting the notion that, good or bad, reasonable or illogical, any opinion has equal weight to any other. The extreme relativism underlying this notion leads us close to the nihilistic position in which a positive idea is of neither greater nor lesser value than its complete opposite. I was struck by the irony that so many students could argue this way, while at the same time tenaciously clinging to the conviction that males are really superior to females.

I took great care to clarify the difference between un-substantiated opinion, based on personal taste or likes or dislikes or hearsay, and informed opinion based on the weighing of evidence. I wanted to convey the notion that gender bias is based on the former kind and that as such it is logically unjustifiable. One student responded that if enough people hold an opinion it becomes 'true.' I argued that it might become accepted but this did not in any way ensure that it was worthy of acceptance. I cited the fascist opinions of Hitler and Mussolini regimes as examples. We wrangled for some time, the boys vigorous in their attempts to show us they were right.

It was tough going. It had become little more than a power struggle.

Jeff's criticism that I was unfair to the boys in discussions raised nagging questions about my choices of topics, about taking an anti-sexist position, and about my skills in handling discussion. I believe I challenged unsupported opinion from all the students, whether male or female. Was it "biased" to point out to the boys their sexist statements and judgements? Was it "trashing" to ask them not to interrupt when the girls were speaking? Were the boys' criticisms legitimate or were they evidence of their own dissatisfaction with their location in the dialogue? An even more critical concern is why were the girls so defensive of the boys? Their fear of offending their male counterparts seemed to emphasize the traditional behaviour of females who defer to the male ego knowing that this may be the only way to preserve their own security and acceptance in a male world.

The boys' resistance to the notions I was presenting was no surprise, but I became aware of my growing impatience and frustration in coping with it. The vocal criticisms of the males in the class almost caused me to overlook another area of resistance emergent in a small number of journals. A few of the the girls and even one or two boys were beginning to voice their opposition to the powerful ways women are described, limited and even proscribed by societal structures. Carleen's response embodies the confusion that arises for the girls as they recognize that sexual discrimination is at work in their lives. She expresses her anger but at the same time is

afraid to offend the boys she has known for so long:

> I think that many guys feel very threatened by what we are discussing and I think that the girls are quite scared to voice their opinions, I know that I am. I think that this class has really made me become aware of how victimized girls have been, but at the same time I want the males to know that I do not blame them for this victimization unless they were a direct cause of it. (Carleen)

A few responses did surprise me. I had not so far been convinced that much critical thinking was going on during our class wranglings. But comments by certain individuals suggest that many, Louise and Byron for example, were making their way along a difficult trail. Had my objectivity not become so unfocussed by the angry responses of the other students, I might have taken heart from these comments:

> I love the tension filled discussions and the headbutting debates. Sometimes I find myself having to hold myself back from jumping out of my seat to strangle someone.... Being in this class has made me feel a "victim" more than ever. I had never pictured myself as being in any way inferior to men but sometimes even superior to some. Reading these articles and definitions I find myself looking at society a different way .... After reading the definitions of "manly" and "womanly" in the dictionary I

was apalled but then I realized I am also part of the problem.... (Louise)

I have found that we have been able to turn a seeming spec of dust into a controversial gender role argument or discussion. I have learned so far that the way I see things to be is not the only picture on the screen. (Byron)

But even Julie's statement that "If English class were to stop right now I would leave with thoughts of how shall I raise my children" was not enough to give me confidence that I was on the right track with these young people. For several classes the magnitude of the boys' resistance became my dominant focus as I went each day into what seemed to have become a battlefield with few allies in sight. My own journal entry after this class reflects a lot of my frustration and more than a little self-pity!

Reflecting on today's class, I feel responsible. I am frustrated that I cannot seem to escape my pattern of controlling the discussion. But I want the class to go further than just passively accepting that gender inequity exists, or worse, denying that it exists at all, especially amongst themselves. The students think I am inflicting my opinion(s) - in this case the opinion that male domination has caused the gender imbalances we are struggling with in today's world- on them when what I want to accomplish is that they see the difference between opinion based on personal preference or ignorance, and opinion based

on logical, fair and reasoned examination of the facts. Can we as a group ever get past the defensiveness, nitpicking, trivializing and denial to some real substance?

How can these kids examine their opinions if they are not told some facts, challenged when they use sloppy expressions and generalizations, and angered or moved into some action by their discoveries? Maybe I'm trying to do too much work for them. So far I've found the articles, I've run them off, I've designed the questions to be asked. All they have to do is respond in class and write in their journals. But Jeff and Curtis and Hank say that I'm forcing MY OPINION on the boys.

I can feel the power of the feminist agenda that seems to push itself forward whenever I approach the class with a new aspect of the gender problem. I feel it in myself and I sense it beginning to assert itself within some of the girls as I listen to them speak out in the class and as I read their journals. It is fed by every remark made by a girl who unwittingly accepts the status quo and every statement of every boy who argues from the position of male privilege. It clashes with my desire to be liked by the students. And it makes me impatient with them. After all these are kids just trying to find their own way on a difficult path.

I feel my energy being drained. I think what disturbs me most is that I feel myself to have little more credibility with the males than any of

the other females in the room. I am as frustrated as the girls that the boys don't seem to want to listen to us. I catch myself being as stridently insistent on being heard as some of the girls are. And the boys appear to be calmer and so much more assured of their positions no matter what topic we are discussing. This all sounds so childish. After all, I'm the adult here. Or, am I still the schoolgirl (re)experiencing reactions that I have already learned to a male dominated conversation? It's as if I am (re)living my past experience as a female student- feeling the same insecurities, the same vague sense of rage that I felt years ago in university. What business have I in believing that I can effect a change to patterns of thinking for my students when those same patterns have been entrenched in my own subconscious throughout my life? How can I hope to change centuries of collective consciousness about patriarchy in three weeks? Who am I to try to swim upstream? I feel like chucking the whole venture. I'm exhausted. (Edited fieldnote, January 11, 1994).

These notes, looked at from the distance of several months, reveal more than the self-indulgent frustration, uncertainty and weariness that I was feeling that January day. They reflect contradictory elements of assertiveness and insecurity affecting my multiple role in the classroom. Why was I feeling so unreasonably angry and defeated? Was it partly because of who I am, where I have been in my life? Surely my teaching experience should serve to override such insecurities? Was it because I was refusing to accept the right of individual students to their own responses, their own

particular struggles with the material? Was I assuming an inflexible position of being 'right' that constructed the obstacle of bias? I had to face the truth that feelings about my position amongst males that I believed I had outgrown or buried forever seemed to surface in the classroom. I could feel myself losing my ability to remain objective, to react without becoming defensive and aggressive. Were my reactions merely childish emotionalism or were they legitimate responses to stimuli that are triggered for many girls and women in confrontative situations that arise with males, especially when the topic is gender relations.

I spent sleepless nights assessing my role as researcher, as teacher, as female. I questioned whether I had gone beyond challenging the students to invading their intellectual and emotional space. I realize now how much I had been focussed on convincing them to change their attitudes rather than allowing them to struggle with new ideas in their own ways and in their own time. Yet I found no easy solutions for overcoming their resistances or my own.

Margins and silences

We had covered a lot of territory, more than half of the way through the unit. At this point, I decided to introduce the notions of visibility and invisiblity, of marginalization, exclusion and silencing. We discussed the ways people could be 'invisible' to others and the sources of power which can create invisibility and silencing. The

class had no problem identifying the kinds of individuals who seem to disappear in society, the handicapped, the aged, the poor. We expanded the list considerably after more discussion and talked about the concept of privilege as it applied to ourselves, members of a socially upscale mostly white community. It is worthy of note that none among these predominantly middle-class students went beyond this limited scope to issues of class and race except in the briefest way, possibly because for this group, such issues were simply less visible. We identified the institutions that hold power in society and the overwhelming majority of males in positions of authority. The students read articles about the absence of females in Canadian history books, the imbalance of history courses focussing on men's and women's accomplishments. [9]

We talked about the effects and the victims of marginalization. We looked for examples of silencing. Finally, I asked for a personal response to the topic, "Have you ever been marginalized or made to feel invisible? If so, describe your feeling about the experience." I did not attempt to prescribe what I wanted in this journal by asking for the relationship between marginalization and silencing. I wanted the students to respond to the topic as they understood it.

Journals on this question ranged from half a page to five pages in length. Many students recalled being compared to others more capable or important, or being ignored as children, or being excluded by a group of friends. But the question seemed to have a different

significance for the girls than for the boys. For the most part, the boys spoke of situations in which they had lost face as in Jeff's comments:

> Often when girls sit around and discuss how certain or several men treated them badly it's like they sometimes resent me for being a man.... (Jeff)

Colin describes having to do the dishes with his sisters at a home party and being ridiculed by his uncles and made to feel like one of the women. Alex talks about a time when he was slighted at a party by a girl he liked:

> There was a big party ... Because he was drunk a person from the so-called "in" crowd was talking to me as if he were my best friend. I shouldn't have but I felt socially cool for some reason. Then it happened. The girl that I had a crush on came in with some more "cool" people. I was nervous in her presence and was stumbling for words ... She started getting into a conversation with my new buddy. They started chatting away leaving me standing there like a road sign ... she made me feel like complete shit. (Alex)

Although Alex's experience of being excluded is limited to a one time event in a social setting, he considers himself to have been ma-

rginalized. He goes on to say, "It was insulting to my morale. I was in a really pissed off but sad mood for the rest of the night....I'm still upset when I even think about it. Damn her! I admit it hurts to be invisible. It hurts a lot."

With considerable belligerance Hank relates marginalization to our class. I can infer that by association I am his target of criticism, an assumption I was even more sure of after reading some of his later entries:

> I believe that I am an outspoken person. I can be loud, obnoxious and just plain rude when I want to make a point or justify my actions. One of the only times I have felt marginalized and when my efforts were trivialized is in this class. Admittedly, this marginalization annoyed and frustrated me tremendously. It makes me feel ignorant, stupid and causes a loss of respect. I do not enjoy it.... (Hank)

Hank seizes the opportunity to let me know how uncomfortable he feels. Do I really feel sorry if he feels he has been made to feel invisible in this class? By his own admission he is used to being "obnoxious" in order to be heard. Perhaps the only way he can come to appreciate the negative effect of being marginalized is to experience it directly. Although the intent of his remarks is ambiguous, it is possible he too understands this. Like Alex, he seems very aware of

the effects on his own ego of being excluded but I am not sure to what extent he can relate these reactions to other people's feelings, in particular those to whom he is "obnoxious."

Curtis minimizes the relationship of his sense of visibity to his being male and attributes it to the security of having male friends - what he does not see is that these are the same:

> I don't believe that I have ever felt invisible, silent or marginalized. This is partly because I am male but not solely. Being male, as long as there are other guys around you always have the lowest common denominator to rely on. (Curtis)

Adam accepts responsibility for his choice to be or not to be invisible but does not question the source of the confidence which permits that choice:

> I don't remember ever being made to feel invisble; if anything there are times when I prefer to be invisible or when I'm silent just because I would rather listen than be heard. Usually in this situation the reason is that I don't feel knowledgeable on a certain topic or that I have any valuable input, so I shut up and listen....If there are any times where I feel invisible or silent it is usually because I've made that choice and that's how I want to feel. I don't

> think you should let others make you feel a certain way. If you want to be heard, speak up. (Adam)

This comment is reflective of a current belief that the individual is entirely responsibility for his/her self-esteem. Adam may not have considered that some people cannot just "speak up," that silencing occurs when individuals are rendered silent by circumstances they feel they cannot control.

Byron is ahead of most of the boys in his attempt to empathize as well as to intellectualize the concept of gender discrimination. He is beginning to question, where he may once have taken for granted, his position in society. This entry reveals a shift in perspective about the source of the rejection women experience.

> I have to say that it is hard to recall a time in which I felt marginalized or invisible. Saying that though seems to make me realize the hidden reason why. Could it be that I have never felt that way because I am male? I fear the answer to that question could be yes. Women in society are in reality not inferior, but are deemed to be by years of patriarchy. It doesn't matter that women are equal in reality, what matters is that they are subconsciously unequal in their minds and ours. If she is in our [sic] minds inferior to me, then how can she make me feel invisible? I in no way feel that I am superior to any human

> being on this planet, but it is a fact that from the day I was born I have been programmed to believe that I am. So I feel that it is not an aspect of my personality that has protected me but an aspect of biology. I am slowly coming to realize how women feel every day of their lives. (Byron)

Byron's attribution to biology of the superior position of men contradicts the notion of a socially constructed gender bias that I had earlier proposed to the class. However, he is making significant progress in attempting to understand the concept of marginalization.

A comparison of what the the boys and girls said on the topic suggests that males experience the humiliation of marginalization in very specific situations which cause them to lose face, particularly in the presence of other males. The boys do not cite the same kinds of experiences and do not appear to understand exclusion or silencing in the same way that the girls do. The self-assurance embedded in the remarks of boys like Adam are not apparent in the comments of many girls. While the development of assertiveness skills can do much to improve individual self-esteem, it is not enough to prevent the marginalization of women in the face of the patriarchal power structures that control society. [11] It is unlikely that women can come out of the shadows solely by sheer force of will. More likely the promotion of the development of self-esteem as if it were a muscle to be toned through exercise or a skill to be acquired by persistent practice allows society to dismiss the problem of exclusion of all

minority groups.

Several girls describe marginalization resulting directly from the deeply ingrained cultural assumption that females are inferior. Julie's words create a classic picture of the exclusion that girls may experience in their years at elementary school:

> Throughout my childhood, elementary school, I never felt equal to the boys. The girls were always on the sidelines watching the boys play soccer. In the rain and cold weather we would stand huddled around each other bickering about how unfair it was. Even if we would ask they would say, "No way, it's our ball, our game," or "Sure" and then picking teams we were left till last. Even the "losers" were picked over us. (Julie)

In this excerpt Julie clearly recognizes the not-so-subtle lesson that girls aren't as good, learned after many daily repetitions by the boys. Her recollection is echoed in Kleo's caustic assessment of a girl's chances to achieve in sports.

> While a guy could prove his worth in sports, it did nothing for a girl. She got little respect or attention or status, good or bad, for it. It was like acquiring a trophy or a new record was forgotten the minute you did it because as far as anyone cares it may never have happened. (Kleo)

Christina describes a specific situation to which most women can probably remember at least one parallel from their own lives. She recalls herself at the age of about nine waiting for a ferry with her best girlfriend. In the lineup two adult males in their twenties verbally harassed the girls, making explicit sexual comments about women and telling them they were "a good excuse for twin beds." Then the men began to throw lit matches at them. No adult in the lineup interfered. On board, after finding seats on one of the long back-to-back benches, Christina was relieved to be away from their harassers until she "felt two heavy people" sit down behind her and turning her head saw "the long jagged scar that characterized one of the men's faces." For the duration of the crossing the men continued to discuss sexual topics in loud voices, letting the girls know that they were aware of their presence. One described in detail masturbating on his resume before giving it to a female boss with whom he had an interview. Although at this point a woman got up and moved to another seat, no adults came to the girls' defence or even spoke to them as they sat frozen to their seats in fear. Marginalizing here was combined with sinister victimization. Christina clearly equates marginalization with victimization. Having extracted from her experiences a justifiable anger which gives her the power to reject such treatment, she displays a strong sense of agency:

> Now, whenever I think of that day, I get so mad to think that they had exposed us to such an ugly and disgusting world when we were so innocent and selfconscious. I wish

> that I could go back to that day right now. I know I would handle it differently. Since then I've experienced various run-ins with crude and vulgar and malicious males and I've learned that what they do is not O.K., that I do have the strength to stand up to it and I have the right to do so. (Christina)

Carleen interpreted the question of silencing in an even more intensely personal way than did Christina. Her entry, which I include in its entirety, exposes the contradictory power of silence/silencing to protect and destroy:

> Silence has caused me pain, confusion, and misunderstanding in the past, and yet now it is one of my most powerful attributes. When I am silent it means two things, I am either mulling over ideas or my voice is trapped somewhere deep in my chest. In the past I thought silence was my only way to survive....My voice betrayed me after I was hurt. I did what my mother, my teachers, and Sesame Street had taught me. I told someone what happened to me and who did it. But from the person I told I received a very different message. I was told to shut up and not say a thing because nobody would ever love a whore. It must have been my fault. Did I ever pay heed. I didn't even know what a whore was let alone want to be one. I became very quiet and at night when my confusion

and pain was overwhelming, I would rock back and forth biting my tongue until it bled. Tears would roll down my cheeks and my body would shake but I wouldn't cry, not a peep, for months my nights were filled with silent sobs. My mother thought I adored to spend hours by myself, but she didn't know that it was because the only time I felt safe was when I wasn't speaking. It was through this silence that I started to write, and every time I had finished writing I would tear the paper into tiny bits and set them on fire, and every time I set the paper alight I felt that I was setting a part of myself alight too. In amongst those ashes were my memories of what had happened. Thoughts too shameful to speak of, and I could barely write them without feeling dirty and guilty. I would wait and watch until the last remaining ash had been swept away by the wind. Everyday my memory became greyer and more distant, my pain began to numb, until the moment had finally been blown clear of my mind. I had remained silent. (Carleen)

Carleen's disclosure is disturbing both in its content and its intensity. In speaking to her about it I found out that she has had counselling for the abuse to which she alludes. I felt that the matter was far from dealt with for her but that I could do no more than to offer her help or at least support. She was willing that the entire passage be typed so that the class might read it. I believe her words

along with Christina's illustrated for the class better than anything I could have said the powerful effects of silencing and marginalization.

Reading Carleen's and Julie's and Christina's journals fills me with pain. I feel helpless to offer Carleen any relief from the anguish she describes. I feel bowed down by the power of the sexism in Christina's story. How much of Julie's life has been determined by her experience as a little girl on the playground? If only the boys will in some way begin to understand the depth of the injustices these girls have lived with just for the simple fault of being female. I find it so hard to accept their cavalier optimism that 'things aren't as bad' as I see them. (Edited fieldnote, January 16, 1994)

Kleo alone resisted the idea of marginalization stating vehemently, "In my mind, no one can make me silent, or can make me feel invisible - unless I allow it... So no. No, no, no. What else can I say?" Although I hope it was genuine, I sense this response was bravado based on Kleo's desire to be in control of some of the intense experiences she was going through when we did this unit, not the least of which was her relationship with Jeff into which another female had become a significant intrusion.

The topic of marginalization lead us fairly naturally to consideration of the terms 'accommodation,' 'agency,' and 'resistance.' We also talked about the pressures associated with being female or male. I asked the students to write about how these ideas related to

their own actions and behaviour with respect to gender relations. The responses reflect some misunderstanding of the terms as well as a great range of focus. Some wrote about personal agency, others about their accommodating behaviours, a few about conscious resistance to discrimination, while others gave voice to their immediate resistance within the course.

Responses differed widely on what 'agency' means, suggesting that the students' senses of it were experientially based and personalized expressions of their successes.

> ... my self esteem gives me my sense of agency. When it comes to my peers (females) I respect them just as they respect me. If they treat me like garbage that's how I will treat them. I have a common respect for everybody until they do something to lose my respect. (Todd)

> I think that it is my striving for further wisdom, creativity, and intelligence that gives me a sense of agency. (Curtis)

> Agency for me comes from the value of my opinions and feelings. When you can express your ideas clearly, you are looked on as credible and valueable. It surprises me the way the presence of females often changes my identity. (Byron)

> My sense of agency comes from being respected by both the guys and the girls. I feel that when I have earned that from both groups it says much more than from only one sex (Kleo).

> What gives me a sense of agency is knowing that I belong to something - that I am needed. (Patrick)

> When I feel like I'm ever being pushed aside or my opinions and feelings ignored, I use my intellect.... Usually, if a sexist comment or joke is said by my guy friends I'll argue with them about it. (Christina)

Louise starts out describing sexist pressures put on her by males but ends up asking a significant question about her accommodating behaviour. Her struggle to resist indicates a growing sense of agency:

> I have had my share of sexual harassment, jokes, and comments. At work when one of my managers had just bought Kentucky Fried Chicken he complained that he had asked for a breast and had got something else. I told him that it was a breast and he quickly said that I wouldn't know what a breast would look like since I have such small ones. He laughed and laughed. I was furious! I guess that when I was younger I never really resisted these

stresses but as I mature I am beginning to find my identity and let people know I will not put up with this kind of treatment. I remember comments and jokes were also cracked towards me by some guys we used to hang around with. The famous "roadkill" chant was sung in my direction and other comments such as "smoke my hawg!" They made rude, vile gestures. I can't believe we hung around them so long. It was mainly to be recognized and thought of as popular. Why should we have to put ourselves through that kind of degrading treatment for popularity? (Louise)

Rebecca's entry reflects difficulty with the notion of accommodation. Here her comments are both ambiguous and contradictory:

The ways that I accommodate to pressures put on me as a female is to ignore them... they are not really noticeable situations like harassment. However, they are still very important because they have so easily slipped into my life without my noticing. An example is the pressure I have given into of looking good for men and measuring myself against how they like me. I have accommodated to the way females are looked down upon when they get mad by ignoring it. It is a hard thing to deal with because it is not a big enough problem to make a point over. I luckily have never really felt ignored or pushed aside because I don't allow it to happen.... (Rebecca)

What some girls would feel as painful, Rebecca simply ignores. Her statements seem to derive from a strong self-esteem that enables her to objectify sexism and thus protect herself from it. She also left me a delightful piece of advice at the end of her entry: "Ms. Dux, don't worry too much about the class, just let it flow."

Carleen's recognition of the accommodation of the girls in the class to what she perceives as the apparent disregard by some of the boys for the girls' views results in a vitriolic, personalized attack focussed on two boys in the group whom she does not name:

> Before [this class] started, myself and some friends were saying, "If we don't get angry and start blaming people, then maybe this can be positive and we can really learn from this class." We felt that in order to get things accomplished and get ideas and feelings listened to, we have to be gentle and nice. Well, we all tried and we still got the same two self-righteous, pompous assholes reacting as if we are discussing matters far too trivial for their liking....the reason why they were off writing their private intellectual puns was because we have been discussing something that will eventually make their masculinity shrink, women's rights. Well boys, deal with it. Women's issues are not going away, and like it or not, even if you poor bastards are sick of listening, you will hear about them many more times as you get older. I can't

> believe that I was actually trying to accommodate. If I'm angry or hurt about something why in the hell should I have to restrain my emotions, I don't give a damn if I'm called a bitch. (Carleen)

After debating with myself about the consequences of such inflamatory comments, I decided to publish the excerpt along with others on this topic as I had been doing all along. I have little doubt that most of the students were able to figure out the identity of the two males. While I might have put her comments aside as inappropriate for public scrutiny, I chose to confront the boys in the class with the rage that some females feel in the presence of males who choose to disregard their ideas. The students said little when they read the excerpts, but a number of students exchanged looks around the room. I hoped that the impact of Carleen's invective would cause students to listen and watch the dynamics of class discussions more critically.

Almost all the boys admit to a clear difference in how they behave around their male and their female friends. They talk about swearing with the guys but watching every word with the girls. Colin admits he wants to impress the girls, be more talkative, more polite. But he says "if I were a girl I'd be outraged at how I am treated so unequally to men." Jeff sees nothing amiss in his dichotomous attitude. His comments emphasize his resistance to letting go of embedded stereotypes about how he should act amongst males and

how he will be viewed for his behaviour with females:

> I am usually the one to catch the spiders. When I walk through the dark with my girlfriend it's usually me who has the responsibility to calm nerves and assure that everything is going to be all right. That's not the way I magically designed it, that's just the way it is - and there is certainly nothing wrong with it. Around females I most certainly act differently (probably even more differently than I imagine) than when I'm around a bunch of guys. I'm less likely to tell a really bad joke (unless we've been drinking) for fear that I might offend them. But you see this is where the problem is. I don't tell disgusting jokes around girls because I think they're not ready for it [but because] I fear the loss of respect. Anyway I wouldn't change the difference if I could. I like the contrast between the two types of conversation. It's appealing. (Jeff)

Jeff was, of all the males in the class, the most unwilling to examine his views for sexist stereotyping. He had so far re-fused to look beyond his small circle of friends to see how women really are treated in society. He continued to insist that women have no need to feel limited by their circumstances. In contrast to Jeff's almost smug satisfaction with the status quo, Hank, revealed great distress:

> I feel like shit. I am not a rapist and I will never abuse my children or any children. I am sickened by everything I have just read. What my male peers wrote, the articles, what females wrote. Everything about this class makes me feel ill. And it's not because I'm sexist and I'm trying to deny it and protect myself. It's because I hate the society in which I live. (Hank)

Hank had up to this point registered little emotion in class. His journal entries had been limited to short, threadbare comments. Here he seems to have clicked into response mode, feeling the accummulated impact of what he was hearing and reading. I felt encouraged by this letting go of the air of indifferent objectivity behind which he had seemed to be hiding.

Extending contexts

Personalizing the topics of accommodation, resistance, and silencing was effective in helping students look inward. But I was not sure if they could shift their attention from their own feelings to gender discrimination in a broader context. What had not come forward in the journals was recognition of the generalized assumption of the inferior status of women by society. In an effort to revisit the notion of marginalization in its broader implications, I introduced Steinem's article on Marilyn Monroe. [10] I chose it partly because it had captured my own interest and imagination. In spite of its somewhat

dated content, Steinem is able to evoke empathy for one woman whose entire life had been scripted by those who saw her as an object, a commodity, a toy or a pet, never looking beneath her physical exterior at the real person. Marilyn is symbolic of all woman silenced, and certainly serves as a reminder of the models of the 'perfect' woman that students see at every turn. The highly publicized image of the stereotypical sex goddess which marginalized her as a woman in the 1960's has evolved but not disappeared in the 1990's.

Though the class had only a hazy idea of Monroe's status in Hollywood and some did not know the circumstances surrounding her tragic and untimely death, they had heard Elton John's song, "Norma Jean," and were intrigued. Their journal responses ranged from compassionate to critical but most give some insight into the progress of their understanding of gender inequity.

Byron's ideas give important clues about the intransigence of sexism. He can recognize the injustice done to women by the elevation of a few to sex star status. But he misses the connection between Marilyn Monroe's position and the men who put her there and puts full re-sponsibility on her for reinforcing the inferiority of all women:

> I realized I had never given any thought to what women think of celebrities such as Marilyn. Women must hate it when female celebrities use sexuality to exploit womanhood. When a person in the eye of the media speaks,

she somehow represents in the minds of the viewers the feelings of everybody. Celebrities who can never be taken seriously demean what it really means to be a woman. I strongly feel that that our identity should come from ourselves, not from a celebrity who can shake her ass and suddenly have the world at her feet. (Byron)

Carleen reveals similar confusion drawing stereotypical derogatory conclusions about Monroe's sexuality while at the same time admiring her as "the ultimate woman." Her choice of the words 'nympho' and 'airhead' emphasize the condemning power of language to stereotype, frequently without the speaker's awareness of the trangression.

I was born long after Marilyn had died and become an untouchable legend. I have always thought of her as a messed up airhead, nympho, but at the same time she was someone I looked up to and revered as the ultimate woman. This makes no sense because she ended up taking her life, and if she was the ultimate woman, what does that say to other girls? (Carleen)

Jeff, who is very knowledgeable about actors and films, speaks here with a sensitivity that had until this point remained unexpressed:

> I honestly never understood the neediness and vulnerability in a woman's feelings about herself. I always saw Monroe as simply a blond sex-symbol who couldn't act and used her body and attractiveness as a cover up. It hurts me to see a woman so abused and exploited by men and the media... This article helped me to see how big the issue of vulnerability and helplessness is to a woman. (Jeff)

This statement appears as a fascinating counterpoint to Jeff's previously inflexible view that "... analysing this problem so deeply is [not] really the answer, not for us anyway... the males and females in our grade are generally equal. I never get caught in the middle of sexism."

Painful and weary steps forward

I am in the copying room running off materials and talking with Kleo. I ask her if she has been holding back lately. She has not been saying much in class or in her journals. Is this, I ask, because your boyfriend, Jeff, is in the class? Are you just trying to keep things smooth between you? Her answer makes me feel terrible,"No. I've already hurt him a lot since this class began." (Edited Fieldnotes, January 20, 1994).

Perhaps the evidence of changes, of movement toward more liberal thinking that I had seen in Jeff's comments and even in Hank's

pained outburst should have buoyed me up at this point in our journey. But for many reasons I felt tired and somehow deeply saddened. What effect was my intervention having in the lives of these students, not just Jeff's and Kleo's, but Hank's and all the others as well? If it was my goal to stimulate changes in their thinking about relations between men and women, did this make me responsible for the conflict or the suffering they encountered in the process? Was I prepared for such responsibility? Does research for praxis by definition require such struggles amongst and by its participants? Surely I had faced my own conflicts up to this point. And now some students were revealing the pain of disillusionment, the anger of recognition, the agony of bad news about relations between men and women.

I sensed a subtle difference in the class, possibly a sort of resignation to the reality of sexism and its impact on us or, perhaps, a beginning of greater understanding. There is no doubt that some students were beginning to soften their attacks against me, to think before reacting to classroom comments but I detected a tired pessimism amongst us.

With a sense of this feeling in mind, I hesitated to distribute the last two articles I wanted the students to read. The first deals with the womens' murders at L'Ecole Polytechnique. [11] The second exposes the sexist war against women being waged by male students at Queens University. [12] I had kept these articles to last wanting to

avoid putting greater emphasis on violence against women than on the more subtle forms of gender discrimination, partly to avoid sensationalism, and partly to avoid overshadowing the more abstract concepts of marginalization and the social construction of gender roles. But these two articles are so powerful that I could not ignore their potential to get through to even the most resistant members of the class. Many students still wanted to believe that they and their age group were free of the bonds of sexist thinking. But these articles clearly expose rampant sexism amongst the college and university men whom many of my students hoped soon to be joining, those whom they believed represented the best and the most enlightened young people in Canada.

The responses I got from both the boys and the girls registered their disgust and outrage at the actions of Marc Lepine and their anger at the males who failed to act at the murder scene, as well as their contempt for the young men at Queens and the faculty who allowed them to harrass and humiliate female students on campus. These reactions were predictable and similar to those one might find amongst the public. I was not surprised by their emotional reactions; in fact, I would have been surprised had they not responded as they did. For several students the vivid, tangible and traumatic events had made clear what I had been trying to reveal but could not. Unfortunately, the girls were getting messages about fear, about the difficult battle for women's rights and about the power of men inherent in the fabric of society.

> ... on Queens campus... I was horrified at the treatment the women received and the general acceptance by the teachers (male mostly) and the school's "hierarchy.' I was terrified for these women... this article made me understand why there is so much anger and frustration built around feminism.... After reading the second article [Montreal Massacre], I was more afraid than ever - afraid of the violence, the anger that is associated with sexism/feminism. (Holly)

Despite their revulsion, some students, the girls in particular, made the important observation that the Lepine case and the behaviour of the men at Queens are pivotal to understanding the depths of misogyny. New to most of them, the term put an intriguing name to what they had begun to recognize:

> I will never defend the action of Marc Lepine or the rituals of the men at Queen's University... their degrading actions and the fact that these actions went unchallenged is a clear sign that women do not hold the respect of a large number of men. (Hank)

> The ignorance and trivialization of the meaning behind the signs posted in the men's dorm at Queens symbolizes a society that is not yet ready to accept that sexist views

still exist... Both articles deal with the way men especially don't want to deal with or admit their sex is mostly benefitting from the present day situation. They always use the comeback that women are generalizing and that there are "nice guys" out there. Sure there are, but that doesn't excuse the violent actions of many men around the world. (Rebecca)

Some men said that they were afraid for women. But the big question is, what are they going to do about it. Complain about the women activists or feminists? (Linda)

The following comments by Stuart, Alex and Misha raised questions in my mind about what messages these boys were taking from their reading and whether our lessons together had had any impact on them at all:

I think that a lot of men show aggression towards women because they are scared. They are scared of change. Men have always been dominant.... Feminists are starting to show that this is unfair and change is starting to take place. A lot of men don't want women to be equal.... I think these men are the ones out abusing the feminists and using their physical strength to cover up their inner weaknesses. (Stuart)

Stuart has correctly identified that it is the "scared" men who are responsible for the backlash against women. But is he in any way able to connect himself with a solution to male aggression against women? Does he see himself in any way responsible for participating in change?

Misha's and Alex's cynical comments are disheartening evidence that for many men self-interest will likely take precedence over any kind of altruistic belief in equality or equity:

> Welcome to the jungle I thought after reading "The Montreal Massacre" and "Sexism and Destiny at Queens" It makes me almost laugh to see the ultimate corruptness of the human mind. Why do I laugh? Because I don't want to deal with the situation and [I] proclaim it non-existent and continue to believe nothing's wrong. Why don't I try to make a difference? Because I'm a coward and dependent upon societal approval and recognition. I don't know how to legitimate my behaviour. (Misha)

> I'm sorry, but if I was there, and this crazy mother_____ [sic] points a machine gun towards me and tells the rest of the men and me to wait outside, you can bet your ass that I'm not going to disagree with this guy and make him feel disturbed. Hell, if he's pointing a pistol at me I'll do what-ever he wants....don't think I'm a chauvanist pig or any-

thing, because I do have remorse and pity for the fourteen women killed ....The killings were a tragedy and it was a definite knock at feminism. (Alex)

Misha rationalizes and generalizes male violence as "the ultimate corruptness of the human mind" rather than considering how he might play an active role fighting it. While Alex cannot be criticised for his genuine fear of finding himself in the face of a violent man with a gun, his attempts to launder his language and his claims of "remorse and pity" appear more like an attempt to be politically correct than a genuine expression of concern. Had either of these boys been affected enough by what we had done in class to accept some of the responsibility for changing their attitudes or those of other men, not just about violence, but about all gender issues? These boys appear to be unprepared to recognize, confront or resist either the social, physical or emotional violence that could very well affect the women who will come into their own lives.

Curtis attributes the failure of the men at L'Ecole Polytechnique to intervene on the behalf of the women to their human weakness. He directs his tolerant comments to the males on the scene, who may very well have been as helpless as the women when confronted by Lepine's gun. But he overlooks the criticism that the article raises against the men of the press who really had the means to wield some influence in the condemnation of violent acts against women but who, on the whole, abdicated their responsibility.

> I feel sick to my stomach when I read this... I don't think that the men who did nothing were sexist, just weak and cowardly. (Curtis)

Though he is somewhat off target, Curtis has nevertheless recognized one significant factor in the gender relations impasse: the cowardliness and acquiescence of men in the face the violence against women.

Carleen's passionate remarks, like those in many of her other entries, emphasize that the realities of women's struggles will remain a continual presence in her own life. It is almost as if increased awareness has become one more cause of her feelings of oppression.

> I hate the fact that for the rest of my life I will have to continually fight against this violence.... Everything seems too painful these days. It seems that I am trying to swim upstream.... things will never change. I guess that saying you can do anything if only you put your mind to it is a load of shit. You know you keep hearing about the fact that white men are no longer at the top of the caste system and that they are the ones being prejudiced against but that is not true, they still hold all the power positions.... (Carleen)

But, in spite of her pessimism, Carleen's powerful sense of the injustices she has experienced may yet help her to overcome the

feelings of hopelessness and move her to resistance. The last words in her passage read:

> I don't know what I have to do now but something definitely must be done. I can't live with what is going on. It is too painful to remember how I have been hurt by males. (Carleen)

The students as researchers

The students devoted the last four days of our time to their presentations of their own findings. Working mainly in pairs they covered a broad range of topics: the effects of fashion on the social position of women through the ages; a comparison of roles for men and women in the medical profession and the limitations for success for women as doctors; the virtual absence of females in the sport of hockey; a critique of sexism in the lyrics of popular rock, rap and alternative music; a survey of the offerings of toy stores and the promotion of gender stereotyping in children's playthings; a survey of the images of women as portrayed in mainstream film and film advertising; a survey of television ads critiquing the power relations of men and women in the endorsation of products; an assessment of the image of females promoted by advertising imagery in magazines; a survey of students in the school about their attitudes regarding gender relations; and an intensive interview with a gay male about gender.

Although a few did not progress beyong finding examples of gender stereotypes, most had worked hard in their investigations to find interesting and worthwhile information and to probe beneath surface assumptions to reveal the implications of gender stereotyping for both males and females. Many were able to make sound critical assessments of its impact on the relative power of males and females. In her analysis of the effect of the advertising industry on the image of women, Carleen introduced and explained the term simulacrum. Christina ventured into territory that was both controversial and powerful as she described her interview with a gay man. The girls brought conviction and common sense to their presentations. It amused and delighted me that they usually presented their facts with the verve and enthusiasm of explorers who have discovered entirely new territory.

In general, the boys did an excellent job as well. Still, there were a few less enthusiastic, less articulate and less willing to acknowledge blatant gender inequity. This was especially true for Misha and Todd who had investigated the position of women in hockey. These two concluded, since one woman had made it to the position of goalie in the NHL (even though she quickly lost the position), that women were receiving equal treatment in the hockey world. Without any apparent recollection of what we had covered in class, they asserted that the only reason why few females actually get hockey jobs is that they just are not up to male standards of physical ability. Their conclusions sparked a volatile debate about why women's hockey

teams are not accepted as part of the NHL. The two argued that women's hockey simply could never be as exciting as men's because men skate faster and better. They refused to consider a women's hockey league in which the best might rise to the top just as with men in the NHL. I did not pass the work these boys did on this project. Their manipulation of the evidence to suit their own sexist views was evident to the entire class, even those who may have partly (but silently!) agreed with them.

It is difficult to estimate the influence of the work we had done in class as a preparation for the students' own investigations. But I could tell that most of them had moved to new positions on the subject of gender relations, a few not far from their starting point, the majority a long distance from where our journey had begun. The one male who had decided not to participate in the study told me he wished now that he had done so. Yet, while I felt encouraged, I realized the class was still plagued by the lingering spectre of resistance. I still sensed among a few of the boys an aggrievedness, an anger as they sat arms folded, faces closed, listening to the presentations, especially by the girls, who proved to them over and over again that patriarchy does indeed exert its controlling power in government, church, the media, and virtually all areas of life. Perhaps they were beginning to think differently, but even for the boys who wanted to change, the feminist message was still about losing face. Each would have to make a long personal struggle toward the position of 'feminist male.' Some will probably never get that far.

Reactions of the girls were varied. I could sense a budding enthusiasm, a confidence, and a new-found conviction that gave me great satisfaction. But I could still hear the journals of some of them ringing with the disappointment of facing reality about their place in the world. These girls will move beyond their pain, I feel sure, toward anger and finally, I hope, toward active anti-sexist positions.

Now that the study is over and the students have left my classroom, I feel strangely upset. I am questioning the nature of the interactions I had with them, the effectiveness of what I tried to do with them. I feel bruised and exhausted as though I had just fought a battle and been wounded or even lost. I feel the guilt of not approaching the material in such a way that the boys could be spared their hostile reactions. I feel responsible for the girls to be aggressive whenever they spoke rather than calm and rational as the boys wanted them to be. But I also feel that I fell again into the trap - or maybe I had always been in it - the sexism that pervaded the classroom controlled me and aroused in me the same impotent feelings of hostility it did in the girls. In the way that I was 'just another female' in the room, I felt victimized by the energy the boys expended in endlessly defending themselves, as if it were somehow my fault they were uncomfortable.

I have felt so tired and let down these last few classes. Even their presentations do not raise my spirits much. I have talked independently with Carleen and with Kleo. I feel as though I need some help or some support, any scraps of positive reactions that will

keep me going to the last day. To their credit both told me frankly what they thought. They did not let me off the hook either. Kleo said my responses to the boys were sometimes harsh and seemed judgemental. She apologized for being critical and I found myself saying that I appreciated her honesty but inside I feel accutely the sting of her remarks. Now that I sit here recalling our conversation, my self-blame increases. Am I really doing anything but analysing my own doubts and fears about my teaching? Is this what participant-research is all about?

Maybe my reactions and worries are unreasonably subjective. Possibly. But they are nonetheless real. I feel myself reacting to the spectre of the gender discrimination that slunk into the classroom as all of us entered it. I am humiliated to realize that I, who supposedly have studied the workings of sexism, am still so subject to its influence. What does this tell me about my capabilities to teach this course? Can I hope to be unbiased? Must I hope to be? I can still hear a male voice saying that if a man had taught the class it would have been "entirely different." Isn't that precisely the point. (Edited fieldnote, January 27, 1994)

The powerful disappointment and self-doubt reflected in these last notes were fortunately not permanent. I attribute them to my personal style as a teacher, my tendency to shoulder responsibility for the feelings and responses of all my students and to the over-whelming pressures of teaching, researching and participating in the

discovery process. I still feel a lingering discomfort from my journey along a road filled with emotional and intellectual land mines.

As for the students, I cannot be sure how they felt. The unit did not really end with a sense of closure. We did not reach a destination; we simply stopped travelling. We ran out of time. So much was left that had not been talked about. The students' presentations had highlighted the effectiveness of learning through their own firsthand investigation and I know that many were satisfied with their efforts. But all of us felt tired. I felt agitated, uncomfortable, and depressed.

On the last day, feeling hollow and changed, we parted company awkwardly.

Chapter IV Endnotes

1. Curtis Sittenfield, *Your life as a girl: What are the options the world gives you?* Ms . July/August, 1993, 92-95.

2. Quotations are reprinted as accurately as I could recall them when originally recording my fieldnotes. I have used direct quotations to bring immediacy to the classroom commentary.

3. Traditionally at this high school females have achieved exemplary scores on a variety of prestigious math contests in significantly greater numbers than the males.

4. Finding articles appropriate for the high school reading level precludes much of the best work by feminists who usually write for a university audience. An article which was generally well received and within the range of grade twelve reading ability on the controversy over nature versus nurture theories is Laura Shapiro's *Guns and Dolls.*

5. R. Lederer, *Is English Prejudiced?* In The Miracle of Langage. New York: Pocket Books, 1993.

6. Using a variety of examples from many sources, I created this exercise of thirteen sentences which require that students criticize and provide alternatives for sexually biased wording.

7. Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Manly and Womanly*, In Prose Models: Canadian, American, and British Essays for Composition. Harcourt Brace Jovanovch Canada, Inc., 1989.

8. Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *From Man as a False Generic.* In The Arch of Experience. Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Ltd. 1987. 67 -75.

9. Mia Stainsby, "The Invisible Past," Vancouver Sun, Sept. 29, 1992.

10. Gloria Steinem, *Marilyn Monroe: The woman who died too soon.* In The Broadview Reader. Broadview Press, Canada, 1987. 427 -433.

11. Lee Lakeman, *Women, Violence and The Montreal Massacre.* This Magazine, Vol #23, March 1993.

12. Alison Dickie, *The Art of Intimidation: Sexism and Destiny at Queens.* This Magazine, Vol #23. March, 1993.

Chapter V

MEANINGS LOCATED AND DISLOCATED

> I so desperately want males to understand how I feel,
> but at the same time I'm scared to say too much in case
> I irk them and they close their minds altogether.
>
> From Carleen's journal

Tensions, conflicts, and contradictions ebbed and flowed in the daily classroom dialogue and in their writing as my students worked their way through the 'Pride and Prejudice' unit. In Chapter IV their struggles to accept the reality of sexism and to identify their positions on gender issues are juxtaposed with my own roller-coaster reactions to the classroom dynamic as teacher/researcher and female participant. What emerges from this representation is that our mutual engagement in the process of grappling with the subject matter and the emotions it evoked, of seeking some level of understanding of the complex issues around gender, followed an erratic but discernable pattern of denial, recognition, resistance and, for some more than others, at least a partial resolution. While I may have been on a faster track, having done more reading and studying than the students, I count myself no less affected by the process than any one of them. We moved at different rates but all of us found ourselves at times beyond our comfort zones. Whatever resolution was reached. it was temporary, personal, a position for that point in time. For each parti-

cipant the shifting reality of future experience will modify that position. If praxis was part of the experience of individuals in the class, it would best be described as an awakening to the sexism in themselves and recognition of the impossibility of change without their resistance to the social structures which keep it in place.

The students' journals and their anonymous evaluations of the class provide evidence that they were engaged in personal research that had the potential to empower them. But I am cautioned by Lather's warning that a research for praxis approach "faces the danger of a rampant subjectivity where one finds only what one is predisposed to look for" (1991:51). With Lather's words in mind, I must question how much I, as the 'reporting researcher,' simply found what I wanted to find in looking for culturally ingrained gender bias, and subsequent shifts in attitudes about gender issues.

Research for praxis, and indeed teaching for praxis, seeks to inspire individuals to action that will redirect or refocus their lives. But in dealing with high school students, I have discovered that although praxis often does occur, a teacher may only find out about it many months or years after the fact when a student comes forward with a story beginning, "I'll never forget our discussion about.... That's when I made up my mind to ....." It is possible that for my students, praxis will occur over time after they have tested new ideas in the context of new experience.

Though not the only source of evidence, the journals provide crucial insights concerning the praxis I sought to achieve in teaching 'Pride and Prejudice.' In Chapter IV, I focussed on the processes of discovery at work in the class, the conflicts, denials, resistances, and realizations that surfaced. Juxtaposed, the many voices in the journals reveal multiple and contradictory interpretations and understandings of the issues around a particular theme or concept. This chapter looks at the journals another way in the hope of detecting messages that may have been obscurred or overlooked in the first analysis or seeing the particular struggles of individuals. Taken individually, decontextualized excerpts reflect only partial thoughts and feelings of each individual, a fragmented but possibly significant notion of what each was thinking of and feeling at a particular time.

Deconstruction in and out of context

Achieving a fair reading of each journal entry has been my biggest challenge in writing this study involving examination of specific words, phrases, or examples in a passage; recognition of significances that may have been important to the writer but may not be expressed with enough emphasis to at first catch notice; and looking for nuances in phrasing which imply attitude, suggest tone, or provide other clues to the state of mind of the writer. I have tried to achieve a fair analysis by balancing a literal reading of content with sensitivity to the emotional spirit and intent of the words. In Chapter IV, my involvement within the complex dynamic of daily activities

affected my attempts to 'take apart' the passages. Such examination, remaining within, never outside of, the context of the circumstances in which the writing was produced, may expose certain themes but may limit or obscure others. Here I want to leave circumstances aside to attend to meanings outside that context.

In reading and re-reading the hundreds of passages I collected, I find their content gives only fragmentary glimpses of what took place in the minds of the students during various short spaces of time over the period of the course. Their responses to specific topics were undoubtedly affected by the degree of interest each inspired, past memories it triggered, and their ability to articulate accurately their feelings and ideas. Some passages reflect a unique take on a particular issue, how it struck an individual at the time or what had been going on in the class prior to the writing as do these two opening remarks written on the same day.

> Surprisingly enough, this is one of the most exciting English courses I've ever taken. (Louise)

> Depressing! The only word I have to describe today's class. Just when I feel that we are finally accomplishing something, my theory is screwed. (Carleen)

Some excerpts also provide a shifting sense of the frustrations which gripped individuals as the students encountered each other's

views. After one particularly contentious discussion, considerable 'dialogue' continued within/amongst the entries:

> On the topic of what Jeff brought up, I do not find the class particularly negative. I also, until today, was not aware of you blaming any of the guys in the class, but I haven't got a very good perspective since I am one of the guys [sic]. But if you are treating us separately, that is probably separating an already uneasy class. (Rebecca)

> It is starting to annoy me that the majority of the class seems to have such a closed mind to what is being said. (Christina)

> I see mixed emotions about the class all around the room. A lot of the guys seem to be frustrated because when we recall past historical times, men in general can be looked upon as the assholes in this whole gender issue. I know that was then, this is now, but in a way it sort of feels insulting to our male egos... (Alex)

> The class discussion was so aggressive that we weren't getting anywhere but angry. (Kleo)

Here Jeff writes a passage which, outside the context of daily class wrangles about male bashing and teacher bias, may reveal a

motive for his resistance which remained unmentioned in class:

> I am supposed to drop all the concerns I have and concentrate so hard to be considered even remotely sensitive? I'm very confused....I am not a traditionally masculine guy and am often thought to be gay when meeting new people and all my best friends are female. I would also like to express my concern for the negative portrayal of homosexuality in the class. I've heard it and I've felt it and I know for a fact that there are some who may be harmed by it. (Jeff)

This passage may not be indicating that Jeff is resistant to hearing about sexism but rather that he is uncomfortable about his own sexuality and a social requirement that he play a particular role to please women. (In an earlier journal on what/how he learned his gender role, Jeff either misinterpreted the topic or evaded it deliberately, making a series of generalizatins about men and women that revealed nothing about himself as a male.) Is his expression of concern here really made on behalf of unnamed class members, as he implies, or was he speaking from personal ambivalence with regard to his own sexuality? Jeff's quite public, intense involvement with at least one girl in the class contributes to the ambiguity associated with these remarks.

In trying to identify the possible basis of his criticism that

homosexuality had been treated negatively in the class, I can only recall a very early discussion we had about the difference between sex and gender roles in which we agreed that homosexuality was a form of sexual expression which must be acknowledged when talking about sex roles. The only other specific mention of homosexuality comes from Curtis in his entry after that discussion:

> I don't feel that I fit the traditional male model. And many of the women (girls) I know don't fit traditional female models. I'd like to know where homosexuals fit in. (Curtis)

Throughout the journals, whether through indifference or avoidance, the students alluded to homosexuality very rarely. Adam makes one particularly uninformed comment when talking about language use, "I was genuinely surprised when people came up with words like dyke. I generally reserve words like dyke/faggot, etc. for those associated with censorship movements, people against gun control." Carleen's remark, "... if I have too many [notches on my bedpost] I am a slut, too few, I'm a lesbian" and one in the anonymous evaluations, "I learned that I am a feminist, and that being a feminist doesn't mean I am a lesbian...." indicate that homophobia is not restricted to males and may be one source of the resistance young women have to calling themselves feminists. I am again reminded with remorse of my own inappropriate question asking students if they thought of me as a manhating lesbian, certainly a telling reminder of how easy it is to be sexist, even when we 'don't mean it' !

Although these few references hardly indicate rampant homophobia amongst my students of either sex, they do support the need for more information about homosexuality in a course about gender relations.

The mechanics (spelling, punctuation, verb tenses and pronoun references) of the original texts have been corrected in the excerpts I quote throughout this work. But in terms of style and facility with language, the journal entries reflect considerable variation from student to student and even from entry to entry in the work of some individuals as they encountered particular topics that struck chords for them and others which proved difficult to relate to or discuss. Many passages contain contradictory and ambiguous messages. A few reveal obvious misinterpretion of written material to which a student was responding, reducing their reliability as a source of insight. Others suggest that a student was unable to apply much logic to the examination of an issue because of the interference of emotions. In asking students to respond to specific topics for most entries, I may have imposed challenges or limitations that some found problematic. The result is sometimes evident in their starting to argue one way and, by the end of their writing, arriving at an opposite or altogether different view. Journal writing for most students was dictated only in part by my suggested topics on a critical examination of particular gender issues. It became a self-discovery process. Christina says, " ....I wander from topic to topic discovering how I feel... ."

Comments some students made on the excerpts written by their

classmates support their usefulness as a focus for thinking beyond the daily class discussions:

> I was shocked to see how the women in the class really felt when they could write anonymously. There seemed to be a layer of frustration and hopelessness in their writing. I really sensed that this writing came from the heart, and the wounds were deep. The men, I felt, were oblivious to the women's true feelings but were sincere in their statements. The quotes are an excellent way to open everybody's eyes to the true feelings which wouldn't be said aloud. (Byron)

> Since I have the opportunity right now, I want to write about some realizations I came to by reading the journal entries. Right from the start, people in this class do not regard themselves in the stereotypical sense, as "males" or "females." [But] if you look at our remarks, it seems we (the girls) all copied the same story but changed the words. It seems like the girls all said this, and the guys all said that. It was truly a frightening realization. (Holly)

Fears and affirmations

The journals sometimes revealed personal concerns that were worth raising in class in a general context to give others with similar

worries a chance to air them. Even though we spent time on language and the associations of power around certain words, the issue of speaking out in class came up several times as a matter of individual confidence, regardless of the language used. This gave me the opportunity to pursue power relations, as they are demonstrated in speech behaviour as a natural part of the curriculum. One of the most laden responses comes from Alex:

> What sort of bothers me are the free for all discussions that... can be an effective way of finding out opinions, but not with this class.... not everyone is a confident public speaker. To me, it seems like we have maybe only one or two tables going away at it while others like myself lose participation marks... I realize that responses and rebuttals are all a part of it, but more than anything maybe I'm just afraid of someone just shooting me down in flames... it seems like one table is shooting away and then the other table fights back ... and then we get a little mini-war going where everyone ends up pissed off.... (Alex)

Alex evidently perceived himself as an outsider to the "mini-wars" between students who dominated the discussion. I recall that he spoke little during many classes although he was very attentive and frequently wrote long journal entries bursting sometimes with angry energy and frequently coloured by expletives. Did he really want to join in, was he genuinely worried about marks, or did he simply

resent the capabilities of those who were more articulate? In this passage he supports the need to address gender issues but does not feel confident in speaking his opinion. What he seems to want to get off his chest about the class is his difficulty as a participant, his fear of being "shot down in flames." If this was his greatest concern, to what degree did it affect his judgements about gender issues as we discussed them in the class? Who is included when he says that "everyone ends up pissed off"? By whom did he feel himself to be silenced? By males? By females? The teacher? To what degree was his learning coloured by his class experience? He concludes his entry by saying, "I've really enjoyed some of the ongoings [sic] and if I could only find the guts to say what I feel then it would probably be that much more enjoyable."

Carleen also identified a communication issue in the class, "I think that many guys feel very threatened by what we are discussing and I think that the girls are quite scared to voice their opinions - I know I am." But she regarded the problem from her position at what Alex calls one of the "two tables going at it," in this sense occupying a position of privilege in the minds of students like Alex. In this entry, written at a later time, she recognizes the power of speaking privilege:

> At the end of the conversation, it was very apparent that mainly men and the most aggressive women were the controllers of the conversation. I guess all it takes is a

> few aggressive and good speakers to intimidate the rest of the class.... (Carleen)

Although she does not name herself as one of the "aggressive women," it is likely Carleen was beginning to realize herself to be one of those who dominated discussion and that her power as a highly articulate person could intimidate others.

Kleo was also particularly sensitive to the potential of speech to control and of her own power to sound like a know-it-all. But what are the "very nasty things" that were brought out in her? What were the "very nasty things" that prompted her to believe she should be silent? Is she subject to stereotypes that females talk too much or did she have criticisms she wanted to air?

> It's a shame that so many of the same people dominate the conversation all the time - but if the other students tried I know they could get in there too. This is where I was silent for about three classes or so. I kept hoping someone else would talk. When I do, it just sounds like I think I know everything.... This has brought out some very nasty things in me. (Kleo)

It is possible that several students who said nothing about their own silence in their journals were in fact struggling with their fear of peer criticism or problems of stating their ideas aloud. Students like

Todd, Misha, and Julie, as well as the two non-participants in this study, were often silent for long periods, making few contributions.

Not surprisingly I found in the entries of some students a strong connection between their problems with written expression and their lack of clarity about the ideas they were discussing. Long, confused passages, of which there were always two or three in every set of entries, were difficult to interpret. Colin's wordy and difficult to follow entries suggest this problem. In the passage below his apparent topic is the distress that speaking out in class causes him. His sentences run on or break into fragments, his phrasing borders on the inarticulate, and his rambling emphasizes a fuzziness of thought which was characteristic of some of his other entries. It is printed here verbatim.

> I'd like to express my concern on how you are grading us. I know part of my mark is based on my journal which I do regularly. But what else are you taking into consideration, perhaps involvement in classroom discussions? I find it unfair because I and know there are others who feel more or less like I do don't participate often. I'd like to because I too have my opinion but I've always been a quiet individual and to open my mouth and participate on a topic I've never discussed in my entire life until now I find difficult. Especially when other people listen to every single word I say and perhaps look to take the opportunity

> to attack what I say if it is anything to oppose another opinion or is considered sexist or simply an invalid statement. I enjoy listening to heated arguments but when I hear a girl say, and she did say, "I'm going to kill _____," of course this can't be taken literally but this girl got so upset with this boy for saying what he did. If I did say something it would be at a wrong time because I've spent so long thinking about how I can say what I feel without upsetting anyone or being placed on the spot...I hate being on the spot.... I guess I am going to have to change if our marks are dependent on classroom participation. (Colin)

In his use of 'people' is Colin thinking of both sexes when he registers his fear of being challenged for his opinions or is he referring exclusively to the girls? He perceives some females in the class to be especially threatening. But a closer reading suggests that marks are his real (would it be unfair to say 'major'?) concern. Does he fear the challenge of being criticized by his peers more than the fear of losing marks for not speaking up? Is he really sure enough of his own opinion to express it if he could get the courage, or is his fear of being put "on the spot" derivative of his not having a clear opinion? Or, does his fear both of speaking out in class and of getting poor marks obscure his fear that his views may be taken as sexist? Colin's painfully awkward comments are an indication that for him (and likely to some degree for many of the students) confused and disorganized thinking and writing are both the products and the

producers of the fear of facing sexism.

Colin's and Alex's concerns about speaking in class are probably typical of at least a few students in every class. But evidence of other more serious insecurities emerged from the writing of particular individuals. Sometimes issues of personal identity were reflected in criticisms of the class, the course, or the teacher as with Curtis who believed that he was being unfairly treated in the class for the way that he spoke. The following segment from Curtis' very long, repetitive response reveals extreme defensiveness:

> I don't feel that I should be classified as sexist because I make my opinions heard loudly and clearly. I think that any woman that cut off a man in mid-speech would be applauded.... I don't feel that I should be yelled at by a group of students and laughed at by a teacher in the midst of making a point. I don't like how everyone expects me to be sexist. If I am it is the only way that I have been taught.... If you don't want me to respond in class I won't but I don't think that there will be as many points of view in the conversation.... I cut off males as well but all anyone ever sees is "Curtis the sexist," cutting off the girls and not listening to their comments.... I'm sorry if I don't listen to women's points of view, I really want to, and all my sexist actions are really sub-conscious....I end up being persecuted for my aggression. I'm sorry for my outspoken

nature. If it doesn't work in your class, tell me. If you have nothing to say, allow me to express my opinion the way I have learned to. (Curtis)

At first reading Curtis' highly charged commentary raises several concerns about the class. Was he really being treated unfairly and if this is true what does it say about my handling of the speaking dynamics in the class? How might I have provided a fair hearing for the female students without pointing out to the boys their assumption of privilege in stating their views? How might I have prevented Curtis' intense personalizing of the incident? Clearly some tactics, time consuming as they might be, such as having students record the speech order in the class, or recording a discussion for their later analysis might have depersonalized the issue by putting it into the realm of objective research. [1]

But, for Curtis the recurrent theme of persecution in a number of his journals raises a deeper concern. As with Jeff, is it possible that his extreme resistance was motivated by another kind of insecurity? Unlike a few of the boys who mentioned 'male bashing' in a general way, Curtis above argues petulantly for his right to retain his "aggressive character" regardless of whether or not it interferes with the rights of others. Yet he repeatedly insists, "I know women are marginalized everyday, and I do want to help" and later, "I do want to help, badly, but it seems that if I make a point I'm either sexist or overly aggressive." Curtis puts blame on me and those in the class for

what may be his own lack of self-confidence.

Curtis may have felt justified in his remarks simply because he perceived himself to be repressed, regardless of whether or not anyone had deliberately set out to make him feel that way. But surely, such an argument is exactly the one denied to women who desire an end to the patriarchal oppression inherent in their everyday existence. By personalizing the incident, Curtis obscurred the power issue on which it really rests. On the teacher's part, while it may evoke greater criticism, the requirement that boys be accountable for their own sexism in the classroom can be no more harmful to their self-esteem than the continued failure to grant girls equal status is to theirs.

The following passage by Todd illustrates the difficulty of getting at what real sexism is and helping boys to understand it. Early in the course in speaking about gender behaviour he has learned, he says:

> For two years I had a job in the fast food industry, a fairly large chain requiring quite a few employess. All my managers were male but they didn't favour the males. They made them work very hard: in my two years at this hole in the ground, I noticed only, and I mean only, guys did dishes. Nobody was hired as a dishwasher, everybody was hired generally, but time after time guys did dishes. The girls

would come onto shift making the food, but rarely were told to clean up at the end of the night. All the girls took advantage of this. Females always got what they asked for. If a guy was to ask to get off early, most of the time he was denied. One Friday I asked to be let off early. My manager made a big deal of it and said 'no.' Later on in the shift a girl asked to get off early and the answer was 'of course, go right ahead.'

Was gender discrimination at work here? From Todd's perspective it was. He saw himself being put to work at less desireable tasks and being refused the same request that was granted to a female. For Todd there is little doubt that he was a victim, of what he might call reverse discrimination. But interpretation of his story from a feminist perspective would suggest that his managers were adopting a particularly insidious form of gender discrimination against the girls by assuming that they were not cut out for dirty work like dishes and by granting them favours they may not have deserved any more or less than the boys did. The implications for the girls in the long run have to do with perpetuation of the patriarchal view that females are more helpless than males. Looking at Todd's entry from his and a feminist point of view, the problem arose of how to deal with his comments so that he would be required to re-examine his assumptions but also so that he would not feel I was out to get him as a male for identifying what he clearly saw as unfair treatment. The complexity of a feminist view was far beyond the

level we had reached in our exploration of sexism. While I settled for a brief explanation, written on his journal, of how he might reconsider what he had seen, he gave no indication of whether or not he had understood my comments. In interpreting his concern for the purposes of this study, can it be regarded as a reasonable attempt to look at gender equity in an objective way, or as a sample of deeply rooted gender bias of which Todd was simply unaware?

In many entries, the strong self-esteem or confidence of an individual underlay the commentary, regardless of the nature of the topic. Certain girls, in particular, reflected great personal pride and satisfaction with their gender. Their comments, taken from early entries, are in stark contrast to those of Julie, Carleen and Kleo, whose responses in describing their notions of what it means to be female, were mixed with sadness and depressingly negative images, supporting the notion that their gender role imposed limitations and even misery on them. [2] Linda, Christina and Rebecca speak of being female with joyful affirmation and independent optimism.

> I can honestly say I am proud of who and what I am and what I stand for.... I was raised in an environment that was settled - which gave me self-worth and pride.... (Linda)

> My best friend and I can talk about anything and we like to think of boyfriends as nice additions to our lives. (Christina)

> I love being a female and am proud of all the qualities that make me unique from males. I luckily never felt limited by being a female and was shocked to find out that sexism really existed. (Rebecca)

When citing the sources of their confidence the girls identified their parents, particularly their mothers, as instrumental in developing their sense of their own worth. Christina says,

> My mother is a very strong role model to me because she has always been very independent. My Dad calls her stubborn and bossy because of the way she doesn't back down from something she believes in.... My mother has never 'needed' a man in her life... she doesn't take abuse from anyone and now I am wondering why I don't ever compliment her on that. I think I should start.... (Christina)

Holly describes a mother who has provided an example of action and thus served as a strong role model:

> It started when my mom started CODA. She taught me a lot about what she learned and continued on to some feminist workshops. This new mother of mine in now a reborn woman... independent (mostly) and fulltime student. (She gets better grades than I do). She always tries to let people know how she feels. From my mother I learned that

people can change. If you don't like your life... change it! (Holly)

From these descriptions of their mothers, it is evident that both Holly and Christina have had help to develop healthy, positive assertiveness.

It seems ironic that specific expressions of satisfaction or happiness about being male, are noticeably absent in the boys' comments, except those of Alex who heard a "little ringing voice" that told him he was lucky to be male. A few mentioned the influence of a male role model, a grandfather or a father, with whom they had spent time as children. But most often the boys said they had not given much thought to the idea of themselves as 'male,' suggesting that they took for granted and assumed the rightness of their privileged position. However, some of the insecurities they reveal in their commentaries raise the question of whether, far from assuming superiority, they were simply unaware of their status as males in positions of privilege. Though their speech patterns in the classroom frequently reflected an unconscious assumption of privilege, as did their descriptions of qualities specific to males, few of the boys seemed to be critically aware of this. What requires continued examination is exactly how and from what sources these boys absorbed their 'lessons' about being male and what complex factors contribute to a male sense of self. Dealing with gender issues might be easier for boys if they had help to identify and analyse the insecurities which feed their resistances.

Starting in the position they do, girls have much to gain in a gender issues class. They may feel the pain of facing feminist concerns; they may fear the reaction of the boys to their assertiveness; and they may be daunted by the monumental battle women must fight to reach genuine equity. But they are also likely to gain confidence from the acknowledgement and discussion of women's needs, even in the face of evidence of the present inferior status of women around the globe. And, if they do not merely allow themselves to be angry and defensive but also take the time to apply their new knowledge thoughtfully, they may learn to negotiate skillfully with the boys and men against patriarchy.

The boys, on the other hand, have much to lose: status amongst their peers, power of place in the dialogue, and a sense of control over the world as they have learned to know it. In response to their fear of loss they exhibit defensiveness, aggression and an exaggerated sensitivity to perceived insult.

Who will carry the burden?

The boys who took my course were trying to take responsibility for themselves with respect to sexism. The girls, throughout the course, struggled with their awakening awareness that sexism and gender inequity are real, will not go away, and directly affect their own lives. They expressed difficulty, pain, and even fury in the face of the truth. But few were able to generate solutions beyond saying that

they realized it was they who had to do 'something' or that they must no longer let men treat them 'that way.' Loath to displease the boys, but loathe to abandon the struggle for their identity, the girls were filled with ambivalence about accepting the challenges of feminism. Holly says, "I still refuse subconsciously to identify male views versus female views," and Rebecca says, " I have discovered that simply because I believe in equality I can not escape sexism...." In her entry on Marilyn Monroe, she comments on how women have been "trapped between not knowing their potential" and being "punished when they try to discover it."

Not unexpectedly, for some girls, much of the ambivalence is generated by concerns about appearance. Kleo tells this story:

> I had a favourite teacher in grade nine. He was fun and we had good conversation in class.... I hadn't seen him in a few years and had lost about ten pounds next time we met. First thing he said was, "Hey, ya don't have quite the buffalo butt you did before." I didn't know whether to be proud of the body I had been working out or just cry that that had once been the focus of this man's attention to me. (Kleo)

In accordance with the new paradigm of the fit and confident woman, Kleo wants to work out for herself. But she cannot escape the male assumption that she does it to be appealing to men. In a similar, but

much more obsessive response, Carleen struggles with her desires to be attractive and a feminist, believing them to be in conflict:

> It is so depressing because it sounds like I am such a women's lib and yet at the same time I will turn around and do anything to make myself look beautiful. I say that I want them to accept me for who I am but at the same time I'm starving and binging, and exercising my ass off just so I can lose twenty or thirty pounds to look good in a bathing suit. I just want to throw up my arms and give up, no matter what I do I am screwed. Too ugly and I'll never be loved or will be referred to as "well, she has a nice personality, " when everyone knows it's a crock of shit, just a polite way of saying she's fatter than a house but she smiles a lot. (Carleen)

These comments say much about the two girls as individuals that may be attributable to male/female relationships they have alluded to in previous excerpts. Carleen, in particular, wrestles her own private monsters, powerful enough to produce the rage that permeates her writing. After a visit to Glass's play, "If We are Women," she provides a glimpse of the conflicts in her life that may account for her irrational generalizations about her appearance and her huge sense of worthlessness. [3]

.... after my mother, grandmother, and sister [and I] left,

> we were feeling really awesome about ourselves and we had such a perfect and communicative night. And yet the second we stepped through the door, there was my dad, piss drunk and making such an ass of himself. And you know what was running through my mind, "I shouldn't have left him, he is so vulnerable and must have been threatened by all the women going out together. It must be my fault.... (Carleen)

Clearly, Carleen's unreasonable assumption of guilt and responsibility springs from a deep well of anguish. She feels overwhelmed by the recognition that sexism is not disappearing, saying, "Sexism is not getting any better; maybe it's hiding in better places, but it is really obvious in the girls' journals that they feel awful about it...." This entry concludes with apologetic and self-denigrating hopelessness: "I got sidetracked. I guess I have a lot to say, maybe this isn't the place to be writing like such a bitch."

The topic of violence against women also evoked feelings in the girls of powerlessness and hopelessness against misogyny. Rebecca says, " It is obviously mostly men who can joke about issues such as rape and pay no attention to those who protest. They rarely feel the consequences." Holly writes. "Before I thought that feminism was a lot of women overreacting. Now I understand it to be angry women fighting the violence, fear, and assault associated with male abuse." Louise says, "I never knew so many men thought of women so badly,

with such hatred." Kleo says, "I hate being motivated by fear - I resent it- but now it is very real, and the anger I feel is backed by a certain hopelessness."

For these young women, the gender issues course has placed responsibility on their shoulders. They are not happy about it but they seem resigned. Fortunately some few, like Rebecca and Louise, Linda and Christina, will take on the challenge with optimism and confidence. But even for them, Kleo's speculation has the bleak ring of a dark and truthful prophesy:

> It's hard for men to take up what must be seen as a "women's" fight. We expect them to stand up for us but they must rightly figure that they are doing their part by just not being sexist and I can see how they would think that is the end of their responsibility. Maybe that's where it does end, and our fight as women is truly ours alone. (Kleo)

CHAPTER V ENDNOTES

1. Students had as an option an assignment on speech patterns in advertising. See appendix, p. 208.

2. Chapter IV, pp. 70-72.

3. Most students in the class attended the play which was presented at the Vancouver Playhouse in January of 1994.

CHAPTER VI

MINGLED VOICES

> The largest challenge that confronted me was accepting that during my life I have been discriminated against, even by those I love.
>
> Anonymous evaluation

The last assignment I required of the students was their typewritten evaluation. I asked for detailed and frank responses on several aspects of their experience of the unit: initial expectations about the course; reactions to the course content, the teaching, and the teacher; how they had been affected by ideas we discussed; and recommendations they had for improving the experience. I received all but two responses on the last day, sealed in the plain envelopes I had distributed. Some students probably suspected, quite rightly, that aspects of their style or what they said might give away their identity but I believe that for most of them by the end of the unit anonymity was not an issue of much concern. Hank and Adam gave me their envelopes a day or two late, each saying that he did not mind my knowing his identity. To maintain as much anonymity as was possible, I shuffled the envelopes before opening them.

As they were used to doing in their regular journals, the

students presented their ideas in a rambling fashion, attending most specifically to those aspects of the evaluation to which they were drawn. In that sense their reponses seem spontaneous, unique and fairly uninhibited. A few range beyond the questions I asked, going back to specific issues that were discussed in class or revisiting personal concerns that were still painful for them. In general, the responses were characterized by refreshing candour.

Excerpts are presented here as decontextualized unidentified voices that speak to similar themes. Some contain contradictions and ambiguities. For the most part, however, their intent is clear. In cases where the context reveals the sex of the writer, I have mentioned it if it facilitates a smoother commentary. However, when occasionally the style or content suggests a strong connection to certain voices as they are quoted in Chapters IV and V, I have resisted the temptation to 'guess' whose voice is speaking.

"I expected to be fed a lot of garbage"

As I had suspected they would, several students entered the class holding assumptions based on stories from peers who had previously taken the unit. Yet with few exceptions, their comments indicate that by the end of the course they had made up their own minds about its atmosphere and content.

When I came into the first class of "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE"

> I expected to endure the first of many "MALE BASHING' classes. This thought was driven into my mind by many of my friends who felt "Ms. Dux is a spaz and a feminist." My views simply changed...

Some give plausible explanations both for their expectations and for their rejection of the hearsay they had picked up. They make critical distinctions between the generalizations of others and what they actually experienced.

> I expected a lot of over reacting, defensiveness and male bashing. I assumed that the class would rant on and on about how crappy I should feel about being a girl and therefore being a victim and how I should learn to hate men. ... people, or mostly males, got defensive, but that was understandable; by reading all those articles that offer proof of endless female victimization, one is bound to begin to feel guilty and ashamed for actions associated with their gender even if they haven't done anything. However, instead of bitching about men the entire term, this class opened my eyes to pain and fear that women have traditionally undergone as a result of sexism.

> I had some expectations of what you were going to teach and some pretty good ideas of what I was going to think. This is possibly where a lot of your frustrations came....

> Due to what we had heard we expected to be confronted with some harsh feminism and we were already in the defensive position, ready to protect our happy little lives. However, I kept waiting for you to make me angry and you never did.

"I don't feel guilty even though I should"

The topic of resistance comes up frequently but with different degrees of insight. Defensiveness and a residue of anger characterize these remarks in which the speakers are still at the stage of looking outward to generalize and blame rather than inward to question the source of their resistance.

> The men... seemed to take a strong defensive role, denying any involvement and often becoming indifferent towards you and your radical views. It seemed as though the men couldn't win. We would describe a situation, you would shoot it down, we would fix the statement and yet you somehow dug deep into the bag of exaggeration and before we knew it our statement was once again wrong.... I just despise it when Joe who raped Suzie can act as my personality as well....

> ... you made many of us feel stupid and belittled. Sometimes your excited nature and vigorous

> interrogations got sidetracked into personal opinions.... Also, in the journals I was constantly startled by your reactions, your frank way of subtly insulting and voicing your unbreakable opinion....I appreciate [the course] and thank you for your concern and assistance, but I don't see it as bad as you do. I don't see it changing over night and I do see it changing over time.

The notion of males as 'pigs' was not used in the class and the next speaker's choice of the expression suggests an extreme and stereotypical perception of a sexist male. Exemplifying the same exaggeration that undermined many of our classroom discussions, it also reveals the illogical assumption that since 'everyone' is sexist, sexism really cannot be eliminated. And yet, the last line hints that he knows this is not true.

> Personally, though I really enjoyed the class, maybe I belong to that can't be helped/saved group... I'll try not to be a sexist, but I know that I'll still say some pretty harsh remarks without regretting it. I'm not a pig, but I think that everyone in a way is sexist. I know I am. I try not to be but like I said, when I say something that demoralizes women, I don't feel guilty, even though I should. It seems weird but I kind of feel guilty for actually not feeling guilty... Still, I know in my heart that these last few weeks are generally dealing with the truth.

As the comment demonstrates, the next writer has a clear understanding of how his resistance operated during the class. could His use of quotations around the word 'feminists' may simply indicate that at the beginning of the gender unit he regarded negatively all those who defend women's rights, but the label could also reveal his lingering scepticism about feminism:

> Being a male, I automatically fell into the trap of trying to defend men from the ever growing group of "feminists" who try to preserve the rights, freedom and equality of women. Instantly, probably on learned instinct, I felt it was necessary to constantly point out the all so common excuse that "not all men are sexist."

"You put your popularity on the edge"

Although there was no doubt the students recognized and resisted my anti-sexist position, their criticisms of my teaching revealed much more understanding than I had expected of them. The following comments support my view that most were able to distinguish the intrusive power of the truths about gender discrimination from the messenger who presented them.

> You have to admit, in class boys were treated much more harshly than girls. But I can understand that this is the opposite in the outside world. It is impossible for a boy to

win an argument that he or another male is not sexist because it is simply not true. Men are sexist and have been forever.

I think that perhaps why some people seemed as if they were contradicting themselves in their journals was because they were unsure what to think and what to expect from you.

I think the class may have been a bit biased since the teacher is a feminist but I can't say the class would have had the same impact if she wasn't.

The next comment is interesting because it challenges my use of facts, something I did not expect given the emphasis on science and social studies in the school curriculum. But the point about the necessity of emotion to create an impact is well taken. Students seem to respond when their hearts are touched. Even the most convicing facts cannot replace the conviction that comes through emotional involvement with an issue.

It's funny though, because I remember all the other students who took this course saying how men were constantly being burned by Ms. Dux and how if anything she's the most sexist person of all. Ah, that's a bunch of bullshit. Teaching faults? The only faults I saw was that

> you based so much of your teachings on statistics and facts. Its hard to make an argument and rebuttal when you say the stats and facts say this and that. I know statistics are important and etc... but they don't always tell the truth. This is the kind of course where emotions have to take over in order for it to be successful.

The following two opinions I include partly out of the need to convince myself that at least some of the students felt satisfied with my teaching:

> I felt that the anonymity of the class was very important as not once did I or anyone I have talked to feel threatened or intimidated. I definitely respect you for doing this class, you have risked alienating yourself from anyone with different views.

> As for the way in which the course was taught, I think you did a marvelous job.

"Writing helped me work through a lot of problems"

Several references to the journals suggest that they provide a space for expression effective in an emotionally charged environment.

> I think finally getting to express myself on paper helped

me to deal with these emotions. Also when I read the articles ranging from a girl's life story to the brutal killings of fourteen innocent women it made me feel responsible. Responsible as a woman to change how women are treated and to start with myself.

I noticed that when I was writing, I was discussing things that I haven't talked about in a long time. Things I guess I blocked out.... I've never really thought of why I enjoy being a girl or spoken of why it's important to me, but now that I have, I feel better about myself and more confident of my sex.

I think that one aspect of the course that really got my attention was the journal quotes from other people, in particular the one about the person whose nights were filled with silent sobs. That entry almost brings me to tears... it made me realize that bad treatment of women is not something confined to another generation in another place. The fact that someone I know wrote that entry made me realize that sexism still exists with all the strength it had years ago.

In the event that students talk about abuses, as they very possibly will, the ethical obligations and the emotional implications for the teacher need serious consideration. These two entries contain

disclosures that are as powerful as any of the previous journal entries. They are convincing proof that, for some girls, the course brought up unfinished business that may never be settled.

> I have never kept any piece of writing about what has happened to me, and never before had I written about being raped. Somehow it solidifies what has happened and really helps me deal with my past. I was so scared that by writing it no one would believe me, and tell me I was lying for attention, even as I wrote I felt that I was lying, and after I wrote a lot more awful memories starting to come flooding back, times when my brother was doing a lot of drugs and he was hurting me a lot. And when I think about it most of the dark times in my life involve men....

The disclosure by others of their experiences of harassment and abuse may have given this girl a space in which to begin to deal with her own pain:

> I am heartbroken for the stories we've read from the journal entries. I myself have been harrassed or abused by a family member, peers and a church leader I trusted. I hate to talk anything about it - I hate and hated myself so much during those times. I can't explain the seething anger I have directed inward, and the blackness I have lived in. I don't believe it is understandable to anyone who hasn't

felt the same. Being made the weaker party and an object of whatever another desires, my will or not, has brought me more despair than I could ever describe.

I should add here that the disclosures, of which these are characteristic, did not stop during the rest of the English course. My colleague continued to receive more writing in her unit on love and relationships. It was as if my unit had opened a door. Both she and I felt the great weight of compassion and concern for the girls who trusted us this way. We became close to some of them and spent much time ourselves discussing our feelings and our moral and legal reponsibilities with regard to the issue of abuse.

"Many of the classes were like a roller coaster of emotions"

In commenting about their personal experiences of the course, without exception, the respondents acknowledged the difficulty of dealing with the realities I had presented. They were quite specific about the effects of the course on their emotions and thoughts.

The most challenging part of this class for me was getting past the idea that sexism doesn't really exist anymore. I was so desperate to believe that things are better than in my father's generation and that my views would never turn out as sexist and racist as his that I convinced myself that he was part of the stone age.

This comment reflects similar feelings to those I experienced as I taught the group:

> ... things you said and articles I read really had a profound impact on me. I am very depressed now, but I've been told that whenever you read an overwhelming amount of upsetting facts, the normal thing to do is to become upset, and that eventually the scale will balance out and I will be able to see both sides, good and bad.
>
> I felt victimized most of the time but I was also filled with anger, frustration, and a sense of responsibility....
>
> I found the class listening to each other.... We were learning from each other. After many of the classes I found myself not wanting to go back. Many of the classes were full of frustration and tension. I loved it but I also hated it.
>
> I think being confronted with these issues cuts one's self-confidence down. I felt that being a male was a burden that I had to bear and suffer.

The following analogy, while amusing on the surface, evokes a disquieting image of me as the power-wielding teacher 'fixing' my students by working on their psyches. On the other hand, it might also

be viewed as evidence of some sort of valuable tranformation in progress:

> I kind of analysed it as being similar to going to a psychiatrist. When you first go to the shrink you know you're there for a reason, but the doctor helps you get your problems out without you even realizing anything was wrong.

"It's everyone's responsibility to start to change"

There is no question that most participants took from our sessions some interpretation of the message that as individuals they must take action if gender equity is to be achieved. But I can not help but wonder whose voices I am hearing in these passages.

> Personally I found myself confronted with myself more than anything in this class. When I read some of the articles about how women have been and still are treated and used it made me wonder if I had been marginalized and never realized it and if I am in the future will I realize it and will I do anything about it. From this class I found myself feeling more of a 'victim' than ever before. Society has engraved these stereotypes over many centuries and from the way the class developed, it will take centuries to change them. I also began to feel sorry for some of the

guys and the stereotypes that they are given by society. Some of these include that all men are pigs and all they want is sex. But these generalizations are as untrue for men as they are for women.... I feel responsible as a woman. I can't allow men to treat me inferior to them and get away with it. I've already begun making my parents and sisters more aware of sexism and prejudice.

... [the most important thing I learned] is it is extremely important to question what society says is right and wrong... to be critical of the way people act around me. It is important to realise that just because society acts in a certain way does not necesarily mean that is the best or the right way to act.

... my whole thinking was affected by the discussions and articles read in the class. I have wanted to believe in a more equal society and perhaps tried to prove to myself there is no big problem out there...I would prefer not to speak or think about it, but of course that would be admitting my incapability of responding to the problem. This course made me think about those things.

The next statement raises the doubt that this individual is ready to act. Whether the voice of a female or a male, it speaks from a position of privilege that protects the speaker from having to act. Apathy and

complacency are powerful barriers to change.

> The most frustrating part of the class for me was that we couldn't identify any specific or concrete solutions. I guess I'm looking for those immediate, drastic changes that can only happen in the change of thought patterns. But at the same time I can be so passive, I am upset for what happens to these women but not angry as I should be, or think I should be. I read all these articles of females and victims and sexism and feel their pain but I am not motivated to stand up for their fears.

The desire for the teacher to 'give' the class solutions is in part attributable to a school system which focusses on finding answers rather than on asking questions. Neither the speaker above nor the next one has listened to his/her own words to find the answers there. Beginning with a criticism, the writer below eventually leads to a statement that addresses that criticism, but it remains unclear whether she/he has recognized this in the process of writing.

> The class was good in several respects, but it was flawed.... You were constantly pointing out how sexist <u>everything</u> in the whole world was, how biased everyone on the planet was. I mean as soon as a boy pointed out a situation of a woman being discriminating and sexist, it would only show how sexist men were. The problem is

that we were not provided with any answers or attempts at answers. We as boys could only sit and be mad because we were frustrated and couldn't fix any problems that we were being presented with. It is hard to be told that you're sexist and then have no answers or ways that you can change yourself. It is frustrating to see that you are the thing that you've hated all along (sexist or redneck).

Some students made significant realizations about the depths of socially constructed notions about gender. One of the most astute and critical comments ascribes equal responsibility to both sexes for the persistence of gender stereotyping.

Many men promote the stereotypes of women. But what drives these even further into society are the millions of women who accept, and even enjoy this promotion and promote it themselves. My own friends just out of high school are quitting their education for marriages and babies. That is as far as they can see, and they seem to like it that way. Women who continue to sell their bodies to magazines and movies for the use of degradation and sexual fantasy and then get treated and fooled into believing they accomplished something make me sick. Most girls my age enjoy the meat-market competitions they are placed into, for the sake of seeing how well they can place. This I know because when in this position of

judgement by both males and females, I notice they thrive on this for their own worth, and these girls' respect for me is lost if I am better, and lost if I am worse, and if we are equal in their minds, then they have to beat me.... I remain angry with both sexes, and resentful of both.

"Just keep the class"

The following passages speak for themselves in support of some kind of mandatory curriculum dealing with gender issues.

The fact that our teacher is a feminist proved to be beneficial because it allowed us to understand the anger and frustration that derives from the suppression of women's rights. The amount of passion you expressed makes the class more interesting .... This is also one of the few classes that I feel will apply to my life after high school, not just another prerequisite for college...

The only thing I wish was that we had more time, so we could study the journals we read. Articles are very helpful but from those too we can distance ourselves and not believe them as much. With a journal entry we cannot. We know that someone in the class wrote it and it is a friend or acquaintance that is feeling this way, not a journalist with a name. This class has shown me the way a lot of

people really think; we get a glimpse behind the masks that everyone holds up.

This class did not offend me in the least. I did not, for a second, feel like you were ever attacking anyone personally. If anyone took it that way I believe it must have to do with some insecurity in them, nothing you did. I really want to stress this because I feel that a class like this is invaluable. How could I argue, and be taken seriously, about sexism in my everyday life if it wasn't even acknowledged as a problem by the entire educational system?

... this is the only course that I really learned something and can use what I learned. The only suggestion I can give is to make the course a bit longer. It needs more time.

Grade 12 is the last schooling and reading some people will ever do. And because these are formative years this course is desperately necessary. I am glad we did it. Good or bad days, or approaches, that is easy to fix. Just keep the class.

I hesitate to make assumptions about the lasting effects of change in the students who speak here. We raced throughout a unit that spanned only eighteen classes and which for many demanded a

dramatic shift in their beliefs. I know that we succeeded in exposing only the most obvious of deeply rooted biases about males and females. Informed by the words of some of the speakers above and the immense emotional weariness I experienced at the end of the course, I doubt that entrenched resistance to gender equity can be rooted out without some emotional cost to the participants. With all that said, the comments from the anonymous evaluations attest to a degree of success that inspires me to continue to confront gender issues in my classroom.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

> I now feel that I am much more perceptive and aware
> of sexism in myself and in others. The more aware
> I am of it, the more I can do to get rid of it.
>
> Anonymous student evaluation

The short journey my students and I took together was hot and uncomfortable, interrupted by frequent breakdowns and setbacks. But this tale of our struggle highlights the value of an interactive, reflexive process of self-discovery as a means of getting at embedded prejudices and misconceptions that all of us may harbour about gender. At the same time, it reveals that changes to student attitudes toward gender equity are possible but will not be easily achieved.

Despite a temptation at times during this research to feel cynical or despairing of motivating significant change, I see value in continuing to work toward establishment of a school program designed specifically to tackle gender matters. This study confirms that young men and women in grade twelve are capable of exploring gender issues and benefiting from the experience. As many excerpts in Chapters IV, V and VI reveal, young women, given even minimal encouragement to examine their lives as females, will gain the confidence to demand their rightful places as equals in gender relations despite their initial resistances and the pain of recalling past

discrimination and marginalization. Young men will probably continue to resist giving up their power, perhaps more because of a learned narcissistic insecurity than for intellectual reasons. While it is true that girls need spaces in which to be heard without a male presence, it is essential that at some point males be included in dialogue about gender issues and that they be given reasons to embrace change that will outweigh their fears. They need opportunities to experience the role of being equal or even *second rather than first* in a gendered classroom and to be challenged to examine their feelings about that position. They need to hear from female peers what it feels like to be a girl, to feel the discomfort of being relegated to inferior status for no reason other than because of one's gender. Above all, boys need to be taught to identify females not as 'other' but as individual selves, as surely as the girls need to learn how to emerge from anonymity.

With few exceptions, my students affirmed the need for a course specifically focussed on gender issues despite the strong anger, sadness and frustration that surfaced for them at times throughout their ex-plorations. What educators must consider is whether or not gender studies should be incorporated into curriculum much sooner than the last year of high school. Through associations with colleagues in elementary schools, I know that conscientious teachers make efforts to help children cope with gender differences and to regard boys and girls as equally capable and deserving of recognition. Nevertheless, gender as a specific topic for study is not required and is rarely mentioned even in the most basic terms, except

perhaps in science studies of the body. Teacher training programs talk in terms of dealing with gender differences within the classroom, but not of *teaching about* gender. At present, socially constructed gender roles which follow children into adulthood are, if anything, reinforced rather than challenged within the entire school system. This is hardly surprising since the mandate of education is to produce what society tacitly expects: namely, young adult graduates capable of perpetuating existing social structures the majority of which are founded on implicit patriarchal edicts. Attempts to introduce at the primary and secondary levels of schooling curriculum which requires deliberate comparison of feminist approaches to acquisition of know-ledge with traditional positivist approaches will undoubtedly meet resistance just as it has and still is at the tertiary level. Daunting as the task may be for teachers, students, both female and male, must be challenged to understand and view feminist values as counters to the violences imposed by a phallocentric vision of the world. But before teachers can do this many will need to do some serious self-reflection and study, just as I found myself obliged to do before embarking on this project.

Assuming that teachers take on the task of examining gender issues in their classrooms, resistance may be looked at as a necessary product of their endeavours. Teachers who recognize this can encourage students to explore the motivation for their resistances, to deconstruct their biases in order to move beyond them. Seeing resistance as an opportunity and looking for a way "to turn the

definition of resistance inside out somehow so that it could be used to shed light on efforts toward praxis" (Lather, 1991:78), may serve as a valuable position from which to appeal to students. Girls resist a reality that circumscribes their lives in order to retain at least a sense of their own agency. Letting go their resistance is easier if they are able to see that real agency lies in assuming equal status with the boys in all aspects of their lives. The indignation and anger of boys who feel threatened by evidence of the emerging power of girls is a different resistance than that of their female counterparts; it is fiercer, less subject to rational consideration. Boys may be less interested in examining their reasons for their own resistance than they are in criticising and trivializing female aspirations, either to deflect attention from their own biases or simply to direct attention back to what they are comfortable with: male ways of looking at the world. Teaching in the face of male resistance is harder and considerably more stressful, especially for females.

The question of what 'respectful' teaching means arises in the context of a classroom where resistances and gender biases are obstructing equal access to the interchange of ideas for all students. Conflict is the inevitable product of a challenge to those biases and resistances. This does not mean that the sharing of differences of opinion is unwelcome; quite the contrary. But the classroom cannot be regarded as a respectful place if oppression of the weak by the powerful is obscurred to maintain the appearance of equanimity. More specifically, tolerating subtle or silent victimization of females in

order to preserve privilege of place for males is never more respectful than confronting the patriarchal and sexist attitudes of young men (and some young women) even if it does produce conflict. Respectful teaching values all students enough to expose their stereotypes, generalizations, and unreasonable assumptions, and to hold them able to expand and modify their views.

It is entirely possible that gender issues will be addressed as regular curriculum only when female teachers take on the responsibility to create the courses and press for their implementation. And most certainly, if they succeed they will have to struggle with an array of accompanying baggage in the classroom. For the teacher who adopts a feminist agenda, an anti-sexist position, in her teaching, problems loom that will put pressure on her at both the professional and personal levels. There is a fine line between open and frank debate about gender inequity and the imposition of the teacher's personal agenda on the students. The teacher's position of anti-sexism has the potential to conflict with her hope of initiating dialogue that offers equal opportunity for every student's free expression of opinion unless students, especially males, can be encouraged to give anti-sexism a fair hearing.

Hartman (1991:22) points out that "when teachers put themselves and their knowledge up for examination, they doff at least some of their authority and alter the dynamics of their classroom, for differences between the authority of teachers and students create for

some students an unbridgeable gap, and the dynamics of the classroom produce students who are 'stupid' as well as students who are 'smart." In opposing students' most cherished beliefs about their roles as males and females, the teacher risks setting students up as 'stupid' and 'smart', thus creating the potential for broadening rather than narrowing 'unbridgeable' gaps in the classroom.

I began this research with Lather's image in mind of a "praxis-oriented" researcher who seeks "emancipatory knowledge" which "increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings," and "directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes" (Lather, 1991:52-54). However, as my classroom research unfolded, I began to find Lather's use of the term limiting in that it implies a notion of praxis as the 'work' of a researcher upon the researched, in other words my project to reform my students. Until I realized that my own thinking and emotions were undergoing significant changes along with those of the students, I had been looking for evidence that would prove I had somehow reached or 'achieved praxis' with my students. I was unable to shed this misguided purpose until I began the process of articulating exactly what I had seen and experienced and connected this with the students' attempts to do the same. I then turned to Freire's broader idea of praxis (1970) which identifies it as a process of thought filled action, a symbiosis of action and enlightenment through which the 'work' of transforming one's world becomes possible. Defined this way, praxis

is both present and potential for all participants in a research project in which a synergy of thought and action, action and thought, allows for the empowerment of individuals according to the depths of their commitment to the work. Although I was late in coming to it, this understanding of praxis most aptly characterizes what I believe was at work in 'Pride and Prejudice.'

Struggling toward a clearer understanding of praxis, I began to consider the transformational functions of various classroom activities, in particular, speaking and writing. Even though I was organizing and presenting as accurately as possible data I had collected, I found myself swept up in the telling of a compelling tale. The dramatic nature of what I have previously called our 'journey' impacted on all of us emotionally and intellectually. The process of describing what occurred and of articulating our reactions to those occurrences, imposed its own transforming effect on each of us. Layers of experience overlapped as recollection of past events or circumstances, examined in light of what was going on in the classroom, were re-experienced in the writing process, and often again reflected to us in the writings of others. Perhaps this phenomenon provides justification for teaching gender matters in an English classroom where students are attuned to the elements of drama and used to the challenge of struggling to record their thoughts. In their anonymous evaluations in Chapter VI, my students attest to the power of the interactive processes of talking, recalling, writing, and reading others' writings to evoke passionate feelings in the

classroom. From passion come the lasting impressions students will carry with them long after the course or study is over.

As I read and re-read their journal entries to hear again the rich and provocative voices of individuals, I become conscious of the powerful dramatic elements of the passages. Juxtaposed as they are in this document, excerpts begin to generate 'characters,' each with a distinctive personality and even a 'name.' Clues and allusions in their comments, some detailed and some sketchy, enable a reader to conjure up an imaginary 'history' for each speaker, and distinctive voices cause some individuals to emerge as protagonists or antagonists with the commanding presence of fictional characters. What begins as research transforms itself into a vivid battle between antagonistic forces, hinting of universal conflicts.

There is no question that my decision to approach gender issues from an anti-sexist position affected not only my choice and presentation of material and my response to the individual students' comments throughout the unit, but also my own experience as a participant, a researcher, and a woman. I am equally sure that my methods affected the students in a number of ways, not the least of which had to do with power relations in the classroom. In consideration of those relations, I am forced to question my methods and my motives, to wonder whether or not I had the right to seem so confrontative to a group of young people I liked and cared about. Who was I to them in that situation - authoritarian, enemy, feminist,

stranger, gadfly, provocateur? Per-haps I was all of these. A part of me clings to the belief that I may also have been, for some, a valued friend. Now that the research is over, these questions still remain before me only partially answered.

Invariably the most complete answers lie with the students. They will differ according to what each student saw on our journey together and will be exemplified in their future actions. For a few, their time in my classroom will stand out as a memory of conflict-ridden discussions led by a controlling female with annoying and intrusive ideas. I hope for the majority it will stand out as a meaningful and dramatic dialogue in a continuing conversation. For me, the dialogue will never end. And I will always carry in my mind images of my students' young faces, and sounds of their voices urging that we keep the dialogue alive.

AND AFTERWARD

In the months since first undertaking this study, I have found myself frequently recalling the process of self-discovery in which the students and I were engaged, hearing again and again their voices of angry denial, of painful recognition and of surprised revelation. I have realized that, as I had suspected, praxis can and does continue to occur long after we have moved on to other experiences. Praxis, I believe, manifests itself less often as a single epiphany, than as a process of expansion resulting from a series of shifts in perception, sometimes connected and sometimes not, each illuminated and emphasized by our reflection upon succeeding experiences. If this is true, I have considerably more hope for positive change regarding gender relations then I did at the end of the arduous travels through 'Pride and Prejudice.'

I have seen some of the participants since our study and, as I had hoped it would, our dialogue has resumed. Without exception, they have mentioned the stressful tensions and conflicts which arose amongst individuals in the class, but they have gone on to say that these were products of trying to establish some clarity about gender relations. They still think the class was one of the most important they took in high school and that it has had application in their lives since.

Carleen visited me not long ago to say that she had taken steps

via counselling to move from the anger and despair she had felt at the time to a serenity that she had never felt before. From her confrontations in her journal with long buried feelings about her identity as a woman and her painful childhood experiences with males, she had continued to write, to explore and work through her confusion. She seemed to me somehow softer and more gentle, less strident and more confident than I had ever seen her. Though the gender unit had not directly produced this transformation in Carleen, it may have served as a catalyst to the healing she has since worked to achieve. For her there has been praxis.

Jeff came to the school a few days ago to pick up a copy of the thesis. Feeling pangs of nervousness as I gave it to him, I wondered how he will respond to my interpretation of his interactions within the class. I asked him to consider helping me to turn the material into a play and his eyes lit up. He suggested that we have a reunion of the participants to continue conversation about the study and about our views on gender now. Kleo and Adam have also declared their interest in reading the thesis and talking further. And so I find that the research process may again come alive in the form of more dialogue, this time from the new perspectives each of us has gained.

In accepting a new role as an administrator just after the 'Pride and Prejudice' unit concluded, I have had to face a set of unfamiliar circumstances in which gender roles often play a key part. In meeting with male peers in administration, I have noticed as an outsider, or at

least a newcomer, the small rituals by which they identify and acknowledge positions of place, the way they reinforce a prescribed hierarchy of status when it comes to decision making. And I have had to make decisions that I had previously observed only men making. This has required that I take a closer look at power and its manifestations and raises questions for me about power relations between me and my colleagues and between me and the students.

Conflicts and tensions that plague students, especially those in grades eight and nine and ten, often revolve around male-female differences, their developing sexuality, and the perceptions parents, teachers and their peers have of the roles and behaviours they should assume. As a vice-principal, I deal with dozens of situations weekly which reflect the problems of young people trying to find their way in the gender role maze.

I find I have developed great empathy for girls who at thirteen or fourteen or fifteen are struggling fiercely to hang on to the freedoms that were theirs as little girls but which they now see being limited as social structures close in on them. Paradoxically, though they are expected to move away from parental direction to be more adult, they feel less free now than as carefree and dependent children. Growing knowledge of how harsh the world can be exerts inhibiting cautions on them. They are confused by their growing desires to make their own decisions about their relationships and their bodies in the face of warnings to watch out for murderers and

rapists. They are encouraged to develop their talents and abilities in any direction they want to go but at the same time they are bombarded by the media model of the female whose major purpose is to attract and serve the male. No wonder many of them arrive in my office to be chastised for disruptions such as rudeness or inappropriate laughter or refusal to cooperate. No wonder they are self-conscious and skittish, testy and resentful, desperate to be accepted as is without pouring themselves into a prefabricated mold.

In dealing with the boys, I find myself reacting with equal concern for their struggles to be 'men' in the face of what they perceive to be requirements to be strong, to admit no weakness, to remain in control. I fear that the sensitivities they have as boys cannot survive the onslaught of such demands. Perhaps the criticism that adult men lack the delicate capacity for feeling is rooted in society's refusal to permit boys to retain that aspect of themselves within their own consciousness. For they seem no less easily hurt than females when I meet them in my office in my role of vice-principal. I wonder what changes them. And I wonder if exploring gender relations in a short classroom unit with seventeen and eighteen year olds really is too little, too late.

Feelings and ideas provoked by the vast set of experiences of teaching, researching and writing about the gender unit continually surface in my consciousness. I find myself wanting to rail more than ever against 'the way things are.' Though I cannot be sure how much or

even whether I may seem changed in the eyes of my students and colleagues, I have the sense that I have awakened to some of those deepest meanings and patterns that I had previously taken for granted or simply not noticed. I do know that I feel changed.

APPENDIX

ITEM 1: STUDENT RESOURCE LIST

These articles appear in the order that they were distributed in the 'Pride and Prejudice' unit.

1. Sittenfield, Curtis. *Your life as a Girl.* Ms. July/Aug, 1993.

2. Shapiro, Laura. (1993). *Guns and Dolls.* Inside Stories II. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada, Inc.

3. Miller, Casey and Swift, Kate. (1987). From *Man as a False Generic.* In The Arch of Experience. Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Ltd. 67 -75.

4. Miller, Casey and Swift, Kate. (1989). *"Manly" and "Womanly,"* In Levin, Gerald, Lynch, Gerald, and Rampton, David, (Eds.). Prose Models: Canadian, American, and British Essays for Composition. Harcourt Brace Jovanovch Canada, Inc.

5. Bernstein, Richard, *Words in Collision.* Vancouver Sun, June 24, 1991.

6. Stainsby, Mia. *"The Invisible Past.* Vancouver Sun, Sept. 29, 1992.

7. Miller, Casey and Swift, Kate. (1987). From *Man as a False Generic.* In The Arch of Experience. Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Ltd. 67 -75.

8. Passage from: Rich, Adrienne. (1985). *Taking women students seriously.* In Culley, M., and Portugris, C., (Eds.). Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching. Boston: Routledge, Kegan Paul.

9. Spender, Dale. *An alternative to Madonna: How to deal with "I'm not a feminist, but...* Ms. July/Aug, 1993.

10. Steinem, Gloria. (1987). *Marilyn Monroe: The woman who died too*

soon. In Rosengarten, Herbert and Flick, Jane (Eds.). The Broadview Reader Broadview Press, Canada. 427 -433.

11. Ford, John. *Pulling Sexual Strings.* Vancouver Sun, Sept 25, 1993.

12. 86,000 women, children fled family violence. Vancouver Sun, Jan 14, 1994.

13. Lakeman, Lee. *Women, Violence and The Montreal Massacre* This Magazine, Vol #23, March 1993.

14. Dickie, Alison. *The Art of Intimidation: Sexism and Destiny at Queens* This Magazine, Vol #23. March, 1993.

ITEM 2: PROJECT: RESEARCHING GENDER ISSUES

Instructions

1. This assignment puts you in the role of investigator into issues about gender. Do all you can to explore and inquire before you draw conclusions. Work alone or with one other person.

2. Be prepared to present your findings to the class including a well-planned handout and where appropriate, recordings or visuals to illustrate your presentation. Marks will be given for evidence of research and critical thinking.

3. Your presentation, which will also be graded, should be from 5 to 10 minutes and, in consideration of others, should not go overtime. We will allow reaction time of 5 minutes after each groups presents.

ACTIVITY CHOICES

1. Visit a video store and assess the array of materials that exploit sex and in particular, females. Look especially in the crime, action, thriller, horror and adventure sections. Document your findings in detail and comment on evidence of sexism that you find. What roles are evident for male? for female? What messages is the public receiving about gender roles?

2. Find at least 6 magazines such as Vogue, Chatelaine, Cosmopolitan and others that are directed mainly at females. Examine their content carefully. Prepare a report in which you comment on and illustrate the articles, visuals, and ads directed at the readers. Explain clearly the myths and stereotypes about sexual roles that are perpetrated or exploited in these publications. Explain the messages that are going out and their possible effects on males and females.

3. Record the lyrics (on tape or in writing) of popular music in several areas - heavy metal, rap, western, etc. which exaggerate the roles of male and female or perpetrate gender stereotypes. Prepare a detailed analysis of your findings in which you include a commentary on the influence of these lyrics on the attitudes of young females and males.

4. Research the issue of violence against women. Find statistics and articles that deal with the topic, particularly those that try to explain why violence against women is on the increase in North America. Prepare a detailed report on your findings and a discussion of the possible causes that stem from sexism.

5. Visit a Toys 'R Us store and examine in detail the range of available playthings for children. Then visit the baby department of a large department store and document your findings in detail. If you can find any, obtain advertising or flyers aimed at buyers. Report the degree of sex role stereotyping you find, giving specific examples. Comment on the degree of societal pressure to mold children to female/male sex roles.

6. Write and conduct an in-depth interview with a group of two or three people of your own sex. Create specific questions that will encourage dialogue about their attitudes and feelings about their sex role and their opinion of the opposite sex. Record your interview in a quiet, private place. Listen to the tape and then write a commentary on your findings. Present to the class the conclusions you made. What themes or dominant ideas seemed to recur in the discussion? Why do you think this is so? Be sure to keep your subjects' names out of your report and be sure to explain the importance of the comments you heard.

7. Research the stresses and difficulties for a non-heterosexual person of existing in a society where heterosexuality is "compulsory." Find out what it means to a person to be marginalized or silenced on a regular basis. It is crucial that write your report in such a way as to protect the privacy of any individual you talk to regarding this topic. This is much like a reporter protecting the privacy of his/her source. Report as sensitively as you can to the class what you learned, particularly about homophobia.

8. Research a sport such as football, hockey, soccer, rugby, tennis, polo, or field hockey, competitive riding, skiing or swimming (- there may be lots more to choose from). Trace its development and find out the roles of males and females in its history. Report on the barriers to either sex that exist within the power structure that supports that sport.

9. Research the field of law, medicine, engineering, nursing, politics, or a particular business or industry. Find out about its history and the relationships of females and males in the power structures that support it. (It might be helpful to narrow the field to Canada or North America). Present a brief historical overview and an analysis of the effect on females of the balance of power.

10. Study the history of women's fashion and determine the effect of fashion trends on the affairs of women over the past millenium (1000 years). Present a historical overview and a critical commentary on the effects of clothing on women's rights, including a critical assessment of today's fashion.

11. Analyse television advertising carefully for evidence of gender stereotyping. Example: look for who speaks, whose voice holds authority, who appears in ads about home products, cars, cosmetics, perfumes, etc. Which products advertise in a gender-fair way? which reinforce sexist stereotypes? Present your findings using short video clips or quoted examples.

12. Select three articles that deal with gender conflict. Examine the arguments in them for logical/illogical reasoning and evidence of bias. Prepare a critical response to each one. Present copies of each

to the class (you may copy them on school photocopier if you see me ahead of time to arrange this). Tell the class clearly about the issues the articles raise and offer your comments and criticisms for consideration.

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